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**The Theatre Director's Philosophical
Entanglements**
Aesthetics and Politics of the Modernist Theatre

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has been composed solely by me, that it is my own work, and that it has not been submitted in whole or in part for any other degree or professional qualifications. The thesis includes two peer reviewed published articles written by me and for which I have attained copyright permission for their inclusion in this thesis.

Signed: Evanthia Katsouraki

Date: 2.2.17

To my mother and father

abstract

This thesis presents a conceptual examination of the modernist director read through Gillian Rose's speculative lenses of the 'broken middle'. Highlighting the significance of speculative philosophy, I explore the meaning of the director as a mediating subjectivity. I demonstrate how a speculative reading of the director can act as a corrective to the received totalitarian, despotic image of the director. I urge for the rehabilitation of the director as a history and as a practice and I propose the emergence of this figure as being the outcome of a complex theatrical articulation entangled with the discipline of philosophy. Combining close readings of philosophical texts by Rose, Plato, Castoriadis, Badiou, Rancière, Laclau and Mouffe, among several other intellectual references in this study, I explore the director as a mode or trope of embodied philosophy. My argument also proposes the director as an Event, in Badiou's definition, and I trace this configuration as already taking place with the 'tragic' paradigm of the Athenian theatre. This Event of the director, I then argue, gets fully inaugurated in modernism as the Event of thought in theatre. I explore how the director acting as a mediator transforms theatre to what Puchner calls 'a theatre of ideas' while simultaneously philosophy becomes itself transformed to a theatre of thought.

Chapter 1 outlines the key strands of Rose's thought and sets out the theoretical parameters of my examination. The chapter argues for a speculative reading of the director cross-examined with current positions within theatre historiography. The chapter paves a new understanding of the director, not historically, but conceptually, as a mode of embodied thought. **Chapter 2** explores the relationship between the primacy and centrality of the aesthetic paradigm of theatre in philosophy and the role and practice of the poet – or 'chorodidaskalos' – who I consider as an early philosophical figuration of the modern director. I highlight speculative 'aporia' which in Rose indicates a path 'without a path' as the primary modality of thinking philosophically, already at work in tragedy, that renders the modernist director as a theatrical thinker. **Chapter 3** puts forward the case of the director's mediating subjectivity by arguing for the Event of the director. I analyse Badiou's philosophy of the Event, making connections to speculative philosophy and illuminating the *Evental* dimension of this figure. **Chapter 4** moves the examination to the Event of the director that I locate in Richard Wagner. My reading explores the philosophical dimension of Wagner as an artist and a thinker by which I rehabilitate his overtly negative image. I do this by reading Left Hegelianism, and anarchist philosophy more broadly, in Wagner's operatic works, writings, and political activism. **Chapter 5** examines the 'speculative director' in the aesthetic project of Naturalism and Realism. The chapter includes a published section by which I explore the political mode of the director indirectly, by examining the articulatory discourse in Laclau and Mouffe's definition and the practice of affirmation. **Chapter 6** looks at the avant-garde manifesto as a form of meta-language that seeks to actively re-shape theatre and the world as embodied, declaimed philosophy. The chapter repositions the avant-garde's aesthetic preoccupation with failure as a profoundly transformative project rather than as being incomplete. The included published article examines more closely the affinity between the Spartacus Manifesto by Rose Luxemburg (philosophy) and the more politicized forms of the Dada Berlin manifesto art (theatre). **Chapter 7** is the concluding chapter by which I argue the case of the director finally having entered the theatre *as a philosopher*; that is, through Bertolt Brecht.

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Angelus Dubiosus
by Paul Klee

PART 1

Philosophical Figurations of the Director

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION *Theatre's Broken Middle*

In response to Walter Benjamin's evocation of Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus*, wherein he famously depicted the angel of history turning his head back, but with his wings facing forward while watching, frozen in horror, as the ruins of history piled up, Gillian Rose proposes another of Paul Klee's angels, namely *Angelus Dubiosus*:

...[a] hybrid of hubris and humility – who makes mistakes, for whom things go wrong, who constantly discovers its own faults and failings, yet who still persists in the pain of staking itself, with the courage to initiate action and the commitment to go on and on, learning from those mistakes and risking new ventures. (*Judaism and Modernity* 10)

This is an angel who has gone through pain, suffering and destruction. However, it is not speechless, paralysed by the trauma that characterises Benjamin's immobilised spirit, which appears struck by shock. Rose's angle is a different, *difficult* angel. A 'hybrid' spirit, that has learnt to recover from loss and turn suffering into a struggle that needs to be overcome. As the name suggests, this spirited creature is not so easily swayed. This is a *dubious* angel. On the one hand, his/her implicit 'double' level of experiencing denotes the kind of difficulty one is faced with when positing an idea or possibility, having it fail in comparison with what takes place in actuality, and positing it again. On the other hand, it is this 'doubtful' bearing that, oddly, might be said to also hold this angel suspect of 'duplicity' – as someone who employs 'difficulty' in order to transform it into an occasion for action and upon action, evoking equivocal, speculative thinking as an aesthetic strategy. Was Rose thinking of the modernist theatre director when she drew upon Klee's angel as a speculative symbol? Whatever the conclusion, one thing is for sure. That Rose's *Angelus Dubiosus*' endless trying, failing,

learning, and trying again, and the director's formalistic experimentation with form and content in theatre, could be easily read as twin tales of speculative interpretation of *how the world is* and *how it could be*. In other words, what places the director, as I hope to show in this thesis, as a speculative thinker in theatre.

From the highly aestheticised experiments of the Symbolists and Formalists of the late-nineteenth century, to Bertolt Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*, the speculative form of the director channels the angst and urgency of what compounds the complexity and, to a high degree, brokenness of an anti-humanist, decadent modern world. The director, as a speculative mode of mediation, which is how I propose to read this figure, reflects and carries out *Angelus Dubiosus*' ceaseless resourcing to experimentation, relentlessly restructuring the form of theatre, de-theatricalising it, re-theatricalising it, anti-theatricalising it, and yet without doing away with. My main premise here is that the director renders speculative thinking into a creative expression of theatre, by which the director, I argue, *mediates* experiences, knowledge and meanings. This speculative function is what allows this figure to claim to *interpret* the world as a form of not only explaining it, but transforming it. The director, as mediation, enacts in my reading experiences, knowledge and meanings, not as mere forms of recreating or presenting these experiences, knowledge and meanings anew, but as *ways of acquiring a new understanding* of them. It is what ultimately transforms, I argue in the following chapters of this thesis, the theatres of modernism into *philosophical theatres*.

Mediation is fundamentally Hegelian. It seeks to reconcile irreconcilable binary opposites by resisting dualistic thinking, replacing them with a 'triune structure of recognition' (Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology* 47), whereby the factor of attention itself to the relation between two terms is the 'third' term of *mediation*. For Hegel, mediation is both transformative and relational. It describes the negotiation of two terms which enables knowledge to arrive, not through the

resolution of oppositions dialectically – which would be a move towards a new synthesis (most prevalent in post-structuralist discourse) – but *reciprocally* – by relating one term to another, moving between opposites into a changed relation. Rose, too, follows this same speculative approach. However, the significance of Rose’s revisionist reworking of Hegel, to which I keep turning in my reading of the director, is that she insists on a sophisticated reading of mediation repeatedly asserted as a ‘broken middle’. (*The Broken Middle* xii) Seeing in mediation a method by which irreconcilables reconfigure, yet through hard and persistent work, Rose argues that the middle that one encounters is always a mediating middle characterised by brokenness.

Brokenness, for Rose, essentially speaks of *diremption* – another key Rosean concept that informs in my reading the mediating subjectivity of the modern director. The significance of diremption is that, as Rose argues, it draws attention to ‘the trauma of separation of that which was, as in marriage, not originally united’ (*The Broken Middle* 236). Diremption points to ‘the scar of being broken and separated from’ (*ibid.*), Rose insists, allowing us to come to terms with the ‘anxiety’ that the ‘middle’ produces (*ibid.*). If it is fundamental to the thought of modernity, it is because it invites speculative thinking, interrogating the structures of the kind of misrecognition that, Rose believes, facilitate and sustain injustice, exclusion and trauma in modernity and its representations. It is also why, in this thesis, the director as a ‘middle’ that informs the aesthetic structure of the modernist theatre is simultaneously an intensely ‘political’ term.

The sway of the current study is, I hope, both ‘speculative’ and ‘political’. Informed by Rose’s logic of the broken middle, I seek to rehabilitate the director, from a tyrannical, totalitarian figure, to how I conceptualise this figure as a *mediating subjectivity*, situated between theatre and philosophy: *a meson*. I thus read the conceptual structure of the director on Rose’s speculative poetics of

breakdown, which designates in my account the means by which theatre shapes change and movement in aesthetic modernity. I start off from the double premise that, 1) mediation defines a process of relating that as a constant process of negotiation, positions the director in the middle, both a cause and an effect of new relationalities and possibilities – ultimately presenting the director as a site of contestation, anxiety and aporia in modernism. And, 2) the director's mediating subjectivity is immersed in matters of thought to the extent that it turns philosophy into experience, produced and received on the increasingly complex understanding of philosophy as a mode of theatre. On this analytical basis, my main theoretical itinerary emerges, not from a historical reading of the director, but from a *conceptual* one. By investigating the breaks *in between* a duality, I pay attention to what might be the speculative dimension of the director which, broadly speaking, I conceive between a 'thinking' (philosophy) and a 'doing' (theatre). An in-betweenness, which I read as an embodied mode of thought, what I consider to be mobilising conceptual energy as an aesthetic strategy in the modernist theatre.

For Jacques Rancière, one of my many intellectual references in this study, the significance of theatre's middle as a performed mode of 'in-betweenness', is that it calls for a 'political being-together' (*Disagreements* 137-8) – another focus of this thesis. As he explains, theatre's 'being-between' is to be 'between identities, between world... between several names, several identities' (ibid.). The middle, therefore, simultaneously designates a political radical middle that interrupts, fractures, disturbs and divides what Rancière calls the 'police' community (meaning authority, the political order, etc.) and the forces of subjectification. It is a line of argument that actively evokes Plato's famous theatrical mistrust while, at the same time, subverting Plato's critical position of anti-theatricality. For Plato, meanwhile, theatre is condemned and banned from his ideal city of the Republic due to theatre's ability to confuse 'phantoms' with

reality and to ‘call the same thing now one, now the other’ (*Republic* 10.605b-c). Theatre’s alluring appearances, being far removed from reality itself, cause one to forget one’s own proper place for Plato. It is also, what posits theatre as another double, between the *demos* and *the Polis*, that is profoundly fractured in the middle.

It is with this in mind that I turn to Rose’s speculative philosophy, which I read through the prisms of the theatrical. In her challenging *The Broken Middle: Out of Our Ancient Society*, the full breadth of her argument unfolds through an eclectic reading of Kierkegaard, whose philosophy Rose puts in dialogue with a number of modern thinkers and writers, from Jacques Lacan and Franz Kafka to Hannah Arendt, John Milbank and Rose Luxemburg. What is so striking here is the way in which she replaces the terms of negotiation with the failure of the two opposites to transform one another, resulting in a broken ‘third’ – the *broken middle*. For Rose, a ‘third’ – which is always a mediating term – is a way by which something or someone can ‘come to a changed relation’ so that ‘recognition’ is attained – or, as she puts it, ‘something [is] understood’ (*The Broken Middle* xi) – even if never instantaneously or miraculously, but through one’s continuous engagement with and negotiation of the points of contradiction in pursue of what she describes as ‘a good enough justice’ (*Love’s Work* 116). As a point of the Hegelian triune structure, the ‘broken middle’ is the most significant ‘third’, yet always, for Rose, being offered as a condition of loss and a register ‘not of one’s struggle but of the nature of struggle itself’ (*The Broken Middle* 100). In this ‘agon’ of the middle, Isobel Armstrong observes, in her nuanced reading in *The Radical Aesthetic* of Rose’s speculative thought, ‘the individual confronts itself as particular and universal, but *discovers* these contradictions’ (64). To be, therefore, in the middle and be confronted by it, is not to accept or escape it, but to bear the anxiety it produces and is produced by – i.e. ‘the anxiety of the middle’(Rose, *The Broken Middle* 101). Such a point of engagement

involving the continuous negotiation of a ‘beginning’ and an ‘end’ – a Hegelian dualism of thesis and anti-thesis – takes the shape in my account of the relation between form and content, character and identity, autonomous and engaged art, aesthetics and politics, the collective and the institutional – all of which are dualistic relations in a true Hegelian sense, fuelling with opposition the ‘middle’ as a point of breakdown that I want to suggest the director inhabits and is inhabited by.

However, Rose is relevant to the director in another way, too. Rose is a *difficult* thinker. Like the figure of the director, Rose not only evades classification, but her important work seems to have been strangely neglected because of this difficulty, both embedded in and employed by her thought. This is the same difficulty, perhaps, that has haunted a conceptual understanding of the director in theatre scholarship, especially within offered accounts of theatre historiography. This is something that I explore in the next session of this chapter, arguing for the significance of a philosophical understanding of this figure and, in effect, of the modernist theatre.

In her introduction to Rose’s thought, Kate Schick bemoans what has too often led to an important neglecting. In *Gillian Rose: A Good Enough Justice*, Schick describes Rose as ‘a creative thinker, who falls outside established and easily defined schools of thought’ (1). Another such ‘timely intervention’ is revoked by Vincent Lloyd’s article, ‘On the use of Gillian Rose’. Lloyd positions Rose as ‘one of those authors, whose work many have looked at, few have read, and still fewer have read carefully’ (697). ‘Rose’s call,’ he stresses, ‘to be content with the difficult and never-ending struggle to grapple with the world we have, not the world we want’ (ibid.) is not an easily accepted invitation, let alone an initiation in how one needs to think and act in this world. A final point of contact, perhaps, between Rose and the figure of the director, is Rose’s intellectual character that, for Arnold Jacob Wolf, is as ‘a polemicist’ (482). Similarly,

Andrew Shanks places Rose in the cannon of a ‘philosophy without inhibitions: a quite uninhibited love of Truth, at its rawest’ (6). Shanks even speaks about her battling with mild dyslexia as a youngster, in which nothing would come easy to her: ‘In her judgment of ideas she is above all, allergic to what comes easy’ (ibid.). However, ‘difficulty’ and the idea of ‘struggle’ are not only central to the experience of reading Rose. They are the very fabric of her thought. The fabric, too, one should add, that runs through the creative identity of the director as an artist and thinker of representation that is met with difficulty in the struggle of interpreting and creating meaning on stage.

Such an agon for what Rose calls ‘re-cognition’ returns in her writings in different formulations to the interchangeability of negotiation, risk and struggle, understood as speculative modes of knowing. For Rose, re-cognition is the staging of reason in such a way that understanding can be seen. When cognition is re-cognised, it mobilises negotiation, change and growth. It is what renders the path of re-cognition a simultaneously theatrical path that dwells in *aporia* (*The Broken Middle* 201) – the path with-out a path that necessitates inquisition, difficulty, diremption. Its learning process is to *re-cognise* – which, itself, stages understanding in the actuality of experience so that it can be *seen* again, but differently, and be re-understood and re-configured as a result. To understand the oppositional logic that Rose proposes as a mode of knowing, we only need to think of the various fraught relationships between the schools of modernist theatre and the legacies of anti-theatricality. It is what, for Martin Puchner, signals the appearance of the ‘closet drama’ (*Stage Fright* 10), in which anti-theatricality is not simply reconsidered or reconfigured, but actively employed in an antithetical manner. If modernist anti-theatricality is fundamentally theatrical, it is not a matter of shifting definition. It is a matter of confronting all modernist theatre with its radical opposition, from an instrumental Aristotelian theatrical *poiesis* to embodying a Platonic critique of theatre, both as a form of theatre and a theatrical

critique of philosophy. It is what turns, for example, Wagnerian theatre to notions of totality as forms of re-establishing the communal agency of the democratic tragedy of the Athenian stage. This is, though, the very political efficacy that is so averse to Plato. Conceiving all mimetic theatre as a democratic paradigm, he condemns theatre as a form of ruling – what he calls *theatrocracy*.

The same opposition is immediately felt in the pure theatricality of the avant-garde theatre. Its foundational form, especially seen in the avant-garde activity of performing manifestos, is surely punctuated by a deep affiliation with radical politics. Manifestoing, indeed, directly interacts with real politics and actively seeks to make radical visions of the world possible. Towards this aim, avant-garde theatres and their manifestos can be seen to act as a kind of philosophy. At the same time, philosophy turns to theatre and produces a stunning display of philosophical thought. Ernst Bloch, Benjamin, Theodor W. Adorno, Georg Lukács are emblematic figures in the political discussion of the twentieth century that set out their thoughts in response to the aesthetic activity of the avant-garde project within modernism. Even in the trajectory of Naturalism and Realism that channels the creative contradiction of the mimetic form as empathy and identification, consensus and discontent, body and psych, what emerges is ‘dramatic presentation’, to borrow from Robert Leach, that ‘does not represent reality, but rather reworks and recreates it’ (41-2). This is the kind of theatre, therefore, that also rehabilitates the various versions of anti-theatricality while revealing, as I will argue in what follows, a deeply *theatocratic* view of theatre which is a philosophical view of theatre on the basis of politics, and most specifically, democracy.

For this reason, the significance of Rose’s thought for the modernist project is, I believe, twofold. Firstly, she attempts to rethink the political on the conjunction power and ethical consideration, understood as a fundamentally agonistic practice which is at the core of the modernist theatre practice . Secondly,

she introduces an aporetic perspective, which is not only the opting out for a path-without-a-path, the critical path of one's engagement with the details of a daily struggle, but also a speculative perspective of mediation, understood again as an agonistic form of knowledge that is also a creative form. The agonistic nature of Rose's broken middle allows speculative thought to form at those moments of diremption. And yet, while it negotiates the actuality of social and political conditions, it is without falling victim to utopian fantasy or self-pity and resignation.

The major significance of *aporia* is that it emphasises relationality. As Schick observes, 'an aporetic journey towards recognition takes place in the middle, where both self and Other are perceived as agents, and the brokenness that attends misrecognition is acknowledged and worked through' (91). Aporitic action is simultaneously theatrical action: it foregrounds the centrality of mediation as a space that, for Armstrong, is about a '*coming to know and knowing about that coming to know*' (62), a place 'inevitably of fracture' (63) rather than connection – an agonistic space. It stands for a mode of thought, which the director employs in my reading to perform an inversion of theatre into philosophy, causing philosophy to yield to theatrical enquiries. Or, to frame this as a question: how can we read philosophy in the aesthetic structure of the modernist theatre, and particularly in the new theatrical form of the director? What kind of philosophy would then be the director? And how does a philosophical understanding of the theatres of modernism potentially allow us to read the director as a philosopher, as an embodied modality of thought? If the director can be thought of as a mediating subjectivity, what exactly does the director mediate? In what follows, I am also interested in the ways by which the director forces philosophy to advance a series of arguments in response to the modernist theatre aesthetic activity, while positioning aesthetic material as philosophical thought in theatre. In my reading, therefore, *aporia* stands for the

kind of theatrical space that reveals a conceptual, speculative meaning of the director, both as a poetics and a philosophical aesthetics of re-cognition in the struggle-filled, hard-won and reversible expressions of modernism. This speculative negotiation of the diremptive middle is the nexus within which my readings of the director as a mediating subjectivity take shape in this thesis. It provides a corrective to the current theatre scholarship, which predominantly insists on thinking and cataloguing the intellectual and artistic achievements of the director as an essentially historical expression of stylistic and theatrical conventions, rather than a speculative articulation or expression of aporetic negotiation, communal collectivity and democratisation that I explore in this thesis.

The director's mediating 'third,' as it is argued in the chapters that follow, reconfigures the opposition between *looking* and *acting* into a transformative act of shaping. In realising, as Rancière claims, that 'looking also is an action which confirms or modifies the distribution of the visible, and that "interpreting the world" is already a means of transforming it, of reconfiguring it' (*The Emancipated Spectator* 227), the director turns theatre's mode of vision into an interpretative act that is both metamorphic and political. It is why tragedy emerges as a primary forum of metamorphosis in the history of theatre. Again for Rose, it is because the activity of mourning, being the founding gesture of tragic representation, is the activity of *working through*. It is also what makes Rose's tragic conception of the political particularly theatrical. By locating the political in the difficult work of mourning, she conveys a tragic conception of politics in tragedy's ability for self-reflection and agency. If tragedy is an experience of thoughtful conflict, then speculative thinking is, first and foremost, tragic thinking, denoting a specific intra-philosophical and intra-aesthetic mode of subjectivity. As already mentioned, the modality Rose names *aporia* evokes an in-between space with-out a way, and yet a space of knowing nonetheless which

sums in my account the director's intellectual activity as practice – an a-poretic mode of embodied inquiry that could yield true social and political insight, and perhaps even real change.

Part 1 of this study, 'Philosophical figurations of the Director' (Chapters 1–3) reads the director's subjectivity in Evental terms. Tracing structural and aesthetic sequences in the function of the director in the Athenian paradigm of tragedy, I identify the potential of the director's in-betweenness. I then discuss mediation in Evental terms, tracing the figure of the director in what becomes the Event of philosophy in theatre – an embodied philosophy in the mode of the director. Part 2, entitled 'The Philosophical Figure of the Director' (Chapters 4–6), subsequently shifts attention to the modernist modes of speculative thinking as the new form of the theatre director. I show how the modern director is not only entangled with philosophical thought, but how the cultural and political landscapes of modernist theatre can be revised by thinking the director as a speculative subjectivity.

Historiography and the (Philosophical) Director

How does one define the director? Being an artist who works *through* the mediums, skills and characteristics of other artists of theatre, such as of the actor, the playwright, the scene and light designer, even the producer, certainly eludes any clear categorisation. This is especially the case when one tries to define what exactly the director does, or what the actual art of directing is. This is a difficulty that is further exacerbated by the critical theory when this figure is assessed from the politics that have shaped the historical moment of aesthetic modernity. So how can we read the artistic identity of this figure? What does this figure mean for the practice of theatre, but also for society and culture as a whole? Most

importantly perhaps, why was there a need for this figure to appear when the director finally emerged at the end of the nineteenth century?

Such questions are prevalent in the critical writings of Adorno. His famous essays around the rise of the culture industry pursue an exploration on what – or better, *who* – caused the culture industry to come into being. Adorno's typically condescending voice turns to Wagner that, for him, denotes the process of setting off cultural commodification: 'like a spider,' Adorno claims, Wagner sits in 'the gigantic web of 19th-century exchange relations' (in Huyssen 36). Adorno's reading is socioeconomically motivated and fuelled to some degree by the already circulating rhetoric of the charismatic 'creator', the self-proclaimed 'genius' that he attaches to Wagner and which informs the artistic tradition of romantic idealism to which Wagner belongs.

Another major philosopher concerned with theatre is Friedrich Nietzsche. Certainly, Nietzsche plays a significant part in shaping the image of the director as a creative artist of the theatre. Starting by reworking Arthur Schopenhauer's idea of the artistic genius that is capable of transcending limitations in thought by following an intuitive process, Nietzsche arrives at the conceptual outlines of his *Übermensch* as the modern creative artist – and specifically, as that gifted individual endowed with special qualities that not only allows intuitive insight into the world but partakes in its creation. Yet what is most interesting is that his *Übermensch* is a man (and it is always a man, for Nietzsche) of theatre: 'the "Dionysian" man,' he writes, 'is a synonym for *Übermensch*, the man in whom will to power has been sublimated into mastery and self-creativity' (*Dithyrambs of Dionysus* 17).

This powerful creative identity is given an emblematic space in Olga Taxidou's *Modernism and Performance, Jarry to Brecht*. For her, the director signals a 'creative force' that, in her words, is 'to an extent codified, experimented with and given some form of definition within the aesthetic concerns of

Modernism and within the broader socio-political framework of modernity' (43). In light of this, too, which places an emphasis on the *synthetic creativity* of this figure, an early definition of the director can be seen in the aesthetic writings of Edward Gordon Craig, who envisions this figure mainly for himself. Claiming special skill and mastery in every practice peculiar to the stage, the director is conceived in his writings as a kind of supreme master that sets off the Theatre of the Future – which is Craig's theatre. This new theatre, like the new figure of the director, creates through gesture, movement, sound, lighting, costume, design and speech. Ironically, Craig had a problematic relationship with the actual practice of theatre and had very little to show in his role as a director. On the contrary, there were numerous lengthy theoretical writings about the role of the director and the new theatre he had envisioned for this figure. Yet this is something that cannot be discounted as a diversion from what directors actually do. Prolific (practical) theatre directors, from Konstantin Stanislavski, to André Antoine, to Vsevolod Meyerhold, to Antonin Artaud and Bertolt Brecht, produced an impressive volume of writings about theatre through which they introduced their own different stylistic preferences and openly sought to transform theatre right from its core by experimenting with and reforming its medium and agents.

Therefore, what is at stake in the practice of the director is the director's own creativity that is often correlated to writing in a way that reflects the equally contested relationship between aesthetic modernity and philosophy. We only need to look, in this sense, at the way Craig endorses Nietzschean philosophy by reciting ideas and whole passages taken directly from Nietzsche in an attempt to compose his own aesthetic writings, particularly as developed in Craig's periodical, *The Mask*. Not only does he impersonate the voice of the philosopher but embodies the figure of some kind of philosophical theatrical master. Following the model of Nietzsche's Zarathustra, which Nietzsche borrows from Plato's dramatic dialogues in the *Republic*, as observes Taxidou, Craig 'appears

as the all-knowing master (in part a Pateresque Socrates-figure but also a Zarathustra one)', initiating 'the student into the mysteries of his art' (*The Mask* 30).

The philosophical concept of the all-powerful 'artistic-genius' offers Craig an intellectual premise upon which he can then enact the image of the 'aesthetic man' as deeply creative and transformative. It is how, Craig also comes to conceptualise his own theatrical *Übermensch*, namely the *Übermarionette*. As a prototype of the modern actor, the *Übermarionette* can be read as an attempt to renovate the artistic tradition of the actor-manager. By making a case about why the actor needs to be 'puppetised', Craig turns the actor into creative artifice for his Theatre of the Future. What is often not registered in the scholarship of the director is that it is *through thinking* about a new creative type of an actor that the director emerges as a by-product of creative intellectual work. In Craig, for example, this thinking takes the shape of promoting an *Über*-figure for the actor that, ultimately, is what the director wants to embody, recreate, and use as some kind of 'other half' in the theatrical expression of the director; that is also what shapes the director's art. Furthermore, theorising about theatre in a direct relation to philosophy brings the director to also claim the new role of this artist as a type of thinker of theatre.

In this respect, the director can, as Taxidou argues, 'act as a channel for the "new" art of the theatre', creating 'a space' and 'a language' that functions in itself as 'a distinct epistemological category, differentiating it from the art of the playwright' (*Modernism and Performance* 44). This is the same relation that we find with the discipline of philosophy which, already since Plato, turns to theatre to theatricalise intellectual activity. In this particular sense, philosophical thought is seen to enacted *by* and *through* the art of the director in modernist theatre and offered by philosophy as a kind of dramatisation of a certain ideological attitude which, in turn, shows the director as a kind of 'construct'. One such example is

Adorno's appropriation of Wagner. As mentioned earlier, by approaching Wagner as an ideological case, Adorno creates a hypothesis that essentially functions as an intellectual dramatisation of it. It is in this light that Maria Delgado and Dan Rebellato also observe in their edited collection *Contemporary European Theatre Directors* that the director cannot be seen to denote 'a homogenous individual but rather as a construct that itself articulates wider debates around the intersections between theatre, nation, state and the broader structures through which geographical, political and cultural spaces intersect or collide' (21).

Now if philosophical discourse has often problematised the role of the director, the centrality of the dramatic text in relation to the director has dictated a further reductive understanding of the function of the director that sees the director as that other 'prosthetic' leg by which theatre carries the weight of the playwright's word. In his *Contemporary Mise en Scène: Staging Theatre Today*, for instance, Patrice Pavis describes the director as the primary function of 'choosing a direction, an orientation, an interpretation' (4). Yet, it is offered always as a practice to be understood in relation to staging a text – a practice, which Pavis conceives to be 'unalterable, to the letter' (ibid.). Thus his reading strictly situates the director in the act of 'laying out' and 'of putting on stage a dramatic text' (ibid.). A similar approach is seen in Simon Shepherd's *Direction: Readings in Theatre Practice*. Here, the English context of the director is considered, this time from a broader artistic and aesthetic perspective in relation to the director's practice. Yet, it is offered as fundamentally rooted in the 'practical theorisation' of directing and he even shifts terms in the UK context, from 'directing' to 'direction' (16). Therefore, Shepherd's study which innovatively attempts to interpret the practice of theatre direction nonetheless falls prey to a theatrical discourse that reads an 'auteur' dimension (as

authoritarian) into the meaning of the director that is hardly emancipatory or radical.

It should also be mentioned at this point that the term of the 'auteur' was first introduced in the theatrical discourse by David Bradby and David Williams. In their influential book *Directors' Theatre*, published in 1988, they analyse the director as an auteur but without intending to propose the director as authoritarian. Rather, the 'auteur' is meant to reflect the radical ramifications of the French cinematic 'auteur' brought in the context of theatre. The 'auteur' conceived as an exemplary agent of the experimental European film occupies the kind of critical space by which to critique and oppose the capitalist machinery of mass entertainment represented by Hollywood. Similarly, in *Directors' Theatre*, the aim was to provide this kind of similar critical ground by which one could conceptualise the director as a radical sociocultural figure. This is further evidenced from the selection of the directors' work they discuss who were all notable experimental figures of the 1960s and 1970s. And yet, their account is still not immune to ideological binary readings of power structures that conflate the art and practice of the director with a type of evolved managerial function originating from the actor-manager theatre – most notably, the first chapter of their book is entitled 'The Rise of the Director'.

The historical evolutionary reading of the director is nothing new in theatre history and can already be seen in John Osborne's early article of 1975. Osborne explores the theatre of the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen which is widely considered among theatre historians as the first director. Entitling his article 'From Political to Cultural Despotism: the Nature of the Saxe-Meiningen Aesthetic,' Osborne's tone of his overarching argument is driven by power dynamics evoked by his use of words and phrases such as 'duke', 'despot', 'consistently authoritarian,' and the like. Another such attempt is made by John H. Terfloth. Terfloth's article, also exploring Saxe-Meiningen but this time in relation to 'The Pre-Meiningen

Rise of the Director in Germany and Austria', explicitly proposes a reading of the director as an autocrat that set off to discipline every aspect of theatre through artistic control and the subordination of the artistic freedom of the actor.

Now you might have thought that forty-one years later, theatre historiography may have moved to more complex interpretations of the history of the director that at least rehabilitate the authoritarian image of the director. However, the answer is principally 'no', mostly giving way to a wealth of factual readings of stylistic trends and movements upon which the director is reductively mapped. Even the achievement of Toby Cole and Helen Krich Chinoy's comprehensive account of the director's art in their *Directors on Directing* that has undoubtedly thrown light on the various stylistic preoccupations of each of the director described, their analysis is limited, nonetheless, to the historical genealogical moment that appropriates the director in theatrical convention and styles mainly understood on the basis of theatrical evolution. This approach can and has significantly aided an understanding of the conditions and processes that compelled this new figure to emerge, yet it has offered very little insight about the meaning of the function of the director and the kind of thinking this figure fosters, both in terms of the formation of the aesthetic trajectory of modernism as well as a new form of art in theatre. This is further evident in Puchner's early book, *Stage Fright, Modernism, Anti-theatricality and Drama* (2002), in which, despite his later, more philosophical approaches to discussing theatre, he employs the same normative historiographical position that reads 'the rise of the so-called directors' in the late-nineteenth century as 'an attempt to reduce collaboration in the theatre and to concentrate the act of creation in the hand of one *supreme* director' (10, my emphasis).

Consequently, what could be said to be the key problem with the historiographical approach is the casting of a particular understanding of the director as a primarily individualistic, tyrannical figure that is read in accordance

with the stylistic manifestations and trends of each movement while it neglects to acknowledge any more radical perspectives for the image of this figure that may include notions such as collectivity, equality or democracy. A representative example of this case in point is Christopher Innes and Maria Shevtsova's *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Directing*, in which the function of the director is described as the immediate extension of 'the emergence of naturalism as the dramatic form of the age' (30). The director viewed as 'a cause and effect' becomes nothing more but a requirement for 'objectivity in presentation and individualised characterisation' (ibid.) that is necessitated by the dramatic conventions and stylistic concerns of Realism. There is no doubt that the director is infinitely connected to the development of verisimilitude in theatre, yet it is also worth questioning what this formal 'requirement' in the aesthetic foundation of Realism (and not only) actually meant for the structure of theatre as a locus of a dynamic interchange between representation, community and emancipation, and between place, form and politics. This recurrent issue in the scope of analysis of historiographical scholarship appears in most available examinations of the director. Even when directing is considered beyond the straightforward confines of practice, rehearsals or the efficient blocking, as seen in Delgado and Rebellato's analysis, the emphasis continues to fall on the smooth organisation of the text's proper enunciation and representation and of whether directing is a matter to be measured by its conformity to the pre-written script. Again here, for them, directing (and the function of the director) is primarily allocated the meaning of a craft event if it 'is never simply a question of "interpreting" but rather about shaping, representing, positioning and creating' (18). It could be argued that the pronouncement of 'craft' rather than 'art' does not necessarily act as a reductive derivative in their assessment of directing. Keeping the connection between 'interpreting' and the 'act of giving form', understood as arranging, representing and creating, is indeed an approach to thinking about the director in

ways that make the question of ‘interpretation’ all the more important. Yet, as I want to propose in this thesis, it is also time that we thought of directing in more complex ways that move theatrical enquiry beyond purely historical accounts or ‘how to do’ manuals of directing practice to more conceptual terms. Indeed, as Boenisch puts it:

For more than a decade now, theatre research has offered prolific, sustained and profound investigations into the art, techniques and problems of the actor, of acting and performing. We still lack a similarly in-depth interrogation, let alone understanding, of theatre direction. (4)

In following pages of this thesis I attempt to identify and articulate a conceptual understanding of the figure of the director within the theatres of modernism. I seek to move beyond this curious ‘lack’ in theatre scholarship when it comes to discussing the director and directing as an art. The notable exceptions are Taxidou’s two volumes, *Modernism and Performance* and *Tragedy, Modernity and Mourning*, both of which explore (even if indirectly) the philosophical underpinnings of the function of the modern director within aesthetic modernity. Other exceptions are Puchner’s philosophically motivated study *The Drama of Ideas* and Boenisch’s recent study *Directing Scene and Senses: The Thinking of Regie*, which reads the director’s *Regie* speculatively, as a Hegelian mode of thinking: ‘I start by asserting,’ he writes, ‘that *directing thinks* and that it thinks in its own way.’ (5)

In the opening chapter of Boenisch’s book, the only other major study on directing that can be seen to complement the conceptual breadth of my own examination, the entry of the director at the last quarter of the nineteenth century is viewed in terms of producing plays, initially coming from the canonical dramatic repertoire and staged by an ensemble of residence artists, ‘usually at the public state and city theatre of Continental Europe’. (1) This is not an uncommon position in theatre scholarship as I have already explained, and the director did

indeed emerge out of the organisational structures of the nineteenth century actor-manager theatre. Yet what is, by contrast, new and particularly interesting in Boenisch's reading of this history is the emphasis he places on distinguishing what he calls a 'Continental theatre' (2) from the Anglo-American theatrical enterprise. In this context, the director's emergence is to be understood as a primarily European phenomenon that is hardly accidental but deeply entangled with the developments in modern philosophical thought. Developments, I should further add, that bring theatre to enact, with the appearance of the modern director, the 'Event of thought in theatre,' (*Handbook* 72) in Badiou's terms – or what Taxidou calls 'a philosophical theatre' (*Modernism and Performance* 71) and the kind of theatre that Puchner conceptualises as a 'theatre of ideas' (*The Drama of Ideas* 7).

The other important part of the history of the director that this thesis proposes is an understanding of the director as subjectivity which I conceptualise as an Event. For Alain Badiou, an Event defines 'pure beginning' (in Barclay 174). In making such an opening, something epochal takes place that is deeply transformative and relational, but it can only be understood retrospectively. Badiou's 'Evental' thinking is central to the conceptual reading of the director's subjectivity I propose as a speculative mode or trope. Firstly, the logic of the Event reveals subjectivity as fundamentally speculative, which brings us back to the conceptual model of mediation. That is to say, it allows us to read the appearance of the director not chronologically, but as the result of the process (Event) of its own appearance that necessitates the director as a 'third' term. Thus, to speak of the Event of the director designates, not merely the history of this figure, but the *very essence of the historical* in such a figure. It also proposes the philosophical configuration of the director, which, in turn, rehabilitates the historical director as a tyrannical, autocratic figure. But what does it mean to read the 'essence' of the director? That, instead of interrogating historical change on a

logic of cause and effect, mediation (what Hegel refers to in this sense as historicity) proposes to explore the ontological region in the structure of change as such. Some of the questions that confront us have to do with the meaning of the appearance of the director in the historical moment of theatre. What did this appearance cause theatre to experience? What did this figure do to philosophy and the hegemonic time of philosophy? How were the ancient quarrels between Plato and theatre first played out, revisited and played out again once the director entered theatre in modernism? What was the political meaning of the director in these theatres? As we shall see, the director as an Event also recreates the Event of tragedy, reinventing what makes democracy in the same manner as to what makes tragedy. The link between theatre, democracy and tragedy in this thesis is where the figure of the director derives its conceptual meaning and where the Event is formed.

What I am proposing, therefore, is not to simply challenge the normative position within theatre scholarship that has often associated the director with someone who suddenly arrested artistic control from the actor, the playwright and the scenic designer in order to impose a new artistic vision that was primarily individualistic and subjective, but to delve deeper into the meaning of the director in its non-anthropomorphic dimension – as a subjectivity. This thesis therefore conceptualises the director as an Event, which is to think of the director in its mediating capacity as negotiator and, as we shall see, a type of speculative thinker and democrat. Reading the director through an Evental prism consigns historical material into an intraphilosophical and transhistorical mode or trope of analysis. It recognises the creation of a new possibility, not in a simple linear and progressive manner, but introspectively and relationally as already embedded in the act of occurring. An Evental conception of the director would then suggest that the perceived origin of the director cannot be understood historically, as a specific moment in time, or as a particular historical figure. Rather, it acts as an

indicator in historical time without a beginning, behaving as a kind of mobile, structural activity conceived as a relational movement already at work since the inception of the institution of theatre in classical Athens.

Following this line of argument, my approach might be seen as purposefully refusing to fall back on received notions and histories of the director as a foil for a restatement of traditional understandings of the director as a particular type or style of theatre, or a particular historical genealogical exposure of theatrical tradition and evolution. Rather, what I propose is a philosophical reading of the director, by which I attempt to rehabilitate the historical moment of this figure while I question the ramifications of this development in the complex critical terrain of aesthetic modernity. The director, presented and understood in my reading as a conceptual paradigm of speculative thought, enacts as much as embodies the anxieties and aspirations of the modernist project, which are then tested and negotiated by this figure. Offered as a paradigm of (politico-aesthetic) practice, the director can also be seen to enable a necessary critical framework upon which certain central questions of politics, ethics, and aesthetics are posed, allowing us, in this way, to gain access to a range of wider philosophical issues that lay at the heart of theatrical modernity. Moreover, to re-conceptualise the director's subjectivity in Hegelian terms, and particularly in Rose's revisionist account of mediation as a 'broken middle', is to move beyond the debilitating binary position that sees tyrannical directors and subordinated actors, and beyond what is a misinformed perception, to again evoke Boenisch's own words, 'of the director as authoritarian *auteur* who allegedly (ab)uses the playwright's work according to his individual will' (46). Rather, the aim of my examination here is to emphasise the speculative dimension of the director as a figure *between* the philosopher and the theatre-maker, what Badiou describes as being between 'thought and representation' (*The Century* 40). This *in-betweenness*, I suggest, is what allows the *actualisation* of ideas. Their dramatisation and potentialities,

once embodied, experienced, and shaped in concrete physical forms on stage, are read in my account as representations of mediation which simultaneously denote the (mediating) subjectivity of the director as modes of knowledge – a productive mode, too, of philosophical thought itself.

Directing as a Philosophical Enterprise

I want to briefly address here, too, my choice of reading the modernist director as a philosophical enterprise rather than as a theatrical practice that purely focuses on the anthropomorphic image of the director either as an auteur, an actors' coach or even perhaps a theatre reformer. Although my reading does not exclude these important parts of the historical identity of the director, it is the speculative status of the director that I turn my critical attention to. By 'speculative' I mean the kind of mediating function that enables the director to enact thought in space and time and to offer the modernist theatre as a site of agonism and a form of 'knowing.' In theatre this 'knowing' is always a matter of embodied knowledge and is embedded in the speculative experience of theatre. It is what turns modernist theatre, as I hope to show in this thesis, to a philosophical theatre inextricably linked with the function of the director as a speculative thinker of representation. If my reading, therefore, appears to situate the director, not at the rehearsal rooms where directors interact with actors in the process of staging plays, it is because my focus is on the speculative values of theatre that I read as representations of mediation. This mediating function I attribute to the director whose art creates a new space between acting and writing, the body and the word, philosophy and the stage. The director *as a philosopher* in this thesis is to be understood, therefore, as this kind of speculative figure that, to borrow from Badiou, 'carries out the very complex investigation into the relationship between text, acting, space and public.' (*The Century* 40)

Following, in this respect, Badiou's understanding of the director as 'something like a thinker of representation' (ibid.), I wish to rehabilitate this artist as a mode thought in theatre. Like Badiou, my interest in this thesis is to highlight the connection between the modernist theatre and philosophy, and more specifically, between the director and speculative thought. As a result, my analysis is less concerned with stylistic expressions, rehearsal methodologies or a 'how to' guides of directing plays. Rather, I consider the art and practice of the director from the ability of theatre to produce ideas and I examine the director, in line with Badiou, as 'an event of thought' (Handbook 72) in theatre. This Event in theatrical modernism, I argue, is carried out through the mediating subjectivity of the theatre director. For this reason, my examination tends to focus on those moments and practices that seem to me to visibly demonstrate the philosophical dimension of the director. I turn to theoretical writings produced by this figure as well as the interrelation between aesthetics, politics and philosophy and less to the material production process of directing concerned with directing actors and staging plays. The latter covers vital information about the practical composition of directing as a theatre craft, but it is the dimension of directing as philosophy located in the aesthetic material themselves that concerns my investigation in this thesis. These are materials, too, that I perceive to be embodied expressions of the mediating subjectivity of the director.

Antiphilosophy

My broader definition of philosophy also includes the somehow recent term of antiphilosophy. First, let's take a closer look at what antiphilosophy is before I explain how the term 'philosophy' is used in my analysis. For Boris Groys, antiphilosophy stands for 'a readymade philosophy that ascribes universal philosophical value to certain already-existing ordinary practices, in the same way in which practices of the artistic readymade ascribe artistic value to ordinary

objects.’ (xi) He then goes on to explain that the antiphilosopher was drawn to ‘ordinary experiences and practices that can be interpreted as being universal – as transcending one’s own cultural identity’ (ibid). What is also of particular interest in his definition is how the intellectual work of antiphilosophy ‘dissociates the production of evidence from the production of philosophical discourses.’ (idid.) In short, it seems that it is the experience, practices, objects or (philosophical) attitudes that produce the evidence for the antiphilosophers, rather than self-evident discourses that are taken to be ‘determined by specific cultural and social conditions’ (ibid.) Thus, whilst philosophy, according to Groys, generates ‘universally self-evident discourses that transcend the limits of any particular cultural identity,’ in antiphilosophy one is concerned with ‘the experience of self-evidence (of truth)’ which is understood in the same way that ‘aesthetic experience’ is produced. (xii). What is further striking with his definition of antiphilosophy is the correlation between the ‘artistic’ and the ‘philosophical’ which appears, in his account, to come into contrast with the task of the philosopher. Indeed, the philosopher is seen as a kind of mediator – as someone who uses personal self-evidence as experiences with which the philosopher ‘mediates through his or her discourse.’ (x)

Now I would like to clarify my approach which does not cancel either critical aspect of what Groys describes as philosophy and antiphilosophy respectively. However, it is the latter aspect – that of mediation – that is most significant for my analysis that Groys attaches to the term of philosophy. As such, if antiphilosophy is concerned with experiences of self-evidence that emerge ‘not at the origin of the object or the production of the text, but as an effect of their contextualisation’ (ibid.), then it is the function of mediation attributed to philosophy that is most relevant for my reading of the director as a type of a speculative philosopher. This does not necessary disallow the contextual practice of the antiphilosopher. Indeed, my analysis often turns to contextualising various

philosophical texts, discourses and practices in relation to the figure of the director that I employ non-anthropomorphically; that is, as I explained earlier, a type of speculative subjectivity. Yet I am aware that antiphilosophy has its own independent conceptual focus and I acknowledge the limitation that my use of the term ‘philosophy’ poses. However, I have chosen to embed antiphilosophy in the broader sense of ‘philosophy’ as a discipline. This is mainly because the focus of my examination is specifically on the mediating aspect of speculative thought as well as the relationship between speculative philosophy and directing that drives the conceptual backbone of this thesis. Furthermore, the thinkers that I turn to, such as Badiou, Rancière, Rose, have often referred to themselves as philosophers and their intellectual activity as philosophy – notably Badiou wrote two manifestos on philosophy – *Manifesto for Philosophy, Followed by Two Essays: the (Re)Turn of Philosophy itself and Definition of Philosophy* (1999) and *Second Manifesto for Philosophy* (2010); Similarly, Rancière’s *The Philosopher and His Poor* (2004) openly situates the author as a philosopher/mediator who not only turns to philosophy to think about ‘the poor’ but also asks how philosophy itself depends on this thinking about the poor, from Plato to Karl Marx to Jean-Paul Sartre to Pierre Bourdieu. The same can be said about Rose who has often claimed herself as a Hegelian philosopher, and so forth. It is, therefore, against this background that I draw on the term of ‘philosophy’ as a general, all-encompassing term by which I read the director without discounting the aspect of antiphilosophy which I consider as an internal current of philosophical thought, since anti-philosophy is essentially a critique of philosophy.

The ‘Tragic’ Gesture of a Mediating Subjectivity

In their edited collection *Staging Philosophy, Intersections of Theatre, Performance and Philosophy*, David Krasner and David Saltz question ‘what

exactly do we mean by a “philosophical” approach to theatre and live performance?’ (2). Distinguishing between critical theory and philosophical analysis, with the latter being the examination of ‘the assumptions made by critical studies’, they conclude that a philosophical approach to analysis is what ‘advances new arguments about – and new approaches to – the nature of theatre and performance in general’ (ibid.). To address a likely objection to the kind of approach that I am proposing here, whose main trope is philosophical, I would like to briefly address my choice. Why treat the director as a philosophical phenomenon? And why approach the director in this way, from the specific philosophical locus of mediation? This privileges a theoretical approach that, while it appears to limit significant historical enquiry, it seems to promote a fundamental *historicity* – it describes, in other words, the historical placement of the meaning of the director as opposed to the director being historical, which again is a Hegelian dialectical mode of analysis. I will address each aspect in turn by highlighting the relevance of mediation to the primary form of theatre, namely tragedy, where I locate the origins of the director as a mode of thought.

We should not forget that when Hegel proposed his speculative philosophy, it was not only in response to the perceived limitation of the Kantian dual thinking, but with a profound grasp of tragedy that rather shaped his understanding of mediation as a dialectical form of reconciliation and dissolution on the other. Since the focus of the tragic universe is not the tragic hero, who is only a by-product of this universe, but the city-state conceived, reflected and presented equivocally, it is always to be negotiated on moral and political grounds. It is what makes the notion of justice both vitally important and intensely ambivalent. There is not one justice – or at least, not one ‘right’ justice – but only justice as an agonistic topos or conflict. Its speculative thinking most visibly unravels in its tendency to repeatedly dissolve all the markers of certitude that need to be questioned and negotiated for any course of action, always leaving us

and its heroes wondering ‘what is to be done next?’ – or, rather, ‘what is the right thing to be done next?’ In other words, it could be said that tragedy, once it is viewed as part of the conceptual constitution of the director’s cultural meaning as I want to explore in what follows, signals not the beginning of the experience of rational argumentation, or its terminus, but the kind of a mediating dimension in which the civic and the collective can be re-thought, re-imagined and, finally, recognised as something new, or something else in the aesthetic paradigm of tragedy. For if tragedy reveals a kind of politics – a tragic politics, founded by the difficulty and uncertainty of action, the partial intelligibility to human agency, ‘where autonomy is necessarily limited by the acknowledgement of dependency’ (‘Tragedy’s Philosophy’ 32) as Simon Critchley argues, in an equivocal world in search of what Rose calls ‘a good enough justice’ – then I would like to argue that it is a tragic conception that provides us with insight into the political and philosophical dimension of the director as a theatrical phenomenon of the modernist theatre. Having said this, however, I am not suggesting here that the director is a ‘tragic’ figure. Rather, that the aesthetic value of the ‘tragic’ is intimately related to this figure and it is a relation that is unambiguously speculative and political as a matter of *aporia*.

When Aristotle described the genre of tragedy as the imitation of action – *mimesis praxeos*, he avoided elaborating the aspect of tragic action as the outcome of a conscious decision (something that Plato was mostly concerned with because it is the aspect the connected theatre with politics). Or to borrow from Simon Critchley, the question here is ‘*how to act?*’ (‘Tragedy’s Philosophy’ 33). As he argues, in tragedy ‘we find human beings somehow compelled to follow a path of suffering that allows them to raise questions which admit of no easy answer: what will happen to me? How can I choose the right path of action? The overwhelming experience of tragedy is a *disorientation* expressed in one bewildered and frequently repeated question: *what shall I do?*’ (ibid.) And yet, it

is a question that in theatre, like in democracy, cannot escape either the speculative act of ‘judging and choosing’. This is primarily an act of thought, of ‘thinking *in* action, thinking *upon* action, *for the sake of* action’. (ibid.) It is the kind of thinking, indeed, that motivates and requests, not only radical questioning, but ‘the *difficulty* and *uncertainty* of action’, (ibid.) whose ethical ambiguity invites equivocation as an aesthetic strategy that incorporates in its experience a mode of embodied thinking – or, if you like, *a thinking subjectivity*, embedded in the work itself. This same kind of subjectivity, therefore, regulates affect and, in particular, the affect of grief in tragedy, and its relation to form – what perhaps triggered Plato’s denunciation of tragedy in the first place. That is, the possibility of embodying, what Stuart Hampshire calls, ‘adversary reasoning’ or ‘adversarial reasoning’ (181) in the visceral, full-blooded form of theatre that is also offered as the most powerful political diagnoses or, even, political forms of power themselves. Even if the experience of tragedy revolves around moral ambiguity, its elevation of ‘justice’ to a conflictual topos to be *seen* and be *experienced* as such, signals the dissolution of all the markers of certitude in which the question of ‘what shall I do?’, for Critchley, poses both the beginning of rational argumentation and the ‘reason’s terminus’ (34), which is the dynamic opposition of *thinking theatrically*. It incorporates spectatorship in the thinking of the ethical, which transforms spectators by reconfiguring a new (ethical) subjectivity through the fictional world of tragedy.

Now there is also the mode and method of thinking about the theatre that the recent ‘philosophical turn’ in theatre studies describes under the rubric of ‘Performance Philosophy’. This is a methodological approach concerned with ‘theatrical thinking’ in ways by which concepts, genres, and language are employed by philosophy to either literally enact philosophical ideas (such as we find in Plato’s dramatic, dialogic thought, for example), or by reconfiguring theatre for the appropriation of philosophy in models and paradigms that

constitute theatrical thinking. Philosophy, in this sense, not only in the sense of producing thought but as a different form of theatre, offers a method of thinking of the theatre while staging and embodying thought. Or, to frame it in Hegelian terms, theatre ‘becomes’ thought, while simultaneously its ‘being’ is its own ‘becoming’ as a mode or trope of theatre.

For Kenneth Burke, such a dialectic dimension is embedded in the dramatic form of philosophy already visible in Plato’s writing. As he argues, the dialectic form can be regarded as written ‘in the mode of ritual drama’ (107). Reflecting on Burke, in his article ‘Kenneth Burke, Theatre, Philosophy, and the Limits of Performance,’ Puchner points out that Burke’s source for developing his argument around the dramatic origin of the ‘dialectic’ is Hegel (48). Indeed, Hegel’s appropriation of theatre as a mode of thought, by which he proposes his speculative dialectics, is outlined in his *Philosophy of History*. History, he maintains, happens *as if* we have entered ‘the theatre’, comprising of different ‘scenes’ and ‘characters’ which unfold on the ‘stages’ of the world history. (58) It is what also brings Simon Critchely to state that ‘tragedy is a dialectical mode of experience. ...[and] an object lesson in dialectical thinking.’ (36) As he explains, ‘It is a staging of dialectics, which is why Hegel had such a profound grasp of tragedy, even if he sometimes confined it within the horizon of reconciliation, on the one hand, and dissolution, on the other’ (ibid.). In Peter Szondi’s *An Essay on the Tragic*, the concept of the ‘tragic’ explored from Schelling to Benjamin is, once again, identified as the source of dialectic thinking, epitomised by Hegel as its key representative. The gesture is one of *reciprocity*, yet one that also allows us to conceive in tragedy a point of rupture; thinking attempts to stage a theatre *of* thought and *for* thought, as both a mode of theatre (tragedy) and of philosophy (knowledge). The mediation between the two is the speculative space that originates in the ‘tragic’ gesture of embodied thought. But

how can mediation provide us with an understanding of the director as a mode of knowledge, a mode of embodied thought?

Mediation is already a ‘thinking over’, which has thought for its content (Armstrong 69) – a kind of going beyond itself, which includes itself and object in the manner that the director attempts to understand theatre and its materiality; in other words, by endorsing an implied sense of ‘incorporation’ that is central to the director’s artistic subjectivity. For, if an activity of ‘thinking over’ contains the dynamism of thought that generates its own principles of activity from within, as Hegel argues, then it is also what changes the object, by re-working, which is the very process of positing it, giving it ‘a new status in consciousness and returning it to experience in a different form’ (ibid.). The director, in this sense, embodies and gives way to a kind of problematisation as a process of producing a new interpretation – and a new interpretation, as a process of creating meaning, *is* a transformation. Towards this end, I argue, the director is a truly Hegelian figure in the most ‘tragic’ sense; it is only through the mediation of alteration that the director proposes that the central aspects of an object come to consciousness, which in itself is an implicit act of shaping – or we might say ‘direction’ – that is also always an aesthetic act. For things, for Hegel, cannot be understood unless they are altered.

What is argued in the next few chapters is that the mediating subjectivity of the director is what turns thought into experience. It is through the mediated nature of the director that thought can be shared, in an attempt to understand the point of aporia – that point where things ‘come into a changed relation’. (Armstrong 70) The director transforms the material s/he thinks with, which is why the double nature of mediation in the modernist theatre can be seen to involve the veering movement of form/unform, shape/unshaped, frame/unframe. It is also why the mediating middle of the director is intrinsic in the act of judging and choosing which, in Hegelian terms, presupposes negation. That tearing apart, a

moment of schism, that is integral to mediation, generating the anxiety which produces it.

The reading I develop in the following pages sees the director as a mediating middle, a form of thought and, simultaneously, a request for knowledge, that renders the medium of his/her art away from the reductive associations of directing as a privileged kind of creativity, cut off from the experience everyone goes through. The tearing apart and splitting of direction, the brokenness of the theatrical middle that I have discussed so far, I see as moments in the mediating process that come to inform the aesthetic subjectivity of the director – as a form of embodied thought, and simultaneously a creative aporia, to borrow from Rose, makes it possible ‘to know, to misknow, and yet to grow’ (*The Broken Middle* 264) in the theatres of modernism as we shall see.

Chapter Outlines

Chapter 1, which is my opening chapter to this thesis, examines the speculative premises of theatre as a ‘broken middle’. The chapter introduces the main strands of Rosean thought upon which I propose my reading of the director as a speculative thinker in theatre. Highlighting some of the problematics in the study of the director in contemporary theatre historiography, this chapter makes a case for a more conceptual, philosophical approach. The theoretical models of the Event and Tragedy are offered as alternative methods by which this thesis approaches and interrogates the meaning of the director as a mediating subjectivity.

The aesthetic paradigm of tragedy is explored in more detail in Chapter 2, in which I identify the origins of a speculative space that later will give rise to the figure of the director – not genealogical, but as what Badiou calls an Event. The chapter looks closely at several philosophical texts by Plato, Castoriadis and Rose

and puts forward a new understanding of the function of the classical ‘poet’ as the first philosophical figuration of the modern director. This premise is more closely examined in the next chapter (Chapter 3) in which I compare Badiou’s philosophy of the Event with mediation, and how they both help us rehabilitate the director and various themes of the modernist theatre conceptually as a mode of thought.

Chapter 4 rehabilitates Wagner from a proto-fascist to the first articulation of a philosophical director. I revisit his own writings that I analyse in relation to the philosophers that shaped his thought and his work, and I interrogate the way Wagner has been received through them and subsequently by philosophical discourse. By identifying an embodied mode of philosophical thought in Wagner’s aesthetic materials themselves, I explore Wagner as a Hegelian modality and argue for an alternative, positive reassessment of the meaning of Wagner as a socialist revolutionary and anarchist.

Chapter 5 looks at the speculative subjectivity of the director in Naturalist and Realist theatre. Part of the aim of this chapter is to rethink the Naturalist and Realist project from its typical coercive application to what I perceive to be an *affirmative antinomy*. I explore this dimension in the published article included. The rest of the chapter takes a close look at what it is precisely that constitutes the Naturalist and Realist director as a speculative figure. This analysis is taken further in the context of the avant-garde project in Chapter 6. I particularly focus on exploring the art of the avant-garde manifesto as a philosophical configuration of the director. My intention is to draw links between the director as the mode of thought in theatre and its relation to politics in ways that keep revealing the director as a speculative modality, deeply agonistic and aporetic. This, I argue, is seen in the director’s meta-language that shapes the creative and intellectual form of the avant-garde manifesto. The chapter reads closely Marinetti’s futurist manifesting activity and, later, the more political Dada Berlin manifesto as

expressions that insists on positively offering the themes of violence and failure as radically transformative, visionary and hopeful.

In this light, Dada's project of performative 'negation' is proposed to exemplify avant-garde's experimentation with the political form of the manifesto; it conveys that glimpse of hope, of the promise that something may just happen, even if by staging the 'negative' which functions as a profoundly affirmative expression or, as it were, meta-manifestation. The premise of staging negativity, and failing because of it, is what ultimately enacts, I argue, a radical transformation in the theatres of the avant-garde; not by seeking to 'mend' the difference, or to seek perfection as a solution, but to exactly work through the brokenness in order to discover, as Rose would insist, a 'good enough justice'. In this way, I propose the rehabilitation of these failed projects which I view as expressions of the director's deeply speculative meta-language of *thinking theatrically* and *acting politically*.

The final chapter takes this premise further and reads the figure of Bertolt Brecht as the instance of the philosopher inside the theatre. With Brecht, the philosopher has entered the physical stage of theatre, rendering theatre into philosophy more directly. I examine this interface by juxtaposing Brecht's ideas with platonic philosophy, and I argue for the status of the philosophical director as fundamentally *theatocratic*. By this I do not mean Platonist but a kind of mediation, between theatre, philosophy and politics, as already implied by the term theatrocracy [theatre + state], that is understood here speculatively – as theatre's broken middle.

Chapter 2

Between Theatre and the *Polis*

The gaps indicate the irruption of thought: not the irruption of the city, alternately legitimate and illegitimate in its morphology of domination and authority... without generating the fantasy of mending the world – even less of mending the ‘two worlds’.

– Gillian Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law* 33

–

Leaving the rubble in their masses
Join in the column as it passes
Squeaking ‘Freedom!’ as they flee
‘Freedom and Democracy!’

– Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Mask of Anarchy* 42

Each society creates its own forms. These forms in turn bring into being a world in which this society sees itself and gives itself a place. It is by means of them that society constitutes a system of norms, institutions in the broadest sense of the term, values, orientations, and goals of collective life as well as of individual life. At their core are to be found in each instance social imaginary significations, which also are created by each society and which are embodied in its institutions.

– Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Social Imaginary* 56

Participation

Plutarch’s historical account of Thespis’ encounter with the magistrate Solon, one of the architects of Athenian democracy alongside Cleisthenes, is presented with a dispute. Having broken ranks with the chorus, Thespis performs an act that voices matters of political and civic life. Solon, enraged by the diversion, accuses Thespis of professionally deceiving the audience with lies that threaten to pervade society. However, the first man of theatre cunningly replies that it is not him but the *character* who speaks in the play, to which Solon, ‘vehemently struck[ing]

his staff against the ground,' responds: "Ay, if we honor and commend such play as this, we shall find it some day in our business" (Plutarch's Lives 229).

Theatre's illusionistic dimension by the means of the spectator's participation in the suspension of disbelief, and its partaking to the theatrical experience of imagining alternative perspectives embodied on stage, have often stood for a more 'real' existence than reality itself. Insofar theatre is taken to mean the direct image of the political *agora*, understood in its classical sense as the assemblage of people in a shared space, theatre can also be seen to represent the twin image of politics. What is at stake is not only the processes of framing and representation that appear common to both politics and theatre. While these are highly formative processes in which public perceptions are influenced, contested, and finally shaped, they are considered to determine the material expression of political life, despite theatre's obvious fictional premise. This kind of political dialogue between theatre (thespis) and the Polis (Solon), foreshadows, to a certain extent, a relationality between theatre and politics which, as we shall see, shapes the identity of the director when this figure finally appears in modernist theatre. I will return to this configuration in my later discussion; for now, however, in order to understand just how the political ramifications of such a possibility problematise theatre in its conceptual core as a medium of vision and of visibility – a medium, as it were, of appearance more 'true' than reality itself – a brief etymological check of theatre is first in order.

Theatre, coming from the same term as 'theory', derives from the Greek word *thea* meaning a place to be seen, or from which to see, to view, or observe something. As a field of vision, the problem with theatrical representation is said to be one of interfering, to recall Solon's words, with the 'business' of governing, at the route of which is one's participation in phantasmic possibilities that come to *pass* as 'real'. In other words, it is the spectator's participation as a form of regulation of the social and the political. At least, this is the perpetuated argument

over the fear of theatricality that has been voiced since the time of Solon. As a result, the civic act of participation receives its most critical attention as a theatrical practice of ‘vision’ of the ‘political’. Indeed, theatre’s double function as a space of ‘play’ and a space of public dialectical debate problematises theatrical visibility as a certain field of power-relations, which shape and threaten the society from within which it evolves. It is why the idea and practice of participation, considered as a distinctively theatrical trait, has always been intertwined with politics and, most particularly, with the formation of Athenian democracy. But it is why, too, the nature of theatre, understood as a fundamental democratic act in the body politic, is naturally invested, I argue, with political values that, on stage, are simultaneous ways of engaging with philosophical thought.

It comes as little surprise, therefore, that the concept of participation has often dictated the ways in which the relationship (or opposition) between theatre and philosophy are assessed. Proposed as a cultural medium to strengthen democratic identity in classical Athens, theatrical participation was meant to facilitate cognitive skills during the act of participation with ‘fragments of reality’ of their society presented on stage. As S. Sara Monoson observes in her comprehensive *Plato’s Democratic Entanglements, Athenian Politics and the Practice of Philosophy*, when theatre was invented in classical Athens it was as a cultural practice through which citizens were provided with ‘an opportunity to hone intellectual skills that would be valuable when conducting policy deliberations and making decisions in the Assembly, courts, and Council’ (7). Monoson then discusses the role of theatre in the running of the democratic society, pointing out how theatre was integrated in the practice of democracy as an innate component of democratic politics rather than as something conducted outside of Athens’ democratic life. The civic content of the Athenian theatre receives an equally political significance in Simon Goldhill’s assessment, in

which he, too, argues that citizens' participation at theatrical events was distinguished between private or leisure activities. Rather, attending the theatre, he points out, and 'being a theatēs... [was] not just a thread in the city's social fabric, it... [was] a fundamental political act' (106). What such a dramatisation of the city's perception of democratic citizenship in the practice of theatre also showed was the ability of theatre to not only engage and foster the vigorous civic practice of democratic identity and the excellence of the democratic polis. Rather, that the possibility of theatre as a philosophical space itself was capable of enacting the Athenian civic self-image as an *intellectual* demos capable of directly conversing with the Athenian politics of democracy. What was more, it was a *relational* configuration (between thought, politics and representation) articulated aesthetically in the work and practice of the poet/chorodidaskalos, that needs to be understood here dialectically – as a Hegelian negativity; that is, as Weber observes, in accordance with Plato, Aristotle and Heidegger, that participation encompasses its own negativity for its materialisation. It denotes a sense of 'sharing' and 'partaking', which is always inherent to 'dividing or divesting, a *parting* or, perhaps more precisely, a departing, a taking leave, a *partitioning* in order to *impart*' (19). This seemingly 'negative' gesture that underpins participation is, however, not actual, in the sense of 'the resolving of a relationship' (ibid.), but is Hegelian dialectical in the sense that it expresses speculative negativity. Or, to phrase this configuration differently, participation as a 'parting' naturally *negates* the very notion of participation, but it does not dissolve participation in its 'partitioning' which is also the point that forms dialectic negation. What this essential condition of negativity highlights, therefore, is a relation that requires one to remain 'with precisely by parting' (ibid.). This performative inversion is, for Weber, equivalent to what Guy Debord reads as a relation of 'union' in theatre: 'The spectacle,' she argues, 'thus unites what is separate, but it unites it only in its *separateness*' (36).

In the special issue of *Performance Research* journal on ‘Philosophy and Participation’, Laura Cull and Karoline Gritzner situate the notion of participation in similar dialectical terms, between performance and philosophy. What they interrogate is ‘how performance and our participation in it or with it might impact upon how we define “thought”’ (‘Editorial’ 5). Participation, they argue, ‘might be considered as a form (between part and whole, particularity and universality, the subject and the object), or it might be explored as a philosophical concept understood to signal a break with the dialectical approach to reality in favour of positing a primary relationality in which mind and matter, beings and Beings, or substance and expression, participate in one another’ (ibid.). The idea of philosophy as an insatiable consumer-participant of spectacle first appears in Plato’s *Republic* when Socrates, portrayed as eager for the thrills of spectacles, heads to Piraeus to attend a festival. In this scenario, the dramatic setting, which is comparable to the physical sight itself, is what conveys thought, rendering in this way the typical ‘lovers of sight’ (*hoi philotheamones*) in theatre, (475d-e) into lovers of the ‘sight’ (or vision) of truth in philosophy. The significance of what seems to be a reciprocal placement between thought and representation etymologically takes place in this ‘split’ that defines participation. On the one hand, it could thus be said that theatre frames or encloses a place or a series of places that it traverses while part(ak)ing (eg. Socrates in the role of theatrical spectating) in semblance as a mode of thought. The idea of speculative spectating is the following: if ‘the divided character of such taking place,’ as Weber observes, ‘constitutes the quintessence of the theatrical scene,’ it gestures towards ‘other scenes, which remain inconclusive, even and especially where the sequence ends or stops’ (22). Yet on the other hand, the very nature of the spectacle, which is capable of transforming a place into some other place somewhere else, is also what makes the visual and aura experience of spectating to be (dis)embodied in site/sights, both in terms of ‘being’ and ‘thinking’. In other

words: the portrayal of Socrates as a theatre-goer, that is reminiscent of Plato's cave imaginary in which the philosopher escapes the spectators' imprisonment, only to descend back in to share the light of 'truth', is also what renders spectating into a simultaneous mode of *thinking-through-seeing* as well as a site of (philosophical) 'knowledge'.

My interest, however, in the theatrical notion of participation is neither purely philosophical nor political. Rather, it is the aesthetic values of participation displayed by the role and function of the poet as *chorodidaskalos* that foreshadows, I argue, an aesthetic figuration of the modern director. With this in mind, what I want to question here is twofold: a) what is the kind of thinking that theatre as a site of vision and knowledge signifies? and b) what kind of participation is found in the aesthetic structure of the tragic theatre? I will look specifically at the tragic imaginary of this theatre as developed in democratic Athens, to which I trace a specific modality of thought, later to be transubstantiated (as in *metousiosis*), I claim, in what makes up the speculative subjectivity of the director, as we shall see.

To start with, we need to first ask how can participating in the embodiment of the Greek tragic imaginary be read as a mode of thinking in itself? What kind of participation in (the thought of) performance is in the act 'of being a theatēs' that the figure of the poet engenders in the Athenian theatre? And what is the relationship of this practice to Athenian democracy? If the tragic theatre denotes a wholly democratic image of its spectatorship, what kind of democrat is the aesthetic presence of the poet/chorodidaskalos?

The issue at hand is not merely to question the relationship that underpins philosophical activity and performative work in terms of how performance might illustrate philosophical discourse. It is how one might interrogate the 'tragic' of the democratic theatre in the embodiment of the poet/director's thinking which I understand as a specific embodied mode of speculative thought already ingrained

in the tragic performance itself. Towards this aim, my analysis draws on Cornelius Castoriadis' notion of the 'social imaginary signification', a striking elaboration of which I locate in Rose's speculative thought by her term of *aporia*. Rose's call for the equivocation of the ethical that shapes her notion of the 'aporetic' as a position of justice that is also a political position seems to bear a great resemblance to the aesthetic core that drives the Greek tragic imaginary, not only as a critique of classical democracy at the Athenian democratic society, but as a poetics of a particular type of democratic thinking embodied in what was called the 'lesson' of the poet/director. I read this practice as the kind of speculative knowing that arrives from *aporia*. I further look at Plato and his notion of teatrocracy, which I positively invert and explore in teatrocratic practice, not what Plato saw as the stompfeet 'rule' of the spectator, but spectating itself as a theatrical modality of thought. I examine this interface in the aesthetic structure of *chorodidaskalia* that I argue prefigures the art of directing.

Didaskein Choron: the Poet/Director

In *Republic*, Book 10, Plato excludes all mimetic poetry from his ideal city. Proposing the existence of single, unchanging 'ideal Forms' instantiated by objects in the physical world, he explores the value of 'truth' in relation to, and between, appearance and original. This, then, leads him to develop what has come to be known as his 'Theory of Forms', the key significance of which is the ascent of the soul to the realm of Forms as the 'ascent of the mind' (517b). These are, of course, not literal ascents from the physical world to the spiritual, but are integral to the ontological status of particulars as existing *in-between* being and non-being (478d) and, as such, of sensory things having a reality to the degree that they participate in reality. Put differently, Plato's Forms make a metaphysical supposition that has a profoundly political significance: for how we understand

the world always inscribes a process from one way of apprehending it (such as through senses) to another (such as the intellect and philosophical labour), which then correlates, as Plato believed, to the ascent from appearance (illusion) to reality (forms).

Plato's metaphysical gesture of Forms, then, articulates a move towards affirming (as opposed to escaping) 'the real world' that he thinks needs to be distinguished from the one considered as 'real' when it is not (e.g. such as in sophistry or theatre). Yet in doing so, Plato lays the ground for a truly dialectical position between the truth of Forms and theatre's deceptive appearance of truth. The problem with the latter has to do, for him, with mimesis, while it is the former – the coming-to-know reality itself – that he attributes to the discipline of philosophy. It goes without saying that holding theatre, on the one hand, as responsible for 'faking' reality and, on the other, philosophy as an eye-opener and the sole instrument for unearthing the true essence of things already implanted in the universal Forms themselves – yet Forms which require proper philosophical attention and understanding – Plato deliberately sets up an antagonistic and anti-mimetic *relationality* between theatre and philosophy, yet with the intention of affirming the superiority of the discipline of philosophy in matters of 'knowing' against mimetic theatre. What is further fascinating in this regard is the way in which he not only distinguishes the *mimetic poet* from any other representational artists (such as the carpenter or painter), but that he does so by employing a theatrical model by which he advances his own dialogic philosophy – what Freddie Rokem (*Aesthetics and its Discontents*) and Tom Stern perceive as an attempt to replicate the effect of mimesis in his thought, putting us in effect 'twice removed from the real thing' (*Philosophy and Theatre* 27), just like the 'reality' that Plato believes theatre attempts to portray. Naturally, the question of whether Plato truly rejects theatrical mimesis registers in ways that open up much speculation. Indeed, as Puchner observes: 'If Plato did not entertain the possibility

of such a good, philosophical mimesis, a mimesis of forms, his own dramatic form would be an obvious and blatant contradiction' (*The Drama of Ideas* 32). But what was, then, the real purpose of Plato's critique of mimesis in his thought?

It should be noted that mimetic poets, usually referred to as *tragōidoi* in David Wiles' *Theatre and Citizenship*, were not only meant to compose the play but to also rehearse and stage it. This was a highly skilled, long process that involved the training of actors and the chorus in movement and choral singing. Choral training was an important part of an Athenian's education. In *Frogs*, for instance, Aristophanes presents choral experience and education as a compulsory skill of any good politician and was seen as second in importance to physical training in the palestras. Even for Plato, the anti-theatrical philosopher, training in choral performances was viewed as an indispensable feature of a citizen's education (*Laws* 654a). Its significance was not simply to educate oneself in singing, movement, tonality, or any of the literary aspects of the play. Rather, it was seen as embodying a particular dramatic understanding instructed by the poets/directors, which rendered the entire performance event of each play into the embodiment of the poet/director's *didaskalia*. To 'teach the chorus', as Rehm attests in *Greek Tragic Theatre*, was the activity of *didaskein choron* which is 'the Greek phrase for directing a play. Even the list of victors in the dramatic competitions was called the *didaskaliai*, indicating that the prizes were given for directing and not for writing' (26). For Rehm, it was the experience of the poet/director in rehearsals in which 'a group of players', working together under the instruction of the poet/director, would bring together 'a highly literate and demanding text' next to music and movement via oral reception, 'since it cannot be assumed that the performers could read' (*ibid.*). Indeed, to get a better sense of the degree of intellectual and physical dexterity that the poet's rehearsing of a play required, it is worth quoting Rehm at length:

The same twelve performers... played the chorus in all four plays – three tragedies and a satyr-play – composed by a given tragedian. To get a sense

of what this meant in practice, consider Aeschylus's production of the *Oresteia* in 458 b.c. The same group of performers appeared as a chorus of Argive Elders in *Agamemnon*, a group of captured slave-women in *Chorephori*, the terrifying spirits of vengeance called the Furies in *Eumenides*, and a band of (presumably) randy satyrs in the last satyr-play, *Proteus*. Not only were the masks, costumes, and personae different, but the style of movement, the music, the level and quality of emotion, the countless other factors shifted from play to play. Since there was only one performance, the chorus were compelled to master a wide range of material without the benefit of preview audiences. (ibid.)

'Teaching' the audience was often considered the poet's primary challenge in staging a play. As Monoson observes, the start of the performance was usually heralded by the proclamation "Bring on your chorus"... [which] meant something like "Show us (citizens) your (poets) skill at teaching" (*Plato's Democratic Entanglements* 106). Unless the actual poet was dead, in which case a separate artist was needed to take charge of the staging process hearing to the name of the *chorodidaskalos* (meaning chorus-instructor/educator), the practical side of directing a play was normally embedded in the art and function of the poet. Poets, therefore, as trainers/directors, were regarded in the Greek theatre as *didaskaloi* (educators) of the demos, in its more general sense, while their ability to utilise mimesis as a *technē* had resulted in them becoming theatre artists of the highest calibre – a cultural placement easily comparable, I think, to the technical abilities of the modern directors, especially in their function as actor-trainers and interpreters of highly sophisticated texts. This is particularly the case considering the more direct links we find in Brecht's reference to his practice as 'didactic', or the lessons in 'humanity' that Wagner called his colossal music-dramas, to the even later Dadaist subversion teachings by negation that we see in the hyperactivity of manifesto art.

Another significant characteristic of the poets' directorial temperament was their ability to anticipate the audience's active participation and, in this way, steer intellectual stimulation in a predetermined and well-thought-through manner. As

Arnott argues, Athenian spectatorship was ‘an active partner, free to comment, to be commented upon, to assist, or to intervene’ (11) during the performance. However, it was an invited ‘intervention’, planted scrupulously by the poets/directors who also counted on deliberately arousing the critical faculties of their spectators, both emotionally and intellectually. This may well explain Plato’s fury with poets whom he accuses of inciting emotional fervour to be led by infatuated performers who then seduce the audience, which is also driven by hedonistic impulses. A vicious circle that, in *Ion*, even takes a co-dependent flavour; not only is Athenian performance culture depicted as one overwhelmingly underpinned by an image of ‘irrationality’, but it is the dreading outcome, as Marcus Floch observes, of a ‘perverse economy of pleasure between uniformly senseless poets and audiences’ (567). In the *Republic*, Plato had already voiced this fearful dynamic through Socrates: poets may ‘fashion phantoms’ in the audiences’ souls, but the audiences, he emphasised, are far from being silent victims. It is they that influence poets’ choices through their overpowering uproar, assuming the role of the active collaborator shaping the meaning of the performance. And yet, there is a further, deeply fundamental, reason for this objection.

Besides poets being possessed by the Muses and then with their audiences being enraptured by pleasure (*Laws* 568), Plato essentially views the poet as a rival figure in the task of training the minds of the civic body of the Athenian demos, a role that he saw himself in as a philosopher, and he claimed *only* for the philosopher. The prospect, however, of the poet/director figure, who was capable of drawing on mimetic representation and producing convincing imitations of lived experiences that claim to convey the ‘truth’ of things, was, as to be expected, deeply troubling for Plato because this was, he thought, the domain of philosophy and not of theatre or any other discipline. Moreover, mimesis’s duplicity was already problematic in its relation between reality and representation, truth and

falsehood, appearance and the forms of Ideas. In theatre, he saw the problem of duplicity which was magnified due to being *embodied*; that is, the *sui generis* trait of theatricality that was simultaneously posing a metaphysical question *about how the world is*.

As Monoson suggests, ‘to Plato, a poet in his capacity as author and director makes a compelling representation of an object in the world of becoming’ (209). What is most compelling indeed in this respect is that Plato’s understanding of the mimetic poet is not in singular literary terms, but it is a primary philosophical function – that is, the ability to represent reality as mimesis through the medium of the poet/director on the one hand, and, on the other, the appropriation of mimesis as *technē*, by which the poet/director engages in profound philosophical thought. What is more, for Plato, poets’ engagement in *the thought of* performance, not only shapes the thinking of the performative event, but transmits a particular modality of an embodied thought, lived and experienced in the presence of an audience’s moment and through their souls, that comes to shape and define political thought and its moment, too. This is reminiscent of Solon’s fear that we heard at the beginning of this chapter and a recurrent accusation that, as we shall see later on, fuels the debates of modernist discussion over the director and this figure’s experimentation with the aesthetic form. The extent of dispute may vary widely in the context of the various movements of theatrical modernism, but the root of the struggle is precisely a Platonic one: the more the spectators’ souls are aroused by vicarious experiences of extreme emotion in the name of emotionally convincing them, the more one’s good and sound reason, or judgement (*krisis*), is misguided. In this configuration, the poet/director is neither a side effect nor a mere participant, but is at the crux of a relationality that rivals philosophy and molds political identity.

The experience of choral training and staging a play, like the experience of attending the theatre itself, was undoubtedly, as Simon Goldhill and many other

commentators of antiquity contend, a profound rehearsal of citizenship in Athenian democracy. It was also, I would add, a long way from what later theatrical traditions such as the actor-manger's theatre would stand for, or even instrumentally aspire to in its practice dominated by repetition and mimicry. The significance of the poet/director's theatrical practice was, ultimately, in 'lessons' of thought. And, by engaging in thought, the poet/director simultaneously forced thought to be performed on stage *and* 'staged' as philosophy in philosophical thought. In either case, the poet/director, as trainer of the chorus, the audience, and the actors, as well as authors and practitioners of the stage, are inaugurated *also* as philosophers; what could be called *poets of philosophy*. This dimension of theatre was to return in the form of the director with the advent of aesthetic modernity in theatre.

In the subsequent parts of this present chapter, I will examine the democratic function of the poet/director, which I believe can throw valuable light on the political dimension that inscribes the aesthetic structure of the modern director. If the Athenian theatre had a primarily democratic function, and the role of the poet/director is a central part of it, then what does it tell us about the role and identity of the modern director? This is a question that underpins much of the following discussion, sometimes indirectly, by examining the democratic values of the aesthetic paradigm of the tragic theatre. This is a paradigm that lays, I believe, at the foundation of the poet/director's thought and the thinking that renders the modern director as a kind of 'democratic' philosopher – indeed, what makes the director, as I will argue, a 'theatocratic democrat', which is to propose a Platonist inversion of teatrocracy by which I read the philosophical status of the director.

The Poet/Director as a Democrat

Participating in the dramatic performance was as much a part of Athenian political life as it was ‘serving on a jury or fighting a battle’ (Monoson 107). Partly as an affirmation of Athenian democratic citizenship that needed to be enacted, embodied and glorified, and partly as a confirmation of the intellectual abilities of the Athenian civic body, theatre-going and theatre-making functioned as a peculiarly intermediate platform, situated between thought and action, that reflected democratic participation in the serious mental work of the Athenian Assembly. The links were further highlighted by the fact that Athenian law requested that a special Assembly meeting would take place within sight of the theatre following the end of the festival, which is described by Plato in the *Republic* as the ‘common meeting places of the multitude’ (492b). What is striking in Plato’s account is the naming of theatres next to Assemblies, courts, and army camps which betrays a seamless continuity (Monoson 97). Further evidence can be found in records of the purchase of theatre tickets, which were supported by money from the public treasury – an act directly recalling the stipends paid from Assembly attendance and jury service. It is now easy to understand why political participation, praised in Pericles’ funeral oration as a model of reciprocal benefaction that enacted and celebrated collectivity in the public body of policy and service, pictured a twin image of theatrical participation. In this sense – and here is where the high significance of the Poet/director’s art lies – is that what was represented or imagined on the Athenian stage was meant to acknowledge the ‘mental infrastructure’ of a democratic body capable of acting ‘with foresight and judge with insight’ (J. Peter Euben ‘introduction’ 23). Attending the theatre also affirmed, at the same time, that its site was an embodied, performed mode of knowledge that *had the capacity to* ‘unsettle[d] normal ways of thinking’ (Monoson 108).

The relationship, therefore, between theatrical experience and democratic citizenship needs to be read as deeply interactive and interrelational, and yet not simply between theatre and Athenian citizenship. Rather, it is precisely the relationship between ‘thinking’ and ‘doing’ as being ‘the mental venture of politics’ of Athenian democracy, articulated *in* and *through* the practice of the Poet/director, that as a practice marks the theatrical venture of philosophy in the Athenian stage. To understand this complex interface between theatre, democracy and philosophy in the identity that comprises the poet/director, we need to look once again at its most impassionate rival – Plato. Indeed, in Plato, as we saw earlier, the poet’s function in the democratic theatre of Athens is coloured negatively; these artists are not only possessed, he tells us, but having misled the audience, they convince them that are capable of intellectual judgement (*krisis*). What this means is that poets have interrupted the hierarchical configuration of judgement, that, for Plato, is always reserved for the aristocracy – the excellent few that are capable of right judgement. This then results in a strange mixture of empowerment of the mob of theatre on principles of democratic freedom and of equality that, for Plato, are not even democratic, as there is no respect for self-limitation in aesthetic expression. What emerges, instead, is what he calls *theatrokratia* – the ruling of the *theatron* by which he means the mob the way it behaves in theatre.

What is important to note at this point, for the purposes of discerning the democratic composition (or not) of the poet/director, is the relation of power that Plato attaches to the poetico-directorial figures of the tragic stage. As Floch observes in his article, ‘Who Calls the Tunes: Literary Criticism, Theatrocracy, and the Performance of Philosophy in Plato’s *Laws*’, ‘upon the poets’ arrival there ensues a subtle but telling shift in the distribution of authority from the judges to poets. ...poets appear as “rulers” or “leaders” [arxodes]’ (564). Floch points out that ‘arxodes’ is ‘a term with overtly political valence’ (564). Having

reconfigured judgement (*Krisi*) to a theatrical value, justice is subverted as something beyond the strictly legal confines and into the aesthetic. To be more precise, if the principle of judgement takes central stage in Plato, it is not only as a democratic paradigm invested with the theatrical values of seduction and pleasure, but principally an ethical paradigm infused with the poet's aesthetic of seduction which corrupts judgement and turns a hedonistically predisposed crowd into an uncontrollable political power relation.

Aesthetic relativism is, therefore, for Plato, a theatrical vice that he unambiguously attributes to the poets. It transforms the important activity of judgement into the concurrent of poets and audience in which a) the definite criterion is pleasure and b) the redistribution of authority from the poets to the audience marks a political act. From this, it is only a small step to finally decry the stage as *theatrokratia* as a new kind of political pathology in which theatrical judgement acquires anarchic connotation. It empowers unrestrained freedom and critical deliberation as indistinguishable from those of moral and political deliberation. For Floch, 'the result is a convergence of democratic criticism and democratic politics, a condition brought about by the transposition of the entitlement to judge from the theatre to the institutions of governance and by the ethical dispositions and forms of knowledge manifest in practices of literary judgment' (567). And yet, I would further argue, that Plato's implicit treatment of what he calls teatrocracy fosters, not only an awareness, as Floch holds, 'of the discursive qualities of civic space', (ibid.) but also a type of aesthetic thinking that shapes the forms of governance as a specific kind of theatrical enactment – an enrapture of poetic utterance, orchestrated by the poets, that is the equivalent to a performance of judgement. What this means, in Platonic terms, is that theatre is elevated to a form of rule (*arxein*) which performs judgement (*krisis*) as a way to redistribute political power and, in itself, is 'constituting itself as an expression of that power' (569). In other words, the event of 'aesthetic formation' articulates

in theatre the poet/director's political feature that exhibits what John Wellach describes in *The Platonic Political Art* as the power that predisposes a society 'for a particular *politeia*' (364). But where precisely is the significance of the poet/director in this politico-aesthetic dynamic?

In an article entitled 'Theater and Democracy', John McGrath argues that theatre's role in the quest of authentic democracy is dialectical – that it is both in the sense of relating and interacting with the given society from which it evolves, and in asking the difficult question of how various social processes construct a given society while simultaneously providing an outlet for voicing *dissensus* and the opinion of the marginalised. He then turns to Castoriadis who provides 'the most fecund interface between Democracy and Theatre' (McGrath 134) and to whom I will refer on a twofold premise: a) that if the democratic paradigm of the theatre functions as simultaneous critique and affirmation of Athenian democracy, it is participating in political values shaped by the tragic poet, and b) if the poet's tragic processes of signification, that is, processes of creation of meaning, espouse the political system of Athenian democracy, they do not have to do merely with the rational mastery of what is right in the rational ordering of laws in a democratic society. Rather, they point us towards what Rose calls *aporia* which, in the democratic theatre, is staged as an answer to human ethics. As I would like to suggest, *aporia* recognises the ethical dimension embedded in the distinctively creative relation that requires the democratic society to exercise the explicit autonomous activity of what Castoriadis calls 'judging and choosing in a non-trivial sense' ('The Greek Polis and the Creation of Democracy' 271). It is why, it seems to me, that tragedy not only opens up the pathway to democracy, but also forces the more difficult question of ethics as *aporetic*, and what posits the poet, too, as an *aporetic democrat*. I will return to this later in my discussion; for now, however, let us briefly examine the domain of ethics in Castoriadis' terms, as a human affair, which will allow us to grasp the deeper implications of

the ethical dimension of the poet's aesthetic constellation, that is also always a political dimension because it is ethical. It is a complex interface that not only implicates the political dimension of the poet with particular tragic conventions and the imagining of the democratic Athens, but also, as I will show later, the theatres of modernism, in the politico-aesthetic image of the figure of the director.

Democracy, Hubris, Aporia

For the Greek philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis, the invention and practice of theatre has been instrumental in shaping the democratic development of the city of Athens. This is because, he tells us, theatre is capable of shaping the processes of imaginary creation that give form to a society: 'what holds a society together' ('The Greek *Polis*' 268) is an active, intrinsic relationship between the creative form of theatre and the Greek democracy, that which makes society's 'world of signification' (ibid.). This is a distinct type of knowledge that can be found in imaginary significations of this society. And, by 'thinking and reflecting about Greece,' he insists, and not about any other culture, 'we are reflecting and thinking about the social and historical conditions of thought itself – at least, thought as we know and practice it' (ibid.). Castoriadis draws a parallel relation between thought and theatre, which becomes particularly relevant for our grasping of their relentless interrelation, but also for the conceptual connection in the relation between the poet of the Polis and the theatre director of modernity. In exploring this link, I place, like Castoriadis, a significance on what he sees as an 'intrinsic relationship' ('The Greek *Polis* and the Creation of Democracy' 270) between Greece and our society, which itself proposes the possibility of 'a potential universality' to be found in the imaginary significations of the Greek society. By 'potential universality' (ibid.), Castoriadis refers not to human rationality but to a kind of 'nontrivial thinking', which he identifies in the practice

of 'creative imagination'. It is the creative ability, in other words, to understanding another society and which is, for him, at the root of a potentially universal human essence. It is a 'potential' universality rather than a universal human essence because, according to Castoriadis, as Nana Biluš Abaffy observes in her article 'The Radical Tragic Imaginary: Castoriadis on Aeschylus & Sophocles', 'most people never realize this essence: they never get to use their "radical" creative imagination... they are prevented in doing so by what Castoriadis calls "the cognitive closure of the institution of society"' (35). What is, however, most compelling, for the purposes of my own query regarding the socio-aesthetic composition of the tragic poet, who I conceive as a figuration of the modern director, is when he discusses the notion of the 'creator' as someone who does not stand for an individual figure but for a social process through which a society recognises itself as the creator of its own 'social imaginary significations' ('The Greek *Polis* and the Creation of Democracy' 270). Here, Castoriadis distinguishes between a *heteronomous* society, which grounds itself in something 'other' (e.g. religion or 'the unlimited expansion of 'rational mastery') than itself and an *autonomous* society, which, like the Athenian society, grasps itself to be self-created. Capitalism, for example, is for Castoriadis a heteronomous society because its running is the result of the legitimation of an inherent 'logic' of that system – the logic of liberal capital. To change this society would not, therefore, be easy because each set of capitalism's 'social imaginaries' would be acknowledged as 'real' by the logic of the very system that informs the existence of that society. What would make a difference, Castoriadis suggests, is the creation of new imaginaries, which is the prospect of, to borrow from Abaffy, 'a *new* human reality, with *new* meanings and laws and norms' (36).

So, would it not then be possible to re-appropriate and re-imagine social imaginaries from our ancient past, in order to bring out what Castoriadis calls a sort of a 'revolution'? Castoriadis certainly seems to think so, and, whether it is

a feasible case or not, it is not the point here. Rather, what counts is the proposal that opens up to a *revolutionary* possibility which he locates in the act of ‘nontrivial thinking’ (‘The Greek *Polis* and the Creation of Democracy’ 270), by which he means philosophical thinking, and which defines the concept of the ‘creator’ in the autonomous society. Autonomy, as expressed and experienced in ancient Athens, describes the active engagement of constantly reforming their laws and systems, a process Castoriadis traces to around 682/683 BC and culminating in the establishment of the direct democracy of 508 BC. Athenian society posits its own laws, explicitly recognising itself as its own creation, most profoundly visible, for Castoriadis, in the ‘activity of judging and choosing’ to be understood as the ability to judge-and-choose one’s own laws and truths that must be recreated – an activity that is *auto* (by itself) + *nomos* (law) = autonomous – but also an activity that is inextricably so much more democratic in the Athenian assembly as it is a poetic/philosophical in the Athenian theatre. No wonder it is at this point that his argument takes an explicitly theatrical turn and is particularly revealing, I think, of the aesthetic meaning that informs the shape of the democratic identity of the dramatic poet.

Accordingly, the first thing to note is that ‘justice’ in Greece, in contrast to other societies, is posed not in divine terms, but as being genuinely *human*. It is also a question that ‘must remain open forever’ (ibid.) because an autonomous society knows that there are no fixed or predetermined laws, norms and meanings, but only the freedom of the creative imagination. It is how this society creates its social imaginary significations and knowing that it is their creators. But what does this have to do with the theatre or the poet? The question of such a human ‘justice’ that is integral to creative imagination can only have one criterion: self-limitation. This is at the heart of the Athenian democratic regime, but which received its full radical potentiality as a critique and shaper of democratic power on the Athenian stage in the form of the tragic *hubris*: ‘In a democracy’, argues Castoriadis,

‘people *can* do anything—and must know that they *ought not* to do just anything. Democracy is the regime of self-limitation [...] it is the regime of freedom—and a tragic regime’ (‘The Greek *Polis* and the Creation of Democracy’ 282).

If democracy is the constant reminder for self-limitation, its tragic theatricalisation is exemplified by the concept of *hubris*. As a dramatic convention, *hubris* defines arrogant excess committed by the tragic hero, describing the subject’s drive to wittingly, or unwittingly, go ahead of norms or limits set by the consensus of a society. The absence of marked boundaries is specific to *hubris* and holds accountable the experience of suffering and dissolution of the tragic characters each time they seek to transcend, undermine, or altogether dismiss the equilibrium of a socio-political and moral composition that they find themselves entangled with. However, as an attempt to overcome self-limitations, it is an idea also related directly to democracy’s simultaneous openness and constant questioning of human and social limits. Presupposing the absence of fixed norms, the essential vagueness of the ultimate bearings of our action. ...*Hubris* exists where self-limitation is the only “norm,” where transgressed ‘limits are “nowhere” defined’ (The Greek *Polis* and the Creation of Democracy’ 282). It is why democracy, for Castoriadis, is not only a regime of freedom but of self-limitation too, which is another way of saying that democracy is a ‘tragic regime’ (ibid.).

In relating the concept of tragic *hubris* to democracy and reading tragedy as essentially democratic, Castoriadis turns his focus on the creative venture of the ‘radical limitation of human beings’ (ibid.) that begins to embody the essence of democratic apparatus understood as fundamentally ‘tragic’. That is, ‘theatrical’: ‘no one knows at what moment *hubris* begins, yet there is a moment when one is on *hubris* and that is when the gods or things intervene to crush you’ (*World in Fragments* 98). It is in this respect that democracy is seen to exhibit what I would like to call *the creatively tragic character of politics* understood

here as *governance* rather than *government*, which exhibits a ‘tragic imaginary’ that, in democracy, entails the acting out of a politics of tragic life, including, as Stathis Gourgouris observes, ‘folly without salvation’ as well as demanding ‘lucidity in conditions of total uncertainty’ (‘Democracy is a Tragic Regime’ 809). Gourgouris identifies, too, in the operative structure of democracy, the kind of ‘tragic’ imaginary in the manner proposed by Castoriadis, as a creative relation. The argument in both of them is that, if we accept that a democratic limit is always a matter of ‘self-limitation’, then the creative enactment of self-limitation as ‘tragic life’ constitutes an imaginary signification that displays the limit of the political as the awareness that there is no such thing as a ‘guaranteed signification’ (Castoriadis, ‘The Dilapidation of the West’ 84). It is then, I would add, that we are confronted with the possibility of theatre as the place of imaginary creation; however, it is not only of a particular kind of democracy (that, for Castoriadis, is always ‘autonomous’), but of a *creative relation of form-making* set in motion by the tragic poets as fundamentally *aporetic*. That is, without a fixed or determined ‘path’ or ‘centre’ of imaginary democratic creation, but one that needs to constantly be re-imagined, re-posed, and re-negotiated on the tragic stage.

One good case in point is Aeschylus’ ontological questioning of ‘what is man’. His poetic/directorial imagining is a sort of ‘divine anthropology’ (Castoriadis, ‘Aeschylean Anthropology’ 38), viewing the human as what was given by the god Prometheus. For Castoriadis, however, his imaginary creation only stages a *heteronomous* image of the human still trapped by ‘the cognitive closure of his faith in the gods’ (ibid.), which is then exceeded by Sophocles’ more *autonomous* creative thinking. While Castoriadis is right to point out that Sophocles ‘posits humanity as self-creation’, that ‘men have taken nothing from the gods, and no god has given them anything whatsoever’ (23-4), it is still the tragic imaginary already at work in Aeschylus that poses the ontological question

‘what is man’ and stages philosophy in the democratic theatre. But Castoriadis goes as far as to distinguish Aeschylus from Sophocles, saying that, unlike Sophocles, who was a truly autonomous democrat, Aeschylus could not have been. And he surely was not, but neither was Sophocles, as far as democracy in this sense is concerned. Rather, what their re-workings of religion and the gods reveal are tragic imaginaries of an aporetic democracy – that is, what Rose would call the difficult path of re-cognition, of resisting the choosing of the easy path, but staying with the difficult path that is always concrete and relational. It is not surprising, either, that Castoriadis would, in the end, have to come to a somehow shifted position. When reading the role of gods in both Aeschylus and Sophocles, he finally comes to acknowledge: ‘the first thing we notice – which forces itself on us and which I simply present here – is huge, astonishing: Aeschylus (like Sophocles) speaks of manticism and not of religion; he mentions the gods only in passing and from a utilitarian perspective. The entrails of sacrificial victims have to be examined in order to see if they suit “the pleasure of the gods”’ (‘Aeschylean Anthropology and Sophoclean Self-Creation of Man’ 18). The ‘concrete’, ‘utilitarian’, secular purposes of religion are then taken as measures of democracy in his reading. In reality, however, what seems to be at work is an aporetic perspectivism that the poet/director creatively re-imagines, re-poses and re-configures as another aporia of democracy.

Let’s now take a closer look at the aesthetic structure of such an aporetic poetic in its major articulation: the Greek tragic imaginary.

The Greek Tragic Imaginary

Holding the wisdom learnt through suffering as the consequence of living in a ‘chaotic’ world, Castoriadis reads the desperate need for an ethical system evoked as justice (*diki*) – which, in the performative matrix of tragedy, often appears

personified as a goddess, namely the Greek goddess Diki. Justice, in this sense, describes a distinct moral quality that differs from the democratically created ethics instituted through human *nomos*, being the laws made by humans. Instead, Diki is always seen from the eyes of each tragic hero, which is why ‘tragic’ justice is never fixed but a matter of perspective, continuously unveiling a new point of view – a new morality. Agamemnon’s victorious return, for example, in *Oresteia* is welcome by the chorus singing, ‘Justice [...] she steers all things towards their destined end’ (761ff.), which is then followed by Agamemnon’s own invocation to Diki: ‘First, with justice I salute my Argos and my gods, my accomplices who brought me home and won my rights from Priam’s Troy – the just gods’ (797ff). However, shortly after, the real ‘masterpiece of justice’ is revealed when Clytaemnestra menacingly cries: ‘Quickly. Let the red stream flow... Justice, lead him in!’ (902ff). Even the chorus’ outrage at the murder is overridden by their own admission of justice: ‘Each change meets counter-charge. None can judge between them. Justice’ (1588ff). The change in perspective is, in turn, a striking change of transformation. As Nana Biluš Abaffy notes in ‘The Radical Tragic Imaginary: Castoriadis on Aeschylus & Sophocles’, there is an overturning of roles: Agamemnon, the murderer, who made Iphigenia into the victim, turns Clytaemnestra into an avenger, who will then turn Agamemnon into the victim, herself into the murderer, and Orestes into the avenger (49). Since perspective determines definition of the dramatic plot and the character’s ethos, justice can only be relevant, fluid and, above all, subjective in the sense that we are reminded, at the end of the second play of the trilogy, as again Abaffy rightly recalls, the Nietzschean saying: ‘all that exists is just and unjust’ (49, also *The Birth of the Tragedy* 51). But if justice is a matter of perspective, then what kind of ethical values describe the tragic universe in which ‘nothing is ever stable or unequivocal’? And, in effect, what does the interrelation between democracy as a tragic regime and tragedy as deeply political hold for theatre?

What is highly significant to note at this point is that the embodied ethical ambiguity conveyed by the righteous Diki of a divine descent is now placed in human hands which, in turn, embodies not so much any particular answer to morality itself, but a riddle. Yet, it is a riddle that asserts itself as something that can no longer be solved by simply saying 'I believe'. It is precisely by acknowledging ethical ambiguity and turning it into a site of 'vision' that one can now finally say 'oida' – *I know by having seen*. In this way, the poet's tragic imaginary arguably transforms the rational nature of politics and the democratic ethical system into a new kind of perspectival morality as a form of philosophical interrogation, in the shape of theatrical questioning. At the root of this ethical conjunction is what Castoriadis describes as the aspect of 'creative imagination', through which the *apoeretic* poet seems to render democracy as most theatrical and theatre as most philosophical. Creative imagination ignites the Athenian theatre in ways that reiterate the aesthetics of aporia in the structure of democracy. Aporia also seems to thoroughly inform the democratic meaning of the poet who acts as an aesthetic figuration of the modern director to come.

In this particular sense, aporia, then, could be said to re-create the social imaginary signification that, in the Athenian society, takes place in theatre *through* the poet's creative imagination. For Castoriadis, creative imagination is the mental activity rooted in the potential human essence. It is what creates social imaginary significations in order to think through or re-imagine the structures and norms of this society by which it also holds together. Since social imaginary significations provide society with a 'guarantee', they assure that all of its particular meanings, laws, and norms are valid. Yet, in this way, the idea of self-instituting the *Polis* constitutes itself as 'a permanent process' ('The Greek *Polis*' 282) that actively engages the demos of Athenian democracy in constant reform of its system, including alteration of its rule through democratic participation and vote. This is the same process that leads society to conceive itself as the creator

of its own laws, norms, and meanings, which is to say, at least in Castoriadis's terms, a society that conceives itself as the creator of its own social imaginary significations. But what precisely is a 'social imaginary signification', that also seems to denote the fundamental aesthetic structure of the democratic theatre of Athens, a theatre that is given shape by its poet?

In Castoriadis' thought, 'meaning' and 'signification', or what he means by these trickiest of words, are determined by the forms that society creates, always temporal and constantly reproduced. As a product of imaginary creation, by which he refers to *the creation of new forms*, the aspect of 'signification' is always completely replaceable, unstable and, each time, fixed anew. This creative relation he calls a *Social Imaginary* by which he describes the 'creation of a human world: of "things", "reality", language, norms, values, ways of life and death [...where a particular society posits a] particular complex of rules, laws, meanings, values, tools, motivations, etc.' (*World in Fragments* 84). If society and its various forms that we have known through history are defined by 'imaginary creation', Castoriadis argues, this is not to say, 'the "fictive", the "illusory", the "spectacular,"', but that which has to do with 'the creation of new forms' (ibid.):

This creation is not determined, but rather determining; it is an unmotivated creation that no causal, functional, or even rational explanation can account for... (ibid.)

It is at the core of this creation, which is essentially an activity of form-making, that Castoriadis identifies 'social imaginary significations' created by each individual society and embodied in its institutions. As he believes, each society creates its own forms by which society 'sees itself' and 'gives itself a place' (ibid.). In this way, the creation of such forms enables society to 'constitute a system of norms, institutions in the broadest sense of the term, values,

orientations, and goals of collective life as well as of individual life' (ibid.). Naturally, in this configuration, the focal point for creation becomes imagination.

Indeed, not only does imagination spark imaginary significations that point to the roots of genuine art, but crucially it designates the lacuna by which 'never does the soul think without phantasms' (Aristotle, *De Anima III* 3). Of course, this association is strongly reminiscent of Plato's worse fears in mimesis that 'fashions phantoms' – which, again, are later revoked in Adorno's *phantasmagoria* as the agora (economy) of the phantasma by which he describes the 'illusion of the absolute reality of the unreal' (*In Search of Wagner* 90). In both cases, the ability to create *because of* the ability to imagine is received critically. However, the irreducible fact that there can be 'no image that does not have a minimum meaning and there is no meaning that is not borne by an image' (Castoriadis, *Les carrefours du labyrinthe* 118) also problematizes the poet's ability to create so much as it does the director's in aesthetic modernity, both of which are treated equally with suspicion in philosophical discourse of anti-theatricality. For, if there can be 'no thought without representations' (Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution* 341), there can *also* be no pure or simple phantasms but only imaginary creations entangled with the ethical problem of correctness and righteousness that, in the theatrical context of (*the thought of*) representation, is also always political. At this point, philosophy joins theatre, while theatre convenes democracy, as comrades and antagonists all at once. Castoriadis is right to observe in this respect:

For, just as a philosopher cannot accept any external limitations on his thoughts, so democracy recognizes no external limits to its instituting power; the sole limits result from its self-limitation. (*The Rise of the Insignificance* 136)

Castoriadis's analysis both invites and resists comparison with Plato, but his emphasis on the social field of the emergence of the imaginary meanings upon which he understands Athenian tragedy – and, more generally, the art of theatre

– makes a clear link between significations and representations, which he reads as a creative relation that, in essence, is theatrical. As such, the *polis* that emerges out of the social imaginary is conceptualised on the theatrical scene, which functions as a aporetic mediating terrain, or *meson*. For, as the poet himself, it is situated between philosophy and democracy, yet always confronted by an unequivocal absence of limit – the kind of limitless that self-generates and self-authenticates. This act of self-limitation in the democratic imaginary is at the core of the poet’s aporetic aesthetic. And yet, this is simultaneously an ethical imaginary in which social meanings and significations are called into question by treating them as otherness, ‘that phantasm of their self that allows them to come out of themselves’ (Pefanis, ‘Philosophy and theatre’ 135) and imagine as another.

An Aporitic Ethics

It is now a good time to make use of an earlier promise and consider an *aporitic ethics* by which I want to examine the interface between the poet’s act of ‘judging and choosing,’ the tragic imaginary, and the democratic regime that I read more generally as the relationship between the power of *demos* and the creative power of theatre. The aim of this theoretical itinerary, to which I will again return later in this thesis, is not the exposition of an inherently ethical argument in the interplay of theatre, politics, and histories. Rather, it is the more political significance of the ethical dimension in the perspectival interchangability between theatre, democracy, and philosophy in the instituting of a society that also informs, I believe, the meaning of the tragic poet in ways that prefigure the modern director.

My hypothesis is that, if the creative dimension in the explicit autonomous activity of a democratic ‘judging and choosing’ as exercised by the poet/director

and, through him, the audience, embodies philosophical thought, then the theatrical paradigm exemplified in the aesthetic paradigm of the tragic imaginary receives the attention it does by raising the difficult question of what kind of laws and reality create society 'beyond' and 'outside' the existing society. As I want to argue, this is not a utopian speculation, but an aporetic perspective that involves, in Rose's term, 'the union' (*The Broken Middle* 201) of the dramatic hero's daily struggle and the recreation of society as a whole. 'This ["beyond" and "outside"] implies disunion of the quotidian, "day", and the cosmic, "world"; a path only definable oppositionally' (ibid). The deeply political signification of an aporetic domain of ethics designates the quest for meaning by working towards a transformed understanding of ourselves and others. In Rose's definition, the ethical route of enquiry 'a-poria – without a path' (ibid), concerns, to paraphrase Andrew Shanks who writes in *Against Innocence, Gillian Rose's Reception and Gift of Faith*, the collapse of every existing understandings of the ethical before the irreducible singularity of each subject's own first-hand experience (54). Taking misrecognition and exclusion seriously, an aporetic morality sets aside simplistic narratives and their attendant dualism, but insists on wrestling with the actualities of exclusion and difference inscribed in the lived experiences of the other, the law, and institutions, as a means of arriving at recognition. In the moral domain, an aporetic ethics, therefore, is never set out, but works towards comprehension of what is, always starting from the middle. If, as Kate Schick succinctly observes, in *Gillian Rose: A Good Enough Justice*, 'recognition takes place on multiple levels: it directs the gaze inwards on a journey of critical self-reflection and outwards on a journey towards comprehension of the stories of others' (102), then experience of suffering and misrecognition are focal points because so are 'the experiences [that] are shaped by institutions' (103).

In a similar manner, Scott Lash argues in his *Critique of Information* that 'the "aporetic" tradition speaks of irreconcilables, whereas in "dialectics" there is

either a resolution or at least an interpenetration of the two spheres (Kant's two types of reason: logic (instrumental rationality, understanding, science) and pure practical reason (substantive rationality, moral law, moral action, religion, noumena)' (8). Yet, contrary to dialectics, Rose's aporia is not interested in the mere recognition that the resolution of the particular into the absolute is possible, but that the solution of cultural, ethical, social and civic, or political, questions cannot come through abstraction. She thus reads in Hegelian philosophy the very labour of the dialectical interplay; between the way 'the Other' manifests itself in the particular, which is always a matter of the relation between the ethical and the political, rather than one between the universal and particular. As in most of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, Rose's approach is concerned with the necessary appearance of the moral law, which involves the sphere of 'the other', of freedom, of substantive reason. In *Traversing the Middle: Ethics, Politics, Religion*, 'this interminable interplay may be understood,' observes Gavin Hyman, 'as a manifestation of what Rose has called the "equivocation" of the ethical. Where one domain is prioritised, ...the aporia is mended, and the result is both ethically and politically destructive' (xi).

It is in this respect that an aporetic ethics, it seems to me, is a deeply relational approach, between thought, democracy and representation, that is profoundly political and inextricably theatrical. Aporia places 'mourning' as central to the political negation of difference and questions any fixed binaries between universal and particular, self and Other, precisely by drawing attention to their mutual constitution. Attending to the complex matrix of norms, imaginary significations, practices, and institutions of the human experience, an aporetic ethics is infinitely bound up to recognition as 'justice' in the political and moral domain. An ethics without a path, without 'poria', Rose tells us, is a difficult path. Again, as Schick usefully notes, 'it is inherently risky to bring social and political actualities into focus, instead of silencing them, and to interrogate one's own

implication in violent structures and norms' (103) – which is what the Athenian tragic theatre does. Indeed, the uneasy negotiation of the difficult path of an aporetic ethics requests the seriousness of political and personal agency and profoundly condemns ignorance. The tragic subject and, similarly, the mode of agency of the democratic subject *through* the poet's embodied 'lesson' on stage, exerts an antagonistic relation to the perspective of power and the order of the law. It is why, too, we might say, hubris always conveys the subject's drive for taking political risk. And yet, it is the failure for the pursuit, as argues Rose, of a 'good enough justice', of not willing, in other words, to stay in the middle and work through the brokenness, that brings about destruction. The recognition of this failure on the tragic stage is ultimately what enacts radical transformation.

Theatrocracy in the Middle

The text that may be viewed as a sharp attack on Athenian democracy is Plato's *Laws* – a critique that is fired on the democratic paradigms of theatre-going and audience participation as the Athenians understood them. Blaming theatre for the excesses of liberty in democratic society, Plato draws attention to the experience of being a theatēs which, he says, involved stomp-feeding, rowdy behaviour, and a very much active spectatorship. The problem for Plato is that such spectators also believed that he or she could practise sound judgement and wise deliberation in regards to the moral teachings contained in the dramatic performances. Or, to put it in Plato's own words, it caused everyone to think that he or she 'is wise in everything' (701a), which, in effect, exaggerated one's confidence in what is good and what is not, resulting in the kind of civic condition that politically was expressed as the rule of the spectators – *theatokratia*. *Theatokratia* (or teatrocracy in English) describes the typical Athenian spectator understood by Plato as excessively confident, noisy, strong-minded, and uninhibited (Monoson, 226). Yet, this appraisal was not entirely dismissive of the experience of theatre-

going or of being a theatēs. Rather, in Plato's text we see him lament the misuse of 'vision' as a resource for philosophical truth and intellectual labour having succumbed to a corrupted force, a force led by phantasmic disillusionment and misrecognition.

What is interesting here is that Plato also links the cultural practice of theorising as spectating with the practice of philosophy in *Laws* as regulation of foreign travel. As he tells us, these travellers were called 'theoroi' and, according to David Cohen, could be male or female (27-40) with the mission to survey other cities, reporting back on the 'nocturnal council' as part of the institutional structure of the city. For Monoson, 'a theoros was typically an envoy sent to a foreign city either for diplomatic reasons, to consult an oracle, or officially to represent the home city at a panhellenic festival (for example, at the Nemean or Olympic Games.) The sending of such official missions was called *theōria*' (229). It was from such activities that the intellectual work was conducted from visiting places, seeing, and reporting back. Plato considered such endeavours of great significance to the development of the city's political, to which he projected a philosophical foundation. Why? The answer has to do with the principal resource of the act of 'seeing', which, in his philosophy, is a primarily philosophical act. Another reason is the fact that the task of 'theorein' was linked with the theatre, not only as a mode of seeing, but as a mode of interpretation which is speculative in intent. This interface, between theatre and philosophy, as speculative modes of vision, can be further seen from the work that any theoros did which was not only about reporting subjectively but reporting correctly. And this was done so to a correctly appointed committee after having collated the material carefully, which then would be interpreted with the group of people from the committee before the report was opened up to the public.

In the light of such an intensely interpretative activity, it is difficult to not think that what Plato was doing here was mostly drawing the association between

the theōros (as a speculative act of spectating) and the chorodidaskalos' equally intensive mental work of interpreting and transferring the knowledge contained in dramatic texts. This is precisely the kind of work that foreshadows the interpretative work of synthesis and appropriation later associated with the art and role of the modern director. If we look closer at the image of the theoros (the foreign traveller) in Plato's *Laws*, in contrast to the image of theatēs in *The Republic*, what we find is a specifically theatrical image meant to represent serious intellectual work but also linked to the act of presentation, framing and interpretation of experience which in theatre *is* the work of the chorodidaskalos.

Now, knowledge which is also understood as virtue in Plato brings political empowerment, which is why he considers knowledge as the domain of philosophy only, and not theatre. His deep meditation of 'spectating' in the *Laws* essentially lays out the main premise that, in engaging with political activity, it is philosophy that can perform a better job rather than theatre. Ironically, the way Plato presents his argument is by dialogic thought that stages his ideas. He employs a kind of dramatic philosophy, in other words, that functions as a form of thinking for his writings. Plato's theatrical imaginary in the *Laws*, in particular, could accord to a 'spectral' configuration that, as always, remains in his thoughts regarding the relationship between philosophy and democracy. What Plato asks there is how might one study another politeia as a spectacle? And how does the politeia of Athens constitute a spectacle? What kind of spectacle is this? And so forth. Yet the interface between theatre, politics and philosophy seems to meet at the particular configuration of *theorein* which is the aspect that also drives creative interpretation both in theatre and the Polis. We should not forget, for instance, that Solon himself, the great engineer of the Athenian democratic constitution, was a theoros, having travelled for ten years, mainly in Egypt, which then led him to propose on his return a number of reforms leading to democracy in his home city. It is now easy to decipher the link between the chorodidaskalos

in theatre and that of the affairs of the city which was a central part of the theoros-job. This link has to do with questioning. A questioning of what was witnessed and experienced, what was reported and interpreted, and finally how the material was to be presented or represented.

By engaging with theatre-going, therefore, and the act of the theatēs and of the theōros as modalities of knowing, Plato can be seen as a deeply *demotic* thinker, despite his seeming objections and denunciations of theatre that, after all, are mostly ‘performances’ of his own dramatic argumentation. Indeed, Athenian democratic politics should be viewed as intimately linked with the practice of philosophy through the practice of theatre. These are continuities that are fully articulated in Plato, interweaving in what could easily be read as a *poetics of theatrical thought* that, I believe, later reappear in what constitutes the aesthetic foundation of the director as a modality of thought in theatre. Platonic language and imaginary, in its ability to articulate the intellectual enterprise of theatre, while problematising actual democratic values and ideas on the aesthetic paradigm of theatre, prefigures the modernist function of the director and the role this figure claims in the intellectual and political landscapes of aesthetic modernity. It is something similar to what Floch calls the ‘tensions between theatre and symposium [as being] most pronounced precisely in terms of their political valence and the paradigms of literary judgment they enable’ (560). The only difference is that the director is the point of contact in modernism, enacting the various tension already felt and sketched out in Platonic thought. It is what ultimately casts this figure right in the middle of Plato’s most intense conflict: the political function of theatre pronounced as teatrocracy.

The Poet as a Form of Thought

As Floch rightly points out, Plato's treatment of Athenian teatrokratia as 'a democratic paradigm of theatre judgment' (561) serves as an 'antitype' against which Plato proposes his own Politeia. Similarly, *Laws* enquires of 'the moral psychology of theatrical judgment' (561) and the development of a model of theatre as the performance of philosophy. However, the most interesting question that Plato poses is not what are the perils of theatrical judgement, but what is the moral psychology of teatrocracy as the democratic paradigm of theatrical judgement? To answer this, in *Laws*, Plato rejects current practices of theatrical judgment and traces constitutional changes from aristocracy to democracy, and finally to anarchy, in the emergence of aesthetic formation and novel artistic expression.

...as time passed, poets became rulers, leaders of unmusical lawlessness, and though they were poetic by nature, they were ignorant of what is just and lawful in music. In bacchic frenzy and extensively possessed by pleasure, they mixed dirges and hymns, paians and dithyrambs. They mimicked the songs of the aulos with the songs of the kithara. They *confounded* everything with everything else. Through their mindlessness they unwillingly bore false witness against music, as though it were a thing with no form of correctness, and as though its correctness should be judged by the pleasure of the one who enjoys it, regardless of whether he is better or worse.

In making such poems and reciting such speeches, they inspired in the masses lawlessness in music and a sense of daring, as though they were equipped to pass judgment. Because of this the once silent theatres became full of voices, as though the audience understood what is fine and beautiful in music and that which is not; and rather than an aristocracy in music, there developed a debased rule of the spectator – *Θεατροκρατία*.

Yet if a democracy of free men had occurred only in music, the development would not have been so terrible. But now among us it was from music that lawlessness and everyone's belief in his own universal wisdom arose; liberty followed. (Floch's translation 563, my emphasis)

What emerges from Plato's account, which is particularly relevant to tracing a figuration of the director in the democratic paradigm of the Athenian theatre, is that democracy was indeed the result, not of political upheaval, but of an aesthetic development *directly attributed to the poet*. Thus, it was not the theatre as an institution, nor the spectator nor actor. Rather, it was the chorodidaskalian figure of the poet, who Plato considers as a form of thought capable of political intervention. Poets, he argues, have introduced the phenomenon of aesthetic relativism that result from the emergence of democratic liberty.

The thesis that theatrical judgment in the democratic theatre of classical Athens reaffirms the fundamental principles of democratic politics has been recurrently reiterated in contemporary critical scholarship. It is a premise that is usually read on the democratic identity of the Athenian spectator. Yet, the truth is that the spectators, 'beyond the influence of noisy expressions of approbation and disapprobation' (Floch 567), did not play any direct role in choosing the judges or passing verdicts. Rather, the crucial point here was the role of the poet/chorodidaskalos, something that is well evidenced in Plato's thought. Poets, he tells us, incite emotional fervour led by infatuated performers which, in turn, seduce the audience, which is also driven by hedonistic impulses. Similarly, in *Ion* we find a portrait of the artistic process, which depicts an Athenian performance culture overwhelmingly underpinned by an image of 'irrationality', explained in Plato, as Floch argues, as 'a perverse economy of pleasure between uniformly senseless poets and audiences' (567). It is what brings Plato to describe in *Ion*, using the voice of Socrates, poets as possessed by the Muses, while, in the *Laws*, the poets and the audience are depicted as enraptured by pleasure (568). What all this leads to in Platonic argumentation is teatrocracy – which, contrary to the Platonic Cave parable, entails an audience which is far from a silenced victim. Socrates is portrayed to point out in the *Republic* that spectators influence poets' choices through their overpowering uproar and, thus, assume the role of

the active collaborator shaping the meaning of the performance. It is why teatrocracy is presented by Plato, not so much as a theatrical problem as we have seen so far, but as a political one. Theatre, capable of unregulated aesthetic innovation, is perceived to directly link with political change in Platonic thought, which, in turn, leads to anarchy, because in theatre one obeys collective and individual psychological impulses.

For Plato, therefore, the result of teatrocracy, as Weber observes, has to do with ‘the teatrocratic usurpation of the rule of the law [which] is driven so much by fear as by pleasure’ (Weber 34). Weber sees the Platonic designation of teatrocracy in the dimension of contemporary ‘multimedia’. He even goes as far as to suggest that the teatrocratic theatre is not the same canonical theatre of Aristotle because Plato’s teatrocracy is not even a theatre. It is ‘a specific place or site’ that is ‘disrupted, disorganized by the different media that converge upon it’ (ibid.). What Weber suggests is that ‘the “rule” of the theatron’ actually stands for the ‘absence of all stable rules’ (ibid.) and is meant to reiterate the cave paradigm, only this time as an ‘open-air version’ that specifically denotes the experience and practice of the Athenian theatre. While I would agree with Weber that teatrocratic theatre is the theatrical equivalent of the Platonic cave, in the sense that it is a mimetic theatre run by shadows (thespians) and shadow-movers (poets), I would go a step further by proposing that teatrocracy is a predominantly speculative theatre in which thought and aesthetic innovation are mediated on the poet/director’s democratic paradigm of theatrical judgment. This is a reading that goes against Benjamin’s conception of teatrocracy as the enemy of all innovation and change that poses real danger when it draws on the ‘false, dissimulating totality’ of the mob as an ultimate and unquestionable criterion in criticism. Although Benjamin’s aim is to highlight the potentiality of the spectators to function as a mass that is, for Weber, ‘monolithic and immutable’ (35), which then dangerously imposes a certain potentially fascist set of relations,

I read teatrocracy as the empowerment of the audience to think through the embodiment of the poet/director's choreographed lesson in dramatic performance.

In many respects, Benjamin gives voice to Plato's concerns. Although Plato disapproves of mimetic theatre, he paradoxically ends up reclaiming a certain kind of theatre, but one with which he stages his philosophy. This philosophical theatre is equally teatrocratic as far as teatrocracy defines not only the rule of the spectator, but the type of ruling 'through seeing.' The use of dramatic dialogues dramatise Plato's philosophy while rendering him into a poet of his own theatre. But the rule of this theatre is not of the tragic poet but the philosopher. The philosophy that is being performed stages 'seeing' as a form of knowledge not that dissimilar from what theatre does, which, for Plato, only leads to teatrocracy itself.

One of the main questions that teatrocracy poses, particularly in identifying an early figuration of the director in the aesthetic structure of the Athenian theatre, is in terms of power-relation. What kind of relation is a teatrocratic theatre? And what is the relation of the poet in the theatres of teatrocracy? For Weber, it is a relation that he associated with the siteness of theatre – the fact that 'the nature of the theatrical site' has, first and foremost, to do with its ability to influence 'the perceptions and behaviors of those who fall under its sway' (*Theatricality as Medium* 35). 'The resurgence of *thauma*' exerts a particular kind of power that is difficult to control because it appeals to one's emotion, what today could be referred to as *affect*, or affective values. This is, to use Plato's own words, the phantasmic power of theatre which comes down to 'harrowing the feelings of their audience with their language, rhythms, and lugubrious strains, and the choir which is most successful in plunging the city... into sudden tears...' (*The Laws* 800c-d). And yet, there is a counter effect: the choir enters the sacred space of the altar, disturbing the public rites by their

overwhelming voices – an image which is, of course, reminiscent of the theatre audiences caught in the frenzy of emotion, disturbing the voice of reason (philosophy).

In examining the role of pleasure and the emotions in the life of virtue, Plato also comes to propose a philosophical model as a kind of theatre in the virtuous life. It is conceived and argued against the theoretical space of teatrocracy that is simultaneously an agonistic place. Theatre is set against philosophy, yet in a way that Plato can rehabilitate theatre as a performance of philosophy, replacing theatre altogether with the philosophical theatre of philosophy. In the choreography between real and utopian, performative and philosophical, theatrical and synoptic, the performance of philosophy is intertwined with the philosophy of performance played out in theatre in the role and image of the poet/chorodidaskalos – a figuration that foreshadows, as I have argued in this chapter, the role and identity of the modern director.

As I have already tried to show, the middle of theatricality is relational and situational. Its in-between space indicates, as Weber claims, ‘that it can never be construed as self-contained or self-regulating’ (43). This chapter has been asking, what kind of participant is the poet/director in this configuration? Perhaps, one thing we know for sure is that theatre indicates spectating as an inter-play between place and identity that is never fixed, but (dis)embodied at the audience in the presence of the actors. That in-between status is also, in this way, an indication of otherness, but an otherness that offers itself as a *meson*, in-between role and actor, spectator and character, identity and non-identity, rather than something to be merely observed. In other words, the middle of theatricality where I locate the director, participates as a decisive element to alter place, space, identity, and so on. And, by doing so, the middle (as the director) constitutes itself as a mode of perception *in* and *through* participation with an alterity that, ultimately, the middle is. That ‘alterity’, that in the end only can function as a ‘middle’, since it

is always relational and reflective in theatre, might justify its place as ‘a podium’ that, in Benjamin’s words, ‘have risen out of the fathomless depths’ (‘What is Epic Theatre’ 44), but a spectrally confounding one, as both a site ‘to see from’ and a ‘sight’ to think by. The director, I want to propose, occupies that conflictual bottomless pit procedure of theatricality that simultaneously problematises its podium as a place of potentiality in the thought of theatrical form. That thought in the form of theatre is the structural modality of the director.

Chapter 3

The Event of the Modernist Director

Now that you have come to know God – or rather, to be known by him...

– Saint Paul, *Gal 4.9*

The artistic event is signaled by the advent of the new forms.

– Alain Badiou, *Philosophy and the Event* 32

Badiou defines the Event as the state of ‘pure emergence’ or ‘pure beginning’. The Event always makes an opening, he argues, that is epochal, deeply transformative and relational. It exposes not only what is possible and impossible, but overthrows what was or could have been (*Ethics* 32). In *Logic of Worlds*, Badiou removes the domain of ‘existence’ from the category of ontology and instead claims it, following Lacan’s psychoanalytic line of thought, as a category of ‘appearing’, or of ‘making appearance’ instead of ‘being’. This configuration is most explicitly articulated in Badiou’s philosophy in terms of ‘truth procedures’, which he distributes among the four fields of thought – art, science, politics, and love (but not philosophy itself which, according to him, does not have the capacity to produce truths). Through these procedures, Badiou maintains, genuine events are being produced which, in turn, bring out what he describes as ‘eternal truths.’ When, therefore, this ‘created’ possibility is lived, embodied and enacted in real life, its truth procedure is *also* created. As such, an Event only denotes the source of possibilities that may (or may not) materialise at a certain point in time, but is and continues to be a source of *actual* possibilities

‘still present with a situation throughout an entire sequential period’ (Badiou, *Philosophy and the Event* 12).

The significance of the Event’s theoretical premise for theatre begins to emerge when the ontological framework of ‘appearing’ (rather than ‘being’) is thought of as something closer to a proposition that creates – or, we could say ‘stages’, a *possibility* for it to become reality. As Adrian Johnson observes, what we see in an Event is what was not authorised ‘either by the mathematical-ontological order of [what Badiou calls] “being qua being” or by the logical system of transcendental structures regulating the play of appearances within circumstances in a given world’ (Badiou, *Žižek and Political Transformations* 10). The Event’s sudden (if not wholly shocking), unexpected, but also sometimes mysterious or hard to comprehend appearance of an occurrence signals the opening up of a new horizon of possibilities, at its most elemental, fundamental change. But the dimension of the Event shares something *of* the ‘theatrical’ – or, what for Badiou is located in ‘theatrical truth’. Theatre, he writes:

is a *completion* or an *accomplishing*. ...[It] is the virtuality of the Idea that has *come* to *arrive* in the perishable actuality of the scene. Moreover, this properly theatrical virtuality exists only in this coming or arriving. Thus theatre is the coming that alone accomplishes the Idea. (*Rhapsody for the Theatre* 101)

When ‘reality’ itself is indistinguishable from its ‘appearance’, then reality is also seen to come into being in its very ‘disappearance’. This is why, for Badiou, any theatrical act is ontologically Evental. It produces in itself and by itself ‘a singular and irreducible effect of truth’ (ibid.) which, in turn, yet most significantly for my argument here, lays out the conceptual foundation of theatre as simultaneously an Event of thought. In this configuration, the director is a key part of this Evental history of theatre. As I want to show in this chapter, the director’s emergence in the historical moment of modernism that, in this thesis, signposts an understanding of theatre as a philosophical theatre, a ‘theatre of ideas’ for

Puchner, is in itself an Event. There are two important ways of critically thinking the Event of the director. The first is as *a theatrical technology* that identifies a new, speculative relationality between the artifice of the spectacle (theatre) and the severity of philosophical argumentation (Idea). This relation is already traceable, as we saw in the previous chapter, on the paradigm of the Athenian tragic imaginary and, most particularly, on the interface between the poet/director and the theatrical philosophy of Plato. The second is a *mode of spectating*, which I read as inextricably linked with the philosophical mode of knowing and which is further exemplified in terms of theatre's centrality to philosophy.

Badiou's philosophy frames the discussion of this chapter. The use of philosophy in this context draws specifically on Badiou's notion of the Event upon which I explore the director as a type of Evental subjectivity in modernist theatre. Philosophy, in this particular sense, provides a conceptual and critical framework in my analysis through which I aim to discuss the director not in the traditional sense of philosophical discourse (as something that disregards any experience of evidence and generates an effect of universal self-evidence), but as a mode of speculative thinking that proposes the director as an Event.

My hypothesis is the following: if it is possible to think of theatre as a mode of thought, what Puchner designates by his term of the 'theatre of ideas', and as what stands for, in Badiou's writings, as the Event of theatre in philosophy, then surely the figure of the director occupies a very similar modality, mediating between the two. How exactly does this interface unfold and how can the director be possibly grasped as a type of philosopher, as a 'thinker of representation'? How can the director be thought of as enacting philosophy, as staging 'forms of ideas' and, in this way, be inverting theatre into philosophy? And, if this is so, then what does this figure of the director signal for philosophy?

Framing, Reframing, Enframing

For Žižek, the distinctively ontological character of the Event is experienced in the physical realm as a marked shift in ‘*the very frame through which we perceive the world and engage in it*’ (Event 10). This shift in the perspective is normally the exposure of a reality that was previously unthinkable or overtly inexistent, yet which suddenly becomes represented in the (new) situation. Badiou, too, in both his *Logics of Worlds* and *Being and Event*, reiterates this view by claiming that an Event can dramatically change the world within which it surfaces. The change procured includes the redistribution of the degrees of existence in a world so that ‘another world’ is created. This modification, else described as *reframing*, is the very manner by which new appearances in that world are ordered. In the context of theatre, which is always about presenting and representing a world on stage, processes of framing and reframing are naturally at work. But what is particularly distinctive in the modernist theatre is how these processes are formulated a) as the modernist quest for a language of the stage, and b) as technology of ‘making appearance’ itself by which the director is also brought into being. Indeed, from Wagner to Brecht, reality and its various simulations are constantly framed and reframed theatrically, but in a manner that not only represents their world orders on stage, but reworks and recreates their reality and theatres anew, while formally establishing the new role of the director as another form of reframing.

This distinctively modernist process can be said to start with the formal structures in Wagner’s *phantasmagoria*, the music-dramas of which strongly articulate what both Badiou and Žižek call as ‘the artistico-political unity of the event called Wagner’ (*Five Lessons on Wagner* 165). Or, as Žižek puts it: ‘Was there an artist who questioned more radically the very fundamentals of power and domination?’ (ibid.). To grasp Wagner’s radicalism in such Evental terms, one only has to look at the performative matrix of his operatic masterpieces. For example, as Žižek further points out, in *Parsifal*, Wagner’s use of the idea of the

Grail as the vessel that contains the blood of Christ symbolically represents that part of Christ that continues to shine, giving life and remaining alive. It denotes the politically subversive dimension of the part of Christ that ‘does *not* expire on the cross’ (*Tarrying with the Negative* 190), but allows ‘the surplus of the divine *jouissance*, the part of it which was *not* evacuated from the domain of the big Other’, (ibid.) to legitimise power. In other words, for Žižek, Wagner’s radically perverse idea was to ‘get Christ down from the Cross, or rather stop him from getting on it’ (ibid.). By doing so, Wagner as the new artist of the director, on the one hand, radically reframes the Christian imaginary by which a new political meaning emerges; yet, on the other hand, he utilises formal means of technology by which he actively seeks to re-think reality through reshaping and restructuring it on the Wagnerian stage as a ‘totality’ – Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

The *Gesamtkunstwerk* is a highly significant part of the history of the director. As Andreas Huyssen observes in his revisionist *After the Great Divide*, it announces the modernist breakthrough during the latter part of the nineteenth century theatre (37). The *Gesamtkunstwerk* also represents, we should not forget, the most advanced stage in the development of opera and music-drama, as Adorno, Wagner’s most unyielding critic, could not but recognise. Yet it is as an Evental site, it seems to me, that we can begin to perceive Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk* as a mode of technology and a philosophical construct in the formation of the director. It is what elevates the function of the director to a philosophical function, while rendering the modernist theatre as a place *of* and *for* philosophical thought.

Most specifically, as Hallward observes in his book *Badiou, A Subject To Truth*, an Evental site is, for Badiou, the ‘limits of currently available resources’ (117), yet it is at these limits that any Evental site is located. In art, it denotes the ‘place from which radical innovation can take place, innovation beyond the normal means of the situation to interpret, classify, and forget’ (120). To perceive,

therefore, Wagner as an Evental site is to approach Wagner's Total Art-Work as an attempt that not only creates a 'technology' of the stage, but what re-creates the stage *as* a technology – which is why Wagner has been considered as the end of opera, because he confronted the limit of opera; or as Hallward puts it, 'of what is recognizable as 'music' (117). Wagner's saturation of the tonal system, for example, in his *Tristan and Isobel*, is a development that led to the overcoming of this barrier in the classical tonal system. But can this by itself classify Wagner as Evental?

What we need to understand about the Evental dimension of Wagner is that it cannot be solely contained in the particular historical moment of Wagner. Rather the Event is something that emanates, as Badiou claims, from a principle of 'anticipatory certitude' – that is, what derives from a trace, yet which instigates and drives forward fundamental change and expansion. The technology of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, aesthetically speaking, is characterised by such a change. But it is its Evental dimension that marks Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* as a mode of technology that changes opera and theatre once and for all. It is why we think of Schoenberg's gesture towards dissonance as already being initiated in the *possibility* of Wagnerian music, which was also what had made the materialisation of dissonance in Schoenberg an actuality. The historical avant-garde's 'integration of art and life' is also another such expression of the Event of Wagner's technology. This time, Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* reformulates the total reality, not of the 'unreal' (*phantasmagoria*) but of the 'real' (reality itself) by re-organising a new life – which, in the words of Peter Bürger, comes 'from the basis in art' (41). As Groys argues in *The Total Art of Stalinism*, there is a total integration in the avant-garde which is a position already voiced in Benjamin's 'aestheticisation thesis'. The same can be said of Brecht's political efficacy of the 'gestus', which is practically positioned as another technology of

the stage and can be read as the direct rendition of Wagner's *phantasmagoria* into the dialectical, *epic* theatre.

But the mode *par excellence* in this respect, which resolutely provides the director as an Event in the history of theatre through which we also come to grasp the director as the Event of *thought* in theatre, is perhaps Naturalism and Realism. Given the advent of a rather sophisticated illusionistic aesthetic at the late-nineteenth century stage, Naturalism, rather than Wagner, has always been historically considered to be the birthplace of the modern director. Naturalist and Realist theatres reframe the reality of life by offering it as an on-going experiment of new social ideas. In his recent *The Antinomies of Realism*, Frederic Jameson goes as far as to claim that 'if it is social truth or knowledge we want from realism, we will soon find that what we get is ideology' (6). This development is immediately felt in the ways aspiring directors such as André Antoine, in staging the works of Zola, and Aurélien Lugné-Poë in the Symbolist plays of Maeterlink, introduce the aesthetics of truthful illusion through which they not only portray a society in transit, but reframe it through its stage as that kind of reality and that kind of place which engages with new ideas or, indeed, new ideologies. Towards this aim, the body acquired focal attention as thoughts and ideas are generated in structures of affect and distinguish themselves from mere emotion. Jameson is once again useful here for differentiating affect as something that 'eludes language and its naming of things (and feelings), whereas emotion is preeminently a phenomenon sorted out in an array of names' (29). Put more simply, there is good reason why the naturalist stage, which is also referred by many commentators as 'Realist', is a shocking place. Naturalist theatre normally describes the overall aesthetic approach of the illusion of a natural environment or behaviour, while Realist theatre is used in the context of physical and psychological portrayal of actions and character. Yet, in both cases, especially in relation to theatre, the staging of a 'slice of life' is also always 'the emergence of

the phenomenological body in language and representation' (Jameson 32), which is the fundamental Naturalist and Realist proposition of the stage as affect. As I will later discuss, it is a type of affect that enacts in modernism the sensory vehicle of thought between the actor's heightened psychological representational presence and the dynamics of an emancipated sensory spectatorship. This is how, for example, the emerging discourses of psychoanalysis and theories of the environment, which become reconfigured and highly inflected on the Naturalist stage particularly through the psychosomatic forms of Realist/Naturalist acting, end up seeking to re-materialise, de-centre, and puppetise the human form of the actor while conjuring the new form of a critical, empathic, and deeply emancipated new spectator. (Taxidou, *Modernism and Performance* 51)

What would these psychic systems at work in Naturalist/Realist characterisation mean in Lacanian terms? That a new signifier is forced, which also simultaneously proposes an intimate inner psychic life that might feel fully natural and human, yet which is always slightly out of reach. Therefore, Naturalist/Realist characters are forced to objectify themselves by their experience of inner and outer contradiction, while the actor's body and psyche undergo the obligatory 'passage' of a system (Stanislavsky) or method (Strasberg) – what soon becomes known in the terminology of the director's stage as 'an actor's training'. Interestingly, in either case the trace that is *forged* theatrically in psychosomatic terms comes to also designate the Event and stands in for it. This forgery allows actors, characters and spectators to access the truth of the experience because the signifier that hits it (and, which simultaneously will, also, inevitably miss it to a certain degree) produces something new, as *ex nihilo*. One might say that Henrik Ibsen's *Miss Julie* is representative of the Naturalist movement because it enacts, in a very subjective way, this very novelty of the modern emblematic woman. Similarly, one may consider the way female characters feature in their psyches and bodies the ambivalent contradictions of

self-reliance and self-fulfillment as ways of exposing the hysteria of the stereotypical womanhood, either as a deprived mother or otherwise outcast, most notably in Ibsen's plays such as *A Doll's House*, *Ghosts*, and *Hedda Gabler*. But, the point of forging what might be a subjective position in these plays (e.g. the new woman), yet which cannot ground itself on anything that is already in place in the Symbolic order is, I think, the means by which the new technology of the director reframes reality. The director stages a reality as real as the acts and decisions embedded in the idea of a desirable outcome, or a future that may or may not arrive. In other words, the Event of the Naturalist/Realist director is not only in the dramatic act of bringing something new into the world, but drawing on a temporality that already pre-exists in possibilities but it is still veiled – that is to say, the temporality of the Evental. Its appearance, therefore, as a form Naturalist representation or Realist portrayal of life and ideas, when finally emerge on these stages, can only be 'radically unconditioned' (Barclay 174). For these portrayals of life and ideas seemingly appear seemingly appear *ex nihilo*, independently of the knowledge that preceded them – what is arguably the metaphysical dimension of the Event. Something suddenly appears in the historical moment that is so profoundly transformative, and yet seems to have come as out of nowhere.

The Evental dimension of Naturalism/Realism is further highlighted by the concept of 'truth' in the portrayal of 'real life' on this stage. It is also what connects this theatre with the idea of 'knowledge through seeing', which is employed by philosophy as a theatrical mode of thinking. Philosophical concepts and ideas are performed as stages – just like in the Platonic cave. The only difference here is that this knowledge is an embodied knowledge represented by social behaviour and human psychology, that claims a reality more 'truthful' than reality itself. Indeed, Stanislavsky, the high priest of theatrical Naturalism, despite his more aesthetic preoccupation with the internalising and externalising

of the psychological nuances of the Naturalist stage, was explicit in the role of his theatre in terms of the ‘search for truth’; ‘what we are undertaking’ he stressed, ‘is not simply a private affair but a social task’ (in Braun, *The Director and the Stage* 60). Similar emphasis was placed by one of his most talented students, Vsevolod Meyerhold, whose bold experimentation with the aesthetic form quickly morphs into a political call for a revolutionary, so much in theatre as in real life. Meyerhold’s identification with the revolutionary politics of Russia undoubtedly foreshadows the more aggressive integration of aesthetics with politics that was soon to mark the theatrical landscapes of the avant-garde activity. His theatrical experiments with the human form in space radically reconfigure the illusionistic aesthetic of the naturalist theatre, acting as a paradigm for theatre artists of the avant-garde, especially Futurists and Constructivists. Indeed, by framing and reframing the reality of illusion, Meyerhold altogether exposes this reality as another dialectical process by which the very frame of illusion needs to be re-materialised, through the body, intellect and the technology of the stage, into the bare ‘real’.

The apogee of this process properly arrived in its full grandeur with the avant-garde’s ability to render theatricality into the only actual space that, not only partakes in the shape of a new reality, but stands as a model of this new reality. The idea here is to aestheticise and theatricalise reality in an effort to bring about and engage with a renewed, reconfigured, essentially integrated – or, to use the Hegelian term, ‘mediated’ – reality; a reality in which the organisation of a new life can only be founded in the instantiation of ‘truth’. And yet, this is a process of re-theatricalisation that ironically can only arrive through error, failure and misrecognition. In other words, the avant-gardish reframing of reality as radicalism, which often has been read as the confounding of the categories of the aesthetic and the political, as Groys many other commentators of the historical avant-garde have claimed, perform a type of what Žižek calls a ‘transference’. As

a framing/reframing device, transference is not so much meant to reflect reality as it is to constitute it anew. But transference is, in fact, an illusion. As Žižek argues, ‘the point is that we cannot bypass it and reach directly for the truth. The truth itself is constituted through the illusion proper to the transference’ (in Bistoien 843). In this sense, the avant-garde’s reclaim of theatricality in the actual ‘real’ is not dissimilar with most theatres of modernism. What is different, instead, is the avant-garde’s strange temporality. While there is an always relational and subjective process, like in all forms of modernism as a product of the director’s creativity and experimentation, in the avant-garde the subjective mistake, error, or misrecognition seems to arrive paradoxically as a mediation, before the truth in relation to which we are designating it as ‘error’. To borrow from Žižek, if ‘truth’ becomes ‘true’ only through ‘error’ (‘The Truth Arises from Misrecognition’ 190-191), then, in an equally true Hegelian manner, the avant-garde recreates the illusion of error, failure, and misrecognition to reframe a reality that is to *become*. And, by doing so, it emerges as the only reality that *is*. ‘Take away the illusion,’ Žižek insists, ‘and you have lost the truth itself’ (*Event* 106).

This now brings us to an understanding of the Event of the director, from a shift in the relationship to reality to a radical change of this reality itself. It is in this sense that the aesthetic subjectivity of director can be understood as a mode of technology. In Heidegger, the ‘essence of technology’ is used by means to indicate a kind of fundamental fantasy by which reality, and how we relate to it, is structured. This is, for Heidegger, the significance of his notion of the *Gestell*, which usually translates to ‘enframing.’ What is particularly interesting here is how Heidegger attaches the meaning of *technology* as something radical. As Žižek observes, for Heidegger the idea of ‘enframing’ does not only designate ‘a complex network of machines and activities but the attitude towards reality’ assumed when is engaged in such activities (*Event* 31). Enframing, therefore as a

mode of technology denotes the ways by which reality, at least for Heidegger, discloses itself to us while posing itself as what objectifies oneself – the kind of enframing perhaps that, in the modernist stage, reduces the human form to what is no longer properly human, but more than human, such as Craig’s *Übermarionette* or Meyerhold’s tribune actor. This is the kind of reality that loses the very feature that allows openness to it, only to theatricalise it as the only ‘real’. And yet, paradoxically, it is this contradiction in acknowledging the essence of technology as a mode of enframing that makes it possible to overcome it, as Heidegger insists, by traversing the fantasy which then introduces the notion of the Event. This in Heidegger appears as *Ereignis*.

The radical configuration of Ereignis refers to the new epochal disclosure of Being, that kind of emergence of a new ‘world’, or perhaps a horizon of meaning within which all entities appear (ibid.). Its processes, therefore, operate not so much in reality itself, but, like in Badiou’s thinking of the Event, define a matter of pure relationality that is, itself, a relation of technology capable of producing the effect that seems to exceed its causes. To understand this delicate point, I will now turn to explore the Event of thought in theatre that makes up, ultimately, the constitution of the Evental director.

Mediation as the *Evental* Director

After Stéphane Mallarmé, after Paul Verlaine, after Gustave Moreau, after Puvis de Chavannes, after our own verse, after all our subtle and nervous rhythm, after the faint mixed tins of Conder, what more is possible? After us the Savage God.

W.B. Yeats in Taxidou, *Modernism and Performance* 1

Alfred Jarry’s highly subversive experimentation in *Ubu Roi* (1896), with the dramatic references from the all too familiar Shakespearean *Macbeth*, was not so much the crux of the controversy for W.B. Yeats. As Taxidou observes, it was

not ‘that Yeats disliked the performance as that he was simply shocked by it’ (ibid.). Jarry’s formal experimentation of the ‘dramatic’ into what could be described as the *anti-dramatic*, not only instigates another (new) form, but something like a mental overload that is shocking because it enables an overturning in thought-processes steering one’s unconscious – what Freud would have probably defined as knowledge which doesn’t know itself, yet which was there all along waiting to be discovered or spoken. It is, then, this act of form as a mode of thought or knowledge that constitutes, while it is simultaneously constituted by, the performance itself that signals a new subjectivity – in this case, the theatrical identity of Jarry as a modern director/author, and of Yeats as the modern spectator/critic, both of which are brought together, given form and definition in the artistic work itself. As Badiou would argue, the main question that artistic work poses is within the domain of form. In theatre, it evolves around theatre’s power for appearance and its relation to ‘being’, which is found at the core of theatre art as aesthetic form – what also pronounces the Evental director as fundamentally an embodied mode of forming ideas. If modernist experimentation is the domain of aesthetic formation, then it is so in the sense of the formal resources that give way to aesthetic potentialities, which are at the core of innovation and experimentation. It is what allows, Badiou claims, the invention of Abstraction, Symbolism, Realism, Expressionism and so forth to take place and simultaneously be shaped as aesthetic form. This experimentation, I further add, is signalled and made possible in modernism on the interrelation between appearance, being (as truth), and representation. While artistic presentation is wholly occurring in the sensory sphere (aesthetic) as something that is seen, felt, and heard, theatrical form simultaneously operates, as argues Badiou, ‘the order of appearing, of that which appears’ (*Philosophy and the Event* 55). Yet, the significance of this interrelation, which is also found at the core of the artistic subjectivity of the director, is in indicating that something essential is ‘felt’ to be

present through one's aestheses (senses), although it is also slightly veiled at the same time. Aesthetic form, in this sense, is part of what renders the director into an Event, not only formalistically, but by ways of opening up possibilities of understanding the very situation of what produced the phenomenon – a phenomenon of mediation, to be more precise, through which the director's subjectivity becomes the aesthetic materials themselves.

The advents of new forms on the modernist stage are, therefore, not meant to only describe formal possibilities lurking to be expressed in the background of theatrical innovation. They are specific thought processes or 'Ideas' – what Badiou describes as 'forms of truth', which are implicated in the sensory realm and are, at the same time, advents of a new subjectivity precisely located in the artistic works themselves. Once again, Badiou carefully points out that 'subjectivity is signalled by the possibility of an Idea, of a new Idea' (*Philosophy and the Event* 74). This 'new Idea' is not a matter of thinking anew something, but of actively engaging in the creation and reception of this idea through acceptance and incorporation. What is striking in this presence is the relation of an inter-activity and intra-connectivity with the subject that makes this idea both 'appear' and 'possible' in the work's existence. In conceptualising the subject as 'the real of the Idea', as that which is 'what makes it exist, what causes it to be real' (ibid.), Badiou is already signalling towards what seems to be an embodied mode or trope of thought that I read as the director's subjectivity. If the director is who makes the 'idea' possible, then the director is the medium by which this Idea receives material expression on stage always positioned between the actor and the spectator, the word and the action, the theatrical space and the civic place. That meson is naturally a hybrid form that also seems to work between theatre and thought. To fully grasp this dimension, which will also allow us to think of the director as a type of an Event, I will briefly draw upon Badiou's fascination with the Apostle Paul.

‘For me,’ Badiou argues, ‘Paul is a poet-thinker of the event... he brings forth the entirely human connection, whose destiny fascinates me, between the general idea of a rupture, an overturning, and that of a thought-practice that is this rupture’s subjective materiality’ (*Saint Paul* 2). What offers Paul as a paradigmatic thinker of the event is the fact that he radically restructures his thought in relation to the Event of Christ’s resurrection, yet in a *form* by which practically reshapes faithfulness to the Event itself. ‘Form’, in this respect, is not just any representation of a particular occurrence or temporality, but is exactly what allows thought to be reshaped *by* the Event whilst emerging itself as the thought *of* the Event. To translate this beautifully complex philosophical proposition in theatrical terms would be to look for those *formal configurations and structures* in which theatrical presentation is exemplified in experimentation, situated between form and content, through which theatre *also* becomes reshaped, but as an activity of thought. To understand this interesting interplay, it is important to note that, for Badiou, the significance of St Paul is in the apostle’s ability to think the new and embody it in time and space, while disconnecting it from the perceived knowledge and social conditioning. What this then also means is that his encounter with grace (e.g. the Event of Christ), is not the climax of a long history and cannot be considered as merely transformative, but an altogether new creation. Indeed, for Badiou, quoting Saint Paul when he writes ‘by the grace of God I am what I am’ (in Barclay 175). The meaning of this encounter is the deeply subversive process of self-creation through the divine that leads St Paul to chart a *third discourse*. This ‘third’ is, as John Barclay observes in his article ‘Paul and the Philosophers: Alain Badiou and the Event’, a discourse that is ‘a-cosmic and il-legal: its co-ordinates and meaning are entirely formed by the event itself’ (ibid.). What this might mean for the director, when read in Pauline terms, is the deeply mediative nature of this figure which pronounces the self-creation of a new aesthetic subjectivity as the result of a process (Event) of its own

‘becoming’, which is what necessitates a third discourse (the director) as the very processuality (mediation) that simultaneously de-substantialises it. For example, the loss of some presumed unity or harmony in the theatrical stage that never quite existed and which needs to always be recognised and negotiated – what results, to recall Rose, is the triune relationship of the broken middle – a broken middle that I identify with the Evental figure of the director.

Antoine Artaud’s *Theatre of Cruelty* is an exemplary case in point. His opposition to the ‘oppressive authority’ (Puchner, ‘The Theatre in Modernist Thought’ 525) of the dramatic text from which the theatrical stage should be freed, reverberates with the unmediated prerogative of theatricality already – a recurrent modernist position already voiced loud and clear in Craig’s and Adolphe Appia’s aesthetic writings earlier in the twentieth century. As Puchner observes, in his article ‘Theatre in Modernist Thought’, ‘the single most important component of Artaud’s theater is its violent and uncompromising critique of dramatic masterworks and, by extension, of the dramatic text as such’ (ibid.). What ultimately emerges is not a critique of the stage, but the essence of theatre which, for Artaud, is re-created in the programmatic, even impossible, utopian terms of the phantasmic – an association that seems to me to display Artaud’s conceptualisation of his Theatre of Cruelty in Badiou’s Evental terms. Whether it is materialisable or not, the aggressive formulation of its own theatrical imaginary as ‘cruel’, anti-literal, anti-textual and, to a great extent, fantasised, forces a particular theatrical existence that is equivalent to the form of its thought – that is, in fact, a mediated position represented and made possible by Artaud in his role as a director, connecting his theatre with the Event of thought. To put it differently: Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty does not denote the mere ‘breaking away’ from previous structures; neither is it accounted for, nor structured by any preconceived generality or any pre-constituted community. Rather, it describes an opening of an epoch, a ‘pure beginning’ in Badiou’s terms,

in which the transformation in the relationship between what is possible and what is impossible invites the third discourse of the director, which ultimately is a-poretic. This embedded a-poria in the mediating subjectivity of the director bores a hole right in the middle of theatre, giving birth while rupturing the very fabric of established knowledge and practices. This kind of a-poretic place, which, as we saw in the previous chapter of this thesis, designates the difficult path without a path, now comes to also claim a 'centre' (poros) without a centre – which, in modernism, foregrounds the theatrical *skene* as a hole (poros), giving birth to itself each time—perhaps the greatest Event of all, namely the Event of modernism. So, to return to the earlier Badiouian analogy, the director, like St Paul, is the figure that dares to not only conceive and articulate the Event of the modernist theatre in the self-creating activity of thought, but positions the figure of the director as an Evental figure itself – what renders this new artist of the director into a certain embodied type of a philosopher.

It is in this sense, too, – to make this densely philosophical hypothesis more concrete in terms of the political expression of the director – that we see the ever-increased democratic project of modernity articulated as what might be considered the democratic identity of the director. Wagner and his totalising, aesthetic stage is the first to paradoxically articulate and instigate such a modern democratic impulse. We should not forget that, despite the totalisation of Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* and the critical reception that followed it in conjunction with the totalising political discourses of the early twentieth century, Wagner's aesthetic conception of the 'total art-work' was politically configured on the idea of the democratization of all art forms and inspired by Wagner's own revolutionary, anarchist action, as we shall later see, and had led him to live a life of exile. This does not mean that we should overlook the totalising meaning that also informs the role of Wagner as a composer/director, and, indeed, of the aspiring figure of the modern director more generally. Rather, that the totalising

dimension, first identified and set into motion by Wagner, is a part of the history of the director's Event because of the director's ability to relate dialectically with both totalising politics *and* with democracy. This can be seen more clearly in how later, more radically subversive, movements of the avant-garde channel Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* into the political notion of performance as the total integration of life and art, ultimately functioning as another type of revolutionary, anti-conformist, negative totality, yet a totality nonetheless.

If the Hegelian logic that governs the subversive nature of the Evental director is what appears only in its disappearance, its speculative procedure posits mediation, in Hegelian terms, as a mobile, structural activity conceived as a relational movement, not an entity. It is this logic that characterises how the Evental director behaves within the aesthetic trajectory of modernism – a relation of movement of opposition and renunciation that keeps aesthetic relations in modernist theatres in play, while directly conversing with philosophy.

One such good example, apart from Wagner's monumental impact on the philosophical thinking of his time and the theatres of thought to come, both in the shape of critical commentators of the Frankfurt school and the language of the modernist stage, is Naturalism's interrelation to the political efficacy of the avant-garde and Brecht's 'epic' Realism when proposing the social *gestus*. Naturalism's affirmative aesthetic not only radicalises the illusion of the stage as the only 'real' reality, but is what enables the more radical politics that shape the stages of both Brecht and of the various subversive experimentations of the avant-garde.

In the next section, I will explore the relationship between theatre and philosophy in an attempt to further explicate the Evental aspect of the director.

Theatre and Philosophy

... philosophical theatricality means this, that the essence of philosophy... is a
[theatrical] act.

–Alain Badiou, *Conditions* 44

To propose the director as an Event is to read the director indistinguishably from philosophy. The director's appearance in the theatrical enterprise of the late-nineteenth century dialectically interacts with philosophy by which this figure establishes itself as a permanent feature in the structure of the modernist theatre, but also in the very intellectual structure by which modern philosophy produces philosophical thought. Philosophy's stable argumentation through ideas is recuperated by the figure of the director as a kind of enacted and embodied mode of thought that also claims to stage philosophical ideas. This phenomenon is first signalled by Wagner and receives its climax with the openly dialectical stage of Brecht, forcing philosophy to engage discursively with his 'epic' theatre, while he directly converses with philosophy. In many respects, this new modern figure of the director channels philosophy into the theatre by means of both rendering the theatrical stage into a platform of philosophical thinking and by theatricalising philosophical enquiry. Their encounter does not come without its conflicts or contradictions. One may only recall the seminal, all-encompassing, indeed, formative interaction between Nietzsche and Wagner. Their passionate love-hate affair is perhaps one of the most extreme examples of this contradiction. Not only does Nietzsche advance his steep polemic against Wagner, but he offers him a distinct opportunity to perform, as Taxidou argues, the openly 'tragic' conception of his thought, which he also configures as a form of philosophy itself (*The Mask* 5). Wagner, in his turn, created his operatic masterpieces as the inception to Schopenhauer's philosophy. Indeed, Wagner not only acknowledges

Schopenhauer as his true intellectual mentor, but he actively endorses his philosophy, seeking to re-create it theatrically in the forms of his later music-dramas. Similarly, Craig's writings, through which he formulates the aesthetic theory of the modern theatre, develop in response to Nietzsche's philosophy, which he incorporates, absorbs, and reiterates as his own in his various theoretical and practical schemes. Nietzsche's philosophical proposition of the *Übermensch*, conceived as the ultimate modern symbol and an active shaper of new values within the moral vacuum of nihilism, acts for Craig, and for many of the aspiring modern directors, as a catalyst. In Craig's case, Nietzschean thought, but also Schopenhauer, formulates and gives direction to the various aspects of Craig's Theatre of the Future, particularly his famous notion of the *Übermarrionette* deriving directly by Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, by which Craig introduces his acting theory.

Nietzschean philosophy, at least for the formative years of the modernist theatre and the new form of the director, was far from figurative or an empty, symbolic gesture. Rather, it displayed an impact that was literal and real. In this context, not only Craig but also the dramatic new waves of writing by Joseph Conrad, Arthur Symons, Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde demonstrate an aesthetic consciousness formulated by the Nietzschean principles, while Bernard Shaw writes and stages *Man and Superman* (1903), a play derived dramaturgically by Nietzsche's *Übermensch*. It depicts the persistent attempts of a confirmed bachelor who avoids the pursuit of Ann Whitefield, referred to as 'the Life Force' (Modernism, Nationalism and the Novel 62). Moreover, in Russia, Fyodor Sologub publishes the influential article 'The Theatre of the Single Will' in 1908 that proposes a Nietzschean model of theatrical practice conceived in as the creative expression of the single artistic 'will'. The sincerely Nietzschean themes are also echoed in Nikolay Evreinov's essay 'Introduction to Monodrama' (1908), which proposed the various aspects of the new theatre as projections that

belong to the psyche of one artistic consciousness. In France, too, Edouard Schré publishes the essay 'Theatre of the Soul', which speaks of the idea of renewal and rebirth as a collective catharsis, another philosophical concept deriving from and being developed in Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*. On the level of theatre practice, the impact of philosophy was even more radically felt, shaking the foundation of the theatre as it was known until then. This can be seen in Marinetti's masculine aggressive imaginary of the machine aesthetic, or Dadaism's negative *poiesis* that seemed to re-invoke and re-play Nietzsche's thesis of 'the eternal recurrence'. But it is equally present in Structuralism, Expressionism and Surrealism that can be understood as fully blown theatrical elaborations of Nietzsche's famous existential statement: 'only as an aesthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are eternally justified' (*The Birth of Tragedy* 59). In this particular sense, the modernist theatre emerges not only as Nietzschean to its core but *Übermenschian*. And the director has claimed it as a role somewhat between theatre and philosophy.

The great rivalry between the philosopher and the director is an old one. Already in Plato, as we saw in the previous chapter, the poet is banished by the philosopher. But this is not because the philosopher (Plato) hates the theatre. Rather, it is an act that shows 'a writer who wants to get rid of his rivals' (Puchner *The Drama of Ideas* 523). What this results in, in terms of the philosophical tradition that follows through the centuries, is another Platonic cave, this time *for* philosophy. Indeed, the way by which philosophy tends to 'stage' its ideas is in a manner akin to the theatre director. The examples here are numerous. From Wagner to the Naturalist directors and Marinetti, and from the various Dadaist artists to Brecht, philosophy continuously restages the figure of director as a particular ideological construction while producing philosophical thought. Strangely enough, the director also appears in this configuration as another engaged thinker that paradoxically seems to somehow also reconcile the

remarkable, long-standing difference that entangles theatre and philosophy. The director as the mediating link in this relation is considered by both as the cause, the effect, while the difference between the philosophical dramatisation of ideas by philosophers and the director's dramatic representation of ideas in space and time is not that dissimilar after all.

In Plato's *Republic* and *The Laws*, for example, what is significant in this respect is Plato's philosophical oeuvre. Here we see the dramatisation of the layout of his thought, but it is made in such a way that elevates a certain sensory understanding which he draws directly from the form of theatre as a sensory mode of 'knowledge through seeing'. The aim is to get to experience philosophical 'knowing' as more 'true' or 'real' than reality itself. Just like a director, therefore, Plato the philosopher 'stages' his philosophical thought.

This centrality of the theatrical paradigm in philosophy continues throughout the philosophical tradition. In Schelling's writing, it appears as a kind of philosophising scene, while in Sartre it appears as a kind of theatricality by which the philosopher appropriates the doctrine of freedom. In contemporary philosophy, philosophers such as Wittgenstein, Burke, Badiou, Rancière, Žižek, and Deleuze are seen to draw on the form of theatre not only as a method by which to theatricalise their philosophy, but to directly appropriate the idea of 'theatricality' in all its related concepts as ways of thinking philosophically and, as such, they write a theatrical type of philosophy. This paradoxically intimate (though, often, hostile) relating is further seen in Schiller's *The Robbers*, the main hero in which inspires Hegel's thought on the Absolute of self-consciousness. In the same spirit, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who ironically dismisses theatre in *Gevena*, then goes on and writes his own operetta, *The Village Soothsayer*. In Brecht's theatre, this fascinating interaction acquires its most exemplary form; By actively claiming the role of the philosopher, Brecht de-theatricalises theatre into his own deeply theatrical model of the Epic theatre, which he presents as an

intellectual practice (philosophy) that is also simultaneously a practice of art theatre. As Brecht announces in the introduction of his *Lehrstück* plays (learning plays):

With the learning-play, then, the stage begins to be didactic. (A word of which I, as a man of many years of experience in the theatre, am not afraid.)
(*The Measures Taken and Other Lehrstück Plays* 1)

In his article ‘Afterword: Please Mind the Gap between Theatre and Philosophy’, Puchner discusses some of these complex problematics in the relationship of the two disciplines. The article is the published version of a keynote presented in the inaugurated conference of the Performance Philosophy Network – an international network of currently over 3,000 members that a group of mainly new scholars established in 2012. Suggesting that there is something irrevocably distinct between theatre and philosophy, Puchner argues that the two cannot be bridged by a shared mode of ‘thinking through doing’ *and* ‘doing through thinking’, or at least not in the way the growing body of scholarship under the intellectual network of Performance Philosophy seems to suggest. Instead, ‘what makes the study of theatre *and* philosophy interesting, even thrilling,’ Puchner suggests, ‘is the very fact that the two are so utterly and irreconcilably different’ (‘Afterword’ 543). In many ways, here Puchner simply tries to reiterate, in this manner, the long-held philosophical thesis of anti-theatricality. Even if theatre has always provided philosophers, already since the time of Plato and Aristotle, he claims, with new and fresh procedures by which to renovate the critical instruments of philosophical thought and its thinking, for Puchner this is not any proof by which to claim that such intimate intellectual endeavours diminish the gap that separates the two respective disciplines. Neither does it help to dissolve, let alone cancel, he argues, the anti-theatrical prejudice that runs through this ancient relationship. Rather, what would be more fruitful in this task would be to look at the deliberate appropriation of theatre by philosophy. On this premise,

Puchner refers to Kenneth Burke's proposed 'dramatism'. For him, Burke's 'dramatism' provides sufficient evidence of a type of philosophical reconstruction of what might be a 'playing theatre' employed as an instrument of philosophy that Burke, in his role as a scholar, adopts for use in the discipline of drama. Burke's proposed model draws on theatrical terms such as 'act', 'agent', 'agency', 'purpose' and 'scene' through which he examines the entire history of philosophy.

On the one hand, Puchner is right to bring up Burke's theatrical appropriation as a good example of the level of appropriation that characterises the relationship between theatre and philosophy. After all, it is a common practice in producing philosophy ever since Plato. It is here that we see Nietzsche turning to Wagner and, subsequently, Adorno following a similar route. We further see Benjamin producing philosophical thought from reflecting on Brecht, Lukács on Realism, Deleuze on Antonin Artaud, and most recently, Badiou, Žižek and Rancière among others developing a theatrical type of political thought. This method of appropriation of the form and concept of theatre is undoubtedly a philosophical tool rather than any accurate representation or analysis of the historical moment of these theatres or their directors. Sometimes, it is indeed with the aim of producing new philosophy and sometimes for elaborating deeply philosophical concerns (the question of 'truth', of metaphysics, of ontology, etc.). In this sense, theatre, and specifically the modern figure of the director, serves as a scapegoat for philosophical argumentation and critique. Thus, these 'philosophical' theatrical models and their reconstructions are the very points of fusion between theatre and philosophy that re-construct the former in order to construct the latter, as something akin *to* theatre and something *of* theatre and yet *not* theatre.

As a result, this process is deeply transformative and constitutive for both theatre and philosophy. However, it does not so much end up bringing the two

disciplines in an 'arranged marriage' ('Afterword' 543), as Puchner would have it, but in what might be a truly dialectical relationality that allows a process of profound creative and intellectual interaction between the two, necessarily resulting in the transformation of each other. But it is a transformation that is diremptive. As Rose describes, diremption is the point that brings re-cognition through this encounter. It draws attention to and re-imagining something that was never united or complete to start with, yet which is precisely what allows them to come together, enriching each other. This point of diremption which is the difficult point of bringing together two irreconcilables, is embodied in my argument by the figure of the director. If theatre and philosophy are supposed opposites that constitute and are constituted by one other, the director stands at this broken middle, enabling theatre and philosophy to think themselves anew. In this sense, the director might be thought as a figure that unsettles dualisms in the structure of theatre and replaces them with a triune Hegelian structure; the philosopher/director as a third term. Yet this 'third' does not account, in my examination, as the mere reconstruction of any particular theatre into a philosophical theatre, or of any particular theatrical figure or movement. Rather, it is the specific process by which mediation, as we shall see in the following chapters, allows the possibility of a renewed understanding of aesthetic structures of these theatres and their discourses. This is what bestows the mediation of the director with a continual working-through in the chasm between 'thinking' and 'appearing'. This is the kind of relational configuration that inaugurates the director into the Event of thought in theatre at the turn of the nineteenth century.

Puchner's analysis seems to ignore the meeting point between theatre and philosophy which is the figure of the director. His reading, like most examinations in theatre studies, is mostly limited to discourses of anti-theatricality and his approach to the interaction between theatre and philosophers is as a dramatic idiom. This forces him to necessarily limit the possibilities and various

expressions this intersection has, had, or even is capable of. As I want to argue in what follows, the theatrical project of modernism appropriates philosophy as much as philosophy appropriates theatre through the figure of the director which, in turn, renders the director into a mode of embodied philosophy.

As a type of embodied philosophy, the director bridges these two antagonistic, often oppositional, fields of knowing that need to be negotiated by the director through theatrical representation. Philosophy, in this thesis, is generally understood ‘as a search for truth’ (Groys *Introduction to Antiphilosophy* 1) and the philosopher as the figure that does the truth-seeking. To view therefore the director as philosopher is to see this theatrical figure as someone who also seeks to find the truth and represent it on stage. Furthermore, being a mediating subjectivity, the director is capable of confronting the limits and possibilities of philosophical truth on stage. It is how modernist theatre is seen to now reflect the move of philosophy, that begins with Marx and Kierkegaard, which wishes to not only explain but *change* the world. The performative idea here that characterises much of the work that the director develops in theatrical modernism is that once the world is changed, the true nature of this world will be revealed. This world-change will be triggered and put into effect by the director’s theatre, or at least, this was the aspiration of the various theatrical schools of directing. Consequently, the appearance of the modernist director conveys in theatre this new philosophical scheme that embodies thought as a ‘command’ for life-action rather than as ‘a purely philosophical decision’ in the intersection of truth (Groys *Introduction to Antiphilosophy* xx).

As such, when, for example, ‘Brecht the thespian’ is seen to introduce ‘a philosopher into the theatre’, it is not to ‘estrangle’ theatre as Puchner would suggest; rather, it is more the case of Brecht ‘the director’ introducing ‘the philosopher’ into the theatre in order to embody the command for change *just like a philosopher*.

PART 2

The Director's Philosophical Modernity

Chapter 4

‘Feeling Together’: Richard Wagner’s Affect Aesthetic Politics

I understand perfectly when a musician says today: “I hate Wagner, but I can no longer endure any other music.” But I’d also understand a philosopher who would declare: “Wagner sums up modernity. There is no way out, one must first become a Wagnerian.”

–Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner* 612.

The mind will tell us *So it is!* but only when the feeling has told us *So it must be!*

– Richard Wagner, *Opera and Drama* 88.

Wagner’s Philosophical Opening

Wagner was composing *Siegfried* from *The Valkyrie* (in *The Ring*) in September 1856 when a recent plea to be allowed to return to his native Germany had been rejected. By then, Wagner had already endured for more than six years the deprivations of life as a political refugee. His participation in the planning and execution of the failed Dresden uprising of 1849 had forced him to flee his homeland. Indeed, by using someone else’s passport, he had narrowly eluded arrest while safely crossing over to the neighbouring Switzerland. Yet, living in exile was to continue for nearly twenty years, during which time he often found himself threatened with imprisonment due to various unpaid debts and had to rely on faithful friends and benefactors for his survival, such as Hans von Bülow and Franz Liszt. Liszt had also helped to produce Wagner’s *Lohengrin* in 1850 in

Weimar. Yet, the premiere of Wagner's next opera was not to be until 1865; this time, it was to be *Tristan*. I will return to Wagner's anarchist activity of his younger years later in my discussion in which, as I hope to show, its significance has not received adequate critical attention. This is partly due to Wagner's appropriation by the Nazi propaganda, and partly due to the various negative critical appraisals as proto-fascist pronouncements. Indeed, Wagner's highly anarchist activity as a form of democratisation is seldom mentioned by his major critics such as Nietzsche, Adorno, Heidegger, or Lacoue-Labarthe. Yet what is important to note for now is the decisive role that Wagner's attitude to politics played in shaping his creative ideas that also drove him to philosophy in the first place. As I argue in this chapter, Wagner's intimate philosophical entanglements position him as an active interlocutor in theatre, actively engaging and interacting with philosophy. Led by his deep-seated belief that another world was possible, he formulates theories that call for a new form of music-drama and correspond to the call for political change through which this new world of the future could be possible. With this in mind, Wagner proposes the theory of his *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Meaning the total-art-work, Wagner's theoretical formulation is conceived as a way of building a new world order that he calls the world order of the 'future'; this new world is distinctively inspired by the widely spread democratic aspirations and ideals of the untangling project of modernity and Wagner, as we shall see, signals its arrival in theatre.

Wagner reads with painstaking devotion the philosophies of Ludwig Feuerbach, Hegel and, later, Arthur Schopenhauer. At the same time, he immerses himself in the anarchist ideas of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, but also Michael Bakunin, with whom Wagner becomes especially closely associated. However, such an intimate acquaintance with the intellectual currents of his time goes beyond what could be considered as mere influence, although, and without a doubt, Wagner's thought and practice was most definitely inspired by these

philosophers and their ideas. What takes place, instead, is the kind of interaction that causes a philosophical oeuvre to occur that leads to the formation of the director as a mode of philosophy through which, I claim, that the new form of the modern director comes into being. I argue that the interface between Wagner and philosophy is part of the history of the director as a philosopher; first by actualising philosophy on the formal level of theatre by which he revolutionises the medium of operatic drama with the aim of addressing pressing matters of political nature involving the widespread call for democratisation at the time. And secondly, by constituting himself as a mode or trope of philosophy by directly engaging with philosophers and their philosophies.

By doing so, Wagner positions his role as a director in-between theatre and philosophy, leading him to create a theatre of change through his interaction with philosophy. At the same time, it is a position that is to be characterised by the kind of tension and debate that fuels the various intellectual constellations and contradictions in the theatres of modernism.

Another significant development associated with Wagner is the function of theatricality that is recast from the actor manager's 'representational regime' (*Aesthetics and its Discontents* 29) as Rancière points out, to what heralds in late-nineteenth century the 'aesthetic regime' of the director's theatre. Indeed, through Wagner, in his role as this new figure of the director, theatre is reconfigured in purely 'aesthetic' terms that are not only simultaneously political but offer theatre as a site of intellectual interaction, capable of 'thinking' *as* philosophy. This is how Wagner as a specifically modernist formation situates the phenomenon of the director in theatre as a philosopher. To better understand this, we may want to recall Badiou's notion of the *Evental* (that I explored in the previous chapter) that claims, in regards to Wagner, that a new situation is created. It is a situation created between music-theatre and philosophy and institutes 'a special kind of philosophical debate about [Wagner] that must inevitably also carry with it a

broader debate about music, even if it involves a much more extensive debate about mythology, theatre and so forth' (*Five Lessons on Wagner* 56).

Now, we should not forget that Wagner's operas have traditionally been associated with claims of 'totality' and the pro-fascist connotations that follow such claims. Yet, in reading Wagner as an Event, Badiou denotes totality in Wagner as being 'uncoupled'; that is to say, Wagner articulates, for him, a universal-like 'human emancipation' and its possibility in phantasmic forms is understood as the very emancipation of thinking about reality itself, while also seeking to formulate it anew. I employ Badiou's definition of totality in rehabilitating Wagner, in what follows in this thesis, which I further examine as a fundamentally 'theatocratic' trait in its Rancièrian sense, meaning 'emancipation' of the audience. By inverting Plato's notion of theatocracy, Rancière argues for the rule of the phantasma in theatre as something that claims 'equality' in thinking and staging of its representation. Theatocracy here empowers the audience to have a voice and is a power that relates, as I will further show, to what we would today refer to as 'affect'.

We have seen already in Chapter 1 the way by which the term of theatocracy appears in Platonic thought and how it has always described the intrinsically political value of theatre. Later, it is reinvented as 'phantasmagoria', the term Adorno coins to denote the specifically political function of mimesis, not only as a form of government – the rule of the spectator – but as an economy of spectacle that functions as commodity. Adorno's sharp critique is targeting not just any mode of production that produces the commodified culture, but the most ambitious modern technology of the nineteenth century theatre – Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*. That is, for Adorno, the specifically Wagnerian gesture of theatricality that possesses the power to spellbound the spectators with the magic of the spectacle, while demanding the audience's obedience that is materialised through the application of technology. In this sense, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* is

considered to consciously deliver a rationally constructed artificial wholeness which simultaneously repudiates free will, at least in Adorno's reading. Here Adorno echoes Nietzsche who had pronounced Wagner as a great sorcerer. Focusing on the physiological effects of the Wagnerian operas, Nietzsche repudiates Wagner's aesthetics for indissolubly being tied to biological presuppositions by which he means the coercive instrumentality of affect – what I would like to call in this thesis as *Wagnerian affectivity*. Indeed, in Wagner's theatre, affect corresponds to an augmentation of a body's capacity to act which, given its social nature in the setting of theatre, becomes indistinguishable from theatricality itself. It is what brings Nietzsche to protest that Wagner's music aims, first and foremost, towards physiological expressiveness, the effect of which causes the audience to suffer exhaustion because of the impact of Wagner's operas. Thus Nietzsche denounces Wagner as a pathological phenomenon that designates nothing less than a disease. Wagner is a neurosis, he writes, a sickness:

because nothing is more modern than this total sickness, this lateness and overexcitement of the nervous mechanism, Wagner is *the modern artist par excellence*, the Cagliostro of modernity... Wagner represents a great corruption of music. He has guessed that it is a means to excite weary nerves—and with that he has made music sick. (*The Case of Wagner* 55)

Similar claims are later made by Heidegger. For him, too, Wagner personifies the archetypal metaphysician in actual ontic terms. But as Badiou explains, this is because Wagner denotes, for them all, 'the supremacy of the One, the capturing of Being by the One' (*Five Lessons on Wagner* 57). The general accusation is, though, is the bigger claim, that Wagner's theatricality, conceived by his *Gesamtkunstwerk* as a technology, is capable of manifesting a certain vision into a reality. In other words, that Wagner *affects* the audience; by manipulating the spectators' sensory receptivity, he not only gets them to 'think' in a certain way, but gets them to also *act* in a certain way. This can be seen in Wagner's use of the melodic line or of how difference is subordinated to itself and, subsequently,

with his image of a conductor; as that ‘One’ that reigns supreme by getting everyone else to follow behind by the blow of the conductor’s baton.

This chapter looks at Wagner’s relationship to philosophy with a view to revising, while bringing into a sharper focus, Wagner’s overtly negative image and reception of his theory and practice of the total artwork. By rethinking the ways in which the introduction of aesthetics into politics, usually indebted to the aesthetic import of Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk*, is presented or misrepresented in philosophical discourse, I wish to identify certain unexplored, or at least little acknowledged, intellectual and artistic trajectories that connect Wagner to the revolutionary philosophical thought of his time. I also want to question how Wagner channels philosophy into what constitutes the new form of the modernist director-conductor that, in turn, constitutes itself as a form of philosophy. My argument is, first, that Wagner reconfigures the form of opera by ‘emotionalis[ing] intellectual matters’ (*Wagner and Philosophy* 58) which turns the Wagnerian theatre, as I argue, into a form of embodied philosophy. The key here is affect which Wagner fuses with intellect in his operatic-dramas. The idea is to make one ‘feel’ the true nature of the social situations projected in the staging of his operas and get the public to feel as being part of them as in real life. So, in this sense, the spectator is actively involved with the action on stage that is ‘felt,’ rather than just having to witness emotions represented on stage as it was normally the tradition with opera and the codified conventions of the actor-manager theatre. Through his staged operas, Wagner seeks, I argue, to consciously get his audiences to understand the true meaning of their social structures and any future society that may be possible.

The second part of my argument concerns the politico-aesthetic ramifications of Wagner that, like Badiou, I read as a theatrical project that necessitates *an opening* in the ideological terrain of philosophy. This philosophical opening is not isolated from the historical contingencies of Wagner

technologically and politically, but intertwined with Wagner's artistic innovations and the intellectual models that traditionally belonged to philosophy. It is, in other words, a philosophical opening that remodels theatre *as* philosophy by foregrounding questions such as form and content, value and appreciation, reception and representation, theatricality and identification., which in turn produce a theatrical model of philosophy.

Wagner, the Philosopher

It is widely accepted that Ludwig Feuerbach was the vital link between the philosophies of Hegel and Marx. His ideas were considered to have transitioned Hegelianism's Idealist philosophy of the 1830s and 1840s to Anglo-French Materialism. Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* was so influential that, as Engels accounts:

set materialism back on the throne without any beating about the bush. [...] One needs oneself to have experienced the liberating power of this book to have a clear idea of it. The enthusiasm was universal. We were all, for a time being, Feuerbachians. How enthusiastically Marx greeted the new idea, and how greatly he was influenced by it, in spite of all his critical reservations, one can read in *The Holy Family*. (quoted in Magee 50)

But Marx was not the only one being so profoundly influenced by Feuerbach. Wagner was undoubtedly another keen disciple who also set out to write his own Feuerbachian philosophy for the art of the future. Indeed, having discovered Feuerbach's writings during his Paris and Dresden years, Wagner becomes obsessively involved with their study, which only increases after the experience of the failed Dresden insurrection and his subsequent immigration to Switzerland. It is then that Wagner devotes his entire time, to writing his best-known revolutionary aesthetic theories, instead of composing operas. As he would later recall, he felt in complete surrender 'to the inner excitement nourished in me by

my acquaintance with the principal work of Ludwig Feuerbach' (*Richard Wagner's Letters* 51): 'Immediately after my arrival in Zurich,' he confided in his autobiography, 'I began setting down on paper my views on the nature of things, as formed under the pressure of my artistic experience and of the political excitement of the era.' (ibid.) The length to which Wagner's fascination with Feuerbach's philosophical propositions traded can also be seen from presenting his book as Feuerbachian. He named it *The Work of Art of the Future*, a title that consciously evoked Feuerbach's own book *The Principles of the Philosophy of the Future* and publicly dedicated it to Feuerbach. In this book he presents the overarching conceptual frameworks for his *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Arguing for the interrelation of poetry, music and dance on a *synthetic* premise, Wagner believed that a more direct communication would be achieved between the creative artist, the operatic work, and the audience. This synthesis would meaningfully set off the process of aesthetic engagement as a unifying experience that, for Wagner, was a fundamental part of the existence of any creative work and the sole purpose of art itself.

Wagner's idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* was not entirely novel though. Its concept had already received sufficient philosophical attention by German thinkers such as Franz Brentano, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Friedrich Hölderlin, Novalis, Friedrich Schiller, Friedrich von Schlegel, Ludwig Tieck and Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder. Wagner had read most of these writers' works preceding the revolution (Wagner, *My Life* 508). Additionally, Hegel had already identified tragic drama as a speculative mode of thought in a lecture in 1803. And Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling had embraced Greek tragic drama as 'the highest incarnation of the "An-sich" and the essence of all art'. (in Magee 87) Finally, Schelling's conception of tragedy as a model for uniting all arts prefigured Wagner's aesthetic arguments and, perhaps, provided him with a Hegelian understanding of theatre as a speculative function. Even

Gesamtkunstwerk as a term itself, as Juliet Koss has demonstrated in her comprehensive *Modernism After Wagner*, was traced back to 1827 in the writings of the Berlin philosopher Karl Friedrich Eusebius Trahdorff (13). Rather, what was truly novel about the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* was the idea of artistic co-operation as an aesthetic mode that enabled each art, and each part of the theatrical experience, to meet its full potential by the practice of what Wagner considered as ‘working in common’. (ibid.) In ‘The Art-Work of the Future,’ he writes:

Each [artform] attains the capacity to be and do the very thing which, of their own and inmost essence, they long to do and be. Each, where her own capacity ends, can be absorbed in the other... proving her own purity, freedom, and independence as *that* which she is. (189)

Wagner’s doctrine of artistic synthesis, then, led him to re-invent the operatic form as a unified music-drama, which, for Benjamin, was a prerequisite for ‘the allegorical way of looking at things’ (*The Origins of German Tragic Drama* 181). Yet, for Wagner, it was always a matter of bringing together a new spectatorship that not only shared a unified experience, but of a common way of thinking and acting in the world. It is why Wagner turned to the poetic drama of the classical Greek theatre, which he considered as an exceptionally communal paradigm that blended together music, poetry and dance for the creation of a democratic spectatorship. Indeed, the largely democratic culture of the Athenian theatre was an aspiring proposal for Wagner in 1849 when he conceptually sketched out the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, essentially becoming a radical means at the wake of the failed revolution, of encouraging the audience’s active engagement and participation. This aim was clearly stated in the central argument of Wagner’s two important treatises, *Art and Revolution* and *The Art-Work of the Future*, both

of which articulate the communal experience of aesthetic engagement and the kind of spectatorship the *Gesamtkunstwerk* would both serve and create.

Furthermore, Wagner's reflection on Hegel is revealing, not only as being proof of his own political radicalism at the time, but of his growing belief that, for the cause of revolution, theatre was a better place for actualising philosophical ideas than philosophy. 'I felt impelled,' Wagner confessed, 'to get to the bottom of what was termed "the [philosophical] Absolute" and everything connected with it. The revolution interrupted this effort; the practical considerations involved in the restructuring of society distracted me...' (*My Life* 429-10). Was this meant as an expression of discontent with the limitations of philosophy? In that, perhaps philosophy's capabilities in inciting action and thus real social change cannot be compared with the power of theatre to embody and enact philosophical ideas on stage.

To a certain degree, Wagner was highlighting the limitations of traditional philosophy that sought to uncover meaning and truth, yet failing to mobilise any real change, becoming instead a kind of commodity rather than truth. As Groys explains, 'From Socrates, via Marx, to the critical theory of Frankfurt provenance, it is held that any truth that appears as a commodity is no truth.' (*Introduction to Antiphilosophy* xviii) What Wagner, then, suggests is to use theatre as a medium that activates philosophy (and philosophical truth) as a mode of (political) action and change, transforming philosophy itself, at the same time, from an assumingly passive, contemplative, critical attitude to a command for change that is active, speculative, embodied, and revealing. A world that 'must first be changed' before 'its true nature' is shown (Groys, *Introduction to Antiphilosophy* xx), is a philosophical trend that comes under the rubric of antiphilosophy as a critique of the discipline of traditional philosophy. Although I have chosen not to make this distinction in my analysis – since my interest is on the mediating function of the director as a type of a speculative philosopher – my understanding of

antiphilosophy as a 'command' for world-change unveils as a profoundly embodied knowledge through the medium and art of the director that can already be seen in Wagner.

In this context of radicalisation and revolutionary upheaval, Wagner's publishing activity comes to shed further light on the new form of music-theatre that he proposes in the place of philosophy in his role as a composer-director. The fact that Wagner's fame as a writer ran ahead of his fame as a composer only reinforces the placement of this theatre as a philosophical theatre. While his matured operas were performed after 1865, most of his theoretical writings were published in the period around the year 1850. These writings, mostly the result of his growing frustration with the current state of German opera and, more broadly, with German operatic styles in relation to Italian and French operas, had brought 'Wagnerianism', rather than Wagner's music, to be known as a set of ideas *first*, and then as artistic works. Coupled with his political radicalism as a result of studying philosophy seriously throughout his creative years, the reaction unleashed on an international level, before even a tone of his major operas was heard, sets a whole new thread characteristic of theatrical modernism that Wagner pioneers and sets in motion as a modern director: 'I had always felt an inclination,' he explains, 'to try and fathom the depths of philosophy, rather as I had been driven by the mystical influence of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony to plumb the deepest recesses of music' (in Magee 70).

Although it has often been speculated that this new development, of producing theories that supersede practice, marks modernism's disanalogous split between theory and practice, it is essentially what introduces the director as someone who necessitates a rethink of existing theatrical conventions and the conceptual foundation of theatre as a practice itself. As such, we witness in Wagner's writings of 1848 the unleashing of an extensive and sharp critique of the Dresden Court Theatre, in which he highlights the various issues concerning

the incompetence of unqualified heads of artistic institutions and the erosion of standards by business interest. Equally, in his Zurich writings (1849–51), he advances an overtly Hegelian argument for opera in which all arts are subservient to each other in which he also locates their redemptive quality. But what carries such an enormous significance in Wagner's theoretical writings is not only his ideas, most of which set forth the developments that announce the modernist aesthetic, but the positioning of theatre in terms of theory that claims the status of knowledge in a similar way as in philosophical knowledge. With Wagner, theatre offers philosophy by dramatising thought in which the possibilities of a new society rest. Yet these are presented not only theatrically, but philosophically, by formulating new theoretical terms. *Gesamtkunstwerk* ('Total Work of Art'), *Zukunftsmusik* ('Music of the Future'), *Unendliche Melodie* ('Unending Melody'), are performative notions that already place theatre at the centre of a theoretical articulation about the nature of its art more broadly, but which, most crucially, supersede mere definition of new terms for practice. These terms become, instead, catalysts of change in the thought of theatre and simultaneously denote a practice as an embodied mode of knowledge equal (if not superior) to philosophy. It is in this light that Edward Lockspeiser remarked, in his discussion on Wagner's synthesis of the arts, that Wagner's ideas of drama were experienced with a sense of brutal finality. Or, when Deathridge speaks, in his book *Wagner, Beyond Good and Evil*, of them being 'in [themselves] an aggressive obstacle' (48) for anyone wishing to meaningfully engage with opera after Wagner. Wagner's ideas essentially express the change in the nature of art, which marks an intrinsic change about how Wagner forces us to think about opera as a theatrical experience, but also about how, most fundamentally, I think, of engaging with the aesthetic form in the thought of theatre; of turning the stage into a space of 'thinking', in which performance is elevated into a place capable of thinking in itself.

It is with this in mind that we can best grasp the idea of the Event of Wagner that Badiou repeatedly suggests; it is in this pure emergence of a new powerful relation between thought and representation, articulated in the sensory realm. Wagner, in his role as a thinker/composer/director, signals the advent of the new form of the director as a new artistic subjectivity in the conjunction between theatre and philosophy. It is also what allows us to think of the modernist director as an Event itself. Its subjectivity is constituted by the artistic event of an embodied philosophy in the operatic dramas of Wagner, which transforms the art of theatre and all its parts, namely spectatorship, acting, composing, staging. After the image of Wagner, this new artistic subjectivity can be seen to exert a sense of ‘incorporation’ as a requirement in the new relationality of theatre that actively seeks to transform one’s subjectivity, whether it is the spectator, the artist-creator, or the various arts that take part in creating theatre. It is also this relationality that, for me, is shaped speculatively in the fact that it does not only create new spectators, new actors, or even new traditions of philosophers. Rather, that these are all created and caused by this relationality, while having created and caused in return, the appearance of the new form of the director in the chiasm between philosophical ideas and theatricality. It is this split, I think, that we see unravel in the various and unique ways in the subsequent modernist debates, anchored fundamentally in questions of (theatrical) form and (philosophical) content.

I will now turn to explore the philosophical function of Wagner in ways that manifest in the aesthetic materials themselves. I will also examine the ways by which Wagner employs the form of theatre and its medium as a philosophical mode. Wagner’s innovations, as I shall also hope to make clear here, were not the mere result of natural change and evolution that normally shapes artistic trends and orientations, but something a lot more fundamentally embedded in the

philosophy of the time that gave way to something truly and uniquely novel: the director as another (type of) philosopher.

Wagnerian Affectivity

The theme of sympathy and communal feeling are key to understanding Wagner as a philosopher. In his new art-form of the music drama, they are expressed in the aesthetic principle of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* by which Wagner wished to create a new kind of spectatorship: the communal audience. In her revisionist *Modernism After Wagner*, Koss examines this communal aspect by sketching out the possibilities by which the *Gesamtkunstwerk* promotes ‘communal efforts’ among the arts, while signifying at the same time ‘the spectator’s own senses united and ennobled by the encounter with it’ (18). Then there is the sense of ‘participation’ which, in the presence of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, indicates the spectator’s entry to a process of collectivity; whereas the spectators disregarded their own identities as individuals, they re-emerged as a unified audience. This fundamental aesthetic proposition was not a forced process, but a willing and willful communal one. Its full aesthetic value was attained from what Wagner saw as the principle of collaboration and was measured ‘by the intensity of the overall effect produced on the spectator’ (ibid.). In other words, what Wagner had in mind with his *Gesamtkunstwerk* was the shared aesthetic experience of a communal audience in its function as *affect*.

Discussions of ‘affect’ or ‘affectivity’ are prevalent within recent cultural and political theory. Whether used as entirely synonymous with ‘emotion’, or as a distinctly visceral term that denotes ‘feeling,’ affect essentially defines a dimension of experience. For the French philosopher Gilbert Simondon, ‘affect’ describes a physical and psychological feature of experience that normally has to do with the domain of varying intensities not fully articulated, individuated and represented in consciousness (Gilbert, *Common Ground* 145). By contrast,

‘emotion’, as Fredric Jameson explains, is usually understood as ‘named’ states of feeling, or as ‘named emotion’ with which the individual identifies and is experienced inwardly (*Antinomies of Realism* 29). There is a marked structural difference, therefore, between emotion and affect which involves the intervention of language, because ‘emotion is pre-eminently a phenomenon sorted out into an array of names’. (ibid.) For Jameson, such names, in this sense, might be love, hate, fear, anger, pleasure, disgust, and so on, whereas affect is regarded to ‘somehow elude language and its naming of things (and feelings)’ (ibid.). This bodily sensory dimension that describes ‘affectivity’ as a category of experience is also explored in Spinozas’s major work *Ethics* and, later, in Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus* in which ‘affect’ is thought of as:

a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution of that body’s capacity to act... (with body taken in its broadest sense to include ‘mental’ or ideal bodies). (Deleuze and Guattari xvi)

To now grasp the ways by which this process works in Wagner, one may want to consider the role that sound plays as a communicative medium in his performative structures. If tonality is what creates dramatic possibility in Wagner (and both Badiou and Jameson have extensively written on this), it also produces a level of chromatism by which affects determine the semantic content of the dramatic narrative, not only emotionally, but sensory or bodily. Chromatism derives from the Greek word *chroma* translating into skin or skin colour, which designates the interaction between sensory form (also produced by colour) and its relationship with the body itself, or the context of embodiment more broadly. However, its affective dimension in Wagner is twofold; first as a bodily modality and, second, as a formal vehicle capable of political and artistic transformation and metamorphosis, to which I will return in the next sections of this chapter. For now, I want to discuss chromatism as a mechanism of affect and how it operates

in Wagner's operatic structure as another highly important function, that also accounts for one of the key characteristics of affect itself. It indexes change, as much in the physical state of the singer/actor (in terms of heart rate, breathing, etc.) as it is in the way affect impacts, in the same bodily manner, upon the recipients/spectators who experience changes occurring in their bodies' capacities to act. As the political theorist Jeremy Gilbert observes in his recent book *Common Ground*, this is the power of affect which brings the recipients to 'become more or less open to persuasion, more or less likely to react with anger, more or less sexually aroused, more or less willing to go to war, and so on' (145). In Nietzsche's ferocious criticism of Wagnerian operas, chromatism appears as 'expressivity' – or, rather, as Wagner's desire for insidious expression, by which Nietzsche means the practice of theatricality at all costs. But, if Wagner's key objective of uniting all aesthetic elements of the music-drama stage was to generate an emotional affectivity, then clearly Wagner was employing theatricality as a means by which he could exercise influence over the spectator's mind in a subconscious way. The question, then, is towards what end?

The key to this question is to understand the experience of affect to the extent observed that bodies constantly influence each other, as Simondon would argue. For Simondon, this is a matter of *relationality* which is constitutive of the capacity of bodies to act in the first place. For Spinoza, too, these actual states of the body are always relational states as he observes in his *Ethics*. They already appear in Wagner's reference in his writings as 'sympathy' – a term that we also find at work in David Hume and Adam Smith's theories of ethics and morality. Indeed, while for Hume 'sympathy' describes an affective relation enabling humans to share the feelings of others and be affected by events that occur in other people's lives, sympathy, as a fundamental element of human relations, also involves a sense of what Girard and Borch-Jacobsen calls 'mimetic identification' in the sense that bodies automatically experience the affective states which our

brains, being partly composed of ‘mirror neurones’, perceive what other bodies are to be experiencing. Deleuze and Guatarri, two pivotal thinkers in the shaping up of ‘affect theory’ today, draw on Hume, Spinoza, Nietzsche and Bergson, in their effort to shift emphasis from the verbal element of communication to more sensory, corporal elements and processes of affect. Indeed, especially for Deleuze, but also for many other theorists who read his work in the context of what might be called ‘affective politics’, such as John Protevi, the high significance of affect begins to be felt more clearly when positioned as an ethical and political response in which the potential power of bodies emerges simply by being together, sharing together and, more broadly, becoming able ‘to form new and potentially empowering encounters’ (*Political Affect* 51).

In this sensory framework, therefore, Wagner’s operatic dramas, which no doubt as musical dramas of emotions actively sought to ‘affect’ the participants directly *through* their emotions, were configurations that were seeking to harvest the radicalism of ‘being together’ – of bodies sharing together affective states. This dimension of feeling, however, should not be confused with what his operas, conceived as complex psycho-emotive compositions, were asking the audience to do – which was to *intelligently* listen. The experience of Wagner’s music is, rather, the experience of listening. Or, as Magee puts it, ‘a changing web of sounds actively recognizing variations, recurring motifs, orchestral modifications, participating in the work as a dramatic event’ (107). It is in this sense that, in Wagner, listening is active, not passive. This level of attentiveness exceeds the kind of pure receptiveness claimed by Adorno, who classifies the Wagnerian experience as passive. Indeed, Adorno famously criticised Wagner’s deliberate use of music for inducing a state of mystical *Einführung*, by which Adorno meant a collective subjectivity that resulted in a denial of rationality. Here, the idea is ‘feeling is everything’ which, Adorno argued, once universalised, justified the power of the ‘director conductor’ through the exercise

of beats, to deny the ‘rupture between subject and object’ (*In Search of Wagner* 44) – the rational autonomy of the subject. In this scheme of things, Wagner’s ‘denial of freedom’ is rooted in the almost subliminal stimuli of his manipulative technology of music that effectively sums up the mechanism of totalitarian mind control. But even when Wagner uses music as ‘effects’, their compositional structures always demonstrate a clear reason that ties into the dramatic structure. Just as Siegfried becomes an ‘accomplice’ of Wotan’s will to self-destruction, so too are all of Wagner’s dramas directed at creating the ideology of transcendent individuality (or the loss of individuality), freed from the oppression of society through the power of sound.

To put it differently – and here is where Wagner’s philosophical significance may mostly account in his role as a director – is the way he conceptualises the capacity of bodies to form productive relations with other bodies. Therefore, beyond and outside the obvious philosophical influence that underpins his dramatic-music narratives, it is these formations that are also, to borrow from Gilbert, ‘an augmentation of potential and relationality’ (*Common Grounds* 147) identified specifically with joy itself – the ‘joyous affect’ for Protevi (*ibid*). As Gilbert maintains, the significance of such a reading of affectivity compared, for example, with Freud’s and Le Bon’s paradigm of group psychology, conceives affective relations as pathological and both dependent upon individual identifications, while, for Deleuze, Guatarri and Protevi, such relations of affect are considered as ‘the key medium of collective agency and creativity’ (*ibid*). It is on this basis, too, that we need to understand the contrast between the Wagnerian model of a totalising, affective theatre, which creates a space of communal feeling directed by the theatrical experience, yet still allows dissensus, and later, the very different Brechtian model of a theatre that sets out to short-circuit affective response and disrupts the affective, communal experience. The claim of totality in Wagner’s theatre, which undeniably is also

what could be said to suppress and submerge identity and the individual, needs to be viewed at the level of collective affectivity as a form of constitution. Through affective-emotional themes which create a mixture of representation and action, Wagnerian operas attempted a sense of collectivity that also allowed collective groups to constitute themselves. What this means is that the integration of arts in the Wagnerian model does not necessarily have to solely imply totalisation experienced in the twentieth century politics as fascism, but it can also indicate democratic participation. Indeed, Wagner's aspiration with the Total Art-Work was to bind groups together so (political) action could be inspired by a set of shared sentiments and sensations that also invited dissensus to be understood as provoked action that challenged the hierarchical order of a given set of social arrangements. For Rancière, such a challenge to hierarchical order is what proposes action to be taken under the presupposition of one's equality. (*Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* 4)

In the case of politics, however, it is collective action that is required rather than individual. It is the kind of action that concerns a group of people, and anyone else in solidarity with this group that is thought to be unequal by any particular hierarchy but acts as equal and thus disrupts the social order itself. In a similar way, in Wagner's operatic theatre, this collectivity is affectively and structurally enacted by the *Gesamtkunstwerk* on the principle of equality among the various arts that disrupts the theatrical conventions of opera, and by projection, the power arrangements of the social order as well as, arguably, the perceptual and epistemic foundation of that order. To put it more simply – and it is here that I believe Wagner foreshadows Brecht's formulation of the distanciation model of the Epic Theatre – Wagner's complex totalising, affective and communal mode of theatre simultaneously poses a disruptive model in the aesthetic interaction of opera with theatre, society and politics. What is more, its enacted dissent from the affective-emotive structure of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*

further reveals the contingencies of the perceptual and conceptual order in which any ethico-political and social arrangements are embedded – such contingencies, once again for Rancière, are concerned with the partition or distribution of the sensible. (5) It is in this sense that we can discern a dissensual political character in the totalising effect of the Wagnerian model and can be seen to reframe theatrical experience to a common experience in which new perspectives and possibilities are formed. It is also what allows us to view the evolution of the directorial paradigm within modernism as one of continuous interaction between aesthetics and politics, but also one of contrast, difference, and dissent, already starting with Wagner.

Now, the problem with affectivity as a medium of agency is that ‘affect’ can also be employed negatively – in the sense of indexing a diminution of agency or manipulation of the relations produced. And it is in such a manner that affect disguises exploitation and commodification which have often coloured the critical assessment of Wagner’s theatre and his totalising image as a composer/director. This theoretical position has been famously argued in contemporary political theory in Hardt and Negri’s concept of ‘biopolitical labour’, in which forms of labour are thought to require a degree of affective involvement, which is what gears them towards the production of affects, social relationships and forms of life (*Commonwealth* 131-3). But this distinctive affective feature of commercial activity that, for Hardt and Negri, is attached to biopolitical labour is also precisely what prompts Adorno’s critique of Wagner.

I will not expand on Adorno’s critique, which has been repeatedly explored elsewhere. It is enough to say that Adorno’s critical engagement with Wagner was lifelong and was fuelled by a desire to discern the various problematised aspects that made up modernity and the development of modern art. Through Wagner, Adorno not only opens up various avenues through which to question his seemingly rigid division between autonomous art and the culture industry, but

he intermingles aesthetic and ideological criteria, claiming that aesthetics and ideology are inseparably intertwined. However, what is fascinating is that Adorno's reception of Wagner functions as another dramatisation of Wagner that serves the purposes of philosophical and ideological discourses that motivated it. An earlier, more fruitful perhaps, construction comes from Charles Baudelaire's *Richard Wagner et Tannhäuser à Paris* (1861), which already provides us with insightful observations on how Wagner's musical innovations were creating emotional structures that were affecting the spectator's minds, while overly changing how music was understood in the nineteenth century more generally. In this sense, Baudelaire's article paves the way for thinking about the operatic experience as ideological structures that intermingle and determine aesthetic form and vice versa.

Frank Trommler's article 'The Social Politics of Musical Redemption', reads Wagner's 'challenge to established compositional structures' as carrying the political potential of Wagner's own rebellious tendencies which, as he maintains, have received 'surprisingly little scholarly attention'. (131) In what follows, I explore this proposition in more detail. I agree with Trommler's observation, which receives particular significance once placed in the context of Wagner's overall musical experience in theatrical terms. Let me rephrase it as a question: *What is the real intention of appealing to one's emotions through the phantasmic power of theatre?* If, as Baudelaire insisted, Wagner's 'intent on frustrating the fulfillment of the fixed, conventional, closed schemata' was to force us 'to relocate ourselves, to find our centre anew, in a procedure whose meaning we are constantly asked to reassess' (in Trommler 130), then this experience was unmistakably political in its intention, drawing on the ability of music-dramas to evoke emotions that could potentially propel in the audience, on a subconscious psychosomatic level, the experience of and desire for action. This is again a political action for Wagner and which, as we shall see below, is infused

with the socialist ideas of anarchist thinkers, including the philosophies of Hegel and later Schopenhauer.

The Politics of the Common

Already in Wagner's writings of 1849, the notion of 'public sphere' – *Öffentlichkeit* – featured heavily and pointed to the ability of theatre performance to reach out to a large number of people. Similarly, given that Wagner's stage performances were the product of synthesis, the principal of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* would produce not simply an audience made up of individual spectators, but an audience that brought these individuals together and who, most importantly, experienced together the operatic works. The significance of linking this shared aesthetic experience to public sphere evokes the form of 'tragic drama' [which] as an art form, that was communally produced and communally received, represented 'the entry of the people's work of art [*Volkskunstwerk*] into public political life' (*The Art-Work of the Future* 135). In this manner, Wagner's conceptual framework of his *Gesamtkunstwerk* was seen to be actively pursuing a kind of synaesthetic creativity as an explicitly political, but also experiential, activity *in common*. What was at stake, then, for Wagner was more about how this communal creative experience would convey his *Gesamtkunstwerk* as a fundamentally active participatory and, most importantly perhaps, revolutionary model of spectatorship? This was a model of engagement was always a correlative matter. Once the three arts were united (as he was proposing with his *Gesamtkunstwerk*), he believed that they would successfully raise 'the will of the drama to direct and potent deed' carried out precisely by one's participation in a communal audience. Yet, to achieve this, Wagner still had to provide the answer to the following question: what was it exactly that tended to bind people together? The answer for him was simple: *common feeling*.

Once again, Simondon may prove useful for us here, as his theories of collectivity and individuation are a good starting point to understanding Wagner's emotional structures as embodied thoughts. The central argument, which then shapes much of the thinking of contemporary philosophers, such as Deleuze and Guatarri and, by extension, Hardt and Negri, is the significance Simondon ascribes to the concept of affect:

If we can speak, in a certain sense, of the individuality of a group or of a people, it is not by virtue of a community of action – too discontinuous to be a solid basis – nor of an identity of conscious representations, too broad and too continuous to allow the segregation of groups; rather it is at the level of *affectivo-emotional theme*, mixtures of representation and action, that collective groupings constitute themselves. Inter-individual participation is possible when affectivo-emotive expressions are the same. The vehicles of this affective community are elements in the life of groups which are effective but which are not only symbolic: the regime of sanctions and rewards, symbols, the arts, objects which are collectively valorised and de-valorised. (my italics, in Gilbert *Common Ground* 143)

Simondon's shift of emphasis, from identification and common activities to 'a set of shared sentiments and sensations which operate at what [Simondon] calls a "subconscious" level' (*Common Grounds* 144), is not to be entirely understood on the Freudian psychoanalytic model. Rather, Simondon argues for a 'fundamental layer of the unconscious, which is the subject's capacity for action, (ibid.), and his argument differs, in this way, from Freud's radical separation between conscious and unconscious in his personality model. However, Simondon is specifically interested in this 'capacity for action' which he calls the 'affective' or "affectivo-emotional" subconscious' (*Common Grounds* 147). Yet, the deeper meaning of his proposition that seems to me to deeply correspond to the synaesthetic experience of Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* is to be understood, not so much on the subject's capacity to act in the world *as such*, but on reading this capacity as being dependent upon one's relations with others and, through these relations, one's subjectivity is also constituted.

Indeed, on closer examination of the dynamic sensory structure of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, we encounter what Wagner viewed as the aesthetic activity of individuals through which the audience is formed. Not only as active, participatory, or even fundamentally new, this spectatorship for Wagner was radically communal precisely because of its ability to co-relate. By exercising ‘sympathetic [*sympathetisch*] gaze’, (*The Art-Work of the Future* 80) the spectator, and not the work alone, activated the aesthetic activity of the work by the activity of ‘feeling with’ (187) – what Wagner describes as *Mitfühlung* (ibid). As Koss explains, this ‘process of sympathy’ was meant to emotionally and psychologically transfer the spectator into the work while bringing the performers to be ‘absorbed into the surrounding audience’ (21). Or, as Wagner himself would put it: “By looking and hearing, [the spectator] completely transports himself onto the stage; the performer becomes an artist only by complete absorption into the audience” (*The Art-Work of the Future* 185). However, the real meaning of this creative synergy between performers and spectators as a collective acquires its full potential when, as would later describe, it is experienced as “fellow-feeling and fellow-creating friend” [*mitfühlenden und mitschöpferischen Freunde*] (Wagner ‘A Communication to My Friends’ 283; “Eine Mittheilung an meine Freunde,’ 4: 244)), pointing to the notion of sympathy as *Einfühlung*, or “feeling into” (*The Art-Work of the Future* 168) as an explicitly psychophysical state of experience and an affective shift that calls for action. Or, to use Wagner’s own terms, through “a thorough stepping out of oneself into the unconditional sympathy [*Mitfühlung*] with the joy of the beloved, in itself” (ibid.), relations of mutual influence would increase the capacity to act in ways that enable new forms of potentially empowering encounters to manifest.

What is really described here is the *Gesamtkunstwerk*’s aesthetic structure as an affective structure. For Jameson, music is already intimately related within modernism with what we call today ‘the affective turn’. Arguing that the

evolution of music is ‘a vivid way to describe the logic of affect’ (39), he explores its first full expression in the innovations articulated by Wagnerian music. For example, the reorganisation of sonata-form temporality into the repetitions of the *Leitmotives*; the transformation of heightened dissonance into ‘vehicles for affect rather than simple preparations for resolution’ (ibid.); and, equally the Wagnerian endless melody. As we saw earlier, for Jameson, these innovations all project a specific ‘chromatic temporality’ that is different ‘from the past-present-future’ of the known sonata music forms, constructing a pure present as ‘eternal’ (ibid). Chromatism is thus meant here as ‘a waxing and waning of the scale’ in Jameson’s words, ‘a slippage up and down the tones’ (ibid.). Wagnerian chromatism, then, may point us to the formal tensions with sonata introduced by Wagner, which is already a political move. For, its real significance is in indicating the means by which Wagner utilises ‘affect’ to displace the operatic supremacy of the traditional aria. Towards this aim, Wagner also introduces his famous long storytelling passages by which he replaces the emotional content, operatically delivered in the form of the aria, with the new embodied forms of rhetorics, which function as affect. I will explore this dimension in the following section which I read as an explicitly Hegelian appropriation in Wagner’s dramatic narrative. However, its function as affect, I think, can be best understood in relation to Nietzsche’s main philosophical argument, which rests on questioning the foundation upon which values can be validated. In response, Wagner makes the equally compelling philosophical proposition that not only confirms Nietzsche’s claims that there cannot be any absolutes and, therefore, no transcendental standards of comparison, but also provides an answer to the puzzle of value creation and what controls its subjective mechanism. That is, again, *relationality* – or, as Wagner would explain, a matter of relation to value as a relation of the common, in which the individual’s relation to collectivity is

determined in terms of the creation of shared feelings and affections, shared interests and shared goals.

Therefore, for Wagner, there is no such thing as an isolated, universalised identity in thinking about the self, but a subjectivity shaped by community and common tradition and history. Thus, it could be argued that, in Wagner's operas, this communal conception of existence does not deny individuality as Nietzsche claimed. Rather, the sense of communal being was anchored in the conception of another key Wagnerian philosophical idea – '*das Werden*', or 'becoming' to which I will turn.

Wagner's Philosophical Gesture of 'Becoming' ('*Das Werden*')

How affective relations functioned in Wagner's theatre is an important question for both our understanding of Wagner's use of theatricality as mode of collective experience – what, in Lawrence Grossberg's terms, would be called 'an affective alliance' (162) – and as a distinctively thinking mode of embodying ideas. To start with, if we accept that configuring shared affective predispositions is a practice that takes place at the level of mimetic identification, then the Wagnerian stage already presupposes a particular type of theatricality as a process of 'becoming' that the audience is able to participate in. This can be seen from the manner in which Wagner proposes the new music-drama form on the theoretical premise of his *Gesamtkunstwerk*, by which the merging of all elements into the theatrical gesture creates a 'living' whole, which, like a 'complete and living body... draws its life from inner life-needs' (*Opera and Drama* 342). It is what brings in his own *Festspielhaus* in Bayreuth, the demand that lights are dimmed during performances, that the orchestra pit is sunken, and that the orchestra is entirely concealed from the audience. The blending of instrumental and vocal sound is, for Wagner, opposed to 'ready-made' melody. As Edwin Østergaard

argues in his article ‘Darwin and Wagner: Evolution and Aesthetic Appreciation’, Wagner’s repeated reference in regards to the formation of melodies is in terms of ‘organic growth’ which, by itself, ‘clearly shows that he is deeply influenced by the concept of organicism and the mechanism-organism debate of the mid-nineteenth century’ (93). What is even more important is how Wagner utilises the notion of ‘organic generation’ by which a new sense of ‘becoming’ is affectively experienced as a process of generation in which one is made to participate in order to grasp its essence. As Wagner carefully points out:

A ready-made melody – so we have seen – remained unintelligible to us, because open to arbitrary interpretations; a ready-made Situation must remain just as unintelligible, even as Nature herself remained unintelligible to us so long as we looked on her as something made – whereas she is intelligible enough, now that we know her as the Being, i.e. the forever Becom-ing: a Being (ein Seiendes) whose Becoming is ever present to us. (*Opera and Drama* 337)

‘Becoming’ is a term already traceable to ancient Greek philosophy and, later, most characteristically reworked by Nietzsche and Deleuze among others, and receives central attention on the conceptual basis of existence as a dynamic and processual expression. ‘Becoming’ in this sense, especially for Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophies, indicates processes of transformation by which they read the notion of ‘existence’ as a whole. It is why, for them, nothing is actually static or stable in its identity and that change is at the core of every physical entity, of even rocks and mountains. In a similar manner, Wagner’s interest in the idea of ‘becoming’ displays an equally transformative conception of relation to reality as ‘being’ or as *what it is*. This approach to existence as ‘becoming’, denoting transformation as a vector expressed relationally, in the formation of ‘becoming-x’, has a clear task in Wagner. For Østergaard, it enables the audience ‘to *experience* the process of change by taking “an active share” in the generation of the drama’ (93). Or, as Østergaard puts it by quoting Wagner:

Plastic art can display only the Finished, i.e. the Motionless; wherefore it can never make of the beholder a confident witness to the becoming of a thing... The Drama, alone, is the artwork that so addresses itself in space and time to our eye and ear, that we can take an active share in its becoming, and therefore can grasp the Becoming as a necessity. (*Opera and Drama* 337)

What essentially Østergaard suggests is that Wagner's idea in the Art-Work of the Future was to create the space in which the audience could take an active share in the creation of *Becoming* and, therefore, grasp this *Becoming* as a necessity. Moreover, the form of music-dramas, being made of space and time, means that the composer is compelled to investigate the Becoming as a necessity. In this sense, Østergaard is right then to observe that *Tristan* present us with the most radical artistic manifestation of 'becoming as a necessity', which Wagner also discusses in his long essay *Opera and Drama*. Yet, while his implicit understanding of Wagner's operatic rendering of the idea of 'becoming' highlights the evident organicity of the Wagnerian stage, which is already a sensory, affective category, what also needs to be further stated is its implicit contradiction as a gesture of theatricality. For, in Wagner, 'becoming' emerges not as a relation of imitation, but as a process that is always seen to occur between two terms. These terms not only end up destabilising any clear idea of existence – or, more concretely, identity – but precisely mobilise, through this process of distabilisation/transformation, various affective potentialities of bodies concerned – bodies which are no other than the bodies of the spectators and of the actors.

To understand this process in actual terms of Wagner's practice, and identify the ways by which it articulates a new mode of philosophy as an entirely theatrical mode through the mediating subjectivity of Wagner as a director/composer, I will examine Wagner's application of Hegelian philosophy as both embodied ideas and a process of 'doing' that embodies thought in theatre.

Wagner's Left Hegelianism

The way in which philosophical ideas are conveyed in Wagner's operas is an examination carried out with admirable detail in Bryan Magee's book, *Wagner and Philosophy*. But my interest in this relation is on the speculative dimension of Wagner as a mediating subjectivity in his role as a director/composer. In what follows, therefore, I examine instances in which Wagner's thought is formed and enacted, particularly through his written theories and operatic compositions, both of which enable us to grasp the form, meaning and identity of the director as a type of philosopher in theatre. As I argue, it is the appearance of the director in the structures of the late nineteenth theatre that allows modernist works to be perceived as philosophical manifestations. This is particularly true for Wagner, whose reception has produced a remarkable body of philosophical thought. One only need to look at operatic dramas, such as *Tristan and Isolde*, *Parsifal* and *The Ring*, that have not only been thought to have been constructed around intriguing philosophical hypotheses, but have motivated a new kind of critical philosophy to take shape in return. By focusing on them in a contextual way, rather than at the level of production practice, I want to identify the director's philosophical thinking embedded in these works as a form of embodied thought itself. This choice may at first create an overlapping between the function of the director and the playwright which is one of the various overlapping functions of the director. What differentiates, however, the director from the typical playwright is the mediating subjectivity of the director which is not something external to the three-dimensional thinking of the theatrical experience but internal. The director's mediating subjectivity that I examine here, through Wagner's theoretical writings, musical and textual scores, releases a 'what thinks' that embodies thought for its content. Arguably, this is nothing new since plays, already since the Greek tragedy, can indeed demonstrate philosophical values and interpretations. But as I hope to demonstrate in this thesis, what is different with

the emergence of the director, starting with Wagner, is that the director reconfigures the dynamism of ‘thinking’ into a mobile, structural activity that is both relational to experience, knowledge and temporalities, and enacted in the very process of positing thought. In other words, we experience the director’s theatre not simply as being invested in philosophical ideas or understood as philosophy, but as living representations of mediation that produces a ‘thinking about’ that goes beyond this point of theatrical representation and includes this ‘thinking about’ and a ‘thinking-over’ in various form, both written and embodied – this complex intersection describes the director as a speculative subjectivity. In other words, my analysis is interested in how ‘thinking’ *becomes* the director, and what type of thought is formed by the director’s mediation, starting with Wagner.

For Žižek, for example, the ending of *Götterdämmerung* conveys the three main positions that are found in the philosophies of Feuerbach, Bakunin, and Schopenhauer: 1) the reign of human love, 2) the revolutionary destruction of the old world, and 3) the resignation and withdrawal from the world (192). As Žižek argues, *The Ring* exhibits a Feuerbachian celebration of sexual love combined with the Proudhonian revolutionary demand for the abolition of private property (‘Afterword’ 214). Additionally, one cannot ignore the Hegelian logic either, which is traced throughout Wagner’s universe, all the way to *Parsifal*, whose final message, as Žižek insist, is a profoundly Hegelian one: ‘The wound can be healed only by the spear that smote it’ (‘Afterward’ 216).

In his *Wagner Beyond Good and Evil*, John Deathridge captures Wagner’s remarkably transformative Hegelianism:

During and immediately after the composition of *Lohengrin*, Wagner became enraptured with Young Hegelian ideas, devoured Feuerbach’s critique of Christian belief (which threw a rather difficult light on the Christian symbolism of the opera), turned into a ferocious orator against the old feudal order in Germany, fought on the barricades in the 1849 Dresden Revolution, more or less gave up composing to write lengthy, socially

critical tomes about the future of art, nearly jettisoned his marriage and ‘domesticity’ (as he put it to Stahr), and began to develop a huge work that eventually became the Ring, in which myth and music were to combine in a utopian Artwork of the Future expressing profound insights into the world in ways no existing art form had ever done before. (32)

Wagner’s own transformation, that Deathridge brilliantly conveys, and which originates from a more radical sense of change of the past ‘not by rejuvenating the old order’ (ibid) but by ‘destroying it completely’ and replacing it altogether with a new one – Wagner’s new democratised order of the future – was setting him already on a radical agenda in his engagement with theatre and opera. His fervent conversion of Feuerbachian and Left Hegelianism then leads him to issue a radical re-examination, through essay writing and the dramatic form, of the prevailing middle-class values and institutions. For Deathridge, Wagner entirely conceives *The Ring of the Nibelung* as an ‘onslaught on the bourgeois-capitalist order’ (48) which, in a typically Hegelian fashion, did not succeed in healing what Wagner considered as the wounds of an afflicted society.

The Hegelian Left background of *The Ring* and the intellectual ferment of 1840s formed Wagner’s communal ideas about the future of opera while simultaneously foreshadowing the political function of theatre in modernism. For Thomas Mann, Wagner was a *Kultur-Bolshevist* ahead of his time (‘Richard Wagner and Der Ring’ 178) that, as Deathridge explains, positioned Wagner as some kind of moral anarchist creating social dramas, which, despite their mythological paraphernalia, ‘outdoes even Ibsen’ in showing how middle-class life has become enmeshed in a failing social order. Here, Deathridge echoes Deryck Cooke who, in his book, *I Saw the World End*, claims that, in the emotional structure, the Ring’s dramatic narrative works exactly as the kind of ‘play of ideas’ later to be fully realised in the Naturalist dramas by Ibsen and Shaw (12). Wagner’s ‘ambition of the social drama’ for Deathridge overcomes the nineteenth-century theatre conventions with a startling emotional clarity in

the portrayal of characterisation that is undoubtedly modernist. One only needs to follow Wagner's depiction of Wotan and Brünnhilde as an unfolding of deep affection between father and daughter which, for Badiou, is also representative of Wagner's powerful passages of dramatic possibility through which subjective identity is formed.

The conclusion of *Götterdämmerung* narrates the destruction of the gods delivered through an enormously long text that involves Brünnhilde talking about the end of the world of the gods against the background of destruction. In her monologue, however, she retells already shown aspects of the story. This makes Wagner, in Badiou's words, 'a true discipline of Aeschylus' because he never 'misses a chance to tell a story everyone is familiar with all over again (*Five Lessons on Wagner* 104). However, such a process of telling and retelling is essential, as Badiou argues, as the declaratory nature of the speech forces the character to confront the existential dimension of their beings: 'Who am I in the overall situation of the world, in terms of the meaning it may have for me and for everyone else?' (116). The character's text, therefore, not only creates in Wagner subjective possibility, but 'the possibility of a new subjectivity' (*ibid.*) which is also, it seems to me, a way of thinking about the situation that the characters find themselves involved, not pre-determinately or externally, but *dialectically* – by speculatively exposing and relating the facts that surround the story he or she is involved in and through which to decide on the next course of action. So, when a character asks a question that another character responds to by retelling the events that have taken place up to this point, it is the means by which the character comes to a conscious realisation of his or her situation from a new subjective point of view, which then also throws light on an understanding of themselves as characters. That is to say, not only from our perspective, but *internally* from them as characters. In other words – and this is also the position argued by Badiou's

revisionist reading of Wagner's dramatic narratives – the characters get to know themselves and the part they play in the story up to the point of their retelling.

In *Five Lessons on Wagner*, Badiou makes this point by drawing on Sachs' monologue at the beginning of Act III of *Die Meistersinger*. As he tells us, 'the decision is arrived at entirely by means of the character's inner transformation or by what might be called the immanent inflection of the themes' (88). Badiou refers to Sachs' monologue as 'the *decision monologue*' since the character arrives at a decision without explicitly making one, but through the more subtle process of inner transformation. As Badiou insightfully observes: 'it is this transformation that really conveys the subjectivity metamorphosis, thereby making the decision appear immanently, not in terms of "I was such and such a way before, but now I am different" but rather in terms of a change from one state to the other in the discourse itself' (89). It is why Wagner insists that dramatic possibilities are created through the music, which is why 'affect' is hugely important in the aesthetic structure of these works. By creating 'dramatic possibility', the music does not merely support the dramatic narrative or reinforce its situation, but 'create dramatic possibility' as Badiou claims (*ibid.*). But what is even more interesting is how the emotion is configured in the dramatic possibility, which in the end is the subjective process of the character's decision – what ultimately transforms Sachs. And yet, the process of transformation is the result of something not dramatic, but as something created by the music. That's why, in Wagner, dramatic possibility is always musically constructed by which a new dramatic situation *is* created: so 'the new Sachs,' as Badiou explains, 'will be the Sachs of a tentative new peace and, it might moreover be said, of a new alliance. The possibility for a new alliance between art and the people is ultimately the true content of this whole process.' (*ibid.*)

Wagner's Hegelianism that can be detected in his operas represent the exploration of a possibility reminiscent of the known theories of his time, such as

the evolution of species (Darwin) and dialectical materialism (Marx). Wagner's chromatism is once again applied functioning here as means of creating a hypothesis. Consider *Parsifal*, for example, in which the musical colour scheme, in conjunction with the thematic structure and overall rhythm, formulate the overtly metaphysical and ontological hypothesis that something else exists beyond Christianity. Or, in *Götterdämmerung*, whether gods can die and what would that mean for humans. But as Susan Sontag has pointed out, Wagner's music-dramas involve ideas rather than beliefs ('Wagner's Fluids' 208). This can be seen most clearly in Wagner's use of motifs, which communicate insights about the psychology of power in ways that cannot be put into words. Indeed, with motifs, Wagner orchestrates the staging of complex ideas into music. The multitudinous and endless subtle metamorphoses of these motifs already involve the means of articulating ideas, at their most refined, more precise and sophisticated expression. Absorbed in the living tissue of the work, ideas are unobtrusive and yet not concealed in any way. Most importantly, perhaps, reality itself is articulated and rethought, not as a state of affairs, but as a process, something going on, as we saw, a 'becoming'. This underlying pattern of process as perpetual change, never ceasing, is a constantly self-renewing triad of thesis-antithesis-synthesis. The supreme impact that this way of thinking and interpreting the world had, can be seen from the revolution it was setting off in the previously established states of affairs and constants. In physics, for example, the Laws of Motion in Newtonian physics were shattering existing models of thoughts offering a new way at looking at and rebuilding this reality anew in a Hegelian dialectical manner; the world as an unending process of perpetual change and speculative synthesis. It is in this way, too, that Wagner sought to change the world through an aesthetic theatre of an explicitly Hegelian bearing.

Anarchist Wagner

The concept of anarchism should not be confused with its contemporary meaning typically used to imply a form of terrorism. Rather, the concept of anarchism originally designated anything but the expression of disorder and violence. Originating from the ideological position of ἀναρχία (*anarchy*), deriving from the Greek ἄναρχος [*anarchos*], meaning ‘one without rulers’ from ἀν- [*an*]- ‘without’ and ἀρχός [*archos*], ‘leader’, ‘ruler’, does not necessarily describe action that resorts to violence, but of action that is pacific in intent. According to Proudhon, who was the first to proclaim himself an anarchist in 1840, philosophical anarchism was conceptualised as the ideological space in which reason and civilisation would be capable alone to overthrow the need for sovereign leadership. With this in mind, he advocated voluntarily co-operation, which was necessary to sustain this new type of society. Once there is no longer a need for a leader, the conflict dissipates and the maintenance of order no longer rests on force by a policing authority. Instead, it is social voluntary co-operation and working in common that preserves social justice naturally and a sense of fellow citizenship of equality that guarantees that no-one’s labour is appropriated for the benefit of someone else, or that property ownership forces individuals out of the land that they live and work on. Other relevant ideas that propagated resistance to any ‘compulsory form of association’ (Magee 37), such as the institution of marriage or the industrialisation of work and life, were axiomatic among anarchist circles which wished to dispense altogether with the notion of rule and government, viewing society as an entirely voluntary association of individuals. The key idea was co-operation in every respect of life and social relation, an idea that also ran deeply in the thinking and practice of Wagner as an anarchic activist himself.

Indeed, the link between anarchism and aesthetics fuels Wagner’s creativity in theatre as a real commitment to transforming society through the practice of

music-drama, that also overcomes in the process any mere formalistic concerns with innovation and reform of the operatic stage. For Deathridge, Wagner's stage was a theatre of ideas 'about love, power, property, nature, religion, and the possibility of social change' (94). One such example is *The Ring*, which Wagner began composing in the late 1840s and can be read as an allegorical reflection on social unrest from the experience of the Revolution of 1848–49. Later, it was expanded into an emotional examination of human destiny, which brings Deathridge to read it as 'politics [turned] into philosophical poetry' (*Wagner Beyond Good and Evil* 49). Wagner was conscious of the need of capturing the revolutionary spirit in a new form of theatre that also possessed the power of expressing and putting into action revolutionary change. This aspiration is confessed in his autobiographical essay *A Communication to My Friends* (1851), in which Wagner claimed that *Lohengrin* was the moment of his vivid realisation that a new form of operatic drama was needed to set off change. This did not refer to required theatrical innovation or stylistic renovation of theatrical expression, but rather the inciting of action through the medium of theatre in its ability to form communal feelings that inspired social action. It is this realisation that rapidly turns into an obsession for him, leading him to actively compose dramatic musical narratives as philosophical treatises of revolutionary action.

Accordingly, an aptly (anarchist) Feuerbach reading can be deciphered in Wagner's depiction of Alberich in which he is shown to curse on love. At the beginning of *The Ring* and Brünnhilde's ending monologue, love needs to return to human aspiration and feeling as opposed to a life led by a misguided sense of justice and love onto God. Wagner's emphasis on 'feeling' is once again pivotal for his own philosophy as a director/composer, as I have argued so far. Likewise, in the first scene of *Das Rheingold*, the Nibelung dwarf Alberich is not only portrayed in Marxian terms snatching the gold and heading to build his own industrial empire in Nibelung, after he has renounced love, and by projection, his

alignment with humanity. Rather, it is the dramatisation of this very idea that forces the spectator to experience it as a primal feeling of conflict, yet which rapidly dissolves into philosophical poetry that incites a sense for action in the audience. However, this is not to say that the audience was made to perform any actual action during performance (in the way, perhaps, we are today accustomed with interactive theatre practices), but that by inciting strong feelings in the audience for political change it would be possible to also actualise these feelings as material ‘deeds’ in real life.

Feuerbach’s idea of the liberation of human kind through love is one of the central preoccupations of *The Ring*’s libretto, which was penned by a Feuerbach-intoxicated German socialist not long after 1844. Many of the characters of *The Ring* are Gods that consciously evoke Feuerbach by presenting Gods at the early stage of the development of the human world. Moreover, this new human order, instituted by taking responsibility for their actions, is configured not by leadership or power, but of love and compassion – there were Feuerbach’s basic principles. It should also be noted that the years leading to the insurrections of 1848–49 were years of revolutionary intellectual activity on arts and politics alike; Proudhon’s *What is Property?* was published in 1840 and Feuerbach’s two most influential books, *The Essence of Christianity* and *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*, had come out in 1843. These books are key to the events that led many to the barricades and helped form the ideas towards a new aesthetic outlook so much in theatre as in real life itself. But the backbone that provided those revolutionary texts and ideas with a firmer and more continues foundation was, as mentioned above, the rich tradition of Hegelianism. This is the source that also gives shape to the dialectical materialist thought of Marx, who was a contemporary of Wagner.

As I will argue in the next sections, Wagner’s anarchist activist was linked with the causes of the rising socialist Left. He actively sought to carry the

revolution into the arts with the belief that a new communal era would be initiated through the form of music-drama, which would liberate society from the constraints of commercialisation and exploitation. Towards this aim, Wagner also invents the new aesthetic form of the Total Art-Work on the socialist principle of co-operation. However, there was a crucial turning point in the realisation of this goal; the anti-parliamentary coup of Paris in December 1851 that brought Wagner to experience extreme depression and loss of the belief in radical activity (Magee 76). This is what led Wagner to his most radical intellectual influence: Arthur Schopenhauer.

The Radical Turn: Schopenhauerism

We must learn to *die* and *to die* in the fullest sense of the word; fear of the end is the source of all lovelessness. ('Letter to August Röckel' 6:67)

Within this context for change, always political and social, Wagner's turn to Schopenhauer's philosophy can be properly read as a mark of his radicalisation in anarchist thought that also comes to define, more broadly, Wagner's role as a composer/director/philosopher. Although it has frequently been claimed that Wagner's encounter with the philosopher's writings caused him to abandon his radical political ideas and realign his personal sympathies with more conservative perspectives, in reality this could not be more removed from the truth. Yet, most critical accounts have traditionally argued for the former. In Magee's analysis, for instance, despite his lucid argument about Wagner's philosophical dimension, he still insists that it was Wagner's disillusionment with politics and political hope for immediate radical change and democratisation (127) that led him to find consonance in Schopenhauer's pessimism: 'Suddenly,' asserts Magee, 'because

there was no hope of revolutionary political and social change, there was no hope for the future of art, and therefore no hope for the future of Richard Wagner. He was plunged into depression... in the full clinical sense of that term. It was felt by him subjectively as unmistakably the most significant turning point in his life up to that point.' (128) Magee then swiftly concludes that, 'What Schopenhauer did for Wagner was to give to someone who was already depressed and disoriented by the loss of an almost religious faith in political solutions a new way of looking at the world, a view that saw all public affairs, including politics, as trivial, and positively advocated disillusionment with them, a turning away from the world and its values' (ibid.).

Magee is not the only one to have misread Wagner's conversion to Schopenhauerism. Nietzsche and Adorno are most vocal in this respect. As John Tietz argues in his *Redemption or Annihilation? Love versus Power in Wagner's Ring*, both Adorno and Nietzsche willfully misunderstood Wagner's supposed resignation from the phenomenal world and the subsequent false dichotomy between idealised humanistic redemption and the kind of decadent, pessimistic renunciation. For Adorno, it is more precisely an expression of pure sociopathic alienation, epitomised most profoundly in *Parsifal*. At the same time, as for Nietzsche, Wagner is championing transcendence of the phenomenal world through sensuality, which ultimately ends up corrupting our spirits.

Another point of reference in this respect is Wagner's emphasis on love, which misguidedly identifies the pathos of metaphysics as the material expression of love through redemption coupled with self-destruction. Adorno reads in *Tristan* the denial of social reality impersonated by the idea of the transcendence of the individual, holding Wagnerian redemption as a substitute for 'the mirage of the enduring upwards soaring individual who vanishes into thin air at the moment of his annihilation... In the innermost core of Wagner's idea of redemption dwells nothingness, it too is empty' (*In Search of Wagner* 149). This

is, moreover, seen in *The Ring*, in which the doctrine of redemptive annihilation is, for Adorno, most clearly played out as Wotan's death wish of a capitalistically alienated society while, in fact, it is a glorification of a self-destructive transcendence *through death* rather than the victory of love over power. In other words, it is not the victory of people over capitalist exploitation and manipulation. Rather, as Adorno argues, it is the bourgeois revolution of an industrialised society that, in Wagner, is offered as a solution and which also functions as the ultimate and idealised escape from capitalism through romanticised subjectivity (Tietz, *Redemption or Annihilation?* 104).

Similarly, for Nietzsche, Wagner reduces values to subjective states. Wagner believed that, by manipulating the experience of others, one can create values in accordance with their subjective states. Yet, it is well known that Nietzsche was interested in the relation between truth and illusion. As Nietzsche argued, what value and truth are concerned with is life itself, but it is always 'us' who 'create' values in ordinary life and who seek the truth. The problem, therefore, when faced with Wagner's reduction of values to subjective states, is that the 'reverence for truth', which is seen, in Nietzsche, as the 'consequence' of an illusion, is understood in the Platonic sense as what associates truth in general with universality. But, if what we expect to find in truth is ultimately the universal, then how is it possible to have truth that is not the opposite of illusion? Or, to put it in plain theatrical terms, why could the destruction of illusion only lead, as Nietzsche believed, in the creation of new illusions? How was it possible that truth depended on illusion when illusion was synonymous with deception? And, most importantly perhaps, if truth was not situated beyond illusion, how could it ever be possible to eliminate illusions altogether, even if in favour of truth?

To fully understand these rather abstract philosophical aporias, one needs to place them in the wider context of the nineteenth-century German traditions of

philosophies and arts, which were often preoccupied with the complex relationship between illusion and reality. They can be summarised as three main queries: a) What are the universal truths and values that constitute our society; b) Can contemporary values be justified or be relative to the given historical circumstances or tradition? and c) How is Wagner connected with these preoccupations? The answer to all three is, formalistically. Wagner's operas, especially evident in the values implicit in *The Ring*, are suddenly seen capable of problematising such questions that are also posed by Nietzsche himself as a philosopher. And, most crucially, they are problematised by Wagner, not merely in terms of what the nature of truth itself is – but, more essentially, in *what truth there actually is*. As Tietz insightfully observes, '*The Ring* does not *advocate* subjectivity or self-destructiveness but it sees these as part of a larger context of change and contingency' (130). In *The Case of Wagner*, Nietzsche's analysis of the character of Siegfried is one such representative example. As Peckham argues, it demonstrates Nietzsche's refusal to read Wagner's Schopenhauerian pessimism and the idea of resignation of the human prospect as a stripping of the self:

The Ring strips the self of... divine authority and asserts that... heroic effort is futile and must necessarily be frustrated. The self is now absolutely – and terribly – free, neither supported nor justified. For the first time it is really stripped bare, its values entirely self-generated. (*Beyond the Tragic Vision* 269)

In Žižek's revisionist examination of Wagner, the shift from early revolutionary to his later 'mature' years of Schopenhauerianism is 'usually conceived as a shift from humanistic belief in the possibility of the revolutionary transformation of existing reality – in other words, from the belief that our reality is miserable due to contingent historical reasons – to the more "profound" insight into how reality *as such* is miserable, and that the only true redemption resides in withdrawing

from it into the abyss of the ‘night of the world’ (‘Afterword 192). It is how the performed wish for wholesale destruction takes a distinctively revolutionary ideal in Wagner’s operas. The old world needs to be destroyed so that a new, better, democratic world can set foot. But how could one get people to change the world? Wagner’s profound realisation that derives from his encounter with Schopenhauer comes from trying to find an answer to this. And the answer is, that the world does not really change. The only thing that does and can change is oneself. In this sense, the most radical change is to deny oneself the reality one finds oneself in, not by means of escapism, but of ‘resignation’, understood in its Hegelian meaning as *radical negativity*.

Hegel’s concept of negativity arrives from the way he considers the conditions and relations of being and reality which, for him, are fundamentally negative because they do not fulfil their actual potential – that is, of what they could truly be. It is why the notion of ‘becoming’ denotes a negative mobility simultaneously negating existence, while affirming it most forcefully on exactly the dimension that negates it – its ‘becoming’. Radical negativity destabilises the premise of existence, but in a manner that intrinsically reaffirms the possibilities of ‘being’ in the all-encompassing actualisation of ‘becoming’. It is what leads Wagner to Schopenhauer’s philosophical thought of resignation that Wagner also reads dialectically in Hegelian speculative terms; that is, as an affirmation of the potential radical life that can be actualised by revealing the constitutive contradiction of life as a life of ‘becoming’, and yet it does not embrace the inherent change of existence itself. It is, therefore, in this sense of radical negativity that Wagner employs as ‘resignation’ directly drawn from Schopenhauer. In many respects, Schopenhauer simply offers Wagner the means by which he not only radicalises the communal aesthetics of his *Gesamtkunstwerk*, but the mode of thought that he embodies in his role as a

composer/director/philosopher and comes to function as a radically negative modality itself.

The Aesthetics of Metamorphosis

Wagner became aware of Schopenhauer's *World as Will and Representation* in the autumn of 1854 through his friend poet Goerg Herwegh and soon found himself in the study of his other philosophical treatise, the *Parerga and Paralipomena*. As he confided in a letter to his friend Franz Liszt, Schopenhauer had come as 'a heavenly presence in my loneliness' (in Magee 180). Wagner's discovery of Schopenhauer came at a time when he was composing the music for *The Valkyrie* and was planning to start working on the music for *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*, although he had already written the libretti for them. After reading Schopenhauer, Wagner created the operatic compositions *Tristan and Isolde*, *The Mastersingers*, and *Parsifal*. Indeed, from the fall of 1854, Arthur Schopenhauer became one of the most pervasive influences over Wagner's thinking, writing, and composing (Stein, *Richard Wagner* 113).

Schopenhauer's classical doctrines of pessimism and renunciation appealed greatly to Wagner's radical revolutionary drive of breaking with the past that had also led him to experience disappointment and discouragement. He wrote to August Röckel on February 5, 1855:

I confess that I had reached a point in my life where only Schopenhauer's philosophy could be completely adequate and decisive. By accepting without reservation his very, very serious truths I have satisfied my inner needs most fully, and although this has taken me in a direction which is widely divergent from my former course, it alone was consonant with my deeply suffering conception of the nature of the world. (*Selected Letters* 52)

Schopenhauer identifies the Kantian *Ding an sich* as the metaphysical will, which he then accepts as the ultimate reality behind the world of phenomena. Setting up

the eternal Ideas or unchanging forms of Plato as direct objectifications of this will, as ‘a kind of generic mid-point, independent of the laws of time, space, and causality, between the will and the phenomenal world’, Schopenhauer considers all forms of art, except music, as revelations that point to phenomena of these eternal ideas. Indeed, in Book III of *The World as Will and Idea*, he makes the case that music which does not derive its material form from phenomena, is independent of the world as representation and, thus, constitutes an objectification of the metaphysical will itself rather than of the Ideas, which is what all the other art forms do:

Music, having no connection with the Ideas, is independent also of the phenomenal world. ...Music is by no means, like the other arts, an image of the Ideas: but an image of the will itself, whose objectification the Ideas are. It is for this reason that the effect of music is so much mightier and more penetrating than that of the other arts; for these speak only of the shadow, music however of the essence. (340)

Schopenhauer’s doctrine of quietism attracts Wagner and, as a result, his own revolutionary theories become more radicalised rather than defused or denounced. Indeed, Wagner’s renewed position of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* is on conceiving the synthesis of music and visual action as complementary revelations, or objectifications, of the metaphysical will. Dramatic dialogue is relegated to a subordinate position functioning as a mechanical aid to clarifying the mimetic action. And yet, it is the shift between word and music that is fundamental. The predominance of music invalidates most of theoretical hypothesis in *Opera and Drama*. However, the question to be asked is not in terms of a newly formed hierarchy in relation to the various arts, but on how an unequal association of one art to another enables the metaphysical justification of the synthesis of music and dramatic representation on stage. Or, to put it differently, what does this new understanding of the synthetic relation of art tell

us about Wagner's theoretical position? If, for Schopenhauer, music represented the direct objectification of the real essence of the universe, what he describes as 'the will', it was because it was impossible to communicate this will to the human conscience in terms of the phenomenal world. But, the relationship of music as [Platonic] Idea and the impossibility of its nature to 'be directly presented as Idea' (Schopenhauer 339) provides Wagner with a revelation that had already been at work in his theories and practice all along: dramatic music in organic connection with dramatic action becomes a manifestation of the metaphysical will, which *can* be transmitted to the people's consciousness and, therefore, effect radical socio-political change. This is what brings Wagner to compose and articulate an aesthetics of metamorphosis. He does so in two ways. First, he concludes that the inner laws of music are also the inner laws by which drama is constructed:

Music... includes the drama within itself, since the drama itself expresses the only Idea of the world adequate to music. Drama towers over the limitations of poetry in the same way that music towers over those of every other art, its effect lying in the realm of the sublime. Just as drama does not depict human characters, but lets them display themselves directly, so music gives us in its motifs the character of all phenomena of the world according to their innermost essence. Not only are the movement, configuration and evolution of these motifs analogues solely to the drama, but the drama representing the Idea can in truth be completely understood only through those moving and evolving musical motifs. *We would then not be in error if we saw in music the a priori qualification for fashioning a drama. As we construct the phenomenal world by application of the laws of time and space which exist a priori in our brain, so this conscious presentation of the Idea of the World in the drama would be conditioned by the inner laws of music, which assert themselves in the dramatist unconsciously much as we draw on the laws of causality in our perception of the phenomenal world.*' (quoted in Stein 160)

Second, the placement of the role of drama itself that continues to be central, even after Wagner's self-conversion to Schopenhauer's aesthetic philosophy. In his 'Beethoven' essay, he makes his position clear by stating that the only factor that *could* condition music was the drama, not as dramatic verse but as dramatic

action, 'the drama actually taking place before our eyes as a visible image of the music, where the word and the dialogue belong solely to the action, not to the poetic thought' (ibid). In other words, what Wagner is reinstating in this essay, which directly links his *Gesamtkunstwerk* theory of his earlier writings with his after Schopenhauer position, is that the 'life-giving centre', as he calls it, is not the musical-poetic verse, but the dramatic action which, in the synthesis of the arts, functions as 'the sole determining agent' (164), to borrow from Stein for the music in Wagner's ideal form of drama.

Yet, for Adorno, there cannot be any Wagnerian pessimism, and the subsequent need for redemption hypostasised from the metaphysical principle of meaningless into a meaning endowed upon a meaningless, empirical reality. Rather, Wagner's pessimism is the philosophy of the apostate rebel. As Adorno writes: 'What he retains from his rebellion is his insight into the evil nature of the world "as such," as an extrapolation from an evil present, as well as the further insight into the inexorable reproduction of the evil.' (*In search of Wagner* 143) The idea here is expressed in the Hegelian model of *Weltgeist-Regisseur*, in which the individual is a mere puppet in the hands of the World-Spirit, which manipulates him or her by means of technological rationality (Karin 'Adorno's Wagner' 74). For Adorno, if Wagnerian art exemplifies totality, which arrives devoid of its dialectic relation to the particular and thus eliminates prevalent antagonism, it is also because the *Gesamtkunstwerk* not only expresses metaphysics, but produces it. In 'Schopenhauer,' argues Adorno, 'suffering appears as a "mere phenomenon", its very shabbiness and meanness make its seriousness evident. In Wagner it is trivialised by the accountments of grandeur' (*In Search of Wagner* 146).

When, therefore, Wagner confronts Schopenhauer's philosophy, for Adorno, Wagner's promotion of the ascetic ideal as part of self-denunciation does not take a more infinitely radical turn. It rather conveys the Wagnerian alliance

with Schopenhauer's pessimism as artistic affirmation of Wagner's renewed position expressed in alignment with bourgeois morality. And yet, in actuality, it is this very position of death and destruction expressed by Wagner's application of Schopenhauer's renunciation of the Will-to-Life that conjures, it seems, a more anarchist, rebellious worldview of metamorphosis. As Bauer points out, Schopenhauer's renunciation of the Will-to-Life develops from the recognition that injustice is unavoidable in the social life of the human order and is aimed at breaking with the vicious circle of blind fate. For Wagner, however, it is this will that becomes blind fate itself and, therefore, death and the death-drive are conceptualised as expressions of sheer joy and the ultimate radical statement of escaping into freedom.

The Socialist Case of Wagner

We've seen earlier how anarchist philosophy attracted Wagner and the application of anarchist ideas in his operas and writings. In many respects, his anarchism prescribed the yearning to uncover the necessary processes that would lead to social change that, in Wagner's writings, take a missionary fervour: how could art – and, most specifically, German opera – fulfill its proper function in people's lives, a function which, for Wagner, was always communal following the social paradigm of the Greek theatre, which he aesthetically considered as a formula for democratisation and emancipation of the people. From this point of view, it was only one small step by which he would passionately align himself with the current anarchist thinking of his time. Yet, this is the same thinking, we should not forget, that was giving way to a rising socialist perspective, rapidly turning itself into what was to soon be understood as 'communism' following Marx's influential political writings. Wagner's own programmatic writings, poured out of anger and frustration following the failed Dresden revolution of 1848–49, could be read as similar socialist articulations explicitly drawing on

the broader socialist (if not as yet ‘communist’) project of setting off the process of democratisation and social justice in Europe.

Wagner’s critically acute sense towards theatre and opera not only advances complex arguments situated within a social context in all of his writings throughout the 1830s and 1840s. Rather, his artistic or reformist propositions project profoundly revolutionary reflections on what could be some of the most fundamental socialist questions: How could possibly impeding social change be aided by the arts such as theatre, which is the most communal of all arts? And, if this is so, how could the masses be mobilised through theatre for the revolution of a socialist – or, indeed, communist – society? Even his interest in the Greek tragic theatre was a means by which he could reformulate theatre and, once again, regain its commun(ist) power which, for Wagner, carried one particular meaning: anti-conformist, anti-hegemonic, anti-subservient. His personal association with the famous anarchist Michael Bakunin, whom he joined in anarchist political activity, only further reinforces Wagner’s socialism. As Magee accounts: ‘When the Dresden uprising of 1848 erupts he is one of the most conspicuous figures among the insurgents; when it fails he is a wanted man’ (34). Indeed, the warrant that goes out puts Wagner next to Bakunin and other known anarchist leaders of the time, which are simultaneously socialist advocates.

Offering his home for the planning of the revolution, it is around that time, too, that Wagner becomes familiar with the revolutionary ideas of Ludwig Feuerbach’s *The Essence of Christianity* (1841) and *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future* (1843) while he engages in lengthy conversations with the political views of Bakunin and Proudhon who, among others, were openly socialist revolutionaries and well familiar with Marx’s work. Wagner does not make any reference to Marx, yet it is almost impossible that Bakunin would have not brought his name up in conversation, or at least Marx’s ideas, if not his writings, to Wagner. Furthermore, as Magee rightly argues, ‘some of Wagner’s prose of

some of his more incendiary articles had an unmistakably Marxian smack: I think he must have read some of Marx's incandescent journalism and been seduced into imitating, if only subconsciously' (35).

The link of revolutionary activism with aesthetics is not hypothetical in Wagner, but a conscious ideological drive that fuels his creativity and his commitment to transforming society through the practice of art. He writes in *My Life*: 'On the basis of the socialist theories of Proudhon and others pertaining to the annihilation of the power of capital by direct productive labour, he [Röckel] constructed a whole new moral order of things to which, by some of his more attractive assertions, he little by little converted me, to the point *where I began to rebuild upon it my hopes for the realization of my artistic ideals*' (my emphasis, 373). These are ideals that are not only concerned with aesthetics, but specifically derive their artistic aspiration from a socio-political socialist context: '[these ideas] led me to further reflections of my own, and I took pleasure in developing conceptions of a possible form of human society which would correspond wholly, and indeed solely, to my highest artistic ideals' (ibid.).

Wagner saw a kindred spirit in Bakunin. 'My relationships,' Wagner confesses, 'fluctuated between instinctive horror and irresistible attraction.' For Magee, 'Bakunin's mad and infantile wish to destroy everything and everybody corresponds to something deeper in Wagner' (41-42). Wagner himself was writing articles at the time whose message was equally clear: his call for a sweeping away of everything is a powerful image in his aesthetic-political writings. And yet, his openly anti-Semitic ideas, which have often been exploited by ideological and propagandistic gains, have greatly distorted Wagner's anarchist image. Moreover, the accusation that claims Wagner as a 'bourgeois liberal revolutionary' (Magee 41) is little supported once placed against his anarchist activity and writings. His political views were hardly liberal, yet he persistently repudiated reform and advocated revolution, often sounding like

Rosa Luxemburg. He also described his opinions as socialist and even, sometimes, as communist. He published pamphlets and newspaper articles about these ideas, participated in the editing of a revolutionary socialist journal *Volksblätter*, and he made speeches with clearly socialist doctrines. Wagner wrote in *Annals* during the autumn of 1849: 'Break now decided. – Solitude: communist ideas on fashioning of mankind of the future in a way conducive to art' (quoted in Magee 42). When the upheaval finally occurred in 1849, Wagner would naturally fight on the barricades.

In his article 'The Social Politics of Musical Redemption,' Frank Trommler observes that 'the broad success of Wagner's writings on the revolutionary aspects of art and culture was helped by the fact that the socialist movement – or, more precisely, socialist organisations with Marxist leanings, i.e., the German Social Democratic Party – did not produce or encourage programmatic texts on socialism in the arts' (120). However, when Wagner's articles, most prominently his 'Art and Revolution', were reprinted in the workers' papers in the 1870s, they were followed, as Trommler observes, with 'critical reviews and warnings regarding his operas' (120). The main thesis in 'Art and Revolution' was on a revolution inspired by art in which a communal spectator alongside the artist of the future would overcome the alienating effects of commercialism, and under the model of classical Greece, would lead people (Volk) to experience the communal life of free human beings:

This is art, as it now fills the entire civilised world! Its true essence is industry; its moral goal, the acquisition of money, its aesthetic claim, the entertainment of the bored. [...] It is for art above all to teach this social impulse its noble meaning and guide it towards its true direction. Only on the shoulders of this great social movement can true art lift itself from its present state of barbarism... (Wagner 42)

The prerogative of an artist who envisages an all-encompassing communion with the people is a powerful image. It positions Wagner as a socialist as much as a maverick artist of a tangible future. In 'The Art-Work of the Future', he outlines the conceptual basis of his premise arguing for the liberation of humanity from the oppressive and alienating forces of existing bourgeois culture. Drawing on the socialist call for 'co-operation', Wagner translates it into what he perceives to be the art of the future; a union of dance, poetry and music, by which it would be possible to produce a total-artwork that he calls *Gesamtkunstwerk* by the means of rhythm, harmony and melody. For Wagner, this was a true social revolution made possible by art which, in the form of theatre, would also put into action the formation of a classless community of spectators and actors. This position is further explored in his much longer and ambitious *Opera and Drama* in which Wagner examines the conjunction between aesthetics and politics from the crucial function of myth as an inexhaustible source of truth. He proposes myth as a possible opening to one's consciousness when it is combined with music. What this again indicates is a consistent interest in dialectically relating arts in ways that express theatre as a mode of affectivity by which Wagner highlights the possibility of a politics of the common through theatre.

Seen in this light, it comes as little surprise that Wagner's notion of 'communal feeling' and his insistence on the democratisation of art were often employed by young Social Democrats known as *Die Jungen* in support of the social struggle. Similarly, the Naturalist Socialist writer Bruno Wille frequently quoted Wagner's revolutionary theses when speaking about 'the great social movement' (in Tommler 122) of the arts. As Tommler observes, 'evidently Wagner, the revolutionary writer, served a peculiar function within the orbit of the German socialist party' (ibid.), inflaming contradictory views as much as influence. Even if Marx himself did not seem to be any near accepting Wagner's socialist leaning, popular party leaders such as August Bebel and, later, the

prominent female leader in the SDP, Clara Zetkin, would frequently acknowledge Wagner's socialist radicalism, considering his writings as artistic visions which the proletariat could use in its struggle: 'Wagner' had turned into an insight, Zetkin announced in her speech at the Fifth Congress of the Communist International, the fact that 'the strength of the revolution goes before the beauty of art and is its pioneer' ('Die Intellektuellenfrage' 3:55). Wagner's proposition of the social and aesthetic liberation of the proletariat through revolution was elevating operatic art, which had reconceptualised as *Gesamtkunstwerk* into a critique of capitalist commercialism and a solution to its problem through the ability of the total artwork to form a socialist society.

After all, the aesthetic equivalent of Wagner's writings for social renewal was his *Gesamtkunstwerk* as an anarchist expression in itself in the form of music-drama. The idea of a total artwork was essentially aimed at removing the aria, frustrating the fulfillment of a fixed melody, and perpetuating process as a challenge to established conventions. The dramatic narratives in Wagner's mythical operas were equally experienced, for Trommler, as 'expressive equivalents of socialist projections' (130). For the socialist leader Victor Adler, it was precisely this political quality that appeared to be fostering an 'emotional community'. Not only were Wagnerian stagings proposing a sensitivity based on crowd dynamics that most directly addressed the people, but was bringing them together as a unified entity, seeking renewal and regeneration.

Wagner's propositions of the role of art in accomplishing the revolution outlined in his essays were already sensitising radical elites into ways of looking at the potential of theatre to inspire and materialise a more heart-felt all-encompassing sense of socialism in relation to the more mechanical scientific materialism that was essentially being advocated and endorsed by Marx. At the centre of this difference lay the notion of synthesis that, in Hegelian terms, was a relational structure in which one was coaxed to arrive at a renewed sense of

socialist existence through reflexivity, mediation and negativity. Let's not forget, too, that socialism's main premise was the actualisation of the class struggle, which could only be made possible by revealing the division within society as a constitutive contradiction inherent within it. As an exemplary practitioner of synthesis, Wagner was also an exemplary socialist, conceiving the idea of his *Gesamtkunstwerk* as a revolutionary model for the synthesising energies of socialism by which its experience could be actualised, not only in theatre, but also in real life.

It is not surprising, consequently, that the aura of the emotional intensity of the revolutionary will, in Wagner's compositions, soon emerged as a principal aesthetic paradigm of collective creativity within the theatres of modernism. In fact, Wagner's fusion of arts and politics could be said to later morph into the avant-garde performance activity of the early twentieth century. Wagnerian emotional-associative structures – or, more precisely, structures of affectivity – focus on audience participation as strategies of affect, announcing a new era of theatrical developments while placing theatre more firmly in political-ideological operations. Wagner, as a prototype of this modernist development, has usually been buried under the rigorous claims of the proto-fascist turn of history. It is, however, perhaps time to unbury him and unearth his revolutionary potential in the context of the socialist tradition of his time and the political ripples felt in much of the aesthetic activity that followed into the twentieth century.

Chapter 5

Unthinking Naturalism & Realism: *Antagonism, Hegemony, Censur*

The Speculative Middle of the Naturalist/Realist Director

The characteristic relational structure of mediation, what Hegel describes by his term *Vermittlung*, does not so much denote adaptation when applied to theatre, but creation. For Hegel, mediation occurs speculatively by challenging two terms with a ‘third’; in relation to theatre, this mediating ‘third’, as we saw in the introduction chapter of this thesis, is always a matter of relationality. For example, the relation between text and performance is no longer a binary structure, but what precisely allows this relation – its in-betweenness – formulates and presents itself as mediation. It is in this manner that the mediated relation between text and the performance can be seen to offer itself in the experience of spectating as a kind of ‘sense’, or, we might say, thought, but thought that is actualised. In his *Phenomenology*, Hegel explains the idea of ‘actualisation’ as ways of *displaying* ‘what is one’s own in the element of universality, whereby it becomes, and should become, the affair of everyone’ (309). This is the same process that reveals the ‘collective’ within the ‘individual’ – that is, again, another Hegelian dimension of understanding a work (Jameson, *Hegel Variations* 67). It is also a fundamental mediated relation which, in the work of the director, can be seen as always a form of thought through which the work itself is ‘actualised’. This mediated relation, that is simultaneously a form of thought, denotes, as Boenisch rightly observes, ‘also always some kind of ‘direction’ (*Directing Senses and Scene* 21-8). The workings of thought, then – and a specific mode of thought at that – as argued so far, which is that it is embodied and speculative, could be read as a concern with portraying the sensuous. In the Naturalist and Realist theatre, such a portrayal concerns the object of truth and the appearance of truth, which then is what necessitate ‘direction’, not only as a demand for a

scientific kind of attention to detail, but as a prerequisite for thinking and acting naturally to the point that ‘nature’ begins to even reconfigure the artificiality of the medium of theatre. The wholly theatrical paradigm shift, from stylised representation (the actor’s manager’s tradition) to Naturalist ‘actualisation’ (the director’s theatre) that the medium of theatre undergoes and has often been read as a shift in response to the wider spread developments in science during the final decades of the nineteenth century. Indeed, science’s capacity to reducing more and more of existence to a deterministic explanation promises to provide ‘truth’ to human existence. However, it does so in a way that also causes theatre to reconfigure human creativity. Creativity as a human act and, particularly the aesthetic act of creation, is now considered to be linked to a wider purpose in nature, no longer being a matter of representation, but of creative interpretation of the highest stakes. It is what turns theatre into a conflictual topos of meaning in which reality itself is a matter of aesthetic interpretation. Yet, it is an interpretation that stands for mediation, not only because all experience is mediated, but because its sensuous dimension, if that is the only one that matters in existence and the world, is already an embodied mode of knowledge that the mediated subjectivity of the director as a form of knowledge epitomises.

For Boenisch, the process of mediation has to do with the underlying relations established for presenting, performing and spectating. ‘Directing, performing and spectating (yet another “magic” theatrical triangle),’ he argues, ‘are thus structurally complementing activities that mutually presuppose each other without a clear hierarchy or privilege awarded to one or the other’ (22). As a separate artist of the theatre, this process of mediation, from text to performance and from music to score, as we saw in the previous chapter with the case of Wagner, releases theatrical experience from the representation of consciousness of the subject to what consciousness itself *does*. It is the same process that invests aesthetic material with meaning, allowing theatre to be seen as a mode of thought

that does its own thinking. The director, in this sense, acquires, not the status of the creator, but *what creates* in theatre, that is an act equivalent to *what thinks* in theatre, and what allows theatre to think. It is a relation already political that evokes Rose's understanding of mediation as always situated between self-struggling and the nature of struggling itself. For Armstrong, it is an agonistic relation that entails 'not a representation of the subject but the subject of representation, which is not a self, or an object, or a thematics, but the structuring movement of thought and feeling' (*The Radical Aesthetic* 17). A third term is needed to not only express this new relation, but to enact it as a new mode of reality itself. We have seen earlier how this relationality is expressed in Wagner as a constitutive moment of dialectical thought out of which Wagner himself emerges as a speculative type of philosopher. What I want to explore in this chapter is the mediation of the Naturalist/Realist director in the aesthetic material themselves as a work of mediation (rather than representation) in order to understand and interpret the mundane reality of the world by thought and feeling. Through this new process, the Naturalist and Realist stage, I argue, define not what 'self' and 'other' is, but what negotiates their new possibilities as actual reality or a reality that could be.

For Rancière, the radical gesture of Naturalism is integrally intertwined with the mediating act of shaping that it introduces as the 'silent speech' of things (*The Future of the Image*, ch.1). It is why, I think, the banality of objects on the Naturalist theatre is not excess or superfluous, but the result of placing, positioning and implicitly *displacing* things. Partly due to the influences from the newly emergent visual technologies of photography, which later gives way to the moving image in film, and partly due to advents in biology and science, theatrical Naturalism inaugurates objective reality as a mode of pure 'appearing' in the Hegelian phenomenological sense that later is rearticulated by Heidegger as a technology of appearing, understood as a transformative medium of what

constitutes as reality. That ‘technology’, and not Naturalism as a stylistic trend, is what simultaneously inaugurates the birth of the director in the Naturalist theatre. Indeed, for Hegel:

The artist does not intend to give us through his work an idea of the object he presents us with. We have already the fullest idea of grapes, flowers, stags, trees, sandy beaches, of the sea, the sun, the sky, the décor and ornaments of the instruments of daily life: of these, there are enough in nature itself. Yet, what is meant to attract us is not the content and its reality, but the pure appearing which is without interest in regards to the object. What is isolated in Beauty is appearance as such, and art is now understood as mastery in representing all secrets of this self-absorbed appearing of external appearances. (*Ästhetik* 562).

But it is Heidegger’s notion of ‘appearing’ or ‘making appearance’ that functions as a mode of ‘revealing’. That is, singular subjects could transform their own capacities and relations to the world because ‘appearing’ involves the structuring, ordering, and ‘requisitioning’ of everything around us and of ourselves that essentially renders it a technology. This Heideggerian technology informs the mediating subjectivity of the director most visibly in the Naturalist theatre. First, in the manner that Rancière’s notion of the ‘obstinate silence’ conceives Naturalism as a primarily aesthetic gesture that forces a Heideggerian ‘appearing’ on the late-nineteenth century stage. And, second, as simultaneously confirming the Naturalist/Realist director as a special form of aesthetic mediation that is itself a form of ‘appearing’. The distinctive feature of the Naturalist theatre that, in many ways, formally heralds the introduction of the director in the modernist theatre, is further evoked in Barthes’ reading of the Naturalist ‘silent moment’ as being ‘what touches the spectator’ (*Camera Lucida* 35). It is why its ‘appearing as such’ which, in Naturalism, always conveys realist authenticity, fosters a mode of ‘being’ (rather than ‘doing’) that Rancière reads as a ‘form of sensory apprehension’ (*Aesthetic and its Discontent* 29): ‘This is what “aesthetics” mean: in the aesthetic regime of art, the property of being art is no longer given by the

criteria of technical perfection but is ascribed to a specific form of sensory apprehension' (ibid.).

In Boenisch's reading, however, the director's mediation is not just about the (Naturalist) means of presentation – that is the 'doing' – but denotes the very site of the aesthetic (26). 'In a paradigmatically dialectic way,' he argues, following Rancière's thinking, 'art was at once identified and (re)defined *as aesthetic* – as a specific and different kind of experience, as an essentially autonomous partition of the sensible' (ibid.). I share this proposition, but would go a step further, arguing in this chapter that the great achievement of the Naturalist director is precisely by offering the aesthetic in Naturalist representation as an immensely mediated form of knowledge, which rethinks, not only reality, but what defines 'knowing' itself. The director, as such a mode embedded in the aesthetic material, itself posits an antagonistic relationship to philosophy that is most acutely experienced as a form of politics of representation. This can be seen by the way this theatre attempts to bring together the various, separate, fragmented aspects of an increasingly alienated society (when industrialisation was tightening its grip towards the turn of the nineteenth century) by which the Naturalist detail in verisimilitude attempts to 'think over' nature itself. The appearance and identity of the director in this context does not mark a theatrical development in the organisational structure of this theatre, but a deeply sociopolitical phenomenon that receives a philosophical expression in the figure of the director – an expression of speculative philosophy that attempts to mediate the various sociopolitical and technologies contingencies and upheavals of industrial capitalism while thinking theatre as a form of thought. Mediation, as Armstrong insists, has thought for its content (69) '...not as a thinking about, but a kind of going beyond itself which includes itself and object. ...It is more like a reworking' (69).

Such a ‘reworking’ as the guiding principle of mediation is already in operation as seen in one of the earliest directors in historical Naturalism : Duke Georg II of Saxe-Meiningen. While his theatrical exhibits of historical Realism were exceptional in staging Shakespearean tragedies, it is the significance of the practices he introduced that made such historical accurate portrayals possible in the first place. For example, getting rid of the stock characters, which was the common acting system, and bringing in actors that impersonated fictional characters carefully developed in long rehearsals was a marked shift in the practice of the time. It was also effecting a fundamental shift in the scenic conception of the stage, which was now furnishing accurately historical scenery and costumes. Soon there was a need to even consult the original playscript rather than rely on the usual contemporary adaptations, all of which were innovative and found passionate followers from all aspiring Naturalist directors, from Konstantin Stanislavsky, André Antoine, to Otto Braham, and Max Reinhardt. However, the deeper meaning of conjuring atmospheric illusions heightened by a real historicist fascination was to present the past in an attempt to come to terms with the present. In other words, by performing the tensions to borrow from Taxidou, ‘between the desire for verisimilitude and the ontological inevitability of illusion and theatricality, (*Modernism and Performance* 47-48) the Naturalist (and Realist) directors articulate the stage antagonistically with a reality that had formed the ‘present’. It is, therefore, not so much an obsession with the accurate portrayal of the historical past but a profound desire to rethink, unthink, and think over the present. It is a tension that, I argue, defines the Naturalist/Realist director as the birthmark of this artist articulated on the interstices between the portrayal of life as *is* and a speculative commentary of what *could be*.

The celebrated historical Realism of the Meininger and the desire for sublime authenticity of the Naturalist/Realist stage speculatively negotiate the rupture between the past and present. The obsession with accuracy, with copying

reality, and highlighting authentic feeling is also what allows speculative thought to form at precisely that rupture. Or, to use Rose's term, 'diremption' between what is lost and disconnected in the present. It is how, too, we confront in Naturalism, theatre's attempt to mend and negotiate a 'broken middle' which is an attempt specifically agonistic in intent, as I argue in the next section. Rather than reflecting a nostalgia with a reality from an old past, or a visual fixation with replicating the social life in the present, its speculative mediation asserts the very possibility of negotiating the actuality of social and political conditions. By direct replication of the present or direct access to the past, the specifically aesthetic experience that is triggered speculatively negotiates this diremptive middle. What this means for the new figure of the director is that the Naturalist/Realist stage carved out a new space for speculative negotiation inextricably linked with the aporetic journey towards recognition of actuality. In theatrical terms, this takes place in the gap that has opened up, between the dramatic text and its performance on stage. It is in this respect that the Naturalist/Realist director is proposed in my reading as a forum and a locus of speculative thinking. This director creatively negotiates and transforms reality at the point of theatre's broken middle, the gap of which reveals antagonisms integral to the mediation that produced it.

Negotiating Reality

To grasp the radically transformative possibilities of the Naturalist stage, my analysis moves beyond the commonly held view of reading the director as an extension of the Naturalist project in theatre. Rather, I direct my attention to exploring the director as a form of mediation that turns thought into experience. Hegel believed that thought entered the world as experience while actuality was its content (para. 6. 30). In terms of theatre, as I discussed earlier with regard to Wagner, the director's mediation posits theatricality as a mode of knowing through which the director reaches out and reworks both the 'natural' in the

medium of theatre. The director as a speculative modality embodies what Hegel discusses when he refers to subjectivity as ‘what thinks’ rather than an ‘I’ that thinks. The idea here is that the experience of an activity of thought already implies a form of play in the way perhaps Schiller claims by pointing to the concept of play, itself rooted in a Kantian terminology; ‘play’ as an affect which, in theatre, is thinking about thought in the act and experience of play – that is, in the case the Naturalist directors, to think, to borrow from Williams, by ‘structure of feeling’, by which identity (e.g. spectator, actor, etc.) and the ‘other’ (e.g. citizen, character, etc.) is delineated and negotiated right at the aesthetic material themselves as representation, repetition and negations of reality at once. What takes shape in these theatres, then, is not the creation of a particular subject, but a process of mediation which, like thought itself, appears to be transitive and interactive, giving way to new possibilities. Mediation, by disallowing, as Isobel Armstrong observes, the domination of an ‘I’, employs a process of relating that is about ‘a constant negotiation of an in-betweenness. Self and other are then coordinates rather than fixed entities in the process of mediation’ (60), even if an act of mediation defines a process that ‘does not necessarily require a negotiation between self and world at all’ (60). This point of negotiation is the director in my reading. It is a form of knowing in the Hegelian sense and yet a ‘broken middle’ in the way Rose proposes Hegelian mediation. It is why I conceive the mediation of the Naturalist and Realist director as both antagonistic and antinomic. While it allows thought to take the shape as expressions of social change in social dramas, they are simultaneous antagonistic expressions that reconfigure the spectator’s experience, the actor and the role of theatre, into what I see as creating an ever-new present. In this sense, the director occupies a Rosen space that revisions reality in the experience of theatre as thought. The placement of the director in the Naturalist theatre as a negotiator of the ‘natural’ appearance of these realities

is what transforms the material that this figure thinks with, attempting to grasp those points of aporia that can, or could, bring things into a changed relationship.

It is why Zola's famous essay 'Le Naturalism au théâtre' was seen to exercise substantial influence to young theatre enthusiasts, enthusiasts that were hoping for reforms, such as Antoine and Strindberg. Their deeper motivation was that kind of experimentation that is firmly political. As Jean Chothia observes: 'A claim to moral regeneration and to a moral clear-sighted patriotism than that which characterized the vested interests of the established theatre was implicit in Zola's identification of Realist drama with demands for a theatre of scale and simplicity, truth and conflict, comparable with that of Molière and Racine' (3). It is with this in mind that Antoine decides to announce his new role as a director in missionary terms, intending to bring about nothing less than (the director's) revolution:

The battle already won in the novel by the naturalists, in painting by the impressionists and in music by the Wagnerians was going to be carried into the theatre... Here then the field of battle, the occupiers of the place to be won, the troupes ready for a possible assault; but who would coordinate so many scattered elements? Who would give the signal? Quite simply, chance. Without being the least aware of it, I was to become the animator of forces which I did not even suspect. (quoted in Chothia 3)

Naturalist directors such as Antoine, and Aurélien Lugné-Poë before he moved onto Symbolism, have often been cited as the first directors that introduced an entire new concept of spectatorship as well as acting. Through the figure of the Naturalist director, the art of the actor and spectator are most distinctively redefined. In Antoine's Théâtre Libre, acting becomes 'psychological, expressive, heavily inflected by the emerging discourses of psychoanalysis and theories of the environment' (Taxidou, *Modernism and Performance* 51), while the audience is trained in attending these performances as a silent, critical observant at the other end of the fourth wall. Another apt example is the Russian director Konstantin Stanislavsky. On his stage, the internal, psychological

approach to acting receives central focus in ways that, as Robert Leach argues, such highly psychologically charged dramatic representations tend to rework and recreate reality. Drawing on Chekhov, Leach explains that it ‘is experience, not an interpretation of experience, which Chekhov provides. This is essentially not static, not conservative, but dynamic. It works in both the head and the heart’ (*Stanislavski and Meyerhold* 41-2). To this, I would further add that as an extension of life, Naturalism, as we shall see below, enacts a fundamental antagonism to that life that it stages, opening up new possibilities – or, to use Laclau and Mouffe’s term, ‘discourses’, that are ‘articulated. However, this essentially dissensual feature of Naturalism generates a tension so central to this movement that it has often effaced its subversive radicalism. It is also why the director comes to occupy such a central space in the Naturalist/Realist project. Not only does the critical potential of the Naturalist stage demand a mediating figure that can enable the staging of a reality as real as actuality itself, but it is infinitely illusionist reality – that is to say, ‘unreal’. A better way of putting it would be the creation of the ‘appearance of the real’ that is always, by nature, antagonistic.

Naturalism’s and Realism’s re-enactment of ‘real’ life, commonly known by the doctrine of the ‘slice of life’, presented reality on stage, not only in an effort to repeat or authenticate, but to replace it. This is why, I think, as I argue in the next part of this chapter, the Naturalist project is a fundamentally antagonistic project – it seeks to not just present or represent reality, but to negate it through the very Naturalist fabric of presentation – that is, historical accuracy, truthful appearance, verisimilitude, natural acting, etc. As we shall see, the function of such an aesthetic is as much coercive as it is dissensual. Here lies, I argue, the great antinomy of the Naturalist/Realist aesthetic. This antinomy I explore in the aesthetic material itself in which I locate the mediating subjectivity of the Naturalist/Realist director, not so much genealogically, but

phenomenologically, as an aesthetic mode that thinks speculatively and thinks antagonistically. On this premise, I examine the crucial link that helps articulate the Naturalist and Realist theatres as discourses. These discourses, I should further add, are indistinguishable from the speculative mode of these social theatres of ideas: the director.

The following discussion examines the kind of thought developed in theatre by the Naturalist and Realist director through an examination that is primarily focused on dramatic texts staged by these directors. The emergence of the director has often been associated with the historical emergence of the Naturalist/Realist theatre but there is still much to be gained from an analysis that approaches the director, not historically, but conceptually; as a mode of thought in the aesthetic expressions of these theatres which I conceive as expressions of the director's artistic subjectivity. My emphasis therefore is not on the directorial practice in the performance space as such, but on the kind of 'thinking' that permeates the materials themselves in which I explore the subjectivity of the director as a modality of thought. Indeed, what I am suggesting is to look at the aesthetic works themselves as representations of the director's mediating subjectivity which allows us to discern, in this way, certain features of the director as a type of a philosopher. This choice requires an investigation, not so much of the practical aspects of directing Naturalist/Realist plays on stage, but the kind of *thinking* that is invested in the relation between 'being' and 'appearing' which I propose it describes the Naturalist/Realist director as an embodied mode of speculative thought.

In this way, what follows develops a non-anthropomorphic reading of directing discussed as a form of thought and understood to be implicated with the sensory realm of the Naturalism/Realist aesthetic. The director, in this particular sense, functions as a *modality* of thought within the aesthetic works that I

examine. I realise that this choice comes with an emphasis on dramatic texts used by the Naturalist/Realist directors and has a focus on philosophical perspectives and theories, rather than directing as a practice. Although there are numerous references to staged performances by directors, the questions I ask are different: what constitutes the art of directing as philosophy; what transforms the theatrical subjectivity of the spectator; and what kind of aesthetic materials demonstrate the director as a speculative figure. As I hope to show, by examining the director within the aesthetic configuration of the Naturalist/Realist theatre, we can also distinguish the theatrical constitution of the director as a philosophical figure.

INTRODUCTION TO THE PUBLISHED ARTICLE

In the following published section, I engage with this interface in strictly political terms, attempting to decipher the inherent politicality of the Naturalist theatre in ways that rehabilitate its aesthetic as antagonistic articulations, while affirming its inherent coerciveness in the aesthetics of the Naturalist and Realist theatres. I thus explore Naturalism and Realism in relation to the power of theatre as a new technology in hegemonic politics that is also always an expression of antagonistic discourses in these theatres. In this light, I pursue a critical analysis of the Naturalist and Realist theatre as a political expression that conveys, not so much the ability of theatre to act politically, which is nothing new in the history of theatre, but the very new function of theatrical representation as articulation of new antagonistic discourses, while simultaneously operating affirmatively – that is coercively – within the broader context of hegemonic politics. *Affirmation* works, I argue, as a form of theatrical illusion that allows us to access the critical potential of the Naturalist and Realist aesthetics. It is also a political practice that, in Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's political thinking, designates the practice

of ‘articulation’ – in the sense of ‘putting something together’ so that this ‘something’ takes a performative function and, as such, acquires an aesthetic value. My following examination rehabilitates the commonly held assumption of Naturalist and Realist theatre as an expression of liberal bourgeois hegemonic politics, to what I perceive to be a site of struggle over articulation. I argue that affirmation is intrinsically incorporated in the project of Naturalism/Realism which, in turn, I read as part of the modernist project of radical politics receiving its climax, as it will be argued in the next chapter, with the advent of the avant-garde and the manifesto art. However, its ideological underpinnings and socio-political applications have long been underappreciated and often misinformed as to what precisely affirmation signposts in the aesthetic terrain of this theatre, and how it can be read as another expression of the director’s mediating subjectivity.

In the first part of the article, I follow the development in the articulation of the Naturalist and Realist aesthetics, which I then subsequently trace and test in theories of articulation and antagonism offered by Laclau and Mouffe. While the Marxist materialist tradition problematises the aesthetic in its broader sense as an expression of (liberal) ideology, I turn to the corrective offered by Laclau and Mouffe’s concept of ‘discourse’. Understanding the aesthetic practices of Naturalism and Realism as ‘discourse’ already rehabilitates the director’s status of the creative tyrant, since discourse is a practice entirely associated with rhetorical practices – one of which is affirmation. My hypothesis is that, if it is discourse that defines antagonistic perspectives in the theatres of Naturalism and Realism, then affirmation is both central to understanding this theatrical project and the way by which the director operates as an aesthetic modality within the conceptual and sociopolitical frameworks that necessitate this theatre in the first place. The second part provides a critical reassessment of the *antinomic* function of affirmation on the Naturalist and Realist stage; that is, as coercion, on the one hand, and as a radically antagonistic practice, on the other. I further locate this

antinomy in the very aesthetic fabric of the Naturalist and Realist project, which is always fraught with difficulty and ambiguity. It is why, in my reading, affirmation is rooted in antinomy which, in terms of theatre, is just another key expression of the Naturalist or Realist director. I highlight this dimension in the final section on 'Socialist Realism' in which affirmation and its antinomies acquire a further layer; from the predominately representational politics of a fictional reality, to the deeply transformative politics of reality itself, through theatre. Social Realism most vividly illustrates the political potential of the Realist aesthetics. It paints the illusion of reality, not only as a new technology of power, but as the radical process of forcing a new reality into being.

CONCLUSION TO THE PUBLISHED ARTICLE

To explore the essential antinomy rooted in the affirmative practice in relation to the aesthetic genres of Naturalist and Realist theatre, my aim was to look at how the genres' critical potential interacts with political hegemony. I outlined, in this way, some of their aesthetic features of this fundamentally directorial project in relation to politics. By drawing on Raymond Williams' definition of Naturalism and Realism, which he considers as highly variable and inherently complex aesthetic terms of reference, I argued that, whilst the Naturalist and Realist aesthetic is stylistically interrelated, the highly significant feature that fundamentally binds them both together is the way that these movements operate in the space of real hegemonic politics. It is also what helps us understand the politically informed mediating subjectivity of the figure of the director, later to be more forcefully expressed in the avant-garde experimentation with form,

particularly with the political art of the manifesto, before it was finally articulated as the political theatre of Brecht theorised as the 'Epic' theatre.

From this conceptual basis, which I premised on the antagonist discourse as developed by Laclau and Mouffe, I explore two interrelated ideas. First, the conceptual structure of hegemony, understood as a condition in which complex and unpredictable sets of power relationships are stabilised temporarily, is found at the making of most Naturalist and Realist drama. Second, the representational constitution that binds illusionist aesthetics of reality with the course of hegemonic politics, is further revealed by closely inspecting Realist and Naturalist theatre as material expressions of socio-political and economic discourses. This process displays, I argued, an antagonistic articulation in the sense of 'putting something together', as Laclau and Mouffe maintain. However, the struggle to fix meaning and define reality temporarily is also, I think, what brings affirmation to effectively occupy so much a coercive space as an antagonistic one. This paradoxical process, I concluded, is at the centre of the antinomy of the affirmative in the aesthetic genres of Realist and Naturalist representation.

In the next chapter, I turn my attention to the most explicit form of the director as a mode of thought in theatre that I locate in the form and practice of the avant-garde manifesto. I am specifically interested in the ways by which the manifesto art interacts with real politics and how this activity can allow us to think of the director as a co-creator, not only of new aesthetic forms in theatre but of real life politics.

Chapter 6

The Director's Meta-Language: *Avant-Garde Manifesto*

The social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot derive its poetry from the past, but only from the future.

– Karl Marx, *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* 80

Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.

WORKERS OF THE WORLD, UNITE!

Communist Manifesto, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels 69

Respected citizens of Zurich, students, artisans, workers, vagabonds, drifters of all counties, unite!

– Richard Huelsenbeck in *100 Artists' Manifestos* 39

Between Theatre and Revolutionary *Poiesis*

The demand for finding a language adequate for the revolutionary hour of the early twentieth century history could not be more urgent than the political and, for that matter, performative efficacy that characterises the genre of the manifesto. At first sight, its power to call change into action might seem to draw on language's inherent performativity as speech acts. For J. L. Austin, speech acts are singularly invested in doing things with words, of making announcements and naming things that are to come into existence. However, as he points out, the

manifesto's self-authorising language renders the concept of authority impossible once this involves the suspension of disbelief. For, whereas the manifestoing language can be seen to project authentic political agency as an openly 'agonistic' expression, the enacted, performative expression of the word simultaneously problematises the type of agency projected by the text. For Puchner, the manifesto's ambiguity has much to do with the combination of 'performative intervention and theatrical posing' (*Poetry of the Revolution* 18). As he argues, its specific performativity stakes everything on an 'authority it does not yet possess', because 'speech acts of the Manifesto... are launched in the anterior future' (24). The manifesto's ability to harvest the future in order to shape the present is similarly acknowledged by Badiou. He writes in his book *The Century* that it is the imperative of the act that makes futurity in the manifesto a matter of 'finality, of prospective conditions, of a promise' (137) – perhaps what could be called, a *poiesis*. It surfaces in its programmatic element (its futurity) and engages in a type of thought as an act of making (its promise or finality).

Marx and Engels were the first to invent the manifesto in its modern form. When they composed the *Communist Manifesto* in 1848, they had in mind the revolution of modernity which, for them, was the uprising of the proletariat. The manifesto's power to endow words with a kind of a revolutionary *poiesis* was further an effort immersed in Feuerbach's calling for philosophers; that is, to not simply 'think' about the world, but to actively seek to change it. It is why its form was seen to be torn between doing away with the past and ushering in the future. Indeed, Marx and Engel's Manifesto 'seeks to produce,' as Puchner observes, 'the arrival of the "modern revolution" through an act of self-foundation and self-creation: we, standing here and now, must act!' (*The Poetry of the Revolution* 2). It was not too long before such a thought-turned-action format would claim one of its most powerful expressions in the engaged art of the avant-garde theatre. Once cast at the meeting point of a creative endeavour, the manifesto not only

reposed the word theatrically, but seemed to now actively intervene and reshape theatre and the world as a whole. In his seminal *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Peter Bürger discusses the social significance of the avant-garde by highlighting its integration with life-praxis. Contrary to Benjamin's 'aestheticisation thesis', by which he condemns the avant-garde's political efficacy for blending art and politics, Bürger reads the process of the aestheticisation of real-life praxis as a mechanism of reclaiming the social function of theatre, shifting attention to how theatre art functions in society (49).

In performing, then, what could be thought of as revolutionary *poiesis*, the manifesto not only exemplifies the deep tensions that prescribe the avant-garde project, replacing its theatricality with the form of the manifesto. Rather, I think, it urges mediation between the startling junctures of thought and action, politics and philosophy, past and future, historiography and intervention. 'Presenting an enacted form of the word' (Modernism and Performance 4), argues Taxidou, the form of the manifesto acts out 'the difficult relationship between theatre and philosophy' which, in this chapter, I read as an articulation as a meta-language of the director. It is a meta-language because it is capable of articulating philosophy not only in the medium of of theatre, but specifically by forming hypotheses that have been hitherto unarticulated. It stems from the manifesto's sense of futurity which, in Laclau's and Mouffe's political theory, is deemed instrumental for, and most indicative of, any class struggle in the process towards emancipation (*Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* 151). In a similar manner, the theatrical form of the manifesto not only turns thought into action, but it simultaneously *summons* this action into a form of performative philosophy. The manifesto, more than any other form of the avant-garde theatre, allows us to grasp this intricate dimension as another expression of the director as a mediator between theatre and philosophy that I have been discussing in this thesis.

In this chapter, therefore, I explore the avant-garde manifesto as a kind of meta-language that negotiates philosophical thought and performativity while it simultaneously articulates the hybrid composition of the director as a theatre artist of philosophy, or if you like, a performative philosopher. Indeed, as I argue, the significance of the avant-garde manifesto is in its capacity to perform a type of enacted philosophy by simultaneously theatricalising the word and remodeling theatricality as a mode of thought.

What I examine here, I should further clarify, is specifically the aesthetic form and literary genre of the art manifesto which I perceive to open up the possibility of a philosophical practice in theatre as a meta-language of the director-philosopher. As such, my examination is focused on the director's shift of theatrical representation into a more direct 'thinking about' the world with the aim of performing thought capable of integrating with real-life praxis and transforming theatre and the world as a whole. This choice limits the scope of my examination to analysing directing in relation to written manifestos rather than the wide range of avant-garde theatrical practice. This is because, as explained elsewhere, the aim of this thesis is to investigate the critical interface between directing and philosophy and less what takes place in directing theatrical works.

Inhumanity and the Futurist Manifesto

It is not surprising that the signal for the kind of manifestoing activity that would harness the power of futurity, transforming politics into a theatrical preoccupation, was given by a manifesto with 'Futurism' in its title. This was not surprising but what was perhaps less anticipated was the apocalyptic imagery by which it would be heralding the new future. We read in 'The Futurist Manifesto':

For far too long Italy has been a marketplace for junk dealers. We want our country free from the endless number of museums that everywhere cover her like countless graveyards. Museums, graveyards! ... They're the same thing, really, because of their grim profusion of corpses that no one remembers. (in *100 Artists' Manifestos* xxii)

Written by the Italian avant-gardist Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, 'The Futurist Manifesto' presented itself as a kind of performed philosophy for radical change. Its fiercely violent language, drawing its dynamism from the emancipatory power of the political manifesto, was boldly announcing 'the desire to destroy, to change, to create something new' as its programme. At the same time, it was presented as the founding gesture for 'the expression of an abundant force, pregnant with Future' (Marinetti in *Critical Writings* 428).

Now, how this aggressive celebration of action process that, for the Futurist, would also turn into an aesthetic doctrine of war-inspired action, is an issue that runs deeply in the programme of theatricalization and energises all avant-garde forms of expression. It is here, for example, that we encounter the idea of a 'total dynamism' in the spoken voice. And yet, it is always from a speech that must be 'metallised, liquefied, vegetalised, petrified, and electrified' ('The Futurist Manifesto' 125). Its synoptic concentration of words transforms collective theatrical creativity into aggression, while it exposes an altogether different kind of theatricality that delights on the premise of a foundational revolutionary rupture as war violence. The shift from a warlike revolution to a revolutionary war – which is, indeed, remarkable in all Futurists manifestos – is also indicative of the subversively dehumanising character of this project. If violence is rupture and revolution is an enactment of change, then Marinetti's programme of theatricalisation stands for the aestheticisation, not only of the glorification of war, but the desire to be dehumanised by it. Marinetti achieves this by making the *inhuman* (e.g. machines, mechanics, metallic, war itself) rather than the human as the manifesto's main protagonist:

We believe that this wonderful world has been further enriched by a new beauty, the beauty of speed. A racing car, its bonnet decked with exhaust pipes like serpents with galvanic breath... a roaring motor car, which seems to race on like machine-gun fire, is more beautiful than the Winged Victory of Samothrace.

We intend to glorify aggressive action, a restive wakefulness, life at the double, the slap and the punching fist. ... We wish to glorify war – the sole cleanser of the world, militarism, patriotism, the destructive act of the libertarian, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and scorn for women. (5)

Marinetti's misogyny needs to be understood in the wider context of the gendered nature of theatrical democracy within the project of modernism. In his influential study *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, and Postmodernism*, Huyssen exposes the hostility that permeates 'high' modernist dramas in their relation to femininity, mass culture and everyday life. As he argues, there is always a divide to be found at the basic structure of the modernist and avant-garde theatres and dramatic texts such as high modernism and mass culture, individual authority and mass democracy, that reflects the male / female binary. Avant-grade modernists such as Marinetti denigrate the feminine, mass culture and mass democracy in an attempt to distance themselves from the values of these categories. Marinetti's 'scorn for women' in his Futurist's manifesto is thus such a vivid example that shows, as Huyssen observes, that 'the historical avant-garde was by and large as patriarchal, misogynist, and masculinist as the major trends of modernism.' (55) We should also not forget that aesthetic authority was deemed predominately male within the project of modernism, even despite differing visions (such as those voiced by Virginia Woolf for example) that were defending a woman's democratic right to education and cultural participation. (Potter 2)

Nevertheless Marinetti's call in 1909, that all young revolutionaries needed to assemble for a new purpose, which now was the purpose of war, not of revolution, was much fitting with the inhuman vision of the world. It is the same impulse behind his famous war stance as the 'hygiene of the world'. At all times, the human body and spirit are shown as modified by their relation to war, both formed and deformed, by its intensely dehumanised force. While its theatricality fuels the depersonalised and dehumanised Futurist events of the *Serate*, Marinetti's manifestoing activity exquisitely performs it. From throwing back words to tomatoes and eggs, he has the participants' physical involvement tightly orchestrated, depending on the tone of the Futurist manifesto. But such a sublated individualism into theatricalised displays of collectivity consciously seeks to bring into being, in Clare Bishop's words, 'an active subject, one that becomes empowered by the experience of physical or symbolic participation' (*Artificial Hells* 12). In effect, the prospect of 'struggle' becomes inevitable: 'There is no longer any beauty except the struggle' Marinetti reaffirms. 'Any work of art that lacks a sense of aggression can never be a masterpiece' ('The Futurist Manifesto' 5).

In his introduction for the collection *100 Artists Manifestos, From the Futurist to Stuckists*, Alex Danchev links Marinetti's hardly 'spontaneous but carefully rehearsed' (xxiii) war-inspired speech with Nietzsche's 'at once unsettling and unsparing' writing. (ibid.). Danchev argues, Nietzsche's 'very titles send a shiver down the spine' – *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), subtitled 'Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future' (xxii). Similarly, Futurism's attachment to the anti-utopian, cataclysmic, aggressive theatricality as lending a visual, aesthetic dimension to the theoretical organ of the tradition of the revolution, could be understood as a 'prelude to a philosophy of the Future theatre'. It is what makes the 'the current war' as 'the most beautiful poem' ('War the Only Hygiene of the World' 333 quoted in Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution* 80), as declaimed

Marinetti. This is not simply because the Futurist manifesto was already per/forming this poem in a language of action, whose *mediated* nature insisted on thought as experience itself, but because its poetic beauty was so intoxicating as a result of the war, to borrow from the French philosopher activist Simone Weil, that it could ‘empty human lives of their reality and seems to turn people into puppets’ (‘Human Personality’ 72). The Futurist manifesto recognises the invitation of war, fascism, death, and destruction as moments of transformation in the experiences of reality that it needs to mediate and theatricalise as ways of grasping these experiences and the world at large in their inhumanity.

Even as political values borrowed directly from Fascism’s extremism, the Futurist manifesto’s living, live, thoroughly experienced and embodied language of action poses itself as a radical mode of speculative thought by which Marinetti mediated actual, concrete, live experience in real life. In other words, he employs the inner logic of thought as mediation through which he exercises the implicit act of shaping experiences that he orchestrates and declaims in his manifesto as an already three-dimensional kind of thinking. In this way, he reconfigures experiences and temporalities in actuality. This is evidenced from the way manifestos featured on the Futurist stage, first as live declamatory performances of agitated thought, *then* as printed texts. Even when printed and published as texts, manifestos still acted more as actions, indeed, as sequences of a kind of performed thought.

We can now begin to conceive two different notions of theatricality in the performative gesture of the Futurist manifestos. One implies tricks, theatrics, and the theatricalisation of the violent politics of fascism. The other, as Nietzsche had realised some time ago, presents us with the condition or mode of theatre that has to do less with the masking and unmasking of reality, but more fundamentally, with one’s capability of doing and undoing the world and our understanding of it. It is without a doubt that, in the first half of the twentieth century, Marinetti’s

larger programme of declamation and manifestation had theatricalised language into action to such an extent that speech had become nearly synonymous with action; from the cabaret to street agitation and acted-out poems, from the distribution of art manifestos thrown out of racing cars and airplanes to violently declaimed speeches, theatricality was shaping and reshaping both theatre and politics. Certainly, Mussolini and Hitler's delivery of public speeches testifies to the performative power and real benefits of the action-like qualities of the spoken word. In this scheme of things, the ethos of a pervasive theatricalisation, shared by arts and politics, could be said to have unleashed much destruction and death. And yet, what is most significant in Marinetti's manifestoing gesture is not so much militarism and art, which had come together to form Marinetti's new theatrical rhetoric, but that, perhaps, its violent aesthetic of war also per/formed the prospect of un/thinking progress. Or, as it were, of both fiercely breaking with the past in order to permanently salute the future as a gesture of contraction – and, as such, of reclaiming humanity by making it 'less human'. It is what can be seen to justify, I think, the centrality of the total machinery rhetoric in Futurism, both as a speech figure and an actual stage. For, after all, as Marinetti believed, the Futurist:

wish to sing the praises of the man behind the steering wheel, whose sleek shaft traverses the Earth, which itself is hurtling at breakneck speed along the racetrack of its orbit.

It is with this in mind that Marinetti's manifestos could be read as intensely dehumanised expressions that the meta-language of the director performs. As an embodied mode of thought, the director's meta-language seeks to theatricalise philosophy and humanity as a whole. 'Everything of any value' claimed Marinetti, is 'theatrical' (*The Futurist Synthetic Theatre* 117).

Marinetti's Meta-Language

Marinetti's Futurist manifesto – and, more broadly, the early phase of Futurism – has often been associated with what Puchner calls the 'antitheoretical' celebration of the rising fascist discourse. For him, 'fascism', lacking coherence or programme, 'used the antitheory and pro-action rhetoric of Sorel and Marinetti to turn a deficiency into an asset' (*Poetry of the Revolution* 85). Puchner reads its theatricality as a pure language of action which not only 'pertains to a specifically fascist oratory' reduced 'to its bare bones, biting, sincere, and firm' (86), but it acts as a shaper of the fascist speech itself. And yet, in holding the speech poetics of the Futurist manifesto as just another fascist articulation in the Italian culture of the early twentieth century, is to properly miss to appreciate the more speculative nature of Marinetti's manifestoing activity. If manifestoing is to perform, then it is also an action-oriented approach that engages with aesthetic values of speech as performative strategies that evoke thought. It has to do less with exposing theatricality as representation, and more with drawing on the speculative sense of contact in which something is called into action *through* thought. Its ability to declare thoughts into action, therefore, functions, in this sense, as a mode of thinking-over. It is an effort of what Rose calls the struggle to comprehend actuality, a comprehension that involves the 'risk of coming to know', yet without an easy escape. As Rose explains:

Not that comprehension completes or closes, but that it returns diremption to where it cannot be overcome in exclusive thought or in partial action – as long as its political history persists. The complementarity of comprehension to diremption involves reflection on what may be ventured – without mending diremption in heaven or on earth. (*The Broken Middle* 39)

To fully understand this theatrical dynamic, we only need to think of the way, for example, Marinetti employs the form of the manifesto to model a new aesthetic

programme. Not only does he replace the making of avant-garde artworks with the activity of performing manifestos, but he exposes another key side of the process of mediation; that, beyond the explicitly revolutionary ethos of the Futurist manifesto, its meta-language stages rupture between past and future, theory and action. That is, at the very vital point of breakdown, both of what is, in Rose's sense, a diremption and a simultaneously a creation. As such, Marinetti's manifestoing activity creates a speculative space for the double action of manifestation: as being an intellectual space of coming to know (comprehension), and a performative knowing about that coming to know (recognition) – both of which are modalities of speculative thought. This double movement can be most clearly felt in the way Marinetti calls attention between two terms:

Why should we be looking back over our shoulders, if what we desire is to smash down the mysterious doors of the Impossible? Time and Space died yesterday. We are already living in the realms of the Absolute, for we have already created infinite, omnipotent speed. (5)

Marinetti's call for the 'future' order is only a means for defining itself *against* what is not, yet without necessarily specifying what it is *for*. 'Poetry must be thought of,' again he clarifies, 'as a violent assault upon the forces of the unknown with the intention of making them prostrate themselves at the feet of the mankind' (5). This 'unknown' is what demands to be *opposed* and *re-cognised* at once, so that what is familiar or well-known can be, to use Rose's own words, 're-experienced or known again (anerkannt) in order to be fully known (erkannt)' (*Hegel Contra Sociology* 47) – and, in this way, changed into a new relation. The speculative thinking of the performing manifestos does exactly that. It restructures – or, at least, seeks to re-organise – thought as action. Then, opposition as cognition. Finally, but not least, futurity as present – and yet, a present that is still to form. Its aggressive emphasis on struggle is part of this same

process of speculative cognition, which the manifestoing-thinker-director performs by engaging with the point of breakdown in theatre's relation with politics. This point entails the risk and anxiety of the middle, which give to the manifesto its form and content as always a demand for action.

It is a demand, for Danchev, 'like the face of "the other" in Emmanuel Levinas's philosophy'. But, if the 'the manifesto is a demand' it is because 'it demands something from us, and it demands it now. That something may,' he argues, 'be no more than our attention – our full attention – or it may be our adherence to a certain world-view, and as like as not a certain programme' (xxvii). And yet, I would add, it is also a 'demand' that generates its own principles of activity, always *from within the subject* so that it does change something, first in the way one thinks, then in the experience of thought as action, turning words into actions. It is why Marinetti claimed Futurism 'an artistic and ideological movement [that] intervenes in the political struggle only at the moments when the nation is in great danger' (*Manifesto of the Futurist Party in Italy* 495). It is an intervention that demanded, too, Marinetti's mediation in his role as an avant-gardist-thinker-director. We should not forget that the form of the manifesto was, first and foremost, associated with Marx and widely acknowledged as a socialist genre when Marinetti first embarked on creatively performing manifestos. As a political form, the manifesto, then, designated a socialist revolutionary space, but also a space inevitably of fracture, rather than just connection. It thus represented an agonistic space that highlighted the need for mediation to work out the differences and engage with radical oppositions. If mediation denotes a form of thinking, it is a 'speculative' mode that, for Rose, engages with contradiction and the anxiety of the middle. This middle, then, conveys aesthetic values by appropriating political forms and strategies into a language of theatre. It is also what simultaneously renders the avant-garde manifesto into a meta-language equivalent with a mode of thought. In this agon

of the middle, the manifesto form is, therefore, an explicit form of mediation. It draws attention to and works out a middle that is 'broken' between past and present, art and politics, theatre and philosophy, communism and fascism, form and content, speech and action.

How would its meta-language operate for the avant-gardist director-thinker? Quite simply, as a grammar of fundamental change, as much for the medium of theatre as for theatre's relation to philosophy. Indeed, its form replaces philosophy with a mobile, active, dynamic, structuring and relentlessly poetic and theatrical type of spoken thought. Moreover, the manifesto's aversion for the art of the 'petty realist who sponged on life', in the words of the Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky, was already an aggressive attack on theatrical efficacy. Why would one represent anything truthfully when the 'truth' could not be seen, sealed behind an oppressive bourgeoisie morality that had one purpose: its class supremacy. In this sense, theatricality presents manifestoing avant-gardists with more than a response of opposition, but a challenge to the form of theatre itself: first, as a spoken declamatory word that could be performed, then as that form of thought that could directly change the world.

Marinetti's manifestoing activity *displaces* both theatre as imitation and theory as philosophy. In interacting with politics, he mediates both fields, rending the manifesto language into a meta-language, while theatre is subsumed in what could be thought as a very peculiar 'grammar' of performing manifestos. I use the term 'grammar' in Mouffe's term, which she develops by drawing on Wittgenstein's 'language game': it denotes the ways of doing, saying and speaking, that account for the 'rules' that govern a specific context upon which they are also dependent. To the manifestoing theatres of Futurism, Marinetti's mediation is their grammar. His meta-language demarcates the shift from theatre to politics, from thought to action, from possibility to inevitability, yet always as a move articulated in relation to grasping performance as a form of radical,

interventionist thought, embodied and estranged at once in the activity of manifestoing.

The next section turns to what motivates and sustains the manifesto's call for action. It is the same response that compels the avant-garde manifestoing activity to interact with real politics, turning the word into the ceaseless productivity of the avant-garde manifestoing theatricality. Such a calling, I claim, is a deeply felt emotional response. Being inseparable from action, it creates and commands an affective attachment – what could be claimed as the manifesto's ability to *enchant*.

Spectres of Enchantment

Enchantment describes the mental state that commands powerful agreement, often as absolute submission, to ideas, emotions and actions that may carry little explicit logical explanation. It may, at first, seem to contradict Marx's historical materialism, but the desire to one day see the proletariat taking the position of power is enough to even overcome its own materialist principles. Indeed, in his writings, Marx turns to the Epicurean idea of the 'swerve' (*Klineste*), which stands for the affirmation of the atom's 'formal determination' or freedom. According to Epicurus, the atom does not always follow straight, predetermined lines, but occasionally swerves from its straight, downward path through the void. In contrast to Democritus, who applies a more deterministic view on nature, stating that nothing is accidental and that chance is an illusion created by the humans to explain our own perplexity about things, Epicurus believes in the freedom of the atom's will:

necessity... does not exist.... some things are accidental, others depend on our arbitrary will... it is a misfortune to live in necessity, but to live in necessity is not a necessity. On all sides many short and easy paths to freedom are open.' ('Difference between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature' 42-43)

The innate prospect of freedom as always being inherent in the atom's matter is a very attractive idea for Marx. To start with, it implies the possibility of freedom. Pursuing a Hegelian reading, he translates the Epicurean idea of the atom's freedom into the subject's 'pure individuality' in its struggle within self-consciousness to realise itself in the larger world. If the atomic swerve denotes, on a symbolic level, 'the active self' (Livergood ix), then it could also indicate that self-consciousness can only attain conscious existence by *swerving*. That is, by resisting the objective, physical world and its social forms, and by fighting back and refusing to toe the line. Thus, the swerve of matter that morphs the revolutionary subject comes to justify, for Marx, the individual's capacity to overthrow unjust social forms. He sees the atom's persistent urge for freedom (which Marx directly translates to human nature) to what leads the proletariat to develop a class consciousness *for* itself and what summons the revolutionary will for overcoming unjust political systems through social praxis.

In giving form to the idea of the swerve, the *Communist Manifesto* could be said to employ the 'energy' of the 'swerve', which possesses the power to enchant. Not only does it bring up the impetus to act against the very injustices one might critically and consciously discern, but it forms something of an encounter, something, in Bennett's words, 'that hits us, but also a comportment that can be fostered through deliberate strategies' (Bennett 4). The atom's swerve, both self-determined and contingent at once, finds expression in the manifesto's sense of poetic play, honing sensory receptivity to the spectrum of revolutionary ideas. It is why enchantment entails a state of wonder that surpasses any limitations of space and time, into an infinite projection of open hypotheses that relegate their full applicability to the future. 'To be enchanted,' as Bennett argues, 'is to participate in a momentarily immobilising encounter; it is to be transfixed, spellbound' (5).

Such a possibility of a poetics that enchant can be further seen in Benjamin's aesthetic theory. Here, it is the idea of the aura developed in the famous artwork essay. Aura enables us to read the manifesto as an object. Defining the kind of sensory space, aura becomes a matter of a deeply felt personal projection and appropriation for the subject. It simultaneously denotes a quality of experience of objects (not necessarily limited to aesthetic products of artistic creation), which demonstrates a semi-magic perception investing an object 'with the capability of returning the gaze' (Benjamin, *Illuminations* 188)—thus, aura for Benjamin withers in modernity. However, to encounter the manifesto as an auratic experience is to fundamentally restructure the spatial and temporal relations that envelop the subject. In other words, the aura of the manifesto contains the capacity for displacement, which is what triggers enchantment as a form of psycho-emotional action.

Indeed, being convinced that aesthetic phenomena provide especially sensitive anticipations of broader perceptual and social trends, Benjamin perceived aura as the juncture at which connections between a broad network of social and historical processes could be identified. To experience something auratically, he explained in his essay 'Small History of Photography' (1931), is to be captivated by the 'atmosphere' that appears to envelop an object, a situation, or a moment:

What is aura, actually? An extraordinary weave of space and time: the unique appearance of distance, however close it may be. While resting on a summer afternoon, to trace the crest of a mountain range against the horizon or a branch that casts its shadow on the beholder, until the moment or the hour becomes part of its appearance – that is what it means to breathe the aura of these mountains, this branch. (378)

What emerges is the condition of intense contemplation which the subject experiences as a type of absorption in the object: 'One who concentrates before a work of art immerses himself in it. He enters into this work of art like the

legendary Chinese painter as he viewed his finished painting' (504). The aura that arises, therefore, from such attentiveness is also a cognitive process: 'in thinking, to the intentional gaze of attentiveness as it does to a gaze in the literal sense' (646). For Benjamin, then, this spell lends the object a cultic status and a mystifying authority (McCole 5). In the thrall of this spell, the subject begins to sense that the object gazes back at him/her.

The *Communist Manifesto* could not be a better example in this sense. It immediately reveals a cultic character as a fleeting, elusive waver of space and time that is also what gives its form its most powerful quality; a 'concentrated gaze [of identification that] involves a perceptual activity that is neither passive nor entirely distracted', but an emotional intensity (Richter 103). It commands change by summoning a state of pure presence, an enchanted state. In *The Enchantment of Modern Life, Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics*, this sensuous condition is, for Bennett, dense and intense enough to 'toss you onto new terrain and to move you from the actual world to its virtual possibilities' (111). Indeed, the *Communist Manifesto* occupies a cultic space throughout the twentieth century. Its ability to enchant accounts for the many ferocious ideological battles that followed it. Its ability to cast a spell would almost disavowal Marxism's materialism. But its aura seemed to have conjured much of its sorcery in the theatre, a sorcery blended, as we shall now see, with the poetics of failure and the violence that failure entails.

INTRODUCTION TO THE PUBLISHED ARTICLE

Avant-garde ‘Failure’

In Bloch’s and Lukács’s aesthetic discussions of Realism and Expressionism, and later the aesthetic theories of Adorno and Benjamin, avant-garde performance is both exemplified and problematised in what Taxidou calls its ‘world building’ (*Modernism and Performance* 182)_dimension. Its fusion of arts and politics not only reconfigures the relationship of the political and the aesthetic, but also situates the experience of performance in a position that renegotiates the civic dynamic of the individual to the collective. This is an important shift, because it simultaneously redefines and reshapes the political space on an aesthetic premise that positions theatricality as an engaged creative expression. What that means is that theatre begins to claim the power to integrate itself with actual life praxis and, as such, to eradicate the separateness of the ‘theatrical’ with the ‘political’. It is the same engaged gesture that the avant-gardist-director employs to redefine authorship. If the stage was once regarded as a fictional, utopian space, the avant-garde’s aspiration to theatricalising real life and, particularly, the highly political life of the early twentieth century, justifies its foundational gesture, especially in the form of the manifesto, as one that organises new life from the basis of theatre. Yet, its committed approach has often been read as indicative of its demise – or, at worse, of its actual inability to effect any change in real life. Despite its endless expression of newness and innovation in invariably appropriating radically engaged aesthetic forms, the avant-garde is seen to mainly repeat a failed proposition and, in itself, stands as proof of its failure to materialise positive or lasting change.

In *Theatre, Performance and the Avant-garde*, Günter Berghaus reads the failure of the avant-garde on a double premise that a) the avant-garde’s rejection of the bourgeois society was paradoxical, since these artists continued to operate

within its artistic institutions, and that b) ‘this opposition’ also strengthened ‘a structural feature of capitalist society: its constant drive to renew and advance itself’ (41). It is a critical position that reiterates to a high degree Benjamin’s ‘aestheticisation thesis’ (1936) by which Benjamin accused the avant-garde’s committed art as paving the path to totalisation. Most recently, Groy’s analysis in his revisionist *The Total Art of Stalinism* attempts to reclaim the immersion of avant-garde’s performance art with the ‘praxis of life’ as a radical affirmation of totalitarianism, leading to the Russian Socialist Realism. Groy argues that, if what is most radical about the avant-garde movement is its attempt to formulate alternative life praxes, then its theatres also formulate an aesthetic paradigm that not only claims to transform actual socio-political life, but lends its political *gestus* to another movement – Social Realism. For him, Social Realism behaves as an aesthetic model of totalisation under Stalin in the sense of affirming, and forcefully imposing, a socialist worldview to real life.

In a similar light, Berghaus claims that ‘the concept of alterity’ that the avant-garde ‘promoted came to be incorporated into the machinery of progress and was neutralized in just the same manner as the attempts to break up the institutionalized distance of art from life’ (42). It was a case, he insists, of a major scandal that turned into an added flavour towards dramatic thrill, like the first theatrical performances of the *Serate* evenings in 1910: ‘after a while audiences came to these events “to find distraction and excitement... to see and experience something new and to feel stimulated and fortified”’ (140). It is the same argument that sees the avant-garde as another stimulation in the rapidly growing capitalist economy of the twentieth century culture. But was it? What is missing here is an equally critical appreciation of what the avant-garde values sought to not only implement, but prevent.

Taxidou and Susan Buck-Morse provide several correctives that rehabilitate such a critical approach, reading the category of ‘failure’ as hopeful

and emancipatory. 'Rather than viewing [the avant-garde] experiments', Taxidou argues, 'as failed/tragic attempts in reconciling politics and aesthetics,' she then agrees with Buck-Morse's study in which she 'urges us to revisit these moments, particularly in their East/West encounters, as instances of hope' (210). In her *Dreamworld and Catastrophe*, Buck-Morse defuses the accusation of avant-garde's aestheticisation of politics as a prelude to totalitarianism by removing it from its instrumentality that most critical assessments focus on. Instead, she provides a more speculative reading of what its function might be, arguing for its mediating form through which two opposite categories were rethought and renegotiated.

In what follows I also employ this speculative line of thinking about failure in order to examine the Dadaist political art of the manifesto and its affinity to a failed revolutionary project. By that, I am interested in further rehabilitating the critical space of avant-garde 'failure' and, in this way, challenge the received wisdom that continues to read the avant-garde political efficacy as a failed intervention within the overall project of modernism. I read failure as a negative modality that, far from its productive counter opposite (success), failure assigns engaged performance with an agonistic radicalism that functions as a critical mode of transformative appropriation. Therefore, I read failure as an aesthetic practice that requires speculative reflection and negotiation of experiencing the anxiety and aporia that the political present moment demands.

As such, the following article explores the ways by which the project of the avant-garde manifesto raises the issue of the political in the theatre. By highlighting what I call *negative poiesis*, I read the inherently political process of 'failure' as a mode of speculative performance. Dada Berlin, the most politicised expression of the avant-garde manifesto, draws on International Socialism represented in Berlin by Rose Luxemburg, by which it charts the political character of the movement. Its manifestos openly appropriate the failing

revolutionary project of the communist Spartacus as a mode of negative meta-manifestation; that is, as creative reconfigurations of ‘failure’ that, in the playground of theatrical expression, simultaneously assert ‘negativity’ as a positive modality. Failure in Dada Berlin is embedded in the political efficacy of the revolutionary project of communism. I am interested in rehabilitating the received perception of ‘failure’ as a setback or shortcoming usually attached to critical evaluation of the avant-garde project, and particularly the political Dada expressions. I want to renegotiate the ability of these aesthetic forms to engage and stage ‘failure’ as a kind of negative theatre that performs political philosophy. Towards this aim, I provide the violating character of failure as a corrective, by which I re-read the political engagement of the Dada manifesto in Berlin, not as failed articulations of a revolutionary future, but as struggle-filled pursuits that renegotiate theatricality in *what is* political. In embodying, reliving and restaging the violence of failure, Dadaists work towards a comprehension of a struggle grounded in the theatrical moment of the political present.

CONCLUSION TO THE ARTICLE

By untangling the aesthetic dynamics that fuel failure as a negative poesis, Dada Berlin rethinks and reshapes what the ‘political’ might be. Dada’s move to performing manifestos as a form of the very negation of the manifestoing activity – what I discuss as anti-manifestation – posits failure as an already speculative experience.

The failed revolution of the Spartacus Uprising propels Dada’s political commitment on the one hand, and embodies anarchist politics as a kind of negative thinking on the other. It enables the Dadaist-thinker to not only perform manifestos as a mode of resistance, but to use the very activity of manifestoing

as a form of negation, speculatively engaging with both the political word and theatricality itself. In this way, Dada anti-manifestation marks artistic praxis as a form of performing the 'negative' of thought, which, in the manifesto form, is always about announcing the arrival of a new world order entangled with the creative vigour that comes from the shaping of this world – a shaping that, in Dada Berlin, is a fundamental political act articulated aesthetically through revolutionary failure.

Chapter 7:

CONCLUSION

The Director's Theatocratic Middle

The dubious angel constantly changes its self-identity and its relation to others. Yet it appears commonplace, pedestrian, bulky and grounded – even though, *mirabile dictu*, there are no grounds and no ground.

– Gillian Rose, *Judaism and Modernity* 10

The theatre becomes a place for philosophers, and for such philosophers as not only wish to explain the world but wish to change it...

– Bertolt Brecht, 'The German Drama: Pre-Hitler' in Willett 78

The Director as Philosopher: Bertolt Brecht

The above excerpt, published in an essay by which Brecht introduces his didactic – or, as he called them, 'learning' – plays, is seen to capture the famous Feuerbachian call for change, this time coming from the director. It is well known that Brecht was well acquainted with the philosophers of his time. Being a close friend with Benjamin, he was in direct contact with his philosophical ideas, but he also engaged in lengthy discussions with Adorno and Lukács. Most famously, his dispute with Lukács was around the workings of Realism within the wider context of political struggle in accordance to Marxism, which is well documented. For Lukács, 'the central structural problem of capitalist society' ('Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat' 83) had to do with what he referred to as the

notion of reification. Reification is an aspect of delusion related to ‘commodity fetishism’, in which something attains the imaginary characteristic of a thing-like status. However, the problem is that it forces a false objectification in the activity of individuals who, being led by delusions, become estranged from their real potentials.

In reality, as Elisabeth Weight observes, both Brecht and Lukács wanted to ‘undo the effects of reification under capitalism’ (*Postmodern Brecht* 70). For Brecht, however, this was a task that could only succeed by ‘de-naturalising the rigidified world’ (ibid.); that is, by getting the spectators to critically engage with reality. With this in mind, Brecht proposed his Epic theatre that consisted of a range of formalist devices aiming to help the spectator decipher the contradictions of life under capitalism. Benjamin’s belief in technology, as a means by which the work of art could be revolutionised and, in effect, come to transform the spectator’s perception, found a natural ally in Brecht’s technical application. Yet, it was not so much in Adorno, who critically contested the idea of technology. Indeed, Adorno’s objection to Benjamin’s essay, that assigns a ‘counter-revolutionary function’ to ‘a sublimated remnant of certain Brechtian motifs’, situates Brecht, like most of the avant-garde project, on the formal structures of mass culture. The culture industry is always received negatively in Adorno. This is because he saw its art at the service of a prevailing power structure. He thus critiques Brecht’s appeal to populist approaches of theatre, accusing him of practising an empty formalism as an aesthetic principle not that dissimilar from the totalitarian aestheticisation of politics. And yet, what Adorno fails to see is the dialectical nature of these plays. As Weight points out, Brecht’s theatre deconstructs ‘the perverse strategies performed by fascism’ by appropriating and exaggerating the bourgeois rhetoric for gangsters and fascists ‘in the attempt to divert attention from political reality.’ She further explains:

The didactic play as artistic principle is not just mere propaganda: what is at stake is not mere 'defamiliarisation' but 'distanciation'... the form betraying the split consciousness which still inhabits it, thereby encouraging the audience (hopelessly unequal to any such task in Adorno's pessimistic assessment) to engage in the production of that particular mode of thinking Brecht called 'interventionist' (GW 18, p. 237), which questions things and events with regards to the possibility of change and transformation. (84)

This chapter identifies Brecht with the role of the philosopher/thinker of theatre. So far, I have explored this role through an analysis of the aesthetic, theatrical, dramatic and political structures that compose the mediating subjectivity of the director. My focus, throughout this thesis, has been on the interface between theater and philosophy in which I locate the mediating subjectivity of the director. This is a 'thinking' subjectivity that is anchored in my examination in the process of the works themselves, both aesthetic and theoretical works, *mediated* by the director as representations of speculative thought. Therefore, I have paid attention to the kind of aesthetic materials and moments in theatre history that seem to me to be emblematic of the philosophical paradigm of the director in theatre rather than the more practical dimension of the director as an artist who interacts with actors and stages plays.

This concluding chapter seeks to reveal the kind of philosophical framing that envelops Brecht's mediating subjectivity as well as the meaning of the relations and tensions that are produced as a result of the director's mediation to both theatre and philosophy.

Regardless of the critical positions voiced by philosophers in response to Brecht's theatrical innovations, the influence of Brecht on modernist theatre cannot be measured only by his impressive approaches to staging and writing of plays. Brecht's real impact comes from thinking about theatre, and thinking philosophically. He thus constantly confronts theatrical form and content with philosophy in the manner that readily evokes Platonic thought. Benjamin, as

Brecht's closest philosophical associate, was the first to remark on the implicit affinity that connected Brecht and his Epic theory with the Platonic tradition of drama. For Puchner, Brecht's Platonic debt originates from the Platonic project of Georg Kaiser, which had intrigued Brecht, particularly in how Kaiser appropriated Socratic dialogues to write his own Socrates play, *Alcibiades Delivered* (*The Drama of Ideas* 106). Turning to Plato's *Symposium*, Brecht finds stylistic features that speak deeply of his own theatrical thinking: 'Socrates' critical edge, his dialectical reasoning, and his willingness to stand up to the powers that be.' (ibid.) Yet, they are features, too, upon which theatre is problemsatised at the same time as a form of bad democracy – a *theatrocracy*. Why, or how, Brecht, a 'man of the theatre' (Puchner *The Drama of Ideas* 107), and a Marxist man at that, would become associated with Platonic philosophy is a valid question to ask, to which Puchner turns and explores at length in his own discussion. However, the most interesting – indeed, the most curious – question to further ask is, I think, how Brecht the theatre director would come to enact a very specific theatre of Plato, that is not only anti-theatrical, anti-mimetic, didactic and critical, but rather a deeply *theatocratic* theatre.

In Chapter 1, I explored the dual meaning of *theatrocracy* in Plato. First, as a democratic mode of 'vision' denoting 'knowledge' that, for him, is always misused as a resource of spectacle in theatre, corrupting the spectators and distorting the 'truth' of things. In condemning theatre as *theatrocracy*, Plato is thinking of democracy. The blurring of the distinction between imitation and representation, and the elimination of the distance between actor and spectator, is reminiscent of the democratic demos which Plato considers dangerous because, to borrow from Hallward, it authenticates 'the untutored expression of the people' ('Staging Equality' 116). As Rancière has said, Plato's problem with Athenian democracy is its fundamental essence which, in democratic politics, often takes the shape of a *theatocratic* rule in the sense that it enables the exercise of power

by the *demos* on ‘the absence of any foundation’ (Lacoue-Labarthe *L’Imitation des modernes* 276). Furthermore, teatrocracy is a mode of ruling theatrically. It introduces a multiplicity of perspective that, for Plato, acts as a cacophony of heterogeneous voices that end up disrupting the ability of the *theatron* as a mode of (philosophical) knowledge and reason. In the end, what emerges is not theatre as such, but, as Weber attests, an expression of the subversive force of theatre: ‘...[theatricality] forsakes the confines of the *theatron*’, as Weber points out, ‘and begins to wander: when, in short, it separates itself from *theatre*’ (*Theatricality as a Medium* 37). It is how teatrocracy, for Plato, begins to control social, political or aesthetic representation, but simultaneously subverts any form of control or the rule of the state by escaping the confines of theatre. Teatrocracy, in this function could be said to confront the forms of ‘imaginary creation’ that shape up society by which this society re-cognises, re-imagines and, finally, re-configures and transforms both itself and theatre.

The parallels between Brecht and Plato can be further seen from the kind of theatrical thinking they both employ. Brecht was known from his writings on theatre, particularly his estrangement effect, distanciation, episodic plots and the use of interruption, and the various defamiliarisation techniques of his Epic theatre. In common with Plato, his objective was to produce a critical frame of mind in the audience and to foreground the stage as a forum of exposure, reflection and analysis, rather than concealment, immersion and illusion. His series of dialogues, entitled *Messingkauf*, concern the nature of theatre, especially from the point of view of what Brecht understands as ‘didactic’. ‘What is the purpose of theatre?’ seems to be the principal question of the dialogic discussion. It is why Brecht introduces a character named ‘The Playwright’, whose interest gravitates more and more in the political function of theatre through which he explores every other aspect: the audience, the actor, the dramatic stage, the text, the scenic design, the use of music and the medium of theatre as a whole. The

emphasis is placed on what is, and is not, Epic theatre, articulating the Epic theatre as the model of the modern theatre. And yet, the main character in Brecht's *Messingkauf* is not 'The Playwright', but another figure who is also the protagonist, namely 'The Philosopher'.

The story plays out the usual anti-theatrical position portraying 'The Philosopher' as feeling disturbed, even tyrannised, by the presence of the actor, who prevents sober thinking, inciting emotions to the audience, embodied by imitation. Yet, what emerges is the affirmation of theatre, even if not as theatre of feeling, but a theatre nonetheless, yet for the specific purposes of the philosopher. Suddenly, the philosopher seems to have replaced the actor, has exchanged embodiment with ideas, imitation with thinking, theatre with knowledge, turning the playwright to that 'other' of theatre, as that '*an*-other' of Brecht himself. In fact, what we see is 'the philosopher' having finally entered the theatre, not figuratively or indirectly, but literally, by which he creates this new alternative space of thought that is simultaneously shown as a space of vision. This new form is made *of* philosophy and *of* theatre, in-between of which Brecht's Epic theatre is a curiously hybrid mode of 'doing' and 'thinking' represented by Brecht himself in his roles as a director, that seems, to me, that Brecht himself occupies in his role as the director. It is why, I think, that while, in *The Drama of Ideas*, Puchner suggests that Brecht impersonates 'the Playwright' who argues with the philosopher in defence of theatre (108), it is actually 'The Philosopher' that Brecht enacts. It is that 'other' half of the director. Moreover, this is a Platonic 'other' half that makes the philosopher-director deeply fractured in the middle. One holds this figure suspect of deceiving its audience. Inverting philosophy into theatre, the director puts theatre into the service of knowledge and analysis, yet without doing away with the perils of the spectacle – what Plato called teatrocracy. In this sense, teatrocratic theatre denotes a site of natural power but not the far cry of spectacularism that seduces

and misleads the emotions of the audience. Instead, theatrocratic theatre could be said to be a truly directorial theatre that is simultaneously a philosophic theatre, the kind of theatre of ideas as being the medium of the philosopher director. This is also why this figure could be viewed as a theatrocratic figure which denotes the director as a mode of embodied philosophy, yet a figure that is also embedded in the power relations of the economy of the spectacle – the rule of the theatron.

Brecht's landmark of the estrangement effect, his emphasis on analysis rather than empathy, his aversion to the hypnotic magic of theatre, his insistence that the audience must be aware at all times that the action of the play is theatre, that the audience must watch critically, can be seen to reiterate the kind of philosophical theatre in which Brecht's character of 'The Philosopher' is interested. Indeed, it is the kind of theatre already sketched out by the original philosopher himself: Plato. Curiously, despite Plato's protest, it is a theatrocratic theatre, a theatre that mediates between the demos and philosophy and which receives its full articulation as the power of thought through the figure of the director. It is the director, not the philosopher per se, that mediates the 'rule' of the theatre and the 'rule' of knowledge, between actors (embodiment) and the act of thought (thinking), bringing together the two ancient rivals and antagonists, – theatre and philosophy – in a single space of co-existence.

Another way that Brecht's *Messingkauf* dialogues connect to Plato is formalistically. Presenting a dramatised type of thought, Brecht's *Messingkauf* dialogues offer Plato's special kind of dramatic philosophy as modernist drama, a thesis that Puchner explores in his various book projects. It is the same dramatic form that an earlier visionary, the director Edward Gordon Craig, as we saw before, used to introduce himself as a director while behaving as a kind of philosopher, appropriating Platonic dialogic thought and imitating a philosophical persona, by which he would initiate the ignorant students to the mysteries of theatre. However, for Brecht, the philosopher is no longer a symbol,

an intellectual passage that ascends to the hegemony of the director in theatre. Rather, it is something of an identity. When, in the *Messingkauf*, Brecht stages the actual ‘philosopher’ in theatre with the spectators also sitting on stage, the setting is a mirror image of Brecht the director surrounded by people that he also needs to instruct: the actors in rehearsals, the spectators in performance. The director, like the *Messingkauf* philosopher, carefully discusses the various elements of theatre, while the play is slowly taking shape, in contrast to the slow process of dismantling that which we see to take place with ‘The Philosopher’ in *Messingkauf*. Here again, the two processes are characteristic of the fundamental opposition that binds them together; the potential to ‘see’ and to ‘know-through-seeing’, that both theatre and philosophy are interested in and want to act out. The mediating subjectivity of the director facilitates this relation, both allowing it to happen while problematising it. It is in this direct (rather than metaphorical) way that the director turns philosophy into theatre, and theatre into philosophy. Besides, as ‘The Philosopher’ seems to take pride in the play: ‘We too have made art for the past four nights’ (Brecht *Messingkauf* 644), yet it is an art that is only a by-product, made possible through the mediation of Brecht, the director.

Brecht’s didactic plays (*Lehrstücke*), to which the *Messingkauf* dialogues belong, are not the only type of philosophical theatre. Rather, what is most special about them is in dramatising the relationship between theatre and philosophy and in literally showing the philosopher having entered the theatre – the kind of philosopher that Brecht uses to address theatre with reason, exemplifying an analytical, didactic model of representation that stands for his Epic theatre. At this meeting point, Brecht embodies Plato performing the antithesis of a Platonic theatre which is also deeply theatrocratic in its anti-theatricality, promoting knowledge as another form of *thea*, inverting it into a site for philosophy. The difference is that, in the process, another philosopher is needed that dramatises both theatre and philosophy at the very point of opposition of ‘*knowing*’ the

world. The director mediates between those two modes of ‘knowing’ as philosophical reason, on the one hand, and as embodied affectivity, on the other. It is what makes the director a Platonic figure, and yet unmistakably theatrocratic. The director *thinks* in theatre by mediating world and tropes of knowing, arts and artists, people and identities. It is also why the director is intensely anti-Aristotelian. Brecht is the prime example, but this can be seen in every other director of the modernist theatre. I will briefly address Aristotelianism as an anti-directorial position before I bring this final chapter to an end, by which I conclude this thesis.

The real significant of Aristotle’s *Poetics* is in proposing ways by which theatre can be *instrumentalised* and, thus, act in a controlled and specified way which is a form of ‘direction’ – of how one thinks and behaves in society. It is, thus, a proposition that aims to reconfigure theatre from being an instrument that empowers people to controlling this power through the instrument of theatre. The latter offers theatre a poetics (which is about a ‘how to’) that aims to defuse theatre’s unsettling ability to merge identities and moderate its place of in-betweenness. Theatre’s mediating capacity that, for Weber, can forsake ‘the confines of the *theatron* and begin to wander’ (37) has always been speculated as a claim to real political power, which is precisely what horrified Plato in the first place, leading him to perceive all theatre as essentially forms of theatrocracy. It is in response to this prospect that Aristotle’s solution is to subordinate theatre to a conception of its medium as a poetic genre of dramatic representation structured as a complete, coherent and unified narrative. From this premise, then, Aristotle advances a sophisticated reading of mimesis as *tekhne* developed on the idea of artistic purity in relation to the literary properties of dramatic plot and narrative. The dramatic paradigm of tragedy, proposed as a single, complete and meaningful *praxis*, can be seen to create an equally structured and meaningful *muthos* (plot) to which he subordinates theatricality and, in this way, devalorises the material

environment of theatre. If theatre, in Aristotle's thought, is not theatrocratic, it is not because it is conceived as lacking in power. But precisely because he relegates theatre to an instrumental status. 'The specifically scenic medium of theatre' in Aristotle, argues Weber, in the sense of 'everything having to do with spectacle, with *opsis*' is rendered susceptible to mere *synoptic* viewing – the act of taking in the spectacle 'with a single view' (99).

And yet, it is by offering theatre as a stable and detachable point or fixed position that Aristotle not only reduces everything that has to do with *opsis* (stage, locality, bodies, auditorium, masks, etc.) to having a solely material, technical meaning. Rather, he effectively prevents the possibility of speculative meaning that can potentially take on a political significance. If theatre is to be 'taken in at a single view' (ibid.), it is to eliminate that troubling confounding of reality and fiction, role and character, theatre and politics, so that text and action can be merely performed on stage in a way that 'nothing happens' (Rancière, *Staging the People*). It is a case of what Rancière claims as 'actors or singers simply execut[ing] their roles and their audiences simply consum[ing] them'; a properly anti-spectacle approach that necessitates the impossibility of a mediating stage or any praxis other than a unified, self-contained plot. It renders theatre to a *medium* – not of mediation and improvisation, but what equals, as Weber observes, to '*means*, instrument, element, a necessary but not sufficient ingredient of poetry' (100). Aristotle's insistence that 'a tragedy cannot exist without a plot, but it can without characters' (*Poetics* 50 a 23-24) offers theatre as *synoptic* by which he describes the sense of a whole as unity established, namely its representation of 'praxis' (action) through 'muthos' (plot). And yet, *synopsis* does not merely relate to a unified understanding of life (*bios*) unfolding in the 'plot', but to a sense of a unified action qua plot as a process of discovery described by Aristotle as *peripeteia*, which is, then, what prepares us for the moment of recognition – *anagnōrisis*. The key question, however, is *recognition of what?* Or, more to the

point, *what kind of recognition?* The answer is the kind of recognition, or perhaps affirmation, that is capable of diverting political ‘excess’, which is the kind associated with the speculative middle of theatre, of that political space, we might also add, of those who have no part in power. Its instrumentalisation not only devaluates the medium of theatricality to the controlled supervision of its scenic medium (*synopsis*), to be exercised from appropriately managing its institution. Rather, it disallows the very function of the director as a mediating form of embodied thought that claims to not only understand the world, but also to be able to shape, reshape and transform it.

Indeed, for Aristotle, the task of representing the unity of an ‘action’ and, through it, of ‘life’, theatre must be subordinated to *the right kind of recognition*. It must not be one that could potentially bring something anew to light, drawing attention to the spontaneous and contingent function of the mediating function of theatre, but something that enables recognition from what is *already known*, mostly in its pedagogical sense and, thus, reaffirms ‘the identity of the learner, who is able to re-identify what he or she has already seen’ (Weber 256). Recognition as a pedagogical mode in Aristotle is often coercive and hegemonic, reiterating the affirmation, repetition, and confirmation of the same, stable or fixed position of authority. It is also why it precludes mediation in which recognition acquires a difficult, agonistic meaning, not as a mode of knowing and understanding, but one that rehabilitates what ‘recognition’ might stand for in the first place, including that part that has to do with reason and criticism as forms of pedagogy. This is why Aristotelianism is not a director’s stage. For the fundamental question of a mediating stage is not what one might come to recognise, but what Rosean *re-cognition* itself might be able to reveal, subvert and, ultimately, transform, always offered as an unsettling form of ‘knowing-through-seeing’ – the kind of embodied philosophy the director exercises in theatre.

It is for this reason, perhaps, that Puchner argues that modern drama results ‘from the coincidence of a demise of Aristotelianism and a rise of Platonism’! And yet, for me, such coincidence is placed elsewhere and has to do with the entrance of Platonism in theatre through the tragic poet. Its return in the modern theatre heralds the figure of the modern director as a deeply Platonic configuration in its antithesis – that is a resourcefully theatrocratic figure. It is an opposition that marks the mediating experience of the director, as an aesthetic subjectivity and a speculative mode of thought. Brecht has always been compared to Marxist Materialism, but it seems that Brecht might be closer to Rose.

In his article ‘The Achievement of Brecht’, Raymond Williams insightfully observes that Brecht exercises a form of ‘complex seeing’, not only through argument (explored mainly in his didactic plays), ‘but through a dramatic demonstration’ (157). Referring to *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, Williams points out that dramatic characters are offered in an oppositional logic as both what are and what are not – such as the case with Shen Te’s transformation of herself into her tough male cousin, Shui Ta, who himself has an enigmatic existence. Yet, what Williams means here is that Brecht discovers, as he puts it, ways of ‘enacting genuine alternatives: not so much, as in traditional drama, through the embodiment of alternative in opposing characters, but by their embodiment in one person, who lives through this way and then that and invites us to draw our conclusions’ (157). ‘Complex seeing’ is simultaneously embedded in the dramatic form and enacted through it without an ‘imposed resolution’, but an invitation for us to think, consider and rethink. As Williams puts it, drama occurs and is seen at once, not assumed as an action and then argued, a difference that offers Brecht’s ‘seeing’ as a complex mode of speculative mode in the Rosean sense – as a mode of *re-cognition*. Its thinking ‘struggles’ towards a comprehension of oppositions in one’s selves and in the roles one plays in sustaining and promoting injustice. In Brecht, we often see ‘the moral’ as being

‘the dramatic’, but as an active process. It functions as a way of speculative looking that, as Rose argues, struggles towards comprehension, and yet acknowledges that any form of understanding might ultimately be partial, incomplete, fraught and covered with gaps and fissures. Here, the process towards understanding, denotes, for Brecht, as for Rose, an essential part of working through contradictions, not only at the level of personal qualities, but also, as Williams observes, at the level of the play as a whole – what would be, for Rose, the anxiety-ridden level of engaging with actuality that sits with ambiguity and embraces equivocation. It is worth quoting Williams’ passage from Brecht taken from *Mother Courage*, which is an excellent example of speculative, equivocal thought employed by Brecht the director/author-philosopher:

Chaplain: ...Mother Courage, I see how you got your name.

Mother Courage: Poorer people need courage. They’re lost, that’s why. That they even get up in the morning is something – in *their* plight. Or that they plough a field, in wartime. Or that they have an Emperor and a Pope, what courage *that* takes, when you can lose your life by it. The Poor! They hang each other one by one, they slaughter each other in the lump, so if they want to look each other in the face once in a while – well, it takes courage, that’s all. (159)

I discussed earlier Rosean aporia as the kind of aporetic perspectivity that informs the director’s mediation, and already being traced as a mode or trope of thought in the aesthetic paradigm of Athenian tragedy. Brecht’s attention on re-cognition of the *what is* and the *how is* as an ongoing process of struggling towards recognition, or an action that ‘is continually being replayed, and could be otherwise’ for Williams, of that kind of fuller re-cognition of others, of ourselves, and where one constantly finds oneself in social and political institutions for Rose, is such an aporetic expression. It conveys the speculative act with engaging, not with the past, not the future, but the present. This active engagement with the present, it seems to me, is a final point of contact between Brecht and Rose, but

also, between the role of the director and speculative philosophy. The process of working towards knowing, what Williams call a ‘complex seeing’, is already political, because it involves the political risk of coming up against that violence that speculative reason requires – the kind of violence that is our own and embedded in the structures of our institutions. For Rose, as Schick observes, ‘an agonistic pursuit of justice does not assume that we can take linear steps towards a better future, but it does not retreat from action’ (129). It is what makes Rosean thought fundamentally theatrical. It urges for action that involves risk because any action will need to be inevitably revisited and revised in the process of knowing and re-cognising it and this is already what we find that theatre does. Theatre does not merely seek displacement or impossible stages of seeing, but, rather, it seems to me, what is here and now in the experience of what Rose calls a ‘good enough justice’, an experience that already performs and acknowledges the brokenness it is embedded in.

Here, we might once more recall *Angelus Dubiosus*. It is the angel that embodies speculative reason, and is unlike Benjamin’s melancholic and traumatised angel of *Angelus Novus* with which I opened this thesis. As Rose maintains, Angelus Dubiosus is more precious than his fellow angelic ‘Novus’ because this is a dubious and, indeed, theatrical angel capable of employing that kind of ‘humorous witness that must endure’ (*Judaism and Modernity* 8). For Schick, this is a ‘humorous witness that embraces a facetious reason that learns and grows, struggling towards recognition and taking political risks’ in the pursuit of this ‘good enough justice’ (130). As Rose insightfully describes:

the dubious angel, bathetic angel, suits reason: for the angel continues to try to do good, to run the risk of idealization, of abstract intentions, to stake itself for ideas and for others. Experience will only accrue if the angel discovers the violence in its initial idea, when that idea comes up against the actuality of others and the unanticipated meanings between them. Now angels, of course, are not meant to gain experience – in the angelic

hierarchies, idea and act at once define the angel, who is the unique instance of its species, without generation or gender. (8)

A speculative director begins here, with such an angel that is aporetic, gender-less and generational-less. It is a figure that occupies the critical space of in-between 'thinking' and 'doing', always as a creative act of thought-embodied scenically in the form of theatre. Each of the chapters discussed in this thesis explores the speculative aspect of the director, which I traced in the Event of tragedy. It is the same Event that gives shape to the director and turns this figure into the Event of the director at the last quarter of the nineteenth century. I focused on moments of that history in Evental terms by looking at those figures and works that most clearly portray the mediating subjectivity of the director as a speculative way of *a-poria*. Aporetic poetics work through the uneasy negotiation of the middle, positing political agency as a matter of theatre, which is why an aporetic perspective is always, in my reading, theatrocratic. It models a radically democratic subjectivity in which political engagement is an agonistic relation, even if negatively for Plato. In aporia as a mode of theatre, there is an urgent sense of readiness to act, by engaging in political risk, yet knowing that any action will be imperfect, incomplete and, for that matter, negative.

The study brought together two distinct but intimately related projects: the relatively absent field of speculative thought in theatre studies and the mode of analysis that we refer to as Performance Philosophy. My reading drew closely on the ideas of Rose as well as other philosophers, such as Castoriadis, Laclau and Mouffe as well as Plato and Hegel. Rose's revisionist Hegelianism as a 'broken middle', with which this thesis began, illustrates that reading to a speculative compass is not only philosophical, but also profoundly theatrical. Rose herself explored this connection with her evocation of the dubious angel in this thesis stands for the speculative dimension of the figure of the director. On Rose's

terms, this is also a figure of a new type of ethics, grounded on mourning and failure, always battling with the brokenness of the middle. I showed how this connection is also part of the meaning of the director and what allows this figure to be read as a mediating, philosophical figure in theatre, equal to a Rosean new aesthetic, ethics and new politics of the broken middle. The predominantly historiographical research in theatre studies, with little attention paid to the conceptual bearing of the director, has often obscured both the philosophical dimension of this figure and its infinite connection to philosophy. My contention more broadly has been that theatre scholarship on the director remains underdeveloped and lacking analytical thinking appropriate to the complexity of this figure. Perceived as an evolutionary moment in theatrical history, the director is often offered on the reductive notion of stylistic reform, despite a great deal of important scholarship available on theatre. A speculative reading, on the other hand, is, as I hope to have shown here, anti-reductive and anti-evolutionary. Rather, it draws its analytical potency from the very form of speculative thought, allowing the director to be conceptualised as an equivalent form of thought. My main hypothesis lies on the recognition of mediation as a primarily broken middle that situates the director in the hybrid, in-between space of mediation, always mending two opposites that were never united to start with, yet always mediating and negotiating this space between theatre and philosophy, stage and the city, actor and character, politics and representation, autonomous and committed art, and so forth. As such, a mediating subjectivity as a properly speculative figure, which recognises theatre as always broken in the middle, does not ask ‘What are the limits of representation?’ Instead, it asks, ‘What are the limits of *aporia*?’

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