

Rejecting the Page, Inciting Visuality: Staging *Woyzeck* in a
Mediatized Culture

Elisha Conway

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Abstract

The influence of new media on theatrical practice over the past fifty years has spurred a movement towards theatrical forms which are increasingly organized around the sensory elements of performance. This change is most noticeable in the visual approaches to theatre, and it has produced what I have labeled a theatre of visuality. This thesis argues that the tendencies for visualization found in visual media have extensively marked the performance strategies of contemporary theatre practice, resulting in a shift away from the logocentric dramatic text and towards theatre performance organized around the visual.

Looking at four contemporary productions of Georg Buchner's *Woyzeck* –Thomas Ostermeier's *Woyzeck* (2005), Vesturport's *Woyzeck* (2005), Robert Wilson's *Woyzeck* (2000), and Josef Nadj's *Woyzeck ou l'Ébauche du Vertige* (1994)– this thesis produces a preliminary typology of four distinct visualities/theatrical forms which make up the theatre of visuality: hyperrealism, synesthesia, superficiality, and visual narration.

This thesis contributes to the conceptualization and understanding of postdramatic theatre by linking the theatre's rejection of the text to the increased centrality of the visual in performance, and by tracing these shifts to the influence of visual media.

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INTRODUCTION

Staging *Woyzeck*: Iconicity, Framing, and Illusions of Dimensionality
in Contemporary Postdramatic Theatre

Staging *Woyzeck*: Iconicity, Framing, and Illusions of Dimensionality in
Contemporary Postdramatic Theatre

We become what we behold. –Marshall McLuhan

We shape our tools and thereafter they shape us. –John Culkin

Today, we spend the vast majority of our time looking at screens, immersed in such visual media as photography, film, video, and television. These technologies hold a prominent position in our daily interactions with the world, and the dominance of visual media continues to increase. McLuhan's and Culkin's quotes speak to the reciprocal nature of modern interaction with media. Our immersion in visual media results in a rebounding of influence, as the new media which we construct in turn construct us. The purpose of this thesis is to examine the ways in which visual media influences the visual and structural characteristics of contemporary theatre.

The predominance of visual media raises the question: what space remains for theatre within a culture dominated by visual media? Contemporary theatre answers this question by turning away from the logocentric dramatic text towards a theatrical form which instead places emphasis on the sensory features of performance: visual, audio, and kinesthetic. While my primary focus will be the visual aspects of performance, it is often not possible to isolate one sensory aspect of performance from all the others. As a result, my analysis will often extend to the audio and kinesthetic in order to analyze the role of the visual in relationship with other sensory aspects of performance.

In this project, I will consider how the turn towards the visual in theatre has arisen in response to the predominance of visual media in contemporary culture. Rosiland Krauss, a preeminent figure in the field of visual culture studies, declares in the article "Welcome to the Cultural Revolution" that culture has indeed experienced a visual turn, a turn which she

argues has disrupted not decades, but centuries, of practice (84). Taking the visual turn in contemporary culture as an established phenomenon, I argue that the increasing visuality of today's mediatized culture has resulted in an increase in imagistic thinking, which has led to increasingly imagistic modes of expression. Consequently, this thesis demonstrates that contemporary theatre there has seen a marked shift towards the visual aspects of performance.

Examining four contemporary productions of Georg Büchner's *Woyzeck*, I link the performance strategies implemented in these productions to the influence of visual media. As the visual is the primary focus of this thesis, the object of study will be the performance text, and more specifically the construction of space in performance. Explaining the term 'performance text,' Marco De Marinis writes: "To speak of a /performance text/ means to presume that a theatrical performance can be considered a text, even if an extreme example of textuality" (47). The term 'performance text' utilizes the expanded sense in which the term text is now understood; 'text' is no longer restricted, De Marinis explains, to its "traditional linguistic and literary application" (47). Importantly, De Marinis explains,

From a semiotic standpoint, the term /text/ designates not only coherent and complete series of linguistic statements, whether oral or written, but also every unit of discourse, whether verbal, nonverbal, or mixed, that results from the coexistence of several codes [...] and possesses the constitutive prerequisites of completeness and coherence. (De Marinis 47)

According to this view of the relationship between performance and text, the performance can be understood as a text in and of itself. The performance text is therefore all aspects of performance which combine to create a theatrical event.

Sensory aspects of theatre are undergoing liberation in contemporary performance. The reduced position of the dramatic text has received considerable scholarly attention, most notably by Hans-Thies Lehmann in his book *Postdramatic Theatre*. Lehmann coined the term *postdramatic* to refer to any type of theatre which has shifted its primary focus away from the dramatic text. Theorization of postdramatic theatre is still rather recent and as such much of the scholarship on the subject is introductory or exploratory in nature. Similarly, though there are a number of studies on the use of visual and digital media in theatrical performance, none of these examine the influence of visual and digital media on productions which do not contain these media. Additionally, there has not yet been a sufficient study of the relationship between the cultural dominance of visual media and the rise of postdramatic theatre. This thesis contributes to the understanding of postdramatic theatre by examining the relationship between the theatre's rejection of the text and the increased centrality of the visual in performance, linking these shifts to the influence of visual media.

Taking the postdramatic turn in theatre practice as an established position, this thesis will trace the influence of visual media in the creation of postdramatic performance strategies. I will argue that the increased predominance of the sensory aspects of performance, specifically a shift towards visuality, typically results in a parallel movement away from the dramatic text. The rejection of the text can be seen as the embracing of other media (photography, film, video, television). Cognitive science suggests that the rise of the sensory aspects of performance results in part from the influence that visual culture has on our subconscious. The characteristics of the visual media in which our lives have become immersed are absorbed into our way of seeing, hearing, and feeling and subsequently become integrated into newly developing performance strategies. It is through these new performance strategies that the visual as well as the auditory and kinesthetic hold their

newfound position of dominance. The thesis will examine the different theatrical forms which have manifested as a result of the influence of visual media.

SUBJECT FOCUS: *WOYZECK*

In order to better understand how the newly arising performance strategies are influenced by the characteristics of visual media (iconicity, framing, and shifting dimensionality), I will examine four contemporary productions of Georg Büchner's *Woyzeck*: Thomas Ostermeier's *Woyzeck* (2005), Vesturport's *Woyzeck* (2005), Robert Wilson's *Woyzeck* (2000), and Josef Nadj's *Woyzeck ou l'Ébauche du Vertige* (1994).

Büchner's *Woyzeck* is the story of a lower-class soldier for whom life is endless toil. To make extra money for his family, he participates in the Doctor's medical experiments, which involve subsisting on a diet of only peas and being subjected to constant prodding. Woyzeck discovers part way through the play that his common-law wife, Marie, (he is too poor to pay for a marriage license) has been cheating on him with the Drum Major. The play climaxes with Woyzeck killing Marie while in a state of madness. The play focuses on the alienation experienced by the central character, a result of the societal tendency to separate the human body from human subjectivity. The Captain and the Doctor represent society. The Captain demands from Woyzeck the separation of body from morality and the Doctor demands the separation of human will from the materiality of the body.

Woyzeck was chosen as the case study for a number of reasons. First, it is important that the example be a work from the literary canon rather than a contemporary piece to illustrate that the influence of visual media is happening primarily at the level of newly developing performance strategies, rather than at the level of the dramatic text. While a play may have been written in a different era which operated within its own optic regime, contemporary concretizations of canonical texts produce the sensorial characteristics of our

own era. Second, *Woyzeck* can be understood as one of the earliest predecessors of postdramatic theatre (which may partly explain its popularity today). The play contains characteristics which are similar to those held by postdramatic practice: non-Aristotelian form, fragmentation of character and dramatic structure, the use of juxtaposition as a structural device, an emphasis on the variation of themes rather than on a linear mode of story-telling, and a questioning of the effectiveness of language. Third, in addition to containing proto-characteristics of postdramatic theatre, *Woyzeck* lends itself to visual theatre since there is a great deal of visuality embedded within the text: images and symbols are significant in the creation of the play's narrative. Finally, on an intuitive level, *Woyzeck* is an interesting case study because of the sheer number of contemporary productions of the play which have been mounted over the last fifteen years, an indication that the play somehow speaks to contemporary sensibilities.

In the last twenty years, *Woyzeck* has seemingly become a "must do play" for theatre artists. In addition to the four performances of *Woyzeck* which I will examine, there have been dozens of significant and diverse contemporary productions. For example, the South African group Handspring Puppet Company created an adaptation of Büchner's *Woyzeck* in 1992, in collaboration with renowned South African artist and film director William Kentridge. Entitled *Woyzeck on the Highveld*, the production is a multimedia creation which combines rod-manipulated puppets and animated film. The adaptation, which places the action in 1956 Johannesburg and re-envisioned *Woyzeck* as a migrant worker, was revived in 2011 for a tour of the United Kingdom. In 1995, *Woyzeck* was adapted into a ballet entitled *Woyzeck-Fragment*, choreographed by David Bombana. In 2000, the Sadari Movement Laboratory from Korea travelled internationally with a production of *Woyzeck* which was a movement-based study of Büchner's play, using only chairs cleverly placed to evoke the

play's various settings. Off-Broadway group LAByrinth Theater Company mounted an adaptation of *Woyzeck* in 2004, entitled *Guinea Pig Solo*. The adaptation moved the action of *Woyzeck* to post 9/11 New York City, positioning *Woyzeck* as an Iraq War veteran. In 2011, a musical adaptation, entitled *Woyzeck and The Tiger Lilies*, interspersed Büchner's story with songs by the British rock band The Tiger Lilies, whose musical style has been described as "Brechtian street opera," "gypsy cabaret," and "macabre vaudeville." More locally, *Woyzeck* has also been produced by Quebec's Denis Marleau as well as by Brigitte Haentjens. This is only a small selection of contemporary productions of *Woyzeck*, listed to illustrate the variety of interests which are expressed on stage through the exploration of Büchner's subject matter.

My criteria for selecting the four productions of *Woyzeck* were twofold. Performing preliminary research and analysis of numerous productions of *Woyzeck*, I looked not simply for productions in which the visual aspects of performance were predominant, but for productions which featured an identifiable directorial and visual style which would add to the formation of a preliminary typology of the disparate theatrical forms which make up the theatre of visibility today. While a number of the productions which I researched were highly visual, not all of them featured an identifiable visual style. The four *Woyzecks* were ultimately selected because they each contain a distinct "scopic regime". A term coined by Martin Jay, scopic regimes are modes of visual organization. Hyperrealism (Ostermeier), synesthetic visibility (Vesturport), and superficiality (Wilson) are each a scopic regime, while visual narration (Nadj) is more accurately a visual mode of narrative organization. The characteristic visibility of each production arises from the vision of the director and is a central feature of the performance text.

Georg Büchner died on 19 February 1837, only a handful of days prior to his intended submission of a completed script of *Woyzeck*.¹ Instead of a definitive authorial version of the text, we have been left with four incomplete manuscripts. In the introduction to his 2004 English translation of *Woyzeck*, Dan Farrelly explains:

None of the four manuscripts contained a full sequence of scenes. Some scenes from the first manuscript were revised in the second, and some appeared, repeated or revised, in the fourth manuscript. The third manuscript contained two scenes which were not taken up into the later, fourth manuscript. (xii)

Also, Farrelly notes that the fourth manuscript has no ending. The play's episodic structure gives it a fragmentary quality: the incompleteness of all four manuscripts has added significantly to the play's fragmentation, as the proper ordering of the scenes can never be known. Because much of the play has been structured by editors after Büchner's death several different orderings of the episodes exist, complicating attempts to fit the play within the tradition of linear story-telling.

Büchner's works were first published by his brother Ludwig in 1850. In *Georg Büchner and the Birth of the Modern Drama*, David G. Richards explains that "since Ludwig had a great difficulty in reading his brother's handwriting, and since he was unable to recognize any connection between the individual scenes in what he evidently considered to be only dramatic sketches, he included none of *Woyzeck* in his edition" (150). Three decades elapsed before *Woyzeck* was published for the first time, by Karl Emil Franzos in 1879.

Discussing this publication, Richards writes:

¹ Just over a week before his death, Büchner had written a letter to Wilhemine Jaegle discussing the upcoming release of three new plays, including *Woyzeck* (Farrelly xi).

While claiming to give an accurate reading and reproduction of Büchner's manuscripts, Franzos in fact took considerable liberty in supplementing the text with his own additions and in altering the sequence and construction of scenes. His edition also contains numerous misreadings, including the one that has been perpetuated in the title of Alban Berg's opera *Wozzeck*. (150)

In spite of Franzos' attempts to modernize the conventions of the play in his translation, *Woyzeck* remained at the time too confounding for popular audiences. In 1920, *Woyzeck* received its second publication, edited by Georg Witkowski. Unlike Franzos, Witkowski successfully separated Büchner's final manuscript from the three preceding manuscripts which more resembled "sketches" (Richards 151). However, Witkowski "did not attempt to discover any order or sequence" of the various scenes (151). In 1922, another edition of *Woyzeck* was published, this time by Fritz Bergemann. Bergemann went further than Witkowski, "determining the sequence of manuscripts and of scenes within the manuscripts [...] He not only altered the sequence of scenes, but also changed the content of individual scenes, contaminating them by the addition of material from earlier compositional stages" (Richards 152). Until 1967, Bergemann's edition was the basis for most subsequent publications. However, Werner Lehmann's 1967 edition, which rethinks the order of the various scenes, is now believed to be the closest thing to an "authorial" sequence of the episodes. In spite of Lehmann's stronger claim to authority, Bergemann's version remains to this day the scene construction most commonly used in performance.

Examining how the three most prominent editions of *Woyzeck* vary in their construction of the text highlights the vast disparity between editions, and aids in understanding the appeal of *Woyzeck* to contemporary/postdramatic interpretation. Both Franzos and Bergemann begin with the shaving scene between Woyzeck and the Captain,

while in Lehmann's edition this is the fifth scene. Lehmann instead begins with the scene in the field between Woyzeck and Andres, which Bergmann places as the second scene and Franzos as the sixth scene. Portions of the scene orderings are similar between Lehmann's and Bergemann's editions; compared to those two, the ordering in Franzos' edition is completely scattered. The greatest difference between Lehmann's edition and Bergemann's is that Bergemann ends the play with Woyzeck in the pond, implying that Woyzeck is about to commit suicide. Lehmann places three scenes after the pond scene, removing this impression. *Woyzeck's* publication history stresses the unstable nature of the text. Ultimately there can be no single canonical or authoritative edition of *Woyzeck*. Since it is impossible to isolate a single authoritative edition, *Woyzeck* will here be considered as consisting of all the edited constructions of the episodes which have been put forward throughout its publication history. As such, my analysis will not stem from one single edition (thereby giving that edition a false sense of authority), but rather will focus on the various orderings of the scenes utilized in each of the four productions.

Curiously, contemporary drama and performance texts of *Woyzeck* echo many elements of the dramatic construction of the original play. While these characteristics of *Woyzeck* are not postdramatic in and of themselves, they become so in the contemporary productions, as these aspects of the text are picked up and expanded on. For example, *Woyzeck's* episodic plot is held together as much by the close focus on its central character as by the repetition of various motifs such as the recurrence of the word "blood" (or the colour red), persistent talk about "the stench" (or various other manifestations of foul odor), and varying discussions of "nature," human and otherwise (Lob 133). The repetition of motifs in *Woyzeck* speaks to what Hans-Thies Lehmann calls the postdramatic "aesthetic of repetition". In postdramatic theatre, repetition takes on a different function than in modern

theatre: “Formerly employed for structuring and constructing a form, [repetition] is now used for the de-structuring and deconstructing of story, meaning and totality of form” (Lehmann 156).

As well as through the repetition of motifs, meaning is assigned in *Woyzeck* through the juxtaposition of the episodes; the potential variations of the episodic structure leave this meaning slightly unstable. This use of juxtaposition turns the spectator into a co-producer who ascribes meaning to the play by assessing the juxtaposition, a process similar to the co-construction commonly resulting from the postdramatic practice of visual dramaturgy.

Lehmann, describing the role of the spectator in the practice of visual dramaturgy, writes,

Under the banner of visual dramaturgy, the perception of theatre no longer simply prepares for a ‘bombardment’ of the sensory apparatus with moving images but, just as in front of a painting, activates the dynamic capacity of the gaze to produce processes, combinations and rhythms on the basis of the data provided by the stage. As the visual semiotics seems to want to stop theatre time and to transform the temporal events into images for contemplation, the spectators’ gaze is invited to ‘dynamize’ the durational stasis offered to them through their own vision [...] In this way, postdramatic theatre effects a displacement of theatrical perception [...] turning from abandoning oneself to the flow of a narration towards a constructing and constructive co-producing of the total audio-visual complex of the theatre. (157)

In addition to the co-construction enacted by the spectator as a result of the play’s episodic structure, the unfinished, fragmented nature of Buchner’s *Woyzeck* heightens the co-constructing role of the director who necessarily has to choose from the numerous possible combinations of the disparate episodes in order to give the unfinished play a narrative flow.

A questioning of the effectiveness of language is central to the construction of *Woyzeck*, whose title character is largely inarticulate. Discussing *Woyzeck*, William C. Reeve comments that “[o]ften the text loses the very character of speech to become interjections of pain and despair ... the protagonist’s psychological state is not the result of the content matter of his speech but rather the consequence of the fragmentary, confused method of presentation” (135). This deterioration of speech takes on a central role in postdramatic theatre. Lehmann explains that in postdramatic practice there emerge “attempts towards restitution of ... a space and speech/discourse without telos, hierarchy and causality, without fixable meaning and unity ... In such a signifying process across all positings (Setzungen) of the logos, it is not the destruction of the latter that is happening but its poetic –and here theatrical –deconstruction” (146). *Woyzeck*’s own inability at times to verbalize his thoughts and feelings speaks to the postdramatic distrust of verbal semiotics; postdramatic theatre often strives to reveal areas of experience which cannot be adequately verbalized.

CHALLENGES OF WORKING FROM VIDEO RECORDINGS

Working from a video recording of a performance rather than from the memory of the live experience is not ideal. Most video recordings of performances, including the ones used for this thesis, contain a certain amount of editing, which results in a mediation of the reception of the performance. The four versions of *Woyzeck* examined are, however, no longer in production. While it is not ideal that I am unable to work from a live experience of the productions, video recordings serve as a necessary replacement. Working from video recordings restricts my ability to comment on questions of spectator experience. However, focusing on the strategies of spatial construction and creation of visuality in contemporary theatre, I was able to effectively examine the performance strategies employed in each production, as all four recordings contain a sufficient number of scenes which are shot in

panorama, allowing me a full view of the spatial constructions of each production.

Furthermore, working from video recordings allows for the ability to freeze the action and examine closely the various performance strategies at work onstage.

While working from video recordings is problematic in that the use of editing causes the recorded productions to become mediations of the original live events, Auslander warns against differentiating too strongly between mediated (recordings) and unmediated (live performance). In his book *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, Auslander discusses the debates which surround video editing and its relationship to the “wandering eye” of the spectator:

The multiple-camera set-up enables the television image to recreate the perceptual continuity of the theatre. Switching from camera to camera allows the television director to replicate the effect of the theatre spectator’s wandering eye: ‘the eye, while observing a stage set... makes its own changes to various parts of the scene to maintain interest, whereas in television the camera must take the eye to various points of interest in the scene. (Auslander 19)

Auslander focuses specifically on the relationship between live theatre and the video editing of television, yet the argument works as well for live theatre and edited recordings of theatre.

The problem with this replication of the movements of the spectator’s eye is that it takes away from the video-spectator’s ability to focus for themselves on given aspects of the performance; “[the] camera does not permit them to choose their own perspectives” (Auslander 19). However, Mary Hunter counters this with her argument that “the spectator’s gaze is always directed in the theatre by means of focal points in the staging that are equivalent to camera views” (qtd. in Auslander 19). Ultimately, theatre is ephemeral and as

such it is often necessary, while not ideal, to use video recordings as material artifacts from which to work.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Visual media has a powerful influence on the way in which contemporary theatre is created and performed. The rise of the sensory aspects of theatre is only one example of the effects visual media has had on theatrical performance; however, it is an important change. The influence of visual media has also manifested itself in a variety of dramaturgical forms. In order to better understand how visual media influences contemporary performance strategies, I will turn to cognitive science. The wider implications of an exploration of cognition in performance are still unravelling. One important aspect of a cognitive approach is that emphasis is placed on both the creative process and audience reception as embodied actions. Bruce McConachie and F. Elizabeth Hart, in *Performance and Cognition: Theatre Studies and the Cognitive Turn*, explain that a breakdown of the mind/body dichotomy is fundamental to cognitive science, which replaces Cartesian dualism with a monistic approach.

Cognitive science proposes that “the mind is inherently embodied” (Lakoff and Johnson 3), and that all conceptual thought is therefore the product of bodily experience. Image schemas, the fundamental structures which create conceptual thought, are understood to arise from embodied experiences of “space, time, material, and action” (Nellhaus 76). Since all conceptual thought is embodied, in the sense that it is derived from bodily experience of the world, the creative process is similarly embodied and dependent upon experience of the cultural environment. The characteristics of visual media (iconicity, framing, and shifting dimensionality) find their way into performance strategies precisely because they have been embodied and absorbed into the artists’ way of seeing, hearing, and

feeling. As contemporary theatre becomes more and more entangled in heavy theoretical thinking, as can be seen in much of postmodern theatre, a cognitive approach to theatre serves as a way of maintaining the presence of the body in the creation (and reception) of theatre.

The inherent embodiment of conceptual thought also means that a change in our embodied experience of the world will produce a change in our cognition. It follows from this concept of embodied realism (a branch of cognitive science) that extensive cultural exposure to visual media has affected cognition, both in terms of sensory-perception and conceptual thought structures. I propose that increased immersion in visual media has affected artists' cognition as the characteristics of visual media become embodied. As a result, the characteristics of visual media are incorporated (both consciously and unconsciously) into the performance strategies which artists create. This concept is illustrated in an interview with Elizabeth LeCompte of the Wooster Group. Interviewed by Mindy N. Levine (ML), LeCompte (EL) acknowledges that the non-linear theatre practices of the Wooster Group result in part from the influence of music video television and TV commercials:

ML: When I watch MTV, I keep wondering if it isn't changing people's habits of viewing; it's vaguely narrative, but doesn't make the same perceptual demands as more traditional forms of narrative.

EL: I think you've hit it. There's no question that my work has been influenced by MTV, and specifically before MTV by ads on TV –the cutting, editing, distancing, storytelling, the combination of live characteristics and animation in commercials, the quick pacing. Telling a sometimes disjointed story in a rapid way is definitely a great influence. (13)

An important aspect of a cognitive approach to performance analysis is that emphasis is placed on the processes of the creative production as embodied actions. The characteristics of visual media find their way into performance strategies precisely because they have been embodied and absorbed into our way of seeing, hearing, and feeling. For the purpose of this project I have isolated three characteristics of visual media whose influence I will map across the four chosen productions: iconicity, framing, and dimensionality (specifically the manipulation of the perception of 2D and 3D).

Tobin Nellhaus' article "Performance Strategies, Image Schemas, and Communication Frameworks" examines the role of cognition in the formation of performance strategies. Nellhaus employs concepts from cognitive science to examine the relationship between changes in communication practices and changes in the dominant theatrical form. He finds that changes in communication practices are causally reflected in changes in theatrical form because performance strategies are organized or ruled by a set of image schemas and primary metaphors. Image schemas are "conceptual structures" which are present in all levels of thought; they can be understood as the foundational building blocks from which conceptual thought is built. Nellhaus asserts that the embodied experiences of communication practices produce culturally dominant image schemas, which are then embedded within performance strategies. As such, when the dominant modes of communication change the culturally dominant image schemas also change, leading to a change in the dominant performance strategies and theatrical form.

Image schemas arise primarily from sensorimotor experiences (bodily experiences which arise from the interaction of movement and sensory input), and in some cases from social experiences. Image schemas are the foundational unit of abstract thought. Some common image schemas are "container," "path," "cycle," "goal," "link," "force," "part-

whole,” and “center-periphery” (Nellhaus 76). These examples show that image schemas “are not fully-fledged images or mental pictures, since they lack particularity and detail: they are abstract or recurrent patterns –tropes if you will, of space, time, material and action” (Nellhaus 76). A recurrent series of image schemas in theatrical practice is called the force-path-goal series. In theatrical terms, these schemas relate to *events* (force), *action* (path), and *objectives* (goal). Primary metaphors are made up of image schemas, or, to use Bruce McConachie’s words, primary metaphors “flesh out the skeletal possibilities of many of these foundational schemas” (2). An example of a common (albeit clichéd) primary metaphor which employs the force-path-goal series is the conception of life as a journey or as a road to be travelled.

Examining where image schemas come from, why some are more culturally dominant than others, and why shifts in the dominance of schemas occur will shed light on why the sensory aspects of theatre are of increasing importance in contemporary practices of postdramatic theatre. Central to my own argument is Nellhaus’ claim that changes in the dominant theatrical form reflect changes in communication practices. The embodied experiences of communication practices produce dominant image schemas which are then embedded within performance strategies.

CHARACTERISTICS OF VISUAL MEDIA

There are several characteristics which unite visual media. Three main characteristics which define visual media have been isolated for the purpose of examining changes in visuality in theatre: iconicity, framing, and illusions of dimensionality. Visual media are necessarily dominated by the iconic sign. In visual media, the frame is always present and functions as both a limiting agent as well as a foundational form. The dimensionality of

visual media is connected to the concept of the frame; a two-dimensional frame contains the illusion of three-dimensionality.

1. Iconicity

A type of sign, the “[i]con signifies by virtue of a similarity of qualities or resemblance to its object” (Iverson 89).² The iconic sign functions *perceptually* rather than *conceptually* as is the case with the abstract linguistic sign. While linguistic signs are arbitrary and signify only through previous knowledge of a linguistic code, iconic signs do not require a code in order to be interpreted: instead, they are directed to the senses. Eli Rozik explains that “[i]conicity’ is a crucial notion in the description of the theatre medium” (21). The definition of iconicity functioning through processes of similarity/resemblance complements the semiotic process of realist theatre in which the fictional world signifies its realism through its resemblance to the conventions of the “real world”. However, this definition of iconicity breaks down when it is applied to some types of non-realist theatre. In an attempt to account for the iconicity of non-realist forms of theatre, Rozik suggests that in addition to defining iconicity in terms of functioning through similarity/resemblance, that iconicity may also be defined “in terms of ‘imagistic thinking’” (22), claiming that “*the theatre medium is imagistic in nature*” (23). Defining iconicity in terms of imagistic thinking becomes problematic, however, when one accounts for the iconicity in the semiosis of sound. For example, sound effects which function through their similarity to sounds from “reality” (such as the sound of hoof beats –which may be recordings of actual hoof beats or may be simulations) may be understood as iconic signs since they function through processes of similarity; however, they are not necessarily instances of “imagistic thinking”.

² While the definition of iconicity has commonly produced an association with the visual, the iconic sign is not restricted to the visual as sounds can also be iconic signs which function through similarity or resemblance.

While both theatre and visual media (photography, film, video, television) function primarily through iconic sign systems, they do not share the same degree of iconicity. The filmic (and televisual) iconic sign is the sign as pure icon: the icon as *direct sign*. In *Semiotics and the Analysis of Film*, Jean Mitry explains that “[a]ccording to the linguistic definition, the direct sign (natural sign, or gestalt-sign) is a homologous figure, a kind of duplicate where the signifier is coextensive with the signified” (30). This relates to the notion of transparency. Roger Munier discussing the work of film critic André Bazin, explains that in photography (and later in film):

for the first time, between the originating object and its reproduction there intervenes only the instrumentality of a nonliving agent, for the first time an image of the world is formed automatically, without creative intervention of man, according to a strict determinism [...]. Photography enjoys a certain advantage in virtue of this transference of reality from the thing to its reproduction. (qtd. in Mitry 33)

Here, the similarity/resemblance between icon (filmic/photographic image) and object (the world/reality) becomes complete, with the two nearly risking conflation. Where Munier falters in the above statement is in the notion that photographic images are formed without the “creative intervention of man”. The act of framing a photographic image is an act of creation. However, photographic, filmic, and televisual images are direct signs precisely because they actively hide their nature as a sign. There is an interpretive difference between the theatre icon versus the filmic icon. Theatrical realism is signification, in that it represents reality without reproducing it in its entirety. By re-presenting reality, that is to say by displaying it whole and in detail, film resists signification. The image of the world produced by the theatre is constricted by its status as a sign, while photography and film, understood as

direct reproductions of an image from reality, hide their status as signs. The filmic sign is a direct sign because the distance between the sign and its signifier is, or appears, removed.

In addition to the difference in the degree of iconicity between the photographic/filmic iconic sign and the iconic sign in theatre, there is a more basic difference in the use of the icon (image) in the narrative process. Photography, film, and television all rely heavily on the image in the narrative process. This is most clear in the case of photography which rarely, if ever, uses language as a means of narration. In photography, the image is the exclusive or central means of expression. While both film and television incorporate verbal language into the narrative process, they retain the process of visual-narration inherited from the photographic medium. Similarly, theatre is a mixed medium, using both verbal language and images for narration. Although verbal language (dialogue) has historically been the predominant means of narration in Western theatre, I argue that this trend of the predominance of verbal language has been fading largely as a result of the cultural dominance of visual media.

2. Framing

Framing practices have long been central to the creation of theatre. The framing of performance as a theatrical event is what separates theatre from daily experiences. In addition to the conceptual frames which allow for the delineation of art from life, there are also the physical frames which contain the theatrical event: “In the physical space of a conventional theatre in the West, the proscenium arch of the stage frames, limits, and systematizes our experience of the action before us and around us” (Bell 36). Architecture frames and delimits the various spaces of the theatre, distinguishing the stage space from the audience space and backstage space. In my discussion of frames as limiting and containing

devices, I will look for the ways in which frames are used to contain, instances in which frames are broken, and instances in which various frames overlap.

Like theatre, visual media such as photography, film, video, and television also necessitate framing. There are both literal frames (the edges of a photograph) as well as more abstract frames (such as class divisions which may organize and frame the social relationships captured within the photograph). In our daily experiences we encounter numerous types of frames: architectural frames, metaphorical frames, social frames, conceptual frames, compositional and aesthetic frames. In *The Virtual Window*, Anne Friedberg charts the history of the frame in artistic practice through an examination of the use of the “window” metaphor, taking Leon Battista Alberti’s 1435 treatise on painting and perspective as her starting point. In this treatise, Alberti famously instructed the painter to “‘regard’ the rectangular frame of the painting as an open window (*aperta finestra*)” (Friedberg 1). Friedberg warns that as we continue to spend increasing amounts of time looking into frames (film, television, computers, cell phones, tablets, etc.) “how the world is framed may be as important as what is contained within that frame” (1). The window metaphor can function in a number of ways. There is the window frame as a depth model (this is largely Alberti’s use of the metaphor). Also, the frame can serve as a liminal site, the division between the immobile spectator and the moving image (in both cinema and television). The window metaphor loses its connection to depth and perspective when it is applied to abstract art or to the computer screen: instead the window becomes a surface.

As with architectural framing in theatre, the window metaphor in visual arts is central to a conception of the frame as a limiting and containing agent, whether this frame is a material one or a conceptual one allowing for the positioning of found objects as art (e.g.,

Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*). In photography, film, video, and television, the material frame of the screen/image determines what is seen and what is not seen.

Each visual medium has a specific relationship with its frame(s). In photography, the frame is the result of the cut (or the crop). Both 'cut' and 'crop' point to the limiting nature of the photograph, as a partial selection of a larger pre-existing whole. In early explorations of photography, many artists turned to the cut as the answer to the question "what is a photograph?" precisely because "the photograph is something necessarily cut away from a larger whole" (Foster et al. 147). While film/video and photography share a number of characteristics, there is a notable difference between the *cut* in photography and the *shot* in film and video. The role of the cut in photography produces a greater level of isolation; it produces one still image which has been cut out of reality and has become dislocated. The result of the cut is:

Photography's absolute and essential transposition of reality; essential not because the photographic image is unlike reality in being flat, or black and white, or small, but because as a set of marks on paper traced by light, it is shown to have no more 'natural' an orientation to axial directions of the real world than do those marks in a book we know as writing. (Foster et al. 147)

The transposed or cut away piece of reality which is captured by the photograph loses (whether wholly or only partially) its connection to reality and becomes instead the photographic subject. The photographic subject comes into existence through the act of being framed.

In film, the subject is similarly transposed from reality by the framing produced by the limiting edges of the screen; however, film does not appear as dislocated from reality as photography because of its continual succession of serial images. In both photography and

film/video, the frame functions as an orienting device which determines point of view and perspective. The frame contains formal clues about how the image is meant to be defined. Framing, in film, can have a great impact on the image in four essential ways: “by means of (1) the size and shape of the frame; (2) the way the frame defines onscreen and offscreen space; (3) the way framing imposes distance, angle, and height of vantage point onto the image; and (4) the way framing can move in relation to the mise-en-scene” (Bordwell and Thompson 186).

The framing of television is very similar to that of film or video. Like film/video, the television frame functions to select and limit the images seen, transposing the images from reality while simultaneously maintaining the illusion of reality through the stream of moving images (rather than the single still image). However, one of the greatest differences in the framing of television is the relationship between the spectator and the frame. In the cinema, the spectator is necessarily immobile in front of a stationary screen that contains moving images that provide the illusion of mobility. In theory, the same is true of the relationship between the television and the spectator, except in practice the television spectator is not immobile; the domesticity of the medium allows the spectator the social freedom to get up, walk around, and come in and out of the room throughout the viewing session, while in the cinema social protocol dictates that the spectators interfere as little as possible with the viewing session of the other spectators around them by remaining stationary at all times. The difference between these two relationships concerning media-frame and spectator is a difference in social framing.

In addition to physical and conceptual frames, social frames are essential to the creation of art across all media, whether it is the theatre or a new medium such as television. Social framing practices are examined by Erving Goffman in *Frame Analysis*; here, framing

is examined as a common social practice used as a means of organizing experience. In visual media, social framing often functions as the content contained within the frame of the screen or photo. Goffman argues that all social experience can be divided into two primary frameworks: natural and social. Natural frameworks are those which do not require an agent to intervene. As well as requiring a live agency which enacts “guided doings”, social frameworks involve rules. In order to analyze a given framework, one must discover its “key”. The key is “the set of conventions by which a given activity, one already meaningful in terms of some primary framework, is transformed into something patterned on this activity but seen by the participants to be something quite else. The process of transcription can be called keying” (43-44). Goffman provides five basic types of keys: make-believe, contests, ceremonials, technical redosings, and regroundings (48). As this discussion demonstrates, frames exist in a number of forms. My intention is to reveal the multiplicity of frames at work within the performance text and to examine the relation of these frames to the performance strategies and the processes of reception.

3. Dimensionality

Theatre is a three-dimensional art form insomuch as the actor’s body is three-dimensional. The claim that theatre is a fundamentally three-dimensional medium may appear to be a self-evident statement; however, when one considers this statement in terms of theatre staging it becomes complicated. Up until the late nineteenth century, when scenery was present in theatre performance it generally consisted of two-dimensional scenic paintings. Even in the case of forced perspective scenery, the scenery remained materially two-dimensional, producing only an illusion of three-dimensionality. Since the primary focus here is the performance strategies of spatial construction, the two-dimensional history of theatre scenography cannot be overlooked. However, in the late nineteenth and early

twentieth centuries theatre artists such as Adolph Appia and Edward Gordon Craig challenged the accepted spatiality of theatre, fighting for “plastic” (or three-dimensional) scenery in the theatre: “Appia and Craig called for a theatricality characterized by simplicity, suggestion, abstraction, and grandeur within the context of a three dimensional sculptural setting that would unify the performer and the stage space” (Aronson 15). Following Appia’s theories of theatrical space, Lee Simonson explains: “One began to set a stage not in mid-air on hanging backdrops, but on the stage floor where the actor moved and worked ... the stage floor was to be a completely fused, plastic unit” (32). It is largely due to these late-nineteenth/early-twentieth century innovations in scenography that theatre is now commonly accepted as a three-dimensional medium.

Unlike theatre, visual media such as photography, film, video, and television are two-dimensional media which merely produce the impression of three-dimensionality. Photography, film, video, and television conduct “a transformation from three-dimensional materiality to two-dimensional virtuality” (Friedberg 151). In other words, three-dimensionality is captured and rendered on a two-dimensional medium. Paul Virilio, in *Lost Dimension*, argues that as three-dimensional space is “translated” to a two-dimensional screen, we are brought to the “zero degree of architecture” (100). Virilio’s “zero degree of architecture” refers to the loss of materiality, the movement towards the purely virtual. Virilio argues that the transfer of material architectural space to the immaterial screen results in confusion during the process of receiving the images and perceiving their loss of dimensionality.

The negotiation between the perception of three-dimensionality and the two-dimensionality of both the photograph and the screen is a constant struggle present in the reception of these media (photography, film, and television). The ontological importance of

this negotiation between two-dimensionality and three-dimensionality has influenced the depth models implemented in the performance strategies of contemporary theatre. Today's theatre artist explores the perceptual confusion which Virilio argues is produced by the immateriality of the filmic/televisual image. In my examination of the four productions of *Woyzeck*, I will look at the ways in which performance strategies manipulate various depth models.

METHODOLOGY

In my analysis of the four productions, my focus will be limited to the performance strategies used in the construction of space. The analysis will trace the influence of visual media on the performance strategies of spatial construction utilized in each production, examining specifically how these performance strategies embody three characteristics of visual media: iconicity, framing, and shifting dimensionality. For the purposes of this thesis, the construction of theatre space has been divided into four categories which allow both audio and kinesthetic aspects of performance to be considered while still focusing primarily on the visual aspects of these modes of construction. The four categories are: the material construction of space, space as created by the movement of bodies, space created by light, and space created by sound.

1. Space as Material Construct

Space as material construct is space which is organized by an object-oriented conception of space. It is space which is “conceived as an empty space to be filled as one fills a container or an environment that has to be controlled, filled, and made expressive” (Pavis 150). Put simply, materially constructed space is created by the arrangement of inanimate objects; the space delineated by the set and props. The material space includes both the *theatrical site* (the architecture of the performance space: e.g., thrust stage,

proscenium arch, alley seating on two sides, black box with adjustable seating), and the *stage space* (this is the space of the theatrical action: the set, the props, the qualities of the floor and any stage walls that may be used).

2. Space as Created by the Movement of Bodies

Space as constructed by the movement of bodies, or embodied space, is described by Pavis as space which “is conceived as invisible, unlimited, and linked to its users, determined by their coordinates, movements, and trajectory: Space as a substance not to be filled, but expanded and extended” (150). It is “the space created by the presence, stage position, and movements of the performers: a space “projected” and outlined by actors, induced through their corporeality, an evolving space that can be expanded and reproduced” (Pavis 152). Understood more simply, the space which is created by the actors’ bodies can be conceived of as performance spaces which exist within the material space of the stage.

In *Analyzing Performance: Theatre, Dance, and Film*, Pavis provides five means by which space is created by the movement of bodies. The first is the *ground* or *trail* possessed by the actor’s presence. It is the ground covered by the actor(s); the “trail” left behind them in space like the wake of a boat. The ground/trail is the space which has been marked or “taken possession of” by the actor(s) travelling through it. The “trail disappears,” Pavis explains, “when spectators shift their attention to some other element on stage” (152). Second, there is the *kinesthetic space*, or space as expressed through movement and bodily sensation. Kinesthetic space arises from “the kinesthetic experience of actors” (Pavis 152). This kinesthetic information – “the actors’ movement, body schema, gravitational axis, and tempo-rhythm” (Pavis 152)– produces an understanding of space as the actors’ kinesthetic experience is apperceived by the spectators. Third, the *underscore* is the sequence of reference points which help actors orient themselves and their movements in time. The

underscore gives the audience access to the actor's trajectory (it provides the audience with a kind of "itinerary" of the actors' movements). Fourth, in addition to the sensorial types of embodied space, embodied space may also be understood culturally through *proxemics*: "a well-established discipline that analyses the cultural coding of spatial relations between individuals" (Pavis 153). Finally, there is also the actors' *centrifugal space* (Pavis 153). This is the space which "extends out from their bodies to the world outside. The body is extended through the dynamics of movement" (Pavis 153). Related to centrifugal space is centripetal space, or "framed space waiting to be filled [...] it goes from the frame to the individual, and focuses all movement in an area on stage" (Pavis 153).

3. Space as Created by Lighting

Visual perception is dependent on lighting. Lighting affects not only our ability to see material but also the ways in which we see it. Most importantly for theatre, lighting always functions to create space³. For example, a spotlight defines the area covered by light as a space of its own. Most often the space created by a spotlight is a performance space, but this need not always be the case. A spotlight may also function to highlight the fact that the material space of the stage contains more than one materially constructed space within the larger material space of the stage.

Objects can be made to appear or disappear through the use of lighting; similarly, lighting can be used to produce illusions. Lighting allows us to perceive textures, like folds in costumes falling into shadow or the way light sheens on satin. Facial expressions can be heightened or masked by lighting; characters can be made to look sinister simply by casting dark shadows on their faces.

³ While lighting always creates space, the creation of space may not always be the intended primary function of a given light.

Lighting also produces colour, and colour evokes numerous sensations. Typically in Western lighting practice warm colours produce pleasant or happy sensations, cool colours sadness, and mid-tones calm or neutral reactions. The intensity of the colour (i.e., whether it is pastel or vibrant) also produces different levels of sensory responses.

Lighting serves both practical and symbolic functions. Firstly, light onstage represents sources of illumination in the physical world (sunlight, electric or other artificial lighting, etc.). Lighting can denote the season and the time of day. Lighting is largely responsible for the creation of atmosphere and mood. Light can also take on more conceptual codes as there are many symbolic interpretations of light and dark, for example the tendency to associate light with good and dark with evil.

4. Space as Created by Sound

Sound creates space in three ways. First, sound creates space through echo and reverberation, allowing the spectators to maintain a sense of the size and depth of the physical space independent of their vision. Second, sound creates space as a soundscape; the space thus created is often referred to as “atmospheric” —that is to say, it is more subjective and experiential than it is tangible or measurable. Third, sound can produce space rhetorically; this includes metaphoric, metonymic, and symbolic space.

Space as created by sound includes the space created by music. Pavis provides a list of some of the functions of music in Western mise-en-scene: the creation/ illustration/ characterization of an atmosphere through the introduction of a musical theme (this atmosphere can become an acoustic setting, locating the action); music as sound effect, meant to make a given situation recognizable; music as punctuation for the mise-en-scene; music as a counterpoint to the action; the production of a sequence of atmospheres or

surroundings through music (a technique borrowed from cinema); and, the “production of action through musical means” (143).

Speech is another means by which space may be created by sound. Vocal intensity, timbre, and tone can all deliver significant information. Discussing voice, Pavis explains the functions of vocal intensity, timbre, and tone: the expression of emotion is related to vocal intensity; timbre can denote the quality of the voice (e.g. husky, hollow, deep, or soft); and tone of voice relates to its pitch (high pitched, low pitched) (134). Above and beyond these objective aspects of speech, it is the qualities of delivery, Pavis explains, which are most important in theatrical practice: “continuity/discontinuity of verbal flow; caesuras and pauses: length, place, function; the speed of elocution in relation to the cultural and individual norm of the listener; accentuation, contouring, and effacement of the voice” (134). Pavis warns that the interpretations of these aspects of voice are not always obvious, as voice is individual and subjective.

While distinct, the four modes of spatial construction combine into a whole: the total space of the production. Vectorization will be used to investigate how performance strategies are built across the four modes of spatial construction. Vectorization is a method of semiotic performance analysis which arose as a response to the critiques of classical semiological analysis. Vectorization, Pavis explains, is a “methodological, mnemotechnical, and dramaturgical means of linking networks of signs” (17). In this way we can conceive of each mode of spatial construction as a network of signs, and vectorization is the tool which allows for links to be made between these four networks. Each mode of spatial construction is a vector; each vector in turn can be conceived of as containing secondary vectors. For example, space as created by the movement of bodies contains within it dance and gesture;

space as material construct contains the architecture of the theatre, the set, and the props; space as created by sound includes sound effects, music, verbal language, and the sounds which are produced by the actors and their environment; lighting, however, is typically conceived of as a single vector. Pavis proposes that there are “totalizing vectors that structure a mise-en-scène as a whole to which all individual signifiers that spectators will be able to recognize will be subordinated [... and these totalizing vectors] constitute the principal vectorization, the frame within which everything is legible” (229). In logocentric theatre, the totalizing vector was typically the dramatic text, in postdramatic theatre the totalizing vector may be any aspect of the performance (i.e. dance, scenography, music, etc.)

Examining the vectors which connect the four modes of spatial construction will help to highlight the ways in which the four modes create distinct spaces as well as the ways in which they combine to form a whole. Explaining the holistic character of vectorization, Pavis writes,

Instead of dismantling perception into its component parts, classifying sensation, multiplying meanings, and thus arbitrarily segmenting the signifier so as to translate it into possible signifieds, here signifiers are conceived as anticipating possible signifieds; and the notion of individualized signs is reworked to establish series of signs grouped according to a process one might call *vectorization*. (17)

Looking at the vectors active in the construction of space within each production, I will examine the presence of iconicity, framing, and shifting dimensionality within the various performance strategies of spatial construction.

STRUCTURE

The thesis contains four chapters and a conclusion. Each chapter focuses on one of the four chosen productions of *Woyzeck* and follows a similar layout, examining a specific

type of visual theatre with particular focus on a certain visual medium, such as photography, film, or music videos. The chapters each begin with an introduction of the specific artist and his production. This is followed by a discussion of how the given production negotiates between textuality and visuality. Following this, I outline the theoretical framework for the chapter and discuss the specific visual medium which has influenced the performance strategies apparent in the production. Finally, each chapter considers the presence of iconicity, framing, and shifting dimensionality within the performance strategies of spatial construction as practiced in each particular production.

The progression of the chapters explores the relationships between textuality and visuality which are manifest in various modes of visual theatre. In the first chapter, Ostermeier's *Woyzeck* presents an example in which the embracing of the sensory aspects of performance does not coincide with a rejection of the text. In the following chapter, rejecting the traditional hierarchization of the dramatic text as the dominant aspect of performance, Vesturport's *Woyzeck* instead positions the dramatic text as one equal aspect of the performance text. Looking at Robert Wilson's *Woyzeck*, the third chapter examines an instance of the dramatic text being deconstructed and hollowed out of meaning, placed in subordinate opposition to the sensory aspects of performance. Finally, the last chapter, on Nadj's *Woyzeck ou l'Ébauche du Vertige*, provides an example of visual theatre which firmly rejects the authority of the dramatic text by abandoning verbal language.

The first chapter, "Hyperreality: The Influence of TV Soap Operas and the Televisual Iconic Sign in Ostermeier's *Woyzeck*," traces the hyperrealism of Ostermeier's performance strategies in his production of *Woyzeck* to the influence of the televisual iconic sign and TV soap operas. The visuality of both the televisual iconic sign and the TV soap opera operate within a hyperreal framework. The chapter will treat hyperrealism both as a particular

theatrical style of expression (aesthetic hyperrealism) and, more broadly, as a cultural theory (cultural hyperrealism); tracing the aesthetic hyperrealism of Ostermeier's mise-en-scene to the influence of the televisual iconic sign, and the cultural hyperrealism of the social space of Ostermeier's *Woyzeck* to the influence of TV soap operas.

The second chapter, "Synesthesia: Cross-sensation and the Influence of Music Videos in Vesturport's *Woyzeck*," focuses on the synesthetic relationship between image and sound. A discussion of the synesthetic nature of music videos sheds light on how the structure of the music video has influenced the dramaturgical layout of Vesturport's *Woyzeck*. Examining how the synesthetic relationship between image and sound is manifested in the performance strategies of spatial construction, I look specifically at how these performative strategies mimic or are marked by the characteristics of visual media (iconicity, framing, and dimensionality).

The third chapter presents a discussion of the postmodern move towards spatial models of depthlessness, and is entitled "Superficiality: The Influence of Postmodern Cinema on the Landscapes of Robert Wilson's *Woyzeck*". Here I will examine how the performance strategies of spatial construction in Wilson's *Woyzeck* produce a sense of two-dimensionality within a three-dimensional space. I look specifically at how the influence of postmodern cinema is manifested in the performance strategies of spatial construction in Wilson's work, focussing on the iconicity of Wilson's creation of landscape images and his use of framing devices from postmodern cinema, and tracing the influence of postmodern cinema on the creation of a sense of two-dimensionality on stage.

In my final chapter, "Visual Narration: The Influence of Photography and Silent Film in Josef Nadj's *Woyzeck ou l'Ébauche du Vertige*," I will trace the influences of photography and silent film in Nadj's choreography, examining how space is created within the media of

photography and silent film. The theoretical focus of the chapter is the use of visual narrative as a replacement for dialogue and verbal narration. Visual narration is examined as both a method of creation and a type of visual theatre. I examine how performance strategies of visual narration correspond to visual media's iconicity, framing, and shifting dimensionality.

A trend can be seen in the creation of new media; new media establish themselves by borrowing techniques from older pre-established media. Early portrait photography, for example, borrowed from the compositional traits of portraiture painting; while pictorialism, a late-nineteenth century artistic movement in photography, borrowed heavily from painting, even utilizing brushstrokes in the creation of manipulated effects within the photograph. Similarly, early cinema, and later, early television borrowed heavily from the theatre. Returning to Auslander's discussion of multi-camera use in television, the argument highlights theatre's influence on early television. Auslander argues that early television strove to replicate the viewing practices established in the theatre:

The multiple-camera set-up enables the television image to recreate the perceptual continuity of the theatre. Switching from camera to camera allows the television director to replicate the effect of the theatre spectator's wandering eye: 'the eye, while observing a stage set... makes its own changes to various parts of the scene to maintain interest, whereas in television the camera must take the eye to various points of interest in the scene. (Auslander 19)

Today, we are seeing how the transfer of influence between new and old media begins to flow the other way. Photography influences practices in painting, as exemplified by hyperrealist paintings. I will argue in the following chapter that television has similarly affected the development of hyperrealist theatre, tracking the return flow of the influence of

visual media on contemporary theatre. As the beginning of a classification of the various types of visual theatre in contemporary performance, I will isolate four types of theatre practice which have been greatly influenced by visual media: hyperrealism, theatre of synesthesia, landscape, and visual storytelling. Traditionally, literature stood as the primary medium of influence on the creation of theatre, leading to the treatment of the dramatic text as the ultimate authorial object. However, modern visual media have begun to replace literature as the primary influence in the creation of contemporary theatre, resulting in a re-evaluation of the role of the dramatic text by many of today's theatre artists. The analysis of the four contemporary productions of *Woyzeck* in the following chapters will reveal that the increasing dominance of visual media has begun to result in a rejection of the dramatic text.

CHAPTER 1

Hyperrealism: The Influence of TV Soap Operas and the Televisual

Iconic Sign in Thomas Ostermeier's *Woyzeck*

Hyperrealism: The Influence of TV Soap Operas and the Televisual Iconic Sign in
Thomas Ostermeier's *Woyzeck*

The influence of new media on theatrical practice over the past fifty years has spurred a movement towards theatrical forms which are increasingly organized around the sensory elements of performance. This change is most noticeable in the *visual* approaches to theatre, and it has produced what I have labeled a *theatre of visuality*. The visuality of contemporary theatre is as diverse as the media which have prompted this turn towards the visual. The shift towards the visual is often accompanied by a movement away from the dramatic text. More extreme examples of visual theatre include productions which have entirely removed verbal language, relying instead on the story being told visually (see chapter 4), or productions in which *visual composition* and *literary dialogue* are placed in opposition to one another in a battle for dominance (see chapter 3). Before examining these more overt examples of visual theatre, I begin with the most subtle: hyperrealism. Hyperrealism is an aesthetic genre in which the realism of representation is taken to extremes, rendering its subject matter *more than real*.

Hyperrealism is the most subtle form of visual theatre because it remains largely logocentric. The dramaturgy of hyperrealist theatre is still organized primarily by the dramatic text rather than by the sensory aspects of performance. Although the shift towards the visual composition of performance typically results in a movement away from the literary text, hyperrealism is one style of theatre which embraces the visual without rejecting logocentrism. While typically hyperrealism remains connected to the dramatic text, it is nonetheless a *new* visual aesthetic –a visual aesthetic which is largely a product of the influence of television. *Woyzeck* directed by Thomas Ostermeier is a strong example of a hyperrealist performance text. I will further demonstrate that the hyperrealism of the

production arises from the influence of the televisual iconic sign as well as from the cultural influence of the TV soap opera form.

Performed for the first time in 2003 at the Schaubühne, Thomas Ostermeier's *Woyzeck* garnered international attention in 2004 when remounted at the Avignon Theatre Festival.⁴ Ostermeier contextualizes Büchner's *Woyzeck* for a modern audience, transposing the action into a contemporary urban context. The stylistic influence of TV soap operas on Ostermeier's *Woyzeck* results in a performance which is both aesthetically and socially hyperreal.

The 2004 Avignon production was staged in the Cour d'Honneur within the Palais de Papes, a space which is notoriously challenging. The Palais des Papes is a Gothic palace which was home to the Avignon Papacy during the fourteenth century. During the Avignon Theatre Festival, the Cour d'Honneur (the main courtyard of the palace) is converted into a two-thousand seat open-air theatre. The converted courtyard presents an extremely wide stage space which requires that the use of space in performance be considered. The uniqueness of the space of the Cour d'Honneur effectively rendered the 2004 Avignon production of Ostermeier's *Woyzeck* a site-specific performance. Ostermeier was forced to account for the extreme width of the space, creating a scenography which effectively forced the action into the center of the stage while still filling the entirety of the stage space.

The juxtaposition of the historical architecture of the Cour d'Honneur with the urban decay of Ostermeier's scenography creates a dialogue which was important for Ostermeier. Ostermeier speaks to the significance of this juxtaposition and of the outdoor space of the Avignon Festival in the French newspaper *Libération*, where he is quoted saying that he

⁴ The recording from which I work is of the 2004 Avignon production. Performed in German, the Avignon production also featured scrolling French subtitles built into the set.

wanted to “planter le décor de la périphérie asphyxiée des grandes villes européennes dans le poumon même du festival et de la ville d'Avignon” (Solis n.pag). Using the metaphor of the ‘life breath of a city’, Ostermeier explains in this quote that the outdoor space of the Avignon production, an embodiment of the vitality of city life which resides at the center of cities such as Avignon, allowed him to show the asphyxiation experienced at the outskirts of large European cities in the ‘lung’ of the city center.

Early in his career, Ostermeier established his interest in presenting gritty reality on stage. After graduating from the Ernst Busch Academy of Dramatic Arts in 1996, Ostermeier became the artistic director of the Baracke at the Deutsches Theater, in Berlin. In his first season as artistic director of the Baracke, Ostermeier declared that the theatre’s program for the year would feature plays which dealt “in the most unadorned way with such subjects as drugs, criminality, sex, and power, to once again reflect reality” (qtd. in Carlson 162). Ostermeier fostered his interest in the grittiness of contemporary reality through the promotion of “a new wave of contemporary, and sometimes violent realism, which could be seen in playwriting, acting, and design” (Carlson 163). Ostermeier’s interest in new realism inspired him to import works from contemporary British playwrights such Sarah Kane and Mark Ravenhill, making him amongst the first to introduce the new wave in British playwriting to German audiences.

Ostermeier developed his own conceptualization of realism which became his signature directing style: *capitalist realism*. He explains that while socialist realism⁵ presents

⁵ Socialist realism is an ideological aesthetic which arose in Russia in the late nineteenth century. Declared the official aesthetic movement of the Soviet Union in 1934, it remained the official aesthetic movement until the Soviet Union’s collapse (Gutkin). Socialist realism features the proletariat worker’s struggle to realize the ideals of socialist progress through the process of being an excellent worker. The socialist realist hero was presented as a positive figure meant to inspire the masses. Ostermeier’s capitalist realism builds off of this mythology. In the capitalist realist aesthetic the notion of the ideal man and the ideal future is lost, as everything becomes subject to deconstruction.

an “affirmation of a particular existing social organization,” capitalist realism is organized by an aesthetic of “anything goes”: “where every reading and interpretation is allowed ... where the self-determination of an essential kernel within a subjective individual no longer exists, when all can be deconstructed” (qtd. in Carlson 166). Ostermeier's capitalist realism aesthetic builds on the same principles of simulation (Baudrillard's simulacrum) and sensorial pleasure (the desire for *more*) which drive the hyperreal.

Ostermeier's capitalist realist aesthetic also shares links to the TV soap opera. Capitalist realism reflects the reality of living in the late capitalist era and imitates the late capitalist conception of reality: in this conception, reality is something which is always mediated before it is perceived. The (hyper)reality of late capitalism is an “unreality”, a form of utopia, of which the soap opera is a prime example. In 2001, Ostermeier staged a world premiere of Biljana Srblijanović's Serbian play, *Supermarket*, which was tellingly subtitled, “a Soap Opera.” Significantly, Marvin Carlson describes the production as “stylistically a new direction for Ostermeier” (169).

The influence of soap operas in Ostermeier's work has often been isolated and disparaged by critics. Ostermeier's 2006 staging of O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra*, for example, was widely criticized as being “only a rather sensationalist TV-style, family melodrama” (qtd. in Carlson 176). Similarly, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* review labeled the production a “Soap Opera,” with the underlying implication that the label is reproachful (qtd. in Carlson 176). The critics' rejection of the traces of the TV soap opera in Ostermeier's work is part of a larger denunciation of mass culture and lowbrow art forms. Popular art has long been vilified as “lowbrow”. Yet, late capitalist culture (postmodernism) has embraced a blending of low and high art forms, in turn rejecting hierarchy within artistic creation (Jameson 63). Similarly, performance which is directed to the senses (such as circus

and variety theatre) has suffered a historical rejection as being “lowbrow”, and labeled pejoratively as “spectacle” and “sensationalist”. However, the embracing of the sensorial and rejection of logocentrism which began with the avant-gardists is experiencing a revival in contemporary theatre and has led to a reconsideration of such valuations (Fischer-Lichte 138-39, 150-51). Traces of popular art forms in Ostermeier’s work, in particular the TV soap opera, remain part of his larger aesthetic of capitalist realism.

Significantly, Ostermeier’s interest in the “gritty reality” of capitalist realism is what drew him to the works of Georg Büchner. Ostermeier first spoke of his interest in Büchner’s work in 1999 when he cited Büchner’s *Danton’s Death* as a pre-modern example of the “skepticism and frustration” which he believes characterises his capitalist realist aesthetic. It was not surprising that in 2001 Ostermeier directed his first revival of a classic canonical play, a production of *Danton’s Death*. The attraction to the “gritty reality” present in Büchner’s work is central to Ostermeier’s treatment of *Woyzeck*.

Ostermeier brings Büchner’s *Woyzeck* up to date by transporting the action of the nineteenth century play into a modern day impoverished lower-class urban area. Instead of army barracks, the action takes place on the outskirts of a contemporary city. The characters convene within a large concrete storm drain channel which they treat as a makeshift courtyard. The storm drain channel is encircled by rotating billboards which shift between images of beautiful men and women in advertisements and images of bleak concrete apartment complexes. These contrasting images speak to the social reality of the characters: the drab apartment buildings depict the characters’ dreary environments, while the consumerist advertisements represent the capitalism which keeps them impoverished.

(HYPER)REALISM AND ITS THEORY

Realism is a theatrical movement which goes back to the mid- nineteenth century, and which was a precursor of naturalism. In the *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts, and Analysis*, Pavis defines Realism as a “desire to represent and imitate reality on stage as faithfully as possible” (*Dictionary of the Theatre* 302). This desire to imitate reality is enacted across all aspects of production: set design, lighting, costuming, and elements of acting style such as gesture and speech delivery. Realism, Pavis adds, “is also a technique to give an objective account of human psychological and social reality” (302). Realism marks the beginning of the Modern era in theatrical practice. Peter Szondi, in *Theory of the Modern Drama*, explains that Realism is also necessarily a *dramatic* form: it is a self-contained form, expressed primarily through dialogue, and dependent on a unity of (internal) time and space (7-10). *Woyzeck* is widely, but not irrefutably, considered the first piece of modern drama due to its realism (see Richards). However, it may be more accurate to understand it as a transitional piece. While *Woyzeck* contains elements of realism, it retains traces of preceding movements (classicism and romanticism). The arguments for Büchner’s proto-realism remain literary arguments: though written in 1837, *Woyzeck* would not be performed for the first time until the beginning of the twentieth century, when the realist movement in theatrical performance was already well underway. Now, in the postmodern twenty-first century, hyperrealism has emerged as an artistic movement. The aesthetic differentiation between the nineteenth century realism and today’s hyperrealism can be observed in the degree of detail and verisimilitude: hyperrealism is a *presentation* of reality rather than a *representation* of reality.

Hyperrealism is both an aesthetic and a cultural theory. In art, hyperrealism is a movement generally associated with painting and sculpture, and is highly connected to the photographic medium. Hyperrealist painting, for example, is characterized by an extremely

high level of detail which leads to a quality of disbelief that what one is seeing is a painting and not a photograph. While aesthetic hyperrealism is primarily discussed in relation to painting and sculpture, I will make an argument for its application to theatre. While hyperrealism in painting is the result of the influence of photography, hyperrealism in theatrical production stems from the influence of television. In addition to being an art movement, hyperrealism is also a philosophical concept used to describe aspects of the postmodern condition. Cultural hyperrealism is most famously defined by Umberto Eco and Jean Baudrillard. In examining Ostermeier's *Woyzeck*, I reveal that the difference between realism and hyperrealism in the theatre is both a semiotic difference (aesthetic hyperrealism) and an ideological difference (cultural hyperrealism).

Dramaturgically, it may be more accurate to link this new (hyper)realism to the naturalist movement rather than to the realist movement. Hans-Thies Lehmann, in *Postdramatic Theatre*, argues for the connection between hyperrealism and naturalism in the theatre and advocates for the use of the term hypernaturalism. Lehmann notes that the realist and naturalist movements were “defined not only by representing that which had been repressed by ‘respectable society’ but also by elevating and surpassing real life through the form of drama” (117). Lehmann continues, explaining that in the “new Naturalism” (what he terms “hypernaturalism”) “there is also a heightening of reality ... but this time the heightening occurs downward: where the toilets are, the scum, that is where we find the figure of the scapegoat, the pharmakos” (117). The accuracy of this distinction is confirmed in Ostermeier's *Woyzeck*, in which the action significantly takes place within and around a city's sewage system. However, while not denying the links to naturalism, I favour the term hyperrealism to describe this new form of theatre, not only for the link to the cultural theories of Eco and Baudrillard but for the connection to the hyperrealist movement in the visual arts.

The choice to use the term hyperrealism and to maintain the connection to the parallel movement in the visual arts is intended to highlight the visual nature of hyperrealist theatre.

Hyperrealism is dependent on perception. For Eco, hyperreality is found in the paradox of the authentic fake—the object which is not real but which is experienced as somehow more “real” than the real. Hyperreality is also the concept that something is real if it is perceptually real. Eco explains that to “speak of things that one wants to connote as real, these things must seem real ... The ‘completely real’ becomes identified with the ‘completely fake.’ Absolute unreality is offered as real presence” (7). When Eco uses the word “seem”, he suggests that hyperreality is about perception: what is perceived as real becomes “real” regardless of whether it is real (that is to say, original) or not. This has vast implications for questions concerning the iconic image. Ostermeier’s *Woyzeck* seems perceptually real; the scenography is made up of visibly real objects and perceptually real sounds and lighting which come from visibly real sources. In the realm of hyperreality, seeing is believing. In this way Ostermeier’s production becomes more than real: it becomes hyperreal.

According to Eco, the aim of the hyperreal is “to supply a ‘sign’ that will then be forgotten as such: the sign aims to be the thing, to abolish the distinction of the reference, the mechanism of replacement. Not the image of the thing, but its plaster cast. Its double, in other words” (7). This definition of the hyperreal could almost stand in as a definition of the *direct sign*, a specific type of iconic sign which is fundamental to the semiosis of both television and the hyperreal. The direct sign is defined as “a homologous figure, a kind of duplicate where the signifier is coextensive with the signified” (Mitry 30). The visual and social worlds of Ostermeier’s *Woyzeck* are duplicates of the “real world”, yet through the extremity of their iconicity, the fact that they are signs becomes hidden. For example,

through the use of *real* lawn chairs on stage (rather than prop chairs), their iconicity is hidden as they instead become hyperreal objects.

The hyperreal, Eco argues, can be identified through the presence of two common slogans which pervade popular culture: “the real thing” and “more” (as in “extra”) (7-8). The concept of *more*, which is internalized within the hyperreal, has produced a state in which the hyperreal is valued over the actual “real” –if there is still such a thing– because it is *more* real than the real. The illusion of the (hyper)real can be increased into excess, whereas the actual “real” can only ever be what it is. Eco provides the example of Disneyland: “Disneyland not only produces illusion, but –in confessing it– stimulates the desire for it: A real crocodile can be found in a zoo, and as a rule it is dozing or hiding, but Disneyland tells us that faked nature corresponds much more to our daydream demands” (44). Following this concept, the illusion of reality (hyperreality) created in the possible world of Ostermeier’s *Woyzeck* is more satisfying than the real world, since it fulfills our desires for sensationalism. This is parallel to the contemporary popular appeal of reality TV. Reality TV is not real, but it is more satisfying than the real because it is reality reduced to the entertaining; because it is hyperreal.

In hyperreality, the boundaries which divide fictive from ‘real’ become blurred. This arises in part from the common practice of mingling the real world with possible worlds. Eco provides the example of the practice in wax museums of treating historical figures and fictive figures as ontologically equal. Similarly, in Ostermeier’s production, real objects mingle on stage with stage props which appear equally real. Through their equal treatment, the real object and stage object become contaminated by each other. Both are real, both are fictive, and most significantly, both are hyperreal.

For Baudrillard, hyperreality is tied in with the concept of the simulacrum. He writes, “The principal of simulation governs us now, rather than the outdated reality principle. We feed on those forms whose finalities have disappeared. No more ideology, only simulacra” (2). In other words, today’s culture “feeds” on hyperreality. The simulation of reality has always existed; however, it has become more extreme. Rather than existing as representation, simulation has become duplication. Baudrillard clarifies this distinction by comparing hyperrealism to the preceding movements, realism and surrealism:

Realism had already inaugurated this tendency [of simulation]. The rhetoric of the real already signals that its status has been radically altered (the golden age of the innocence of language where what is said need not be doubled in an effect of reality). Surrealism was still in solidarity with the realism it contested, but which it doubled and ruptured in the imaginary. The hyperreal represents a much more advanced phase insofar as it effaces the contradiction of the real and the imaginary. Irreality no longer belongs to the dream or the phantasm, to a beyond or a hidden interiority, but to *the hallucinatory resemblance of the real to itself*. (72)

The hyperrealist blurring of the “real” and simulation results in each being contaminated by the other.

Baudrillard builds on Eco’s proposition that hyperreality is dependent, first and foremost, on perception. He notes that the hyperrealist position of “perceiving as being” relegates the (hyper)real to the superficial. “The old illusions of relief, perspective and depth (both spatial and psychological) bound up with the perception of the object are over with: optics in its entirety, scopics, has begun to operate on the surface of things –the gaze has become the object’s molecular code” (72). Here beauty is only skin deep, things are their

appearance (see Chapter 3 for a further discussion of the theory of postmodern superficiality).

Baudrillard goes so far as to argue that hyperrealism is no longer simply the simulation of reality, “in fact, hyperrealism must be interpreted in inverse manner: today reality itself is hyperrealist” (74). Baudrillard explains that the “very definition of the real is that of which it is possible to provide an equivalent reproduction. ... At the end of this process of reproducibility, the real is not only that which can be reproduced, but that which is always already reproduced: the hyperreal” (73). While hyperreality shares connections with representation, Baudrillard warns against overemphasizing this comparison: “The hyperreal is beyond representation [...] only because it is entirely within simulation, in which the barriers of representation rotate crazily, an implosive madness which, far from being ex-centric, keeps its gaze fixed on the centre, on its own abyssal repetition” (73-74).

The negotiation between the “real”, representation, and simulation returns to the question of the direct sign. The semiosis of television depends upon the direct sign. The TV image is simultaneously a representation (interpreted/mediated) and a presentation (uninterpreted/unmediated). In hiding the semiotic nature of the televisual image, the nature of the image as a representation becomes hidden, thus transforming it into a hyperrealist presentation. Similarly, hyperrealist theatre remains a representation which strives to hide its own sign system to appear as a direct sign. Since perception dominates in hyperrealism, hyperrealist theatre’s pretext as the real, rather than as representation, renders it so.

Baudrillard warns that hyperreality has infiltrated all aspects of contemporary life: “Today everyday, political, social, historical, economic, etc., reality has already incorporated the hyperrealist dimension of simulation so that we are now living entirely within the ‘aesthetic’ hallucination of reality” (74). As a result, Baudrillard claims that today, “the

simulation principle dominates the reality principle as well as the pleasure principle” (76). Accordingly, television is possibly the ultimate hyperrealist medium. Hyperrealism in television is not restricted to the realm of reality television. TV drama has also moved into the realm of the hyperreal through our consumption of it as a plausible substitute for reality. Soap operas are a particularly powerful example of the hyperreality of television. The melodramatic interpersonal relationships of soap operas become more real than the mundane relationships found in reality, exemplifying the condition in which the desire for “more” supersedes the need for realism. In spite of the sensationalism of soap operas, they often are engaged by viewers as being “the real thing.” Discussing the hyperrealism of soap operas in the essay “Postmodernism and Popular Culture,” John Storey notes that “we in the West live in a world in which people write letters addressed to characters in soap operas, making them offers of marriage, sympathizing with their current difficulties, offering them new accommodation, or just writing to ask how they are coping with life” (149). This confusion in treating fictional characters as real people is the result of the hyperreality of soap operas, and is an instance of what Baudrillard calls “the dissolution of TV into life, the dissolution of life into TV” (qtd. in Storey 149). As TV and life dissolve into one another the distinction ceases to matter; instead what is left is the draw of the hyperreal.

Ostermeier’s *Woyzeck* is permeated by melodrama: not theatrical melodrama from the end of the nineteenth century, but a melodrama which is more akin to (or duplicates) the melodrama of TV soap operas. American soap operas are stylistically different from British and German soap operas. American soap operas feature upper-middle-to upper-class characters, idealize wealth and produce a hyperrealistic image of the glamour and sensationalism of the lives of the wealthy (e.g., *General Hospital*, *The Young and The Restless*, etc.). Whereas in British soap operas such as *Coronation Street*, the famous long-

running British soap opera, the focus is on the lives of the working class. German soap operas more closely resemble British ones. In fact, the German soap opera, *Lindenstraße*, is directly based on *Coronation Street*. While British and German soaps do not produce the American soap operas' hyperreal image of wealth, the interpersonal relationships presented are equally melodramatic, to the point of becoming hyperrealistic. Real life does not unroll in an unending stream of sensational incidents: consequently the sensational and melodramatic interpersonal relationships of soap operas are experienced as hyperreal, as better than the real thing. The hyperreality of the sensationalized interpersonal relationships featured in German soap operas serves as the popular cultural reference point through which Ostermeier's production can be read; the interpersonal relationships of the characters in *Woyzeck* are heightened to the level of melodrama.

HYPERREALISM: Traces of televisual iconic signs and TV soap operas in *Woyzeck*

1. Iconicity

1.1. *The iconic sign*

The American semiotician Charles S. Peirce proposed the typology of artificial signs, such as icon, index, and symbol. "The Icon signifies by virtue of a similarity of qualities or resemblance to its object [...] The icon would appear to have a certain independence with respect to both object and interpretant" (Iverson 89). Alternatively, "[t]he index signifies by virtue of an existential bond, in many cases a causal connection, between itself and the object [...] The symbol signifies by virtue of a contract or rule" (89). While the definition of iconicity is associated with the visual, the iconic sign is not restricted to the visual, as sounds can also be iconic signs functioning through similarity or resemblance. Unlike the symbolic (linguistic) sign, the iconic sign does not require a previously understood convention in order

to be interpreted; viewed in this sense, the iconic sign is also not arbitrary. The iconic sign functions “sensuously, *perceptually*” (McFarlane 26-27).

It is most accurate to state that all three types of signs (iconic, indexical, and symbolic) are present in the theatre, though there is a general predominance of the iconic sign. As Rozik notes, “‘Iconicity’ is a crucial notion in the description of the theatre medium” (21). Realist theatre is the ultimate example of the dominance of iconic signs. The desire to imitate reality which defines the realist movement is enacted through the production and proliferation of iconic signs that function through resemblance. Realism utilizes both visual iconic signs (e.g., historically accurate scenography) and auditory iconic signs (e.g. accurate regional accents and mimetic sound effects) in the pursuit of the realist aesthetic. However, not all iconic signs are created equal –there are varying degrees of similarity and resemblance.

In *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, Keir Elam discusses the prevalence of the iconic sign in the theatre. In this text, he makes the stipulation that

the principle of similarity [which defines the iconic sign] is less well defined in the theatre than it might appear. The degree of genuine homology operating between the performance and what is it supposed to denote is extremely variable [...] Much of the richness of the stage spectacle derives from the interplay of varying degrees of semiotic literalness [...] from a] mixing of the literally iconic with the blatantly schematic. (21)

The varying degrees of iconicity can be explained in part through Peirce’s subdivisational categories of the iconic sign. The iconic sign has three classes: image, diagram, and metaphor. Explaining the three classes of iconic sign, Elam explains that illusionistic forms

of theatre (e.g. realism) “encourage the spectator to perceive the performance as a direct image of the dramatic world” (21). Other forms of theatre, Elam continues,

content themselves with diagrammatic or metaphorical portrayal where only a very general structural similitude exists between sign and object. Thus the actor [...] may impersonate the shape of a table (diagram). Alternatively, similarity may be simply asserted rather than apparent, as in the case of an empty stage which becomes for the audience, a battlefield, palace or prison cell (metaphor). (21)

In addition to there being a difference in the degree of iconicity between the different types of iconic signs (image, diagram, and metaphor), there may also be different degrees of iconicity within single types of iconic signs, in this case the iconic image. These degrees of iconicity can be identified in Ostermeier’s *Woyzeck*.

In Ostermeier’s *Woyzeck*, the scenography consists of a (re)presentation of a concrete storm drain channel. The drainage channel forms a semi-circle on the stage, forcing the performance into the middle of the stage (effectively solving the problem of the extreme wideness of the stage space). The storm drain channel is primarily filled with sandy and rocky ground; however, water trickling out of a storm drain pipe forms a small pool at the center. The water and the sand which fill the drainage channel are real, rather than being implied or represented, thus increasing the degree of reality presented on stage. The walls of the channel are raked, leading to an elevated second level further back on the stage.

The illusion of the real is the central focus of the set design. A food canteen is parked on the right end of the elevated space above the canal. The canteen is filled with real items: a real fridge, microwave, plastic cups, food containers, cleaning supplies, etc. Not a single item within the canteen reveals any aspect of artificiality, reinforcing again the sense that what one is seeing is not a representation of reality but a presentation of reality. On this elevated

level there is also a portable toilet, plastic tables, and lawn chairs: all of these are real, rather than objects created for the purpose of the theatrical production. The effect of these real objects on stage is to create a space composed of direct signs (in which the signifier is essentially the same as the signified) rather than the simple iconic signs (signs which signify through similarity of resemblance) that typically permeate theatre.

The set is framed by three large rotating billboards which fill the backdrop of the stage, masking the towering walls of the Palais de Papes. The images on these billboards oscillate between advertisements and images of low income high-rise apartments. The billboards, contained within aluminum scaffolding are authentic objects taken from the real world. Additionally, in the original production at the Schaubühne, the distinctive Fernsehturm (TV tower) could be seen in the background. The Fernsehturm, the tallest structure in Germany, is situated in the city centre of Berlin. While excluded from the Avignon production, the TV tower's original inclusion speaks to the importance of TV in German popular culture, serving as a visual manifestation of the role of TV in the landscape of contemporary Germany.

In addition to the set design, the spaces created by sound and by lighting function similarly as direct signs which strive to produce a sense of being “the real thing”. The spaces become hyperrealist through the inclusion of practical lighting and sound. Practical lighting results when the lighting on stage is produced by actual light fixtures embedded within the set which are intended to signify as real light sources. For example, the set contains a working street light which illuminates the stage. Music also adds to the hyperrealism, as it is often played directly from a ghetto blaster. In this case, not only does the object (the ghetto blaster) become a direct sign, the music played is also a direct sign which is causally (indexically) connected to the object. The music signifies as emanating from a ghetto blaster

(rather than from an unseen theatrical source) and, for semiotic purposes, it *is* music from a ghetto blaster even if it actually comes from a master source. What is important is that the music is signified as real by the interpretant.

1.2 The Direct Sign

Having shown that there are multiple degrees of iconicity amongst iconic signs, I will not focus on the televisual sign. While both theatre and television function primarily through iconic sign systems, they do not share the same degree of iconicity. The televisual iconic sign is the sign as pure iconic image: *the direct sign*. Theorization of the direct sign has focused primarily on cinema; however, the televisual iconic sign, like the filmic iconic sign, is also a direct sign.

In *Semiotics and the Analysis of Film*, Jean Mitry explains that “[a]ccording to the linguistic definition, the direct sign (natural sign, or gestalt-sign) is a homologous figure, a kind of duplicate where the signifier is coextensive with the signified” (30). In realist drama, the iconic sign retains its status as a sign while functioning to resemble its referent.

Alternatively, the direct sign hides its semiotic nature and is interpreted as “real”. For example, in a realist drama, a living room on stage is recognizable as a representation of a living room; in film or television, the living room is either a real living room, or so closely resembles one, that the room is interpreted as “real.” It is a direct sign because it is interpreted as the “real thing”. However, while the film/TV living room is interpreted as real and not a representation, it is necessarily a representation because of its nature as a captured image on film/television. Therefore, the direct sign remains a sign, yet it is a sign which resists semiosis.

The direct sign relates to the notion of *transparency*, a concept which relates to photography as well as film and television. Roger Munier, discussing the work of film critic André Bazin, explains that in photography (and later in film and television),

for the first time, between the originating object and its reproduction there intervenes only the instrumentality of a nonliving agent, for the first time an image of the world is formed automatically, without creative intervention of man, according to a strict determinism [...]. Photography enjoys a certain advantage in virtue of this transference of reality from the thing to its reproduction. (qtd. in Mitry 33)

Here, the similarity or resemblance between icon (televisual image) and object (the world/reality) becomes complete, with the two nearly risking conflation. Theatrical realism represents reality while television re-presents reality. The image of the world produced by the theatre icon is constricted by the creative intervention of the artistic figures involved in the theatre production, while photography is a direct reproduction of an image from reality. This differentiation makes it possible to understand that the difference between realism and hyperrealism is the degree of detail, but more significantly, the degree of *reality*. The televisual sign is a direct sign because the distance between the sign and its signifier is (or appears to be) removed. Hyperrealism strives to give a similar impression of being a direct sign.

Just as hyperrealism in painting remains recognizable as not actually being photography, hyperrealist theatre is not read as actually being television. Like hyperrealist painting, which is defined by its attempt to signify as a direct sign just as photography does, theatre becomes hyperrealist when it gives the impression of being built of direct signs. It is not a coincidence that Ostermeier's hyperrealist aesthetic resulted in critics associating a number of his productions with the TV soap opera.

2. Framing

2.1. *Frame within a Frame*

Ostermeier's *Woyzeck* is the only production which I examine that contains video projection. During the carnival scene the community members gather, and set up a makeshift cinema for themselves. Lawn chairs and milk crates are arranged into a viewing area; a film projector is set up in the concrete courtyard, and a film is projected onto the billboard which rests at upstage left. The rectangular shape of the large billboard, which had already been reminiscent of a film screen, now becomes a makeshift film-screen. Black-and-white images are projected in negative over top the billboard image of drab concrete apartment complexes. The projections are difficult to make out, but give the impression of people (the masses) squirming and crawling along the image of the concrete jungle. During the projection of the film, the Captain (who is more accurately a gangster in Ostermeier's performance text) stands atop a soap box placed between the makeshift onstage audience and the projection. Wearing a bird mask, the Captain/Gangster delivers the lines of the Barker from the carnival scene in Büchner's playtext. Gesturing behind himself to the images of swarming humanity projected on the billboard the Captain/Gangster declares, "Voyez à present les progrès de la civilisation" (Look at the progress of civilization). This declaration can be interpreted in two ways. Pointing to the swarming, squirming masses depicted in the projection, as well as the squalor of the billboard images and the environment of the stage, the declaration of the progress of civilization becomes ironic. The alternative meaning is that cinema itself stands as a bastion of cultural and technological progress. This statement, too, becomes problematic, as the irony of the alternate reading taints both possible meanings. The reference to cinema as the progress of civilization is rebounded into the audience through the

meta-theatricality of the device of the cinematic frame within the dramatic frame, questioning the cultural status of theatre.

2.2 Social framing

The social spaces of the performance produce a hyperrealist social frame. For example, the production opens with two children playing in the sand within the canal. They are real children, not adults or teenagers acting as children. The play of the children is similarly real, as one child draws in the sand while the other plays hopscotch. This social space of the children (a space of play) signifies as real through the children's acts of play. This scene is representative of how the space created by bodies functions semiotically throughout the production. That is, the actors' embodied interactions signify as real interactions. However, it remains true that while these are real children and the games they play are real, they are also actors acting the roles of children at play. In other words, the gestural space of the playing children produces iconic signs which function through similarity/resemblance (the children as actors resemble real children playing); however, the intent of the children playing is to produce direct signs. It is in this way that the gestural space becomes hyperrealist.

The realism of the highly detailed lower-class setting is revealed as hyperrealist through the sensational, melodramatic interpersonal relationships that Woyzeck has with the other characters. Similar to soap operas, the distinction between the real and the hyperreal in Ostermeier's production becomes blurred as the constructed realist social space mingles with the irreality of the events which befall the characters (i.e. the sensationalism of Woyzeck's madness, Marie's affair, and Woyzeck's act of murder).

3. Dimensionality

3.1 The proscenium as panorama

The extreme width of the staging area in the Cour d'Honneur of the Palais de Papes produces an impression of panorama. The enlarged stage frame extends beyond the limits of the spectator's visual field, functioning to render the stage frame nearly invisible. The concept of the panorama originates in painting, and is today associated with the widescreen frame of cinema. The practice of panorama painting, a 360° cylindrical painting viewed from the inside, began in the late 18th century. However, as Jonathan Crary explains in *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture*, “the word [panorama] came to acquire [a new meaning] during the nineteenth century: a sweeping, comprehensive view (even if attained through a succession of many views” (136). During the nineteenth century, as the term panorama took on this meaning, several mechanical viewing devices were invented to draw on the public desire for spectacular viewing experiences, eventually culminating in the advent of cinema. One example is the kaiserpanorama, invented in 1883, a large round device fitted with several viewing stations containing glass stereoscopic photographs which produced illusory three-dimensional scenes. The kaiserpanorama was a precursor to the kineoscope, a proto-cinematic device consisting of “a mechanized series of photographic images” (Crary 136). The kineoscope is historically significant, Crary explains, as an early device which exhibited moving images (136).

3.2 Dimensionality and the cinematic frame

The extreme wideness of the stage produces stronger associations with the cinematic frame than with the more traditional frame of theatre proscenium arches. This association with the widescreen cinematic frame reinforces the sense that the (hyper)realism on stage is nearly of filmic quality (i.e., an imprint of reality rather than a creative representation of reality). Using a two-dimensional proscenium frame to enclose a panorama renders the action contained within the frame conceptually two-dimensional. However, the inclusion of

film projection during the carnival scene shatters the conceptual two-dimensionality of the stage-frame. Through comparison with the true two-dimensionality of the projected image, the conceptual two-dimensionality of the stage space gives way to the reality of its three-dimensionality.

In creating a makeshift cinema screen by projecting onto billboards and gathering lawn chairs together to form a crude movie theatre, the “carnival scene” becomes metatheatrical, as the presence of the makeshift film audience onstage mirrors the positionality of the performance’s actual audience in the auditorium of the Cour d’Honneur. Just as the actual audience is separated from the action by the limits of the stage, the onstage audience is separated from the action of the film by the makeshift film-screen.

SEEING IS REALITY: Concluding remarks on the visuality of the hyperreal

Looking at Ostermeier’s *Woyzeck*, it becomes clear that hyperrealism extends to all aspects of production. Cultural hyperrealism, the cultural desire for things that are *more* (better) than real, is framed by the social relationships of the fictional world (i.e. sensationalized social interactions which are “more” than real). In Ostermeier’s production, cultural hyperrealism is indebted to the influence of TV soap operas. Aesthetic hyperrealism, the instance of an object appearing as “the real thing” in effect hiding its nature as a sign, is seen in the semiosis of the scenography (i.e. scenography built upon the direct sign). The aesthetic hyperrealism of Ostermeier’s *Woyzeck*, a feature of the production’s iconicity, is derived from the influence of the televisual iconic sign.

As theatre becomes increasingly visual, it becomes less literary. Hyperrealism remains the exception to this trend, retaining a close connection to the dramatic text. Yet, in examining Ostermeier’s hyperrealist *Woyzeck*, it is possible to see the subtle ways in which hyperrealist theatre turns away from the authority of the dramatic text. Ostermeier’s

hyperrealism arises from his creation of the performance text (rather than arising from the characteristics of the dramatic text itself). In creating his performance text, Ostermeier builds on Büchner's text, freely altering aspects of that text in order to achieve his directorial vision. Ostermeier's transposition of the action from a nineteenth-century army barrack to an impoverished contemporary urban environment can be interpreted as a declaration that the director, and subsequently the performance text, is the primary authority, reducing the authority of the original dramatic text. While originating in the mid-nineteenth century, the practice of rejecting the authority of the text and replacing it with the authority of the director has experienced a revival in contemporary practice. The rise of the visual (and rejection of the dramatic text) is enmeshed with this elevation of the director to the position of final authority.

Popular culture, and consequently television, is currently experiencing a renewed interest in the "real" and "reality" (best exemplified by the predominance of reality TV). However, the "reality" being pursued is a facsimile of the real (it is hyperreal). Hyperrealist theatre such as Ostermeier's *Woyzeck* is only one example of how this pursuit of the real has influenced contemporary theatre. Documentary and Verbatim theatre, for example, are also products of this growing cultural fascination with the real. Yet, like the hyperrealism I have examined in Ostermeier's production, documentary and verbatim theatre remain simply a replica of the real and are not the thing itself.

The visuality of hyperrealist theatre is simply one manifestation of the influence of new media on the treatment of the sensory aspects of performance (visual, audio, kinesthetic). In the following chapter, I will examine the presence of synesthesia in theatre which has been influenced by the music video.

CHAPTER 2

Synesthesia: Cross-sensation and the Influence of Music Videos in

Vesturport's *Woyzeck*

Synesthesia: Cross-sensation and the Influence of Music Videos in Vesturport's *Woyzeck*

In his book *Why I [Still] Want My MTV*, Kevin Williams explains that the music video has been heralded as “a pioneer of video expression” (Rabinowitz), “the postmodern turn in television” (Lorch), and has even been called a “shift in the ‘large scape knowledge’ of our culture” (Lorch) (Williams 3-4).⁶ Just as postdramatic theatre is marked by a movement away from the linearity of the dramatic text, the music video, embracing fragmentation and non-linearity, constitutes a similar shift for video and television. Placing importance on form over content, the music video brings affect and sensation to the foreground. Constructed through the blending of music and imagery, music videos produce synesthetic experiences of cross-sensation in the processes of reception. Drawing heavily from rock culture, Vesturport's *Woyzeck* is a rock musical adaptation which utilizes similar compositional strategies as music videos. The influence of the music video on Vesturport's production results primarily in what may best be understood as a *theatre of synesthesia*, in which a blending of image and sound leads to a proliferation of constructed hybrid sensory experiences. Like Ostermeier's production, Vesturport's *Woyzeck* retains much of the dramatic action of Büchner's play. However, Vesturport's production reconfigures the role of the dramatic text, as the logocentrism of the dramatic action is balanced by the inclusion of rock musical numbers and vivid imagery, thus appealing to the senses as well as the intellect. Taking the connection between music videos and Vesturport's *Woyzeck* one step further, I will argue that the production is constructed using the same type of internal logic

⁶Some may say that the music video died with the beginning of the twenty-first century; however, while I would concede that *music video television* may have died at the turn of the new millennium, the music video itself is still very much alive, as videos such as Kanye West's *Runaway* would show. *Runaway* is a thirty-five-minute-long music video (sometimes referred to as a short film), which was produced and directed by musician Kanye West himself; it has over 20 million views on YouTube for the full length version alone (not to mention the views for the three shorter versions of the video as well as views from video hosting sites other than YouTube). The music video is not dead: it has simply moved from the television to the internet.

which is used in the music video form, featuring performance strategies which encourage cross-sensation as images become musicalized and music is visualized.

Vesturport's *Woyzeck* premiered in 2005 at The Reykjavik City Theatre in Iceland. A co-production between Vesturport, the Barbican Theatre in London, the Het Muzik Theatre in Amsterdam, and The Reykjavik City Theatre, the production was taken on tour and mounted in eight countries.⁷ In creating *Woyzeck*, Vesturport collaborated with rock musicians Nick Cave and Warren Ellis⁸ to produce a rock-musical adaptation which is steeped in spectacle. Transposing the action of Büchner's story from a nineteenth-century army barrack to the fictional world of a modern day small industrial town which trades in clean water, Vesturport's *Woyzeck* combines rock music, vivid imagery, and acrobatics to create an affective adaptation of Büchner's play which is as much *felt* as it is seen.

This chapter will examine theories of synesthesia and demonstrate the means by which artistic constructions produce cross-sensation (synesthesia). Looking at the performance strategies of visualizing music and musicalizing images employed in Vesturport's *Woyzeck*, I will trace connections between these strategies and the music video. Examining the dramaturgical structure of Vesturport's *Woyzeck*, I will demonstrate that the performance is constructed using the same type of internal logic as music videos, namely the use of an alternating verse/chorus structure that is borrowed from rock/pop music and rendered imagistic through strategies of visualization.

⁷ The production was mounted in Denmark in 2009 where it was part of the Aarhus Theatre Festival, and where the recording which I working from was made.

⁸ Nick Cave and Warren Ellis are members of the Australian alternative rock band *Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds*. Formed in London in 1983, the band continues to produced new music and has a large cult following. Their musical style is described as "literary folk rock", with aspects of "noise rock", cabaret, and "baroque pop." In addition to *Woyzeck*, Nick Cave and Warren Ellis created musical scores for Vesturport's productions of *Metamorphosis* (2006) and *Faust* (2010). Cave and Ellis have also produced sound tracks for over a dozen films, including *The Proposition* (2005), *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* (2007), *The Road* (2009), and *Lawless* (2012).

With a focus on sound and imagery, the production treats Büchner's dramatic text as a source text—a starting point in the process of creation rather than an authorial object. Vesturport's *Woyzeck* is more precisely an adaptation than a direct staging of Büchner's play. For the production, director Gisli Örn Gardarsson produced his own translation of the play, in which he changes the setting—placing the story in a modern-day industrial town that is in the business of distributing water. In producing his *Woyzeck*, Gardarsson deletes many scenes, and reorders others. He also changes existing dialogue and adds new scenes to account for the contemporary setting. These changes to the playtext are in addition to the more significant inclusion of the songs created by Cave and Ellis. The adaptation of the dramatic text together with the inclusion of new songs and musical numbers constitute, for this production, a significant movement away from the text: they position the dramatic text as only one of many equal aspects of the performance text, while altering the focus to the creation of visual motifs and lyrical storytelling.

The use of spectacle is a central feature of the performance text. Like the use of acrobatics, the production's scenography is employed in the creation of spectacle. The production takes place in a proscenium arch theatre, featuring a permanent stationary set piece which consists of a labyrinth of large industrial metal pipes. The pipes create dynamic multi-level performance spaces, as characters stand on and climb between the pipes. The pipe system rests on a larger platform which is covered with green Astroturf and raised a few feet above stage level. In one particularly sensational scene, flowers fall from the sky only to land perfectly embedded in the Astroturf, as if they had been growing there all along. At the front edge of this Astroturf platform is a clear aquarium tunnel filled with water that stretches the width of the stage, inside of which several of the characters swim, float, and splash at various moments throughout the show.

The production contains no intermissions and few other clear breaks in the action to delineate different scenes. For the purposes of my analysis, I have chosen to use changes in music to denote different scenes, as music is the totalizing/dominant vector in this production. There are two types of scenes in this production: the first are story-driven moments of action; the second type is the musical number. Music permeates both types of scenes, but functions differently in each. In the story-driven scenes, the music functions as a backdrop, a landscape if you will, that provides atmosphere and tone but which can also build on the themes and metaphors which pervade the story. In the musical numbers, the music is at the forefront and the action functions to complement the music (similar to a rock star's stage performance which serves to support and highlight the live music). A shift from one song to another in the story-driven action serves as a shift from one scene to another. Alternatively, the musical numbers serve as larger and more significant breaks in the action.

Founded in 2001, Vesturport is a collective of young artists with a background in theatre and film. The company began when four newly-graduated theatre students found a theatre space for rent; in order to afford the space another nine artists were invited into the collective. Vesturport was founded on a mutual desire of its founders to experiment in theatre and film. This experimental edge can be traced throughout the collective's body of work. They cemented themselves as a company, creating a manifesto which declared that all of the members were free to do what they wanted with the small theatre space, which seated 49 spectators, stipulating that each member must be artistically and financially responsible for their own work. In return, the members of the collective would always offer each other

truthful and constructive criticism. Eventually Vesturport left their theatre space, instead working in found spaces or collaborating with The Reykjavik City Theatre.⁹

Vesturport first gained international recognition in 2003 with a circus-inspired adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*. With this show, Vesturport developed its signature style. Featuring gymnastic and acrobatic feats, the performative narrative of *Romeo and Juliet*, much like that of *Woyzeck*, is built around a combination of striking visual imagery and rock music numbers. As Vesturport explains, the “goal was to create a production, which would introduce theatre in a fun and an interesting way to the general public who often perceives theatre as a dull and stagnated art form” (“Vesturport” n.pag). The desire to make their theatre “fun and interesting” drives Vesturport’s treatment of the dramatic text within their productions. Stephen Purcell characterized the production as having “an unconventional freedom with the text,” noting that “lines were delivered in both English and Icelandic, clowns ad-libbed with the audience and pop culture references abounded” (364).

Vesturport has created a number of dramatic adaptations of canonical works, each of which freely adapts the dramatic text. In addition to *Romeo and Juliet* and *Woyzeck*, they have also produced acclaimed productions of *Metamorphosis* and *Faust* (the latter two also featured music by Cave and Ellis). In each of these productions, the dramatic text is treated as a source text, and the notion of authorial intent is rejected in favour of adapting each performance with the aim of appealing to popular audiences.

Adaptation necessarily involves a reconfiguration of the audience’s relationship to the adapted narrative. Linda Hutcheon, in *A Theory of Adaptation*, explains that “the different media and genres that stories are transcoded to and from in the adapting process are

⁹ In light of the company’s recurring treatment of rock music within their theatrical productions it is interesting that in their early years the space held a number of concerts, as it was frequently rented out to a variety of bands.

not just formal entities ... they also represent various ways of engaging audiences” (xiv).

Hutcheon argues that there are three primary means by which media and genres engage audiences: *telling* (this is the mode of engagement used in literature and, I would argue, the primary mode used in dramatic theatre); *showing* (the primary mode used in visual media as well as postdramatic theatre); and *interaction* (both physical and kinesthetic interaction –this mode is utilized prominently in video/computer games but is also a feature of many postdramatic performances) (xiv).

Music videos combine all three modes of narration (*telling, showing, interacting*) to engage their audiences. The instrumental music kinesthetically (*interactively*) engages the spectator, while the lyrics *tell* a narrative, and the imagery *shows* the narrative. Adopting performance strategies from other mediums such as circus, rock musicals, and in the case of *Woyzeck*, music videos, Vesturport attempts to create theatre which appeals to popular audiences. Increasingly, popular mediums rely on *showing* rather than *telling* stories. Reducing the role of the dramatic text, whose primary mode of engagement is that of *telling*, Vesturport supplements the delivery of the narrative by engaging the spectators with visual imagery as a means of *showing* the story. It also does so by engaging the audience *interactively* (both physically when, in some scenes, the action enters into the audience, as well as kinesthetically through the sensory experience of the music). By shifting the predominant mode of the audience’s engagement with the story of *Woyzeck* from *telling* to *showing/interacting*, Vesturport is able to engage new audiences who may not otherwise attend the theatre, attaining their goal of creating productions which are “fun an interesting” and there by dispelling any prejudices that theatre is “dull” or a “stagnated art form” (“Vesturport” n.pag).

Vesturport's productions have received criticism for emphasizing sensory aspects of performance and for their subsequent reduction of the role of the dramatic text. In *The New York Times* review, Charles Isherwood disparages the emphasis on spectacle in Vesturport's *Woyzeck*, commenting jeeringly,

Every once in a while, when a breather from the merry antics is deemed necessary, somebody bellows a line or two or three from the Büchner play about the alienating forces that drive the title character, a mentally imbalanced, emotionally distraught soldier, to despair, madness and murder. But don't worry; you'll barely notice. The circus is never in serious danger of being spoiled by that party-pooing *Woyzeck*.

(n.pag)

This quote reveals Isherwood's bias towards the logocentrism of the text. Disparaging the production's emphasis on spectacle and the sensorial, Isherwood endorses a false hierarchy; positioning logocentric art as high art and sensorial art as "low".

Sight has enjoyed a degree of emancipation from the body. Caroline A. Jones, in *Sensorium: Embodied Experience, Technology, and Contemporary Art*, explains that sight holds this unique position because it is "the sense capable of producing the most 'distance' from the body" (8). Jones goes on to argue that this distancing of vision from the body is in part what differentiated painting as a high art. While spectacular mediums such as circus (or the music video) direct themselves to vision, they are also highly kinesthetic, and have subsequently been labeled 'low' or popular. Isherwood ends his review with the warning that it "should simply be noted that admirers of Büchner's art will probably be grievously disappointed by this staging," commenting that "If, on the other hand, you're in the mood for a kind of anything-goes spectacle ... you have come to the right place" (n.pag). This quote highlights the cultural divide which remains between logocentric art (which is positioned as

“high art”) and sensorial/spectacular art (which is often labeled as ‘low’ or ‘popular’ art). Synesthetic art blurs the perceived divide between mind and body; similarly, Vesturport blurs the classification of low and high art, by blending a canonical dramatic text with spectacular acrobatics and the verse/chorus structure of rock music.

SYNESTHESIA AND ITS THEORY

The predominant use of music and images in the creation of *Woyzeck*’s dramaturgical structure results in a synesthetic blending of image and sound. Physiologically, synesthesia is a neurological condition, “the involuntary physical experience of the simulation of one sensory modality reliably caused by a perception in one or more different senses” (Kim 148). However, this is not the type of synesthetic experience to which I refer in this chapter. My focus is *artificial synesthesia*, which occurs when synesthetic constructions are induced intentionally as a perceptual feature of an artistic creation. Artificial synesthesia results from *multi-sensory joining experiments* in art. The fostering of hybrid sensory experiences (or *co-sensation*) serves to challenge the traditional views of sense perception, complicating attempts to classify sense perception into five distinct senses. This confounding of the senses, like the production’s questioning of the authority of the text, functions to expose the problematic nature of hierarchies amongst different types of art as well as hierarchies amongst the different senses.

Experiments in synesthetic art have existed throughout history; however, they gained cultural status in the mid-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, as evidenced by the popularity of musical light shows during this period. A famous experimental example of the musical light show is the performance piece *Reflektorische Lichtspiel* (1922), literally “reflectional colour play”, by Bauhaus artists Kurt Schwerdtfeger and Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack. The performance featured the interplay of music, colour, and form created in light.

In the first decades of the twentieth-century, Russian composer Alexander Scriabin and Russian painter Wassily Kandinsky both experimented with synesthetic experiences in the creation and reception of art. Both Scriabin and Kandinsky explored questions of *colour hearing* (the synesthetic perception of colours in sound and sounds in colours). Scriabin believed that “colors are often associated with tonality”: as such, “the major aim of his experiment with auditory and visual perceptions explored the artistic potentials of the simultaneous playing of sound and colors” (Kim 147). Scriabin’s experiments involved the inclusion of notations for coloured light within his musical compositions. Eventually, he also included notations for accompanying scents and tastes. Kandinsky based the creation of his paintings on “hearing tones and chords [...] he theorized colors with tones and geometric figures and their relationship” (Kim 147). Scriabin’s experiments focused on *sensory fusion*, while Kandinsky focused primarily on *multi-cross-sensation* and the sensory perception of movement.

The blending of sensory objects has become more prevalent since the creation of modern media: “The rise of modern media technology has been founded upon the separation of sound (in recording) and image (in the photograph) and in their subsequent reunification through electronic means,” Jody Berland writes in the essay “Sound, Image and Social Space: Music Video and Media Reconstruction” (26). Berland goes on to explain that “[e]lectronic reproduction makes it possible to fix and move images or sounds across the barriers of physical time or space” (27). The sound and images which constitute music videos share no unified origin; their reunification is manufactured. While the images in music videos are produced to be accompanied by music, the images and music are created and recorded separately. This disconnection is resolved by the processes of synesthesia, which are at the centre of music video creation. The image and sound of the music video,

which share no original unification, become unified through the mutual effects of synesthesia: the visualization of music and musicalization of images.

The synesthetic quality of music videos is not true synesthesia (physiological synesthesia), but is rather a creation of the impression of synesthesia (artificial synesthesia). Like music videos, the synesthetic affects produced in Vesturport's *Woyzeck* are *artificial*. Music videos are defined by the vectors which connect music and image. Music and images often share a symbiotic relationship in the music video form. In music videos, the vectors connecting music and image generally produce two processes: images become music made visual (this is often referred to as the process of "visualizing music"), and the images themselves take on musical properties (what I will refer to as "musicalizing images"). Andrew Goodwin, in his book *Dancing in the Distraction Factory: Music Television and Popular Culture*, connects the processes of making images musical and music imagistic to the pleasure experienced when watching music videos. He also explains these processes to be a form of synesthesia:

Visual pleasure is present not so much at the level of narrative, but in the *making musical* of the television image. Television is *musiced*. The process of synesthesia is toyed with and developed. Television is made to succumb to new rhythms, in the pulses of rock, rap, and dance music [...] It is as much the case here (if not more so) that music has invaded television as it is true that video has "taken over" music. (70)

Goodwin goes on to discuss the relationship between the images present in music videos and the songs around which the videos are built. Goodwin explains that there are three prominent modes of visualizing music employed in music videos: *illustration*, *amplification*, and *disjunction*. These three modes of visualization are implemented across three codes of music which are visualized: *lyrics*, *music*, and *performance*. Goodwin's categories can be

applied to the analysis of Vesturport's production, provided we interpret the visual action of the characters as well as the mise-en-scene within the same framework which Goodwin uses for the visual images of music videos.

It is the pervasive use of synesthesia combined with the speed and movement necessitated by the tempo and rhythm of the song that produce the intense sensory impact characteristic of the music video form. It is also the combination of synesthesia with speed and movement which contribute to the association of *distraction* with the music video. It is no coincidence that Goodwin's book, which is widely held as the quintessential work of scholarship on music video television, contains the word "distraction" in its title. Goodwin explains his use of the word "distraction":

The notion of "distraction" is widely known through the cultural criticism of Walter Benjamin and has recently been taken up in the debate about postmodernity. My deployment of the term *distraction factory* is, however, taken from an essay by Siegfried Kracauer titled "The Mass Ornament." (Goodwin 199)

The reference to Benjamin highlights associations between distraction and critical distancing, while the reference to postmodernity adds a second layer of superficiality (the privileging of image over object, or signifier over signified).

Walter Benjamin discusses art and distraction in his seminal essay, "The work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction": he argues that while paintings invite concentration and architecture invokes a state of distraction, film exists somewhere in between the perceptual models of concentration and distraction. For Benjamin, distraction is linked to the loss of "aura": "Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be" (214). What is lacking in the loss of an object's presence in time and space, Benjamin

argues, is its authenticity, its aura. Modern visual media are disconnected from time and space, as both time and space become malleable, virtual. For Benjamin, this loss of the object's presence in time and space reduces the process of reception to "a state of distraction ... The public is an examiner, but an absent-minded one" (234). Distraction provides the spectator with the distance necessary to become a spectator-critic. Similarly, the music video spectator does not become absorbed by the music video but encounters it from a distance; the music video spectator is not frozen in front of the TV (or computer) but is free to enter into or leave his/her spectating at any moment.

The distraction experienced when watching music videos is also connected to the superficiality of the sound and images. In *The Society of the Spectacle*, Guy Debord argues that, in contemporary society, "life presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into representation" (1); in other words, life has become reduced to images. Debord describes the spectacle as "a world vision which has become objectified" (5). From a semiotic standpoint, music videos are often described as being made up of systems of free-floating signifiers (Williams 95). Contained within the notion of free-floating signifiers is the idea of superficiality. This superficiality applies primarily to the iconic sign systems at work in many music videos (the images associated with rock culture). The common use of rich visual imagery put through the rapid-cutting style of music videos creates a form of visual superficiality as the images are rendered into visual surfaces. This process encourages distraction as sound and image are consumed for the sensorial pleasure they produce.

Alternatively, the reference to Kracauer makes allusions to the kind of distraction associated with hollow escapist entertainments. The distraction produced by escapist entertainment is of a primarily social nature, and must be understood as happening on a

much larger scale. However, this conception of distraction is not at odds with the two previous meanings of distraction: instead it is simply an explanation of the social ramifications of the other two types of distraction (distancing and superficiality).

SYNESTHESIA: Tracing the influence of music videos in *Woyzeck*

The dramaturgical structure of Vesturport's *Woyzeck* is similar to the internal logic used in music video form: rock/pop song structure is used in the creation of visual narrative. Pop and rock songs are structured around the alternation of verse and chorus. The repeating chorus functions as the "hook" for the song, drawing in the listener and ensuring their continued attention; the chorus is broken up by the verses. Music video structure follows a similar format; here, the repetition of visual motifs, like the repeating chorus, serve as a (visual) "hook". Earlier, I explained that in this production the action unfolds within two different types of scenes (musical numbers and scenes of dramatic action). This organization is reminiscent of the music video's verse/chorus structure. The story-driven scenes can be understood as the verses, while the musical act scenes can be understood as the chorus (the repeating hook). The repeating water imagery can also be understood as its own type of hook. Goodwin explains that the imagery of music videos contains *visual hooks*, which occur when "a visual image seems to carry an emotive charge or set of associations that connects with a musical motif, and it is repeated throughout the clip in parallel with its musical partner" (94). *Woyzeck*'s character is associated musically with the folk genre; visually he is associated with water. Here the water serves as a visual hook connected to the folk music motif.

Vesturport's *Woyzeck* emphasizes the sensory experiences of live performance, utilizing colour, composition, movement, music, and sound to produce a richly evocative experience. The four modes of spatial production (material, embodied, lighting, and sound)

interconnect, like in the music video form, to create a spectacular interweaving of sound and image across all aspects of the production. Specifically, the synesthetic blending of sound and image can be traced across the practices of iconicity, framing, and dimensionality within Vesturport's *Woyzeck*.

1. Iconicity

1.1. *Iconographization: visualizing music*

The process of visualizing music or rendering music visual employed in music videos may best be understood as a process of iconographization. The lyrics of the songs in the production become illustrated, or rendered iconic, in moments when the imagery of the stage tells the narrative contained in the lyrics. The visual images created by the vectorization of material space, embodied space, and lighting space may also function to *illustrate*, *amplify*, or *disjoin* through their relationship with the instrumentals of the music. The images serve as an *illustration* (iconographization) of the music when “the visuals provide a feeling of tempo, rhythm, and texture,” while they function as *amplification* when “the visuals enhance the meanings of the songs,” and finally, are in *disjuncture* with the music when “the visuals fail to respond to the feel of the music” (Williams 64).

Similarly, the performance aspect of the songs may become visualized (iconographized). Gardarsson utilizes the iconography of rock and roll performance to supplement the need for familiarity through which the performance of a song may be visualized. As a result of this, the illustration, amplification, and disjunction of performance and image become possible. The images of performance illustrate already established rock performance iconography and the iconography of concert performance. The use of acrobatics serves to amplify the iconography of rock performance. Finally, disjunction would occur if the imagery on stage differed from established rock iconography; however, Gardarsson

intentionally affirms established rock iconography throughout the production, avoiding disjuncture.

1.2. *Rhetoric in imagery*

Music videos commonly use visual themes, symbols, motifs, and metaphors to create visual narratives or visual equivalencies for the narratives of the song's lyrics. In Vesturport's *Woyzeck*, the space created by bodies not only produces performance spaces, but also produces *rhetorical spaces* in which the themes, symbols, motifs, and metaphors of the story of *Woyzeck* are visually manifested in the bodies of the performers.

The production opens with Woyzeck kneeling at center stage; the Doctor stands above him on a platform, pouring water into a bowl held by Woyzeck. As the water pours into the bowl, Woyzeck drinks from it, causing him to choke repeatedly. A siren blares and the Doctor exits as Factory Workers spread out across the pipe system. The Factory Manager (who fills the roll of the Captain) now stands at center of the raised platform where the Doctor had been. These blocking choices serve as a visualization of the production's central social theme: the degradation of the working classes at the hands of those with authority. Just as the Manager and the Doctor stand physically above Woyzeck, they hold higher class positions than him, giving them license to abuse Woyzeck.

The Manager engages Woyzeck in a discussion of the nature of Man, one of the primary themes explored in *Woyzeck*. The Manager argues that Man's morality is stronger than his base physical nature. Throughout the conversation, Woyzeck fidgets in physical discomfort from the need to urinate. The movements of his body visually echo his position that "men are flesh and blood" in the debate over the nature of Man. Throughout Woyzeck's conversation with the Manager, the other workers are frozen in tableau in the background. As the conversation comes to an end, the Workers begin to sing (which functions as the end

of the scene and a transition to the next). The Workers dance in unison as they sing. Their dancing switches back and forth between two types of movement: 1. disciplined and militaristic movements, 2. crude and bawdy movements. These two styles of movement are visualizations of the two sides of the philosophical debate about the nature of man: on one side, man is a moral/spiritual being capable of discipline and grace; on the other side, man is trapped by the basic needs of his body. As the song ends, Woyzeck urinates into a circular opening in the floor at the front of the stage. This act serves as another visual affirmation that man is “flesh and blood.”

Another strong example of visual rhetoric comes in a later scene where Woyzeck gives Marie a dress as a present. The dress resembles the iconic dress worn by Walt Disney’s Snow White. This iconic dress is a symbol of the idealized woman. The dress symbolizes the way Woyzeck views Marie not as a real person, but as an ideal. The symbol of the dress highlights the tragedy in *Woyzeck*, which arises in part from Woyzeck’s inability to accept Marie’s fallibility because he idealizes her.

The most prominent visual motif of the production is water. Water becomes a double metaphor. The “water is life” metaphor is a vital aspect of the performance text created by Gardasson. All of the characters depend physically and financially on the factory’s distribution and sale of water. The dark side of the “water is life” metaphor is that water can also take away life. This is hinted at by the torturous test the Doctor enacts on Woyzeck by repeatedly making him choke on water, and is later proven in the last scene when Woyzeck murders Marie by drowning her, and then drowns himself. Alternatively, water also serves as a metaphor for the capitalist system in which life (water) is reduced to a good or service and is subjected to cost evaluation and symbolic exchange.

2. Framing

2.1. *Synesthetic frames*

The processes of synesthesia can be best understood as framing devices. When pressed to explain what defines a music video, scholars such as Goodwin, William, Berland, and many others have determined that it is not simply the presence of music and image, but that it is this *blending* of music and image (synesthesia) which is found at the heart of the music video form. Synesthesia is the more complex frame contained within the more obvious framing device of the video/television. It is not surprising that the video editing techniques that distinguish the music video form also contain processes of synesthesia. Goodwin explains that “often, computerized effects are added [in the editing process] to introduce more movement into the frame,” Goodwin gives the example of the use of multiple split screen editing in order to fracture the television image “into more than a dozen rapidly changing sections” (61). This artificial sense of speed and movement created by the editing process — its own form of synesthesia— also produces synesthesia in its replication of musical rhythm and tempo, in effect making the music visual. Music video editing style is necessitated in large part by a need to keep up with the tempo of the music: “The fast cutting that is a feature of the vast majority of clips is clearly used because to cut at the speed of cinema or broadcast television would appear incongruous in relation to the sound track” (Goodwin 61).

In order to be able to make comparisons between the main vectors of music videos (music and image) and the vectors connecting the four modes of spatial construction in Vesturport’s *Woyzeck*, I will need to first consider how images are constructed across the various spatial modes. The space created by sound forms the music side of the music/image relationship which defines music video structure. Sound-space can be divided into four main subcategories: the space created by instrumentals, the space created by lyrics, the space

created by speech, and the space created by sound effects. Images, the other half of the primary vector system at work in the music video form, result from the three other modes of spatial construction: material space, embodied space, and lighting space. Images can be created by any one of these three modes of spatial construction or by a combination of any two or all three of these modes. Importantly, the space created by bodies bridges both the music and the image aspects of the music video form, as the music often originates from bodies.

Following Goodwin's categories of visualization, I will examine first how the lyrics of the songs (sound-space) relate to the visuals (the material space, embodied space, lighting space) in Vesturport's *Woyzeck*. Next, I will examine how the instrumentals (sound-space) relate to the visuals (material space, embodied space, lighting space) in this show. Finally, I will consider the relationship between the performance of songs (sound-space and embodied space) and modes of visualization (material space, embodied space, lighting space) in this show.

Vesturport's production resembles the music video form in part because it is structured around the musical numbers (functioning as the chorus or "hook"), alternating with dramatic scenes (which function as the verse). The song lyrics, the most significant alteration to the playtext in Vesturport's production, at times continue to tell the same story as the dialogue (*illustration*); at others, they seem only linked to the action thematically (*amplification*); occasionally the two seem to share no connection whatsoever (*disjuncture*), reflecting the ways that lyrics connect to imagery in the music video form.

The lyrics of the songs are *illustrated* by the accompanying imagery, Goodwin explains, in the instances when "the visual narration tells the story of the song lyric". *Amplification* of the lyrics "occurs when the clip introduces new meanings that do not

conflict with the lyrics, but that add layers of meaning”. Finally, *disjuncture* between lyric and images can occur in two ways: first, when “the imagery has no apparent bearing on the lyrics” (this is unusual), second, when the visual narrative “either flatly contradict[s] the lyrics or perhaps unintentionally undermine[s] them” (Goodwin 88).

The Drum Major’s entrance scene is a strong example of the processes by which music is visualized and images are made musical. The Drum Major’s song tells of his physical and sexual prowess. The Drum Major’s physical placement in space, suspended above the others (and the audience), reaffirms and *illustrates* the meaning of the lyrics. The two women on stage, Marie and the Doctor, stare in a shocked pleasure at the Drum Major’s performance, *illustrating* the effect that the Drum Major’s appearance has on women. This is affirmed and *amplified* by the lyrics of the song, in which he brags: “a blizzard of knickers follow me wherever I go”. Similarly, the image of the Drum Major’s Men dancing in unified rhythm and looking “cool” in their black suits alongside poorly-dressed Woyzeck and the Workers who stand frozen watching the spectacle, *amplifies* the meaning of the lyrics. The *mise-en-scene* implies that not only do women want to be with the Drum Major (as the lyrics state) but men also want to *be* the Drum Major himself (as the imagery implies).

The visual images may also function to *illustrate*, *amplify*, or work in *disjuncture* in their relationship with the music (instrumental). Kevin Williams explains that images serve as an *illustration* of the music when “the visuals provide a feeling of tempo, rhythm, and texture”, while they function as *amplification* when “the visuals enhance the meanings of the songs”, and finally, the visuals are in disjuncture with the music when “the visuals fail to respond to the feel of the music” (64).

The Drum Major’s performance, for example, *amplifies* the visualization of the music. The Drum Major performs his acrobatics in time with the music. This symbiosis of

music and movement functions as a visual *amplification* of the music. His swinging matches the rhythm of his songs, while his more spectacular acts are enacted during the key points in the song. Simultaneously, the Drum Major's Men produce the rhythm in this scene as they stomp their feet at a continuous steady pace producing a basic beat for the song. The foot stomping functions to visually *illustrate* the music's rhythm and tempo. Just as the movements of the Drum Major and his men *amplify* and *illustrate* the music (instruments), the lighting *amplifies* both the movements of the Drum Major and his Men and *illustrates* the rhythm of the music. The rhythm and tempo of the moving lights pulse in sync with the rhythm and tempo of the music (*illustrating* the music). Similarly, at the end of the song, the final staccato notes of the song are accentuated and *amplified* by strobe lighting, as each note is executed in time with each flash of light.

In addition to the music and lyrics, songs also require *performance*, which Goodwin and Williams describe as the third aspect of a song. The performance can share the same codes of visualization in music videos as the lyrics and music do (again these are illustration, amplification, and disjuncture). In music videos, the images may "illustrate a band's already established performance iconography in videos that mimic a band's concert performance" (Williams 66). "Videos amplify a band's visual performance through the technical capabilities of video that are not possible in live performance", Williams explains (66). Finally, "performance and [visuals] are disjunctive when the band appears in a manner that differs from their established iconography" (William 67).

In music videos, the modes of visualizing performance require that the spectator be previously familiar with the performance iconography of the figures in the video. Gardarsson utilized the general iconography of rock and roll performance to supplement this need for familiarity and in doing so make the illustration, amplification, and disjunction of

performance and image possible. For example, the sharkskin suit and greasy hair of the Drum Major are both aspects of rock iconography; they function to *illustrate* the Drum Major's status as a "rock star". The Drum Major's acrobatics, as spectacular feats, serve to *amplify* his rock star performance. Similarly, the moving lights which are built into the set produce an effect which evokes associations with rock concert lighting, *amplifying* the rock iconography of the Drum Major's performance. The associations with rock concert lighting are produced as much by the physical presence of the light fixtures built into the set as by the moving and pulsing beams of light themselves. The fact that one is able to see the light fixture adds to the association with rock concert lighting, since in most rock concerts no effort is made to hide the source of the light. As such, the visible lighting fixtures in *Woyzeck* play up the iconography of rock performance, serving as *amplifications* of the song's performance.

2.2. Acoustic framing

Musical genre functions as another framing device in Vesturport's production. For example, Woyzeck sings only folk songs, while the Drum Major sings only rock music—even his love songs remain in the style of the rock ballad. Woyzeck is framed aurally by his use of folk music, which reinforces his pre-existing connections to nature and to philosophical materialism. The Drum Major is given his own aural frame through his link to rock music, framing him as the antithesis of Woyzeck (in the case of this production, that antithesis is pop culture/capitalism). It is no coincidence that the Drum Major's entrance for his rock number interrupts Woyzeck singing a folk love song to Marie.

The Drum Major's association with rock music results in the most significant metonym created in the production: rock music and the Drum Major come to stand in for

capitalism. In *Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure, and the Politics of Rock and Roll*, Simon Frith writes:

Rock music is capitalist music. It draws its meanings from the relationships of capitalist production, and it contributes, as a leisure activity, to the reproduction of those relationships; the music doesn't challenge the system but reflects and illuminates it ... The needs expressed in rock –for freedom, control, power, a sense of life –are needs defined by capitalism. And rock is a mass culture. It is not folk or art but a commoditized dream. (272)

Just as rock music is capitalist, so too is the music video; “music videos may be considered to be advertising and promotional vehicles” (Williams 49). In addition to promoting the musicians and their records, music videos follow a similar format as TV commercials; in music, television commercials and music videos flow together, blurring the distinction between them.

While musical genre serves as an aural representation of social class divisions, the use of sound effects serves as a frame for the performance's thematic and scenic structures. The sound effects used throughout the performance, such as alarms, function almost like musical punctuation. At times, the alarms serve to end one action and denote the beginning of another, and at other times, they serve as an auditory exclamation point. For example, the production opens with soft piano and violin music playing over the sounds of Woyzeck sputtering and choking on water. A siren blasts, ending the action of the Doctor pouring water onto Woyzeck, and the music recommences over the sound of Woyzeck choking. The sound of Woyzeck's choking, as well as the sirens, produce a stark juxtaposition and musical counterpoint against the serenity of the music, thus creating two contrasting auditory spaces. The siren continues to blare periodically throughout the rest of the scene. As the scene

continues, the Workers and Manager shout their lines, again clashing with the tone and atmosphere created by the music. However, later in the scene, Woyzeck and Marie speak sweetly to one another; their speech, unlike that of the others, complements and harmonizes with the tone of the music. At the end of the scene, the music fades out as the Workers begin to sing. They switch between two different tonal styles as they sing: 1. they sing in a controlled fashion, 2. their tone is gruff and bawdy. This mirrors aurally (as their two dance styles do visually) the two sides of the debate over the nature of Man.

2.3 Spatiality and social framing

Just as musical genre is used to denote differences between social classes, the social division of the characters is illustrated visually through their separation in space. The material, embodied, and lighting spaces combine, for example, in the Drum Major's entrance scene to produce a visual image of the social separations of the characters. The figures on stage are separated spatially into two groups; the townsfolk (including Woyzeck and Marie) are placed upstage, while the Drum Major's Men stand down stage. The Drum Major himself is suspended in mid-air above the audience on a trapeze—a position that distinguishes him as separate and above others in a class of his own. Again following Goodwin's categories of musical visualization, the spatial division of the characters is an *illustration* of the social division. These images of social division work to *illustrate* and *amplify* the meaning of the lyrics of the Drum Major's song which describe him as a superior individual.

3. Dimensionality

3.1 Breaking the frame: shifting dimensionality

The proscenium arch produces an enclosed three-dimensional depth model within a two-dimensional frame. Yet, when the frame is broken, for example by the intrusion of the action into the space of the auditorium in the Drum Major's entrance scene, the depth model

shifts to pure three-dimensionality. When the Drum Major performs acrobatic feats while suspended over the audience, his presence in the auditorium breaks the frame and thereby shatters the impression of the two-dimensionality of the stage frame. Similarly, direct address to the audience also breaks the frame. The material space is organized so as to make these two spaces (the stage and the auditorium) separate; it is the intrusion of bodied space into the material space of the audience that breaks this seemingly strict separation.

The ruptures of the frame are a result of the intrusion of the actor's presence (either their physical presence or the presence of their gaze) into the space of the audience. During moments in which a character performs direct address to the audience and breaks the frame, the nature of the frame shifts. In the case of enclosed proscenium arch theatre, the frame functions similar to the cinematic frame: it allows for one-way surveillance by the audience, who can voyeuristically watch the action within the frame without being watched in return. However, when the frame is broken in proscenium arch theatre, the ontological nature of the frame shifts and becomes more akin to the functioning of the television frame, in which there is the potential for the act of surveillance to have the appearance of being two-way. An example of this is the narrative technique in which the television actor directly addresses the audience. While not a new technique in the filming of television, direct address is undergoing a resurgence of popularity in television, with many shows using direct address to the audience as an integral feature of the programs. In fact, the use of direct address has become a fixture in reality television and mockumentary comedies.

3.2. Distraction and the rupture of the Proscenium frame

Vesturport's *Woyzeck* contains several acrobatic spectacles which break the two-dimensional frame of the proscenium arch. The proliferation of these spectacular feats produces visual distraction. Discussing the nature of visual cognition, in *Visual Cognition:*

Computational, Experimental and Neuropsychological Perspectives, Glyn W. Humphreys and Vicki Bruce explain that “peripheral cues generate automatic shifts in attention, whilst the effects on central cues can be controlled by the subject” (158). The automatism of shifts in visual attention caused by peripheral cues speaks to how attention functions in relation to spectacle. Humphreys and Bruce are referring to movement registered in the periphery; it is the unexpectedness of this movement which produces an automatic response. Just as the rapid succession of images in the music video produce distraction, the quickness and unexpected quality of many of the acrobatic spectacles creates a similar automatic response in our visual attention. It is in this way that spectacle produces distraction.

HEARING IS SEEING: Concluding remarks on visuality and synesthesia

The visuality of synesthetic theatre is necessarily a hybrid visuality. Through the construction of *multi-sensory joining* stimuli (artificial synesthesia), the audio (and/or kinesthetic) aspects of performance may become visualized (and vice versa). Vesturport’s *Woyzeck*, constructed from *artificial* synesthetic objections/sensory experiences, becomes a theatre of synesthesia as the performance text is built around the processes of visualizing music and musicalizing images.

Looking at the dramaturgical structures of Vesturport’s *Woyzeck*, it becomes clear that the principles of synesthesia extend to all aspects of creation. Utilizing the same internal logic as music videos in the creation of narrative, the production’s dramaturgy is structured similarly to a rock song—functioning through the alternation of verses (dramatic action) and a repeating chorus or “hook” (musical numbers). The alternating verse/chorus structure is borrowed from rock music and becomes applicable to performance structures only by undergoing a process of *iconographization*. The practice of a musical verse, which lyrically tells the narrative in a song, finds a visual equivalent in the dramatic action, while the

function of the chorus, which serves both to repeat motifs and as musical hooks to draw the audience's attention, becomes rendered visually in the performance's musical-dance numbers.

Within this larger dramaturgical structure of alternating visual equivalents of verses and choruses, there are additional processes of visualization (illustration, amplification, and disjuncture) which replicate the synesthetic framework of music videos. These processes of visualization can be found within all aspects of the performance text created by Gardarsson: in the creation of iconography, rhetorical imagery, the framing processes of musical genre, and the social uses of space. In this way, all aspects of the performance text (dialogue, lyrics, music, acting, dance, space, scenography, etc.) are given visual characteristics through the processes of visualization. Vesturport's theatre of synesthesia may be understood in this way as an ultimate example of visual theatre, with the visual attaining a presence in all aspects of the production.

One of the consequences of synesthesia is the potential for sensory overload; this produces distraction (as in the case of the Drum Major's spectacular acrobatics which break the proscenium frame). Distraction has become a central feature of today's multi-media culture. The relationship between modern visual media and the creation of a culture of distraction has been noted in scholarship since the advent of cinema (as expressed in the earlier discussion of the work of Walter Benjamin). Influenced by modern visual media, distraction has become a viewing position which is fostered in many postdramatic practices. Such is the case in landscape theatre, as will be shown in the following chapter on Robert Wilson. In dramatic theatre, distraction interferes with the linear narrative; landscape theatre, which treats time synchronically rather than diachronically, embraces distraction through the

process of reception. The synchronic time becomes spatialized in the landscape image; the result is that distraction no longer has a negative effect on reception.

CHAPTER 3

Superficiality: The Influence of Postmodern Cinema on the Landscapes of Robert Wilson's *Woyzeck*

Superficiality: The Influence of Postmodern Cinema on the Landscapes of
Robert Wilson's *Woyzeck*

Film has become such a ubiquitous medium that its influence on the sensorial aspects of theatrical performance is both varied and abundant. In Robert Wilson's *Woyzeck*, the influence of postmodern cinema can be traced through the production's framing practices. These framing practices reflect the stylistic flatness of postmodern cinema, a flatness which dominates the strategies of spatial construction employed by Wilson. The flatness which pervades the production is best understood as both an aesthetic two-dimensionality and a cultural depthlessness which is a feature of postmodernism. Drawing on the flatness of abstract painting and postmodern cinema, Wilson's work speaks to the dominating superficiality of postmodern culture. This chapter will argue that traces of influence from postmodern cinema result, in Wilson's *Woyzeck*, in a specific visuality defined by its superficiality.

Created in 2000, Wilson's *Woyzeck* is a rock musical adaptation of Büchner's play, made in collaboration with influential blues and rock musician Tom Waits. The dramaturgy of Wilson's production is dominated by visually breathtaking scenography that reveals traces of influence from the landscapes of abstract painting and cinematography. Vibrant colours, striking geometric lines, and a stark two-dimensionality fight against the text to capture the audience's attention.

Embracing the visual, Wilson's production marks a significant shift away from the dramatic text and from logocentrism. In the Chapter 1, I determined that Ostermeier's hyperrealism remains the exception to the trend in which a movement towards visual composition results in a movement away from the dramatic text. In the Chapter 2, I showed how Vesturport's adaptation of Büchner's playtext and inclusion of new songs and musical

numbers constitutes a movement away from the text by positioning the dramatic text as equal to the other aspects of performance. Wilson's production goes one step further than the two productions previously discussed by declaring war on the dramatic text. By placing the text in submissive opposition to the other aspects of performance, Wilson takes the shift away from text to extremes.

Like Vesturport's production, Wilson's *Woyzeck* is a rock musical adaptation. However, the result is not the same. While Vesturport's inclusion of rock lyrics and aesthetics results in a theatre of synesthesia, Wilson's rock musical form serves to further his rejection of the authority of the dramatic text. In rejecting the authority of the text, Wilson becomes the new author of his own *Woyzeck*. As mentioned, this practice of rejecting the authority of the text and replacing it with the authority of the director, while originating in the late-nineteenth century, has returned in contemporary practice and is a common feature of postdramatic theatre.

Wilson's *Woyzeck* exists in its own fictional world. Wilson creates a world devoid of realism, a world apart from emotions and psychology –instead, it is a world organized by visual and musical composition. Wilson embraces *Woyzeck*'s episodic plot, presenting each scene in isolation. Utilizing the proscenium arch, Wilson renders each scene as a moving image. While in some instances Wilson utilizes tableaux, in others he *simulates* the experience of a tableau. In the moments that simulate tableaux, his figures are not frozen but continue to move within the frame with an exaggerated slowness to their fractured movements. Through the use of tableaux, the action is subordinated to the stage image and scenography. The scenography is the totalizing vector in Wilson's *Woyzeck*. The scenes are driven more by the changing of the scenography, composed of large abstract geometric shapes and vibrant colours, than by the remaining remnants of narrative. Wilson's

abstraction resides also in his exploration of Büchner's text, his interaction with the narrative of *Woyzeck* functioning as an investigation of archetypes.

Wilson's characteristic dramaturgy is heavily indebted to his background in both architecture and abstract painting. In 1962, after dropping out of business school, Wilson began his career as an artist, studying in Paris with American abstract expressionist painter George McNeil. Following his apprenticeship with McNeil, Wilson studied architecture at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. Wilson's work, whether in theatre, performance art, or sculpture and installation art, always returns to an "architectural concern with building a space in which all play elements could be organized systematically" (Shevtsova 2). In an interview, Wilson expressed this architectural drive behind his work, explaining, "For me a horizontal line is space, and a vertical line is time ... It is this cross of time and space that is the basic architecture of everything" (qtd. in Safir 25).

Wilson started The Byrd Hoffman Foundation in 1969. As artistic director of the foundation, he began to work on *The King of Spain* (1969). Staged at the Anderson Theatre, *The King of Spain* was Wilson's first production to be presented on a proscenium stage, which becomes an important feature of his signature dramaturgy.

While *Woyzeck* belongs to a much later period in Wilson's career, it contains a key visual motif which was featured in his earlier works such as *The King of Spain* and *The Life and Times of Sigmund Freud* (1969). The visual motif is the image of "a man running [in place] continually" (Shevtsova 7). In Wilson's *Woyzeck*, Woyzeck is featured running in place at various moments throughout the production. Such creation and recycling of images is a characteristic feature of Wilson's theatre:

Wilson's methods of creation reflect the influence of cinema. He begins his process "with 'story-boards' (the term from the film technique of sketching scenes to be shot)":

Everything sketched in them, scene by scene, usually with text beside or below his drawings, are support for the preparation of his productions as well as their actual staging. The space and shapes of his scenes are configurations rather than illustrations but they nevertheless summarise in images the overall structure of a work, how long it will be, how scenes will look and what will happen in them. (Shevtsova 42)

Wilson discusses the usefulness of his storyboard method, connecting their use to his preoccupations with visibility, space, and architecture; he explains that the storyboards allow him to *see* "how different scenes can relate to one another, whether there might be recitatives or something spoken, a duet or some songs. I do it with drawings to see the construction, to see how the story is told visually, how the architecture looks in time and space" (Wilson qtd. in Shevtsova 42). The link between cinema and the use of storyboards is evident in Wilson's works, as the precision of the landscape images Wilson produces in his theatre reflects, as I will argue, the visual framing devices used in cinema.

Wilson's work, while highly visual, is directed to all of the senses. Wilson intends his theatre to be an embodied experience, rather than a logocentric or even simply an ocular experience. Discussing his theatre, Wilson explains that it is "in some ways, really closer to animal behavior. When a dog stalks a bird his whole body is listening ... He's not listening with his ears, with his head; it's the whole body. The eyes are listening" (qtd. in Safir 35). Philip Glass has referred to this quality of Wilson's work as "a state of attention" (Safir 35). The musicality of Wilson's *Woyzeck* functions to highlight this aspect of Wilson's work: the

music, sounds, and lyrics combine with the vibrant colours and geometric architecture of the set in an attempt to arrest the spectator's attention.

Wilson's rejection of logocentrism results in a consequent rejection of psychology. Isabelle Huppert, an actress who has worked with Wilson on a number of productions, explains that Wilson uses musicality to fill the role that psychology has traditionally played in characterization and the telling of narrative.

We are obviously never dealing with the psychological realm, and even if one of the first steps in working with Bob is to extract the tone of the language and the text, the text is never envisaged literally, but rendered by way of its musicality: Meaning is constructed through rhythm and tone. It's close to the difference between abstract and figurative art, because he starts by taking the text as an abstract piece and then by giving it different shades – not through words but through color –ends up re-endowing it with sense. (qtd. in Safir 78)

Continuing her account of Wilson's rejection of psychology in the theatre, Huppert explains that Wilson's musicality extends not only to his scenography but also to his unique uses of language.

Bob gets there by working the text as though it were a sound sculpture. Actors wear microphones in his performance. Sometimes we speak very loudly; sometimes the sound system stops so we have to project; sometimes we're translating a certain feeling; sometimes we're in an extremely intimate situation; sometimes we whisper, we shout, we speak slowly. But what's magical about Bob is that you get the feeling –maybe it's true, maybe it's not, I never tried to find out – that the choice of passages to whisper is completely arbitrary. It's not that he takes a pen and says, 'Okay, here we'll translate literally, here we'll interiorize.' It's an intuitive thing, as if he were

accessing language. He's worked a lot with autistic people, as we know, and in the end you sort of feel like you're entering that world when you work with him. (qtd. in Safir 78)

Whether or not it is an autistic experience, Wilson's work is its own world, one that has characteristics which remain constant. The world of Wilson's dramaturgy, characterized by its superficiality, is defined as much by his unique approach to language and the dramatic text as it is by the use of vibrant colour, abstract shapes, clean lines, and large spaces.

SUPERFICIALITY AND ITS THEORY

Superficiality, or flatness, is a fundamental aspect of postmodernism. Fredric Jameson theorizes flatness as "the supreme formal feature of all the postmodernisms" (9). He argues that in postmodern culture there has emerged "a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the more literal sense" (9). The depthlessness or superficiality that Jameson refers to is not simply an aesthetic flatness; it is the loss of all categories of depth. Modernism, he argues, operates through a series of depth models (essence/appearance, latent/manifest, authentic/inauthentic, etc.); in postmodernism, "depth is replaced by surface, or by multiple surfaces" (12). This flatness, which I will track through the legacy of abstract formalist painting and the influence of the cinematic "shot" as well as through the performance strategies of Landscape Theatre, has invaded all aspects of postmodern theatre.

Wilson's use of language, characteristic of the role of language in postdramatic theatre, is defined by its superficiality. In postdramatic theatre, language stands apart from plot and dialogue. Where "drama has dialogue," Aleks Sierz writes, "postdramatic theatre has [...] juxtaposed language surfaces" (379). Language surfaces, like abstract images, serve as aesthetic objects which can be appreciated for their form, texture, and tendency to produce associations. Unlike hyperrealist theatre, Wilson's postdramatic theatre declares its nature as

a sign, embracing its artificiality. In postdramatic theatre, the source and originality of speech is placed in question: “all that is ever delivered is a quotation; it is never suggested that the speaker is the originator” (Barnett 20).

The recognition of the theatrical event, achieved through the distancing of figure from speech, serves to shift the act of speech from representation to presentation. This idea is manifested in the postdramatic concept of the ‘text bearer.’ The ‘text bearer’ replaces the character; the actor’s only responsibility becomes the delivery of the lines, without the interference of interpretation. Explaining further the concept of the ‘text bearer,’ David Barnett writes:

Theatre becomes a place in which speech is not processed on the stage but in the auditorium. In many ways this is a radicalization of Brecht’s diegetic practices. While Brecht’s actors pointed to their own representations as socially influenced, here postdramatic text bearers open up the site of text construction to unrestricted speculation without the filter of Brecht’s ideological indices: the words are pointing but in no particular direction. (18-19)

Instead of actors portraying characters, Wilson molds the actors into receptacles (“text-bearers”) which are subsequently filled with meaning, or, more neutrally, information, by the spectator.

In Wilson’s hands, the narrative and character motivations of Büchner’s *Woyzeck* lose their definition and are emptied of emotion and specificity. In Wilson’s theatre, one is given the impression that “the human actors on stage do not act of their own volition and agency [... and that] there are mysterious forces at work who seem to be moving the figure magically without any visible motivation, objectives or connections” (Lehmann 78). In this particular production, there is often a disconnect between action and the spoken word: this

produces the impression that the figures are devoid of agency. For example, in a scene between Woyzeck and Marie, the two sing a love song together (“Coney Island Baby”). While singing, they both begin to swing their arms back and forth with increasing speed until finally they are both manically flailing their arms without any apparent reason for doing so. Similarly, in the shaving scene, when Woyzeck delivers the following speech, the actor says the lines while running on the spot in a manner which is exaggerated to the point of caricature:

Woyzeck: When you’re poor like us, sir... It’s the money, the money! If you haven’t got the money... I mean you can’t bring the likes of us into the world on decency. We’re flesh and blood too. Our kind doesn’t get a chance in this world or the next. If we go to heaven they’ll put us to work on the thunder.

This second example is slightly different. It creates the impression that the sentiment of Woyzeck’s speech produces the action of running; however, it is running as a metonym, not running as an action. In other words, the content of Woyzeck’s speech (the idea that Man toils) induces his running, which is a metonymical representation of Man’s toiling. In both instances, the artificiality of the relationship between word and action produces a separation of text and image, resulting in a distancing from the dramatic text.

In addition to separating text from action and reducing the dramatic text to textual surfaces delivered not by characters but by “text bearers”, Wilson’s rejection of the authority of the text is also manifested in his treatment of the image as the ultimate expressive unit (the totalizing vector). Wilson’s visuality is one of flatness. For Wilson, the pinnacle of the visual is the *image*, a superficial visuality.

The replacement of character with text-bearers in postdramatic theatre is a manifestation of the turn toward postmodern superficiality that Jameson refers to. Wilson’s

hollowing out of the emotional depths of Büchner's text and subsequent replacement of this depth with a series of images becomes, according to Jameson, a part of a larger cultural movement in which subjects are emptied of their specificity and rendered as images to be consumed. In these images, content is replaced by form. Furthermore, Jameson insists that the depthlessness, which he claims defines postmodern culture, is not "merely metaphorical: it can be experienced physically and 'literally'" (12). This literal flatness is found in the common use of tableaux in Wilson's work. It is also found in Wilson's division of space along horizontal axes as well as in the use of horizontally-sliding scenery. This superficiality is the defining feature of Wilson's *Woyzeck*.

The flatness and clean geometric lines that characterize this production can be linked back to the American abstract formalist art movement. Abstract Formalism has been most famously theorized by critic Clement Greenberg. Greenberg championed a purity of form in each art medium. In painting, Greenberg argued that this purity exists in the medium's nature as a "purely visual" form, an argument that has been widely contested. Greenberg didn't strictly believe that painting was purely visual, but rather that its strength came from its visuality and its flatness; consequently the presence of other perceptual aspects should be suppressed. Greenberg explains, in "Towards a Newer Laocoon," that "a confusion of the arts" (a mixing of media if you will) can occur, and that this confusion takes place when one art form becomes dominant in society (24). Significantly, Greenberg argues:

When... a single art is given the dominant role, it becomes the prototype of all arts: the others try to shed their proper characters and imitate its effects. The dominant art in turn tries itself to absorb the functions of the others... [and] the subservient ones are perverted and distorted; they are forced to deny their own nature in an effort to attain the effect of the dominant art. (24)

Greenberg asserts that in the beginning of the nineteenth century, literature had become the dominant art, leaving painting at risk of becoming “perverted” and “distorted”. Later, in response, pictorial artists began to remove subject matter from their art. For Greenberg, abstract formalism was the ultimate extension of this rejection of subject matter. Greenberg defines subject matter as “distinguished from content,” specifying, “in the sense that every work of art must have content, but that subject matter is something the artist does or does not have in mind when he is actually at work” (28). Painters removed subject matter, Greenberg argues, because “the dominance of literature... [is] subject matter at its most oppressive” (28). The formalist rejection of the dominance of literature and its subsequent elevation of the sensorial serves as a model for postdramatic theatre. Similarly, the flatness of American abstract formalism, which served as Wilson’s formal introduction into the world of visual art, functions as a model for the superficiality that has become the predominant feature of Wilson’s theatre.

Greenberg conceived of formalist painting as being addressed directly to the eye. In the essay “Sculpture in Our Time,” Greenberg states: “[t]he human body is no longer postulated as the agent of space in either pictorial or sculptural art; now it is eyesight alone” (59). This orientation towards the eye results in a perceptual flatness, Greenberg explains, creating a conception of space that “can be travelled through, literally or figuratively, only with the eye” (“Modernist Painting” 312). This aesthetic flatness, which can only be travelled by the eye, also occurs in the postdramatic practices of landscape theatre.

While the cultural superficiality of the production is traced to the larger influence of postmodernism, the aesthetic flatness that characterizes Wilson’s *mise-en-scene* is a feature of landscape theatre practice.

SUPERFICIALITY: Traces postmodern cinema in the landscapes of *Woyzeck*

1. Iconicity

1.1. *Landscape image*

Landscape theatre is built upon the image (the icon). The concept of landscape theatre traces back to the work of Gertrude Stein. Stein believed that a problem with theatre is a fundamental disconnect between the spectator's experience of time and the time of the play; she claimed that the spectator was always a little behind or ahead of the action. In "Landscapes of Metatheatre: Gertrude Stein's Anticipation of the Postmodern," Teresa Requena Pelegrí explains that Stein's "solution for what she found troublesome in the theatre consisted of the elimination of the story, since the story presupposed the need to use memory in the cognitive process" (111); here memory is linked to the spectator's temporal disconnect. Stein's plays often depended on a series of tableaux as a replacement for narrative. It is in the essay "Plays" that Stein provides the term "Landscape" as a solution to this problem. Stein approved of landscapes for their nature as "the thing itself" (Stein L). Landscape theatre can be understood in relation to landscape painting: it does not contain a narrative (at least not in the traditional sense); instead it is meant to be consumed by the eye.¹⁰ Landscapes appeal to a panoramic vision, and do not require specific focalization. Instead, the eye travels over a landscape almost randomly, being drawn momentarily to areas of interest, such as bright colours, only to move on to another area. In this way, landscape theatre produces (or encourages) not simply distraction, but a distraction which frees one from the focalizing demands of narratives and allows for the absorption of the production through the senses.

¹⁰ The type of landscape painting which Stein was referencing is not the type of landscape painting which features bucolic lambs grazing in a field against a backdrop of rolling mountains, a practice born out of the seventeenth century, instead Stein's point of reference was the cubist landscapes of the early twentieth-century (connecting landscape theatre to the same genealogy which would produce abstract formalist painting).

Landscape theatre, while originating with Stein, has been revived and is commonly employed in postdramatic theatre. Wilson's work is one of the most cited examples of postdramatic landscape theatre (see Fuchs 92-107 and Lehmann 77-81). Under Wilson's guiding hand, *Woyzeck* becomes a landscape of colours and geometric shapes, arrested in time as a series of tableaux. In Wilson's use of tableau, the proscenium constructs a conceptually two-dimensional stage image, producing a visual model of superficiality rather than depth.

Objects, for example, are treated as two-dimensional by Wilson, and are used to materially construct space. The designs, which use geometric shapes and vivid colours, are reminiscent of the abstract formalist painting discussed by Greenberg. The costumes also utilize geometric shapes and bright colours to transform the actors into two-dimensional images. Wilson often uses bodies specifically for their ability to produce shapes on stage. This practice objectifies the bodies, transforming them into images to be consumed. The bodies of the actors are rendered two-dimensional by the geometric quality of gestures and costumes; they become part of the similarly geometric scenery, blending to become a landscape image. For example, the geometric quality of Marie's costume reduces her body to two inverted triangles; the objectified body subsequently becomes one with the similarly geometric scenography. This geometric scenery has a quality of grandeur which results from Wilson's preference for large stage spaces.

The panoramic nature of the scenery produces distraction: the audience's focus becomes slightly fragmented as the bright colours and shapes of the scenery vie for the spectator's attention. Just as in landscape painting, the spectator's vision continuously re-focuses as attention shifts from one area of the image to another. The action of the scene

becomes secondary to the dominating landscape image; the spectator struggles with shifting their attention back and forth between the action of the scene and the panoramic landscape.

1.2. *Iconic sound: soundscapes*

The role of the space created by sound becomes heightened in much of postdramatic theatre. Landscape theatre organizes performance around the creation of images; however, the images produced need not be only visual images, since audio images (or soundscapes) share a role in making the landscape. Discussing the role of sound in postdramatic theatre practice, Lehmann writes: “An independent auditory semiotics emerges; directors also apply their sense of music and rhythm, which is influenced by pop [and in this case rock and blues] music, to classical texts” (91). Wilson’s *Woyzeck* is organized as much as an “audio landscape” as it is a visual landscape: instrumentals, singing, speech, and sound effects are combined to produce an audio *environment* as Wilson intersperses Büchner’s episodic text with songs by Tom Waits.

2. Framing

2.1. *Landscape tableau*

The tableau strategies of landscape theatre are necessarily framing practices. In *Postdramatic Theatre*, Lehmann argues that “as a tableau the stage space deliberately and programmatically closes itself off from the theatron” (151). As the action of the stage becomes closed off from the audience it is received as an image. This is often accomplished through the use of the proscenium arch as a framing device. Lehmann writes that tableau “has justly been compared to the tradition of the tableau vivant,” explaining that “[i]n painting the frame is part of the tableau” (151). Wilson favours the use of proscenium arch theatres. Maria Shevtsova remarks that in Wilson’s theatre, “The proscenium offsets his structures (or ‘architecture’), and provides them with a frame without closing them in” (53).

2.2. Acoustic frames

Wilson intersperses Büchner's episodic text with songs by Tom Waits. The songs contain Waits' unique sound, a mixing of various musical forms and styles, such as rock, blues, electronic, vaudeville, folk, and jazz. The songs provide a melancholic atmosphere. The effect of blending Büchner's text with Waits' songs is to shroud any clear depiction of era or geographical location, as the text implies one thing and the songs another. The weaving of song and text also creates the impression of two narratives that, paradoxically, are simultaneously parallel and overlapping –sometimes telling the same narrative, other times telling divergent narratives, and still other times telling narratives that only share thematic links.

Like the bright pops of colour within the landscape images of the set, unexpected changes in the tone and pitch of the soundscape function to draw in the spectator's attention; yet, once the resulting tension is released, so is the spectator's focus. In addition to changes in the tone and pitch of the singing, the various sound effects throughout the show share a similar focalizing function. That said, the plurality of noises and sounds that sometimes serves to focus attention at other times produces a great deal of distraction, becoming cacophonous as metallic clangs and crashes overlap with heavy distortion and percussion.

2.3. Social frames

The space created by bodies in Wilson's production and the social space of the performance are interdependent. Discussing Wilson's body of work, Lehmann argues that framing effects are produced by "the sculptural precision of the gestures and the heightened concentration of the actors that have a 'ceremonial' and thus [...] framing effect" (151). This ceremonial quality of the actors' gestures and embodied use of space is a key feature of the bodied space of Wilson's *Woyzeck*. The link between ceremony and framing reflects

Goffman's discussion of social framing, in which he isolates ceremonials as one of five primary types of "keys", or "conventions by which a given activity [...] is transformed into something patterned on this activity but seen by the participants to be something quite else" (Goffman 43-44), used to produce secondary frames.

Each character has its own stylized way of moving, and each of these modes of movement functions as a frame. For example, *Woyzeck's* movements are mechanical, stiff, and repetitive while also displaying a great deal of physical effort and exhaustion, allowing his movements to retain a human quality. *Woyzeck's* movements frame him as a man who has been mechanized. Marie moves in the style of a Marilyn Monroe figure, slinking around smoothly and sensuously, thus framing Marie as an idealized sensual female. Margret's movements also produce an idealized image of "woman"; she is statuesque, moving in a series of classical poses.

The stylization of the characters' movements also functions in the creation of tableau images. The characters share a set of similarities in their movements despite their differences: all move in a way that is fractured. This fracturing manifests itself differently with each character but the end effect is the same: they lapse in and out of stillness, making them seem to move in a series of still images. This produces a sense of movement reminiscent of proto-cinematic devices such as the kinoscope, which consisted of "a mechanized series of photographic images" (Crary 136).

2.4. Cinematic frames

Abstract Formalism is only one of the influences behind Wilson's landscape theatre. In his *Woyzeck*, the central influence comes from postmodern cinema. In cinema, the frame is often referred to as the "shot", since the camera and its framing effects are interdependent. However, the "shot" is a broad term that refers to both the image's frame (composition) and

the type of perspective used within that frame (produced through the selection of different camera lenses). The choice of the type of shot will greatly determine the formation of space created within the image. The selection of the frame determines what space is captured in the image, while the choice of camera lens determines the scale relationships between objects and the depth of field of the space captured. I will discuss three types of film shots that influence the construction of space in Wilson's *Woyzeck*: the close-up shot, the wide-angle (deep focus) shot, and the tracking shot.

2.5. A cinematic frame: *The close-up shot*

In *Theory of the Film*, Béla Balász argues that the “close-up” was a uniquely new discovery in film form. Through the use of the close-up, film discovered “the world of very small things visible only from very short distances, the hidden life of little things” (314). Without the aid of video or film, the theatre cannot fully replicate what the close-up shot accomplishes. Close-ups allow the spectator to notice little details, the visual and emotional details which form the film. “Close-ups are often dramatic revelations of what is really happening under the surface of appearances” (Balász 315). Balász provides the example of the use of close-up to reveal that a figure's hands are nervously twitching while in the previous wider framed shot the figure appeared to be operating with an icy calm. Balász also suggests that the close-up is akin to a silent monologue: it is a monologue of facial expression (or the expression of another body part, such as in the example of the hand above).

Wilson employs spot lighting as a means of producing a “close-up effect”. Using small high-intensity spotlights to frame and isolate small areas of focus, Wilson is able to replicate many of the effects produced by the use of close-up in film. This use of the lighting constricts the space of the stage, momentarily shifting focus to a very small area, making the

object isolated within the light seem to exist outside of its original spatial paradigm. Balász argues that this effect is always produced by the use of the close-up shot. Wilson's use of small framing spot lights serves to reveal underlying aspects of a scene, similar to the close-up shot.

Wilson uses this close-up effect in the shaving scene. In this scene, the light goes dark on Woyzeck midway through the scene, except for a small spotlight framed tightly on Woyzeck's hand, which is bent behind his back holding the straight razor. This spotlight focused tightly on Woyzeck's hand produces the effect of a close-up. The light continues to tightly frame the hand as Woyzeck walks menacingly towards the Captain with the razor. However, once the blade reaches the Captain's neck the spotlight snaps off and the original lighting snaps back on; in this snap transition, the close-up effect is released and the stage image returns to a landscape image. Just as Balász suggests about the effect of the close-up shot, the framing of Woyzeck's hand holding the razor reveals the danger that lies underneath the surface of the scene. While the Captain traditionally appears as the authoritative figure in this scene, Wilson reveals the unspoken vulnerability of the Captain and the unutilized power Woyzeck holds in his hand.

Another similar example is from the scene in which Woyzeck goes to Marie's house before bringing her to the field in order to kill her. In this scene Woyzeck arrives framed in the doorway of the house, producing a very menacing silhouette. Marie is lit by a deep blue light. A small framing spotlight appears once again upon Woyzeck's hand, except this time the light is a dark red. As before, the focus produced by the tight spotlight of Woyzeck's hand has a close-up effect. As Woyzeck slowly approaches Marie, the spotlight remains tight on his hand. The moment he finally touches her, the red spot on Woyzeck's hand disappears and the light on Marie snaps from blue to red. As in the previous scene, the moment that the

spotlight is released the close-up effect ends and the organization of the scene returns to that of the landscape image. The close-up effect of the red spotlight on Woyzeck's hand reveals Woyzeck as a possible threat to Marie and foreshadows her eventual demise by his hand.

3. Dimensionality

3.1. *The dimensionality of cinema: the wide-angle shot*

The wide-angle shot is typically used for long shots; landscape images in film would be one example. Wide-angle lenses have the “property of exaggerating depth” (Bordwell and Thompson 174). The great depth of field (deep focus) produced by the wide-angle shot typically allows for a greater use of “composition in depth”, that is, “the blocking or arrangement of characters and objects within the film frame to give a sense of depth to the screen imagery” (Beaver 80). However, there is a practice in postmodern cinema in which deep focus lenses are used while composition in depth is avoided.

Discussing the work of postmodern film director Jean-Luc Godard, Brian Henderson explains that this practice of using deep focus lenses while avoiding composition in depth produced a sense of flatness. This particular style of flatness resembles many instances of Wilson's particular use of tableau in the spatial composition of *Woyzeck*. Henderson writes, “Godard avoids depth: he arranges his characters in a single plane only –none is ever closer to the camera than another” (55). Similarly, Wilson's scenography divides the stage to make the space appear to be made up of multiple two-dimensional planes, one behind the other, rather than being truly three-dimensional. Further explaining Godard's treatment of space, Henderson notes that in instances where there are multiple planes present in the image, Godard would strictly position the characters along only one plane while the other planes “are used merely as backdrop to this one” (56) –this is an effect often utilized in Wilson's organization of his figures in relation to their scenography.

Godard's insistence on visual flatness moved the composition of his scenes away from realism. Similarly, Wilson's prioritization of the horizontal plane produces a movement away from realism. The loss of realism occurs because the insistence on having the figures operate along a strict horizontal line distances the figures' movements from what would be more realistic movement within three-dimensional space.

The effect of this compositional flatness is akin to the effect of the landscape image: in both instances the viewer's attention is not focalized; however the viewer is free to let their vision roam within a landscape image, making choices about what to absorb. Godard's (and in many instances Wilson's) "viewer is not drawn into the image, nor does he make choice's within it," because of the blatantly manufactured quality of the image, "[the viewer] stands outside the image and judges it as a whole" (Henderson 56).

3.2. The dimensionality of cinema: The tracking shot

A tracking shot is a type of moving camera shot in which "the camera and its mount are moved to follow the action" (Beaver 344). There are different kinds of tracking shots: the camera may move towards or away from the object filmed along a perpendicular angle; it may follow the object left or right along a parallel line; a tracking shot can also occur along innumerable diagonals.

Henderson explains that, in addition to the use of wide-angle shots in which composition in depth is avoided, Godard relies heavily in many of his films on parallel tracking shots in order to affirm a sense of flatness. The horizontal position of Godard's figures is reinforced and magnified by his use of horizontally-organized tracking shots, producing an "extreme stylization, wherein a plane or planes of subject are paralleled exactly by the plane of art" (Henderson 54). The effect of parallel tracking shots is replicated by Wilson by the use of moving scenery that slides back and forth across the stage parallel to

the front of the stage. For example, in the scene in which the Drum Major visits Marie at her house, a flat set structure, which is an abstract representation of Marie's house, slides horizontally across the stage from the left to right (replicating the movement of the eye during the reading process in Western civilization –the reading of both words as well as of images). This use of horizontally-sliding scenery occurs in several scenes throughout the production.

The use of set structures that simulate tracking shots reinforces the production's overall stylistic flatness. Just as "Godard achieves flatness using only a portion of the depth which deep-focus lenses permit [...using] the long-shot range and leav[ing] the shorter ranges 'blank,' so to speak" (61), Wilson uses a similar effect, often placing his figures and set pieces along one strict horizontal plane while not utilizing the remaining depth levels of the stage space. The stylistic flatness as well as the horizontally-organized movement drastically affect how the spectator's eye travels throughout the image. "Godard's planes, even where multiple, are strictly parallel ... they do not intersect or interrelate" (Henderson 61). Continuing, Henderson explains that

Consequently the eye is not led back into the depth of the frame nor forward to its surfaces. How we have to 'read' a [...] frame is one aspect of its depth; to read the frames of [many of Godard's films] the eye moves strictly from the left to the right (sometimes from right to left), never from front to back or back to front. (61)

The same is nearly always true about the visual reading of the scenes in Wilson's *Woyzeck*. The characters almost never move frontwards or backwards through the stage space, only left and right. The rare moments in which a figure moves frontwards or backwards through space coincide with moments in which those figures are menacing, such as when *Woyzeck* walks

towards the Captain with razor in hand, or in which Woyzeck enters Marie's house in order to lead her out to her eventual death.

DEPTHLESS SEEING: Concluding remarks on the landscape of superficiality

The flatness characteristic of Wilson's *Woyzeck* is seen to extend to all aspects of the performance. While this flatness defines the visuality of the production, it extends significantly to the production's spatiotemporal model, which produces far-reaching consequences. Replacing textual narrative with iconography, landscape theatre reduces the need for memory, by conceiving time as a synchronous spatial frame. Memory, then, is no longer a necessity, as the past and future are reduced to the continuous present. This reduction of chronological time to a continuous present may best be understood, not as an *atemporality*, but as what Steve Dixon refers to as 'extratemporal'. Dixon explains that "certain images and *coups de theatre* ... temporarily appear to suspend time ... [creating the] 'experience of being outside of time'" (505). In extratemporal treatments of time, time becomes "suspended, absent, irrelevant" (505). Subsequently, as time becomes irrelevant, memory too becomes extraneous. The removal of temporality, and consequently of linear narrative, reduces the necessity of focalizing agents, allowing the eye freedom to roam the landscape image in a state of distraction.

In Wilson's extratemporal world, spatiality is similarly released from a preconceived spatial paradigm. Influenced by the cinematic close-up shot, Wilson's use of spotlights function, as described above, to isolate images and extract them from the originating spatiotemporal paradigm. Similarly, the abstract two-dimensionality of the scenography provides the production with its own unique spatial paradigm; a spatiality characterized by horizontality and two-dimensionality. This characteristic horizontality and two-

dimensionality results in large part from the influence of the postmodern cinematic techniques of the wide-angle shot and tracking shot.

The depth/superficiality binary contains embedded value judgments; depth is often interpreted positively as insightful, nuanced, and meaningful, while superficiality is commonly understood negatively as partial, hollow, and limited. However, the postmodern questioning of totalizing metanarratives has resulted in an embracing of the partialness and limitedness of knowledge; this has subsequently manifested in all aspects of culture, including visuality.

The flatness of Wilson's *Woyzeck* is part of an aesthetic movement that encompasses both landscape theatre and postmodern cinema; this aesthetic superficiality is derived from the larger cultural condition of postmodernism. The separation of meaning from speech and language in postdramatic theatre practices can be connected to the larger cultural practice in postmodernity of rejecting metanarratives. While Jameson isolated flatness/superficiality as the defining characteristic of postmodern culture, Jean-Francois Lyotard, in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, writes, "simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives" (XXIV). These two designations of a defining feature of postmodern culture are not in fact in opposition; superficiality can be seen to arise as a response to the rejection of metanarratives since it is no longer possible to conceive of wholeness. Instead, objects and concepts are conceived of as necessarily limited, partial, fragmented.

The questioning of language, which results in part from the postmodern rejection of metanarratives, finds its ultimate expression in my discussion of Nadj's *Woyzeck ou l'Ébauche du Vertige*; an example of dance-theatre in which verbal language is removed entirely.

CHAPTER 4

Visual Narration: The Legacy of Photography and Silent Film in

Josef Nadj's *Woyzeck ou l'Ébauche du Vertige*

Visual Narration: The Legacy of Photography and Silent Film in Josef Nadj's *Woyzeck ou l'Ébauche du Vertige*

The creation of new visual media strongly influences the formation of performance strategies –yet it is not the only influence. The creation of performance strategies is also greatly impacted by the use of pre-existing media, the ways in which these media are used, and their continued influential role in society. While silent film is no longer a culturally dominant visual medium, it remains influential to contemporary theatrical practices because of its continued cultural legacy. Rejecting verbal language in performance, Joseph Nadj's *Woyzeck ou l'Ébauche du Vertige* invokes characteristics of silent film and of cinema's sister practice, photography. The abandonment of speech necessitates an alternative means of narration. Instead of verbal language, Nadj uses visual narrative components such as spatial composition, body language, images, and dance to create a performative language to tell the story of *Woyzeck*. The influence of photography and silent film is manifested in the visual narration strategies which the production employs in the exploration of two-dimensional images in three-dimensional space.

Woyzeck ou l'Ébauche du Vertige is a dance-theatre adaptation of Büchner's play. The production premiered in 1994 at the Théâtre National de Bretagne in Rennes, France, and was remounted at the Avignon Theatre Festival in 1997. The work of Josef Nadj, the French choreographer of Serbo-Hungarian origin, is characterized by an openness of signification. In accordance with its open dramaturgy, the performance presents a strong example of postdramatic tendencies: the absence of verbal language in this performance text highlights the sensory aspects of theatrical utterance. Rejecting the *artificiality* of verbal language, the materials the production depends on are from *nature*: clay, hay, sand, wood, and human bodies.

This chapter will examine the theory of visual narratology and demonstrate the means by which imagery *shows* (rather than *tells*) the story of *Woyzeck*. Looking at the strategies of visual narration employed by Nadj, I will outline the connections between these strategies and the media of photography and silent film. The lack of speech, the accompanying piano music, and the faux proscenium arch all combine in this production to bring forth associations with silent film. The influence of photography can be traced in both the semiotic processes embedded in the performance text and in the use of tableaux to capture static images.

Nadj was born in 1957, in the Serbian town of Kanjiza in the former Yugoslavia. Nadj's artistic interests began with painting. It was while attending the University of Budapest, studying art history and music, that Nadj discovered performance and began his training in acting and movement/dance. After university, Nadj moved to Paris, where he trained in acting and mime under Marcel Marceau, Etienne Decroux, and Jacques Lecoq. Nadj founded the company Théâtre JEL (Sign Theatre) in 1986. During this period at Théâtre JEL, he abandoned his painting to focus on performance. In 1995, Nadj became the artistic director of the Centre Chorégraphique National d'Orléans, from where he continues to create today.

Nadj's work is characterized by a blending of artistic media, blurring the borders between art forms. Often described as dance-theatre, Nadj's work also combines media such as poetry, literature, painting, sculpture, and video in the creation of his performances. In the article "Knowable and Unknowable Worlds: The Dance-Theatre of Josef Nadj," Tibor Várszegi describes Nadj's theatre as a "theatre of wholeness." Várszegi explains that in Nadj's work, "The combination of dance and theatre creates a complex of effects ... in which dramatic situation, character, motivation, dance techniques and choreography are

interrelated components each weighted similarly in terms of importance. In this way a ‘wholeness’ is produced, with no single element predominating” (99). This “wholeness” is at the heart of Nadj’s performance strategies for visual narration.

Though many media appear in his productions, Nadj primarily utilizes dance to tell his stories. For Nadj, dance is not simply the movement of bodies; it is the internal logic of his performance dramaturgy. “In Nadj’s work, dance has become an element expressive of narrative and character, the motivation between individual scenes, and the dramaturgical underpinning for the productions as a whole” (Várszegi 99). Várszegi isolates the performance components utilized by Nadj to produce narrative: “Alongside a visual dramaturgy, contact and its choreographies provide the other essential element in the narrative language of Nadj’s work” (101). In other words, Nadj builds his narratives using scenic and performative language made up of images, space, bodies, and movement.

Nadj works closely with his performers in the creation of his pieces, integrating a degree of improvisational movement into the creation process. Discussing his collaborative approach to directing, Nadj explains:

I, for example, direct my performers by simply defining a space for them, providing material which is inert in itself but which has to be given expression in performance. In the course of the improvisation, the performers have to fill this space with life. In addition to this, there is some sort of basis or source from which the performer may also take nourishment: for example, a poem ... All this may be imagined as taking place in an empty space, but I am personally drawn to concrete spaces and our relations to architecture, objects, pictures, images. The second source is a topic, which I have recently acquired in my reading. The third source is being in the world, the perspective from which I see all this. I am also influenced by the phenomena

outside theatre and art ... Whatever happens in the world, I can do nothing else but turn it into theatre. (qtd. in Várszegi 101)

From this, Nadj's creations can be seen to stem from three sources: a source of inspiration (such as a poem or an image), a topic, and a perspective (point of view). In many of Nadj's works, he takes inspiration from the life and work of an artist or writer (for example, Nadj's *Comedia Tempio* drew on writer Géza Csáth). *Woyzeck ou l'Ébauche du Vertige* is unique amongst Nadj's creations in that it is the only work to overtly draw on a dramatic text. From Büchner's *Woyzeck*, Nadj draws out his topic: Man's struggle between enlightenment and his more base nature. Through the subject of *Woyzeck*, Nadj explores how this internal struggle of man is connected to the precariousness of the boundary between Man's sanity and his slide into madness. Containing the figures on stage within a fixed space, the performance of *Woyzeck* becomes an observation of the breakdown of a man when faced with the struggle between his humanity and his baser nature.

It is telling that Nadj describes his process as starting with a space; this speaks to the important role that space plays in the formation of his visual narratives. Furthermore, for Nadj, narrative grows from the interrelationship of the body and space. Nadj describes the process used to determine the orientation and atmosphere of a scene:

A scene is usually oriented in a number of different directions at once, so in the course of rehearsals we spend a long time trying to find the key. If for example the structure of a scene demands the creation of a character, then we will structure space around this character, and props will be selected accordingly. But it is also possible that we choose space as our starting point, and we adjust the choreography or characters to that. (qtd. in Várszegi 100)

Nadj's scene-building process illustrates the reciprocal nature of the relationship between space and the body in his work.

The themes found in Nadj's *Woyzeck* are recurrent in his works. The image of containment/confinement appears in many of Nadj's creations, starting with his very first production, *Canard Pékinois* (1987). In this piece, several figures are confined at a dinner party without food; despite their desire to leave, they are unable to do so. The exploration of the fine line between creativity and madness is also a key theme throughout many of Nadj's works. For example, in *Comedia Tempio*, Nadj examines the relationships between creativity, addiction, and madness in his study of the life and work of Hungarian writer Géza Csáth. Similarly, the philosophical exploration of the nature of Man runs throughout nearly all of Nadj's work, most notably in *Les Philosophes*, about four sons/disciples/students who orbit around the figure of the Father/master/teacher.

Woyzeck ou l'Ébauche du Vertige, like all of Nadj's work, is characterized by an openness of signification. The practice of bestowing authority upon the dramatic text has long functioned to put limitations on the interpretation of signs; this typically functioned to produce a more unified interpretation and understanding amongst the audience. In Nadj's postdramatic dance-theatre the decreased importance (or absence) of the dramatic text permits a semiotic free-play of interpretation; visual narration encourages a plurality in the possible interpretations of signs. Because the production is characterized by this openness of signification, it is necessary to establish a certain framework of reference for delineating scenes and identifying characters, to allow for easier discussion of the features of the production.

In addition to being semiotically open the production is also structurally open, with no clear scene or act breaks, similar to modern dance techniques. The dominant mode of

spatial construction (the totalizing vector) is the space created by the actors' bodies. Subsequently, in the absence of speech, it is primarily the actors' bodies that tell the story of *Woyzeck*. The characters never leave the stage: their constant presence, in addition to the performance's open structure, makes it difficult to differentiate scenes. For the purposes of this thesis, a framework for distinguishing scenes is necessary. I propose that individual scenes in Nadj's *Woyzeck* are delineated by tableaux, with each individual scene framed by an opening and closing tableau. Each scene can then be defined by significant events, such as the murder of a main character.

Since there is no textual narration, the identity of each figure is unclear. The figures are never given names, either in dialogue (since it is excluded), or in the production's program. In order to describe and name Nadj's figures I have provided each figure on stage with a name from Büchner's original *dramatis personae* by deducing their characters from their on-stage functions and actions. Yet, the assignment of characters to figures is not perfect. For example, I have chosen to refer to the large malformed figure in white as the Doctor in part because he is dressed in white, as doctors commonly are, and because it is this figure who forcefully feeds (Mad)Woyzeck peas; however, this is also the same figure whom (Mad)Woyzeck shaves, which would indicate that this figure is the Captain if the actions follow Büchner's playtext.

Instead of ignoring these discrepancies, I want to acknowledge them as an integral part of the production: the free-interpretation of signs extends to the determination of character for the figures on stage. It is not possible to be certain of the identity of the majority of the figures onstage. I would not provide the figures with character names at all, if it were not for the practical need to be able to easily and quickly reference individual figures. There is only one figure on stage that is easily identified, that being Marie, as she is the only

female. While none of the figures are fully-fleshed out characters, Marie is the figure with the least agency: she is positioned and reduced to the archetype of the ideal woman, an object of men's desire.

Significantly, Nadj has also added a secondary Woyzeck. The two Woyzecks can be interpreted as two sides of the same coin, each an aspect of Woyzeck's mind—his fragile humanity and his madness. The two Woyzecks are dressed identically, with one exception: one is smeared with clay and the other is not. The Woyzeck who is *not* smeared in clay is timid and gentle, while the Woyzeck who is smeared in clay is violent and erratic. As such, I will refer to the Woyzeck who is smeared with clay as Mad-Woyzeck and the other I will refer to only as Woyzeck.¹¹

VISUAL NARRATION AND ITS THEORY

In visual narratology, as in literary narratology, the notion of focalization is central. In her book *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, Mieke Bal writes that “Focalization acts as the steering perspective on the events (or fabula)” (165). The presence of a “steering perspective” is essential for the creation of a narrative in order for it to have some degree of universal understanding in its reception. Visual narratology theory examines how an interpretation of visual stories is prescribed from within. Bal implies that focalization is not simply central to visual narratology, but rather that focalization within an image produces the visual narrative.

The process by which focalization produces visual narrative can be clarified by looking at the example of the visual narrative depicted on a portion of *Arjuna's Penance* (the world's largest bas-relief carving) that is provided in Bal's book. On the upper left section of

¹¹ The Woyzeck who is present onstage in opening scene is Mad-Woyzeck, and is played by Josef Nadj himself.

the relief, the wise man Arjuna is depicted in a yoga position. On the lower right side of the image, a cat standing on one of its hind legs holds the same position. Around the cat there are a number of mice, and the mice are laughing. Bal explains that without interpretation the different parts of the relief share no relation. Through interpretation, the parts form together into a narrative: the cat, inspired by Arjuna's grace, attempts imitation, while the mice laugh at the cat's folly knowing happily that they are now safe from the threat of the cat.

One of the central ideas that Bal outlines is that the image and the story can only be connected by "the view" of the spectator, with "view" meaning both sight and interpretation. Another vital aspect of this example is the absence of language. The image produces a narrative spatially, and does so without, in Bal's words, "absorbing the image in language" (149). In other words, the narrative is not created by a form of translation of the images into words but rather the story springs directly from the images themselves.

Visual narration relates back to Marie Hunter's statement, featured in the introduction, which stipulates that "the spectator's gaze is always directed in the theatre by means of focal points in the staging that are equivalent to camera views" (19). This implies that all theatre operates to some degree within the frame of visual narration. I would amend Hunter's statement, arguing instead that the spectator's eye is *often* directed by focal points. In Nadj's production, when there are multiple areas of actor movement onstage, there is no longer a central focalizing mechanism at work and the eye is let loose to wander. In these moments, there is more than one active space created by the actors' bodies. The lack of a central focalizing mechanism when there are multiple areas of movement on stage fractures the spectator's attention, producing distraction. These moments are not in opposition to the visual narration, but are instead a feature of the production's open dramaturgical structure.

Here the spectator is able to choose their own areas of focus, building their own narrative from the multiple visual compositions present on stage.

In Nadj's *Woyzeck*, the actors' movements and gestures serve as the production's totalizing vector. The space created by bodies dominates the other categories of space in Nadj's production because the story of the performance is told primarily through the bodies of the actors. Nadj, rejecting verbal language, utilizes the movement and gestures of the actors to tell the story of *Woyzeck*. In other words, Nadj uses dance and gesture as focalizing devices in his creation of both static and dynamic visual imagery.

The opening scene is particularly useful as an example of the processes by which components of visual narration form together into a narrative, as it sets up the conventions of spatial construction and narration for the production. The performance begins in tableau. The scene opens with Marie at upstage left standing on a stool. Mad-Woyzeck is at centre stage with his back to the audience, facing a table at which are seated the Doctor and a Soldier who wears a burlap sack over his head. At upstage right the Captain is crouched down beside another soldier who also wears a burlap sack over his head. All are frozen in place. Marie is the first to move; she slowly uncrosses one of her arms and begins to extend it slowly towards Mad-Woyzeck. She climbs down off the stool, walks towards Mad-Woyzeck and stops once she reaches him; then she begins to use her fingers to manipulate his facial expressions. Once the tableau is released, the Doctor takes hold of the bodies of Mad-Woyzeck and Marie, and manipulates and adjusts their limbs and postures as if manipulating puppets. This demonstrates visually the other characters' lack of agency. The Doctor picks up Marie and places her back on top of her pedestal, which is an image of male patriarchy relegating the female body to an object of male sexual desire. It is at this point that Mad-Woyzeck begins to move of his own accord. Mad-Woyzeck sits at the table, on the stage-left

side, while the Doctor sits at the upstage side of the table. The Doctor begins to feed peas to Mad-Woyzeck, who lets them dribble out of his mouth. Once finished with the peas, Mad-Woyzeck stands up, pulls a knife, walks to the side of the Doctor and begins to shave his head. The scene ends in the second tableau, with Marie still frozen on her pedestal, all of the supporting characters sprawled over furniture and the floor, and Mad-Woyzeck at center-stage with a wooden pole raised horizontally above his head. Very slowly Mad-Woyzeck bends the pole over his head, a symbolic image of the “unbearable pressure exerted upon him” (“*Woyzeck*” Bloedé n.pag), until finally it breaks and action resumes with the second scene.

This opening scene combines two key scenes from Büchner’s *Woyzeck*: the shaving scene and the medical trial scene. The iconic image of Woyzeck eating peas effectively encapsulates the scene from Büchner’s play in which the Doctor subjects Woyzeck to a rigorous medical trial. The action of shaving the Doctor-figure performs the narrative of the shaving scene, using visual cues to bring forth narrative points from Büchner’s dramatic text. Additionally, the opening scene provides a visual depiction of the thematic narratives of patriarchy and female repression which run throughout the play, when Marie’s attempt to gain agency is thwarted by the Doctor, who forcibly places her back atop her pedestal.

The murder scene provides another key example of the formation of narrative through visual imagery. The scene begins with the men all performing a choreographed series of military salutes. This choreography ends with Woyzeck breaking away from the group, as the remaining four men’s movements shift into a series of hand movements which resemble nervous hand wringing. During this action, Woyzeck joins Marie, and in the background of the actions of the four men she makes Woyzeck get down on his hands and knees and crawl while she sits on his back. He stops in front of the mirror; still seated on his

back, Marie looks at herself in the mirror. Woyzeck then rises and embraces Marie. In the midst of the action of the other four men, Woyzeck picks up Marie as if to dance with her but instead he stumbles and slams into the table, atop which she falls limp. Woyzeck, seeing Marie go limp, becomes scared and backs away. As Woyzeck stumbles away from the lifeless Marie, Mad-Woyzeck walks to the table and climbs on top of Marie cradling her with one arm and trying to shake her awake with the other. However, each time Mad-Woyzeck raises her hand it simply falls lifeless back to the table. Meanwhile, Woyzeck flees and hides behind the door, from where he will helplessly watch the rest of the scene. Mad-Woyzeck continues to try to wake Marie: he tries to make her stand and tries to make her dance with him but she remains lifeless.

In this scene, the act of Marie sitting on Woyzeck's back while he crawls on hands and knees visually narrates the emasculation he experiences as a result of her infidelity, an emasculation that eventually pushes his already troubled mind over the edge, leading him to murder Marie. The image of Marie looking in the mirror is a visual narrative strategy used to *show* her shallowness and insecurity, character flaws that lead her to be unfaithful when tempted by the attentions of the Drum Major. Woyzeck's own fear and confusion over Marie's limp form effectively narrates the instability of his mind. The choice to have Marie die while embraced by and dancing with Woyzeck provides a commentary on her death in Büchner's play: Woyzeck was not fully aware of his act of murder, since it was a crime of passion. Finally, the replacement of Woyzeck with Mad-Woyzeck, as Woyzeck flees from Marie's limp body, is an imagistic means of showing that Woyzeck becomes lost in his madness when he murders Marie.

In the production, when the action is replaced by tableau, the focalizing mechanism is lost and the spectator's eye is free to roam the image. When the performance shifts into

tableau there is simultaneously a shift out of story mode and into something more akin to landscape theatre. Landscape theatre, understood in relation to landscape painting, does not contain a narrative (at least not in the traditional sense). Landscape theatre is not logocentric, it is sensorial and it is meant to be consumed by the eye. As discussed in the previous chapter on Robert Wilson's *Woyzeck*, landscapes appeal to a panoramic vision and do not require specific focalization. Instead, the eye travels over a landscape almost randomly, being drawn momentarily to areas of interest such as bright colours, only to move on to another area shortly thereafter. In this way, landscape theatre produces (or encourages) distraction, but a distraction that frees one from the focalizing demands of narratives and allows for the absorption of the production through the senses.

VISUAL NARRATION: Tracing photography and silent film in *Woyzeck*

1. Iconography

1.1. *Iconography of the scenography*

In Nadj's *Woyzeck*, the scenography functions as an agent of containment. The set is encased within a wooden cube-shaped frame. The cube-frame is a visual image of confinement that encloses the entire performance space. The rear of the cube-frame is the only solid wall with a door inset at stage left. The confinement produced by the set is a thematic feature of the performance's visual narrative. Throughout the performance, none of the characters are ever permitted to leave the space; even though the Drum Major is hidden in the cupboard at the beginning of the performance, he is never actually outside of the performance space. Similarly, when Woyzeck retreats in horror after killing Marie, he opens the door to flee, but the door leads nowhere and he is forced to hide in the narrow space between the door frame and the wall. The confinement, like the medical experiment Woyzeck is submitted to, is a feature of the "unbearable pressure exerted upon him— a

process of dehumanisation leading him to madness and murder” (Bloedé n.pag). Once madness fully consumes Woyzeck and he kills Marie, his dehumanisation is complete, he disappears behind the door, and Mad-Woyzeck reigns. The release into madness allows in turn for the characters’ release from the confines of the performance space.

In the final scene, the Doctor and the Captain begin to clean up the performance space. The Captain picks up the door and relocates it from the rear wall of the cube to centre stage right of the cube, providing the space for the first time with an entrance/exit. Only once the door is relocated are the figures able to slowly start leaving the space. The last image is of Woyzeck picking up Marie’s corpse and the chair on which she rests, and tenderly carrying her body off stage.

1.2. *Silent film iconography*

The absence of speech¹² in Nadj’s *Woyzeck* creates a strong association with silent film. This association is reinforced as the appearance and movements of the characters stylistically resemble many silent films of the early twentieth century. For example, the warped grotesque appearance of the figures and the dreamlike atmosphere of Nadj’s *Woyzeck* are reminiscent of the expressionism of such silent films as *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* (1920) and *The Golem* (1920).

The figures in *Woyzeck ou l’Ébauche du Vertige* are deformed humanoid creatures. The dehumanization of the figures serves as a physical manifestation of their mental deterioration as they are led into madness. Discussing expressionism in silent film, A. R. Fulton explains that “expressionism results from the attempt of the artist to express meaning beyond reality. The result is a studied distortion” (118). In Nadj’s production, the distortion

¹² The absence of speech in theatre has a history in the practice of mime, a practice that Nadj himself trained in under Marcel Marceau, Etienne Decroux and Jacques Lecoq.

emanating from Woyzeck's increasingly warped mind extends not only to the physicality of the figures, but to the environment as well. For example, the legs of all the chairs have been cut on irregular angles, off-centering and unbalancing the figures further.

1.3. *Silent film and narrative 'showing'*

Returning to Hutcheon's categories of adaptation from chapter 2, cinema often combines the narrative modes of "showing" and "telling". This relationship between showing and telling is not a constant in cinema, different genres and eras of filmmaking relying more on visual narration, or "showing", and others depending more strongly on narration, or "telling." All cinema must necessarily use elements of *visual narration* because of the visual nature of the medium, while the more literary "telling" mode of narration is not a requirement and is instead often a supplement to the central visual narration. Even within the era of silent films, some films relied partially on title cards to "tell" the narrative, while others relied solely on the use of imagery to "show" the narrative.

Visual narrative strategies of early silent film often relied on the audience's previous cultural knowledge. In *Early Cinema: From Factory Gate to Dream Factory*, Simon Pople and Joe Kember explain that in silent films "traditional stereotypes and intertextual expectations ... furnished audiences with a range of conventions concerning the characters and narratives of films" (101). Nadj similarly utilizes stereotypes and intertexts to create a narrative framework. Büchner's *Woyzeck* serves as Nadj's primary intertext; however, any knowledge that a spectator may have of criticism of the play serves as a series of secondary intertexts. Nadj "shows" iconic scenes from Büchner's play (the shaving scene, Woyzeck eating peas) as a means of building narrative by linking the action on stage to the audience's knowledge of the story of *Woyzeck*. The primary stereotype utilized by Nadj as a mechanism of narration is that of the ideal woman, presented visually by the recurrent image of Marie

standing upon a stool. This placement is a visual depiction of the idealization imposed on Marie by Woyzeck. Placed upon the stool, Marie becomes vulnerable to the male's objectifying gaze. In the image of Marie standing atop the stool, the object ceases to be a stool and instead signifies as a pedestal, a symbolic image of woman's reduction to an ideal. Furthermore, Nadj places Marie in a white dress, signifying virginity and a bride's wedding dress. Both the white dress and Marie's objectified position atop the stool reinforce her position as a symbol of the archetypical ideal woman rather than as a real woman, and reduce her to the object of man's desire.

2. Framing

2.1. Photographic frames: the paratext and the 'rhetoric of the image'

Nadj's strategies of visual narration share structural similarities with photography at the level of semiosis. In essence, photography can be narrowed down to two defining characteristics: "its verism and its mute resistance to interpretation" (Foster et al. 154). By examining the strategies employed to render a photograph interpretable (looking specifically at the concept of the *paratext* and Barthes' "Rhetoric of the Image"), Nadj's strategies of visual narration will subsequently be clarified.

The paratext, a term coined by Gérard Genette, consists of "the elements located on the peripheries of a text that together provide a guiding framework for a reader" (Larson 103). In devising the term paratext, Genette was referring primarily to literary works. Genette's paratext is made up of two parts. First, the "peritext" is anything included within the text that may influence the reader, such as the title, publication information, prefaces,

afterwords, notes, etc. Second, the “epitext” is any object outside the text that may influence the reader, such as reviews, interviews with the author, letters, editorial remarks, etc.¹³

Though Genette’s paratext refers to literary texts, the term can also be applied to a broader sense of “text”. The concept of the paratext can similarly be applied to photography, if one accepts the photograph as a text. The photograph’s name or title and possible caption serve as its peritext, while any statements made by the artist about the photograph serve as its epitext. The role of the paratext in the creation of meaning in photography is explained, in *Art Since 1900*, as follows:

Photographs do not bind their interpretive text into themselves the way paintings with their compositional protocols are able to do. Rather, stenciled directly off reality, the photograph is a manifestation of fact which often depends on an added text –such as the newspaper caption –for its explanation. (Foster et al. 154-56)

Like photographs, many of the visual narrative strategies deployed by Nadj depend on an added text –the paratext– for signification.

In Nadj’s production, Büchner’s dramatic text serves as an aspect of the production’s paratext, since it is simultaneously an “interior” and “exterior” element of the production (Genette 261). Many of the scenes in Nadj’s production –such as the shaving scene and the pea-eating scene– obtain meaning only through external signification, which arises from previous knowledge of Büchner’s playtext. The importance of a paratext to the semiosis of photographs, like the importance of the dramatic text to the semiosis of Nadj’s *Woyzeck*,

¹³ In theatrical practice, the program and advertising posters can be understood as belonging to the peritext of a production; while performance reviews, interviews with the director, and information about a production from the company’s website (such as Myriam Bloedé’s description and discussion of *Woyzeck* on Nadj’s official website) may be understood as aspects of the show’s epitext.

should not be overstressed: Roland Barthes positions the paratext as only one aspect of a tripartite theory of the semiotic processes of photography.

In the essay “Rhetoric of the Image,” Barthes argues that photography produces three messages: the *linguistic* message, the *denoted* message, and the *connoted* (symbolic) message. First, the *linguistic* message is equivalent to the paratext/peritext: it is the caption and/or title. It serves two functions for the iconic image (photograph): “anchorage and relay” (Barthes 38). In other words, in photography the linguistic message serves to *fix* the free-floating iconic signifiers in order to convey a clearer message. Similarly, previous knowledge of the story of *Woyzeck* helps to fix and relay the message presented by the visual narrative. In the pea-eating scene, the audience’s knowledge of Büchner’s dramatic text provides a paratextual linguistic message that fixes the meaning of the scene. The paratextual knowledge of the playtext serves to render the scene a depiction of Woyzeck undergoing medical experimentation at the hands of the Doctor. Second, the *denoted* message is the literal message. In this example, the denoted message is simply that Woyzeck is eating peas. Third, the connoted message is symbolic/cultural, arising from both the linguistic message and the denoted iconic message. Barthes explains that the “common domain of the signifieds of connotation is that of ideology” (49). The connoted message of the pea-eating scene is Woyzeck’s oppression and degradation: he is forced by his poverty and by the authority of the Doctor (*linguistic message*) to eat the peas (*denoted message*) as part of a medical experiment (*linguistic message*). Despite the absence of verbal language, this example shows that Büchner’s dramatic text plays a role in the creation of the production’s narrative. However, the status of the dramatic text remains paratextual, only signifying through the visual narrative strategies which reference it.

2.2 Cinematic frames: tableaux montages

Film director and theorist Sergei Eisenstein argues that “cinema is, first and foremost, montage” (15). Eisenstein confronts the accepted meaning of montage, which traditionally was understood as “a means of producing something by describing it, adding individual shots to one another like building blocks” (28). Against this conception of montage, Eisenstein proposes that “*montage is not an idea composed of successive shots stuck together but an idea that DERIVES from the collision between two shots that are independent of one another*” (28). Each shot on its own “corresponds to an object but their combination [collision] corresponds to a *concept*” (16). The montage can be formulated as follows: concrete image (denotation) juxtaposed against another concrete image (denotation) produces an abstract concept (connotation). The meaning arises from the *conflict* between the two images produced by their *collision*.

“The shot is a montage cell,” Eisenstein explains (20). Nadj uses tableaux to produce montage, treating each tableau as a “montage cell.” The murder scene is preceded by a montage of five tableaux. Throughout the five tableaux, Marie remains segregated to the corner, standing upstage left in front of her pedestal, facing the wall. In the first tableau, each figure picks up a large piece of rock (Marie instead picks up a small clear crystal). Each figure then strikes a pose while holding the rock (placing the large rock on their head, chest, shoulder, etc.). They freeze in this position. Ending the tableau, the figures unfreeze and take up a new position, relocating the weight of their rock onto a new body part. They then freeze again in this new position. For the third tableau, they all rest their rocks on the table at centre stage and lay their faces against the rock as if listening to a noise. Unfreezing once more, each figure leaves their rock on the table and then lies down crumpled on the floor, forming the fourth tableau. Finally, they all retrieve their rocks from the table and rest them on various surfaces both high and low throughout the stage space; while frozen in this final

tableau they put their mouths to small holes within their rocks and blow, causing large puffs of smoke to rise from each rock. The tableau then is released and action is resumed.

Individually, each of these tableaux does not produce a narrative; however, through their juxtaposition (collision) a narrative of Man's labour arises. The act of holding a larger rock only obtains meaning through its *collision* with the second tableau. The act of holding a rock depicted in the first tableau (denoted) comes to signify (connote) the concepts of labour and Man's burden through the juxtaposition of two similar but different tableaux that show the weight and effort exerted in the simple act of holding a large rock. The third tableau, in which the figures gather around listening to their rocks, is equally meaningless and uninterpretable on its own. However, through its juxtaposition with the two previous tableaux and the inherited symbol of the rock as man's metaphorical burden, the act of listening to their rock becomes a metaphor for how the proletariat's life is dictated by their circumstances (i.e., the figures listen to instructions from their burdens). The fourth tableau is one of the very few instances in the production in which the figures make noise. Lying crumpled on the floor, the five figures let out a thin monotone wail. This noise signifies a death wail: in the final tableau the figures are reborn, and their labour becomes mechanized as the clouds of dust from their rocks come to symbolize the smoke from factory smoke stacks.

Through the processes of "collision" which mark montage, the juxtaposed tableaux tell a narrative of man's labour as his burden becomes part of the cycle of production (life/rebirth) and consumption (death).

2.3. Musical framing

The use of extradiegetic piano music creates a referential framework; this in turn creates the strongest association between Nadj's *Woyzeck* and the medium of silent film. The

piano track, which plays on and off throughout the performance, is greatly reminiscent of the live music that accompanied silent films in the cinema. As Norman King explains, in the essay “The Sounds of Silents,” in silent films the extra-diegetic music was “there to anticipate, confirm, and reinforce” (31). The musical accompaniment in silent film is basically “mood music,” King explains, “making the images more atmospheric, intensifying the emotional impact, heightening the drama, underscoring the climaxes, providing a sense of complicity” (King 31). This description can equally apply to the use of music in *Woyzeck ou l'Ébauche du Vertige*.

The murder scene, for example, begins in silence. It is only in the moment that Marie is killed that the music commences. This delayed commencement of the music underscores the tragedy of Marie’s death. Alternatively, when Mad-Woyzeck later stabs himself, the music stops abruptly. In this instance, the absence of the music functions to heighten the scene’s dramatic impact. Similarly, in the final scene, a sad melody begins to play in the moment that Woyzeck picks up the dead Marie in her chair and carries her offstage. The melancholic-sounding music functions to create atmosphere, to “intensify the emotional impact” (following King’s description of silent film music), as well as to reinforce the finality of the ending (67).

Nadj’s use of music also provides the “sense of complicity” that King attributes to silent film music. Throughout the performance the music undergoes several changes in style, rhythm, and tempo. With each shift in time signature and musical genre, the actors’ movements shift in speed and style in response. This responsiveness between music and action reflects the similar kind of collaboration that existed between the projection of the silent film and the performance of the live accompanying music.

The piano music which accompanies the performance serves two main framing functions. In some instances it initiates the action, serving as the catalyst that releases the figures from a tableau. In other instances, the music functions primarily to build and reinforce the emotional atmosphere of the performance. There is also a third, more subtle, relationship between the music and the action. The actors' movements often function as a visualization of the music, as the actors move in timed response to the music. Inversely, at times the music seems to respond to cues from the actors' movement. For example, when Mad-Woyzeck displays shock or surprise on his face, the music speeds up and becomes higher-pitched, mirroring the sensations displayed on Mad-Woyzeck's face.

The music also functions to "confirm" or "reinforce" the visual narrative. Returning to the example of Marie's murder, while the commencement of the music highlights the moment of her death, the music also supports the impression created by the visual narrative that Woyzeck may simply be dancing with Marie, and that she is not dead.

2.3. Framing with light

As Mieke Bal suggests, visual narration requires a focalizing mechanism (165). In Nadj's *Woyzeck*, spotlighting serves as one such focalizing mechanism. Spotlighting actors serves to create performance spaces, effectively showing the audience where to place their attention. Alternatively, just as the lighting often frames acting spaces, spotlights are used to frame smaller material spaces within the total area of the stage. For example, a spotlight frames the table at centre stage, marking it as an important material space within the larger stage space. Similarly, in the final scene, a spotlight on the door enframes Woyzeck, who is hidden behind the door. Later, after the door has been relocated by the Captain, the same spotlight highlights the door's absence by continuing to frame the space it used to occupy. Finally, the lighting serves to reinforce the limits of the stage space. At times the lighting

spreads into a warm wash, encompassing the entire stage space within the cube-frame. This showcases the constraining/containing function of the cube-frame.

3. Dimensionality

3.1. *Dimensions of photography: stasis, immediacy, and the 'cut'*

Although the use of tableau has a long history in the theatre, the practice is commonly connected to narrative painting. However, in Nadj's *Woyzeck ou l'Ébauche du Vertige*, I suggest that tableau can be connected more accurately to photography and to cinema. Superficially, the creation of static images through the use of quick transitions from movement to static tableau resembles, on a functional level, the process of snap-shot photography. On a more nuanced level, Nadj's use of tableau functions like the cut (or crop) in photography.

In photography, the frame is the result of the cut (or the crop), and both terms (cut and crop) point to the limiting function of the photograph: "the photograph is something necessarily cut away from a larger whole" (Foster et al. 147). A photograph is the production of a still image, which has been *cut* out of reality and has subsequently become dislocated from its original spatiotemporality. Quite simply, it is an image extracted from the world and then rendered two-dimensional and static. The transposed or cut-away piece of reality captured by the photograph loses (whether wholly or only partially) its connection to reality and becomes instead the photographic subject, a subject which comes into existence through the act of being framed. In Nadj's *Woyzeck*, the creation of tableaux functions similarly. The freezing of action into a still tableau is akin to the act of taking a photograph: it isolates a moment in time and severs it from temporal progression. The act of creating a tableau, like the act of taking a photograph, also alters the spatiality of the captured moment. In photography, three-dimensional space is captured on a two-dimensional surface. Tableau

functions to produce a similar perceptual flattening out of three-dimensional space into two-dimensionality.

Photography is distinct from painting in its verism. Its verism is derived in part from the sense of immediacy that photographs produce; unlike painting, which requires duration in the act of rendering an image, photographs are immediate capturings of images. Similarly, tableaux depend on the immediacy of the figures. Like photography, the figures featured in a tableau are necessarily caught in an actual moment and are not a representation of an instance that may or may not have taken place.

3.2. Dimensions of cinema: movement within a fixed frame

Both photography and cinema involve a process of extracting a segment of three-dimensional reality and transposing it onto a two-dimensional medium which produces a perceptual impression of three-dimensionality. However, while photography renders its subject static, cinema captures its subject in movement and instead renders its spectator static: cinema depends on “the immobility of its spectators and the aperture of a fixed frame” (Friedberg 5).

Nadj’s limiting cube-frame, imitating the function of a proscenium arch, and his use of tableaux emulate the dimensionality of cinema through a sort of inversion. In cinema, perceivable three-dimensionality is contained within a two-dimensional screen; in Nadj’s production actual three-dimensionality is closed off from the audience and rendered conceptually two-dimensional by the framing device of the faux proscenium arch.

SEEING STORIES: Concluding remarks on the rejection of dialogue

This chapter differs from the previous three, as I focus on tracing the influence of visual media (namely silent film and photography) to the *mode of narration* (visual narrative) as it is utilized in *Woyzeck ou l’Ébauche du Vertige*: in previous chapters, I focussed on

tracing the relationships between visual media and theatre in application to a specific type of visuality (hyperrealism, synesthesia, and superficiality). Visual narration, necessarily constructed through the ‘view’ (both sight and interpretation) of the spectator, functions through processes of focalization embedded within the performance text. For example, Nadj utilizes light as a focalizing mechanism to frame the action and attract the spectator’s gaze, assisting in the transmission of the visual narrative. An openness of semiosis, as illustrated in this chapter, is a resulting characteristic of visual narration. Subsequently, visual narration depends on the interpretation of the spectator in the process of narrative creation.

Nadj navigates between the static two-dimensional space of tableaux, and the dynamic three-dimensional space of dance. Contained within the cube-frame, these two spatiotemporal relationships in Nadj’s *Woyzeck* reflect the two visual media which influence the production: photography and silent film. The diachronic treatment of space/time in the dance/mime echoes the treatment of space/time in silent film, while the synchronic spatiotemporality experienced in tableaux replicates that of photography.

Of the four chosen examples, Nadj’s *Woyzeck ou l’Ébauche du Vertige* most fully rejects the logocentrism of the dramatic text, turning instead to visual composition as a means of *showing* the story of *Woyzeck*. Yet all four productions employ strategies of visual narration. In Ostermeier’s *Woyzeck*, the image of urban decay produced by the scenography *shows* the degradation and “asphyxiation” of the working class who have been pushed to barren edges of the European city center. In Vesturport’s production, iconography produces meaning, as with Marie’s “Snow White’s” dress which is a visual symbol of her objectification and status as an archetypal ideal woman. Similarly, the rock iconography associated with the Drum Major serves as a metonym for late capitalism. Robert Wilson also uses iconography as a strategy of visual narration. Each of the figures in Wilson’s *Woyzeck*

have their own iconic way of moving. Woyzeck's movements are mechanical and repetitive, *showing* his degradation and dehumanization, while Marie's movements are reminiscent of those of Marilyn Monroe and functioning to depict her as an objectified sex symbol.

As the analysis of the four *Woyzecks* has revealed, directors, influenced by the visuality of our mediatized culture, turn increasingly to strategies of visual narration. Consequently, in contemporary practice the role of the dramatic text has become subsumed – or replaced as in Nadj's *Woyzeck* – by the performance text. This has led to a parallel shift, as the authority of the playwright has been replaced by the authority of the director. These shifts in theatre practice do not occur in a vacuum, they are part of larger cultural shifts: the shift away from the word and towards the image (Kress 1), and the movement away from organizations of time towards organizations of space (Jameson 16).

CONCLUSION

The (Visual) Medium is the (Visual) Message: Perceptions of
Visuality in Contemporary Theatre

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In 1964, McLuhan famously claimed that “the medium is the message”, arguing that the impact of technology occurs not at the level of content, but at the level of form. He wrote that “the effects of technology do not occur at the level of opinions or concepts, but alter sense ratios or patterns of perception steadily and without any resistance” (18). This observation is confirmed today by the growing visuality of culture and subsequent rejection of logocentrism which has resulted from the advent and dominance of visual media. As McLuhan argues, the formation of new “sense ratios” and “patterns of perception” resulting from the advent of new technology, “creates a totally new human environment” (vi). This thesis has examined four “human environments” created by visual media: hyperrealism, synesthesia, superficiality, and visual narration.

The increasing visuality of today’s culture has resulted in an increase in imagistic thinking which lends itself to increasingly imagistic modes of expression. Consequently, I have demonstrated that in contemporary theatre there has been a marked shift towards the visual (and other sensory) aspects of performance. In turn, I have shown that the shift towards the visual has spurred a parallel movement away from the logocentrism of the literary dramatic text.¹⁴ The roles of dramatic structure and narrative have been reconfigured, as directors increasingly turn to strategies of visual composition. Rather than being the central organizing principal of theatrical performance, the status of the dramatic text has been diminished in contemporary theatre to become merely one aspect of the performance text. Using the example of Vesturport’s *Woyzeck*, it was shown that the once-central

¹⁴ The shift away from the dramatic text towards visual composition belongs to a larger cultural shift away from the word and towards the image. This cultural shift from word to image is documented by Gunther Kress in his book, *Literacy in the New Media Age*.

dramatic text now finds itself sharing the role of narrative creation with imagery and music. Looking at Robert Wilson's production as a rejection of logocentrism, the dramatic text is deconstructed and hollowed out of meaning. Analyzing Nadj's *Woyzeck*, I have demonstrated that the dramatic text is reduced to a paratext of performance, as dialogue and verbal language are removed entirely. While these examples show the diminishing hegemony of dramatic text, there do remain exceptions in which the movement towards a theatre of visibility does not result in a subsequent rejection and reconfiguration of the dramatic text, but instead fosters a heightening of the importance of visual aspects to work alongside the dramatic text—such as the example of Ostermeier's *Woyzeck*.

Büchner's *Woyzeck* playtext was chosen precisely for its imagistic qualities. It has proven an exemplary subject, as its visual characteristics come to fruition in the four performance texts. In addition to producing meaning through the repetition of visual motifs, the playtext is structured around the juxtaposition of disparate scenes, only creating meaning through their collision. The imagistic qualities of the dramatic text are supported by *Woyzeck*'s own questioning of the effectiveness of verbal language, as *Woyzeck* increasingly becomes unable to verbalize his thoughts and emotions. As I have demonstrated, each of the productions picks up and expands on these proto-postdramatic aspects of the dramatic source text. Nadj's production embraces the playtext's scepticism towards verbal language's ability to express true feeling, and took this characteristic to its ultimate outcome by removing dialogue from the performance. Wilson confronts the question of the expressiveness of verbal language by removing emotion and psychology from the performance of the dialogue. Instead, he treats verbal language as language surfaces (aural textures) and employs these language surfaces, like music, for their auditory qualities (rhythm and tempo) rather than for their linguistic meaning. By contrast, Vesturport

supplements the dialogue with imagery and music to show that performative languages may “speak” louder than verbal expression. Retaining the central role of the dramatic text, Ostermeier’s scenography produces a visual narrative which echoes and reinforces the narrative of subjugation and degradation expressed in the dialogue.

The questioning of language, present as a theme in the playtext, is expanded upon in performance in the four *Woyzecks*. However, in performance, the questioning of language ceases to be either content or theme and instead becomes a significant formal aspect of each production. In this way, the distrust of verbal language combined with the strength of visual language becomes the message of each production. Following McLuhan’s argument that “the medium is the message” (7), the significance of media is not what it says (content) but its method of delivery (form). McLuhan provides cubist painting as an example. He explains that the statement made by cubism is a formal one, in which an attempt to represent the whole through many juxtaposed parts is made. It is a *perceptual* statement. In considering the example of cubism, McLuhan asks, “Is it not evident that the moment that sequence yields to the simultaneous, one is in the world of the structure and of configuration?” (13). McLuhan argues that as previously segmented attention (for example linear narrative) is “shifted to total field” (for example the extratemporal landscape image) the fact that the medium is the message becomes obvious (13). Content was long considered to be the message, “as people used to ask what a painting was about”; yet, as McLuhan points out, “they never thought to ask what a melody was about” (13). Significantly, just as I have traced the shift towards the visual in theatre to the influence of visual media, McLuhan notes that the cubist movement occurred parallel to the invention of cinema. This radiating effect of the creation of a new medium results in part because, as McLuhan explains, the formation of a new technology “creates a totally new human environment” (vi). This argument is

supported by the findings of cognitive science; specifically the discovery that thought is an embodied process which derives from our motor-sensory experiences of our environment.

At the beginning of this thesis, I used cognitive science theories from Tobin Nellhaus and from George Lakoff and Mark Johnson to support the claim that the invention of new media will alter conceptual thought processes, and subsequently the act of creativity. This proposition is supported by the idea that new technology invites the alteration of “sense ratios” or “patterns of perception”, and subsequently creates new “human environments”. The creation of visual media has altered our collective “sense ratio”, producing a culture, or a new human environment, of visuality. The visuality of contemporary culture finds its expression in the formation of new visual performance strategies.

ICONICITY: The rejection of the dramatic text

The practice of replacing the authority of the dramatic text with the authority of the performance text dates back to the late nineteenth century. In all four productions I studied in this thesis, the authority of the dramatic text is treated as secondary to the director’s vision of the performance text. Back in 1905, Edward Gordon Craig proclaimed that the director is no longer restricted to the authority of the playwright. Yet, while Craig argued for the power of the director, authority remained in the domain of the dramatic text. Craig believed that the director’s job is to bring life to the dramatic text, writing frequently about the necessity for the director to “harmonize with the thoughts of the poet [playwright]” (“Artists of the Theatre of the Future” 22). While the authority of the director owes its roots to the theatre artists of the late nineteenth century, the director as the primary author of the theatrical performance is more accurately a contemporary phenomenon. For Craig, the stage director is a “master interpreter” of the dramatic text. Today, the postdramatic director is a master creator of the performance text.

The relationship between the increased authority of the director and the predominance of the visual aspects of performance can similarly be traced back to the late nineteenth century. For example, the same Edward Gordon Craig regarded vision as the most important of the senses, arguing that “the eye is more swiftly and powerfully appealed to than any other sense . . . it is without question the keenest sense of the body of man” (“The First Dialogue” 115). Craig’s ocularcentrism marks most of his writings on the theatre. The swiftness which Craig accredits to the eye may in part account for the importance of imagery in contemporary performance. As mentioned in the discussions of iconicity, iconic signs, unlike verbal signs, do not require previous knowledge of a code. The implication is that the decoding process of iconic signs is more “natural” or immediate. Clement Greenberg, in his criticism of American abstract formalism, similarly placed sight above not only the other physical senses, but also above a sense of the literary, writing that the greatest achievement of abstract formalism is that art is no longer directed to the entire body in space, instead, art was now for “eyesight alone” (59).

Analysis of the four *Woyzecks* has revealed that each production has its own characteristic visuality, or borrowing Martin Jay’s term, each production has its own *scopic regime*.¹⁵ Hyperrealism, synesthetic visuality, and superficiality are each a scopic regime, while visual narration is more accurately a mode of narrative organization. The scopic regime of each production arises from the vision of the director and is a central feature of the performance text.

Hyperrealism, while retaining a strong connection to logocentrism, does involve a reallocation of power: the dramatic text is made to bend to the choices of the director. The

¹⁵ As mentioned in my introductory chapter, Scopic regimes are modes of visual (and subsequently spatial) organization.

visual hyperrealism of Thomas Ostermeier's *Woyzeck* does not result from embedded characteristics of the dramatic text, but is rather a feature of the performance text created by Ostermeier. The realism of the production is taken to the level of hyperrealism, fulfilling the cultural desire for *more* while hiding the semiotic nature of the visual compositions, making them appear as if they were the "real thing".

Vesturport, like Ostermeier, retains a dependency on the dramatic text. However, in Vesturport's *Woyzeck*, the dramatic text is treated as only one equal element of performance. Rather than being constructed around a textual dramaturgy, the dramaturgy of Vesturport's production replicates the verse/chorus structure of rock/pop songs and the perceptual structure of music videos by alternating between dramatic action and musical acts, and creating narrative through a synesthetic blending of sound and image. Spectacular feats and the familiar compositional logic of pop/rock musical structure are utilized by Vesturport as a means to appeal to popular and young audiences.

Robert Wilson goes further than Ostermeier and Vesturport in the rejection of the dramatic text. Wilson retains the dramatic text only to position it in submissive opposition to the performance text, placing the literary dialogue in conflict with the performance's visual and musical compositions. In Wilson's *Woyzeck*, the image replaces the word as the dominant unit of composition. The dramatic text becomes dwarfed by the grandeur of Wilson's landscape images. Both the landscape image and dialogue become flattened and reduced to their surfaces, conforming to the logic of superficiality.

This practice of replacing the word with the image finds its ultimate outcome in Nadj's dance-theatre production. With verbal language entirely removed, alternative languages are implemented in the visual narrative created by Josef Nadj. Nadj uses visual narrative components, such as spatial composition, body language, images, and dance to

create a performative language with which to tell the story of *Woyzeck*. Through Nadj's use of tableaux, images and bodies are made to speak. This rejection of the dramatic text can be understood more positively as the advancement of the performance text.

FRAMING: The influence of visual media

The creation of the performance text necessarily involves stylization. Stylization can be understood as an expression of a production's relationship with reality. Stylization is also necessarily a central performance frame. While typically used to refer to avant-garde mise-en-scene, stylization extends to all mise-en-scene. Realism, for example, is a form of stylization –it is the enunciation of a relationship which is characterized by the likeness between the fictional world and our “real” world. Ostermeier's hyperrealist style is an expression of a relationship to reality in which the hyperreal fictional world is *more* “real” than, and therefore better than, reality. This stylization, or relationship to reality, extends equally to both the scenography (aesthetic hyperrealism) and to the production's social/interpersonal relationships (cultural hyperrealism). Synesthesia in Vesturport's *Woyzeck* produces an enhanced reality in which spectacle and musicality follow their own logic, as the action is organized according to the principals of musical structure. In Wilson's production, reality is abstracted and rendered geometric and flat; it becomes a superficial image. In Nadj's *Woyzeck ou l'Ébauche du Vertige*, reality is made to bend to the internal logic of the image and of dance.

The specific stylization of each production can be traced to the influence of visual media. In Ostermeier's production, cultural hyperrealism (the cultural desire for things that are *more* than real, and better than real) is indebted to the influence of TV soap operas. The aesthetic hyperrealism of Ostermeier's *Woyzeck* —the semiotic phenomenon of an object

appearing as “the real thing”, in effect hiding its nature as a sign—is derived from the influence of the televisual iconic sign.

Vesturport’s *Woyzeck*, constructed from artificial synesthetic objects and sensory experiences, becomes a theatre of synesthesia as the performance text is built around the processes of visualizing music and musicalizing images. The process of rendering music visual and images musical replicates music video style. Similarly, the production utilizes the same internal logic as music videos in the creation of narrative: the production’s dramaturgy is structured similarly to a rock song—functioning through the alternation of verses (dramatic action) and a repeating chorus/hook (musical numbers).

The stylistic flatness and superficiality which are characteristic of Wilson’s *Woyzeck* is traced to the influence of postmodern cinema. Wilson’s use of spotlights, for example, mirrors the function of the cinematic close-up shot, isolating images and extracting them from their original spatiotemporal paradigm. Similarly, the abstract two-dimensionality of the scenography provides the production with its own unique spatial paradigm; a spatiality characterized by horizontality and depthlessness. This characteristic horizontality and depthlessness results in large part from the influence of postmodern cinematic uses of the wide-angle shot and tracking shot.

Nadj’s fictional world navigates between two separate conceptions of reality: the static two-dimensional style of tableau, and the dynamic three-dimensional style of dance. Contained within and enframed by the cube-frame, these two stylistic characteristics reflect the two visual media that influence the production: silent film and photography. The diachronic reality of the scenes that feature dance/mime echo the treatment of reality in silent film, while the synchronic reality of tableaux replicates that of photography. As the creation of new media continues to produce “new human environments” (McLuhan vi), altering

cultural conceptions of reality, new stylistic forms will continue to arise which express the changing conceptions of reality.

DIMENSIONALITY: The visual as the spatial

Dimensionality results from the relationship between space and time. Mikhail Bakhtin, following Albert Einstein, conceptualizes “time as the fourth dimension of space” (Bakhtin 53). The spatiotemporal relationship is not fixed, but is instead variable, since it arises from perception. The perception of time and space is necessarily framed by our senses. Robert Wilson was describing the visualization of time and space, as he sees it, when he explained, “For me a horizontal line is space, and a vertical line is time ... It is this cross of time and space that is the basic architecture of everything” (qtd. in Safir 25).

The shift from word to image has had possibly the greatest influence on the conception of time and space. Represented visually, time becomes length and space becomes surface. Shifts in the spatiotemporal relationship will produce changes in the dynamics of length and surface (i.e. dimensionality). This concept is expressed most elegantly by Bakhtin in the notion of the chronotope, defined as “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature” –i.e. the understanding of “[T]ime as the fourth dimension of space” (Bakhtin 53). Explaining the notion of time as the fourth dimension of space, Bakhtin writes: “Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history” (53).¹⁶ The chronotope of postmodern culture is defined by superficiality, as time is dominated by space (time has become synchronic).

¹⁶ Looking at the example of the ‘road’ chronotope, one can understand how a chronotope is a specific visualization of the relationship between time and space. The road is a visual manifestation of the linear progression of time: the space of the road can only be traveled through an experience of time, and conversely time is felt as the result of one’s movement through space. This example also demonstrates that chronotopes are

Time has begun to lose its fixity. Jameson writes that under postmodernity, we have begun to witness “the waning of the great high modernist thematic of time and temporality [...] of *durée* and memory” (16). In Wilson’s *Woyzeck*, this loss of temporality and memory occurs; their place is taken by the extratemporal landscape image. Temporality is utilized for its musicality in Vesturport’s production, as time becomes rhythm and tempo. The production’s alternating verse/chorus structure results in a musical temporality, which is dually characterized by progression (verse) and cyclicity (chorus). In Nadj’s *Woyzeck ou l’Ébauche du Vertige*, time is treated both diachronically and synchronically. During the action/dance, time is diachronic, while in tableaux time is synchronic. Again, Ostermeier’s production remains the exception. By not rejecting the dramatic text, Ostermeier’s *Woyzeck* retains its linear temporality. However, an argument may also be made for a degree of cyclicity. By considering the static scenography alongside the production’s social commentary, it is possible to argue that the dramatic action is simply one instance within a cyclical chain of events. Framed by the impoverished urban environment created by Ostermeier, *Woyzeck*’s progression into madness and his act of murder can be understood as part of a larger cycle of abuse which results from his socio-economic environment, a cycle which existed before the dramatic action and which will continue after its conclusion.

Just as the treatment of space in each production can be traced to the influence of visual media, as has been illustrated in the previous chapters, the treatment of time in each production can be linked to the influence of visual media. Wilson’s extratemporality traces back not to the influence of postmodern cinema, but to the influence of abstract painting (while abstract painting is not a new medium, it is a visual medium). Like Wilson’s

typically primary metaphors (described in cognitive science as foundational concepts of language). The chronotope of the road is similar to the primary metaphor of life as a journey (or road to be traveled) (see Bakhtin 54-6).

extratemporal landscape images, abstract painting, having removed narrative/subject from its content, exists outside of time and is instead pure spatiality. In Vesturport's *Woyzeck*, the alternating conceptions of time, oscillating between temporal progression and cyclicity, mirror the treatment of time in music video television. The constant stream of music videos, one after another, that characterizes music video television produces a cyclical conception of time. The temporal experience of each individual video often contains a degree of linearity; however, the temporality of individual videos may equally be cyclical, atemporal, non-linear, or extratemporal. The two separate treatments of time in Nadj's *Woyzeck* reflect the two visual media which influence the production: silent film and photography. The diachronic treatment of time in the scene of dance/mime echoes the treatment of time in silent film, while the synchronic time experienced in tableaux replicates the temporality of photography. The linear temporality of Ostermeier's *Woyzeck* duplicates the linearity of TV soap operas. Alternatively, the perceivable cyclicity of the social world of Ostermeier's *Woyzeck* reflects the cyclical nature of serial TV dramas.

The consequence of the "waning" of temporality has been that time has become absorbed by space. This subjection of time to space is expanded upon by Jameson, who writes, "we now inhabit the synchronic rather than the diachronic, and I think it is at least empirically arguable that our daily life, our psychic experience, our cultural languages, are today dominated by categories of space rather than by categories of time, as in the preceding period of high modernism" (16). The shift from temporal organizations of experience to spatial organizations is interconnected with the move from word to image (from dramatic text to performance text). The word is a temporal medium while the image is a spatial medium. The relationship between word and time and image and space exists at the level of

internal structural logic. The four *Woyzecks* were constructed with spatialized logic, as the analysis of the construction of space in each production has illustrated.

The degree to which spatial logic is dominant varies from production to production. *Woyzeck ou l'Ébauche du Vertige* is built around an energized conception of space; exploring the difference between the static two-dimensional space of tableaux and the dynamic three-dimensional space of dance. Alternatively, Wilson's *Woyzeck* utilizes an architectural and imagistic conception of space; dividing space into planes of depth. The synesthesia which resides at the center of Vesturport's dramaturgy extends to the organization of space. In Vesturport's *Woyzeck*, space is oriented to multiple senses: it is seen (visual), heard (audio), and felt (kinesthetic). Filled with imagery and music, space is rendered affective. In Ostermeier's production, space is treated as fixed. The stationary environment of the urban scenography is an illustration of a static conception of space. Static space becomes, in Ostermeier's *Woyzeck*, an agent of confinement; imprisoning the characters within their impoverished socio-economic environment. The turn towards the visual is part of the larger cultural turn towards spatial organization: the visual, according to Maurice Merleau-Ponty, is necessarily spatially organized (252).

SENSORY CONFUSION: Concluding remarks on visibility, cross-sensation, virtuality

Visual media, and subsequently visual/postdramatic theatre, have played an important role in rethinking the logocentrism of Western culture and of dramatic theatre, creating in its place a culture and theatre of visibility. However, visual culture may be seen as simply a mutation of logocentrism into ocularcentrism. As Caroline A. Jones argues, sight is the sense which enjoys the strongest connection to the mind (logocentrism), since following the old mind/body dichotomy, sight is "the sense capable of producing the most 'distance' from the body" (8).

The segregation of the senses has produced a false hierarchy. Just as Bakhtin reconfigures the classification of time and space, arguing for their interconnection, Merleau-Ponty argues against the segregation of the senses, highlighting instead their interdependence. Rather than treat synesthesia as a perceptual rarity, as do scientific examinations of biological synesthesia, or as an artificial multisensory joining, as in the examination of synesthetic art, Merleau-Ponty, in *Phenomenology of Perception*, suggests that all sensation may be understood as synesthetic. Merleau-Ponty declares that synesthesia is not an “exceptional phenomen[on]”, claiming instead that

Synaesthetic perception is the rule, and we are unaware of it only because scientific knowledge shifts the centre of gravity of experience, so that we have unlearned how to see, hear, and generally speaking, feel, in order to deduce, from our bodily organization and the world as the physicist conceives it, what we are to see, hear and feel. (266)

In other words, as a result of the desire to determine what we sense, the processes of sensation have been oversimplified and segregated. Instead of having completely distinct senses which function in seclusion, Merleau-Ponty argues that each sense is able to register sensory information belonging to other senses: “The senses intercommunicate by opening on to the structure of the thing [the sensed object]” (265).¹⁷ To follow Merleau-Ponty’s argument is to believe that visuality is always impure: seeing is also hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling.

¹⁷ Merleau-Ponty’s notion of synesthesia as the “rule” of perception is a more subtle conception of synesthesia than that which was explored in chapter 2. The synesthetic performance strategies implemented in Vesturport’s *Woyzeck* resulted from artificial multisensory joining: the processes of visualizing music and musicalizing images were intentional and constructed.

To consider this more subtle and nuanced approach to cross-sensation is to understand all four productions chosen for this thesis as containing varying degrees of synesthetic experience. Yet, rather than contradict the notion of a theatre of visuality, the idea that all sensation is cross-sensation serves simply as a reminder that visual theatre is not defined by pure visuality but rather by a predominance of the visual. As W.J.T. Mitchell has argued, “there are no purely visual media” (264).

The visual media age is currently giving way to the virtual media age. The cultural consequences of the computer/internet era have not yet fully materialized. The influence of computer and internet technology on theatre have not yet manifested in their totality. Returning to McLuhan, as the creation of a new technology “creates a totally new human environment” (vi), each new technology reprocesses the environment created by the previous technology. An example of this “reprocessing” is Wilson’s appropriation of the dramatic text, treating the text sensorially as language surfaces rather than logocentrically as dialogue. The concept of new technology reprocessing the environments created by previous technology can be seen very clearly in the internet’s absorption of all other media: painting, literature, radio, film, television, and the music video, have all been (at least partially) relocated to the internet.

The environment created by computer/internet technology is a virtual one. The influence of this virtual world on contemporary theatre has begun to manifest: productions have begun to incorporate streaming videos, instant messaging, and live “tweets”. As productions continue to incorporate the virtual into the fictional worlds and real spaces of the theatre the boundaries between the “real”, the fictive, and the virtual become blurred. As I have demonstrated in the discussion of the hyperreal, these lines have already begun to blend. The troubling of the boundaries between the “real”, the fictive, and the virtual reflects

a Žižekian questioning of the possibility of the “real” as a category. For theorist Slavoj Žižek, “the real is already a virtual construct” (qtd. in Gunkel 138). Or as anthropologist Tom Boellstorff explains, “virtual worlds show us how, under our very noses, our ‘real’ lives have been ‘virtual’ all along” (qtd. in Gunkel 138). The virtual worlds of internet technologies have already begun to affect the performance strategies of contemporary theatre; however, the full impact of the influence of the virtual co-presence afforded by internet technology on theatre cannot yet be *sensed*.

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