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TRANSGRESSION OF BOUNDARIES IN VAXTANGOV'S
PRODUCTION OF TURANDOT

by

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Thesis submitted to
the School of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the M.A. degree in Slavic Studies

Université d'Ottawa/University of Ottawa



Joanne Ledger, Ottawa, Canada, 1990



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for mom and dad

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CHAPTER ONE
Introduction

Evgenij Vaxtangov's production of Carlo Gozzi's commedia dell'arte play Princess Turandot premièred on February 28, 1922 at the Third Studio of the Moscow Art Theatre. The members of the Moscow Art Theatre and its studios who attended the premièred claimed it an instant success. According to Gorchakov,¹ Stanislavskij was the most excited of all. He could not wait to express his approval. Immediately after the second act he went to see Vaxtangov (who was at home, ill) to congratulate him personally (197-98).² Perhaps Nemirovič-Dančenko best describes the nature of the performance that so elated the audience in his note in the Third Studio's visitors' log:

The creator of this production knows what should be swept away in the old theatre and what has to be retained There is no doubt that this director . . . will yet astonish us, the older generation, but we already feel 'both pained and happy,' both elated and horrified. (Gorchakov 199)

Nemirovič-Dančenko had a good understanding of the production, which was marked by contradiction right from the start. In fact the work was almost abandoned

at its very conception: the director's performance theories clashed with the Schiller version of the play, which was initially the basis for the production.³

Earlier, in 1911, Reinhardt had staged the Schiller version of the play quite successfully at the Deutsches Theatre in Berlin. Yet Vaxtangov was hesitant to use Reinhardt's production as a model for his own play. He felt that it emphasized the symbolic and the mythic at the expense of the realistic. For example, it showed "China as a fairy land with all the meticulousness of the sets and costumes and props."⁴ Yet if he were to discard the notion of a strictly fantastic performance, he would be faced with the equally unpalatable alternative of embracing the tradition of Stanislavskij's naturalism, which seemed too outdated for his purposes. Only after he read Mixail Osorgin's translation of the play, which remained extremely faithful to Gozzi's text, could he formulate the performance strategy that made his production one of the most outstanding events in the history of Russian theatre.⁵

However the source of Vaxtangov's Turandot lies as much in the eighteenth-century Italian text as in the various theories of theatre in his time. For instance, scholars of Italian drama are quick to identify the marked internal tension of Turandot in the written text alone. In the introduction to his translations of three of Gozzi's plays DiGaetani writes the following:

Directors of Turandot . . . have to deal with the major internal tension in the play--the serious, noble characters who feel themselves desperately involved with the dramatic situations in the play and the comic, comedia dell'arte mask figures, who make fun of the play and sometimes address the audience directly. (10)

Moreover, having read about Vaxtangov's production of the play, DiGaetani credits the internal tension of Gozzi's written text for its success:

Such an internal contradiction poses difficulties for modern productions, though Vaxtangov, in his famous production of Turandot in Moscow in 1922, brilliantly surmounted these difficulties to form a superbly complex and textured ensemble with his troupe. The internal conflicts of the play itself became a major delight of the production, a source for both dramatic irony and theatrical parody.

(10-11)

Another Italianist who notes the contradictory nature of Gozzi's text is Emery. In the introduction to his anthology of Gozzi's Tales, Emery describes how the Tales foreshadow more modern approaches to theatre:

Both the romantics and the formalists were fascinated by the jarring anomaly of these plots in which serious and comic elements are present at the same time, and in which exotic oriental characters are indiscriminately mixed with the typically Italian and Venetian masks of the *commedia dell'arte*. This juxtaposition of contradictory elements, the guiding stylistic principle of the Tales, is the source of Gozzi's apparent modernity, for the playwright's emphatic heterogeneity allows him not merely to avoid his adversaries' [especially Goldoni's] realism, but to subvert it. (8)

Thus the internal tensions of Vaxtangov's production of Turandot are not unique to Vaxtangov but go back to Gozzi's eighteenth-century Italian written text.⁶ Moreover, while these two national traditions are separate, in terms of polemics about art, the circumstances in Italy of Gozzi's time were remarkably similar to those in Russia of Vaxtangov's time.

In Venice of the mid- to late eighteenth-century Gozzi became engaged in a fierce polemic with his adversaries, Goldoni and Chiari, who sensed that the middle class audience, which had by now "acquired an important place" in Italian society, was becoming increasingly bored with the commedia dell'arte, which

was no longer spontaneous, "its plots and routines familiar from long use" (Emery 3-4). In an attack against the old commedia Goldoni proposed his own plays. They were devoid of fantastic elements and obscenities, and left little room for improvisation. Gozzi counter-attacked by writing his Tales, "in which he championed the traditional improvised theatre of the commedia dell'arte against the 'realistic' plays of its would-be reformers" (Emery 3).

An analogous retaliation against realism in the theatre occurred in Russia at the turn of the century. Around the time of the Revolution, Vaxtangov and other theatre directors were becoming more and more frustrated with forms which were for the most part based on Stanislavskij's techniques.

In many ways, Stanislavskij's emotional realism echoes the trend in eighteenth-century European theatre that Gozzi had attacked: namely, Goldoni's realism and the French comédies larmoyantes and dramas bourgeois,⁷ in which "human passions were indulged on stage in order to engage the sentiments of the audience," much like the present-day soap opera (Emery 9). Curiously, however, Gozzi attacked this type of theatre only on moral grounds and not on artistic grounds. Thus, his plays maintain a high degree of emotional complexity and his serious characters very convincingly reveal the psychological reality of their

plights and woes. The readers of Turandot may easily share in Kalaf's plight of unrequited love, for example. But as Emery observes, their emotional involvement is continually undermined by the less believable comic characters who disrupt the plot:

On the one hand . . . Gozzi wants to create a believable theatrical illusion out of the unbelievable events of the fairy-tale, encouraging the same kind of emotional empathy that characterizes the style of his realistic adversaries. At the same time, however, the illusion and the empathy of the melodramatic plots are continually broken Serious characters are found side by side with comic ones, melodrama is brought up short by slapstick humor, realistic illusion is overturned by deliberate dramatic alienation, and exotic fairy-tale settings improbably harbor references to the real world of eighteenth-century Venice The empathic relationship between serious characters and spectators, constructed by the 'vigorous passions' of the melodramatic plots, is continually deconstructed by the abrupt juxtaposition of such contradictory elements. (9)

The contradiction between the psychologically real

and the fantastic is the essence of Turandot, as it is of Gozzi's other Tales. Thus, when Vaxtangov prepared to stage the play he faced some difficult choices. To favor a realistic production over a fantastic production, or vice versa, would be to deny the play's complexity of meaning--the result would be either a soap opera or a folk performance. As mentioned earlier, Vaxtangov envisioned neither a fantastic nor a naturalistic production. Mixing the two styles, however, would give the play a double edge, and this is what he finally decided upon. Therefore Vaxtangov's highly sophisticated use of irony in the production is not at all surprising and is in fact celebrated. The superimposition of fantastic elements upon traditionally conservative (read authoritarian) realist elements made his work both a celebration of the "theatricality" of the theatre⁸ and, perhaps more significantly, an "authorized transgression" of norms.⁹

The notion of "transgression" underlies both the written and performance texts of Turandot but seems much more immediate in Vaxtangov's work, especially in the context of what is perhaps the ultimate transgression of authority: revolution. Moreover, in Vaxtangov's play the idea of "transgression" was also much more emphatic, stemming as it did from some small, but highly significant, changes and additions to the

original work. The first of these is minor: in the Osorgin translation the answer to the third riddle, "the lion of St. Mark," is replaced by the answer to one of the Schiller riddles: "rainbow" (Princessa 26). The second change is that the mask figures are given (slightly) more freedom to improvise: Osorgin's scenarios replace Gozzi's written "lines" for these characters.¹⁰ The third and most important change is not in the Russian translation at all but was added to the production at the suggestion of the actor Zavadskij, who played the role of Kalaf. Following the second act, instead of changing the set the stage hands (zanni) performed a parody of the main play (Princessa 27).¹¹

The Russian changes and additions magnify but do not necessarily alter the subversive nature of the Italian text, however. Emery is extremely perceptive in his observation that underlying Gozzi's radical formal technique is a very conservative ideology based upon the playwright's belief in social hierarchy. For instance, a basic opposition between order and disorder is central to all of Gozzi's plots, in which the order of a fictional kingdom is threatened by some sort of chaos which is then always corrected by a heroic act. This, as Emery states, is essential for plot progression in any fiction, yet it is in Gozzi's "manner of elaborating this conflict that we may find a

link between his theatrical expression and his social outlook" (11-12). Emery concludes that for Gozzi Turandot is not really a rejection of conservative ideology and that "[i]n the final analysis, the radical Gozzi, the forward-looking man of the theatre, cannot be separated from the conservative social ideologue, nostalgic for the past and opposed to modern 'corruption'" (10). Yet he also concludes that, on the other hand, the play is not (not) a rejection of that conservatism:

Gozzi rejects [the] conception of the theatre as a social mirror, undermines the empathy between characters and audience, and substitutes a theatre of entertainment and fantasy. In thus challenging the realistic form of Goldoni's theatre, Gozzi also strikes at the world view that that form transmits. By privileging the theatre's power to create entertaining fantasies, Gozzi prevents it from constituting a model of what, for him, is an undesirable reality. (Emery 10)

The concept of "not . . . not (not)" is Schechner's and is admittedly somewhat confusing. As Schechner puts it, ". . . Olivier is not Hamlet, but he is also not not Hamlet. The reverse is also true: in this production of the play, Hamlet is not Olivier, but

he is also not not Olivier. Within this field or frame of double negativity choice and virtuality remain open" (Between Theater and Anthropology 110). But Schechner's theory also describes an abortive attempt to violate boundaries. For example, something that is described as not black, yet not (not) black, is probably still more black than, for example, white. That is, implicit in the description is the idea of an affirmation of boundaries rather than a feeling that the borders between black and white have been successfully transgressed.

For Schechner (and other theorists) art exists in between the "not" and the "not (not)."¹² Emery comes very close to Schechner's theories when he observes that the key to Gozzi's plays lies in the transformations which come "at the culminating moment of the conflict between order and disorder The 'pure' theatrical spectacle of transformation thus allows Gozzi to displace his perception of a threatening disorder from the realm of reality to that of fantasy, where its danger may be more easily defused" (12). Schechner's performance theories, and others related to them, will be discussed in greater detail in support of the thesis that Vaxtangov's production of Turandot represented a very remarkable quest to change the unchangeable: it derived its complexity of both form and meaning from its violation,

yet affirmation, of the traditional boundaries between character and actor, spectacle and spectator, and ultimately between art and life.

Notes

1 All transliterations follow the International system, with the following exceptions. Transliterations of authors' names correlate with their listings under Works Consulted. The names of the mask figures are given in their traditional spelling (Tartaglia, Pantalone, Truffaldino and Brighella), thus identifying them with the more general theatrical tradition of the commedia dell'arte and conveying a sense of their transcendence of time and place.

2 Vaxtangov was initially a student of Stanislavskij. However, toward the end of his career he moved away from Stanislavskij's Naturalism to form his own system of "fantastic realism," which was inspired largely by Mejerxol'd's productions of The Puppet Show, The Female Stranger, Columbine's Scarf and Harlequin the Marriage Broker, the influence of this last play being seen in Vaxtangov's production of Turandot (Worrall, Modernism to Realism on the Soviet Stage 76-8). For information on Vaxtangov's "fantastic realism" see: Orani; Vaxtangov, Materialy i stat'i 206-14; Vendrovskaja and Kaptereva 429-37.

3 For the production history of Vaxtangov's Turandot see Chapter One of the commemorative volume Princessa Turandot.

4 Simonov 153. For a favorable review of

Reinhardt's production of 27 October 1911 see Doxman. For a discussion of the differences between Gozzi's Turandot (1762), upon which Vaxtangov's production was based, Schiller's version, and Puccini's opera, see DiGaetani 8-9.

⁵ Princessa 13-14.

⁶ Such internal tension also goes back to medieval and renaissance plays, which both attracted Vaxtangov.

⁷ This is not to suggest, however, that Goldoni's plays, Stanislavskij's productions, and the eighteenth-century sentimentalist dramas are all the same. In eliminating the scenarios of the traditional commedia plays, Goldoni made these plays more literary; Stanislavskij's realist and naturalist productions adhered closely to the written dramatic text. Stanislavskij's technique of pereživanie, or "living through the part," which required the actors to re-evoke emotions from their own personal pasts in order to convey the emotions of fictional characters perhaps loosely parallels the emotionalism of the sentimentalist dramas. For information on the close relationship between Stanislavskij's productions and the written dramatic texts, and also on Stanislavskij's technique of pereživanie, see Schmid.

⁸ Rudnitsky quotes Vaxtangov, who claims: "the actors do not simply perform Gozzi's fairy-tale, they

show how they perform it'" (54). This tradition of the actors revealing the conventions of a production has a long history in theatre, going back at least to the medieval and renaissance periods.

⁹ The idea of "authorized transgression" is Hutcheon's (Theory of Parody 75). It will be explained in greater detail in the course of this dissertation.

¹⁰ For the Osorgin text see Princessa 69-195. Bermel and Emery attempt to remain close to the Italian original in their English translation of the play (128-84).

¹¹ These changes will be discussed in the subsequent chapters.

¹² See, for example, Winnicott; Bateson 177-93; Schechner, "Playing" 7-8.

CHAPTER TWO

The Duality of the Main Characters

One of the most significant components of Vaxtangov's Turandot was the Introduction, in which the performers assumed double roles: they performed both as actors and as if they were characters. This was the first indication of the metatheatrical nature of the production.

According to the commemorative volume, Vaxtangov's first impulse was to begin the play by blurring the boundary between the audience and the performers in the manner of the improvised theatre of Gozzi's time. Initially he envisioned the opening of the play according to the following scheme: The audience gathers in the auditorium while the actors are behind the curtain doing preparatory exercises. Suddenly, four commedia dell'arte mask figures enter from outside the studio. They arrive in full costume, giving the impression that they had wandered to Russia across space and time, from Italy of the late eighteenth-century when Goldoni "won [his] victory" over the storyteller Gozzi and the commedia dell'arte disappeared forever (Princessa 21-22). Once they realize they have stumbled (quite by chance) into a theatre building, however, the masks promptly decide to

organize a play, using the actors who just happened to be available behind the curtain. The masks draw the curtain and begin to deal out parts for an improvisation of the story of the Chinese Princess Turandot (Princessa 21-22).

A parallel may be drawn between Vaxtangov's initial plan and the Happenings of the early and mid-1960s, where a group of people would spontaneously create a performance wherever they happened to be, on a street corner or in a corridor, for example (Michael Kirby 111). Like the Happening, Vaxtangov's initial plan corresponds to a trend in Western avant-garde art which Kaprow terms "lifelike art." As opposed to "artlike art," lifelike art strives to connect art and life, rather than to separate the two. Lifelike art is spontaneous, or at least appears to be spontaneous, because it arises within the context of everyday occurrences. Thus it represents a very different philosophy of reality which tends to "mix things up: body with mind, individual with people in general, civilization with nature, and so on" (38). Kaprow writes that because lifelike art rejects the traditional view of "art at the service of art" and embraces the view of "art at the service of life," it is often misunderstood: "If you don't know much about life you'll miss much of the meaning of the lifelike art that's born of it. Indeed, it's never certain if

an artist who creates avant-garde lifelike art is an artist" (38).

Of course, lifelike art is not at all new, it just has not received much critical attention. It may be traced back to the Futurists and Dadaists at the turn of the century. In Russia of Vaxtangov's time there were many experiments in lifelike art. Perhaps the most monumental of these was Evreinov's production of November 7, 1920 entitled The Taking of the Winter Palace. The production involved over eight thousand participants in its attempt to recreate the historical event of November 7 (October 25 o.s.) 1917, when the Bolsheviks seized the Winter Palace in Petrograd and overthrew the Provisional Government headed by Kerenskij.¹

Kaprow explains why the experiments in North American lifelike art² inevitably failed. While the artists became adept at abolishing the physical boundaries between art and life such as the stage, they had much more difficulty breaking down the mental barriers which their audience had acquired:

. . . we couldn't escape the fact that audiences still came to see what we were doing (or to participate a little) just as they always had back at the standard exhibitions, concerts, plays, dances, and films. All the traditional esthetic

habits of detached spectatorship, the usual hour or so of attention after dinner, all the expectations based on what they had learned about the arts, were brought to the new situation intact. It was a little like slumming. (39)

In other words, lifelike art does not work if the viewers remain conscious that they are watching a performance.

The actual opening of Vaxtangov's play turned out to be quite different from the initial scheme. The play did not appear to occur spontaneously but began with a composed introduction followed by a very controlled entrance parade, neither of which ventured out beyond the boundary of the stage. The following is a description of the opening of the première.³

The performers did not mingle with the audience but remained behind the closed curtain. Jurij Zavadskij, the actor who played the role of the hero, Kalaf, was the first to come out to the proscenium where he read a letter to the audience from Vaxtangov, who could not make it to the performance due to illness. Zavadskij's task was to orient the audience. He identified the actors and the nature of their roles and explained that the play was to be viewed as a studio exercise and a "pretext" (predlog) for seeking

new forms in theatre (Princessa 16). Once he finished reading the letter, a waltz began and the stage was revealed. On it was a platform strewn with bright objects (props) and colorful strips of fabric. At the command of one of the mask figures, Truffaldino, the actors, including Zavadskij, came out onto the platform wearing traditional evening dress. In time to the waltz they created their own costumes by arranging the various props and strips of fabric over top of their tailcoats and ball gowns (Simonov 170-171).

Zavadskij's introduction and the way in which he and the other performers presented themselves as actors and fictional characters simultaneously by wearing their costumes over evening dress calls to mind the structure of early secular plays of the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries. In Theatricality, Burns describes the introductions of these plays:

In early secular plays an introduction was often made by presenting characters who were half in, half out of the play world One of the first of these, Medwall's Fulgens and Lucres, moves between the outer world of ordinary life to which the spectators belonged and the enclosed world of the play in conscious exploitation of their relationship The function of presenting was assigned to two anonymous characters,

who, as retainers in a great hall, heralded the arrival of a troupe of players. They then addressed the spectators, specifying the role they were expected to play as a theatrical audience

Having imposed in the first place this circumstantial definition of the situation between themselves and the audience, they introduce the play proper, giving a detailed description of the setting and plot before it begins. Beyond this, they are soon involved in the selfsame plot, acting the parts of servants to the two main characters. They retain their ambivalence, stepping out of the play to comment on it from time to time, and implying some control over it.

(42)

According to Burns, the presenters serve as distancing devices; their function is to reveal "the two levels of theatrical interaction, the presentation of the play and the play itself. The same characters are allowed to move from the Induction into the play and to suggest a shifting perspective" (43). This too was the function of Zavadskij and the other performers in Vaxtangov's Turandot. When they donned their costumes over top of their evening attire they broke the audience's suspension of disbelief. The spectators saw

simultaneously actors aligned with the real world of the audience and characters aligned with the fictional world of the play.

But while Burns notes that the presenters highlight the distinction between fiction and reality, De Marinis writes that the disruption of the performance which results when traditional conventions are broken unexpectedly does not so much oppose theatre to everyday life as it opposes a particular performance (for example Vaxtangov's Turandot) to theatre (111). This is so because the spectators become more aware of the double focus, and less aware of the plot. The separation of the audience from the presented imaginary world gives evidence that the play has become conscious of its own enunciation. Thus the viewers cannot help but read it as a comment upon itself. With this in mind, Vaxtangov's Introduction resembled artlike art more than lifelike art. In foregrounding the techniques of play production the director did not necessarily comment upon life. While it will be shown that there were also elements of lifelike avant-garde art in Vaxtangov's Turandot, his Introduction serves as an excellent starting point from which to discuss the work as a comment upon theatre.

It is not surprising that Vaxtangov's performers wore costumes over costumes. By visually separating the real-life actor from the conceptualized character

Vaxtangov expressed literally something that has been of crucial significance to performance theorists, especially those of the Prague School, since his time. Simonov reports that while contemplating the nature of acting in Russian popular theatre of the seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries, Vaxtangov once remarked: "'[t]he naive, unsophisticated theatergoer almost always identifies the role portrayed with its portrayer, thinking the character and the actor are one and the same person'" (160). Moreover, the director liked Gozzi's play because he saw in it "a continuation of the folk-theater tradition" (Simonov 160). In contrast to Realist and Naturalist theatre, folk-theatre may elicit in the spectator what Bogatyrev describes as a "dual perception of the actor" ("Semiotics in the Folk Theatre" 48). Since in folk theatre the spectators usually know the actors personally (they all usually live in the same village), their costumes and gestures do not entirely prevent the spectators from seeing them as real people. As Bogatyrev explains, the significance of this dual perception of the actor lies in its affirmation "that it is impossible to identify the player with the role he plays, that no equation can be made between the actor and the character whom he represents, that the costume and mask and gestures of the actor are only a sign of the character portrayed by him" ("Folk Theatre" 48).

Markov writes that in Vaxtangov's Turandot the actor "played simultaneously both the character [obraz] and his attitude towards that character The character neither engulfed nor weighed down the personality of the actor."⁴ At the same time, however, Markov also notes that "the personality of the actor did not destroy the personality of the character, but hovered far above it" (Princessa 50). Thus it would appear that the actors in the production never lost their essential subjectivity, even though they embraced their characters wholeheartedly.

Gorchakov reports a conversation between Vaxtangov and the set designer, Nivinskij, concerning costumes. Determined to have the actors first appear before the audience out of costume, Vaxtangov asked Nivinskij what an actor might wear if he were not performing. When Nivinskij replied that the men would probably wear three-piece suits and the women dresses, Vaxtangov retorted: "'No, you're wrong again . . . 'We don't want to see actors as they are in life, but as they are on the stage. A tailcoat! That's what an actor should appear in on the stage! Just imagine a director in a tailcoat! Why, it's grand! Supposing we dress everybody in tailcoats?'" (111-112).

Vaxtangov's remark suggests that he wanted to make a crucial distinction between actors on stage and actors in real life. For him, the actors on stage

belonged neither to the real world of the spectators nor to the fictional world of the characters, but to some kind of intermediary category between the two. Moreover, he seemed to want to focus on this intermediary space--by having the performers wear costumes over costumes, for example. But the focus on the intermediary was also evident in the way in which he wanted his actors to perform: not as if they were characters but as the commedia dell'arte artists in Gozzi's time who played these characters.

The most recorded examples of Vaxtangov's original acting technique are his suggestions to Oročko and Remizova, who played Adel'ma and Zelima. Oročko was instructed not to play Adel'ma but an Italian actress playing Adel'ma; "in addition to imagining herself the wife of the director of the troupe and fancying herself mistress of the male lead, [she] should also imagine she wore slippers too large for her causing her to stumble and slither on stage."⁵ Remizova, who played Zelima, was to imagine herself a lazy actress who does not hide the fact that she would rather sleep than perform (Princessa 18). The technique of having actors play actors playing roles is a powerful distancing device which allows the director to comment upon the nature of acting. In fact, Passow emphasizes exactly what Vaxtangov highlights, namely, that it is only a partial aim of the theatre to transport the spectators

to a fictitious world so that they may share in it and experience it.

It is essential to keep in mind that ". . . the actor on the stage is indeed, 'at the same time a part of reality (a person who treads the stage), and a representation of reality (that is, something other than what he is).' . . . That is to say, the actor is not only what he [re]presents, the character of the play, but he always remains a creative person who is undertaking a professional job."⁶

The history of performance theory has proved that Vaxtangov's lesson is difficult to learn. In his "Contribution to the Semiotics of Acting" Veltruský writes that many semiotic approaches to acting fail because they continue to incorporate the "naive view of acting as the impersonation of a character" (553). Inspired by the writings of the Czech aesthetician Otakar Zich, Veltruský stresses it is crucial to understand that a performance always unfolds on two levels, the level of the "acting event" (the concrete level of the performance in its technical aspects) and the level of the "acted event" (the abstract level of what is conceptualized via the technical aspect of the performance) (passim).

Veltruský also discusses the concept of the "stage figure" (in Czech, herecká postava) which Zich introduced (Estetika dramatického umění 213-14) and the Prague School theorists developed. The stage figure is an entity separate from both the actor and the character. Deák explains that its basis lies in Zich's fundamental distinction between the technical and the imaginary aspects found in every component of theatre: the stage figure is "the technical aspect that includes each actor's artistic choice" and as such it is not the same as the dramatic character, which is "the imaginary aspect that the audience perceives" (Deák 85). Reeder explains further that the stage figure is just one element of the dramatic character, or *dramatis persona*. The dramatic character is represented not only by the actor but by "all information about the person [i.e., the character] conveyed by other codes. In semiotic terms the *dramatis persona* would be the signified, while the stage figure might be only one element in the set of signs that signify it" (89). The point is that the stage figure is not the actor, yet it is not the character either. Rather it represents an intermediary stage between actor and character.

In Vaxtangov's production of Turandot, what the spectators actually saw was not the Russian actresses Oročko and Remizova, yet not the characters Adel'ma and Zelima. They saw Oročko and Remizova playing actresses

playing Adel'ma and Zelima. The focus was "actresses," not real actresses, and not characters. Similarly, in the Introduction, the spectators saw Zavadskij playing a Presenter playing Kalaf. Here the focus was "Presenter," not Zavadskij, and not Kalaf. Insofar as "actresses" and "Presenters" are members of the acting profession, Vaxtangov's performers could have been visual metaphors for the boundary between the real world of the audience and the fictional world of the stage.

Nevertheless, Veltruský relates that it is very easy to confuse the stage figure with the character, because "the signatum (signifieds) of acting "are represented by a signans [signifier] of the same nature" ("Contribution" 554). That is, both are perceived by the spectator as being of human form and appearance. In semiotic terms, the stage figure represents a split between signifier and signified. Although on the stage it has the same physical appearance as the signified character it is not equal to that character but only a signifier of it. This split between the signified and the signifier is the source of the marked internal tension which characterizes both Gozzi's and Vaxtangov's Turandot.

To a large degree, the play Turandot revolved around what in semiotic terms is called plurisignation. Plurisignation is when one signifier equals two or more

signifieds, or, conversely, when two or more signifiers equal one signified. Either way it is marked by semiotic tension--an extreme distancing between the signifier and what is signified.

Emery posits that the heroine of Gozzi's story, Princess Turandot, is the ultimate embodiment of semiotic tension. The story of Turandot is as follows: At the beginning of the tale we learn that the beautiful princess has all but usurped the rule of her father, the Chinese Emperor Altoum. By playing upon his weakness, she has defied cultural norms and succeeded in avoiding marriage ("the very word 'wife' is enough to kill me").⁷ She has demanded that her father pass a law decreeing all of her suitors to solve three riddles before she will agree to marriage. She will marry the man who solves the riddles, but those who fail to solve them will be beheaded. Right at the beginning of the play we are informed that many executions have already taken place--at the gates to the city there is a row of severed heads impaled on iron spears; cushions on top of spears in Vaxtangov's production (Worrall 134). What is more, the princess's cruelty has sparked considerable unrest in the Empire, for example wars have broken out with other cities (1.1).

Clearly Turandot (the princess as well as the play) represents a threat to social order, not only at

the level of the plot, but at the level of the text: both written and performance. Moreover, it is at the textual level that the discrepancy between the signifier and what is signified becomes most apparent. Firstly, Turandot is beyond description: "No painter has captured her beauty" (1.3). In the written text her portrait does so little justice to her true beauty that it can only be described as "a few signs daubed by a painter" (1.3) but in Vaxtangov's production of the play it was literally that--"a crude sketch done on a piece of cardboard" (Worrall 135). The point is, as Emery so eloquently states it, that Turandot's portrait is inadequate "as a signifier for her superhuman signified" (15).

Secondly, the Princess cannot be described in words: "But neither could the highest eloquence of the finest speaker succeed in describing her pride, her ambition, the rancor and perversity in her heart" (1.3). As Emery again very perceptively points out, the inability to describe Turandot may be considered in terms of the failure of the ordering function of language:

. . . Gozzi's heroine cannot be reduced to the terms of language, the primary structure of order upon which all other symbolic systems--culture, custom, law, and so forth--inevitably depend. She

is the emblem of an ultimate power and plenitude, beyond our ken and threatening precisely because it may not be described, quantified, ordered within the constraints of the symbolic systems by which our consciousness is limited. (15)

Emery sees in the play a connection between linguistic structure and social structure: "the princess can avoid accepting her social role as wife only by an adroit manipulation of language"--in posing riddles which nobody can solve she "subverts language's power to signify" (15). Unfortunately for Turandot, however, Kalaf reorders the linguistic disorder. He answers the riddles, thereby "reestablishing the link between word and meaning. In doing so, he fixes Turandot in the realm not only of language, but of law and society as well, as she is 'sentenced to marriage'" (2.5).

Vaxtangov's princess is no different from Gozzi's. In his production of the play Turandot's marriage to the prince also marked a reestablishment of social order. But where Gozzi uses words, Vaxtangov used theatre. Because it provides the added dimension of the spectator, theatre may generate an even greater degree of ambiguity between signifier and signified. The next chapter will discuss how this heightened power of the theatre was especially evident in the improvisation techniques of the mask figures, who had the ultimate ability to both create and destroy order.

Notes

¹ Evreinov 146-47.

² That is, lifelike art that occurred in North America in the 1960s: Happenings, environmental performances, Futurist performances, and art created by earth workers, body artists, provos, postal artists, conceptualists, noise musicians, flux artists. See Kaprow.

³ Descriptions of the production are mainly from Princessa, Worrall, Simonov and Gorchakov. In analyzing a theatrical production one must rely upon descriptions which may inevitably be somewhat inaccurate, since the object of analysis, the production, ceases to exist once the curtain closes. For example, Simonov's book was published in 1969, and his descriptions of Turandot could very well be influenced by his own productions of this play. (Beginning on 21 April 1963 Simonov directed a revived version of Vaxtangov's Turandot at the Vaxtangov Theatre in Moscow [Worrall 127].) However, even the observations in Vaxtangov's own memoirs may be no more reliable than Simonov's. For more information on the problems of recording and reviving theatrical productions see Carlson, Theatre Semiotics: Signs of Life 110-22. See also Schechner's essay "Restoration of Behavior" in Between Theater and Anthropology

35-116, especially page 43 regarding the Moscow Art Theatre's visit to New York in the mid 1960s, with the aim of presenting "Chekhov according to Stanislavski's original mise-en-scènes." For further descriptions of Vaxtangov's production of Turandot see: Xersonskij; Ivanov and Krivickij; Smirnova; Smirnov-Nesvickij; Vaxtangov: zapiski: pis'ma: stat'i; Vaxtangov, Materialy i stat'i; Vendrovskaja and Kaptereva; Zaxava; and Zograf.

4 Princessa 49. Unless otherwise stated, all translations from the Russian are my own.

5 Worrall, Modernism to Realism on the Soviet Stage 130. Unless otherwise indicated, all subsequent references to this book are identified as: Worrall. Worrall's essay, "Meyerhold's Production of The Magnificent Cuckold," is cited only once, in Chapter Four of this dissertation.

6 Passow 239. Passow quotes from Manfred Wekewerth, Theater und Wissenschaft (Berlin: Henschel, 1972) 36.

7 Gozzi, Five Tales for the Theatre 2.5. The English translation of Turandot by Bermel and Emery is quoted unless it differs from Osorgin's Russian translation. Citations from the Russian translation are identified as such in the text of the dissertation.

CHAPTER THREE

Circus Elements and the Fictional World
of the Masks

In "Realism in Vakhtangov's Theatre of Fantasy" Orani writes that in Vaxtangov's production of Turandot the function of the masks was to erase the boundary between the stage and the spectators by "assisting the other performers and intensifying the rapport between the audience and the stage" (479). Similarly, Worrall writes that the masks were "[c]entral to the success of the production" because they provided a "'bridge' between the actors, who played serious roles, and the audience" (131). On closer consideration, however, while the masks did help to blur the border between the audience and the stage, they did so indirectly. They did assist the other performers and create a rapport with the audience but they were not the only figures who did this and, moreover, this helped to highlight rather than to eliminate the border.

The masks helped to merge the level of the spectator-oriented acting event with the level of the stage-oriented acted event, even though they remained distinct from the other players. The following account of the beginning of the première will help to explain. Once Zavadskij finished his Introduction the mask figures, Tartaglia, Pantalone, Truffaldino and

Brighella, assumed their positions in front of the curtain and introduced themselves to the spectators. Tartaglia yelled "Parade!" and he and Pantalone opened the curtain to reveal the other actors, who were standing in a line facing the audience (Worrall 133-34). (These other actors would later play the roles of the serious characters: the Emperor Altoum, Princess Turandot, Prince Kalaf, his tutor Barax, Timur--King of Astraxan', the servants Adel'ma and Zelima, the wise men of the Divan, etc.) Then, "in circus style" Truffaldino hopped up onto the platform and yelled "Alee-oop!"--the signal for the performers to take their places on the platform. Only when Truffaldino had given a second command did they begin dressing into their costumes using the various props and pieces of fabric strewn across the platform. They dressed very calmly and efficiently, in time to the music. The whole thing had been very carefully rehearsed in front of a mirror to appear natural (Simonov 170). From this description it appears that the primary function of the masks was to direct the other players. The parade progressed in a very regimented order, reflecting the actors' obedience to the masks' commands. At this point the play proper with its fictional characters and events had not yet begun. Thus, during the entrance parade, the masks showed that on the technical level, that is, on the

level of the acting event, they held ultimate power over the other performers.

However, the masks were in control on the level of the acted event as well. In the written text their authority is explicit in their official titles: Tartaglia is High Chancellor, Pantalone the Emperor's minister, Truffaldino the Chief Eunuch, and Brighella Captain of the Guard. Their status as high-ranking (military) officials connotes a certain responsibility for maintaining law and order, even if in the production the Captain was a "tremulous and simple-minded glutton" and the Chief was "a joker and prankster" (Worrall 131). More important, the masks' ranks separate them from the serious characters. They are of lower rank than the Emperor or Princess and of higher rank than the servants and slaves.

In the entrance parade the commedia figures were distinct from both the actors and the characters in many other important ways. For example, they appeared on the stage earlier than the other actors, except for Zavadskij, who presented the play. Moreover, unlike the other performers, they made their initial appearance already in character; they did not dress into their costumes in front of the spectators.

Curiously, this was more likely to incite the naive audience¹ to forget about the technical aspect of the masks. When the spectators continuously see

actors dressed in costume over costume they are also continuously being reminded of the distinction between performer and character, since both are simultaneously in full view on the stage. However, in the case of the masks the situation was a bit different. Throughout the production they appeared in one costume only, that of their type. Unlike the performers who played the serious roles and who blatantly had double identities, the masks gave few visual clues to their real side. The key lies in Vaxtangov's play on contrasts. The spectators came to rely on the double costumes to remind them of what should have been obvious, namely that the characters had a real element as well as a fictional element.

What is more, in the production all four commedia figures wore masks--heavy facial makeup (especially dark around the eyes), bright lipstick, and false noses (for Tartaglia and Pantalone) (for examples, see the plates in Princessa and Gorchakov). Emery writes that traditionally only Brighella, Truffaldino (also known as Arlecchino) and Pantalone wore masks (3). DiGaetani has noticed this subtle distinction between Vaxtangov's masks and the traditional commedia figures, suggesting that in Vaxtangov's production they all wore masks "to indicate to the audience [their] classical heritage" and thus their continuity with "the masked clowns of the ancient Roman stage" (10). However, they all may

have worn masks to disguise their real element, especially to the more sophisticated viewers.¹

Unlike the actors of the traditional commedia dell'arte, the actors playing Vaxtangov's masks did not have the occasion to establish an emploi. Traditionally, the commedia actors were well-known in their community and played the role of one character throughout their careers such that during a performance the audience was well aware of their duality (Emery 3). This is true of other types of popular theatre as well, from the Balinese topeng padjegan (Reeder) to various types of Russian popular theatre. Simonov relates that in Russian theatre in the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries an actor would keep the same emploi (for example, "the hero," "the hero-lover," "the noble") throughout his career, and the audience knew by the actor what role he would play in a particular performance (161).

By contrast, Simonov did not play Truffaldino throughout his career; neither did Ščukin, Glazunov and Kudrjavcev play Tartaglia, Brighella and Pantalone. Moreover, all four actors were further disguised by bulky costumes which dehumanized their shapes. If one of the figures had not worn a mask, his real aspect would have been uncovered and the masks' connection with the real world of the spectators would have been foregrounded. By highlighting the real element of the

serious characters Vaxtangov played down the real element of the masks. Only in this way could the masks invite the spectators to confuse the level of the acting event with the level of the acted event. Thus the masks controlled not only the other performers and the other characters, but the spectators' perceptions as well.

The masks also created a rapport between the spectators and the performers, but they were not the only figures who did so. In any event, creating a rapport between the spectators and the performers highlights rather than blurs the boundary between the audience and the stage. Worrall inadvertently describes how during the very first scene of the première the serious characters, Kalaf and Barax, as well as the masks and the stage-hands (zanni), all functioned as intermediaries between the spectators and the events on the stage:

As well as recounting tales of woe and suffering, both Barach and Kalaf were permitted elements of buffo Having appeared on stage, Barach bowed politely to the audience, then proceeded to play an imitation stringed instrument which, to his consternation, emitted the sound of a kettledrum. He reacted in scared fashion, rolling his eyes whilst making great play of listening

concentratedly. With his entry, Kalaf bowed several times to the audience then, at moments of high tension (when debating whether to run away with the woman he loves or die) proceeded to remove his shoe and wave it about to emphasise his gestures. Whilst recounting their joint adventures and depicting their woes, Barach rolled on the ground weeping, accompanied by the genuine tears of Kalaf who was so overcome at one point that a zanni brought on a bentwood chair for him to sit on. Tartaglia rushed on clutching a shaving bowl in which he collected Barach's tears and then ran forward to the front of the stage to demonstrate their genuineness. (134)

The passage shows that like the comic masks, the first priority of the actors playing the serious characters, Barax and Kalaf, was to address the audience. In their foolish antics which interrupted the serious plot they revealed that they were as adept at improvisation as the mask figure Tartaglia, who rushed over to the spectators to show them Kalaf's tears. To be sure, Tartaglia may also be considered a support figure for the actor playing Kalaf, and in this capacity a mediator between Kalaf's fictional world and the real world of the audience. He helped to convey the intensity of the character's suffering by drawing

attention to the tears. However the zanni who brought out the chair had a similar function to Tartaglia. She helped to convey Kalaf's grief to the audience by emphasizing his need to sit down.

More significantly, this scene took place with the lights on in the auditorium (Worrall 134). Veltruský writes that the technique of lighting up the auditorium when the actors addressed the audience was common in the practice of the Moscow Art Theatre, for example in its productions of Gogol's Government Inspector and Saitykov-Ščedrin's Pažuxin's Death ("Contribution" 585-86). The technique achieves similar effects to improvisation in that both relate the level of the acting event, where the addressee is the spectator, to the level of the acted event, where the addressee "is not the spectator but the character signified by the stage figure and stage action" ("Contribution" 584). By extending the stage out into the auditorium, it abolishes the fourth wall and attempts to involve the viewers in the action of the play.

However some critics have noted that performances which attempt to erase the fourth wall ultimately fail to blur the boundary between the audience and the stage or to make the spectators co-creators of the performance. Veltruský himself notes Burian's attempt to involve the audience in his production of Alladine and Palomides, which was staged in a hallway: ". . .

it should be pointed out that for Burian, as he himself put it, 'the activation of the spectators does not mean: the spectators are to play. It means only: the spectators sitting in the auditorium are to be staged, in the same way as the different places of the playing area'" ("Theatre in the Corridor" 80). Burns is another critic who emphasizes that, despite even a high degree of audience participation, spectators do not become full participants in the performance. While during improvisation the spectators are required to relinquish their passive roles (under the spotlights they feel they are being presented and thus they feel obligated to participate), they do not become entirely active. In Vaxtangov's production, for example, the spectators did not actually get up on the stage and take part in the action. When Kalaf wept, it was not a spectator who got up to offer him a chair but a stage-hand, even though the spectator might have empathised with the character. Likewise, a spectator did not hop on the stage and play the role of Turandot's suitor.

Burns explains that when the audience is invited to participate in a performance the action somehow gets thrust in between the spectators and the characters: the spectators "are in fact asked to be props for the actors--neither themselves nor 'characters,' involved wholly neither in a theatrical nor in a real life

situation" (49). Thus improvisation does not involve the viewers in the play so much as make them conscious of their marginality. Because the spectators are not fully involved in the action on stage, they may view that action objectively, much as someone who for some reason is not fully integrated into society may tend to view life from an objective distance. Burns:

The theatrical quality of life, taken for granted by nearly everyone, seems to be experienced most concretely by those who feel themselves on the margin of events either because they have adopted the role of spectator or because, though present, they have not yet been offered a part or have not learnt it sufficiently well to enable them to join the actors The 'partless actors' are those who for neurotic reasons feel themselves outside life, those who have not yet learnt the conventions of a foreign country, or those who find themselves suddenly in a situation in which they had never envisaged themselves. (11)

In other words, when asked to participate in a performance in which it is impossible to participate, the spectators feel alienated and out of control. Therefore, in making the viewers aware of their marginality, improvisation serves to foreground rather

than to erase the gap between the audience and the stage.

In fact, borders may best be blurred subversively, against the spectators' expectations. This goes back to Kaprow's thesis that the early experiments in lifelike avant-garde art failed because the spectators, who came expecting to see a performance, came with a predetermined psychological barrier between themselves and the stage. Vaxtangov's masks managed to counteract that barrier by redirecting the audience's expectations. The audience assumed the masks would adhere to the same conventions as the serious characters, yet all the while they were following the rules of a different game. Whereas the spectators were conditioned to seeing the serious characters as inhabitants of both their own world and the fictional world, they were also conditioned to seeing the masks as members solely of the fictional realm. Therefore, from the viewpoint of the audience, the masks did not pretend to be something that they were not, much like in the circus, for example, the performers do not purport to be anything but themselves (lion tamers, tightrope walkers, animal trainers, etc.).

In fact the circus was a vital component of Vaxtangov's production of Turandot and was especially apparent in the acting. The director relied heavily on the suggestions of the conductor of the Moscow Circus

in training the performers playing the masks, who needed to acquire experience in acrobatics, tightrope walking and juggling (Worrall 131). According to the commemorative volume for the production the director insisted that his actors make use of clown techniques in the first scene of the play, the meeting between Kalaf and Barax. Because this first scene was to serve solely as an exposition, it was crucial to communicate the background information of the story in a language that the spectators would understand (Princessa 17). Thus Zavadskij and Tolčanov, the actors playing Kalaf and Barax, were encouraged to speak to the audience in "clown language" (po-klounski), according to the methods and rules of S. M. Volkonskij (Princessa 17). Vaxtangov admired the clown's skill in gradually building up the spectators' confidence by not proceeding until certain of having captured fully the spectators' attention and by not revealing anything extraneous to the idea they wished to convey (Princessa 17).

In its play on contrasts, clowning has a subversive element. The basic clown act consists of at least two clowns with opposite characteristics. For example, a white-faced clown is usually contrasted with an "auguste" clown, or proper clown. The white-faced clown possesses positive characteristics. He is well-mannered, impeccably dressed (in white), elegant

and authoritative, intelligent and well-spoken. He is the epitome of the given culture. The auguste clown is the antithesis of the white-faced clown. He is ill-mannered, a slob. His makeup accentuates protuberances, he has an enlarged mouth or a bulbous nose, for example. His clothes do not fit and are of crass colors. His shoes are too big. He speaks in slang (Bouissac, Circus and Culture 164). However, Bouissac explains that the contrasting social behaviors of the two clowns represent a dichotomy in cultural norms. The white-faced clown puts objects to their proper use while the auguste clown is unaware of convention and misuses objects. Moreover, while both clowns exhibit violent behavior, "their social interactions are governed by different rules, such as generalization of a highly specialized act, reciprocal use of what is supposed to be a one-directional action (e.g., pedagogical sanctions like slapping a student), and reversal of aggression (e.g., exhaustion of the kicker)" (Circus and Culture 167).

Similarly, the commedia dell'arte characters are traditionally divided into opposing groups: serious and comic. The serious characters, for example Turandot, Kalaf and Altoum, are of the higher classes. They speak in a high style of language, usually in verse. The comic characters are the mask figures from the middle classes (Pantalone and Tartaglia) and lower

classes (Truffaldino and Brighella). They speak in rural dialects, usually in prose, and they improvise rather than speak set lines. Worrall notes, for example, that in Vaxtangov's Turandot Pantalone spoke in the "accents of a Russian provincial" (131). Emery observes that in Gozzi's tales especially there exists a clear opposition between the serious and the comic characters:

Gozzi's characterizations involve a rigid barrier between the serious and comic characters. Serious characters are aristocrats, whose noble passions of love and despair are featured in the often melodramatic plots of the Tales. Comic characters are middle or lower class and provide a foil for the melodrama of their social betters. (10-11)

Just as in the circus the auguste clown parodies the white-faced clown, during improvised lazzi Vaxtangov's masks parodied serious characters. In at least one instance, they parodied not a fictional character but a serious figure from real life: a dentist. Defying the protocol of a real dentist, they proceeded to extract teeth "through the ears, nose and other orifices of the body, in addition to the mouth, concluding with the extraction of hair because it, too possesses 'roots'" (Worrall 131). In another stunt,

while the stage-hands were changing scenes the masks made up their own riddles and then parodied Kalaf solving them:

What has two sticker-outers, four hanger-downers, a swisher and, generally speaking, is a domestic animal?

"A cow", answered Pantalone and then manifested extreme embarrassment at having given the game away. Tartaglia then crept forward, imitating a cat:

Tartaglia: What has four legs. A tail. A nice fluffy tail, catches mice and miaows?

Pantalone: I know that. (Profound pause)
A cat!

Tartaglia: No, that's what I thought at first. In fact, it's a kitten. (Worrall 133)

Bouissac sees in clown acts an attempt to "change the cultural rule that one appearance equals one identity" (Circus and Culture 174). That is, while the white-faced clown and the auguste clown are both easily identified as clowns, they are nevertheless very different from one another; in fact they are exact opposites. Moreover, in parodying the white-faced clown (especially in mirror acts), the auguste clown takes on a subversive role. Not only does he put

himself in the place of the white-faced clown, he replaces the cultural and social norms that the white-faced clown represents (Circus and Culture 174). In Vaxtangov's production of Turandot the mask figures did exactly this. They replaced the professional conduct of a real dentist with their own conduct, which was entirely inappropriate within the context of the existing cultural codes. In the riddle parody, the masks' social behavior was the antithesis of that expected from the characters of the higher classes whom they imitated. There is a sense that the masks wanted to usurp the power of the authority figures and assert their own crude authority in its place.

But an attempt to defy cultural norms was also expressed in instances where one signifier had multiple referents. One rather humorous example occurred at the end of the play, just before the "wedding scene." After Adel'ma had delivered a tragic monologue and went away into voluntary exile Altoum sighed heavily and wiped his eyes with Timur's beard, which was really a Turkish towel (Worrall 137). Here one object, the towel, had two different functions (beard and towel) which could be identified only by the actor's use of the object.

In fact the costumes were the most obvious examples of one signifier having two or more signifieds. The Emperor's hair was made of black wool.

He wore shoelaces for moustaches and a lamp shade for a crown. He carried a tennis racquet as his scepter. A football served as the official emblem of his empire (Gorchakov plates; Orani 477; Van Gyseghem 99). The wise men wore fruit baskets decorated with soup spoons and serviettes as hats. The men's beards consisted of clothes brushes and towels and, as noted in Chapter Two, cushions on spears represented impaled severed heads (Worrall 130-31).

This presentation of costumes and props is strikingly similar to circus clowns' presentations of characters as what Bouissac terms "jokes of construction" (Circus and Culture 170). Bouissac describes the costume of a famous clown of the early nineteenth century named Grimaldi, who presented the character of a hussar. His hat consisted of a lady's muff with a pocket watch pinned to its side and a table brush protruding from the crown; bell ropes served as cords and tassels; a pair of coal scuttles served as boots; he used a poker for a sword (Circus and Culture 170). Bouissac:

The accessories selected by Grimaldi were very similar in shape and material to the uniform of a real hussar but as different as possible with respect to the existing cultural system. The trappings of a woman and a hearth were transformed

into the paraphernalia of a warrior (one who is defined as virile and remote from the hearth) Obviously, the elements of 'jokes of construction' are not combined at random; they are the result of a systematic operation within a structure that becomes evident as such during the process. (170-71)

Significantly, in Vaxtangov's Turandot only the attire of the male serious characters consisted of household items (lamp shades, fruit baskets, towels, clothes brushes, cushions, soup spoons, serviettes, etc.). From the descriptions and photographs available, it appears that in contrast to the men's costumes the women's costumes were very simple and representational and were not marked by an extreme gap between signifier and signified. The women wore real silk gowns decorated with shawls and scarfs. Their headdress consisted of delicate hats or bows. They wore ballet slippers. The Princess had already usurped the Emperor's authority by decreeing her own laws concerning marriage, but Altoum's masculinity was undermined further by his costume, which consisted of items traditionally connected with women.

Just as Altoum's masculinity was undermined, so was the intelligence of the wise men who wore fruit baskets on their heads. This undermining of the

concept of intelligence was reinforced in the "Divan scene," where the sages of the Divan, or Chinese High Council, met with Altoum to discuss their concern that the empire might crumble because of the Princess's cruelty. At the meeting the wise men pondered such profound problems as "'How ought one to feed a fly so as to make it as big as an elephant?'" or "'How useful would it be to have six ears and where might the other four best be located?'" (Worrall 135).

There are still other parallels between the circus and Vaxtangov's Turandot. For example, in the production there was a marked contrast between the musical instruments of the band and the actual music played. Worrall writes that an "improvised orchestra consisting of mandolins, balalaikas, castanets, flutes, drums and cymbals was supplemented by a comb and paper band which played waltzes and polkas" (131). In the case of the waltz at least, a high style of music was played with low style instruments (a comb and paper). Furthermore, stringed instruments produced crude sounds. For example, in Act One, scene one, when Barax came on stage he began to play a stringed instrument, but was clearly startled at the sound of a kettledrum which the instrument produced (Worrall 134).

At first glance it would seem appropriate to dismiss these incongruities between signifier and signified as mere reflections of the festive,

improvisatory nature of the performance, as Worrall has done (130-31). Or, as Van Gyseghem asserts, it may be that economic conditions were a major factor in the materials chosen for the costumes; in 1922 Russia was experiencing an economic crisis due to famine and civil war. There was no wood to make scenery because it had all been used for firewood, and there was no fabric for costumes, since the cloth was needed to keep the population warm (99). But perhaps there is much more significance in the production's affinity with the circus, especially since Vaxtangov commissioned the conductor of the Moscow Circus to help him with the acting. Moreover, in the 1920s there was an obvious trend to use circus both as a model and a theme, not only in the theatre but in the other arts as well (Senderovich 469-470). Vaxtangov's artistic choices may not have been dictated solely by economic conditions (although he may have been making the best out of a bad situation), but by an intuitive understanding of the circus.

Yet the circus was only one of the director's sources of inspiration. His costumes echoed the techniques of ancient oriental theatre as well. For example, photographs of costumes of the Chinese characters in his production (see, for example, the plates in Gorchakov and Princessa) correlate with Brušak's descriptions of costumes in the ancient Chinese theatre:

. . . old men are characterized by evenly painted eyebrows extended to the ears The use of false beards and mustaches, of which there are more than a dozen kinds is also subject to convention. Their shape and mode of wear are nonrealistic; they are fastened with wires behind the ears, and their styles, which are often very bizarre, are signs of the wearer's age, status, and personality. (66-67)

Thus, the non-realistic features of Vaxtangov's Turandot were more calculated than most people give him credit for. His use of circus techniques served well to highlight the subversive nature of both the production and the written text. However, costumes and clowning represent only the mimetic element of the circus which, as Senderovich relates, is used only marginally, namely to parody the main acts, and indeed "is in the service of parody exactly because it is in contrast to the main circus element" (465). In other words, while clowning and pantomime are distinguished by an extreme gap between the signifier and the signified, the main aim of the circus is to close that gap. The next chapter will explore the non-mimetic and non-representational aspects of the production.

Notes

¹ Around the time of the production (1922, just five years after the Revolution) Russian theatre-goers were perhaps a heterogeneous group: some members had been raised on Stanislavskij's productions at the Moscow Art Theatre, while others, for example the peasants, were more familiar with the conventions of street theatre. A "naive" viewer would be one who is not familiar with the conventions of the type of theatrical production she or he is viewing, while a "more sophisticated" viewer would be one who is familiar with the conventions. It is not my intention to make any value judgements about the viewers.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Real World of the Zanni

Just as Vaxtangov played down the real aspect of the masks, he also played down (initially) the fictional aspect of the zanni, or stage-hands. Like the masks, the zanni made their first appearance already in costume. But in comparison to these commedia dell'arte figures whose costumes and make-up dehumanized their shapes, and also to the serious male characters, whose costumes consisted of "rags and oddments" (Worrall 132), the zanni's outfits were representational and did not reflect a gap between signifier and signified. Except for a bit of theatrical make-up (on their cheeks and around their eyes) they wore what real stage-hands might have been expected to wear--theatrical overalls.

Like the masks, the zanni helped to create a rapport with the audience. They appeared not only between scenes, to change the settings, but within scenes, to assist the other performers in various ways. They straightened out folds in the actors' capes, handed the heroine a mirror and the hero Turandot's portrait, removed Kalaf's shoes so that he could relax, gave Adel'ma a dagger when she wanted to kill herself, and clanged pots and pans and beat drums to frighten the audience (when Brighella told Kalaf not to be afraid of ghosts) (Worrall 134, 137).

Also like the masks, the zanni assumed a certain amount of control over the production. As mentioned in Chapter Three, during the entrance parade the masks were responsible for creating order on the stage. (They commanded the other performers to get up onto the platform and then to dress into their costumes.) But they created this order only to destroy it later on. Once the performers had finished assembling their costumes and began to file off the stage in a very orderly manner (in a "snakelike line" [Simonov 172]), the masks disrupted their procession. They bumped into each other and into the other actors and they did not want to follow in the same direction (Simonov 172). Even after the other actors had left the stage the masks lingered on, indulging in buffoonery and generally creating a commotion (Worrall 134). But the zanni quickly righted the disorder. They marched onto the stage and, using drop curtains and cloth-made scenery, began to transform the platform into Peking for the beginning of the first act (Worrall 134; Simonov 172).

However, while the zanni may have controlled the set they gave the impression that they did not act entirely of their own accord. All of "their actions were co-ordinated with specially written music" and they all wore identical costumes (Worrall 133). This conveyed a sense of harmony and interdependency, but

also a sense of lost identity. The zanni could not act independently or without the music and they could not be distinguished from one another, except by large numbers appliquéd on the backs of their overalls, which gave them the appearance of "members of a football team" (Worrall 134). Furthermore, photographs of the production indicate that when the zanni appeared as a group they were arranged numerically. For example in the photographs of the "Wedding scene" and the "Prayer for the happiness of Calaf and Turandot," their backs are toward the auditorium and the numbers on their uniforms are in descending order: 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 (Gorchakov, plates 172-73).

Unlike the masks, who often interrupted the progression of the plot and who tended to show off, especially during improvisation, the stage-hands called as little attention to themselves as possible. Gorchakov reports that Vaxtangov said the stage-hands were to represent

"No one. The whole trick is that the zanies are supposed to be invisible when they do anything on the stage We must teach the zanies to do everything on the stage that is required of them as if they were not there. No acting. No mimicry. No attention to what is going on [on] the stage." (178)

"Invisible" stage-hands are not, of course, limited to Vaxtangov's art, nor to Russian theatre of the 1920's. For instance, in "Dynamics of the Sign in the Theater" Honzl relates that in ancient Chinese and Japanese theatre it is a convention (that is, a set of rules known and understood in advance by spectators and actors alike) that the stage-hands who appear on the set from time to time are to be considered inconsequential to the plot (82).

Theatre and performance theorists find these stage-hands intriguing precisely because they are not included in the plot. Michael Kirby discusses the nature of stage-attendants in the Japanese Kabuki:

These attendants move props into position and remove them, help with onstage costume changes, and even serve tea to the actors. Their dress distinguishes them from the actors, and they are not included in the informational structure of the narrative. Even if the spectator ignores them as people, however, they are not invisible. They do not act, and yet they are part of the visual presentation. (98-99)

Kirby has developed an acting scale that measures amounts, or degrees, of acting in performance behavior. He places stage-attendants (like those of the Far

Eastern theatres) at the "extreme not-acting" end of his scale, emphasizing that even though these figures do not act, they are still vital elements of the performance (98-100).

According to Veltruský, the stage-hands, who repeat limited actions very simply and efficiently so as not to distract the viewers, cannot be considered active performers "since their constituent signs are limited to the minimum" ("Man and Object in the Theater" 86). Rather, they are forced to surrender their subjectivity and become mere props, forming a "transition between the sphere of man and the sphere of the object" (Veltruský, "Man and Object" 86). This merging of the figure of the actor with the sphere of the object occurs frequently in artlike avant-garde productions which "[i]n search for the roots of theatricality" tend to rely heavily on conventions (Senderovich 464). Mejerxol'd's productions are good examples of this type of theatre, and in "Meyerhold's Production of The Magnificent Cuckold," Worrall gives an excellent account of this director's virtuosity in turning props into actors and actors into props.¹

Houghton writes that Mejerxol'd was developing his constructivist techniques (for example, his system of biomechanics) in the early 1920s, around the same time Vaxtangov was working on Turandot (131). Vaxtangov did not agree entirely with the theories of his colleague,

however. Most of all he rejected Mejerxol'd's "mechanistic materialism," because he felt it depersonalized the actor unnecessarily (131). Nevertheless, Vaxtangov's stage-hands were clearly depersonalized. Even though their costume was representational and did not distort their human shapes, it made them indistinguishable from one another.

In fact, the depersonalized zanni held much in common with the spectators who were required to relinquish their subjectivity during improvisation (see Chapter Three). In addition, the zanni shared the spectators' temporal and spatial planes. As stage-hands they did not purport to be in a different time or place than the members of the audience. For instance, they did not pretend to exist in the fictional world of ancient China; their actions and costumes showed they existed in a real theatre, and the time it took them to change the set was equal to the real time it takes to change real sets. Furthermore, insofar as the zanni did not play the roles of any characters in the main plot, they could easily have been considered divorced from the fictional world of the play and therefore outside the level of the acted event. Of course the zanni did have a fictional element, but by foregrounding their allegiance to the real world of the spectators Vaxtangov played down this

fictional element. The spectators were invited to consider the zanni members solely of their own real world, much like they were invited to consider the masks members solely of the fictional world of the play.

However, the zanni did not pretend to be outside the fictional world for very long. Once Vaxtangov had established the convention that the stage-hands were to be invisible, he promptly proceeded to break the rules of that convention. Following Act Two, instead of changing the scenery the stage-hands performed in mime their own version of the main play. As Worrall relates, the pantomime, which was set to music, both repeated past events and proposed a future outcome for the tale:

They re-enacted the 'parade', the meeting between Barach and Kalaf, the riddle scene, then a pantomimic prophecy of how the play would end. The servant girl impersonating Turandot delivered a wrathful speech, with a veil over her face, so that her extreme emotional state was indicated by the inhalation of the veil with every breath taken, performed in time to music. Then each of the zanni stabbed herself. (136)

According to Burns, one of the functions of plays within plays is to "prepar[e] or arous[e] the audience

for certain kinds of events" (45). For example, the dumb-show in Marston's Antonio and Mellida is presented "as a presage of future events intended to heighten the sense of horror and dread for the audience" (45). Similarly, in Vaxtangov's production of Turandot the zanni's metaplay prepared the audience for a tragic ending. However the proposed tragic ending was different from the actual happy ending. Worrall sees in the discrepancy between the tragic ending of the zanni's metaplay and the happy ending of the main play Vaxtangov's predilection for mixing styles:

. . . this pantomime was staged in such a manner as to deliberately mislead the audience into anticipating a tragic outcome involving the deaths of Kalaf, Adelma and Zelima together with the triumph of the 'wicked' Turandot. The audience was thus led 'up the garden path' of tragedy only to be confronted by the 'peripeteia' of a comic denouement as the play concluded with the happy marriage of Kalaf and Turandot. (133)

Yet the metaplay had even more significance. In proposing a different ending it created a new subworld. In The Semiotics of Theater and Drama Elam explains that subworlds are created when both spectators and characters create their own speculations about the

outcome of events. Because the outcome is not fully known until the end of the play, speculations about the development of the plot become extremely important. Hypotheses, predictions, and plausible endings based on real life experience are

often responsible for the continued interest of the spectator (the desire to discover whether a predictable outcome 'really' occurs), dramatic surprise and peripeteia (when the spectator's or character's expectations are proved wrong), the creation of tension and 'suspense' (which of two projected possibilities will be realized?) and so on. (114)

The metaplay was significant especially in conjunction with the ending of the main play. DeMarinis makes an important distinction between disruptive features of the performance and disruptive features within the performance. Disruptive features of the performance use surprise to generate interest and suspense. For example, the spectators become surprised when conventions are unexpectedly broken. As mentioned in Chapter Two, this type of disruption occurred throughout Vaxtangov's production of Turandot, for example when the characters defied the conventions of Realism by stepping out of their roles to address

the audience. However, disruption of the performance destroys, but never creates, expectations. When the characters stepped out of the play they destroyed the illusion of reality, but they did not offer anything in its place.

In DeMarinis's view, because it is both creative and destructive, disruption within the performance is most important in terms of the spectators' attention. It lies in the performance's ability to create expectations, and then to frustrate them, "by sudden leaps, rapid changes of direction, tone, atmosphere, rhythm, etc." (111). He cautions that there is a risk in maintaining that the success of a performance depends solely upon its disruptive strategies. Rather, we must accept "that theatrical pleasure arises and is maintained in an unbroken dialectic between the frustration and satisfaction of expectations," for if a balance is not kept between the pleasure of finding the unexpected and that of finding the anticipated, "the success of the complex communicative interaction which constitutes the very life of the theatrical performance" is threatened (111-12). In Vaxtangov's production of Turandot the zanni's metaplay frustrated the expectation of a happy ending but created in its place a new expectation of an unhappy ending, which was in turn disrupted to satisfy the spectators' initial desire to see the marriage of Turandot and Kalaf. If

the metaplay had proposed an outcome similar to that of the main play, or if it had not occurred at all, the main play would have lacked the heightened internal tension which made it a success.

Insofar as the metaplay helped to create an awareness of the illusory nature of theatre, its disruptive features should not be ignored. Like the masks, the zanni effected a merging of the level of the acting event with the level of the acted event. They did this by de-emphasizing their allegiance either with the real world of the spectators (for the masks) or with the fictional world of the play (for the zanni, until they performed their metaplay). However, while the masks merged the technical aspect of the performance with the fictional aspect, they did not merge life with art. This is so because, as mentioned in Chapter Three, the masks used pantomime and clowning, which are mimetic and representational and as such are characterized by a gap between signifier and signified.

The zanni used pantomime and clowning also, but only in their metaplay. Thus, like the serious performers who wore costumes over costumes, the zanni, during their pantomime sequence, functioned solely to highlight the technical aspect of the production. When they switched back and forth between the level of the acting event and the level of the acted event they

called attention to the seams of the performance and thus foregrounded rather than blurred the border between the two levels. The zanni's metaplay made the main play even more reflexive than it already was. It should not be considered an attempt to blur the border between life and art but only an attempt to explore the nature of theatre.

Although in the metaplay the zanni were like the rest of the characters, including the masks, who during improvisation stepped out of the play to comment upon it, they were different from these characters in one important way. The other characters stepped out of the play whereas the zanni stepped into it. In this respect, the zanni may be compared to the author who appears at the end of The French Lieutenant's Woman, for example, to emphasize that the story is not real but a work of his creative imagination. McHale discusses the effects of this author stepping into and commenting upon the work:

With this gesture, the illusory reality of the fictional world is destroyed, and in its place we are offered, if not the real world, at least a real world. For what is ultimately real in the ontological structure of The French Lieutenant's Woman, if not the author's performance in creating that world? The author occupies an ontological

level superior to his world; by breaking the frame around his world, the author foregrounds his own superior reality. (197)

Because the zanni were aligned more with the real world of the audience than with the fictional world of the characters, in their own play--which was a pantomime of these fictional characters--they could easily present themselves as real-life spectators of a fictional presentation.

But, paradoxically, they merely became fictional characters once-removed. As McHale explains, the foregrounding of the author's superior reality ultimately makes his presence all the more illusory:

. . . the metafictional gesture of sacrificing an illusory reality to a higher, 'realer' reality, that of the author, sets a precedent: why should this gesture not be repeatable? What prevents the author's reality from being treated in its turn as an illusion to be shattered? . . . to reveal the author's position within the ontological structure is only to introduce the author into the fiction; far from abolishing the frame, this gesture merely widens it to include the author as a fictional character. (197-98)

Thus, the metaplay surely foregrounded the zanni's true

fictional status as "stage-hands" and not stage-hands.

On close consideration, the Program for the première hints that Vaxtangov never intended to trick the viewers into thinking that the stage-hands were not characters. In the program the stage-hands are grouped with the other actors under the heading "Dramatis Personae" ("Dejstvujščie lica"): Basov plays "Altoum," Simonov plays "Truffaldino," and Bazanova, Bendina, Bervi, Ivanova, L'vova and Nal' play "stage servants" ("slugi prosceniuma") (Princessa 67). The performers who play the stage servants are not listed where they might be expected to be listed, that is they are not listed with the support staff, such as the set designer, costume designers, musicians and assistant directors.

Nevertheless, the status of the stage-hands was vague, because the performers who played the "roles" of stage-hands actually were stage-hands. Granted, they were performers, but at the same time they were responsible for changing the settings and ensuring that the play ran smoothly. In fact, the zanni held much in common with circus performers, who also present themselves as what they really are. For example, horseback riders, animal tamers, and acrobats do not pretend to be someone or something else whenever they step into the circus ring. As Senderovich relates, "there is no difference between the actor and the hero

in circus: the actor is the hero, he does not imitate a heroic feat, he performs it" (467). In other words, circus does not rely on a gap but on a contiguity between signifier and signified. It is precisely the absence of the gap which makes circus so exciting: "[a] feeling of real danger that stems from the awareness of a total identity of the show and its meaning, representing and represented, is responsible for that special circus atmosphere" (Senderovich 466). Circus performers conceal rather than foreground their techniques; their careers depend on their ability to maintain illusions. If the illusions are shattered, the sense of danger would be lost.

In the ways in which circus creates a sense of danger, it may be compared to what Schechner terms "dark play" ("Playing"). Unlike ordinary play, dark play occurs when not all of the participants are aware that they are playing. Con-games and confidence tricks are good examples of dark play because their success relies on the trickster's ability to maintain an illusion, or to protect a lie, usually against seemingly impossible odds. Schechner explains that dark play is subversive:

it dissolves frames, breaks its own rules, so that the playing itself is in danger of being destroyed Unlike the inversions of carnivals, ritual

clowns, and so on (whose agendas are public), dark play's inversions are not declared or resolved; its end is not integration but disruption, deceit, excess, and gratification. ("Playing" 12-13)

Like the main genres of circus, dark play is non-mimetic and non-representational. It attempts to conceal the gap between signifier and signified. This makes it the exact opposite of metacommunication, which tends to highlight the gap. Whereas metacommunication states, I, or we, are playing, dark play states, "I, or we, are not playing" (Schechner, "Playing" 14). Dark play does not really break frames; it attempts to assert that there are no frames.

In Vaxtangov's production of Turandot, the zanni were indulging in dark play whenever they performed their stage duties, at least until they performed their metaplay. So did Zavadskij at the beginning of the production, when he walked over to the proscenium in his tail-coat to deliver his introduction. In both instances the performers presented themselves as what they really were: stage-hands, and presenter. By not disclosing their allegiance to the fictional world, they implied that they were not playing. Only in retrospect, when Zavadskij jumped onto the platform and dressed into his costume, and when the zanni performed their pantomime sequence instead of changing the set, could the spectators realize they had been conned.

The masks indulged in dark play as well. Because their real element was concealed, they too implied they were not playing. The masks stated, We are real-life commedia dell'arte performers who have survived through sixteenth-century Italy to twentieth-century Russia. Curiously, the masks' illusion was never broken, perhaps giving them a transcendent quality and creating an impression that they, and the theatrical tradition they represent, will continue to exist for centuries to come.

The performers who played the roles of the serious characters, all of whom were instructed to play actors playing roles (for example Oročko and Remizova), were also indulging in dark play. While in life they were real actors, on the stage they became fictional actors. Because there was no gap between what they were in real life and what they performed on the stage, they may have been able to maintain an illusion that they were not acting--in their roles as fictional actors, that is.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the zanni's dark play (that is, before the metaplay, when they performed their stage duties and did not attract attention to themselves) falls on the "extreme not-acting" end of Michael Kirby's acting continuum. Moreover, as stage-hands the zanni were also "non-matrixed" performers: they were "not embedded

. . . in matrices of pretended or represented character, situation, place, and time" (Michael Kirby 99).

However, when they performed their pantomime sequence they moved toward the opposite end of the scale. At this point their amounts of simulation, representation and personification had increased to the level of "simple acting," which means that the zanni used and projected a certain amount of emotion when they imitated the characters of the main play (103). In addition, they could not use the various props and settings of the main play. If they had been able to use these props and settings, they would not have been acting, but only imitating the main performers. As Kirby relates, "[i]f the originator in [a] mirror exercise put on his jacket, he would not necessarily be acting; if he or the mirror, not having a jacket, pretended to put one on, it would be acting, and so on" (104-5). The zanni's performance was pure mime and this alone marks their progression from not-acting to acting on Kirby's scale.

Thus, using different amounts or degrees of acting, the zanni alternately concealed and highlighted the seams of the production. More significantly, insofar as lifelike performances, including dark play, as well as Happenings and environmental theatre, fall on the not-acting end of Kirby's scale and artlike

performances, which emphasize boundaries between life and art, fall on the acting end of the scale (108-9), the zanni's shift from stage-hands to characters could also represent a shift from life to art.

Notes

¹ See also E. T. Kirby, Total Theatre 153. For a discussion of the relationship between techniques of cubist theatre and Mejerxol'd's use of props in his production of The Death of Tarelkin, see Glover 59-64.

CHAPTER FIVE
Conclusion and Related Areas
for Further Study

The main point of this thesis is that Vaxtangov utilized two opposing streams of avant-garde art in his production of Turandot. On the one hand, he employed what Kaprow terms artlike art. All of the techniques which highlighted the border between the audience and the stage comprised the artlike art aspect of his production: the actors who wore costumes over costumes and who played actors playing roles, the performers who stepped out of their roles during improvisation and the stage-hands, or zanni, who stepped into a fictional world when they performed their pantomime sequence. These highlighting techniques reflect artlike art's tendency to create tension between the signifier and the signified.

On the other hand, Vaxtangov employed lifelike art, which tends to maintain a contiguity between signifier and signified. The performers' indulgence in what Schechner terms dark play comprised the lifelike art aspect. When the actors played actors playing roles, they participated in two performances simultaneously. In one performance actors played characters in the fairy-tale plot; in the other performance actors played actors. But performances in

which actors play themselves may easily deceive their audiences, since it may be difficult to tell whether the actors are really performing or simply behaving as they normally would in everyday life. Moreover, the overall tendency to foreground the artificiality of the production could very easily have heightened the realism of this latter performance (see, for example, Michael Kirby 109).

The zanni were another example of individuals playing themselves. They were simultaneously stage-hands and "stage-hands." Yet the zanni also highlighted the techniques of play production in their metaplay, which represented what DeMarinis terms disruption of the performance: the metaplay not only interrupted the progression of the plot, it proposed a tragic ending different from the traditional happy endings of most fairy-tales. However the production as a whole, which included both the tragic outcome of the metaplay and the happy outcome of the main play, represented disruption within the performance, which DeMarinis believes is the most important in terms of spectators' attention: the metaplay introduced the disruptive feature of a tragic ending which was nevertheless controlled by the main play. Despite the metaplay's prophecy of doom, the production ended happily, thus satisfying the spectators' initial desire to see the marriage of the prince and the princess.

In the way in which the main play overcame the tragic prophecy of the metaplay, Vaxtangov's production may be compared once more to circus acts, which consist of three typical phases: "construction of a situation, introduction of a disrupting factor, and control of the disruption" (Bouissac, Circus and Culture 70).

In Turandot the "construction of the situation" is two-fold. First, the princess will marry Kalaf if he solves her riddles, and Kalaf will die if he does not solve them. Second, Kalaf unexpectedly solves the riddles but, seeing Turandot's despair, he challenges her with his own--if she solves it she will not have to marry him. Although in the first situation the readers doubt Kalaf's abilities to solve the riddles (many eligible suitors have already failed miserably), in the second situation they doubt Turandot's ability to solve Kalaf's riddle. Therefore, despite the twist in the plot, the readers maintain their initial expectation that the prince and the princess will marry and live happily ever after. But in Vaxtangov's production, the zanni's metaplay occurred precisely at this point (immediately following Act Two). The metaplay introduced a "disruptive factor" by predicting Kalaf's failure and the inevitable disintegration of the empire (all of the zanni stabbed themselves at the end). Moreover, since the metaplay occurred early on, the threat of disruption operated for three out of five

acts, or for sixty percent of the production. Finally, the main play controlled the metaplay's attempt at subversion; its comic resolution marked the successful "control of the disruption."

Bouissac writes that circus acts appear to reflect an attempt to effect some sort of change:

The circus freely manipulates a cultural system to such an extent that it leaves the audience contemplating a demonstration of humanity freed from the constraints of the culture within which the performance takes place. Circus tradition, contrary to what many assume, is not an invariable repetition of the same tricks but a set of rules for cultural transformations, displayed in a ritualistic manner that tempers the transgressive aspect. (Circus and Culture 8)

Yet, as this dissertation has attempted to explain, circus acts only create an illusion of freedom from constraints. Despite their subversive elements, they remain controlled. This is reflected in the performers' eventual re-integration into the cultural system despite the continued threat of disruption. Through seemingly incredible odds, acrobats and animal tamers survive their death-defying stunts. Bouissac adds that the artists' survival may be sociocultural as

well as physical. For example, the bad clown who violates cultural rules is finally re-integrated into the society he attempts to subvert (Circus and Culture 70).

Like the bad clown in the circus, the wicked princess in Turandot also becomes re-integrated into society. Significantly, Vaxtangov's princess, like Gozzi's, was not entirely a negative character (as she is in Puccini's opera or in Schiller's version of the play, for example). In Gozzi's text, upon which Vaxtangov's production was based, she is ambiguous. Throughout the play she shows her vulnerability when she experiences a distinct attraction to the hero. When Kalaf decides to attempt to solve the riddles and therefore is certain to die, Turandot weakens and implores him to run away (2.5); when Kalaf unexpectedly solves the riddles, even though her pride is insulted she confides to her servant, Zelima: "I am ashamed to admit . . . he made me feel . . . as I've never felt before" (3.2); and when she in turn is confident of answering Kalaf's riddle, thereby restoring her pride, she falters at the last minute: "I'll shame him, and reject him. (Hesitating) And yet, am I sure that I will enjoy it? . . . I can almost see his sadness. It distresses me, I don't know why" (4.3). Emery makes the following comment about Turandot's weakness: "Not truly powerful, not whole and sufficient unto herself,

Turandot feels desire--the sign of a lack which may be filled only when she voluntarily accepts her place in the social order by agreeing to marry Calaf" (15-16).

Emery sees in Turandot's vulnerability and in the comic resolution of the plot "a ritualistic idealization of a concept of order," which he notes is common in Gozzi's tales (16). Emery considers Gozzi's tales "a reaction to a disquieting (for some) sense of cultural instability, a sense that the traditional categories of meaning and behavior were being called into question" (15-16). Curiously, in this regard he suggests that the revivals of Gozzi's plays in Germany in the nineteenth-century as well as in the Soviet Union around the time of the Revolution reflect a need to escape "into a world where plurality and disorder can be dominated, and a comforting (if imaginary) stability restored" (17-18).

Thus, the subversive activities of both Gozzi's and Vaxtangov's heroines are not attempts to create anarchy. Rather, they are attempts to order a world which is already anarchic. As Turandot herself tells Kalaf: ". . . I defend myself in the only way I know . . . Why should I not be as free as you are? Who forced you to come here, to make me be cruel against my will?" (2.5). Moreover, in her unsuccessful attempt to (re)gain control Turandot has much in common with Vaxtangov's zanni. In their metaplay the zanni

attempted to usurp the main plot, yet they were clearly the most controlled figures in the production. (They wore identical costumes and all of their actions were coordinated with specially written music.) Perhaps it is also significant that the performers who played the zanni were all women.

The masks were the only figures who seemed to be truly free. Because their allegiance to the real world of the spectators was played down, they appeared to transcend the normal boundaries of time and space (in contrast to the zanni, whose allegiance to the real world was emphasized, thus containing them within those boundaries). Moreover, the masks were the only figures who had the power to destroy as well as create order. They established their authority early, during the entrance parade, by first commanding the other performers and then disrupting their actions.

Nevertheless, the masks shared with the other performers the task of communicating with the audience during improvisation. At various points they stepped out of their fictional world to mime the serious characters. Some critics (Simonov, Worrall, Orani) believe that mime blurs the border between the stage and the audience because it involves the viewers in the creation of the production. However, while it may create a rapport between the spectators and the performers, mime actually highlights rather than blurs

the border between them, for one important reason. Like parody, mime's meaning lies mainly in its juxtaposition with the structures it imitates. Therefore, while mime may make fun of those structures, it can never truly subvert them. As Hutcheon relates, ". . . being made to feel that we are actively participating in the generation of meaning is no guarantee of freedom; manipulators who make us feel in control are no less present for all their careful concealment" (Theory of Parody 92). Contrary to the opinions of some critics, mime (which together with parody and gesture comprise improvisation) reinforces rather than subverts authority. Mime in Vaxtangov's production of Turandot served to mirror, not to subvert, the authority figures in the play. The performers who jumped in and out of the play only reinforced their marginality, and by extension the marginality of their audience.

Moreover, the constant shifting back and forth between the spectator-oriented level of the acting event and the stage-oriented level of the acted event is an excellent example of what McHale terms "metalepsis." In fiction, metalepsis is a looping down to, or a violation of the borders between, different narrative levels. In fact, McHale describes characters as "agents or 'carriers' of metalepsis, disturbers of the ontological hierarchy of levels through their

awareness of the recursive structures in which they find themselves" (121). McHale observes a predilection for metalepsis in twentieth-century drama, for example in plays by Beckett, Genet, Stoppard, Handke, Brecht, and especially Pirandello, and posits an explanation for its precocious development in theatre in comparison with prose fiction:

Metalepsis appears so early in twentieth-century drama, and attains such precocious sophistication by comparison with prose fiction, for reasons which should be fairly obvious. The fundamental ontological boundary in theater is a literal, physical threshold, equally visible to the audience and (if they are permitted to recognize it) the characters: namely, the footlights, the edge of the stage. As theater develops self-consciousness in the modernist period, this ontological threshold becomes an obvious resource for aesthetic exploitation, much more so than the equivalent boundaries (between narrative levels, for instance) in prose texts, which must be made visible, palpable, before they can be exploited. Hence the theatrical motif of characters in search of an author. (121)

The previous chapters have suggested how the

continual transgression of boundaries in Vaxtangov's production of Turandot could reflect an attempt to defy cultural norms, or to attain freedom from constraint. However McHale posits that the subconscious texts which metalepsis creates have other implications. According to McHale, "texts about themselves, self-reflective, self-conscious texts, are also, as if inevitably, about death, precisely because they are about ontological differences and the transgression of ontological boundaries" (231).

To end on a rather morbid note, while Vaxtangov's Turandot was a fairy-tale about love and desire, perhaps these were not its only themes. The theme of death could have been equally present, both explicitly (in the content--Kalaf courted death by attempting to solve Turandot's riddles, while Turandot fought a raging battle to escape marriage, which for her was a fate equal to death) and implicitly (in the structure).

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TRANSGRESSION OF BOUNDARIES IN VAXTANGOV'S
PRODUCTION OF TURANDOT -- ABSTRACT

Evgenij Vaxtangov's last and most famous theatrical production, Turandot, premièred on February 28, 1922 at the Third Studio of the Moscow Art Theatre. The production was critically acclaimed and is generally considered a landmark in the history of Russian and Soviet theatre. However, there have been surprisingly few analytic studies of the production in contrast to the vast amount of descriptive literature available.

The essence of Vaxtangov's interpretation of Carlo Gozzi's fairy-tale lay in its metatheatrical nature, as the director himself claimed. Moreover, the production challenged the traditional boundaries between the stage and the audience, and by extension (and in an ontological context) between art and life. In other words, the production generated semiotic tension within the spectator-actor-character relationships. On the one hand, it emphasized the gap between signifier and signified, revealing the technical aspect of theatre, and thereby emphasizing an opposition between art and life. On the other hand, it denied the existence of that gap, attempting to conceal the technical aspect, thereby emphasizing a contiguity between art and life. The techniques which generated this semiotic tension,

and the implications of their use, highlight theatre's significance within Russian society around the time of the Revolution.