UC Irvine

UC Irvine Previously Published Works

Title

THEATER AFTER FILM, OR DISMEDIATION

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6477q2t5>

Journal

ELH, 83(2)

ISSN

0013-8304

Author

Harries, Martin

Publication Date

2016

Peer reviewed

PROJECT MUSE®

Theater After Film, or Dismediation

Martin Harries

ELH, Volume 83, Number 2, Summer 2016, pp. 345-361 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: 10.1353/elh.2016.0024

➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/621630>

THEATER AFTER FILM, OR DISMEDIATION

BY MARTIN HARRIES

In 1902, the American Mutoscope & Biograph Co. took out the copyright on a film listed by the Library of Congress, where it forms part of the Paper Print Collection, as “Star Theatre.” The short film is now more often known and discussed under the more elaborate title, “Demolishing and Building Up the Star Theatre.” Using simple but effective time-lapse techniques, it records the demolition, in April, 1901, of the Star Theatre at the northeast corner of Broadway and 13th Street in Manhattan.¹ The offices of the American Mutoscope & Biograph Co. were across the street, and the company saw that film could capture the deliberate demolition of the building. The film company also took advantage of its medium, and urged exhibitors to reverse the direction of the film through the projector after first playing it as shot. So, as exhibited, the spectacle of the rebuilding of the theater followed demolition, hence the “building up” of the longer and more common title.

“Demolishing and Building Up the Star Theatre” sensationally pictures what sense experience cannot register on its own. As my title will have signaled, what especially interests me here is the way that the film places this automatic registration of what the eye cannot see in relation to the demolition of a theater. That is, the self-conscious display of a possibility of film as medium happens in relation to the obsolescence of a particular stage. How to read this self-reflexive exhibition of the force of film as medium is, however, not self-evident. How, in particular, should one understand the “building up”? The cinematic rebuilding of the theater is only virtual: the spectator knows that it is a special effect. In this way, the film might seem an early, spectacular promise of film’s colonization of what had been the aesthetic terrain of the theater. In all too easy retrospect, it is hard not to see the film as harbinger of the cinema’s international hegemony as medium over the disintegrating theater. Speed things up, and a cinematic lapse in time can show the decline of the theater; the trick of rebuilding what theater did is only a special effect, one made possible by the new medium.

At the time of this early twentieth-century demolition, film’s triumph was itself only a distant potential, and the Star Theatre was, in fact,

not permanently in ruins but moving uptown to the more vibrant theatrical hub growing around Times Square, leaving Union Square to a new industry that had not yet discovered the permanent sunshine of the Los Angeles basin. The film might allegorize the inevitable dismantling of the theater. And yet the building up of this fantasmatic theater, made possible by the medium of film in reverse, also suggests an alternative allegory: the destruction of a theater, caught on film, lays the groundwork for a new theater, a theater made in part of the effects of film. My argument will move in that direction, suggesting that film's catastrophic effects on theater were, in a scenario no less paradoxical than the building up of the collapsed Star, also a source of the remarkable experiments of postwar theater.²

To many now, theater seems the most embarrassingly residual of media, sustained only by the undead force of petrified distinction in a mediascape where it will never again be new. Where, implicitly or explicitly, the subject is a historical progression of media, theater is very often relegated to the ragged company of antiquated forms technological progress has long since transcended. Following some accounts, succinctly captured, but also challenged, by J. Hoberman's title, *Film after Film*, theater is now cinema's predecessor in another way, as an exemplar of a pattern of unplanned obsolescence to which film, too, now falls victim.³ More typically still, theater simply has no place in contemporary discussions of media, except very often as a metaphor for more important shifts happening elsewhere. A solution to this predicament of arrested development common to scholars of theater is to claim that as a medium it returns us to forms of experience other media cannot match. In particular, theater scholarship invokes the importance of copresence as the factor that makes theater a form—even a medium—unlike others. Theater becomes, among other things, the medium of an abstract ritual, belonging to no particular religion, somehow secularized, but nevertheless imbued with a sacral air. If, on the one hand, a too-simple diachronic scheme relegates theater to the sphere of the outmoded, on the other hand a form of synchronic thinking that asserts the importance of theater because of some unchanging, valuable essence ignores the historicity of the form entirely. The choice between triumphalism in which theater is one of the spoils carried by the victors in an inevitable march toward the crowning of the newest of new media and a wishful celebration of theater's special difference from other media is a false one. What's needed are considered and historically alert accounts of theater as a medium among other media.

In *Liveness*, Philip Auslander solidly debunked the sacralization of theater on the grounds of its separateness from other forms of media. Auslander's deconstruction of the cult value of copresence as the special property of theater has been influential, and contested. The force of his debunking of the privileged category of "liveness" has, however, distorted what may be the more important contribution of the book. Auslander does not mean to argue that "liveness" does not exist, or is not a useful category. He does, however, imply that it has no "distinctive ontology": "[A]ny distinctions," he writes, "need to derive from careful consideration of how the relationship between the live and the mediatized is articulated in particular cases, not from a set of assumptions that constructs the relation between live and mediatized representations *a priori* as a relation of essential opposition."⁴ The critical task, then, becomes not how to establish a definitive ontology of liveness but instead how to track the articulation of liveness and its others in particular circumstances. To return to the film with which I began: spectators will notice exceptions to its manic pace at the beginning and end: pedestrians and vehicles pass by, as it were, at a normal, or only slightly accelerated, speed. Real time frames the time lapse. And yet this illusion of the comfort of real time is no less a special effect than the rapid demolition or reconstruction. Indeed, the rapid lapse of time in part makes the everyday actuality of pedestrian life appear to be the more compelling simulation of regular liveness. In contrast to the obviously mediated time lapse sequence, the equally mediated registration of something resembling everyday life appears to be relatively immediate, a few seconds of liveness.

I have been playing with cognates of the keywords of this forum, and, before turning more squarely to my central example of postwar theater, I want to think about that pair of medium and media. Auslander would not be alone in insisting that the first term makes no sense without considering the second: the conditions of a medium are not ontological, but, instead, historical and relational. Marshall McLuhan's classic formulation bears repeating:

The instance of the electric light may prove illuminating in this connection. The electric light is pure information. It is a medium without a message, as it were, unless it is used to spell out some verbal ad or name. This fact, characteristic of all media, means that the "content" of any medium is always another medium.⁵

Pairing this quotation with a passage from Lisa Gitelman's *Always Already New* emphasizes the historicity of the relationship between media:

it is as much of a mistake to write broadly of “the telephone,” “the camera,” or “the computer” as it is “the media,” and of now—somehow, “the Internet” and “the Web”—naturalizing or essentializing technologies as if they were unchanging, “immutable objects with given, self-defining properties” around which changes swirl, or to or from which history proceeds. Instead, it is better to specify telephones in 1890 in the rural United States, broadcast telephones in Budapest in the 1920s, or cellular, satellite, corded, and cordless landline telephones in North America at the beginning of the twenty-first century.⁶

The scare quotes with which McLuhan surrounds that most suspect word, “content,” opens up a space that Gitelman illuminates, so to speak. McLuhan’s punctuation acknowledges that “content” is necessarily a provisional term. Nevertheless, McLuhan’s simple copulative—“the ‘content’ of any medium *is* always another medium”—appears to assert an identity: we may not know what word should take the place of “content,” but we know that the thing that takes the place of content *is* always another medium.” The promise here is that we know what a medium, or “another medium,” is, that once we recognize which medium provides the “content” for another medium we will be able to recognize the second medium. The force of Gitelman’s critique, by contrast, lies in her insistence that a technology is not a stable entity that could, in some unproblematic way, provide the “content” for another technology. There is a vanishing point implicit in Gitelman’s theorization beyond which it would be impossible to speak of a technology or a medium at all; as Meredith McGill pointed out, Gitelman’s approach still requires, however provisionally, a certain abstraction or reification of historically disparate practices into something called a medium or a technology.⁷ In a particular historical moment and geographical site, a medium and its attendant practices become recognizable: this abstraction of “medium” will have required the separating out of unusual or residual uses of the medium. Gitelman’s revision of McLuhan offers one way to read his scare quotes around the word “content.” That interrogative punctuation alienates any simple notion of a given content provided by one medium that another medium might adopt or translate. Gitelman’s emphasis on the historicity of that content suggests a modification of McLuhan’s thesis: the “content” provided by one medium to other media will not remain constant. Even if one accepts McLuhan’s formulation, one will need to recall that the content provider must itself be seen as changeable, as not a stable medium at all.

McLuhan's formulation seems to me enduringly useful, and especially for the sphere of the aesthetic. My title alludes to and reverses two important studies published almost fifty years apart: A. Nicolas Vardac's *Stage to Screen* of 1949 and Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs's *Theater to Cinema* of 1998. Brewster and Jacobs have anticipated my revision of Vardac's title: theater replaces stage, cinema replaces screen. Of course, historically stage and theater preceded screen and cinema: both books demonstrate how theater provided certain kinds of content for film, with special attention to the passage of melodrama from medium to medium. These are important books, and each revises overly simple accounts of the historical relationship between theater and film. Nevertheless, teleology remains. This is especially true in Vardac's account, which, as Brewster and Jacobs themselves comment, relies on a kind of *Kunstwollen* to explain how film satisfied desires for realistic effects first created by nineteenth-century theater.⁸ The point of my "after," then, is to stress two things: first, and most simply, that theater continues after film and, second and more complexly, that theater's interaction with film shaped this afterlife in important ways.

To return to the familiar sentence from McLuhan: "This fact, characteristic of all media, means that the 'content' of any medium is always another medium." What this does not say is that a new medium will take its content from an old medium. Some of McLuhan's examples may be taken to suggest this, but he explicitly does not limit his larger claim to that form of appropriation. The "old" medium, that is, may take the newer one as its content just as surely as the reverse. Indeed, the letter of McLuhan's claim would be that such taking is necessarily a feature of every medium in every situation. The most difficult questions circle around that questionable term, "content." In *Remediation*, Bolter and Grusin return to McLuhan's declaration about medium and content and observe:

As his problematic examples suggest, McLuhan was not thinking of simple repurposing, but perhaps of a more complex kind of borrowing in which one medium is itself incorporated or represented in another medium. Dutch painters incorporated maps, globes, inscriptions, letters, and mirrors in their works.⁹

In the same paragraph, Bolter and Grusin remind the reader: "Again, we call the representation of one medium in another *remediation*, and we will argue that remediation is a defining characteristic of the new digital media."¹⁰ A detail here is telling: in paraphrasing McLuhan, Bolter and Grusin think of the form that content takes as a matter of

incorporation or representation. Their example of Dutch painting is a resonant one. Their definition of remediation, however, drops “incorporation” to isolate “representation” as the mode of remediation. With all their elaboration of what “representation” can mean, this reliance on representation is consequential. It may be that this reduction of all forms of content to representation is particularly suggestive for the meeting of, and missed connections between, media studies and aesthetics. In the particular field that occupies this paper, postwar theater—a field marked by a particularly generative crisis of a medium among other media—representation is exactly the wrong concept to describe what happens when a medium becomes part of the “content” of another medium, when film in all its perceived totalizing force becomes part of the substance of theater.

Before turning directly to theatrical examples, I want to think further about the question of Bolter and Grusin’s vocabulary for the modalities of remediation. “Dutch painters,” they write, “*incorporated* maps, globes, inscriptions, letters, and mirrors in their works.” Incorporation is an odd figure for the mimesis in painting of these earlier inscriptive forms and media, but it accords with their insistence that the force of Dutch painting lies in its combination of the persuasive illusion of immediacy characteristic of painterly perspective with the simultaneous attention to the modes of inscription that characterize what they call hypermediacy.¹¹ The example of the instruments and documents in Dutch painting is exemplary here: Holbein’s *Ambassadors*, for instance, simultaneously appears simply to have incorporated objects of a lavishly equipped world and, especially through its fatal anamorphic blot—the skull that becomes visible from an oblique angle—obliges the viewer to contemplate the painting’s mode of representation. This model of the representation of earlier media or technologies inside later ones tells us a lot about the history of media and about the history of various arts. It can’t, however, account for the theatrical examples that interest me. Indeed, an insistence on the mimesis of a medium as the signal of the incorporation of that medium explains why the force of postwar theater has been misrecognized. What’s needed is a term for forms of remediation that are not traceable because of their explicit repetition inside works of art—for example, letters inside paintings, or television monitors on stage, and so on—but which nevertheless shape aesthetic fields. It is tempting to use the term Bolter and Grusin abandon, and to call the kind of remediation by negation that I have in mind “incorporation.” That word, however, can too easily suggest a form of mimesis, the bodily repetition of content. With all necessary

hesitation about introducing a new use for an existing term, I propose that we call such remediation through negation of another medium *dismediation*.¹²

In the first half of the 1960s, the issue of theater as a medium became a live one for critics from Michael Fried to Susan Sontag. This debate concerned the problem of what the essential medium of theater might be: for Fried “*What lies between the arts is theater*” because it has no medium to which it can be specific.¹³ Sontag also addresses another question, that is, whether theater, like film, can “encapsulate” another art form: “[O]ne *can*,” she asserts, “film a play or ballet or opera or sporting event in such a way that film becomes, relatively speaking, a transparency, and it seems correct to say that one is seeing the event filmed. But theatre is never a ‘medium.’”¹⁴ Sontag’s claim underlines the aspiration of experimental postwar theater: its project was in part to reject this model of medium as transparency.¹⁵ If this theater made a claim to the prestige of medium in the sense important to Fried, the specificity of the medium belonged to its repudiation of a medium’s transparency in Sontag’s sense. This is also to say that in important ways this theater constituted itself as the dismediation of cinema. Surely these theorizations of the first half of the 1960s involved a phantasm of film itself as a hypnotic and hegemonic medium few critics would now endorse. Understanding postwar theater, and potentially the postwar arts more generally, requires registering how a persuasive conception of film as medium became part of a structure of feeling or horizon of expectation. In this context, it’s significant that Raymond Williams first sketched his notion of “structure of feeling” not, as is often claimed, in *The Long Revolution*, but in “The Dramatic Tradition,” his long contribution to the short book *Preface to Film*, published in 1954.¹⁶ The power of film as an instrument in the production of fascist publics; the paired notion of Hollywood as a machine of capitalist hegemony; the wider and widespread sense of mass culture as an unprecedented tool for the production of docile subjects: such beliefs were simply central to postwar discourse, elements of which remain remarkably tenacious. The focus on the inevitable psychic effects of the cinematic apparatus in somewhat later theories of the 1970s may have been a paranoid idealization of the moviegoer’s experience, but it correctly summarized a conception of film that helped to shape postwar theater negatively even as that theater worked to negate it in practice.¹⁷

Adorno’s model of negation would be more helpful were it not for its insistence on social totality as what art negates. All the same, that model’s theorization of aesthetic negation as simultaneously the

incorporation and undoing of the logic of what it negates is essential. The conception of the force of film in theorizations of the apparatus relied on a particular sense of the spectator in the dark movie theater as passively manipulated: Jean-Louis Baudry's translation of Plato's allegory of the cave from ancient puppet show for the forcibly restrained to cinema may stand in for a larger body of theories and assumptions.¹⁸ Postwar theater, in short, worked to negate a model of the spectator associated with mass culture. This dismediation of cinematic spectatorship in the theater is not so much a matter of representation as a concerted dramaturgical insistence on the absence of the incorporated medium. If, to use Adorno and Horkheimer's phrase, culture was now "administered," film and mass culture were seen as central to the apparatus of that administration. For theater to come after film, then, was for theater to come after the belief that the cultural force of mass culture had become commonplace, part of the postwar cultural imaginary.

The contrast between cinema's international power as an apparatus of subjection after 1945 and the slender means of postwar theaters is glaring. Dismediation, to be sure, very often becomes the project of a relatively marginal avant-garde. And yet the importance of theater in between 1950 and 1970—to give very rough dates—lies in part in its alienation of assumptions about the spectator. To an unprecedented degree, from Brecht and Beckett to Grotowski and the Living Theater to Peter Handke and Adrienne Kennedy, scrutiny of the spectator and disruption of its place became central to theatrical experiment. The cinematic spectator became the content of theater after film. That this theater to a large degree also dispensed with storytelling suggests not so much some transhistorical suspicion of narrative as such as the dismediation of the pleasures of cinematic narration in particular. Displaced as the preeminent medium for narration using human bodies, theater remade itself as a medium for reflection on such narration and on the structures of identification that made that cinema so powerful a force of subjection.

Samuel Beckett's importance for theater lies in the consistency and rigor with which his work for the stage worked to alienate patterns of spectatorial address familiar from film. More generally, however, the remarkable efflorescence of theater in the postwar years stemmed in part from such rigorous efforts at dismediation. One way to measure the difference between theatrical experiment and the boulevard theater of the postwar decades would be to note the extent to which that boulevard theater pretended nothing had changed and that its

audience remained the audience of 1933. Theatrical experiment registered a notion of the consolidation of cinema and its force as apparatus by imagining other situations for the spectator. The effect of this minimal, sometimes minimalist, dismediation of the conditions of cinematic spectatorship has been the misrecognition of some postwar theater—Beckett is, again, exemplary—as a testament to theater’s at last achieving the true modernist condition of medium specificity and theater’s belated discovery of its own essential medium. The reduction of the means of theater associated with Beckett is made all too easily legible through a history of abstraction familiar from Greenberg and Fried. As Thomas Crow has stressed, however, a genealogy of such an account of painting will find that Greenberg, too, began by linking painting’s reduction of its medium to mass culture’s, and particularly Hollywood’s, colonization of the raw material of the traditional arts.¹⁹ Recent media theory, however, helps to locate this “discovery,” as the result of a relational history: theater after film.

Not least because of its title, Beckett’s *Play*—first staged, in Germany, in 1963—has often been taken to be his quintessential exploration of theater as medium. It won’t be surprising, then, that this work seems to me one of the most comprehensive of Beckett’s dismediations. To trace this dismediation requires more than a glance, and *Play* will be my chief example in the remainder of this article. *Play* is most familiar for its striking scenography: in the words of Beckett’s opening stage direction, the stage features “three identical grey urns . . . about one yard high. From each a head protrudes, the neck held fast in the urn’s mouth” (B, 236; 355).²⁰ The three figures occupy a stripped-down afterlife, unaware of each other but painfully aware of a spotlight that brings them to speech. With no names beyond telegraphically gendered speech prefixes, W1, W2, and M, the talking heads emerging from their beds of ashes narrate, in fragments, an adulterous affair between the male figure, and W2, W1 being M’s wife. Their other chief concern is “you,” a second person addressee associated with but not necessarily identical to the spotlight that shines on them and makes them speak. M wonders from inside his urn:

M: I know now, all that was just . . . play. And all this? When will all this—

Spot from M to W 1

W 1: Is that it?

Spot from W 1 to W 2

W 2: Mightn’t you?

Spot from W 2 to M

M: All this, when will all this have been . . . just play? (B, 256; 361)

On the one hand, this is one of Beckett's explorations of the future conditional as the time anterior to suffering when the sufferer will, in theory, have distance from pain felt now. (Winnie, in *Happy Days*, is especially invested in this form of putatively comforting temporality: "Oh this *is* a happy day, this will have been another happy day!" [B, 232; 307]). M claims a present condition of knowledge where "all that" appears to have been "play," and asks about the possibility of a future condition when "all this" will equally appear to have been "play." On the other hand, the keyword "play" here signals the self-reflexivity about medium that critics have long recognized as one of Beckett's concerns. There may, then, be some relation between "play" as the neutralization of suffering and "play" as the medium of the event being staged for an audience. Here, it is important to stress that all evidence in the purgatorial situation of *Play* suggests that, where suffering is concerned, "play" can never be an experience of or in the present. This problem of play's infinitely deferred temporality also illuminates the problem of "play" as medium. It is on this point, so consequential for the topic of this cluster of essays, that my argument diverges from much of the writing on Beckett and medium. In yet another chapter of the grand tale of the triumphal procession of medium specificity through all media, critics often depict Beckett as the "last modernist" who reduces theater to its essential medium.²¹ On the contrary, it seems to me clear that Beckett's plays indelibly mark the peculiar historicity of the medium in a postwar moment. The response to that moment inside the plays is idiosyncratic and in no way determined by the media surround to which the plays respond. Nevertheless, for all the irreducible strangeness of Beckett's response to this surround, his work stems from a widely shared understanding of the postwar moment as, to an unprecedented degree, marked by the force of film and mass culture.

In *Play*, theater dismediates not simply another medium, but an apparatus in the wider sense: an apparatus as technological and ideological assemblage. Such dismediation cannot be a matter of representation in any straightforward way: the importance of the apparatus transcends its technological means, so the mimesis of the medium—its potential remediation as image (say, a globe inside a Dutch painting)—would miss the point. Beckett's *Play* dismediates the cinematic apparatus in this wider sense, as a repertoire of effects, a combination of technologies of address and anonymity. In this context, Beckett's stipulations about the lighting of *Play*, notoriously difficult for lighting designers to achieve, are crucial. In performance, a spotlight

moves with exceptional speed from face to face: “Their speech,” according to an opening stage direction, “is provoked by a spotlight projected on faces alone” (*B*, 236; 355). Already, the verb “projected” signals that this spotlight exists in relation to the cinematic apparatus, and the concentration on faces recalls the subjectifying effects of the close-up. In a note following the text, Beckett’s instructions for the lighting include these requirements:

The source of the light is single and must not be situated outside the ideal space (stage) occupied by its victims.

The optimum position for the spot is at the centre of the footlights, the faces being thus lit at close quarters and from below.

.....
The method consisting in assigning to each face a separate fixed spot is unsatisfactory in that it is less expressive of a unique inquisitor than the single mobile spot.²²

Only the spotlight’s projection produces speech: anything that might seem like dialogue in the transition from speaker to speaker is accidental. The spotlight, that is, has something like the power of subjection associated with the cinematic apparatus. To use language I will have more to say about later: once hailed by the light, the subject has no choice but to speak. The strict architectonic arrangement of Beckett’s scheme, however, significantly differs from the cinematic apparatus in locating the source of the projection on stage, in that “ideal space.” This proximity underscores the intimacy of the relation between the spotlight and its victims even while the nature of its projections remains inscrutable. One might provisionally say that this arrangement also makes an apparatus visible as apparatus: the audience is aware of the spotlight as part of a system presented in front of it. The heads become subjects only through projected light. In this way, they resemble the star produced by the close-up. Interrogated by the light, they speak. Hugh Kenner astutely called this a variation on “Beckett’s Gestapo theme”: it must also, however, be seen as the dismediation of cinematic address.²³ The important point is that cinematic address and the use of spotlights in interrogation and torture seemed, in this period, part of the same apparatus: subjection through cinema was only the less blatantly violent technology of obedience. W1, W2, and M take turns breaking the rule of this quasi-cinematic apparatus, talking back to the light, addressing the machine that addresses them.

This sequence follows closely upon M’s wistful desire for “play” that I just discussed:

M: Perhaps they have become friends. Perhaps sorrow—
Spot from M to W 1.

W 1: But I have said all I can. All you let me. All I—
Spot from W 1 to M.

M: Perhaps sorrow has brought them together.
Spot from M to W 2

W 2: No doubt I made the same mistake as when it was the sun
 that shone, of looking for sense where possibly there is none.
Spot from W 2 to M.

M: Perhaps they meet, and sit, over a cup of that green tea they
 both so loved, without milk or sugar, not even a squeeze of lemon—
Spot from M to W 2.

W 2: Are you listening to me? Is anyone listening to me? Is anyone
 looking at me? Is anyone bothering about me at all?
Spot from W 2 to M.

M: Not even a squeeze of—
Spot from M to W 1.

W 1: Is it something to do with my face, other than utter? Weep?
Spot from W 1 to W 2.

W 2: Is my name taboo, I wonder. Not necessarily, now that all danger
 is averted. That poor creature—I can hear her—that poor creature—
Spot from W 2 to W 1.

W 1: Bite off my tongue and swallow it? Spit it out? Would that
 placate you? How the mind works still to be sure!
Spot from W 1 to M.

M: Meet, and sit, now in one dear place, now in the other, and
 sorrow together, and compare—*hiccup*—pardon—happy memories.
Spot from M to W 1.

W 1: If only I could think, There is no sense in this . . . either, none
 whatsoever. I can't.
Spot from W 1 to W 2.

W 2: That poor creature who tried to seduce you, what ever became
 of her, do you suppose?—I can hear her. Poor thing.
Spot from W 2 to M.

M: Personally I always preferred Lipton's. (B, 256–60; 362–63)

The brand name is the closest the play comes to remediation through representation and to admitting the mass cultural surround to which it responds. Otherwise, the passage oscillates between M's imagining untormented reunions of his wife and lover and the affectless anguish that characterizes the lines of W1 and W2. In his fantasy of friendship based in shared sorrow, W1 and W2 nevertheless compare "happy memories." Meanwhile, W1 and W2, equally unaware of each other or of M, are nonetheless alike in addressing that "you," who may or may not be watching and may or may not be "bothering about" them.

W2's lines are especially resonant: "Are you listening to me? Is anyone listening to me? Is anyone looking at me? Is anyone bothering about me at all?" (B, 258; 159). This passage exemplifies the place of the second person pronoun in *Play*, and also of the condition of theater after film. On the one hand, the pathetic survivor, left behind by its audience, asks for attention. On the other, this old, renewed medium dismediates the place of the spectator, and complicates the direction and misdirection of performed address which constitutes a public. The dramaturgical situation implies that that second person addresses the just barely personified spotlight: insofar as that light seems to address the figures in the urns, it can in turn be addressed. The logic of *Play* encapsulates, then, an aspect of the phenomenology of mass cultural address: the audience member experiences itself as addressee. To be addressed is to imagine the solicitation of a reply: to reply may be to a greater or lesser degree psychotic, but *Play* registers the desire to answer, to undo the logic of "one-to-many communication," to use Fred Turner's phrase.²⁴ Something like it is the enabling condition of cinematic spectatorship. *Play* puts its captive and unmoving audience in something like the position of those in the urns: "Are you listening to me?" Are you anyone? *Play* perfectly allows the audience to renounce the second person: that "you" addresses an apparatus of which I am not a part. And yet W2's translation of *you* to *anyone* implicitly opens a divide in the second person who may be listening: you *or* anyone. The audience may not be "you" but cannot disavow being that anonymous or anonymized someone who is, at the very least, listening and looking. The last line caps this sequence: to bother about implies some concern—a form of care so minimal as to add up to bother—that exceeds the basic spectatorial activities of watching and listening. Late in *Play*, M takes on this scrutiny of spectatorship, asking repeatedly, "Am I as much as . . . being seen?" (B, 268; 366). For M, to be seen would be bother enough. This emphasis, however, may only emphasize the machinic nature of the apparatus that seems to see. Beckett's insistence that that spotlight belongs to the "ideal space" of the performers accentuates the inhuman aspect of the illusion of such address: the projection doesn't bother about you at all. The automatic response of the figures in the urns and the silence of the audience in the theater are related. After film, the theatrical convention that the audience should not respond resembles the anonymity of the apparatus that produces second persons it does not address.

Beckett never allowed that the response of the audience might alter a performance. In this way, his theater rigorously opposed the

spectacles designed to dissolve the separation between audience and performers that were arguably another feature of this period's reaction to the apparatus of cinema.²⁵ The transformative force of identification in the cinema had long been, however, a far more powerful force for such dissolution than the happening was ever to be. Beckett's isolation of the audience stresses its difference from the "ideal space" of the stage. This divide stresses his theater's disavowal of the technologies of identification that made cinema what it was. Beckett's theater suggests that the stage can estrange but cannot undo the force of the cinematic apparatus and what it stands for. A return to the most familiar narrative of an apparatus and its force will help to situate the historicity of Beckett's revision of theater as medium. Althusser, it's worth stressing, insistently describes his "theoretical scene" in theatrical terms: he calls the policeman's hailing of the subject "my little theoretical theatre" and further calls his account "this *mise en scène* of interpellation."²⁶ Theater figures the apparatus that makes possible the narrativization *in time* of the ideological formation of the subject that has "always-already" happened, as Althusser stresses, that is, outside of time (*B*, 175). Such a translation from unthought, timeless ideology into aesthetic medium is necessary in order to recognize how ideology works: the model of the theater makes it possible to imagine in temporal sequence something that does not belong to the order of time at all.

Althusser's account of ideological apparatuses, that is, illuminates the ambitions of the postwar theater and in particular its negative relation to film imagined as a powerful, quasi-official ideological apparatus. The exercises in theatrical reflexivity critics were beginning to call metatheater—a term invented, symptomatically, by Lionel Abel only in 1963, and in part in response to Beckett²⁷—were not, then, simply another chapter in the long history of a medium's calling awareness to its own artifice. Against cinematic experience insistently figured as a warm bath in the sleep of ideology or the "Hollywood dream factory," theater insistently returned to reflection on its own medium.²⁸ Such exposure of a medium as medium, however, pointed not to some late modernist project of the reduction of a medium to its essentials but to theater as a place where, through negation, processes of subjection through interpellation could be made visible. Emphasis on the relative poverty of theater as medium—alas, poor theater!—also, that is, underlined its inefficiency as ideological apparatus. The richness of film as a medium for realist narrative, and consequently its power as conduit for ideology, had made that relative poverty especially visible. If film was an apparatus of subjection, theater as medium could make that

formation visible through metatheatrical techniques. These techniques were at once inside stage traditions of address, and formed specifically in negative reaction to what was understood to be cinema's immense power to form subjects.

Stories of the demolition of the theater over the course of the twentieth century and its relegation to the junkyard of media history neglect the ways theater rebuilt itself as a medium formed in relation to other media. This rebuilding happened in part through dismediation, through the formal negation of modes of spectatorship associated with the cinema. Such theatrical dismediation in turn, in the work of Godard and others, fostered a cinematic experiment designed to counter the Hollywood apparatus. My aim here, however, has been not to argue for the importance of postwar theater because of its effects later or elsewhere or because of some other rebuilding project—for instance, inside the history of film—to which it might have contributed. This theater becomes newly visible because of its relation to other media. The forms of dismediation I have in mind have not wholly died out, but they are no longer so central to the making of experimental theater as they were between the mid-1950s and the mid 1970s or so: Adrienne Kennedy's *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White*, first staged in New York in 1976, is one important theatrical sublation of and endpoint to the period of dismediation I have in view. After the splintering in the belief of film as medium of mass subjection, and consequent changes in conceptions of spectatorship—that is, *after* film, in an important sense—theater became, again, a different medium.

University of California, Irvine

NOTES

I thank the audience at the 2014 English Institute for its generous response to this paper. I also thank colleagues whose comments I am still catching up with: Jerry Christensen, Nico Israel, and Julia Jarcho. Finally, I thank Virginia Jackson for her constantly invigorating conversation.

¹American Memory, "Star Theatre / American Mutoscope and Biograph Company," Library of Congress, accessed 10 October 2014, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mbrsmi/lcmp002.m2b01464>. See also Frederick Armitage, "Building Up and Demolishing the Star Theatre," in *Unseen Cinema: Picturing a Metropolis*, DVD (Los Angeles: Image Entertainment, 2005).

²Cinema had of course had a massive impact on theater before the middle of the twentieth century: "If there is one thing on which cultural historians agree," writes David Savran, "it is that Hollywood has been the 'largest single force' shaping the American theater since at least 1912, when 'the first full-length commercial film was shown in America,' *Queen Elizabeth*, starring (not by accident) the most famous stage actor in the world, Sarah Bernhardt" (Savran, *Highbrow/Lowdown: Theater, Jazz, and*

the *Making of the New Middle Class* [Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 2009], 43–44). Savran quotes Robert McLaughlin, *Broadway and Hollywood: A History of Economic Interaction* (New York: Arno, 1974), n.p.; 9. My argument is that a formal response to the impact of film, while not without precedent in the interwar years, shaped theater in new ways after 1945.

³J. Hoberman, *Film After Film: Or, What Became of 21st-Century Cinema?* (London: Verso, 2012). Hoberman's discussion of Tsai-Ming Liang's stunning *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* is especially relevant: the film, writes Hoberman, examines "the inner life of the Fu-Ho theater, a since-demolished poured-concrete cavern in the heart of Taipei" (215). More generally, the book discusses the cinematic consequences of the "digital turn" (vii) away from film as medium that *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* allegorizes. On filmic nostalgia for the movie house itself, see Gabriele Pedullà, *In Broad Daylight: Movies and Spectators after Cinema*, trans. Patricia Gaborik (London: Verso, 2012) 4–5; 15.

⁴Phillip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999), 54. Han-Thies Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. Karen Jürs-Munby (London: Routledge, 2006) offers another important account of postwar theater's relationship to other media, which I will address elsewhere.

⁵Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, ed. W. Terrence Gordon (Corte Madera, CA: Gingko), 19.

⁶Lisa Gitelman, *Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 8. I have previously discussed the quotation from Gitelman in "Theater and Media Before 'New' Media: Beckett's *Film* and *Play*," *Theater* 42.2 (2012): 8.

⁷I owe this point to conversation with Meredith McGill.

⁸Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs, *Theatre to Cinema: Stage Pictorialism and the Early Feature Film* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997), 6. Brewster and Jacobs, indeed, are at pains to undo a history of teleological thinking within film history, where early film with its debts to theatrical practice inevitably gives way to later, more sophisticated filmmaking built around montage.

⁹Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin Bolter, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 45.

¹⁰Bolter and Grusin, 45.

¹¹Bolter and Grusin, 33–34.

¹²"Dismediation" is already in occasional use as a name for the dissolution of existing media institutions, such as newspapers. See, for instance, Rupert Read, "Not the End of the Media Yet. Please," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, October 2009, accessed 27 February 2016, <https://mondediplo.com/blogs/not-the-end-of-the-media-yet-please>.

¹³Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood" (1967), in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1998), 164.

¹⁴Susan Sontag, "Film and Theatre," *The Tulane Drama Review* 11.1 (Autumn, 1966), 25.

¹⁵That theater has become, from Broadway to the Brooklyn Academy of Music, a mode for the remediation of cinema and television is not my concern here.

¹⁶Raymond Williams and Michael Orrom, *Preface to Film* (London: Film Drama Ltd., 1954) 21–22. See the important discussion in Williams's *Politics and Letters: Interviews with the New Left Review* (London: Verso, 1979), 156–74. In that interview, Williams points out his use of the phrase in *Preface to Film* (158–59).

¹⁷The importance of Brecht to the *Screen* collective is significant in this context: it was precisely through a theory of theater as the other of a stultifying mass culture that

the *Screen* group conceptualized a potential for film that broke with cinematic norms. For a particularly representative issue of the journal, see *Screen* 14.2 (Summer 1974). This issue includes Roland Barthes's "Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein" (33–39), a dossier on *Kuhle Wampe* (41–73), and Stephen Heath's "Lessons from Brecht" (103–28). For another representative publication, see Martin Walsh, *The Brechtian Aspect of Radical Cinema*, ed. Keith M. Griffiths (London: BFI, 1981).

¹⁸ See Jean-Louis Baudry, "The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in the Cinema," in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1986), 299–318. Pedullà, in *In Broad Daylight*, summarizes the Platonic analogy, and asserts that "American cognitive film theorists" such as Noël Carroll have proven it wrong (11). What interests me here is not the analogy's empirical accuracy but its persuasive force, along with that of analogous pictures of cinematic experience in the period.

¹⁹ Thomas Crow, "Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts," in *Modern Art in the Common Culture* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1996), 9.

²⁰ Quotations from Beckett follow the texts of the single most useful volume for the study of his drama: Samuel Beckett, *Dramatische Dichtungen in drei Sprachen* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1981). This volume is unavailable in the United States, and so I also give citations from *Dramatic Works*, vol. 3 of *Samuel Beckett: The Grove Centenary Edition* (New York: Grove, 2006). Hereafter abbreviated *B* and cited parenthetically.

²¹ Daniel Allbright's *Beckett and Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003) is a compelling account of Beckett's modernist fidelity to media. Here I also allude to Anthony Cronin's biography, *Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist* (New York: Da Capo, 1997).

²² Beckett, *Dramatic Works*, 366–67. *Dramatische Dichtungen in drei Sprachen* does not include Beckett's notes to *Play*. On the play's print history, see S. E. Gontarski, "Beckett's *Play*, in *extenso*," *Modern Drama* 42.3 (1999): 442–55; for comments on this strange omission, see 450.

²³ See Hugh Kenner, *A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1973), 153. See also Kenner's *The Mechanic Muse* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987), 103.

²⁴ Fred Turner, *The Democratic Surround: Multimedia & American Liberalism from World War II to the Psychedelic Sixties* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2013). Turner's account of a set of multimedia experiments as a response to fears about the power of mass culture anticipates my argument here. Our objects are different, but we share an understanding of the importance of a generalized sense of the dangers of mass culture as foundational to the specificity of postwar experimentation. I thank Jonathan Sterne for this reference.

²⁵ Attempts to dissolve the status of the spectator in the period were very often also engaged with the mass cultural surround. For a revisionary account of the work of Allan Kaprow, for instance, see Judith Rodenbeck, *Radical Prototypes: Allan Kaprow and the Invention of Happenings* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011).

²⁶ Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review, 1971), 174; 177.

²⁷ Lionel Abel, *Metatheatre: A New View of Dramatic Form* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1963).

²⁸ See Hortense Powdermaker, *Hollywood, The Dream Factory; An Anthropologist Looks at the Movie-Makers* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1950).