

# MEYERHOLD AND THE CUBISTS

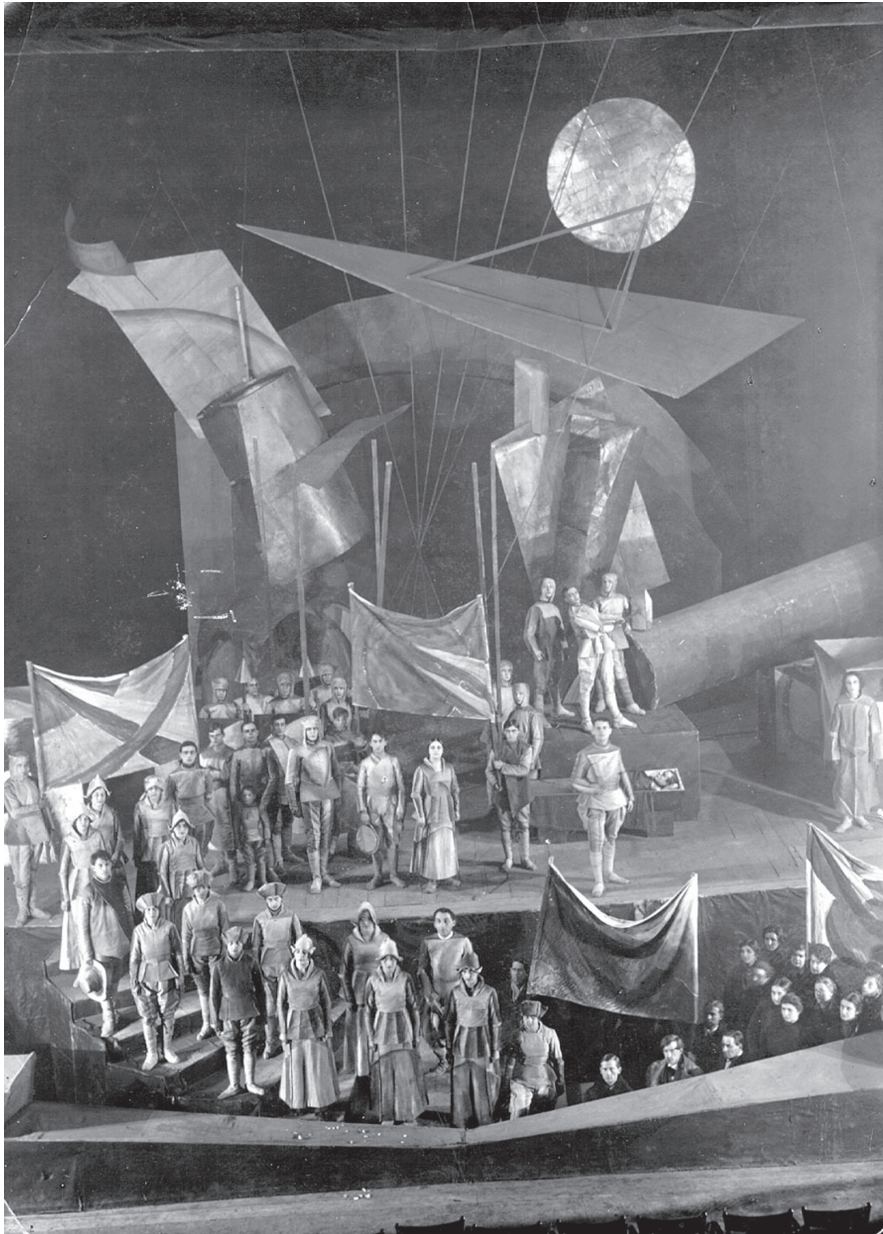
PERSPECTIVES ON PAINTING AND  
PERFORMANCE



AMY SKINNER

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# Meyerhold and the Cubists



*The Dawn* by E. Verhaeren, directed by Vs. Meyerhold. RSFSR Theatre no. 1, 1920.  
Scene 7 ("The Square of Nations").

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Theatre Museum", Moscow.

# Meyerhold and the Cubists: Perspectives on Painting and Performance

By Amy Skinner



**intellect** Bristol, UK / Chicago, USA





We only have to talk to the latest followers of Picasso and Tatlin to know at once that we are dealing with kindred spirits ... We are building just as they are building.

Vsevolod Meyerhold, discussing his staging of *The Dawn*, 1920  
(Meyerhold, trans. Braun [1969] 1998: 173)

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Frontispiece image     *The Dawn* by E. Verhaeren, directed by Vs. Meyerhold. RSFSR Theatre no. 1, 1920. Scene 7 ('The Square of Nations').  
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## Diagrams

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2. Meyerhold’s diagram of the ‘Theatre of the Straight Line’, from his essay ‘First Attempts at a Stylized Theatre’, as translated by Edward Braun ([1969] 1998: 50).  
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## Re-reading Meyerhold, part one

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Nearly fifty years later, in 1961, André Breton still recalled how stunned he was when, in that 1913 issue of *Les Soirées de Paris*, he first encountered Picasso's Cubism. These were shockingly disruptive works.

(Read 2002: 121)

The emergence of cubism altered the course of twentieth century art. The cubist artists' radical disruption of linear space, the flattening of the canvas surface and the spatial vocabulary of geometric forms not only challenged the dominant representational modes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but also incorporated the wider, philosophical concerns of the era within the frame of the canvas: this was not the art of a comforting world of absolutes, the era of Newtonian mechanics, but of a radically shifting and disrupted universe of non-Euclidean geometry and Relativity Theory, political revolution and international conflict. The cubist works of Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, Juan Gris, Jean Metzinger, Albert Gleizes and their collaborators have become a definitive, and revolutionary, moment in the history of contemporary art.

The career of theatre director, theorist and pedagogue Vsevolod Meyerhold coincided chronologically with the era of cubism. When Picasso completed his proto-cubist canvas *Les Femmes d'Alger* in 1907, Meyerhold was taking up the position of artistic director at Russia's Imperial Theatres. When Picasso and Braque began their experiments with collage in 1911–1912, Meyerhold published his collection of theoretical articles, *On the Theatre*. In 1913, the year in which photographs of Picasso's canvases stunned Breton, Meyerhold opened his first training studio. Beyond these historical overlaps, however, there is a much more significant relationship between Meyerhold's practice and that of the cubists: the director's challenge to accepted formal conventions and his disruption of linear understandings of time and space echoed, on stage, the revolutions of the cubist canvas.

The purpose of this book is to explore a new way in which to read the theatre of Meyerhold, using, as a starting point, the concurrent developments in visual culture during the *fin-de-siècle* and early twentieth century. The emphasis is on the director's relationship with visual, or fine, art, and particularly with the artists and practices of cubism (a broadly European form) and cubo-futurism (the adaptation and development of this form within a Russian context). This is not to suggest that the consideration of Meyerhold's theatre from the perspective of his relationship with visual art or visual

artists is, in itself, a new phenomenon: it is not; and much work exists that establishes the director's links to some of the most significant names in painting in the early years of the twentieth century (see Mikhailova 1995).<sup>1</sup> The causal connections between Meyerhold and avant-garde art are well documented, not least by the director himself, whose extensive references to painting and art movements provide a convincing context for this analysis. The association of Meyerhold with Picasso is particularly prevalent, evoked by both his contemporaries (Nikolai Foregger, see Rudnitsky 1981, and Meyerhold's wife Zinaida Raikh, see *Teatr* 1974) and by later scholars of his work (Rudnitsky 1981; Innes and Shevtsova 2013). Meyerhold's on-going innovation and his ruthless appetite for experimentation resulted in him being dubbed 'the Picasso of the theatre' by his own and subsequent generations (see Leach 1989: 23, 174).

The association of Meyerhold and Picasso acts primarily as a cipher to indicate an aspect of the director's practice: Picasso is used as a metaphor for innovation, experimentation, and the avant-garde. Konstantin Rudnitsky expands this cipher through his analysis of form in the two artists' work: he identifies an 'internal connection' between decisions made by Meyerhold and Picasso, particularly in the rise of an art with subjective, rather than objective concerns (Rudnitsky 1981: 106).<sup>2</sup> Rudnitsky's observation indicates the potential of this comparison between visual artist and theatre director as a productive tool for the analysis of Meyerhold's theatre on the level of its formal and visual construction. What this volume wishes to contribute is a way of using the techniques, practices and philosophy of the visual artists in order to develop a comparative analysis of Meyerhold's theatre practice within the frame of visual art. The formal and philosophical tenets of cubism are considered to have resonances in Meyerhold's theatre not only as design practices, rehearsal techniques and documentary records, but also as a wider organizational principle for productions, underlying the structural decisions that shaped the director's work. Beyond this, the work of the visual artists is also extended, metaphorically, to become a tool for the reading of Meyerhold's work from a historical perspective, that is, as a framework for the understanding of Meyerhold's theatre and for its historical analysis. In this sense, the approach here owes much to Nick Worrall's 1973 analysis of Meyerhold's production of *The Magnanimous Cuckold*, which establishes significant formal connections between Meyerhold's theatre and trends in concurrent artistic and philosophical developments (including futurism and cubo-futurism).<sup>3</sup>

Meyerhold's contribution to the development of theatre since the early twentieth century incorporated innovation in theatre aesthetics, working practices and actor training. The tripartite model for theatre making that he developed, incorporating three spheres of practice (stage-laboratory-training room), allowed innovations to move throughout all aspects of his work, echoing the director's desire for a realization of the Wagnerian *gesamtkunstwerk* not simply in performance, but also in approach (Meyerhold, 'The Reconstruction of the Theatre' 1930, trans. Braun [1969] 1998: 254).<sup>4</sup> As such, a new influence in stage design became a new form of training, a new approach

to characterization or a new technique for rehearsal. A survey of Meyerhold's innovations in theatre practice, particularly those considered most significant in the West, can be gleaned from the emphases selected by English language publications on the director: Meyerhold has contributed to debates on design and scenography (Hoover 1988; Worrall 1973), actor training (Pitches 2003; Law and Gordon 1996; Normington 2005), characterization (Leach 1989), ensemble practice (Pitches 2003; Skinner 2013) and audience studies (Bennett [1997] 2001).

In part, the significance of Meyerhold's work lies in its cultural context. His theatre is a link in a chain of innovations associated with the development of twentieth century performance, innovations that have now become almost synonymous with avant-garde, experimental or even simply non-naturalistic approaches to theatre practice: the removal of the footlights, the leaving on or raising of the houselights, the removal of the front curtain, the direct incorporation of the spectator into the performance, the use of placards, the coexistence of abstraction and realism on stage and so forth.<sup>5</sup> Meyerhold's significance lies not only in his innovations in aesthetics and working practices, but also in his historical context, as a theatrical figure representative of a specific moment in theatre history. This moment, the transition from the *fin-de-siècle* into the early twentieth century, indicates that Meyerhold was a practitioner with certain philosophical and social concerns (which will be addressed in greater depth in the following chapters), but also that he was a product of a certain cultural and theatrical milieu, his particular circumstances making him an especially epitomic figure of this specific cultural and historical moment.<sup>6</sup>

Meyerhold's work, and his death, cannot be separated from the political developments of early twentieth century Russia. Born just over a decade after the social upheaval of the abolition of serfdom, Meyerhold lived through the aborted attempt at revolution in 1905 and the Bloody Sunday Massacre, as well as the two revolutions of 1917. He spent time as a prisoner of war under the White Army in the south of Russia at Novorossiysk. His death was one of thousands during Stalin's Purges. Beyond his overtly political actions, Meyerhold was also closely involved in the politicization of daily life under the Soviets, the question of rebuilding society – and humanity – in line with Soviet goals. The trends of Soviet policy can be seen in Meyerhold's practice, from his construction of the theatrical ensemble through to the theorization of biomechanics using (pseudo) scientific principles. Whether Meyerhold was truly committed to the Communist cause, or was, in the words of Mel Gordon, 'simply a devious and intriguing animal' who attempted to manipulate circumstances to his own ends, cannot detract from his status as a representative of theatre in the pre- and early Soviet years (Gordon, in interview with de Haan 1998: 11).

The revolutions of the early twentieth century, however, were not only political ones. Meyerhold's theatre is also a product of the revolution in theatre practice, which saw the rise of the stage director (in Russian, *rezhissor*) as the organizing force behind the realization of the performance. For Meyerhold, whose training under Stanislavsky had familiarized him with this new model, this included not just the arrangement of the



actors in the space and the construction of the *mise-en-scène*, but the full scope of the production, from its concept, its philosophical values and its visual impact, through to the delivery of specific lines by individual actors. Much has been made of the dictatorial nature of Meyerhold's practice (see, for example, Houghton 1938), and programmes for his performances often credited him as 'author' of the production (see Mikhailova 1995). The implication here is not only the director as the author of the *mise-en-scène*, but also the author in other senses, including the writing (adaptation or rewriting) of the playtext, a crediting which was possible both when the text was by an obscure author not well-known in Russia and when the playwright was a significant figure in the Russian canon: Fernand Crommelynck's *Magnanimous Cuckold* became Meyerhold's, but so did Nikolai Gogol's *Government Inspector*. Braun summarizes Meyerhold's approach to the text using Mounet-Sully's aphorism that *chaque texte ce n'est qu'une prétexte* (each text is only a pretext), placing the work of the playwright at the service of the production as a whole, as envisioned by the director (Braun [1995] 1998: 221). In this sense, Meyerhold was one of the first of the modern stage directors, key in the rise of theatre direction and in developing the function of the director's role.

Meyerhold's relationship with Stanislavsky is only an indication of the director's integration in the wider cultural context of the early twentieth century. Meyerhold was one of a matrix of figures who worked alongside one another, sometimes in the form of literal collaborations, but often simply in dialogue through correspondence, membership of societies (such as the Symbolist Tower Group in St. Petersburg) and attendance at each other's events. Meyerhold's work is embedded in such relationships, both supportive and contentious, with practitioners from theatre (Stanislavsky, Chekhov, Tairov, Okhlopkov), cinema (Eisenstein, Kuleshov), fine art (Malevich, Picasso), music (Shostakovich, Prokofiev), literature (Pasternak) and many more. His work, characteristic of the early twentieth century avant-garde, demonstrated a relational approach to art-making, which extended beyond the confines of theatre into other disciplines. What emerges is a picture of a practitioner who was intimately related to the concerns of his era, be that the politics of the Russian Revolution, the rise of the theatre director or the networked relationships of the avant-garde. The resulting impact on Meyerhold's significance as a figure for historical study is not only that his work is representative of a moment but also that this moment opens up the potential frames for analysis.

Although in terms of his context, Meyerhold as a figure provides a potentially wide scope for study, these approaches have been complicated by the issues of personal and biographical interest that the director represents. Most significant amongst these is the question of Meyerhold's death and its implications for scholarship. Although, at a fundamental level, the restriction on material relating to the director has consequently constrained understanding of his practice in the West, the circumstances of Meyerhold's execution have also led to the emergence of certain narratives associated with the director in Western scholarship. The alienating effect of the narrative of a director whose work was so politically controversial that it resulted in his execution is such that the

political aspects of his work have been predominant in Western approaches. There has even been, in some instances, a perpetuation of the binary model of ‘formalist vs. Communist’ in Meyerhold’s practice; a restrictive approach in that it does not allow for a great deal of ambiguity in his theatre. Gordon’s assertion that he ‘step[s] outside this political assessment of [Meyerhold] because as far as I know [he] never held a gun and shot anyone’ is one such perspective that implies a definition of the political that excludes questions of theatrical form, allowing for little slippage between the two terms (Gordon, in interview with de Haan 1998: 18).

The restriction of access to Meyerhold material has also led to a further dominant narrative, that of something which is hidden and must be uncovered. This places an emphasis on the discovery of new materials, directing scholarship down a specific path: that of unearthing rather than that of re-reading. This approach is understandable – Meyerhold’s practice was diverse above all, and his desire to document and theorize his own theatre has led to a wealth of material, much of it only available in Russian.

There are further restrictions in the nostalgia that has developed around Meyerhold as a practitioner. Records of unrealized productions, including the hints at a theatre-in-the-round developing through his work with El Lissitzky on Sergei Tretyakov’s *I Want a Child* (1927–1930) and the designs produced for his own unfinished theatre building (see Barkhin and Vakhtangov 1972), imbue the director with a sense of profound sadness – something that is missing in his *oeuvre* that goes beyond the experiments in aesthetics which have defined his influence on contemporary theatre. I have written on the effect of this nostalgia elsewhere, on the development of biomechanics, where a respect for the director as a ‘figure fallen’ has led, in some instances, to an unwillingness to modify his ideas (Skinner 2012). The result is a potential stagnation in biomechanical practice, and this consigns Meyerhold to the role of historical figure and his innovations to the status of museum pieces. This effect is seen most clearly with biomechanics where there is a perception that the system relies on the utmost accuracy in physical structure in order to achieve its ends. The danger is that this could also, when taken in association with the problems of restricted access and the belief in the ultimate significance of the ‘new’ biographical or documentary evidence that might become available, begin to restrict Meyerhold scholarship, placing the ultimate emphasis on a historical, rather than historiographic, approach.

The approach taken in this volume is one of analysis. Some of the historical material on which the work is based has previously been made available elsewhere, in Russian and English studies on the director. What is offered here is an alternative reading of this material through a comparison of Meyerhold’s work with that of his cubist contemporaries. The goal is dual: to suggest a new way of looking at the director’s work; and to suggest the wider need for (and validity of) exploring new ways of looking at his practice in general, that is, the need to keep re-reading Meyerhold.

### **The First Premise: The Need for Re-reading**

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Three premises underlie this consideration of Meyerhold's theatre through the lens of cubist art. The first concerns the motivation for the study: the need for new ways in which to read Meyerhold's work. The analysis of Meyerhold's theatre in British scholarship is at a critical point in its development. The field of English language Meyerhold scholarship has been clearly established since the 1960s, initially by Edward Braun, and then by others (Robert Leach, Mel Gordon, Alma Law, Nick Worrall, Marjorie Hoover, Jonathan Pitches). Now that Meyerhold is significantly established in theatre scholarship and practice in the West, the challenge is to explore the ways in which Meyerhold and Meyerhold scholarship can remain relevant. The increasing interest in biomechanical actor training suggests one sphere in which Meyerhold's ideas are contributing to contemporary theatre practice, not only in training performers but in an expanded sense, for example, as training for puppeteers (Cariad Astles) and dramatherapists (Anna Seymour). This interest in practical explorations of Meyerhold's ideas must work in tandem with the development of new ways of reading his theatre in order to ensure a continued expansion in our understanding of the director as practitioner, theorist and pedagogue. It is this need to re-read that has prompted the analysis of Meyerhold's theatre through the analytical frame of the visual arts.

### **The Second Premise: Cultural Practice as Socially and Politically Embedded**

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In addition to the motivation of re-reading which underlies this volume, the ideas presented here are based on assumptions, or premises, regarding the nature of the cross-disciplinary study of theatre and visual art. The first of these is the seemingly obvious assertion that cultural practice is intimately connected to the social and political milieu of its creation. The particular reason for noting this in the context of a study on Meyerhold is that it sits in direct conflict with the 'formalist vs. Communist' dichotomy levelled at the director by the Soviet government, by suggesting that form, and not just content, is a political statement. The politics of form has a cultural resonance in the early twentieth century, particularly within cubist experimentation with new formal techniques intended to be provocative in their effect: in the words of Picasso, 'it is not necessary to paint a man with a gun. An apple can be just as revolutionary' (Picasso in Leighton 1989: 141).

### **The Third Premise: The Cultural Matrix**

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Finally, this study also assumes that the relationship between different disciplines is more than causal, and that cross-disciplinarity does not rely on causal connections in order to function. The model used in this volume (considered in more depth in chapter one)

is the cultural matrix theory proposed by N. Katherine Hayles. This is not to discard the significance of causal connections, which, in the instance of Meyerhold's theatre and visual art, are many and varied, but to suggest that the connections operate on a more fundamental level than that of literal overlapping. In other words, the intimate connection of cultural developments to social and political circumstances facilitates an overlap in working practices and ideas between different disciplines. Meyerhold's theatre need not be consciously 'cubist' in order to reflect a similarity in formal structure and philosophical intent to that demonstrated by the cubist artworks. It is the presence of these structures and intents that gives the director's work its power. In Worrall's words:

The importance of [Meyerhold's productions of *Nora* and *The Magnanimous Cuckold*] may not seem clear unless the course of Meyerhold's development as a director can be seen in relation to other movements in the arts which serve to explain, at least partially, what he was trying to do and how the dominant influences of the period found expression in his work.

(Worrall 1973: 14)

Using these premises as a starting point, this study considers how Meyerhold constructed a relationship between his theatre and the visual arts in practice and in his theoretical writings. The analysis considers Meyerhold's work in all three spheres of his working structure: as represented on stage in public performances; in smaller experimental settings; and in training and pedagogy. It explores the relationship that Meyerhold had with the cubist artists in particular, considering the significance of this relationship in the study of his theatre. There is an emphasis on how cubism functions as a visual language, the aspects of this visual language that are also seen in Meyerhold's theatre, and the ways in which cubist formal practice can function as a framework for reading the director's work. Finally, looking beyond the causal, there is a consideration of other models of relationship between theatre and the visual arts suggested by the study of Meyerhold and cubism. Similarities and differences between the canvas and the stage are fundamental, in that it is through these differences that the analysis functions. There is an emphasis on the visual, structural reading of canvases and theatrical *mise-en-scène* as a way in which these comparisons can be explored. The intention is to posit a way of reading Meyerhold's work, which firstly contextualizes his practice with the era of the *fin-de-siècle* and early twentieth century, and against the concurrent creative work occurring at that time, and, secondly, opens up new dialogues around the ways in which his theatre functioned as a performative experience. Above all else, the work is comparative and dialogic, suggesting one way amongst many in which the theatre of Meyerhold can be read and re-read.

The first chapter, 'Setting the Scene', contextualizes Meyerhold's work with artists in terms of his cultural setting and his philosophical and practical attitude towards scenography. The chapter suggests that Meyerhold's model of theatre cast him in the role of 'director-scenographer', emphasizing the importance that he placed on the construction

or 'writing' of the scenic space. A survey of Meyerhold's personal working relationships with visual artists is undertaken, and the ways in which the visual arts influenced his theatre practice are addressed. There is specific consideration of the development of cubism in Europe and Russia, and of Meyerhold's relationship with the cubist artists, framing cubist form as a 'visual language' – a model that is significant in establishing the utility of cubist ideas within Meyerhold's scenographic approach as he searches for a mode of spatial communication in performance. The chapter concludes with an overview of the different models of relationship between the visual arts and theatre suggested by Meyerhold's practice.

Chapters two to five each address a specific aspect of cubist visual language in comparison with Meyerhold's theatre practice. Chapter two, 'Depth', uses the construction of depth on canvas and stage to introduce the formal parallels between Meyerhold's theatre and cubism, and to explore their similar approaches to representation. The cubists' playful negotiation of the tension between depth and surface is seen echoed in Meyerhold's productions. Meyerhold's theatre is established as a space in which realism and abstraction (through the metaphors of constructed depth and realized surface) are not mutually exclusive but entirely co-dependent. The relationship between Meyerhold's theatre and cubist art is grounded in this common definition of representation, not as anti-realist but as a dialogue between the realist and the abstract resulting in a deconstruction of reality arguably more challenging than the outright rejection of realism altogether.

Focusing on cubist figure drawing and portraiture, chapter three, 'Figure', addresses the redefinition of the object of representation in cubist painting and the artists' engagement with the human form. The cubists' conscious mediation of the object of representation expands on the principles of realism and abstraction held in tension, resulting in a rejection of pure abstraction in favour of a renegotiation of the principles of realist representation. In cubist art, the object of representation remains as a connection between reality and the canvas. This resonates with the central problem of abstraction that Meyerhold encountered in theatre: the resolutely indexical semiotics of the human form in performance. Grappling with this issue led to Meyerhold's rejection of symbolist mysticism and his concurrent move towards a theatre that placed its emphasis on the corporeality of the actor, expressed in a distinctly cubist fashion. This chapter explores the way in which the director's theorization of the body (particularly in his work on actor training) echoes cubist themes of decentralization, motor space and perspective and, ultimately, the redefinition of representation in performance, suggesting Meyerhold's actors as a staged equivalent to the cubist studies of the human body.

Chapter four, 'Collage', focuses on one particular device employed by the cubists. A very literal embodiment of the principle of dialogue between the realist and the abstract, collage was a fundamental aspect of cubist formal experimentation. Through the fragmentation and juxtaposition at the heart of collage practice, the chapter considers the new temporal constructs contained within the artist's canvas and especially the relationship between the artwork and Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity (a well-known reference point

for the cubist artists). Transmuting the question of the object of representation into that of the objectivity of representation, the collaged canvas becomes a space of relativity in which multiple temporal and spatial identities simultaneously coexist. Despite the different temporal constraints implied by the canvas and the stage, Meyerhold's use of fragments related by collage-like juxtapositions enables a similar temporal and spatial deconstruction in his theatre practice. This results in a dissonance in the visual language of the stage and in an unsettling effect for the spectator, ultimately very similar to that experienced when viewing the cubist collage.

Chapter five, 'Spectatorship', deals with the cubist reconstruction of the role and function of the spectator in relation to the formal construction of the artwork (including the use of collage). From their earliest canvases, an awareness of reception underwrote cubist experimentation. Through the extrapolation of the principles of cubist spectatorship, in which viewing is seen as a process that is active, empowering, relational and multiplied, a model emerges that can also be applied to Meyerhold's theatre. For Meyerhold, the identity and role of the spectator was a central concern, and there are key similarities between Meyerhold's approach to spectatorship and the cubist attitude towards viewing, notably the embedding of a 'notion of looking' within the performance or canvas itself. This idea is extended through the application of Field Theory (drawn from physics, and applied to cubist artworks by Vargish and Mook 1999), giving the spectator-stage relationship a political slant and locating Meyerhold's practice within the context of 1920s Soviet Russia.

The final chapter, 'Documentation', seeks to expand the ways in which cubist ideas can contribute to an understanding of Meyerhold's theatre, by moving from the analysis of his construction of the visual language of the stage to the documentation of his theatre practice. Beginning from the primacy of visual documentation in the director's archives, and the premise that the limited material available in translation makes these visual sources a significant conduit into the director's work for non-Russian speakers, the chapter selects two processes of visual documentation to act as case studies: photography and caricature (both practices associated with the cubist artists). The chapter argues that the reading of these documents should be mediated by an understanding of them as creative practices within the context of early twentieth century Russia. Some of the material in this chapter relating to photography and photodocumentation was previously published in the journal *About Performance* (2008), and is included here, adapted and extended, with the kind permission of the editors.<sup>7</sup>

The volume concludes by returning to the theme of re-reading in order to suggest the further questions that this approach to Meyerhold's theatre provokes. In this final chapter, the implications of cubist practice as a starting point for the analysis of Meyerhold's theatre are considered, and themes are drawn out from the discussions in the volume. The question of the restrictions and advantages of the study of Russian theatre in translation, and particularly in English translation, are considered, ending with a resounding call for further exploration of Meyerhold's theatre in the West.



## Case Study Productions

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As a director Meyerhold's output was extensive, numbering some 300 completed productions (a full list can be found in Leach 1989). Although this volume makes reference to a significant number of these productions, four in particular have been chosen as case studies for closer analysis and interrogation: *Sister Beatrice* (1906), *The Fairground Booth* (variants in 1906, 1908 and 1914), *Masquerade* (1917) and *The Government Inspector* (1926). Each of these productions has been selected because it highlights a specific aspect of Meyerhold's aesthetic. Taken as a whole, the productions represent the key shifts in the director's *oeuvre* (from symbolism to *commedia*, for example, or from pre- to post-revolution), as well as significant themes in his practice, notably, the development of the grotesque as a primary formal strategy. The productions will be explored in depth as the volume progresses; however, for the sake of clarity, what follows is a brief introduction to each. To aid with placing the productions in their wider artistic and cultural context, a timeline of developments in visual art and Meyerhold's theatre has been provided as an appendix.

After his departure from the Moscow Art Theatre in 1902, Meyerhold's interest shifted from acting to directing. He spent three years working in provincial theatre (Kherson, Sevastopol, Tiflis, Nikolayev) before returning to Moscow at the invitation of Stanislavsky, as artistic director of the Art Theatre's Theatre Studio. This reconciliation between teacher and pupil, however, was short-lived: Meyerhold's interests had moved on from those of the Art Theatre, and, despite Stanislavsky's desire for innovation in the Studio's aesthetic, Meyerhold's radical symbolism proved a step too far. The Studio was disbanded before any production was made public, ostensibly in response to the political unrest of 1905, although in reality artistic differences had made the venture untenable. After a brief return to the provinces, Meyerhold was invited to join the St. Petersburg company belonging to actress Vera Komissarzhevskaya.

Maurice Maeterlinck's *Sister Beatrice* was Meyerhold's third production at the Komissarzhevskaya Theatre, opening on 22 November 1906. His collaboration with Komissarzhevskaya would prove to be short-lived, leading to an acrimonious separation less than a year later, a result of artistic differences between the two, and particularly Komissarzhevskaya's disappointment with the restrictions that Meyerhold's static, symbolist-influenced productions placed on her own performance style. Maeterlinck's play is quintessentially symbolist in its plot and subject matter: a statue of the Virgin Mary comes to life to take the place of the nun Beatrice who has run away from her convent with her prince-lover. When Beatrice returns, unaware of the miracle and dying from the effects of her sin, she cannot seek redemption, finding herself instead exalted for her life of selfless saintliness by the Mother Superior and other nuns. Meyerhold's production was designed by Sergei Sudeikin, later a member of the World of Art, who had already designed for the Moscow Art Theatre and would go on to work with the *Ballets Russes*. Meyerhold's reflections on the production, which include references to the visual arts, can be found in translation in Braun ([1969] 1998: 68–70).

Just over a month after *Sister Beatrice*, the Komissarzhevskaya Theatre premiered Meyerhold's first production of *The Fairground Booth*, a short verse drama by the acknowledged symbolist poet Aleksandr Blok. Blok's play explores the familiar love triangle of Pierrot, Columbine and Harlequin, and, despite its author's symbolist pedigree, the play's symbolist features are outweighed by its satirical take on mysticism. Meyerhold would go on to produce Blok's text twice more before 1917: in 1908, with an unnamed company in Vitebsk (see Leach 1989: 198) and with students from his own studio in 1914, at the Tenishevskoe High School. His interest in Blok's play can be seen as indicative of Meyerhold's waning commitment to the symbolist movement, and he acknowledged his 1906 variant of *The Fairground Booth* as a watershed in his *oeuvre*, claiming that through his work on the production he came to redefine his aesthetic and shift away from symbolist concerns towards an exploration of the self-consciously theatrical elements of performance. According to Braun, in the introduction to *On the Theatre*, Meyerhold described *The Fairground Booth* as one of the 'decisive productions in his first ten years as a stage-director' (Braun [1969] 1998: 115). Meyerhold's variants of Blok's play emphasized *commedia*-influenced physicality in performance style and conscious theatricality in the production concepts, including frequent interjections from the author (who questions why his work is being produced in this manner) and references to theatrical tricks (in 1906, for example, a wounded clown cried out that he was bleeding cranberry juice). Braun has provided translations of Meyerhold's reflections on the 1906 variant of the play (Braun [1969] 1998: 70–71), as well as the director's significant essay of the same title (Braun [1969] 1998: 119–143).

Meyerhold's departure from Komissarzhevskaya was followed by the offer of a high-profile position as artistic director at the Russian Imperial Theatres. Mikhail Lermontov's *Masquerade*, staged at the Alexandrinsky Theatre, was the director's final pre-revolutionary work. Although the production did not open until 25 February 1917, Meyerhold spent six years preparing his *Masquerade*, which was designed by his regular collaborator at the Imperial Theatres, visual artist Alexander Golovin. In Meyerhold's production the play, which thematically focuses on the corrupting influence of society, took on an almost horrific sense of dark foreboding, particularly in the presence of the shadowy figure of the Stranger. Arbenin, the play's protagonist, believes that he is being cuckolded by his faithful wife, Nina, and, convinced of her guilt by misleading circumstantial evidence and driven to despair, he murders her. Throughout Meyerhold's production, the Stranger manipulated circumstances and arranged incriminating evidence, leading Arbenin and Nina to their fate. The project was of almost unprecedented size and cost, involving over 200 performers, with all scenery, props and costumes being made to Golovin's detailed specifications. The spectacular scale of the production resulted in its being titled the 'swansong of the tsarist regime' by critics, who were quick to note the irony of its first performance falling on the day that Russia's February Revolution broke out (Beeson 1960: 175).

Meyerhold's response to revolution was immediate and whole-hearted. Referring to the events of October 1917 as his 'second birth' (Meyerhold in Gladkov 1997: 93), he made



his affiliation to the Bolshevik government apparent, taking up the position of Director of TEO (the Theatre Department of Narkompros, the Commissariat for Education). Launching his 'October in the Theatre' campaign, he made his understanding of the intimacy between theatrical form and political motivation the foundation of an ongoing campaign for politicization in the arts. The complexity of his theatre, however, and his continued interest in the grotesque as a mode of expression, led to tensions with the Soviet government.

His production of Nikolai Gogol's *The Government Inspector*, opening on 9 December 1926, came at what was arguably the pinnacle of Meyerhold's reputation. In 1923, he had been named People's Artist of the Republic. As Braun observes, he was the sixth artist, and first theatre director, to be awarded this honour (Braun [1995] 1998: 188). In August 1926, his theatre was granted government subsidy and a new acronym: TIM (the *Teatr Imeni Meïerkhol'da*, or Meyerhold Theatre) became GosTIM, the State Meyerhold Theatre. *The Government Inspector* was the first production to premiere under the company's new title, and became the synthesis of Meyerhold's experimentation to that date. The play with stillness that characterized his symbolist works, the interest in the human form and physicality of *commedia*, the meta-theatricality of *The Fairground Booth*, and the grotesque that he had theorized in his essay of the same title and explored in *Masquerade* came together to create the production that Harold Clurman, after visiting GosTIM, would refer to as a theatrical 'masterpiece' (Clurman 1998: 80).

In Meyerhold's treatment, Gogol's play underwent significant modification. Retaining the original plot line, which follows the actions of conman Khlestakov as he dupes a corrupt small town mayor and his officials into believing he is a visiting inspector from central government, Meyerhold expanded on Gogol's text to create a production of nearly four hours in length. Characters were added, as were references to Gogol's other works, including *The Gamblers* and *Dead Souls*. Gogol's act structure was re-worked into episodes, and the setting was (implicitly) relocated to the Tsarist capital, St. Petersburg. In the play's final moments, when the local officials realize that they have been deceived, and that the real inspector has arrived, Meyerhold took Gogol's closing tableaux and constructed a *coup de théâtre* whose effect on spectators was, in Worrall's words, the equivalent of 'a minor miracle' (Worrall 1972: 94).

## Transliteration and Translation

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The question of the transliteration from the Cyrillic to the Latin alphabet is problematic: a number of systems exist, and there is little consensus between sources. In order to avoid confusion, the common anglicized forms of Russian names have been used throughout this volume, and diacritics have been avoided: hence Мейерхольд is rendered 'Meyerhold' rather than 'Meïerkhol'd'. The exception is the name Aleksandr, which for the case of Aleksandr Gladkov and Aleksandr Blok appears in this more

russified form throughout, following the spelling used in translations by Alma Law (1997) and Michael Green (1986) respectively. Direct transliterations from titles and acronyms and all bibliographic references use the Library of Congress system of transliteration (2012). Edward Braun's work has been used as a spelling model in any instance where there is some confusion, and all quotations have retained the spelling used in the original. Where English translations already exist for Russian language materials, these have been used. In instances when no translation has been published in English, translations are either my own or those of my colleague Natalie Vinokurova (as acknowledged in the endnotes).



## Chapter 1

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Setting the scene



Before issues of formal structure and scenic construction are addressed, it is essential to begin by setting the scene for Meyerhold's work with the visual arts, that is, by establishing contexts that are not only the historiographic basis for the analysis of Meyerhold and cubism, but also make up the cultural and visual world in which the director worked. The first process of scene setting is one of literal contextualization, which establishes the salient characteristics of early twentieth century culture and how these were reflected in cubist art-making. Meyerhold knew cubist artists – despite Stalin's efforts at repression, the documentation of Meyerhold's theatre is extensive, allowing historians to establish connections without resorting to conjecture – and these relationships were established within the frame of early twentieth century cultural practice. Beyond the literal connections between Meyerhold and the artists, there are a series of wider, philosophical connections, characteristic of the early twentieth century avant-garde, common interests in terms of the philosophical intent and formal structure that shaped modernist experimentation as a whole.

Setting the scene, however, not only implies a historical contextualization of Meyerhold's work, but is also a convincing metaphor for its practical realization – in other words, a metaphor for the work of the theatre director, whose role is that of 'setting scenes'. At his theatres, Meyerhold developed his own working methods, models for collaboration, staging, training and rehearsal. The director's attitude towards his own practice, and towards the role of visual art in shaping his methods, forms a second, significant, contextual frame. For Meyerhold, the construction of the stage environment, the placement of performer against performer or performer against space, was more than the simple mechanics of effective blocking or *mise-en-scène*. It was, to draw on the definition of the term agreed at the 1994 Moscow World Congress of the International Federation of Theatre Research, 'scenographic'; that is, a writing of the stage space (see White 2009). In Meyerhold's theatre, setting the scene meant the creation of a visual system for the communication of ideas: a performative and spatial language that could directly speak to and act on the spectator.

The search for a distinctive stage language is at the heart of Meyerhold's career, definitive in his approach to staging and rehearsing productions, training actors and directors, and collaborating with his co-workers. It is a through-line in his practice, underwriting stylistic shifts in his approach: Meyerhold's abandonment of symbolism in favour of *commedia*, or decadence in favour of constructivism, may indicate a change in form but not in intent – each is a different model for theatrical communication, a

different language. Meyerhold's work on biomechanics crystallizes this communicative potential of theatre in the performer's body and is perhaps the director's clearest work on stage language: here, through a series of pre-learned physical forms, the actor is taught a performative syntax and grammar, a shared language for theatre making that can be realized on stage in many combinations, but remains an absolute reference point for the director and performer. The significant role played by biomechanical training in Meyerhold's theatre in establishing a style and working practice, and the potential of biomechanics as a physical-linguistic approach to acting, emphasizes the centrality of stage language in Meyerhold's methods. Biomechanics is ultimately a scenographic – stage writing – practice, and Meyerhold, even in his training of actors, takes a scenographic approach to theatre making.

This understanding of Meyerhold as director-scenographer is fundamental to exploring the relationship between his work and the visual arts. Cubism is a specific visual language, distinct from but connected to the representational models by which it was preceded in art history. It is designed to use spatial structure in order to communicate with the viewer. The cubist artists (Picasso in particular) were engaged in a process of searching similar to that of Meyerhold, exploring and rejecting different representational models. The elements of the cubist visual language that resulted from this process addressed concerns that echoed those in Meyerhold's theatres: What is the relationship between reality and representation? What place does the object of representation hold in artistic practice? Where is the viewer and what is their role? What new formal structures does this thinking imply? It is these aspects of the visual language of cubism that resonate with Meyerhold's theatre practice and imply that any connection between the two operates at a level of greater significance than mere causal overlap. Meyerhold's approach to the visual arts in establishing his stage language and the wider historical contextualization of early twentieth century culture combine to set the scene for the investigation of these questions as they emerge in both cubist art and Meyerhold's theatre.

## Setting the Scene I: Contexts and Connections

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### Contextualizing Cubism

In summer 1907, Picasso completed work on a large, square canvas that had occupied him since late 1906 (Figure 1). Named *Les Femmes d'Alger* by André Salmon, it features five women, all prostitutes (Picasso would refer to the painting as *Mon Bordel* – *My Brothel*), whose bodies, distorted into physically improbable positions, have been simplified into geometric structures. Two of the women appear to be masked, or have had their faces treated according to representational conventions of African masks. All five stare uncompromisingly out at the viewer. As visual arts subject matter, female nudes and

prostitution were in no way new; the representation of the women, however, indicated an impending formal revolution amongst the artists of the early twentieth century. The intricacies of Picasso's canvas, its status as a watershed moment for the artists of the avant-garde and its relationship to the movement that would be called cubism are all heavily debated in the field of art history (see Green 2001). What is clear, however, is that the formal structure of the *Demoiselles* contains within it the concerns that would occupy the cubist painters and that would, by 1914, have established Picasso as the leader of this new movement.

From the *Demoiselles*, Picasso would go on to develop the formal principles of cubism. In his 1908 canvas, *Woman with a Fan*, the geometric rendering of the physical form and the use of flat planes of space are clearly apparent. From 1908 to 1912, Picasso approached painting as an analysis of space and shape, superimposing a series of intersecting planes and surfaces whose connection to the object of representation was increasingly obscured. In the works of this period, classified as 'analytical cubism' by Juan Gris (see Cottington 2004: 173–174), representation in its broadest sense is a process of analysis. In 1911–1912, however, alongside Georges Braque (whose works had also contributed to the development of analytical cubism), Picasso entered a new cubist period. The discovery of collage as an expressive strategy for the artists led to the inclusion of non-painterly elements within their canvases, including pieces of newspaper, *faux-bois* wallpaper and printed oil cloth. These works, the *papier-collés*, resulted in the development of the second cubist phase, 'synthetic cubism' (Gris, see Cottington 2004: 173–174). Unlike analytical cubism, where emphasis was placed on the deconstruction of the object into constituent parts, the synthetic cubist works are concerned with the bringing together of elements constituting the canvas with an emphasis on difference and juxtaposition.

The visual language of cubism differs in its analytical and synthetic phases and in its appropriation in Europe and Russia. For the purpose of this analysis, however, and when seen as a whole, there are certain concerns that emerge repeatedly throughout the cubist works. These are the features of cubism that are most significant in the relationship of the movement to Meyerhold's theatre, drawn from either the analytical or synthetic cubist periods, or from both. They include a concern with the object of representation and, consequently, with the relationship between the artwork and the real world; the use of mobile space and multiple perspectives to embed the canvas with a conscious temporal, as well as spatial, element; the play with depth and surface; the use of collage and the relationship between the canvas and other media; and the primacy of the observer over the observed (that is, a concern with the process of viewing, and a belief that the construction of meaning takes place outside of the frame of the canvas itself).

In its development of these questions, cubism as a visual language is representative of the political, philosophical and scientific concerns underlying the modernist epoch. As Malcolm Bradbury and James MacFarlane highlight, modernism as it was expressed in art and literature was a formal response to a moment of cultural crisis:



[...] Modernism would seem to be the point at which the idea of the radical and innovating arts, the experimental, technical, aesthetic ideal that had been growing forward from Romanticism, reaches formal crisis – in which myth, structure and organisation in a traditional sense collapse, and not only for formal reasons. The crisis is a crisis of culture; it often involves an unhappy view of history – so the Modernist writer is not simply the artist set free, but the artist under specific, historical strain.

(Bradbury and MacFarlane 1991: 26)

At the turn of the twentieth century, the 'specific historical strain' under which the artist was placed resulted from a combination of radically unsettling political and cultural developments. Politically, the international community was engaged in preparations for conflict. When the First World War began in 1914, the development of mechanized ways of killing would redefine the nature of warfare, shattering lives and countries in a way that nineteenth century conflict never suggested was a possibility. In intellectual circles, however, the world had been blown to pieces before the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand triggered war, as philosophical and scientific developments since the *fin-de-siècle* had steadily overthrown the reassuring absolutes associated with positivist thought. The world of the positivists was one in which science had the potential to provide every answer. Scientific explanations were sought for phenomena that had previously been classified as acts of God – be they in the natural world or the subconscious of the human mind. The purpose of art was deemed to be overwhelmingly moral, articulating the new theocracy of science for the masses, as explained by positivist philosopher Auguste Comte:

Art may be defined as an ideal representation of Fact; and its object is to cultivate our sense of perfection. Its sphere therefore is co-extensive with that of science. Both deal in their own way with the world of Fact; the one explains it, the other beautifies it.

(Comte 1880: 208)

The 'world of Fact' had been steadily instilled in scientific thought since the seventeenth century. The principles of Newtonian mechanics had been the basis of scientific study since 1686 when Newton first presented his *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica*, positing that space and time, and the relationship between them, were absolute values. In mathematics, the Athenian principles of Euclid dominated geometry, particularly his parallel postulate: the premise that two straight lines running parallel to one another can never meet. Space was seen as a flat surface, without curves, bends or folds, where uniform rules could be applied.

In 1905, Albert Einstein published his Special Theory of Relativity. In it, he undercut the fundamental tenet of the Newtonian universe by removing any possibility of an absolute answer. Space and time were no longer straightforward entities: the measurement

of space, for example, was wholly dependent on the position of the measurer and the speed at which the measurer, or the object to be measured, was travelling. Einstein supplemented his theory with the development of his General Theory of Relativity between 1907 and 1916, arguing that time could be considered as a fourth dimension, a theory that became widely known through its popularization in literature such as in H. G. Wells' novel *The Time Machine*. Hermann Minkowski provided Einstein with a visualization of his theories in the form of the Minkowskian space-time diagrams. These illustrations function as graphs on which the progress of an object in both space and time can be represented. Through these diagrams, in which spatial and temporal coordinates are plotted on a single line, the two separate entities are collapsed into one: space-time. Space and time are not only no longer absolute values; they are also values that cannot be separated. Einstein's Relativity became a link in a chain of philosophical and scientific redefinitions of temporal and spatial perception, and the dialogue between Relativity, Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle (1927) and Quantum Mechanics would ensure that the shockwaves of the early twentieth century are still felt in contemporary culture.<sup>8</sup> In the field of mathematics the absolute notion of space was also being deconstructed. The emergence of non-Euclidean geometries, for example in the work of Henri Poincaré, had applied the principles of Euclid to curved space and found them inaccurate: on a curved surface, parallel lines can meet and the parallel postulate, then one of the foundation stones of all geometrical principles, was rendered impotent.

The spatial-temporal relationship was an equally popular subject in philosophy. Prior to Einstein's classification of the fourth dimension as purely temporal, the Russian philosopher P. D. Ouspensky had posited the existence of a purely spatial fourth dimension. In his two theses on the nature of the spatial-temporal relationship (*The Fourth Dimension*, written in 1905, and *Tertium Organum*, written in 1911, see Ouspensky [1934] 1971; [1911, 1916] 1922; Henderson 1983), Ouspensky developed a theory of the fourth dimension that turned time into space, claiming that an experience of time in the third dimension is in actuality a distorted experience of a fourth spatial dimension. Drawing on spiritual ideas of a higher power, Ouspensky's philosophy of the fourth dimension relies on the belief in a higher perception, the ability to see beyond this world, or at least to understand the potential of some to see beyond this world, reflected in the philosopher's own example:

If we touch the surface of a table with our five fingertips of one hand, there will then be on the surface of the table only five circles, and on *this surface* it is impossible to have any idea either of the hand or of the man to whom the hand belongs. There will be five separate circles. ... Our relation to the four-dimensional world may be exactly the same as the relationship between that consciousness which sees five circles on the table and *the man*.

(Ouspensky in Perloff 1986: 128)<sup>9</sup>

The relationship between the three- and four-dimensional worlds is therefore parallel to the relationship between the three-dimensional world and a hypothetical two-dimensional world, as described by Edwin Abbott in his novel *Flatland*:

Your country of Two Dimensions [says the Sphere to the Square] is not spacious enough to represent me, a being of Three, but can only exhibit a slice or a section of me, which is what you call a circle. [...] You cannot indeed see more than one of my sections, or circles, at a time; for you have no power to raise your eye out of the plane of Flatland; but you can at least see that, as I rise in Space, so my section becomes smaller.

(Abbott 1884: 72)

The two-dimensional square thus experiences an intersection with the three-dimensional world only in terms of movement, or, in other words, only as temporal progression. Consequently, it is only the experience of the fourth dimension that is temporal, the dimension itself is entirely spatial, and time becomes a spatial construct. In a concurrent exploration of the nature of time, Henri Bergson argued for a differentiation between objective and subjective temporal experience: 'homogeneous time' versus 'heterogeneous duration' (see Bergson 1965). Bergson's approach draws on the subjectivity of time as it is experienced by the individual, calling for a heterogeneous reading of temporality as different for each person, rather than as mathematically divided into equally apportioned seconds, minutes and hours.<sup>10</sup>

These anti-positivist worldviews were popular amongst the avant-garde artists who believed in the value of engaging with trends in contemporary thought, echoing Rimbaud's sentiment '*il faut être absolument moderne*' (Rimbaud in Childs [2000] 2004: 12). The Parisian Cubists, including Braque, Picasso and Gris, met regularly at a restaurant run by a Monsieur Vernin on Rue Cavalotti to discuss philosophical developments and these new ideas, as is recorded in an article in the journal *Fantasio* in October 1912 (see Antliff and Leighton 2001: 22–23).

The interest expressed by the avant-garde artists in the philosophical developments of their culture provides more than a contextual framework for arts practice during this era. The simultaneous occurrence of the international and discipline-wide move away from the influence of Renaissance approaches indicates that there is some fundamental characteristic of the *fin-de-siècle* and early twentieth century, the period of modernism, that brings to birth artistic works with a similar philosophy. Renaissance artistic practice is closely associated with the advent of a fully realized system of linear perspective, giving birth to a potentially higher degree of verisimilitude in representation, and therefore retaining a significant influence on realist art. The avant-garde artists saw their work as a rebellion against this Renaissance legacy. This rebellion was not restricted to the arts but also to literature and even to scientific progress, as is suggested by Thomas Vargish and Delo E. Mook in their interdisciplinary study of modernism (1999). For Vargish and Mook, there are significant similarities between cubist art, modernist literature and

Einstein's theories of relativity. It is the methodology adopted by the Vargish and Mook study that is significant in this context, taking the form of an adaptation of the cultural matrix theory proposed by N. Katherine Hayles (1994).

Hayles proposes an underlying matrix that influences the form taken by intellectual processes in a certain culture. Thus, the question of direct influence of one practitioner on another is subsumed by a more general (and wide ranging) question of simultaneous manifestations of the same thought processes in different disciplines at a particular moment:

Different disciplines are drawn to similar problems because the concerns underlying them are highly charged within a prevailing cultural context. Moreover, different disciplines base the theories they construct on similar presuppositions because these are the assumptions that guide the constitution of knowledge in a given episteme.

(Hayles 1994: xi)

Hayles' theoretical framework suggests a relationship between disciplines which is more dynamic and two-way than the simple model of visual art as influence or inspiration for the theatre maker. By applying Hayles' theoretical model to the analysis of Meyerhold's theatre, the connections between his practice and the art of the avant-garde may, therefore, manifest themselves not only as instances of direct or causal influence, but as a simultaneous occurrence of similar concerns resulting from a shared cultural context. This sort of reading, of course, does not undercut the importance of work that identifies instances of direct, causal relationship between Meyerhold's practice and the art of the avant-garde. These relationships, in fact, will be explored in a good part of the remainder of this chapter. However, these causal connections can also be supplemented by a relationship of shared cultural context that suggests different incidences of overlap between the director's and artists' practice. It is this dual model of relationship that underlies this analysis of Meyerhold's theatre in relation to the visual art of the early twentieth century avant-garde.

## **Cubism in Russia**

Meyerhold had some contact with Western Europe, particularly with Germany (his father was a German national) and with France. In 1913, on his first visit to Paris, he directed D'Annunzio's *La Pisanella* at the Châtelet Theatre, commissioned by and starring Ida Rubenstein and designed by Leon Bakst. This visit, as Edward Braun notes, allowed Meyerhold to make significant European contacts, particularly with the writer Guillaume Apollinaire. This contact is worth noting: Meyerhold's meeting with Apollinaire, the poetic philosopher of the avant-garde, indicates a connection between Meyerhold and the cubist circle. Apollinaire knew the cubist artists well, and was closely associated with

both groups of cubist artists in Paris: with Picasso and Braque, whom he considered to be the true founders of the movement, and with the Puteaux, or Salon, cubists (including Metzinger and Gleizes).

The year of Meyerhold's visit coincided with the publication of Apollinaire's only book-length treatise on the visual arts, *The Cubist Painters*. This work is poetic in tone and collaged in its structure. It draws on articles and reflections that Apollinaire had previously published on the artists and their works. Apollinaire's emphasis is on the creative work of the artist, rejecting the realist imitation of nature as the role of the photographer not the painter, and asserting the geometric basis of visual art and consequently the influence of the emergence of non-Euclidean (fourth-dimensional) geometry on the modern artists. He identifies cubism as the new movement in painting, and provides a brief history of the development of the style, as well as his own taxonomy of cubist approaches, which identifies four forms of cubism: Scientific, Physical, Orphic, and Instinctive (Apollinaire, trans. Read 2002: 27). Having established his theories of painting, Apollinaire goes on to discuss the artists individually: Picasso and Braque are given precedence, and discussed first, followed by the Salon cubists, Metzinger, Gleizes, Laurencin, Gris, Léger, Picabia, Duchamp and Duchamp-Villon. Apollinaire's text is a passionate defence of cubist art, as well as a poetic exposition of his understanding of its function: it indicates a writer intimately involved in the development of the movement at the moment at which he encountered Meyerhold.

When Meyerhold returned to Paris, his career and the political circumstances of his homeland were much altered. In July 1928, Meyerhold and his wife, Zinaida Raikh, spent a five-month holiday in France (Braun [1995] 1998: 248). On this occasion, Meyerhold met Picasso. A letter from Raikh, written during this trip, confirms that the director visited the artist's atelier and the two talked:

Yesterday, we went to Picasso's. We spent two hours there [...] It was very interesting. ... We spoke a lot about *Hamlet*, dreamt of the collaboration between Picasso and Meyerhold, and saw Picasso's newest works. Picasso claims that Meyerhold is his 'rival', and he declared that he 'adores' *The Government Inspector*, and considers it an inspired work of Meyerhold's.

(Raikh 1974: 34)<sup>11</sup>

Seeing as Meyerhold openly admitted to his own limited ability as an artist, Picasso's comment indicates a different sort of 'rivalry' between the two practitioners, an affinity in their work based on a similarity of intent and, potentially, of style. In April 1930, the Meyerhold Theatre was granted permission to undertake a combined tour of Paris and Berlin, during which the company performed *The Government Inspector* at the Théâtre de Montparnasse. Ilya Ehrenburg notes that Picasso attended the opening of *The Government Inspector* alongside Louis Jouvert, Charles Dullin and Jean Cocteau, amongst others (Braun [1969] 1998: 240). Aleksandr Gladkov also records Meyerhold's comments on a possible collaboration with the artist, a result of their encounter in Paris:

‘Picasso promised me he would be the designer for our *Hamlet* when we have time to do it’ (Meyerhold, trans. Gladkov 1997: 97). According to Gladkov, Meyerhold and Picasso discussed this project again, in the autumn of 1936.

Meyerhold’s encounters with European cubism, however, would not have been confined to the time he spent abroad. Works by the European avant-garde were accessible in Russia from the beginning of the century, when there had been a surge of interest in art collection, resulting in private galleries with impressive collections of up-to-the-minute European works. The contribution of Muscovite collector Sergei Shchukin to Russian awareness of the European movements was particularly significant, his gallery encompassing a wide range of the avant-garde works, including those by the cubists, as Camilla Gray observes:

By the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 [Shchukin’s collection] numbered 221 works of the French Impressionist and Post-Impressionist schools, over fifty of them by Matisse and Picasso, including many vital Fauve and Post-Fauve works by Matisse and examples of Picasso’s latest period of analytical Cubism.

(Gray [1962] 1971: 68)

Shchukin particularly favoured Picasso, and in October 1918, when his collection was seized by decree of Lenin, it contained fifty works by the artist. Shchukin’s interest in Picasso extended beyond his cubist works – the collection also features works from the artist’s Blue Period, for example – but the Picassos owned by the collector conscientiously tracked the progression of his cubist aesthetic. Albert Kostenevich, writing for the Hermitage (Netherlands) exhibition of works from the St. Petersburg gallery of the same name (2010), observes that Shchukin’s interest was primarily in Picasso as an artist, and not in the cubist aesthetic itself (he only acquired one cubist work by Braque, and none by the other European followers), but such is the centrality of Picasso to the development of cubism that the Shchukin collection is one of extreme importance:

At the very start of the twentieth century, only the Paris collection of Leo and Gertrude Stein could compare with that of Shchukin [...] As a result, Russia – through Shchukin – gained *Three Women* (1908, Hermitage), perhaps the best of all Cubist paintings [...] Kahnweiler, through whom Picasso sold most of his paintings, saw Shchukin as the only major admirer of avant-garde art at the time. He recalled, for instance, that when he received a whole series of works by Picasso he immediately telegraphed Shchukin, who at once set out for Paris.

(Kostenevich 2010)

Shchukin’s collection was so complete, in fact, that Kostenevich concludes that ‘this first stage of cubism was concentrated in the hands of Shchukin [...] as nowhere else’ (Kostenevich 2010). The accessibility of Picasso’s cubist works in Russia, certainly from 1910 onwards, was almost unrivalled.<sup>12</sup>

There is very little recorded evidence to indicate whether or not Meyerhold visited Shchukin's collection in person.<sup>13</sup> There are, however, references to connections between the two men. Shchukin certainly knew Meyerhold: John Richardson, in his biography of Picasso, notes that it was Shchukin whom Diaghilev consulted in reference to a Soviet Ballet project that he was considering undertaking with the director (Richardson 2007: 161). In addition, artists who worked alongside Meyerhold at his theatres had seen the collection (Lyubov Popova, for example, visited in 1912). The connection between Meyerhold's artists (that is, those with whom he collaborated) and European cubism is considerable, as the Russian avant-garde artists developed close links with their European counterparts pre-1917. A number of the artists Meyerhold would work with after the Revolution had studied in Paris and considered themselves exponents of cubism during this period, including Popova, Nadezhda Udaltsova and Vladimir Tatlin, whose work formed the basis of cubist influence in Russia.

Echoing the tendency in European scholarship to associate the beginning of avant-garde visual art with the introduction of cubist ideas, George Costakis identifies the earliest Russian avant-garde practice as occurring in 1910 (Zander Rudenstine and Rowell 1981: 11). This year saw the Moscow exhibition of the Knave of Diamonds group, a collective drawing together names that would become central to the development of avant-garde visual arts practice in Russia: Mikhail Larionov, Natalia Goncharova and Kasimir Malevich were all involved. Alongside their works, the exhibition also included significant avant-garde – and cubist – works from Europe (see Roman and Marquardt 1992: 3). Gleizes and Metzinger, for example, whose manifesto *Du Cubisme* would become a significant document in the definition of the formal concerns of the movement, were amongst the European artists who exhibited.

The Russian response to the cubist innovations in Europe was the emergence of a hybrid form, 'cubo-futurism'.<sup>14</sup> As the term implies, this form was a synthesis of cubist and futurist techniques, unique from either European precedent. The cubo-futurist paintings have formal qualities that reflect the treatment of the subject in analytical cubism, as well as the futurist interest in dynamism and movement. These can be seen in the fracturing of the image and the representation of a figure in a number of positions simultaneously, as apparent, for example, in Malevich's 1912–1913 painting, *The Knife Grinder* (Figure 2). Here, the figure of the knife grinder has been reinterpreted as a series of geometric shapes that are repeated and rotated across the canvas, echoing the treatment of figures by Picasso and his colleagues. There is, however, also a dynamic engagement with the form, as the repetition of the shapes is not purely analytical (that is, not purely for the purpose of breaking down the figure into constituent parts in order to represent it from different perspectives), but instead, the repeated shapes mimic the movement of the knife grinder as he works. There is a temporal impulse in the image, in addition to the spatial construction of cubism: the knife grinder is represented as a figure in motion.

As a school of painting, cubo-futurism would ultimately attract the 'Big Four' of early twentieth century Russian art: Larionov, Goncharova, Malevich and Tatlin. The four



would first exhibit together in March 1912, under the title of the Donkey's Tail group (after the separation of Larionov and Goncharova from the Knave of Diamonds), and from them would emerge the nucleus of movements that characterized the Russian avant-garde as a force with which to be reckoned: Larionov, along with Goncharova, would create rayonnism; Malevich, suprematism; and Tatlin would be a driving force in the development of constructivism.<sup>15</sup> Other artists would move through these groups, acting as links between the diverse aesthetics of the movements, including Popova, Varvara Stepanova, Alexander Rodchenko, Alexei Gan, Alexandra Exter and El Lissitzky. The nature of the Russian avant-garde, structured as a series of small groups that rapidly formed, disbanded and re-formed in other combinations, allowed for the free movement of ideas, a process in which the artists of cubo-futurism were at the centre.

## Setting the Scene II: Meyerhold, Art and Artists

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As a member of the intelligentsia in early twentieth century Russia, Meyerhold had easy access to avant-garde visual art, and his personal and professional connections with the artists are well documented, both in Russian and in English (see, for example, Rudnitsky 1981; Hoover 1988; Mikhailova 1995; Titova 1998). Beyond this, from records of his conversations, notes in his journal and his work on productions, there emerges evidence of a far wider understanding of the visual arts than is restricted to his avant-garde collaborations: Meyerhold did not only know artists on a personal and professional level, but he also had a developed understanding of art history and theory.

In her survey of Meyerhold and his work with designers (1995), Alla Mikhailova provides a comprehensive overview of Meyerhold's collaborations with visual artists, drawing on sources in publication in Russian and on documents from the Meyerhold archive. As Mikhailova's publication is bilingual (Russian and English), it is not the intention here to iterate these ideas and sources. It is, however, necessary to provide a context for the consideration of Meyerhold and the cubists. The following three themes, which have been developed out of Mikhailova's survey, as well as the work of Rudnitsky and the memoirs of artists who collaborated with the director, draw on Meyerhold's own practice with designers and allow for the contextualization of cubism within Meyerhold's wider understanding of art history and theory. These themes contextualize Meyerhold in his role as art viewer, as artists' collaborator and, finally, as director-scenographer.

At this point, it is important to emphasize that Meyerhold was, above all else, a man of the theatre. His understanding of theatrical practice was primarily that – theatrical, rooted in the unique conditions of theatre performance. To say that Meyerhold created a theatre in which the theory and practice of the visual arts exerted a significant influence is not to say that Meyerhold's understanding of space, stage image and *mise-en-scène* was based on the principles of the visual arts at the expense of theatricality; rather, it is



to suggest that Meyerhold's specific approach to theatricality functioned through the adaptation of practices from other disciplines to the conditions of theatrical production. In Worrall's words, Meyerhold 'seemed instinctively to sense the logic of the application of [cubo-futurism's] "painterly" content within a theatrical form' (Worrall 1973: 17). It is the tension between the methods of production in the different media that Meyerhold exploited in order to shape theatrical reception and extend the potential of theatre to communicate with the spectator.

### Theme One: Meyerhold as Art Viewer

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Meyerhold was not a visual artist: Mikhailova notes that, although his ideal working practice would be that of the director-designer, taking responsibility for the design of his own productions in the manner of Edward Gordon Craig, Meyerhold was not able to do this himself, and lacked drawing skills beyond basic sketches of staging ideas (Mikhailova 1995: 64). His visual imagination, however, was strong, and he could 'see a play in his mind's eye before he could hear it' (Mikhailova 1995: 51). He was conscious of the significance of this visual imagination in his work as a director, and strove consistently to feed and develop it. His knowledge of, and interest in, visual art was extensive, and his relationship with artists extended beyond the confines of his own productions, becoming the subject of a number of portraits by his collaborators, including works by Nikolai Ulyanov, Alexander Golovin, Boris Grigoriev and the photographer (and later cinematographer) Alexei Temerin (see also Mikhailova 1995: 52).<sup>16</sup> The scope of Meyerhold's experience as a viewer of artworks, and the influence of artworks on his theatre making is highlighted in notes by the trio of caricaturists Mikhail Kupriyanov, Porfiri Krylov and Nikolai Sokolov, known collectively as the Kukryniksy, who worked with Meyerhold on his production of *The Bedbug* in 1929:

Having conversations with Meyerhold in the theatre, at home and later during occasional meetings we found out that he was greatly interested in the fine arts. Once he asked us to bring him monographs by the painter Daumier, especially a series of his lithographs 'Robert Macaire'. He needed them for his staging of *Krechinsky's Wedding*. Staging *The Lady of the Camellias*, he studied the French painters Manet, Degas, Renoir.

(Kukryniksy 1967: 386)<sup>17</sup>

Meyerhold's reference points in the visual arts spanned both Russia and Europe, as well as stretching across centuries in their scope. Mikhailova concludes:

[Meyerhold] loved painting and was a top-level connoisseur, a familiar figure at art exhibitions and artists' studios ... 'Looking at pictures', pondering over them was

one of his favourite pastimes. Stored in his memory was a vast number of works, compositional sketches, and critical expertise.

(Mikhailova 1995: 51)

The exhibition culture played a significant part in the construction of collective identity for the various groupings of artists in the early twentieth century Russian avant-garde. Exhibitions worked in parallel to the practice of manifesto making in a culture in which visual arts practice was becoming increasingly performative. The interaction of different groups of artists with their audiences was a vital aspect in the formation of ideas, and the confrontational nature of manifesto making resulted in a thriving discursive community for the arts, allowing members of the intelligentsia easy access to others' ideas and works. According to Jane A. Sharp, these exhibitions not only performed the function of displaying the creative works of the artists and thus entering the work into the public domain, but also constituted an experience steeped in theatricality. They were a performative reiteration of the beliefs of the artist or movement, where the public declaration and rebuttal of ideas was as important as the display of the artworks themselves:

Typically, an event would open with a series of lectures or propositions expounded by the organizers, to which 'opponents' responded, having been solicited earlier by the sponsors or 'chair'. The audience might interject to support, counter, or redirect speech at any time, and all parties participated responsively.

(Sharp 1999: 97)

For Sharp, the purpose of these events is clear: in reference to Mikhail Larionov's contribution to the exhibition and debate culture, she notes that his 'intention [was] to reshape the conditions that marked the reception of new art' (Sharp 1999: 98). These exhibitions, and the artists' manifestos, were supplemented by the publication of journals associated with the movements, formalizing the debates in print. The resulting artistic culture was marked by the theoretical and performative exposition of ideas outside of the artworks themselves: the Russian avant-garde was a culture of discussion, debate and interaction.

Within this context, Meyerhold's attendance at exhibitions gains additional significance, as a conscious engagement with not only works of art, but also the philosophical ideas that they embodied. Evidence of Meyerhold's presence in the Russian art exhibition culture is possibly seen most clearly in his choice of Popova as designer for his 1922 production of *The Magnanimous Cuckold*: Meyerhold selected Popova after seeing her work at the '5 x 5 = 25' exhibition of constructivist art. This event, which took place in Moscow in 1921, featured the work of five artists at the centre of the emerging constructivist movement: Vesnin, Rodchenko, Stepanova, Exter and Popova. Although the selection of Popova is an instance of the direct influence of exhibition attendance on Meyerhold's theatre, his place within the culture of the avant-garde suggests that this

influence would have been much more wide-ranging. The avant-garde exhibition culture in the first decades of the twentieth century was focused around the artistic centres of Moscow and St. Petersburg (then the Russian capital), cities in which Meyerhold worked regularly throughout his life: he was in St. Petersburg in 1906, for the last World of Art Exhibition and the unveiling of the Golden Fleece group, and for their 1908 exhibition featuring works by Braque, Van Gogh and Matisse.<sup>18</sup> After the Revolution, he was in Moscow during the Exhibition of Four (featuring Kandinsky, Rodchenko, Stepanova and Sinezubov) and for the 3rd Obmokhu exhibition, in which Rodchenko displayed his first hanging constructions (1921). Meyerhold was consistently well placed to engage with developments in visual art.

## Theme Two: Meyerhold as Collaborator

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Exhibitions were sites of access for Meyerhold, both to developments in the visual arts and to the artists themselves, who formed a group of collaborators working alongside the director at his various theatre venues. The practice of employing visual artists as stage designers has become almost synonymous with the Russian theatre, particularly as it was practiced at Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes*. At Meyerhold's *alma mater*, the Moscow Art Theatre, visual artists also undertook the role of designers, providing the young Meyerhold with a reference point for the interaction between developments in visual arts and innovations in theatrical staging. Stanislavsky's cousin, Savva Mamontov, was the patron of the colony of artists at Abramtsevo, where groups such as the *Peredvizhniki* (Wanderers) were affiliated. Mikhailova identifies Victor Simov, member of the *Peredvizhniki* and the designer who worked on the Art Theatre's first production and Meyerhold's first professional acting engagement *Tsar Fyodor Ivannovich* (1898), as a significant influence on the director's developing understanding of the role of visual art in performance. She refers to Meyerhold as 'falling in love' with Simov's design, citing his own reflections:

[The scenery was] top-level in its originality, beauty and authenticity. One can contemplate it for hours without getting bored. Bored indeed! The scenery grows on you as if it were something real.

(Meyerhold in Mikhailova 1995: 50)

Mikhailova notes that this fascination with realistic scenery was 'short-lived', but as a first encounter with a designer who was also a visual artist, this connection was decisive in Meyerhold's future practice (Mikhailova 1995: 50). Simov's work was primarily realist, well-suited to the theatre of Stanislavsky; however, it was not the artist's style, but the principle of the incorporation of visual arts into stage practice that had a long-term hold on Meyerhold's attention. Meyerhold placed his artist collaborators at the centre of his aesthetic experiments, as Rudnitsky observes:

Meyerhold was the first to present the painter with enormous, previously impossible power in the theater, not only bringing him to the same level as the actor, but rising him above the actor, since in the creation of new worlds 'independent of reality' the painter was the truest and most essential assistant to the director, and the decorations, once painted, would no longer be changed every evening.

(Rudnitsky 1981: 128)

The list of Meyerhold's collaborators who had a pedigree in the visual arts, as compiled by Mikhailova, is extensive, and is worth reproducing here in full:

Nikolai Sapunov, Sergei Sudeikin, Alexander Golovin, Leon Bakst, Vasily Denisov, Boris Anisfeld, Konstantin Korovin, Mstislav Dobuzhinsky, Vladimir Dmitriev, Nikolai Ulyanov, Kasimir Malevich, Lyubov Popova, Varvara Stepanova, Alexander Rodchenko, El Lissitsky, Alexander Deineka, Victor Shestakov, Alexander Tyshler, the Kukryniksy group, and Vladimir Stenberg.

(Mikhailova 1995: 51)

Striking is the range of artistic backgrounds and affiliations to movements and developments in artistic practice which are covered: artists from the symbolist, cubist, cubo-futurist, suprematist and constructivist groups, canvas painters and caricaturists, students and graduates of his theatre school (like Dmitriev) and those, like Golovin, whom Meyerhold considered to be his instructors (see Mikhailova 1995: 51). Some collaborations were one-offs (Meyerhold worked with Stepanova only once, on *Tarelkin's Death* in 1922); some were repeated (with Golovin or Shestakov, for example). In some cases, the collaboration never came to fruition in performance, and remains only as a series of photographs, models and sketches that hint, frustratingly, at a new form of theatrical production in development but never to be realized – such is the case of Meyerhold's collaboration with El Lissitsky on *I Want A Child* (1927–1930).

In some instances, the term 'collaboration' is a problematic description of the director's working process. Meyerhold's strong visual concept for a production, and his desire to function as both designer and director, could reduce the designer's role to that of realizing the director's intentions. With this in mind, the success of his work with established visual artists is somewhat surprising, as in some instances, working with Meyerhold does not appear to give the artist a huge degree of creative freedom. Artists were presented with ideas, sketches and designs by the Master, as Meyerhold was called, prior to the commencement of the production process. Failure to fulfil these requirements could result in dismissal from the project.

A case in point is Vladimir Dmitriev's dismissal from work on *The Government Inspector*, which did not meet up to Meyerhold's exacting standards. The setting for the production was finally credited to Meyerhold, with Vladimir Kiselev executing the designs, and mechanical realization (that is, the technical engineering of the staging system that

Meyerhold devised) by K. A. Soste (see Mikhailova 1995: 66—67; Rudnitsky 1981: 391). The use of a designer whose function was primarily the execution of Meyerhold's ideas is reflected in the terminology with which different collaborators were credited in his theatre. The terms used range from the relatively straightforward *khudozhnik*, meaning simply 'artist' or 'designer' (and used to denote any type of artist, including the actor, director or musician), to 'design realization', 'realization and workings' and even 'the role of the director in respect of the material design'. Designers after the Revolution are still credited as *khudozhniki*, but also, on occasion as 'director-constructor' or 'scenic engineer', the different terms implying different working relationships between Meyerhold and his artists.

In Mikhailova's survey, much is made of artists who have the ability to 'add' to Meyerhold's visual schemes. Dmitriev (she says in relation to the fiasco surrounding his work on *The Government Inspector*) was 'undoubtedly capable of adding quite a lot to both the execution of the plan and to its essentials' (Mikhailova 1995: 67), although, on this occasion, he had failed to do so. Golovin, also, was given 'some leeway', for example, in the work on *Don Juan* in 1910, and Mikhailova attributes the production's success to:

Golovin's ability to make a contribution *of his own*: his mastery of colour, his famous ornamentalism; his superb composition; his unerring perception of the depth of the stage, which he skilfully enhanced with delineated planes; his impeccable feeling of style, which he was able to reconstitute with the help of various stage appointments.

(Mikhailova 1995: 58)<sup>19</sup>

Mikhailova here highlights this notion of 'adding': through his talent and skill as an artist, Golovin was 'able to enrich Meyerhold's schemes, to materialize them as unique artistic entities' (Mikhailova 1995: 58). It is these relationships between Meyerhold and his artists that are of the greatest interest – the occasions on which something was added, altered, shifted in the director's work through his interaction with the visual artists who were engaged at his theatres. Mikhailova uses the phrase 'artist-designer' to indicate the role that these practitioners held in Meyerhold's theatre, encompassing the double meaning of the Russian *khudozhnik*, which can refer both to visual artists and to stage designers, and emphasizing the dual status of the practitioners who 'added' to Meyerhold's aesthetic schemes.

In addition to Meyerhold's work with artist-designers, Olga Feigelman describes a different mode of interaction between the director and visual artists in her article *Molodye khudozhniki na spektakliakh Meïerkhol'da/Young Artists at Meyerhold's Productions* (1978), which explores the collaboration of Meyerhold with Victor Vakidin, Vitaly Goryaev, Sergey Urusevsky and Ivan Bezin. Vakidin, Goryaev and Urusevsky approached the Meyerhold Theatre in 1936 for permission to make sketches of the performances, a project that was endorsed by Meyerhold. The resulting drawings reflect more than the construction of the *mise-en-scène*: they are studies of the relationship

between performance and visual art at Meyerhold's theatre. The artists produced images of *Krechinsky's Wedding* and *The Government Inspector*, with Goryaev, on Meyerhold's suggestion, also drawing events backstage. Feigelman observes the difficulties faced by the artists in producing sketches of moving actors during a performance – 'it was not the artist who controlled the model for a long time, but vice versa – the artist obeyed the model' (Feigelman 1978: 457–458) – as well as the creative solutions that the artists devised. Bezin's work on *The Government Inspector* is the most comprehensive example, in which the artist rendered the episodic structure of Meyerhold's theatre as a series of quick, separate sketches that 'taken together formed the image of an episode' (Feigelman 1978: 458). Feigelman summarizes the significance of the product of this artist-director collaboration:

[Bezin's] 198 shots [sketches] remain the so-called document of the performance. They help to see Khlestakov's style the way it was created by Meyerhold and realized by Erast Garin. Meyerhold used to say: 'The internal and external in a person are always tied up. Characteristics are always defined by the external expression.' This is vividly seen in the sketches by Bezin.

(Feigelman 1978: 458–459)

Meyerhold's collaboration with these young artists not only indicates the use of visual arts practice as a documentary device in his theatre, but also demonstrates how Meyerhold's decisions as director influenced the artist's style. The relationship between art and theatre, in this instance, is clearly a reciprocal one.<sup>20</sup>

### **Theme Three: Meyerhold as Scenographer-Director**

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The desire to act as designer for his own productions clearly underwrote Meyerhold's working practice, and the director devised systems and methods of working that would allow him to function in both roles despite his limited skill as a visual artist. His resolutely visual approach to theatre making and the emphasis he placed on the visual construction of the performance were facilitated by decisions made at his theatres. It can be seen in his choice of collaborators (both artist-designers and those employed to realize technically his own ideas), but also in a wider sense, in his work with the actor, who, through biomechanical training, was to master her own body to the extent that she could respond to the demands of Meyerhold's stage image in performance. The self-awareness of the biomechanical actor, and the ability of the actor to function within the wider visual scheme, was intended to allow the director control over the *mise-en-scène* as a whole. The preparation of sketches by Meyerhold and his collaborators indicates a concern with the ways in which theatre can communicate visually with the audience and ultimately an interest in the pure visual aesthetics of theatre and the notion of stage beauty. This idea of

scenographic-direction is borne out by the Courses in Theatre Production that Meyerhold devised at his various training institutions after 1917, where actors and designers studied alongside one another and took the same classes:

He tried to give the budding directors at his Workshop a chance to learn the skills which he himself missed so much: draftsmanship and the craft of scale model-making. He had a longtime ambition of training future directors and designers together – a logical sequel to his idea of ‘unison’ between director and designer.

(Mikhailova 1995: 65)

The centrality of the visual arts to Meyerhold’s training programme can be seen most clearly in his employment of one key figure. Art historian and analyst Nikolai Tarabukin worked alongside Meyerhold at GITIS (the State Institute of Theatrical Art), where he taught the history of world art and costume to students in Meyerhold’s Workshops. His art historical and theoretical approach indicates the significance that Meyerhold placed on the integration of training for actors and directors in the visual arts beyond the skill of drawing: under Tarabukin, students learnt the analysis of image, as well as art history and theory (see Feldman 1998). During his time with Meyerhold, Tarabukin produced a series of analyses of the director’s *mise-en-scène* drawing on the principles of the visual arts. He located Meyerhold’s practice against that of artists from Russia and Europe (including Surikov, Perov, Repin and Botticelli), as well as indicating similarities with the art of Ancient Egypt, and with the cubists, amongst others. Tarabukin’s articles deal with the application of visual arts analysis to Meyerhold’s theatre in practice, considering the shape of the *mise-en-scène* and the transitions between different visual schemes, in productions including *The Government Inspector* (1926), *Woe to Wit* (1928) and the opera *The Queen of Spades* (1935). Tarabukin identifies features of Meyerhold’s *mise-en-scène* that echo the practices of visual artists, elucidating their function within a theatrical context, emphasizing the musicality of the relationship between static and dynamic images in performance (see Feldman 1998: 12). This can be seen particularly in his work on a taxonomy of diagonal trajectories on stage (for *Woe to Wit*, see Feldman 1998: 12–13) and in his detailed analysis of *The Government Inspector* (reproduced in Feldman 1998: 18–52).<sup>21</sup> Tarabukin’s centrality as analyst and teacher at Meyerhold’s theatre indicates the intimacy of the relationship between the director’s practice and the visual arts, and suggests a substantial lineage in the application of the visual art practices as a tool for understanding Meyerhold’s productions.

The connection between Meyerhold’s theatre practice and the visual art of the early twentieth century is more than one of causal overlap. The literal instances of connections between Meyerhold and visual artists indicate a deliberately constructed relationship between the two. This relationship exists, however, within a wider context of a cultural matrix of shifting values and practices in modernist culture as a whole, contextualizing Meyerhold’s work, as Worrall suggests, within an era of concerns similar to those that



prompted the experimentations in avant-garde visual arts (Worrall 1973: 14).<sup>22</sup> Through this shared context, Meyerhold's work reflects similar philosophical, social and, obviously in the Russian frame, political concerns as those of the artists, and the adaptation of arts practice to the conditions of theatrical production allows for an exploration of similar themes and similar practices in the work of Meyerhold and the cubists. Drawing on the themes apparent in Meyerhold's engagement with the visual arts, a series of distinct types of relationship emerge between Meyerhold's theatre and visual arts practice. Although this volume is focused on Meyerhold and cubism, these relationships are equally applicable to the director's work with other formal structures and movements, from the influences of Giotto and Memling seen in his *Sister Beatrice* (1906) to his collaborations with the constructivists in the 1920s.

The first five relationships fall into the category of literal or causal interactions, of the type dealt with in this chapter. These are instances in which the relationship is consciously constructed by either Meyerhold, or the artist, or both, sometimes existing as part of a pre-arranged contract (for example, to work as artist-designer for a Meyerhold production) or constructed to contribute towards a specific goal or end. The first four of these relationships have already been explored in publications in both Russian and English, in the work of Mikhailova, for example, but also in Rudnitsky (1981) and in English-language scholarship, amongst others, in Hoover (1988). They have each been addressed in this chapter to provide context, and although their influence will continue to be felt throughout this volume, they are not the primary emphasis of this work. The fifth relationship, although causal in some senses, also indicates the utility of Meyerhold's visual work to the study of his theatre.

- The first relationship is that of visual art as inspiration for the theatre maker. Here, Meyerhold's attendance at galleries, exhibitions and studios is significant, as is Mikhailova's description of the director's 'vast' range of visual reference points that he knew from memory and employed in production planning and rehearsal.
- The second relationship follows naturally from the first, and concerns the employment of recognized and practising visual artists as artist-designers at Meyerhold's theatres, where they had the opportunity to make a contribution not only to the visual scheme of the production on which they worked, but also to the director's understanding of stage space and his aesthetic. Again, Mikhailova's work provides an extensive overview of these sorts of relationships in operation, as do the materials contained in the Meyerhold archives, and available in some instances in publication and translation (see Braun [1969] 1998; Picon-Vallin [1973] 2001, [1975] 2009, 1980, 1992; Gladkov 1997).
- The third is the use of visual arts practice as a pedagogical tool in the training of theatre professionals, particularly directors and actors. Meyerhold's desire to teach directors and designers together, his insistence that acting students look at visual images as part of their training and his employment of visual artists (such as



Petrov-Vodkin) and art historians (such as Tarabukin) as teachers in his training studios are all essential indicators of this relationship.

- The fourth relationship is the use of visual arts practice as a process in the rehearsal of theatre and in production preparation, for example, through sketches and visualizations.
- The fifth relationship in this group is that of documentation, in which visual arts practice is used to create a record of a theatrical event. Here, the relationship centres around the ephemerality of theatre performance, and the contribution that visual records make to the potential to engage with Meyerhold's work as a historical theatre, or to aid the reproduction of elements of his practice (as has been especially important in the recreation of biomechanical practices outside of Russia, but also in recreated versions of his productions or stagings).<sup>23</sup> The documentary model of relationship is different to the first four literal or causal models, in that it is, in some instances, less under the control of the director (take, for example, the use of caricatures in the Russian press and their role as documents of Meyerhold's theatre, which will be addressed in chapter six of this volume).

The final two relationships move away from the literal use of visual arts practice within the rehearsal, performance and documentation of a theatre production. Instead, they extend beyond the visual arts media itself to a wider consideration of the philosophical concerns of the artwork, and how the applications of visual arts practice might function for the theatre historian as tools for the reading of historical theatre practice: how, in other words, the reading of theatre through the lens of the visual arts might elucidate new or alternative ways of understanding Meyerhold's work.

- The first of these relationships is that of visual art as a metaphor for performance construction, or as an 'organizational principle' for theatrical performance. This terminology is adapted from Roger Copeland's analysis of the choreographic practice of Merce Cunningham, although the term also reflects Jan Mukařovský's principle of the hierarchy of theatrical components.<sup>24</sup> It denotes the overriding system by which the theatrical experience has been ordered, that which underlies the construction of the performance event. Copeland identifies aspects of Cunningham's work which suggest that visual arts practice, in the form of the collage device, is fundamental to his aesthetic (Copeland 2002, 2004). Rather than focusing on a literal form of collage, for example, in Cunningham's choice of stage design or designer, Copeland addresses the more encompassing notion of collage as a 'principle organizing strategy' for a performance (Copeland 2002: 32). To this end, Copeland suggests a form of theatre practice in which the influence of the visual arts is felt at a more fundamental level than in the stage image alone. In this instance, the techniques of the visual arts become an aesthetic device for the

fundamental structures of the performance itself, and the adaptation of an idea from the visual arts to the stage is a metaphorical process.

- The final relationship suggested expands this notion of organizational principle to address the way in which the visual arts can suggest frameworks for the analysis of performance. The springboard for this model is the use of the term 'theatricality' within the visual arts (see, for example, Quinn 1995). The practice of using theatre as a critical paradigm in other art forms is well established. If an artwork can be 'theatrical', whether the term is used in a positive or negative sense, then it stands to reason that a theatre performance, in some sense, can be 'artistic', that is, appropriate for analysis through the models and approaches used in the visual arts. When employed as a critical approach in other media, the term 'theatre' uncovers aspects of practice that are not readily apparent or easily articulated through that media's current critical vocabulary. The same is true of the reverse process: through the application of visual arts theory or practice as a critical approach in theatre, elements of theatrical practice disguised by the constraints of the medium can be more readily acknowledged. The process is one of difference, whereby the different formal constructions of the two media allow a new mode of reading to function. In this instance, bearing in mind the difference between the stage, as a three-dimensional environment experienced in linear temporal progression, and the canvas, as a two-dimensional space in which any third- or fourth-dimensional engagement must be constructed through recognized and shared formal codes (for example, through the use of linear perspective to construct depth), the temporal and spatial construction of each art form is a key way in which the application of visual arts practice can elucidate new aspects of Meyerhold's theatre.

Each of these seven relationships is threaded throughout the analysis that follows, and each part of the analysis functions through an awareness of all of the potential types of relationship in operation. Like Hayles' reading of cultural influence, they function as a matrix of ideas that are constantly interlinked. Within the context of Meyerhold's era, his awareness of visual arts practice, his causal connections with artists and his fundamentally scenographic working methods, these relationships allow for a new engagement with the connections between Meyerhold's theatre and the visual language of cubism. For the director and the historian, the formal and philosophical approaches of the cubists shape a new way of making and reading theatre practice.



## Chapter 2

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Depth



The dialogue between realistic representation and its abstraction is fundamental in the construction of both cubist canvases and Meyerholdian theatre. The centrality of this dialogue is felt particularly keenly in the question of depth, its construction, perception and effect, which are vital aspects of the cubist approach to visual art. The many and varied movements of the early twentieth century avant-garde sought to tackle the fundamental paradox of the canvas as a site of tension between surface and depth. The formal innovation of Renaissance linear, or vanishing point, perspective had proposed one resolution to this tension by obscuring the surface and drawing attention to a constructed field of depth appearing to extend beyond the painting itself. By the *fin-de-siècle*, this visual trick, a *trompe l'oeil* associated with realist art, had become pervasive in its influence.

Despite their rebellion against representation in its realist, or Renaissance, form, the cubist canvases are not, in their entirety, rejections of representation per se. They are dialogues or ripostes: spaces in which representation is questioned and interrogated in its potential as an ideal or practice.<sup>25</sup> This is true of many of the avant-garde movements in the early twentieth century. Goncharova and Larionov's rayonnist works, for example, have a distinctly representational root, despite their appearance of total abstraction: they are paintings of the rays of light that emanate from the object rather than of the object's external form. The object of representation remains central to the artist's endeavour; without the object, the rays of light cannot be reproduced on the canvas. These works are a deconstruction of realist representation, and a widening of the notion of representation itself, a theme that would continue into Goncharova and Larionov's experiments with cubo-futurism.

As the realization of the formal construction of an object became, for the avant-garde, more significant than its realistic reconstruction on the canvas, the engagement with the canvas itself began to change. Where vanishing point perspective requires the canvas to be seen as receding in depth beyond the surface, for the artists of the avant-garde, the surface itself became a vital point of contact with the viewer. The artists rejected the technical innovations of Renaissance painting in favour of a return to earlier forms whose two-dimensionality implied a more realized notion of surface, including folk art in Russia and African masks in Paris.<sup>26</sup> The use of the so-called primitive forms in the realization of the complex interaction of surface and depth can be seen clearly in *Les Femmes d'Alger* (Figure 1). In the figures on the far left, for example, Picasso's prostitutes and the planes and surfaces from which they are constructed appear to

recede in depth, despite the abstractions of their physical form. In these instances, there is a sense of perspective extending beyond the canvas. In contrast, however, two of the figures' faces, bearing the trace of Picasso's interest in African culture, are mask-like in their construction, with large, hollow eyes. Some of these mask surfaces are seemingly flat, despite the artist's use of parallel lines to imply shading in depth. In fact, it is these lines, in their ostensibly false representation of depth, that emphasize the flatness of the canvas itself. Picasso engages with both the representation of depth (in the figures, the planes of their construction and their environment) and the acknowledgement and foregrounding of the canvas surface.

Picasso's playful engagement with perspective indicates a model in the cubist canvas that both embraces and rejects depth and surface, without attempting a reconciliation of the two, a metaphor for the tension between realistic representation and abstraction in the cubist artwork. In the *Demoiselles*, the disparity between depth and surface is part of the function of the canvas, and the artist allows this contradiction to define the structure of the image. Consistently applied linear perspective allows for a fixed, externalized viewing point and a sense of absolute security for the viewer. Picasso's play with perspective in the *Demoiselles* constructs contradictions for the viewer, which cannot be resolved by finding a 'correct' external position. The resulting image resounds with a sense of indeterminacy, an uncertainty that functions through the collision of constructed depth and realized surface. This ambiguity is expressed as a spatial construction, but reflects the wider tenet of the cubist artwork as negotiating the question of representational conventions in realist and anti-realist art.

Facilitating a space of ambiguity or indeterminacy is fundamental to the art of the avant-garde, and an approach that is clearly apparent in the theatre of Meyerhold. The contextualization of Meyerhold's theatre as a dialogue with the conventions of realism is a vital aspect in understanding his practice. Meyerhold consciously positioned his work as a 'search for new forms' (Braun [1969] 1998: 15): an alternative to the conventions of naturalism that he had learnt during his years of apprenticeship at the Moscow Art Theatre. Within the context of this search for an alternative, particularly in his work prior to 1917, Meyerhold's exploration of space on stage turned towards the questions of depth and surface that had also occupied the cubist artists. Just as the paintings of the avant-garde engage with the notions of realism and representation through the manipulation of perspective, Meyerhold's theatre uses a similar spatial structure to facilitate a tension between naturalism and abstraction. In the early twentieth century, and particularly within the context of Meyerhold's theatrical education and training alongside Nemirovich-Danchenko and Stanislavsky, theatre functioned as a laboratory space for the consideration of the interaction of depth and surface. The use of a back-cloth or backdrop, a device common in productions at Meyerhold's *alma mater*, was itself a space of contradiction between surface and depth: ostensibly flat (particularly in its comparison to the three-dimensional figures of the actors on the stage) but often – in its use at the Art Theatre, at least – constructed according to the rules of linear perspective,

the back-cloth embodies the tension between depth and surface with which the cubist canvases were also engaged, albeit to a different end. This was a particular source of dissatisfaction for Meyerhold, as he noted in his 1908 essay 'The Naturalistic Theatre and the Theatre of Mood':

The characters in Act Two of *The Cherry Orchard* walk through 'real' ravines, across 'real' bridges, past a 'real' chapel, yet from the sky are suspended two big pieces of blue-painted canvas with tulle frills, which bear no resemblance at all to either sky or clouds. The hills on the battlefield in *Julius Caesar* may be constructed so that they decrease in size towards the horizon, but why don't the characters become smaller, too, as they move away from us towards the hills?

(Meyerhold 'The Naturalistic Theatre and the Theatre of Mood'  
1906-1908, trans. Braun [1969] 1998: 31)<sup>27</sup>

Meyerhold highlights the dichotomy between the elements of 'real' in the Moscow Art Theatre's stagings and the overtly constructed – even, in the case of the sky, abstracted – nature of other theatrical conventions. Cynical even at the reality of the 'real' elements, as the use of inverted commas indicates, Meyerhold's main objection is the false construction of depth in the hills of *Julius Caesar*. Questions of reality, representation and how these are related to depth construction in performance are central to Meyerhold's critique of the hyper-naturalism that had developed for this production at the Art Theatre. Depth is a key issue for the conventions of representation, not just for the canvas, but also for the stage.

### **Painterly Perceptions of the Stage: Meyerhold, the Art Theatre and *The Cherry Orchard***

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Periods of direct contact, modification of original ideas and a lifelong mutual respect all contribute to the complexity of Meyerhold's relationship with Stanislavsky, his System and naturalism as a formal convention. In the same way as the avant-garde artists offered their canvases as alternatives to the accepted conventions of verisimilitude and Renaissance linear perspective, analysis of Meyerhold's early independent directorial projects must maintain an awareness of the deliberate construction of his productions against the naturalistic principles of the Art Theatre. Rebellion against accepted forms, the motto of the avant-garde, drives the formal conventions of both cubism and Meyerhold's theatre; in this sense, they are contextually similar practices. Rebellion functions through differentiation: in order for the viewer to understand that the cubist canvas is engaged in a dialogue with the conventions of realist representation, they must be consciously aware that this dialogue is taking place. As such, the cubist canvas is constructed so that the viewer can identify and appreciate the tensions regarding the nature of representation (seen, in this instance, in the simultaneous emphasis on surface and depth).



In the same way, Meyerhold's theatre functions as a dialogue with the naturalistic theatre of Stanislavsky and the Art Theatre, particularly as the style was realized in the company's early productions.<sup>28</sup> Meyerhold's desire to locate his productions against those of the Moscow company is particularly evident in his attitude towards the work of Anton Chekhov, the playwright who had become the stronghold of the Art Theatre repertoire. By the time the Moscow Art Theatre premiered Chekhov's final play *The Cherry Orchard* in January 1904, the relationship between Chekhov and the theatre was well established, and the company were so keen to perform it that Elena Pavlovna Muratova, one of the Art Theatre actresses, even claimed that should she not be cast, she would play the part of Yasha's mother – who never appears on stage (Worrall 1996: 159). At the same time as the Art Theatre rehearsed in Moscow, Meyerhold, then based in the provincial town of Kherson, was preparing his own production of the play, apparently with no reference to or knowledge of the details of Stanislavsky's production (see Rudnitsky 1981: 43).

Chekhov's final play joined the Art Theatre repertoire during the production of arguably its most fanatically naturalistic project of the early twentieth century: Nemirovich-Danchenko's production of *Julius Caesar*. Against the background of these repertoire choices, Stanislavsky was clearly aware of the potential limitations of a purely naturalistic production of Chekhov's play and of the complexity of Chekhov's work in general, resting as it does between symbolist and realist concerns. Worrall refers to Stanislavsky's reading of the play as it was recorded in his production score:

What would seem to emerge from [Stanislavsky's] score [...] is an intuitive sense of the play's problematic nature, hovering between realism and symbolism. An intensely felt opposition between the natural and human worlds would appear to have exercised itself so powerfully on Stanislavsky's imagination that the fully human, three-dimensional, flesh and blood solidity of human character seems held in a state of suspended animation. (Worrall 1996: 156)

*The Cherry Orchard*, as represented in Stanislavsky's score, was a text concerned with the relationship between realist and abstract, in this instance symbolist, influences. As Worrall acknowledges, however, it was not these concerns that were communicated by *The Cherry Orchard* in performance. When he finally had the chance to see the Art Theatre production in spring 1904, Meyerhold felt that the play had been misinterpreted and Stanislavsky had placed too great an emphasis on naturalistic detail at the expense of the (symbolist) impression of the production as a whole:

The director at the Art Theatre has shown how the harmony of the act can be destroyed. [...] In] Chekhov the director loses sight of the whole by concentrating on its parts, because Chekhov's impressionistically treated images happen to lend themselves to portrayal as clearly defined figures (or *types*).

(Meyerhold 1906-1908, trans. Braun 1969, 1998: 29)<sup>29</sup>

In his correspondence with Chekhov, Stanislavsky engages with the text on an extremely literal level, seeking advice from the playwright as to whether the house is made of stone or wood, to which Chekhov's characteristically laconic response is 'wood... or stone, it doesn't matter' (Chekhov in Benedetti 1991: 178), and even suggesting the inclusion of his trademark ciphers of naturalism, the croaking frogs and corncrake:

Allow us, during one of the pauses, to bring a train with little puffs of smoke across. That could work splendidly. [...] The concert of frogs and the corncrake at the end of the act likewise [...] This is for the actors to help them live their roles.

(Stanislavsky in Benedetti 1991: 185)

Chekhov's own interpretation of his play is in striking contrast to that of Stanislavsky. In the face of the Art Theatre's insistence to play the piece as a tragedy, the author maintained he had written a farce.<sup>30</sup> He resisted the cluttering of his plays with devices intended to increase realism, rejecting Stanislavsky's suggestions of the train and the frogs (Chekhov in Benedetti 1991: 185). To Chekhov's mind, rather than enhancing the play's naturalism, these additions undermined the conventionalized nature of theatre as an art form. Meyerhold records Chekhov's objection to such devices as early as 1898 during rehearsals for *The Seagull*:

On the second occasion (11 September 1898) that Chekhov attended rehearsals of *The Seagull* at the Moscow Art Theatre, one of the actors told him that offstage there would be frogs croaking, dragon-flies humming and dogs barking.

'Why' – asked Anton Pavlovich in a dissatisfied tone.

'Because it's realistic' – replied the actor.

'Realistic!' – repeated Chekhov with a laugh. Then after a short pause he said: 'The stage is art. There's a genre painting by Kramskoy in which the faces are portrayed superbly. What would happen if you cut the nose out of one of the paintings and substituted a real one? The nose would be "realistic" but the picture would be ruined.'

(Meyerhold 1906-1908, trans. Braun 1969, 1998: 30)

Meyerhold recorded this conversation with the playwright in his diary, and returned to Chekhov's comments eight years later, writing 'The Naturalistic Theatre and the Theatre of Mood'. Chekhov's acknowledgement of the conventions that dictate theatrical representation appears to have impressed Meyerhold, and to have had a lasting influence on his belief in the fundamentally problematic nature of stage naturalism.

'The Naturalistic Theatre and the Theatre of Mood' was written in response to the Art Theatre's production of *The Cherry Orchard*. In the essay, Meyerhold critiques naturalism as a closed form that restricts the potential for creativity in both actor and spectator. Of the naturalistic actor, Meyerhold claims:

The naturalistic theatre teaches the actor to express himself in a finished, clearly defined manner; there is no room for the play of illusion or for conscious understatement.

(Meyerhold 1906-1908, trans. Braun [1969] 1998: 25)

The spectator, when presented with this 'finished' performance, suffers a similar fate:

It would seem that the naturalistic theatre denies the spectator's capacity to fill in the details with his imagination the way one does when listening to music.

(Meyerhold 1906-1908, trans. Braun [1969] 1998: 26)

This closed approach is at the core of Meyerhold's dislike for naturalism, which he summarizes, significantly, with a reference to viewing in the visual arts:

[The] spectator in the theatre aspires – albeit unconsciously – to that exercise of fantasy which rises sometimes to the level of creativity. Similarly, how can an exhibition of paintings possibly exist except as a spur to the imagination?

(Meyerhold 1906-1908, trans. Braun [1969] 1998: 25)

This reference to painting serves to highlight the difference between the naturalistic theatre and the theatre of mood: a style that Meyerhold frames as overtly symbolist. Unlike naturalism, the theatre of mood invites the spectator into an active creative role: it is a 'spur to the imagination'. In his critique of Stanislavsky's production, Meyerhold suggests an alternative approach to *The Cherry Orchard*, which cuts through the small talk of Chekhov's play to its essence, engaging with the implications of the playwright's use of imagery, sound and rhythm, applying stage techniques that echo the practices of visual artists. Instead of Stanislavsky's focus on the creation of believable human characters and situations, Meyerhold suggests that meaning on stage can be created at a different level, where text, subtext and image are synthesized. In a letter to Chekhov dated May 1904, Meyerhold refers to the third act of *The Cherry Orchard* as containing 'jollity with overtones of death', making the connection to symbolism explicit by concluding that 'in this act there is something terrifying, something Maeterlinckian' (Meyerhold 'Letter to Chekhov, 8 May 1904', trans. Braun [1969] 1998: 34).<sup>31</sup> In 'The Naturalistic Theatre and the Theatre of Mood' he goes on to discuss what he considered to be the Art Theatre's fundamental misinterpretation of Chekhov's essentially symbolist play:

One recalls how the overall harmony was disturbed in the Moscow Art interpretation of Act Three of *The Cherry Orchard*. The author intended the act's *leitmotiv* to be Ranevskaya's premonition of an approaching storm (the sale of the cherry orchard). Everyone else is behaving as though stupefied: they are dancing happily to the monotonous tinkling of the Jewish band, whirling around as if in the vortex of a nightmare, in a tedious modern dance devoid of enthusiasm, passion, grace, even

lasciviousness. They do not realise that the ground on which they are dancing is subsiding under their feet. Ranevskaya alone foresees the disaster; she rushes back and forth, then briefly halts the revolving wheel, the nightmare dance of the puppet show. In her anguish, she urges the people to sin, only not to be 'namby-pambies'; through sin man can attain grace, but through mediocrity he attains nothing.

(Meyerhold 1906-1908, trans. Braun [1969] 1998: 28)

Meyerhold's reading of the act emphasizes the rhythmic and visual properties of Chekhov's work. Using a musical analogy as a starting point, Meyerhold selects a *leitmotiv* in the suffering of Ranevskaya, and extends this individual's suffering to a universal theme: the condemnation of ignorance and passivity. In Meyerhold's essay, the third act of Chekhov's play is conceived of as an overall impression rather than a series of linear objectives. His construction of the act revolves around the audience's sensory, more than their intellectual, experience: the tinkling of the band and whirling people set against the heightened rhythm of panic and foreboding represented by Ranevskaya. Through his emphasis on the sensory and rhythmic elements of the act, Meyerhold visualized a production in which the events of the party on Ranevskaya and Gayev's estate became a manifestation of Ranevskaya's mental process as she awaits the report of the sale of the orchard. Meyerhold reinterprets the notion of Chekhovian subtext, by creating a second layer of meaning aside from the narrative development of the act, a layer of meaning that is entirely sensory, visual and rhythmic. Meyerhold envisages the audience being presented with a visual impression that can inform their reading of the text, allowing the viewer an insight into Ranevskaya's state of mind and attempting to draw the audience into the performance, emphasizing the need for an active, engaged spectator.

In his reading of *The Cherry Orchard*, Meyerhold establishes his theatrical priorities as distinct from those of the Art Theatre. Taking the same text as a starting point, he explores the potential of a different mode of representation for its realization, one which does not reject the text as a whole, nor does it reject the central role of character and plot, but subordinates these to the construction of a performance experience that foregrounds the engagement of the spectator on a visual and visceral level. The spectator is presented with a visual, or metaphorical, moment, which could be realist (this could be a representation of the events that take place at the party on Ranevskaya's estate), but simultaneously could be the events as viewed by Ranevskaya, or could be the director's manipulation of the events to reflect his own perspective on the text, that is, a metaphor for Chekhov's play. In his theoretical reading of *The Cherry Orchard*, Meyerhold begins to explore the visual and the metaphorical as devices for the construction of the dialogue between the real, the representational (realist or anti-realist) and the stage.

Meyerhold's reading of Chekhov suggests that the material visual expression of the text is as significant to the audience's experience of the production as the text itself: he explores the interaction between the different production elements in terms of shapes, colours and rhythms. Although rhythm in its musical sense was fundamental to Meyerhold's

aesthetic (see Leach 1989), in this context, the notion of rhythm is based on the use of the term in the visual arts, where the rhythm of the canvas is determined by the artist's spatial organization of the elements that construct the image. Meyerhold demonstrates a belief that the audience's perception of the production is formed through the rhythmic organization of its visual elements: in other words, Meyerhold's reading of *The Cherry Orchard* acts on the viewer less as a playtext and more as a painting. With Meyerhold's creative dialogue with his *alma mater* and this painterly and metaphorical approach to staging in mind, it is now possible to turn specifically to the director's construction of depth and perspective on stage.

### Georg Fuchs and the Theatre of the Future

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In his 1906 production of *Sister Beatrice*, Meyerhold's deliberate construction of depth on stage allowed him to exploit spatial structure in order to forefront the production's *mise-en-scène*. Although the play's plot is linear, and Maeterlinck shows a specific awareness of the imagined timescale of the action by indicating a twenty-year time-lapse between the second and third acts, Meyerhold undercut the continuity of Maeterlinck's text by constructing a series of static moments that punctuated the performance, connected by smooth, slow, unobtrusive movements, and accompanied by melodic, intoned dialogue punctuated with extended pauses (Figure 3). The intention was to bring the spectator's perception of the image to the forefront of the viewing experience, as Meyerhold makes clear in his comments on his staging of another production with Komissarzhevskaya, *Hedda Gabler*:

The huge armchair covered with white fur is meant as a kind of throne for Hedda; she plays the majority of her scenes either on it or near it. The spectator is intended to associate Hedda with her throne and carry away this impression in his memory. Brack is associated with the pedestal bearing the large vase [...] The table serves as a pedestal for the motionless figures which the theatre wishes to imprint on the spectator's memory.

(Meyerhold '*Hedda Gabler*' 1906, trans. Braun [1969] 1998: 67)

The use of static images is the director's method for constructing a visual experience that extends beyond the performance. Consequently, the construction of these images became an overriding concern. To this end, Meyerhold rejected the Art Theatre's realistic construction of the stage in depth, instead choosing to reduce significantly the performance space.

The spatial structure that emerged took the form of a narrow strip of stage placed close to the footlights, reminiscent of the overtly non-naturalistic relief staging device outlined in the writings of Georg Fuchs. Meyerhold's discovery of Fuchs' theories was a significant milestone in the development of his aesthetic. The director's adoption of Fuchs' relief stage demonstrates a direct connection between his theatre and the

visual arts: the narrow strip of stage advocated by Fuchs emulated the construction of bas-relief sculpture, juxtaposing a three-dimensional figure with a two-dimensional environment. Meyerhold's use of the relief stage at the Komissarzhevskaya Theatre was closely associated with his experiments in symbolist staging, experiments that emphasize stillness over movement and subsequently the construction of the stage image over the fluid development of action. The combination of the bas-relief staging structure and the director's emphasis on static tableaux suggests that similar concerns were represented by Meyerhold's construction of the stage image and the artist's construction of the canvas. After his hypothetical staging for *The Cherry Orchard*, Meyerhold had continued to develop a perception of the stage space that incorporated painterly overtones.

Both Edward Braun and Nora Beate Beeson estimate that Meyerhold first read Fuchs' *Die Schaubühne der Zukunft/The Stage of the Future* in 1906, a matter of months before starting work at the Komissarzhevskaya Theatre (Braun [1995] 1998: 48; Beeson 1960: 86). Fuchs' staging ideas were radically anti-realist, believing that the convention-based nature of the stage environment made accurate realistic representation impossible, and that theatre should therefore reject all imitative methods:

Fuchs felt that the entire stage space was to be treated not so much as three-dimensional space (an idea that carried such falsehoods as trick perspective) but as a shallow, visual picture on which the actors protruded as in relief, much as a sculptural relief. The actor, in turn, should be trained in graceful movements, gymnastics, sports, even acrobatics so that his play on the stage, in combination with beautiful costumes, miming and colourful decorations, would help to create for the audience an experience greater than life, an experience only to be accomplished by the arts.

(Beeson 1960: 41–42)

Fuchs' emphasis on the necessity of recognizing the conventionalized aspects of the stage recalls Chekhov's comments at Stanislavsky's rehearsal of *The Seagull*. The manipulation of the audience's perception of depth was paramount in the Moscow Art Theatre's construction of the stage space, where the use of trick perspective techniques was common, and this is hinted at, for example, in Stanislavsky's notes on the staging for *The Cherry Orchard*:

The left part of the stage and the centre without masking flats – just the distant horizon. This will be done with a continuous semi-circular backdrop with supports to take it into the distance.

(Stanislavsky in Benedetti 1991: 185).

In contrast, and in line with Fuchs' theories, Meyerhold hung the *Sister Beatrice* backdrop a mere seven feet from the footlights, reflecting the narrow stage space at Fuchs' own theatre, the Münchner Künstlertheater. The foreshortening of perspective in Meyerhold's

staging demonstrates his desire to alert his audience to the fact that depth on stage is in fact constructed. Like its artistic precedent bas-relief sculpture, relief staging results in the division of the performance space into two planes: a foreground (the actors) and a background (the non-representative backdrop). In his review of Meyerhold's *Sister Beatrice* for the newspaper *Russ*, Maximillian Voloshin compares Meyerhold's stage tableaux with the frescoes of Giotto:

A Gothic wall in which the green and lilac-tinted stone blends with the grey tones of the tapestries and glimmers faintly with pale silver and old gold ... The Sisters in grayish-blue, close fitting garments with simple bonnets framing their rounded cheeks. I was constantly reminded of Giotto's frescoes in the Duomo in Florence, the glorious *Assumption of Saint Frances* portrayed with unsparing realism and idealized beauty.

(Voloshin in Braun [1995] 1998: 59)

Meyerhold, who cites the Voloshin review in his own reflections on *Sister Beatrice*, acknowledges the influence of visual art on his production, in the form of the 'old masters' and the primitives:

The critics tried to compare the production with most disparate artists: they spoke of Memling, Giotto, Botticelli and many others. In *Beatrice* we borrowed only the means of expression employed by the old masters, the movements, groupings, properties and costumes were simply a synthesis of the lines and colours found in the Primitives.

(Meyerhold *Sister Beatrice* 1906, trans. Braun [1969] 1998: 69)

Voloshin's review suggests that Meyerhold's use of images drawn from painterly and sculptural sources was apparent to the spectator during the performance, provided they had the correct frame of reference to access it. František Deák identifies further specific visual reference points created by the director. He observes that:

Several symbolist productions in France and in Russia were based on the idiom of symbolist paintings, but the staging of *Sister Beatrice* seems to go farther than any other production in modeling all of its visual aspects – blocking, grouping, tableaux, postures, gestures, eye movement – on concrete visual sources.

(Deák 1982: 48)

Deák claims that Meyerhold's *mise-en-scène* for the first act was 'inspired' by Domenico Veneziano's *Martyrdom of Saint Lucy*, identifying an 'inverse parallelism' in the narrative of the two sources: whereas Maeterlink's *Beatrice* is tempted away from her life of celibacy, Lucy refuses to yield to sexual advances and is martyred (Deák 1982: 43). Deák identifies the staged moment in which Meyerhold's *mise-en-scène* exactly mimicked Veneziano's image:



In Domenico's painting, St. Lucy is kneeling and praying, while her executioner, standing behind her, is stabbing her with a sword through her neck. Both figures are in profile against the almost blank, neutral space of a courtyard. The first scene of the play actually opens with Beatrice on her knees praying to the Virgin Mary and asking her for advice. She is still praying when Bellidor enters, so it is at this moment that the arrangement of the painting is evoked for the first time in the *mise-en-scène*.

(Deák 1982: 43)

For the spectator in possession of the correct visual reference point, Meyerhold's *mise-en-scène* expands Maeterlinck's text. Beatrice, in her comparison to St. Lucy, is implicitly condemned for her weakness in the face of temptation. This form of visual cross-referencing is, however, very specific in its functioning, to a large extent limited in its implications, and, in Meyerhold's claim, the production rejected references to specific images in favour of a more general use of 'means of expression'. Meyerhold's construction of the *mise-en-scène* also evoked a notion of religious imagery, manifesting the theme of the text in the visual arrangement of the actors, a visual metaphor similar to the visual manifestation of Ranevskaya's state of mind seen in the director's analysis of *The Cherry Orchard*.

Like the figures in bas-relief sculpture, the actors in Meyerhold's *Sister Beatrice* were forced out in relief against designer Sudeikin's abstract backdrop, the shapes of their bodies becoming the focal point for the audience's experience of the production. Fuchs' relief stage was intended to provide the actors with an environment in which to work physically: a stage space that would emphasize their bodies, making them the focus of the performance. The reduction of the space in depth draws the spectator's attention to the body of the actor and the image she creates. In this sense, Fuchs' staging fulfils the same function as the associations between the characters and elements of the stage environment that Meyerhold employed in *Hedda Gabler*: the performance is constructed as a series of images that are intended to be retained by the audience.

By providing an environment that highlighted the actor's physical reality Meyerhold was addressing a fundamental crisis in the symbolist theatre. Theatre was not the preferred medium of the symbolists as, unlike a novel or a poem, the theatre cannot be elevated to the realm of the purely symbolic: however ethereal a talented artist can make the stage environment appear, the actor remains resolutely corporeal, destroying any attempt to transcend the everyday. The parallel developed by Meyerhold between Fuchs' staging principles and the Russian cultural shift towards symbolism was therefore a problematic one. Although symbolism relied heavily on the notion of synaesthesia, that is, the 'transference from one sense to another' (Deák 1976: 121), Fuchs' relief stage, in its combination of a two-dimensional environment and three-dimensional performer, functions more through a process of juxtaposition than unification. This aspect of Meyerhold's staging is most evident when Fuchs' device is compared to the techniques employed in religious iconography, the appropriation of which was emerging as a trend amongst the artists of the Russian avant-garde prior to 1917. The



similarities between Meyerhold's staging for *Sister Beatrice* and the work of Giotto indicate a direct link between Meyerhold's appreciation of art and his construction of the stage space. The lines and groupings of *Sister Beatrice* are certainly reminiscent of the frescoes Voloshin cites and Meyerhold acknowledges. However, the structural division of the space into two planes is reminiscent less of Giotto (whose work shows evidence of pre-Renaissance perspective painting techniques), than of the Byzantine-influenced Russian orthodox icons.<sup>32</sup>

The techniques of icon painting were introduced to Russia with Byzantine Christianity in 988 AD. Both the religion and its cultural conventions were transferred almost intact from the Byzantine Empire to Kiev by Prince Vladimir who began the process of converting the, mostly pagan, Russian people. As Russian iconographers began to adapt the foreign style to create uniquely Russian icons, their works became a focal point for Christian worship in Russia.<sup>33</sup> At the turn of the twentieth century, iconography became a popular reference point for the emerging avant-garde art scene, as can be seen, for example, in Goncharova's 1905–1907 primitivist painting *Madonna and Child*. Gray ([1962] 1971) argues that the radical new perception of art that emerged in early twentieth century Russia had its roots in late nineteenth century Russian art movements, especially those concerned with the revival of traditional and popular imagery. The revived interest in iconography and the repeated use of icon-like images amongst the early twentieth century avant-garde artists indicate that the comparison of Meyerhold's work in 1906 to techniques evident in icons painted as early as the thirteenth century is not unfounded speculation. Iconography was becoming a popular reference point in early twentieth century Russian culture.

The Russian orthodox icons represent a similar spatial structure to that which Meyerhold, prompted by Fuchs, employed in *Sister Beatrice*: the subject of the icon (the figure to be worshipped) is painted in detail in the foreground; the backgrounds are predominantly non-representational, often two-dimensional and comprising an abstract pattern or image. In the same way that Picasso's fluctuation between surface and depth disrupts the viewing experience of the *Demoiselles*, any sense of depth constructed by the detailed representation of the object of worship is disrupted by the abrupt imposition of the abstract background. In both the icons and Meyerhold's stage structure, the abstract setting does not reflect the location of the figures, placing more emphasis on the expressive power of painting in terms of colour and shape (such as is indicated by Voloshin's description of Sudeikin's setting for *Sister Beatrice*). The construction of the orthodox icon is intended to create a specific space of identification and intimacy between the viewer and the image. On stage, the incongruity of the three-dimensional actor and two-dimensional environment serves to highlight the actor in the same way that the simple backgrounds of the early Russian icons drew attention to the focus of the believer's worship. The focal point constructed by the use of the device in Meyerhold's theatre is not an abstraction of a deity however, but the corporeality of the actor's body.

## Depth and Spectatorship

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The re-emergence of iconographic techniques in Russian art at the turn of the twentieth century posits a redefinition of the relationship between the viewer and the art object, based on the construction of depth within the image. For Erwin Panofsky, the advent of linear perspective in painting in the early fifteenth century is the logical predecessor of the Cartesian concept of the autonomous subject, and the dominance of linear perspective in art since the Renaissance has shaped the perception of reality in Western culture, as Petran Kockelkoren demonstrates:

Westerners have been familiarised with the organisation of our field of vision according to the regularity of linear perspective since infancy. What we perceive is arranged within a clearly delineated frame, with the eye focused on a single, central disappearing point situated on the horizon.

(Kockelkoren 2003: 42)

In an exploration of the movement of ideas between visual art and philosophy that echoes the theory of the cultural matrix proposed by Hayles, Panofsky and Kockelkoren see the organization of Western perceptions of reality around a vanishing point as a catalyst for the emergence of the autonomous subject in art, and ultimately for philosophical frames such as those of Descartes. As Kockelkoren notes, this worldview has a significant implication for the relationship between the viewer and the image:

Through the application of linear perspective, the world is transformed into an external scene, while in the same movement the viewer who was initially a part of it is dragged backwards out of the picture and turned into a remote spectator.

(Kockelkoren 2003: 42)

These observations are equally applicable to the spectator in a theatre reliant on verisimilitude. The innovation of Renaissance perspective was the re-ordering of the canvas to promote the belief that only one viewpoint, that of the external spectator, was correct. The use of a back-cloth on stage, for example, constructed according to the rules of linear perspective, implies that there is a single, external, viewpoint from which the image of the stage space can be encountered. Meyerhold's foreshortening of the stage space to a narrow strip stage reverts to a pre-Renaissance concept of perspective, as seen in the Russian icons, where the figure is juxtaposed against a two-dimensional, non-realistic background. In viewing the icon, the worshipper is engaged in an active process of identification with the image; there is no external point from which the image must be viewed in order to function. Through the use of the relief stage, foreshortening the performance space in depth and making apparent the contradiction between the two-dimensional back-cloth and the three-dimensional performer, Meyerhold reverses the

process that Kockelkoren and Panofsky observe: pulling the audience back into their original place within the image, the place they occupied before they were ‘dragged backwards’ by linear Renaissance perspective and by the trick perspective scenery that the director had objected to in his critique of the Moscow Art Theatre.

The significance of Meyerhold’s engagement with the question of depth through the use of foreshortened perspective is that it undercuts the notion of objectivity in viewing, by challenging the belief that the spectator needs to occupy a position external to the performance in order to appreciate it. Instead, the intimacy of the stage-auditorium relationship suggests that the spectator should engage with the performance on a more personal, subjective level. Here, a specifically cubist parallel, or, in Hayles’ terminology, an occurrence of a ‘similar presupposition’ in different disciplines, begins to emerge (Hayles 1994: xi). This removal of an objective external viewing point echoes the multiple perspectives of cubist painting, and this suggests an increased number of acceptable points from which the spectator may observe the image, and consequently, the number of intellectual viewpoints they may construct. Meyerhold’s emphasis on subjectivity over objectivity has significant implications for the role of the spectator. The stage is no longer constructed as a space for the audience to see but not to touch. In Meyerhold’s later projects, this dissolution of boundaries was to become a literal process: in the highly politicized atmosphere post-1917, connections between the stage and the auditorium took on a new dimension. In his symbolist-influenced work, the foreshortening of the stage space lays the groundwork for this dissolution of boundaries, which created an atmosphere of intimacy between the audience and the performer. Panofsky’s reading of perspective in art provides a fuller explanation for the intimacy of Meyerhold’s *Sister Beatrice* staging than the simple proximity of the playing space to the audience, whilst re-emphasizing the connection between Meyerhold’s theatre and the radical changes in canvas art that were beginning to take place in the early twentieth century.

Discussing the construction of depth in the works of cubist artists (particularly in the collage practice of Picasso and Braque), Clement Greenberg addresses the artists’ intentional assertion of the flatness of the canvas as a surface. Writing on collage practice and modernism, Greenberg argues that cubist art before the introduction of the collage device had begun to address the question of the flatness of the canvas, and the problem of distinguishing between the depicted flatness of the forms represented on the canvas, and the literal flatness of the canvas itself. Greenberg observes this process operating in Braque’s use of letters and *trompe l’oeil* effects in his cubist paintings, which serve to emphasize the canvas as a surface:

If the actuality of the surface – its real, physical flatness – could be indicated explicitly enough in certain places, it would be distinguished and separated from everything else the surface contained.

(Greenberg [1961] 1969: 72)

The effect of this process, according to Greenberg, is the construction of two opposing planes of flatness in the image. The interaction of these planes is seen as emphasizing the constructed, anti-realist nature of the painting:

Sealed between two parallel flatnesses – the depicted cubist flatness and the literal flatness of the paint surface – the illusion is made a little more present but, at the same time, even more ambiguous. [...] The abiding effect is of a constant shuttling between surface and depth, in which the depicted flatness is ‘infected’ by the undepicted. Rather than being deceived, the eye is puzzled; instead of seeing objects in space, it sees nothing more than – a picture.

(Greenberg [1961] 1969: 73)

Through this engagement with the notions of surface and flatness, Greenberg provides a connection between cubist canvases (painted, collaged and both) and sculptural bas-relief. The paradox of the cubist collage fragment is that it simultaneously functions as foreground and background of the canvas:

The actual surface becomes both ground and background, and it turns out – suddenly and paradoxically – that the only place left for a three-dimensional illusion is in front of, upon, the surface. In their very first collages, Braque and Picasso draw or paint over and on the affixed paper or cloth, so that certain principal features of their subjects as depicted seem to thrust out into real, bas-relief space – or to be about to do so – while the rest of the subject remains embedded in, or flat upon, the surface.

(Greenberg [1961] 1969: 75)

Greenberg’s reading of the collage surface provides a framework that can be used in the analysis of Meyerhold’s foreshortened stage space in *Sister Beatrice*. In Meyerhold’s production, the flattening of the stage space was essential in constructing juxtapositions between the performers and their environment. Whereas in the Art Theatre the actors were hidden behind the imaginary surface of the fourth wall, in Meyerhold’s production they were forced out in relief against the abstract backdrop. The removal of trick perspective and the proximity of the performance space to the audience also questioned the validity of conceiving of the proscenium arch as a frame for a depth space, in the same way that collage highlighted the canvas as present surface rather than transparent window. Meyerhold’s use of Fuchs’ principles suggests that relief staging operates through processes similar to cubist painting and collage. Greenberg’s analysis of the flatness of the cubist surface also applies to Meyerhold’s meta-theatrical construction of the stage space. By foreshortening the stage in depth, the spectator, like the viewer of the cubist canvas, is forced to make attempts to reconcile the three-dimensional figure with the two-dimensional environment, ‘shuttling between surface and depth’. The constructed nature of the theatrical space becomes consciously apparent and the eye, as Greenberg

says, unable to be deceived by verisimilitude, is puzzled and, in this instance, sees nothing more than a stage.

## Surface and Depth in *Masquerade*

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Meyerhold's rejection of the relief stage was motivated by actorly, rather than visual, concerns. Before his dismissal from the Komissarzhevskaya Theatre in November 1907, Meyerhold had begun to show traces of dissatisfaction with both symbolism and the relief stage. In December 1906, he staged his first production of *The Fairground Booth*. Meyerhold's affection for Blok's text indicates both his fading interest in symbolism and static mysticism well suited to a reduced performance space, and his increasing interest in the actor's corporeality, as exemplified by his emerging emphasis on the *commedia dell'arte*. Unlike symbolism, where the actor seems a necessary distraction from the ethereal construction of the stage world, the physical presence of the actor and the tension between the actor and the character are central to the *commedia* aesthetic. Meyerhold employed *commedia* techniques to increase the physical virtuosity of his performers, suggesting the cabotin (strolling player) 'in terms of an actor-training alternative to that of Stanislavsky' (Rudlin 1994: 170). It was the physicality of the cabotin that appealed to Meyerhold, as his essay '*The Fairground Booth*' makes clear:

It is to the heyday of cabotinage that one must look for the origins of the theatre [...] Nowadays the majority of stage-directors are turning to pantomime and prefer this form to verbal drama. This strikes me as more than a coincidence. It is not just a question of taste. In their attempts to propagate pantomime, directors are not merely attracted by the peculiar fascination which the genre possesses. In order to revive the theatre of the past contemporary directors are finding it necessary to begin with pantomime, because when these silent plays are staged they reveal to directors and actors the power of the primordial elements of the theatre: the power of the mask, gesture, movement and plot.

(Meyerhold '*The Fairground Booth*' 1911-1912, trans. Braun [1969] 1998: 125)<sup>34</sup>

Meyerhold's desire for an increasingly physically-adept performer, rooted in corporeality rather than ethereality, is echoed in his movement away from relief staging. The director appears to have encountered the fundamental paradox of Fuchs' theory: Fuchs advocates an extremely physical training regime for the actor, but the manifestation of these skills in performance is restricted by the imposition of the narrow strip of stage space. Meyerhold's *commedia*-influenced, highly acrobatic performers required a stage shape more appropriate to the expression of their abilities. Consequently, Meyerhold's reintroduction of a deep stage space (a 'depth stage') seems to be a rejection of the principles of relief staging in favour of a space more suited to a physical performance style. The extension

of the stage space does not, however, necessarily indicate a complete abandonment by Meyerhold of Fuchs' ideology.

Meyerhold's experiments with depth after his rejection of the relief stage in its purest form began with the division of the stage space according to its literal or metaphorical function. This practice is apparent, for example, in his 1914 variant of *The Fairground Booth*, in which the director manipulated the depth of the stage space according to the style of performance that it was intended to facilitate: performance that required space for movement took place on a depth stage, behind which was a narrow relief stage, where Meyerhold located performances that emphasized stillness. Meyerhold divided the characters of Blok's play according to their function in the production, and assigned them to the two distinct spaces. The characters of *commedia* and the Harlequinade (Pierrot, Columbine and Harlequin) formed the more active element of the production, influenced by Meyerhold's interest in cabotinage, and as such were assigned to the deep performance space downstage; upstage, in a restricted strip of space behind a large table, sat a row of static 'mystics'.

This division of characters and space obviously allowed room for the physical performance style of Meyerhold's cabotins: in this sense, it is a literally functional choice. In addition, however, the space also fulfilled a metaphorical function. Placing the mystics in the restricted space upstage acts as a visual metaphor for the audience, implying that the characters and the ideas they represented were outdated, trapped in the past as the performers were trapped behind the table. The association of the mystics with the restricted stage space and the more physically active performers with the depth stage also indicates a degree of progression in Meyerhold's perception of performance: the mockery of the mystics and parody of his own symbolist work is extended by implication to the narrow strip stage. In contrast, the depth stage is the home of his new style, the physicality he associated with the *commedia dell'arte*. The depth of the stage space in which the characters operate becomes a metaphor for Meyerhold's perception of character, playtext and, meta-theatrically, for his own development as a theatre maker.

Separating stillness and movement in this way embeds a rhythmic function in the stage space. Fast-paced action and movement take place on the depth stage, whereas static or slower sequences are restricted to the relief stage. The use of the stage shape to construct a sense of rhythm in the production as a whole was exploited more fully in Meyerhold's most elaborate pre-revolutionary production, *Masquerade*. Golovin's design for *Masquerade* extended the principles seen in the 1914 variant of *The Fairground Booth* by juxtaposing a narrow and a deep stage space. Lermontov's text frequently requires elaborate set changes between scenes. In order not to disrupt the rhythmic flow of the production to change the scene, Meyerhold and Golovin conceived of an intricate series of decorated curtains, which were lowered from the theatre flies before each scene ended, isolating the relevant characters in front of the tabs and allowing for large-scale sets to be changed without disrupting the strict pacing of the performance. The result, in effect, was one of repeated rapid transitions between the relief and the depth stage.

Golovin's elaborate designs for settings on the depth stage made some use of trick perspective devices. In Figure 4, for example, the design attempts to construct a sense of depth in the stage space through the use of a visual focal point upstage, the surface with two portraits hung in the centre. The viewer's eye is guided towards this focal point by Golovin's use of several sets of curtains and borders at different heights, the lowest of which frames the cloth itself. The sense of perspective is further emphasized through the large sets of doors stage right and stage left that are angled diagonally upstage. Despite the elaborate decoration of the stage space, the design incorporates both a realistic sense of depth and naturalistic elements in furniture and design (particularly in the area furthest upstage). In contrast, the curtains Golovin designed were decorative and non-representational, constituting a clear meta-theatrical reference to the proscenium curtain (Figure 5). These curtains framed the stage space, and the non-representational drapes emphasized the theatricality, and implicitly the artifice, of the performance. In addition, the insertion of a curtain, which in practice functioned as the reduction of the depth stage to a relief stage, emphasized the constructed nature of theatrical space, highlighting the trick perspectives of Golovin's designs as mere tricks.

The rhythmic shifts between the relief and the depth stage had implications for the audience's experience of Meyerhold's production. The depth stage, enhanced by the vastness of the performance space at the Alexandrinsky Theatre, implied a sense of distance between the audience and the performers. The curtains, signalling intimacy, appeared to push scenes closer to the audience, as if the actors had 'crossed the proscenium line and entered the auditorium', taking the audience into their confidence (Yuriev in Leach 1989: 140). Through the use of the curtains, Meyerhold could rapidly reconstruct the sense of perspective experienced by the spectator. Golovin's use of trick perspective devices on the depth stage placed the audience in the position of the externalized viewer that Panofsky associates with Renaissance linear perspective techniques; when the curtain was lowered, it abruptly foreshortened the audience's perspective and replaced the objective position of the external observer with a subjective, personalized viewpoint. In his 1914 variant of *The Fairground Booth*, Meyerhold divided the stage space according to the actor's function: depth space was more appropriate for acrobatics and physicality; relief space was more appropriate for static mysticism. The director's placement of the actor in the space inferred his attitude towards the character, for example, in the location of the mystics in restricted space. In *Masquerade*, the space was divided according to the required relationship between the stage and the auditorium: large-scale scenes were played on the depth stage; more intimate sequences on the relief stage. Meyerhold's staging repeatedly reconstructed the spatial relationship between audience and stage, implying a spectator who was alternately externalized as observer and internalized as confidante.

Like the cubist artists using the alternation between *trompe l'oeil* constructions of depth and the emphasis of the canvas surface in order to foreground the constructed nature of art-making, Meyerhold's use of depth and relief stage in *Masquerade* emphasizes the performance experience as consciously constructed, that is, as an experience of conscious theatricality. Primarily, Meyerhold had conceived of the curtains to maintain the pace



of the production: to avoid the action becoming fragmented by frequent scene changes. However, in terms of the audience's experience of the performance, the imposition of the curtains was arguably as disruptive as the interruption caused by a large-scale set change. Yury Yuriev, who played Arbenin in the original production, observes a generally negative audience reaction to the device:

[With] one voice they all protested at the division (or if you like, the segmentation) of the episodes... by the device of lowering the curtain in the middle of the dialogue. [...] 'It breaks the illusion...' - 'It distracts your attention, it stops you concentrating'.  
(Yuriev in Leach 1989: 140–141)

Through the imposition of a curtain in the middle of a scene, the spectator's sense of continuity was subordinated to the director's desire to maintain the pace of the production and the resulting experience was intentionally 'distracting' or fragmented: the curtains were clearly intended to produce the effect against which the audience 'protested with one voice'. The imposition of the curtain that 'breaks the illusion' established the performance as a conscious theatrical construct, and emphasized the ways in which Meyerhold's theatre chimed with the principles of the Russian Formalists, particularly that of *ostranenie* (estrangement). Victor Shklovsky's claim that the role of art is to '[remove] objects from the automatism of perception' is evident in Meyerhold's fluctuation between the depth and relief stages, a process that implies that the audience's role should be brought into their own consciousness by being actively reconstructed throughout the performance (Shklovsky 1965: 21–22). Reflecting the rejection of naturalistic passivity that he outlined a decade earlier in 'The Naturalistic Theatre and the Theatre of Mood', Meyerhold uses the alternation of the depth and relief stage to establish a new mode of spectatorship that is conscious, engaged, active and creative.

Like his proposals for *The Cherry Orchard* in his earlier essay, Meyerhold's use of depth in *Masquerade* is also strikingly metaphorical. Through the association of the relief stage with intimacy and the depth stage with distance, the production appears to suggest that *where* the audience look from (their perspective on the space) affects *how* they see (their philosophical or emotional reaction to the production's content). Meyerhold continues to establish the visual and spatial structure of the stage as a metaphorical device for the communication of ideas, which operates in an independent, but complimentary, way to the content of the playtext. This connection between formal decisions and philosophical engagement is fundamental to the artists of the avant-garde, and particularly the cubists. As Bruce Altshuler claims:

For these artists, painting was to depict intellectual conception and not visual appearance, encapsulating what is known rather than what is merely seen.  
(Altshuler 1994: 33)



Rudnitsky suggests that the rapidly shifting configuration of the stage space in *Masquerade* functioned as a visual representation of the instability of the Tsarist regime:

The world appeared dubious, threateningly mutable and mobile. The monumental stateliness of the era of Nicholas, presented with the maximum opulence of Golovin's decorations and costumes, with its excessive, striking splendor and the intoxicating refrains of Meyerhold's circular stagings, shifted to the edge of catastrophe, collapse, disaster.

(Rudnitsky 1981: 239)

This visual metaphor can be extended. The shifts in the configuration of the stage space resulted in the repeated reconfiguration of the spectator's visual relationship with that space. More than simply presenting a world in crisis that would soon collapse, Meyerhold created an audience experience which mimicked that crisis, continually moving between the objective and the subjective, the externalized and the internalized spectator. The resulting viewing experience was unsettling, destabilizing the spectator's position, and through this, placing the audience in a position analogous to that of Arbenin, the play's protagonist, a figure who cannot define his relationship to the world with which he is presented. Both alienated from society by his own actions and embraced by it through his marriage to socialite Nina, Arbenin can neither reconcile himself to his world, nor control its effect on him. Like Arbenin, the audience of Meyerhold's *Masquerade* were alternately embraced by the stage world, invited in as confidantes, and excluded by it, pushed back by depth space to the position of outside observer.

In *Masquerade*, the restricted relief stage that had constructed intimacy in *Sister Beatrice* gave way to a radical and shifting conception of depth, which, like the cubist play with surface, ultimately functioned as a device for the fragmentation of the audience's viewing experience. Through repeatedly reconstructing the spectator's relationship with the stage space, Meyerhold created an experience of spectatorship that was, above all, unsettling. The rapid transitions between relief and depth stage space demonstrated that both the action and the spectator's experience of that action were subject to the director's influence. Through the use of varying constructions of depth and surface, Meyerhold openly manipulated the spectator's perspective on the stage, signalling first distance, then intimacy, and undercutting any opportunity for the viewer to sit outside of the experience as objective judge.

## Chapter 3

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Figure



In 1915, in Petrograd, an exhibition was mounted in the Small Hall of the Imperial Circle of the Friends of Art.<sup>35</sup> The venue was surprisingly high profile for the relatively marginalized artists of the avant-garde: the exhibition, entitled *Tramway V*, included works by Malevich, Tatlin, Popova, Exter, Rosanova and Udaltsova (Boersma 1994: 28). The styles represented ranged from Malevich's proto-suprematism to Tatlin's counter-reliefs, and for Gray, the event was Russia's 'first futurist exhibition of painting' (Gray [1962] 1971: 160). The influence of cubism – in both its French and evolving Russian forms – was still keenly felt, however, not least in the works by Exter and Ivan Puni, the exhibition's organizer. Linda S. Boersma, in her documentation of Russian futurist exhibitions, notes that the works displayed at *Tramway V* can 'be broadly described as cubist' (Boersma 1994: 30), from Puni's *Card Players* (1914) to Malevich's *Englishman in Moscow* (1913–1914). Malevich's painting is of particular interest, not only for its clear cubist influence in the multiple planes that construct the image, but also as an example of a specific and significant aspect of cubist practice: portraiture or figure painting.

The representation of the human form was central to the cubist experiment. During his analytical cubist period, Picasso painted portraits, including those of Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, Ambroise Vollard and William Uhde, and he and Braque completed figure studies of women (Braque's *Woman with a Guitar*, 1913) and nudes (including the *Demoiselles*). The motif of the guitar was developed as a substitute representation for the female form, distinctly sexualized, with its curves and openings, pursued by Picasso in his synthetic cubist works. In Russia, Tatlin and Popova adapted Picasso's cubist portraits to their own form, as in Tatlin's self-portrait, *The Sailor* (1912) or Popova's *Portrait of a Philosopher* (1915). In *Man+Air+Space* (1912), Popova explores the placement of the figure within its surrounding context using a distinctly cubist pictorial vocabulary. Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* (No. 2, 1912) is a cubist study in space and motion, with the repetition of the formal elements of the image across the canvas echoing the conventions of Russian cubo-futurism.

The human figure, with its lineage of representational styles in the history of visual art, provided the cubists with a space for exploration and rebellion. The figure drawings and portraits encapsulate the cubist relationship with the object of representation: even in the most complex analytical cubist canvases, the residual link to an identifiable human figure remains, often reinforced by the title given to the work.<sup>36</sup> The formal vocabulary of the cubist figure studies is the representation of the human body as a series of geometric

lines and planes, intersecting and conflicting with one another. In some instances (Tatlin's *Sailor*), this leads to a simplification of the human form; in others (Picasso's portrait of Kahnweiler), the image appears extremely complex in its construction. For Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase*, or Malevich's *Knife Grinder*, the geometric representation of the form allows for its multiplication across the canvas, implying movement. In Popova's *Man+Air+Space*, as the title implies, the formal vocabulary used for the representation of the human body is extended to the space around the figure, facilitating an interaction between ground and foreground, as well as between body and space. The cubist figures and portraits are both decentralizations and affirmations of the human body, a crystallization of the cubist approach to art, representation and reality.

On 12 February 1915, the same month as *Tramway V*, Petrograd witnessed a different cultural event equally concerned with the construction of the human form: the first official presentation of an actor training system devised by Meyerhold.<sup>37</sup> In the gymnasium at the Tenishevskoe High School, Meyerhold and his students presented work on the 'Sixteen Études', a series of exercises drawing on the director's knowledge of historical theatrical systems, intended as a comprehensive training programme for the actor. The work presented on 12 February had been developed at Meyerhold's Studio, opened in 1913 and based initially on Trotskaia, and then on Borodinskaya, Street. The operation of the Borodinskaya Studio coincided with the period of major cubist influence in Russia: 1913 was the year of Popova and Udaltsova's return to Moscow from Paris, where they had studied under Metzinger and viewed Picasso's work.<sup>38</sup> The studio operated throughout the years leading up to the Revolution, closing in 1917. It was the site of Meyerhold's first systematic exploration of actor training, incorporating the study of *commedia dell'arte*, as well as stage movement, musical recitation and theatre production.<sup>39</sup>

Despite differences in the context and justification, there is much reason to regard this system as the forerunner to Meyerhold's post-revolutionary actor training system: biomechanics. The similarities are not just those of intention (the systematization of a process for developing actors), but are also seen in formal structure and content, differing, as Gordon notes, in a 'purely functional manner':

The Sixteen Études mainly, pertained to Meyerhold's pre-revolutionary studio work, which was a synthesis of many traditional conventions, while Biomechanics was designed as a more universal system for many kinds of theatre.

(Gordon 1974: 73–74)

Gordon's observation of the shift from the synthesis of different theatrical forms to the universalization of actor training indicates a similarity in intent between Meyerhold's practice and the work of the cubists. Meyerhold's intention was both analytical and synthetic: he was concerned with both the investigation of the universal ideas, which might underwrite acting as a practice, and the bringing together of the elements that have defined that practice across the scope of theatre history as he had experienced it. Although

these two approaches are differentiated by Gordon, they are also interdependent, in that the development of the universal system is predicated on the synthesis of conventions: biomechanics, in other words, is built on the premise of the Sixteen Études.

The emphasis that Meyerhold placed on the development of an actor training system reflects the significance of the actor in his theatre. For Meyerhold, the actor was a physically realized and physically expressive being, whose work was at the core of theatre practice, and the key to theorizing the theatre was to theorize the actor's body. Meyerhold identifies the actor's body as the vital compositional unit in the construction of the performance. It is through her own physical form that the actor must understand and engage with the production as a whole, a process that is not abstracted or metaphysical, but embodied:

An actor must know the composition of the entire production, must understand and feel it with his whole body.

(Meyerhold, trans. Gladkov 1997: 105)

The centrality of the actor's body echoes the cubist attitude towards the object of representation. Like the link to reality which the physical form of the portrait or nude provided for Picasso's analytical cubist experiments, Meyerhold's theatre was similarly bound to reality by an object of representation: the body of the actor. As the comparative failure of symbolist theatre and Meyerhold's own rejection of symbolist mysticism had demonstrated, in performance the physical realities of the actor's body were inescapable boundaries when trying to stage the ethereal. The exploration, reinterpretation and ultimate transgression of the actor's physical form became a repeated theme of twentieth century theatre, from Craig's *ubermarionette* to Stelarc's *Suspensions* performances. For Meyerhold, despite the accusations of performers treated as puppets or, in Norris Houghton's case, 'rubbers balls' for the director to bounce (Houghton 1938: 120), actors, both in their physical bodies that formed the basis of acting as a craft and in their physical-intellectual engagement with the process of acting, were essential to theatre-making. The actor's body was the ultimate theatrical reference point, a boundary of non-objectivity for performance: theatre was, in Meyerhold's words, 'above all the art of the actor' (Meyerhold 'First Attempts at a Stylized Theatre' 1907, trans. Braun [1969] 1998: 53).<sup>40</sup>

The similarity in function and intent between Meyerhold's conception of the actor's body and the cubist approach to figure drawing indicates a potentially interesting overlap between the two practices. Both theoretically and in practice, Meyerhold's understanding of the actor echoes the cubist construction of the figure on the canvas, positing a new, yet culturally contextualized and current, reading of the body in performance. Again, it should be emphasized here that Meyerhold's understanding of the actor's body was both complex and specifically rooted in theatricality. It was also, however, culturally contextualized. This is demonstrated in the director's theorization of biomechanics as a response to the shifts in theatre's function in Russia after 1917, seen in his comments in a 1922 lecture on his training system:

In the past the actor has always conformed with the society for which his art was intended. In future the actor must go even further in relating his technique to the industrial situation. For he will be working in a society where labour is no longer regarded as a curse but as a joyful, vital necessity. In these conditions of ideal labour art clearly requires a new foundation.

(Meyerhold "The Actor of the Future and Biomechanics" 1922,  
trans. Braun [1969] 1998: 198)<sup>41</sup>

Biomechanics is framed as the much-needed 'new foundation' for the actor's art. Drawing on models of cultural cross-fertilization like Hayles' cultural matrix indicates that the cultural contextualization of Meyerhold's understanding of the body would extend beyond political circumstance, also reflecting cultural concerns similar to those apparent in cubist figure drawing and portraiture. This is not to suggest that every aspect of the cubist treatment of figures can be seen in Meyerhold's theatre, or that his understanding of the body was identical to that of the cubists. Instead, it is to claim that cubism provides an alternative perspective on how Meyerhold conceives of the performer, both in the Sixteen Études and in biomechanics.

### **The Object of Representation: Biomechanics as the Analytical Fragmentation of Self**

The cubist interest in the object of representation was, according to Fernand Léger, a legacy of the Impressionists' search for a style of painting that represented the essence of the object depicted through the specific medium of the painter (see Vargish and Mook 1999: 29). The shift that Léger implies is from the primacy of the object itself, as represented through an external similarity between its appearance in reality and on the canvas (mediated, of course, through the conventions of realism), towards the representation of essence, an inner quality of the object, as it is experienced by the artist in space and time. The cubist approach to the object of representation is one of analysis and interpretation, as Olga Rozanova outlines in her description of the artist's process:

Only now does the artist create a Picture quite consciously not only by not copying nature, but also by subordinating the primitive conception of it to conceptions complicated by all the psychology of modern thought: what the artist sees + what he knows + what he remembers, etc.

(Rozanova [1992] 1993: 210)

The cubist approach to representation does not reject the object, rather shifting the focus of the artist's endeavours onto the process of representation, that is, onto the *way* in which the object becomes the artwork. In this sense, the artist's role is the analysis of the object, its theorization and interpretation on the canvas. This new emphasis results in a new

visual language, the lines, shapes and volumes of the cubist portrait, through which the human body is represented as a series of geometric forms. It is a process of analytical fragmentation, the division of the whole into its constituent parts, and as such, the fragmentation implies a complex duality of unity and disunity: the whole is fragmented into parts, but the parts facilitate a fuller, interrogated, understanding of the whole.

Meyerhold's theorization of the actor draws on a similar process of analytical fragmentation, which is reflected both in the actor's use of the body and in the director's theoretical understanding of acting as a craft. Meyerhold's desire for an actor who was conscious of the process of performance and the functioning of the body on stage demonstrates a multi-faceted attitude towards the place of the actor's self in training and subsequently in performance. Meyerhold's work on the Sixteen Études and biomechanics shows a preoccupation with the notion of decentralization, which is the key to the cubist representation of the object. It is this thematic decentralization of a unified self that leads to the analytical fragmentation of the actor's self characterized by Meyerhold's training system. Far from the assumption of the self as a unified starting point for the creation of a psychologically rounded character, as in the Stanislavsky System, biomechanics is based on a theorization of acting that repeatedly unsettles the actor's understanding of her own identity as performer, embedding analytical fragmentation into the training process.<sup>42</sup>

Lecturing in 1922, Meyerhold claimed that the sole motivation behind the creation of biomechanical training was his encounter with Constant-Benoît Coquelin's writings on the nature of the actor's art (see Braun [1969] 1998: 202).<sup>43</sup> Coquelin's ideas, based on the *Paradoxe sur le Comédien* of Diderot (c. 1773), posed the central question of acting as the ability of the actor to control his physicality, what Meyerhold called the 'organization of [the] raw material' of acting (Meyerhold 1922, trans. Braun [1969] 1998: 197). From this premise the actor emerges as a fragmented, rather than unified being: she is operating in two mindsets at once, both the organizer and the material to be organized. In line with the early Communist vogue for all things scientific, Meyerhold chose to express this dual nature of the actor algebraically as:

$N = A1 + A2$  (where  $N$  = the actor;  $A1$  = the artist who conceives the idea and issues the information necessary for its execution;  $A2$  = the executant who executes the conception of  $A1$ ).

(Meyerhold 1922, trans. Braun [1969] 1998: 198)

Articulated by Robert Leach, the fragmentation of the actor becomes even more apparent:

Meyerhold called this duality variously the 'first I' and the 'second I', the 'creative process' and the 'technique', or – and this implies a possible definition of biomechanics itself – 'imagination' and 'biomechanics'.

(Leach 1989: 53)



For Meyerhold there is no one 'actor', no one 'I' at the centre of the training process, and the unified self of the actor becomes Meyerhold's fragmented 'N' comprised of two separate beings fulfilling two functions that in other forms of art are physically separate: Coquelin's example of the musician (A1) and the instrument (A2) was a comparison commonly employed by Meyerhold in his acting classes (see Leach 1989: 53).

This fragmented notion of self proposed by Meyerhold is fundamentally analytical in its intention. The dual nature of acting presents a problem for the actor not encountered in other arts: the actor can never step back from his work in order to get an external perspective (as the artist can step back from the canvas). In Meyerhold's theatre, the creative role of the director as overseer of the *mise-en-scène* partly resolves this problem of the lack of an outside eye. However, Meyerhold was not content to completely externalize the role of physically monitoring the actor's outside appearance to the director. The actor must embody the role of the external observer, that is, must have an analytical understanding of the self achieved through being able to engage simultaneously with both A1 and A2. Meyerhold intensifies the dual self-perception of the actor by drawing on elements from Eastern performance traditions, particularly the Japanese *Noh* theatre, in which heightened physical awareness emerges through an acknowledgement of duality. The self-awareness of the *Noh* actor results from the contrast of the two poles of *Noh*, the *monomame* (the external, or movement) and the *yugen* (the internal, or stillness). The highly structured and conventionalized physicality of the *Noh* performance encourages the actor to develop an outside eye, an ability to understand how the physical movements of the body may appear to others during performance. Biomechanics uses a similar device of precise, memorized movements, interspersed with moments of stillness, in order to develop a company of actors who understood the outside appearance of every move they made, who knew their bodies well enough to be able simultaneously to watch from the auditorium and perform on the stage. In Meyerhold's words:

Biomechanical exercises have the purpose of teaching the actor how to have... [a] director's consciousness, an outside perspective on the material in its coordination with the stage space, partner, costume, and properties.

(Meyerhold 'Programme of Biomechanics' 1922, trans. Hoover 1974: 311)

Similarly, the teaching methods at Meyerhold's State Higher Directors' Workshop (GVYTM) indicate his desire for the actor to understand her own position in space with reference to everyone and everything around her, for example, in the arrangement of many biomechanical études as pair or group exercises, the necessity of practicing twice daily in a class rather than individually, and the use of sticks, balls, and other properties, all of which were designed to contribute to the development of the performer's self-knowledge and ability to work as part of an ensemble.<sup>44</sup> The heightened self-awareness resulting from the development of the actor's outside eye was to be achieved through the

intensive regime of physical training provided by biomechanics, analytical in its approach to stage movement, and combined with a theoretical knowledge of the human body: at the Meyerhold Workshop, for example, first year students were required to take a class in 'plastic anatomy' (see Meyerhold 'Curricula of the Meyerhold Workshop' 1922-1923, trans. Hoover 1974: 317).

Meyerhold's theoretical understanding of the actor is underwritten by duality: the actor is understood to be two coexistent beings. Beyond this fragmentation of the performer, Meyerhold also posits an increased theoretical awareness of the gap between the performer and the character.<sup>45</sup> Again, the director draws on the differentiation of his practice from that of the Art Theatre to articulate his belief in the necessity of a separation of character and performer:

In his search for verisimilitude the actor of today concentrates on eliminating his 'self' and tries to create an illusion of life on the stage. Why do they bother to write actors' names on the playbills? In its production of Gorky's *Lower Depths* [premiered in 1902] the Moscow Art Theatre brought a real tramp on to the stage in place of an actor. The pursuit of verisimilitude reached such a point that it was considered better to free the actor from such an impossible task of creating a total illusion of life. [...] Can the man who plays *himself* on the stage really be called a performer? Why mislead the public?

(Meyerhold 1911-1912, trans. Braun [1969] 1998: 130)<sup>46</sup>

In Meyerhold's reading, the Art Theatre pursues an actor who is so like the character that the two are collapsed into one (even literally, in the example of the 'real tramp'). In contrast, Meyerhold's performer is to reject the 'total illusion of life' by opening up the gap between the actor and the character. As Worrall observes of Igor Illinsky's performance as Bruno in *The Magnanimous Cuckold*:

[He] exemplified the duality of the new actor's function in embodying both the idea of suffering and his own parody of it, demonstrating suffering rather than living it out realistically.

(Worrall 1973: 24)

As an alternative to the 'impossible' deception that the Art Theatre sought to perpetrate, Meyerhold presents the developed and articulate human body and the physical virtuosity of the self-conscious performer. In Meyerhold's theatre there is no attempt to lose the self of the actor behind the mask of the character: the two are coexistent facets of the performance.

## Biomechanics as the Universalization of Acting

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Meyerhold's theorization of acting is based on analytical fragmentation: of the self in A1 and A2, and in the conscious differentiation between actor and character. This understanding of the body is a metaphorical reflection of the visual language of cubism: the decentralization and fragmentation of unity that is seen in the artists' approach to the object of representation. Analytical fragmentation, however, is apparent not only in the theory of biomechanics, but also in its practice, where the fragmented perception of self leads to a formal vocabulary for the actor focusing on the universalization of acting through an emphasis on its constituent parts. As the cubists shifted from 'questions of identities and relationships to questions of representation' (Cottingham 1998:25), the formal vocabulary of the artists became more concerned with the representation of the generalized characteristics of the human form than the specific characteristics of the individual figures that were portrayed. This generalization of the figure reflects the analytical cubist exploration of the structure of the object, resulting in the use of geometric forms to represent body parts: the human body is seen as a series of intersecting shapes, predominantly triangles and quadrilaterals, as typified, for example, by Metzinger's *Two Women* (c. 1913) (Figure 6).

Biomechanical actor training comprises a shift towards universal forms and a reductive process similar to the analytical geometricization seen in Metzinger's work.<sup>47</sup> Meyerhold's desire to reduce the complexities of acting to universal processes can be seen in both biomechanics and the Sixteen Études. In 1913, Meyerhold's goal was a synthesis of extant ideas, consolidated into his own über-system, incorporating 'various theatrical cultures' (Gordon 1974: 73–74). The consolidation of all theatre history, from the Greeks, to *commedia*, to seventeenth century Spanish performance, into sixteen pantomime-style exercises is clearly an ambitious and significant attempt at reduction and universalization. By 1921, and the creation of biomechanics, the historical emphasis of the Sixteen Études was no longer relevant for post-revolutionary Communist society, a '*cul de sac*', to use Leach's words, which had to be modified in order to chime with new political developments (Leach 1989: 50). Meyerhold's 'modernization' of his theatre in line with the new Soviet society is reflected in a shift in focus: the process of reduction and generalization are still his goals, but rather than the consolidation of theatre history, Meyerhold turns to the reduction of the theatrical present, in the form of the actor's movement vocabulary. Biomechanics attempted to simplify acting and analyse the task of the actor by reducing it to universal elements, what Leach calls 'the essential rhythmic and dynamic qualities in stage movement' (Leach 1989: 53).

The emphasis biomechanical training places on the generalization of the actor's physical vocabulary results in a streamlining of movement with the goal of optimum efficiency. This is echoed in Meyerhold's choice of Taylorism as a scientific justification for his system:

Analyzing the execution of each task according to precise motions, which he timed and regulated within fractions of a second, Taylor sought to find the most efficient movements and gestures for each kind of work.... A. K. Gastev (1881–1941), the foremost Soviet Taylorist, went even further than his American counterparts in this reduction of Taylor’s principles. He maintained that once the worker attained perfect mastery over the handling of (a) the hammer, (b) the knife, and (c) the pick, he would be able to run any piece of machinery, no matter how complex.

(Gordon 1974: 75–76)

For the Russian Taylorists, the economy principle of the American system is reduced to the mastery of the physical activity associated with the use of just three tools. By grasping this reduced sphere of competence, the Russian worker could be trained for any task. For Meyerhold, the efficiency of the new Soviet (biomechanical) actor was to be paralleled with the efficiency of the new Soviet (Taylorist) worker:

The spectacle of a man working efficiently affords positive pleasure. This applies equally to the work of the actor of the future.

(Meyerhold 1922, trans. Braun [1969] 1998: 198)

Meyerhold associates efficiency with theatricality, claiming that analysed and efficient movement is inherently theatrical: it is spectacle. Regardless of whether work takes place in a theatre or in a factory (a boundary that was increasingly framed as irrelevant in a Soviet context at any rate), that work is at its most pleasing when well carried out. The universalization of all the variety of tasks carried out by either the actor or the worker into a reduced sphere of competence is considered the most effective approach to training by both Meyerhold and the Taylorists. In its broadest sense, Meyerhold’s reduction of the scope of the actor’s tasks into clearly controlled exercises can be seen in the biomechanical *études* that he devised: short series of movements, which were to be learnt and replicated exactly as part of biomechanical training. The *études* have a broadly narrative structure, in that the series of movements that the actor undertakes are connected through an overarching action, reflected in the title of each study (‘Shooting the Bow’ or ‘Throwing the Stone’, for example). Each narrative is restructured into a series of poses and connected movements that require the actor to engage with both the physical form of the exercise and the development of the skills that Meyerhold considered fundamental to acting proficiency (including self-awareness, physical expressiveness and reflex excitability).

Through biomechanics, the scope of the actor’s movement vocabulary is reduced to a limited number of learnt exercises: Mel Gordon identifies thirteen *études* in his 1974 article; Jonathan Pitches identifies just five that remain significant (Pitches 2003: 127). The skills required by an actor are also reduced into those that are considered essential and these are developed by biomechanical training: Pitches highlights the skills of the biomechanical actor as precision, balance, coordination, efficiency, rhythm, expressiveness,

responsiveness, playfulness and discipline. Alexei Levinsky, a contemporary biomechanics practitioner trained at the Moscow Theatre of Satire in the 1970s by Meyerhold's colleague Nikolai Kustov, is cited by Pitches to illustrate the perceived comprehensiveness of biomechanical training in terms of the development of the actor's skills set:

I once asked Alexei Levinsky [...] the question: What else does an actor need to do, beyond a training in the études? 'Nothing,' he said, 'that's all you need.'

(Pitches 2003: 126)

Although Meyerhold's system comprised more than the études alone (actors also learnt exercises, including throwing and catching tasks with balls and sticks, and tap dance steps), these studies consolidated within them Meyerhold's approach to the actor's task. An example of a comprehensive process of universalization, the mastery of the études was to lead to the mastery of all theatrical work.

In addition, each étude itself functions as an analytical fragmented restructuring of the action implied in its title. Although the études are precise in their physical form, and require a high degree of physical mastery, they are a streamlining of their equivalent action in real life, simplified according to the principles of efficiency and economy and constructed in order to target the key skills that the actor must learn. The alternation of held poses with movement fractures the through-line of the activity that each étude represents (be that hunting an animal with a bow, throwing a stone at a target or stabbing an enemy with a dagger). In order to structure the movements that comprised the études, Meyerhold drew on Taylor's Work Cycle (the equal balance of work and rest, aimed, predictably, at increasing efficiency). From this starting point, the director devised his acting cycle, a conscious balance of work and rest within the biomechanical études resulting in their rhythmic structure. Each separate movement comprising the étude follows a similar circular pattern, which Meyerhold divided into three sections, the *otkaz*, *posil'* and *tochka*. This cycle structures the actor's movement into and between poses: the *otkaz* is the refusal, preceding the movement by a slight withdrawal (a movement forward, for example, is highlighted by first moving slightly backwards); the *posil'* is the movement itself, the transition from one pose of the étude to the next; the *tochka* simultaneously completes the cycle and prepares the actor to move into the next *otkaz*, both the 'full stop' of the previous movement and the initiation of the following movement.

Through the cycle, smooth movements are broken down into their constituent parts – Meyerhold's approach is analytical – and the étude itself is a series of rhythmic bursts of movement and stillness. The resultant structure is remarkably similar to the chosen poses of Malevich's *Knife Grinder* or Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* (Figure 7), in which the artist selects poses from a continuum of fluid movement in order to consider the shapes and forms which make up that movement over time. The similarity in effect between the rhythmic structure of Duchamp's image and Meyerhold's biomechanical études is clearly seen in a series of photographs by Eliot Elisofon, which

mimic the painting by depicting Duchamp himself descending the stairs (Figure 8). The superimposition of each image of Duchamp allows for the deconstruction of the action of walking downstairs into its constituent parts, in the same way that Meyerhold's poses represent the key moments of the act of shooting a bow or throwing a stone.

### **Biomechanics as the Geometric Analysis of Figure and Space**

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The Taylorist emphasis on efficiency and economy of movement is significant not only in the structure of Meyerhold's training system, but also in its formal vocabulary. Meyerhold's Taylorism is distinct from its factory equivalent as developed by Gastev, in that efficiency in the theatre does not necessarily equate to efficiency in life. Meyerhold demands an efficiency that is not necessarily restricted to streamlining activities to the minimum amount of effort required to get the action done, but that required to communicate the doing of that action clearly to the spectator within the confines of the aesthetic which the director had developed for the production. As such, in terms of its physical shape, Meyerhold's biomechanics embodies both efficiency and exaggeration, demonstrated in the elongated lines of the biomechanical actor, which echo the abstraction of the human form in cubist figure painting. Worrall notes a similar effect in the cut of the costumes that Popova designed for *The Magnanimous Cuckold*:

[The] flow of the human frame, which a conventional costume serves to enhance, becomes irregularly structured. It can be seen as an attempt to impart to the human frame, through the way the material of the loose-fitting overall has been cut, the structural patterning of the human figure depiction in Cubist painting. This fractured, fragmented quality in Cubist figure painting is then enhanced by the nonnaturalistic movement and placement of the arms and legs.

(Worrall 1973: 22)

It is the stylization of the actor's movements, in combination with the cut of their costumes, which reflect the cubist engagement with the human form in *The Magnanimous Cuckold*; the biomechanical *étude* also engages with non-naturalistic movement, which in this instance equates to a geometrical analysis of the actor's form.

In their physical shape, Meyerhold's biomechanical *études* parallel cubist canvases, in that they function as an analysis of the body of the actor through geometric forms that are exaggerated, elongated or stylized. The artist's interpretation of the body as interlocking geometric shapes is possibly the definitive feature of the cubist figure drawings and portraits, as seen in Metzinger's *Two Women*, Popova's *Portrait of a Philosopher* and a series of nudes sketched by Vladimir Tatlin between 1911 and 1914. Each of these works reflects the desire to use geometric shapes in order to analyse the human form. Vladimir Ivanovich Kostin's observations regarding Tatlin's sketches are particularly pertinent to

Meyerhold's geometricization of the actor in biomechanics.<sup>48</sup> According to Kostin, Tatlin 'analysed the structure of the human body, searching to find its laws of composition' as he 'reduces the proportions of the figure to simple geometric forms' (Kostin 1988: 69; 70).

For Kostin, it is the analytical potential of cubism as knowledge that is most significant in the development of Tatlin's aesthetic, as he concludes:

The artist's purpose was neither the cubist breaking down of forms, nor the reconstruction of abstract structures from these dismembered forms, but knowledge of the structural essence of objects, in this case, the human body – the revelation of its living dynamics, the discovery of the mechanical-physical laws of the body's structure.  
(Kostin 1988: 70)

This aim is strikingly similar to the analytical approach that Louis Lozowick, a guest of the Meyerhold Theatre in the 1930s, observes in biomechanics:

Biomechanics... meant the study of the physiological and psychological laws that govern the actor's body as a normally functioning mechanism so that its every gesture and movement might be employed to the greatest efficiency.  
(Lozowick in Leach 1989: 53)

The analytical approach to acting is seen not only in the intentions of biomechanics as identified by Lozowick, but also in the treatment of the actor's body, the physical poses that Meyerhold devised. These forms are structurally similar to those seen in the cubist portraits and figure studies, favouring the use of intersecting straight lines and triangles, both of which are arranged in a series of alternating planes that continually shift the actor's relationship to the surrounding space. The reconfiguration of the relationship between the performer and their spatial context is a key similarity between biomechanics and cubism. The cubist artists developed a fluidity in their representation of space, called motor space, which deconstructed spatial unity on the canvas. Aspects of the object were rotated and relocated into different planes of perspective allowing the artist simultaneously to represent the object from more than one angle. Tatlin's formal approach used a specific tool to this end, what Kostin calls the 'cubist cut-off', which is composed of 'sharp straight lines which intersect the figure at certain points and move it to the side in space' (Kostin 1988: 70). In Tatlin's sketches, the use of straight lines facilitates a shift in perspective on the canvas.

Although the biomechanical études include some curved lines in their construction, particularly in the spine, Meyerhold's exercises demonstrate a clear preference for the straight line, exploiting the angularity of the human body.<sup>49</sup> In poses taken from the étude 'Shooting the Bow' (Figure 9), for example, straight lines can be traced along the actor's arms (particularly apparent in the first and fourth poses depicted in Figure 9), through the legs, with intersections at the knees (particularly apparent in the third and fourth poses) and through the trunk or spine (particularly apparent in the first pose, along the front of the



body to the left knee, and the third pose, from the bent knee through to the shoulder). In some instances, the extension of the arms detracts from the curve of the back, maintaining an impression of angularity in the overall image (as is the case in the fourth figure, where the emphasis is on the two extended arms intersecting at the shoulder). The use of the straight line to shift perspective, similar to that which Kostin identifies in Tatlin's sketches, can be seen in the twists of the actor's body (particularly in the first pose). Meyerhold's biomechanical actors are trained to twist their bodies in order to present conflicting perspectives to the viewer. In 'Shooting the Bow', the actor's body frequently appears to be divided into two parts, with the feet facing from stage left to stage right and the upper body facing downstage towards the viewer, immediately presenting, through this unnatural twist, two simultaneous perspectives. In the first pose in Figure 9, this twist is facilitated through the extended straight arms of the performer, which, in their intersection with the body, turn the torso towards the camera whilst the feet still rest in parallel. The result is an actor presented to the viewer (in this instance, the photographer) from two angles at once.

At their full extension (as in the first pose), the arms appear to extend the line beyond the actor's body, drawing the focus away from the performer and towards the space in which he is working. Tatlin's use of multiple lines intersecting in the figure, as noted by Kostin, is symptomatic of the cubist breakdown of distinctions between object and environment. In Figure 9, this is emphasized by the shadow of the first performer, which echoes the lines of his body on the studio wall, and 'connects the [...] figure with a part of the space surrounding it' (Kostin 1988: 69), in a way which echoes the cubist use of parallel lines in the figure and the background. Although in this instance, the parallel lines may be entirely fortuitous – a coincidence of lighting in the studio space where the photographs were taken – Worrall notes the use of repeated lines in figure and space to facilitate visual connections between performer and design in Meyerhold's work on *The Magnanimous Cuckold*, making reference to the cubo-futurist devices in operation in the production.<sup>50</sup> Shadows are also used in this production to create echoes between the three-dimensional performer and the two-dimensional surface of the back wall. This effect can be seen in photographs of *The Magnanimous Cuckold* (Figure 10), which demonstrate how the shadows merge the figures of the actors with the construction on which they performed, facilitating an even greater degree of interpenetration between performer and space.

Moving from straight lines to geometric shapes, Meyerhold's études seem to be structured primarily around a series of interlocking triangles. The basic biomechanical stance, the starting point for any biomechanical training, is centred on the relationship between the triangle and stability. The stance, as described by Erast Garin, a pupil of GVTM and actor at the Meyerhold Theatre, is:

reminiscent of a boxer's [with] the feet [...] placed parallel, heels slightly raised, toes pointed in [...] opposed to the turned-out technique of classical posture exercises.

(Garin in Schmidt 1981: 38)



In the biomechanical stance, the actor's feet form the triangular base for the rest of the body. As Garin observes, the positioning of the feet is an inversion of the classical posture or ballet stance of turned-out legs and toes, as the biomechanical actor stands with the heels of the feet apart and the toes pointing inwards. Both positions form a triangle on the floor in the lines formed by the placement of the feet. However, the biomechanical inversion of the classical stance results in a shift of the body weight forward from being over the apex of the triangle (the heels in the classical posture or ballet exercises) to over the centre of the triangle (the knees and balls of the feet in biomechanics). This shift in weight changes the stance from being static and stabilized to being dynamic, an emblem of the readiness Meyerhold sought in his actors. Although the feet do not remain in this triangular position throughout the *étude*, the actor repeatedly returns to this stance, which also forms the basis of all movement in *The Dactyl*, a preparatory and focus exercise Meyerhold devised to punctuate biomechanical training.

Within the *études* themselves, further examples of the triangle can be discerned. In biomechanics, the actor's body is grounded, and the connection with the floor is particularly emphasized. In 'Shooting the Bow,' Meyerhold emphasizes the triangle formed between the two feet and the head by placing both feet in near-on continuous contact with the stage floor. A triangular outline of each position in the *étude* can be identified by connecting the feet to the head, which, as the greatest weight in the body, determines the rhythmic shifts of weight in the *étude*. Further triangles are formed between the actor's head, the centre of gravity (usually directly over one foot or the other, or over the centre of the gap between the feet) and the hands. These triangles facilitate another instance of shifting perspective in the biomechanical *étude*. In the course of the *étude*, the actor makes part turns (not full rotations), constantly moving the body into a different plane and relocating it in relation to the surrounding space. The radical shifts in weight led by the head further emphasize this decentralization: biomechanics functions through placing the actor in a position of imbalance (with the goal of ultimately teaching the actor how to control their own balance in performance).

The triangles formed between the head, the centre of gravity and the hands demonstrate the movement of the actor through different planes of space. The triangles using the left hand are easy to identify, even in moving footage, as the hand does not cross the body (it remains on the left-hand side, and does not move to the right). The triangle is therefore maintained in one plane, parallel to the viewer, and in one form, pointing out to the left. It forms a stable basis. Throughout the *étude*, the right hand is freer than the left, frequently crossing the body, and initiating much of the movement: this is the hand that loads the bow, pulls back the arrow and so forth, acting as catalyst for much of the narrative in the sequence. As a result of the freer motion of the right hand and in contrast to the static triangle formed with the left hand, this second triangle moves: it is frequently inverted and reformed, shifting out of the plane parallel to the viewer into other planes. When the triangle is inverted, for example through the crossing of the right hand over the body, the geometric form of the *étude* moves into another plane, as if the viewer has changed perspective on the actor.<sup>51</sup>

## Actor Training and Cubist Temporality

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Through his analytical fragmentation of the unified 'self' of the actor, his universalization of the actor's tasks, his generalization of the actor's body to geometric forms and his presentation of multiple perspectives on the body to the viewer, Meyerhold creates a new conception for the performing body, a modern body with which to subvert the physical ideals and spatial unity of the positivist worldview. The combined presentation of two separate states (A1 + A2; self and character) or two separate physical perspectives simultaneously in the Meyerholdian actor introduces a new temporal element to Meyerhold's theorization of performance. The motor space and multiple perspectives of the cubist portraits invite both spatial and temporal readings. Read spatially, they are an indication of a fragmented unity, a physical form exploded and fractured across the canvas. However, the Russian adaptation of cubism into cubo-futurism resists this reading. Malevich's *Knife Grinder*, for example, does not bear a purely spatial interpretation: the object is not only fragmented, but simplified and repeated. The multiple perspectives of the grinder's arm, for example, represent a movement through space – a temporal progression. This device expands the artwork beyond the space and moment of the canvas. Paul Laporte sees the motor space in cubist representation as kinaesthetic, rooted in motion and therefore in time:

It seems that the only possible procedure of integrating the kinaesthetic with the visual experience in painting is by breaking through the absoluteness of Euclidean geometry, and by re-assembling the shattered fragments of visual perception on the basis of their temporal cohesion.

(Laporte in Vargish and Mook 1999: 89)

In the cubist painting the viewer is presented with a condensed temporal experience, an expression of the artist's knowledge of the object acquired over time and in three dimensions: in cubism, pure time can be expressed as pure space. Whereas the Renaissance artist presents one face of the object using single-point perspective to enhance a sense of three-dimensionality, the cubist artist presents simultaneously, on the surface of the two-dimensional canvas, all the faces of the object as they are experienced in extended time and space. On the canvas, two dimensions can not only imply but can actually embody three and four dimensions; it is a spatial condensation of the artist's temporal experience of the object.

Meyerhold's anti-illusionistic approach to the actor in performance functions as a redefinition of the spatial-temporal confines of theatre. As cubism uses fragmentary forms to heighten the viewer's awareness of the medium of painting, making art an end in itself rather than a means, Meyerhold uses fragmentary devices to make both the actor and the audience increasingly aware of the actor's presence in performance. When Meyerhold presents on stage the actor-as-actor alongside the actor-as-character,

he condenses into a moment an experience that had been extended across the whole of the theatrical event. At the Art Theatre, the actor's identity was purposefully concealed until the last moment, the curtain call. Meyerhold's actor is never hidden, and the experience of the revelation of the actor from behind the character occurs throughout the performance, thus disrupting the temporal expectations of the viewing event for the audience. By containing the whole viewing process in each moment of the performance, Meyerhold redefines theatrical temporality. Linear time is not a pre-requisite to theatrical experience; every moment of the play can be viewed individually and can exist outside the sequence of the performance. Theatre can define and redefine its use of time, cutting and sticking together different moments and ideas. In a theatre like this, time is not a linear constraint, but a playground opening to a world of possibilities.

## Chapter 4

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Collage



In 1911–1912, Picasso executed his first collage, *Still Life with Chair Caning* (Figure 11). The canvas combines oil painting with the inclusion of two fragments: a piece of oil cloth printed with imitation chair caning and a length of rope. The fragments are selected with a wit that was to become characteristic of Picasso's use of collage. The chair caning is imitation, rather than real, calling into question the value of *trompe l'oeil* representation. The rope encircles the canvas, taking the place of a frame, and challenging the conventions of art exhibition. The artist's ironic approach to the selection and combination of fragments in the artwork revitalized the collage technique, which had an established history in cultural practice, from ancient Japan to the paste-ups of Victorian England. Cubism moved from what Gris classed as its analytical phase into its synthetic phase.

By 1958, Clement Greenberg regarded the cubist (re)discovery of collage as the 'major turning point' of the last century (Greenberg [1961] 1969: 70). The influence of collage practice spread throughout the avant-garde and has remained a significant mode of cultural expression during the postmodern era. For the artists of the avant-garde, the fragments of the collaged canvas constituted a fundamental redefinition of the identity of the artwork, born out of a belief that the image is not just a spatial, but also a temporal construction. The new thinking that characterized early twentieth century philosophy, including Einstein's theories of relativity and the collapse of space and time into the single entity space-time, is reflected in the artists' perception of the image. Images became more than simply spatial constructs, seen instead as representations in two dimensions of the four-dimensional space-time continuum. As concurrent moments across the cultural matrix, the development of collage had consequences for canvas art that were as unsettling as Einsteinian physics was to advocates of Newtonian mechanics.

The radical impact of collage practice is born out of the deconstructive quality of the temporal and spatial nature of the artwork. When a collagist combines fragments of images on the surface of the canvas, they create a space that is both a multi-locational and multi-temporal plane. In the words of Donald Kuspit:

The elements [of the collage] are already 'relative' by reason of their displacement from the life-world into the 'art world,' and by reason of their fragmentary state. [...] They are an experiment in time and space – which shows that the old idea of Modern art as an experiment concerned with articulating the fourth dimension has, for all its charming naiveté, a certain truth to it.

(Kuspit in Copeland 2002: 11)

In its articulation of the fourth (temporal), dimension, collage practice resonates with theatre. Copeland emphasizes the natural relationship between collage and performance, which he sees as being rooted in the temporal nature of the performative or theatrical event:

[It's] my belief that the collage principle has been carried to its furthest extreme in the more fully *temporal* realm of performance. There are two reasons for this: In performance, all of the elements are potentially dynamic (i.e., set in motion); and the gaps of space and time that separate these disparate elements can be more highly accentuated.

(Copeland 2002: 15)<sup>52</sup>

It is clear that the avant-garde use of collage techniques in the early twentieth century extended beyond the confines of the artist's canvas and into other artistic practices. Collage became a strategy for the expression of modern life, in which industry had taken over from rural modes of production, and cities, with all their associated paraphernalia of billboards, traffic lights and street signs, were the backdrop to the work of artists and intellectuals across the Western world. The avant-garde appropriation of collage was an articulation of the world that surrounded the artists, and functioned so adequately in this role that it was incorporated as an expressive strategy outside of canvas art. As Herta Wescher states:

It has been customary to apply the term 'collage' to all works in which components belonging to separate intellectual or perceptual categories have been combined, even when, as in many instances, nothing has been pasted or glued.

(Wescher in Polkinhorn 1989: 216)

Collage became the underlying aesthetic mode for a wide variety of artistic and cultural practices, including music, literature and sculpture. More than a formal technique, collage became a philosophical principle. In the words of Katherine Hoffman:

Once considered a folk art, collage in the twentieth century has emerged as both a medium and an idea.

(Hoffman 1989: 1)

Against this backdrop of the rising influence of collage principles at the start of the twentieth century, it is interesting to note that there are very few specifically theatrical examples of the collage device. Although scenographic adaptations of collage are common (particularly after the early twentieth century, in the work of practitioners such as Josef Svoboda), more metaphysical models of stage collage are harder to locate. Kurt Schwitters's *Merzbühne* (Merz-Stage) is the only extended and explicit theoretical

application of collage to performance amongst the avant-garde. According to Helga Vormus, the *Merzbühne* concept is unique in its adaptation of collage to the spatial and temporal realms of theatrical performance:

Theatre has the potential to be the privileged space in which one can play in the two dimensions of art: time and space, the medium of language and of the plastic arts. It seems best to lend itself to the erasing of boundaries between the different arts through the juxtaposition or opposition of the most diverse elements: image – sound – lighting – text – movement. Schwitters is the only one who dared to elaborate a theory of collage-theatre, which he called the Merz-Stage.

(Vormus 1978: 221)<sup>53</sup>

The connection between Schwitters's *Merzbühne* and the collage aesthetic is immediately made apparent in the use of the word 'Merz'. A truncated fragment of the word 'Kommerz', from an advertisement for the *Kommerz und Privatbank*, which he included in one of his early collages, Merz became synonymous with Schwitters's art. The word denoted a technique, but also a rebellion – not affiliated to any other avant-garde movement, Merz constituted Schwitters's private avant-garde project – even becoming, finally, an alias for the artist himself. Schwitters's diverse Merz projects were all characterized by the principles of collage and assemblage. The original Merz work, his *Merzbild* (Merz Picture), exhibited in July 1919, was a collaged canvas including, alongside the 'Merz' fragment, pieces of wire and truncated images. In 1920, the artist began to construct Merz columns: freestanding assembled sculptures. These projects, located in his Hanover home, were expanded to become the *Merzbau* (Merz Building), an immense environmental sculpture. The *Merzbau* comprised a series of grotto-like spaces, constructed by Schwitters from wood and plaster, amongst which objects could be placed. Clearly driven by a theatrical impulse, the *Merzbau* was a constructed environment with an interactive element: guests could explore the structure and Schwitters's friends were even invited to contribute objects to a space in the grotto reserved for them. Annabelle Melzer claims that Schwitters's *Merzbühne* concept was a natural development from his earlier Merz projects, particularly the environmental *Merzbau*:

[Schwitters's] aesthetic discipline became a way of life: the objects he lived with he worked into his art, his 'merzbau' became a backdrop and set for his real life. By 1919, the walls and floors had become so crowded with collages and free-standing objects that there was no distinction between the room and the interior architecture. The rooms in their different settings were given names: Cathedral of Erotic Misery, Great Grotto of Love, Lavatory Attendant of Life, Sex-Murder cave. From here it was but a small step to a concept of theatre [...].

(Melzer [1976] 1994: 199)



The *Merzbau* certainly reflected an element of theatricality, both in its environmental nature, as the 'set for [Schwitters's] real life', and in the thematic organization of the rooms titled to reflect their content. Through the *Merzbau*, Schwitters turned his life into a conscious performance.

Schwitters's adaptation of Merz to theatre took the form of a proposed staged event in which all elements were related (or unrelated) according to the principles of collage. In his manifesto of the *Merzbühne*, Schwitters states that:

The Merz stage knows only the fusing of all factors into a composite work. [...] As in poetry word is played off against word, here factor is played off against factor, material against material.

(Schwitters in Zinder [1976] 1980: 82)

The factors that Schwitters imagines resonating off one another to create the performance include the stage set – 'materials for the stage set are all solid, liquid and gaseous bodies, such as white wall, man, barbed wire entanglements, blue distances [...]'; the score – 'materials for the score are all the tones and noises capable of being produced by violin, drum, trombone, grandfather clock, stream of water, etc'; the text – 'all experiences that provoke the intelligence and emotions'; and even the actor:

Even people can be used,  
People can even be tied to backdrops,  
People can even appear actively, even in their everyday positions, they can speak on two legs, even in sensible sentences.

(Schwitters in Zinder [1976] 1980: 83)

Having identified the potential materials for the *Merzbühne* stage collage, Schwitters then describes the process of their combination:

Now begin to wed your materials to one another. For example, you marry the oil cloth table cover to the homeowner's loan association, you bring the lamp cleaner into a relationship with the marriage between Anna Blume and A-natural concert pitch.

(Schwitters in Zinder [1976] 1980: 83)

In the *Merzbühne*, Schwitters develops an adaptation of collage to the stage, which extends beyond the organization of the scenography or even the construction of the stage image. In Schwitters's *Merzbühne*, collage becomes the underlying theoretical principle for the performance as a whole.

The *Merzbühne* was a hypothetical project, never extended beyond a manifesto, and according to Melzer even the artist himself regarded it as purely theoretical and unrealizable in practice (Melzer [1976] 1994: 201). However, the juxtapositional impulse

that underlies the *Merzbühne* is clearly open to adaptation in other theatrical forms. Using Schwitters's proposal as a starting point, it is possible to extrapolate the most significant aspects of collage practice that characterize any use of the device, be it in visual art, literature or performance. It is clear that despite the etymological origins of the word, it is not the use of glue or paste alone that determined a work as collaged. As Max Ernst, whose aesthetic expounded collage as idea rather than as formal process, claims in his much-quoted witticism, '*si ce sont les plumes qui font le plumage, ce n'est pas la colle qui fait le collage*': 'if it is feathers which make plumage, it is not glue which makes collage' (Ernst in Perloff 1983: 6).

As Schwitters and Ernst suggest, the 'colle' (glue) that constitutes collage need not be the literal cut-and-paste of the canvas. Instead, it is a metaphor for a process of combination of images, words or ideas, truncated into fragments and relocated into the frame of the artwork (be that canvas, poem or performance). The combination of the fragments is, in the work of the avant-garde in particular, arranged according to the principles of juxtaposition, that is, to create deliberate and provocative contrasts between the different images. The collaged canvas brings together independent fragments of images or objects in order to construct meanings through their collision, and it is fundamental to the functioning of collage practice that the fragments that meet on the collaged canvas retain their original identity and are not subject to a process of levelling that collapses one into another – that they are consciously juxtaposed. As Jean-Jacques Thomas observes:

[Collage] is characterized by the explicit and deliberate presentation of the heterogeneous nature of diverse components.

(Thomas 1983: 85)

The use of fragmentation and juxtaposition – the twin formal tenets of collage practice – allows for an unsettling effect in the viewing of the canvas for the spectator and encourages a consciousness of the philosophies of time and space advocated by the anti-positivists.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, the two formal tenets of collage enable the artist to convey meaning or opinion through the artwork: the significance of the collage in terms of meaning making emerges through reading one image fragment against another. The collision of images on the collaged canvas allows the viewer to construct meanings that operate outside of narrative, and through the selection and combination of fragments, the collagist can comment on social and political issues. This process is enhanced by the nature of the collage fragments, which are often quotidian and help to blur the boundary between life and art, suggesting a more intimate and vital dialogue between the two than that which is evident in the aesthetics of verisimilitude.

Through the inclusion of fragments of everyday life, Harry Polkinhorn argues that the collagist engages with the temporal idea of simultaneity.<sup>55</sup> Polkinhorn claims that the use of the collage technique challenges the belief that an extended period of time is a necessary pre-requisite for the creation of the artwork:

Time is not necessary for the collage artist to achieve mastery [...]. Rather, he or she plugs into the instantaneous present of cultural artefacts.

(Polkinhorn 1989: 220)

Collage is, in fact, for Polkinhorn, well articulated through the metaphor of space travel:

If the purpose of a spacecraft is to travel through space, the faster we move the shorter the amount of time elapsed. Pushing the model to its extreme, we see that instantaneous transport, the hypothetical ideal state of the system, in which speed is totalized, eliminates time as a category separable from any other, which logically eliminates space, its complement. Thus one can speak either of spatial or of temporal simultaneity. [...] Collage, then, gestures towards this instantaneity, which perhaps suggests why the process has been so appealing to contemporary sensibility.

(Polkinhorn 1989: 221)

Through the use of fragments, each of which represents part of a whole image that has a spatial and a temporal identity of its own, the collagist creates an artwork in which the notions of unified and linear space and time are radically unsettled, resulting in a fragmented viewing experience. In this sense, collage practice engages directly with the notion of relativity. Through the emergence of relativity theory, both the scientific community and the intellectual world at large were confronted with the possibility that complete objectivity and absolute truth were unobtainable ideals. The canvas was no longer the site of a developed fictional location as, for example, could be seen in art that adheres to the conventions of linear perspective. Instead, through the multiple fragments that constructed the collaged image, the canvas became a multi-locational and a multi-temporal construct in which no space or time was seen as extended, continuous or absolute.

Meyerhold's theatre and cubist collage share the same context: they are both embedded in the modernist philosophical and cultural upheaval, concurrent points in Hayles' cultural matrix. Reading Meyerhold's theatre as collage practice allows for an exploration of the director's use of fragmentation and juxtaposition to place the spectator in a position of uncertainty akin to the unsettling effect of the collaged canvas. Focusing on Meyerhold's 1926 production of *The Government Inspector*, it is possible to identify the use of fragmentation and juxtaposition operating on two levels in his theatre. In his essay 'The Fairground Booth' (1911–1912), Meyerhold considers the connection between art and reality, as formulated by symbolist writer Andrei Bely. Bely, cited by Meyerhold, states:

Art is incapable of conveying the sum of reality, that is, all concepts as they succeed one another in time. Art dismantles reality, depicting it now spatially, now temporally. For

this reason, art consists either in images or in the alternation of images: the first yields the spatial forms of art, the second – temporal forms.

(Bely in Meyerhold 1911-1912, trans. Braun [1969] 1998: 137)

For Bely, the connection between art and reality is an analytical one, in which art mediates perceptions of the real through different temporal and spatial frames. Meyerhold's choice of this quotation indicates a similar interest in the interaction between the real and artistic representation, allowing the director to consider the temporal and spatial constructions of the stage. This alternation of spatial and temporal models equally applies to the identification of collage practice in Meyerhold's theatre, which operates on both a spatial and temporal level – that is, in both the stand-alone stage image, and in the moment-to-moment alternation of images that constructs the performance as a whole.

### **Collage and the Stage Image: Creating Dissonance**

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The first level of collage-like fragmentation and juxtaposition in Meyerhold's aesthetic consists of the elements that construct the stage image, namely the stage space itself, the area of the theatre building designated for performance; the stage set as placed into that space; and the actors, particularly their costumed appearance. The visual construction of Meyerhold's performance is grounded in the collision of these elements, which exist as independent and often contradictory entities. Through this process of juxtaposition, Meyerhold creates irresolvable differences between the elements that comprise the stage image, undercutting the visual unity of the *mise-en-scène*. This process of fragmentation highlights the theatricality of the stage environment over its representational function, acting as an estrangement or alienation device. The development of the different visual aspects of the production as independent elements (or collage fragments) is particularly apparent in Meyerhold's contrasting use of set and costume.

Meyerhold's approach to costume reflected an interest in the practical function of the actor's garments. During biomechanical training, for example, the fall of the actor's clothing fulfils an important role in developing the student's outside eye: the student actors are taught to consider the creases falling in their loose-fitting training clothes in order to judge the shapes that their bodies are making. This function of the garment is carried across into Meyerhold's use of costume in his productions: Meyerhold considered the costume to be vital in constructing the style and quality of the actor's movement in performance. Actors at the Meyerhold Theatre were taught to play with their costumes, using them as an extension of their own bodies, as can be seen in Meyerhold's work on the role of Yelena Goncharova in Yury Olesha's *A List of Benefits* (1931), originally played by Zinaida Raikh. Maria Sukhanova describes Meyerhold's rehearsal demonstration of the actor's play with costume, in this instance, a cloak:

Vsevolod Emilevich went up onto the stage. [...] He put on the hat and took the cloak out of my hand. He smoothed it and threw it over his right arm. With an elegant gesture of his left hand, he took the top part of the cloak and drew his left hand aside, but not very far, so that all the lower part of the cloak fell beside his left leg. He put his right hand on the cloak and with his other hand spread it out like a fan in front of his leg. The cloak lay beautiful and free.

(Sukhanova in Leach 1989: 71)<sup>56</sup>

Through Meyerhold's movements, the cloak is given an expressive force in the actor's communication with the audience, sometimes directly conveying the character's attitude, sometimes creating an impression to inform the audience's assessment of the character.

Briefly, in the early 1920s, Meyerhold advocated a form of costuming that was wholly functional rather than representational, taking the form of the cover-all work clothes designed by Popova for *The Magnanimous Cuckold* (1922), the *prozodezhda*. These uniform overalls made no allowance for the character, or even for the gender of the performer, reducing the essential representational function of the costume, the distinction of one character from another, to simple signifying elements: red pompoms for one character, black boots for another. This period of complete abstraction in costuming, however, was short-lived, and Meyerhold's use of costume, as traced across his entire career, indicates a strikingly realistic approach.<sup>57</sup> In his pre-revolutionary work, for example, Vera Komissarzhevskaya and the chorus of nuns in *Sister Beatrice* wore what could easily be construed as nuns' habits and Yury Yuriev and the cast of *Don Juan* performed in full period costume. Aside from the brief use of the *prozodezhda*, Meyerhold's post-revolutionary attitude towards costuming appears to have been extremely similar: *A Profitable Post* (1923) and *The Forest* (1924), *The Government Inspector* (1926) and *The Lady of the Camellias* (1934), for example, were all performed in as detailed period dress as his pre-revolutionary productions of *Don Juan* or *Masquerade*. Realistic costuming was not restricted to Meyerhold's performances of the classics, as photographs of his productions of Faiko's *Lake Lyul* (1923) or Ehrenberg's *D.E.* (1924), both contemporary plays, demonstrate.

In contrast to the realistic approach to costuming, Meyerhold's construction of the performance space is strikingly non-naturalistic, from the reduction of the stage in depth for *Sister Beatrice*, to the abstract curtains of *Masquerade*, and, post-revolution, the increasing influence of constructivist design principles on his productions. Rudnitsky notes the collision of realism in costuming with constructivist abstraction in the set in his analysis of *A Profitable Post* (1923):

The consciously discovered and strongly underscored contradiction between asceticism, the constructivist aridity of the overall tone of the decorations, and the colour and historical detail of the costumes [...] was the simple but precise form of the connection achieved in this staging between modern and past times.

(Rudnitsky 1981: 325)

More than being restricted to this production, and achieving more than the connection between past and present, the difference between Meyerhold's use of set and costume provides one of the most striking instances of an estrangement or alienation device in his theatre. Meyerhold's departure from a naturalistic theatrical aesthetic is clearly embodied in his rejection of a naturalistic setting in performance. His productions are instead located (or possibly dislocated) in a stage environment that is often, particularly after 1917, without specific place or space markers. Meyerhold's stage space becomes consciously theatrical because it is consciously a theatre, a stage or platform onto which realistically-costumed performers are placed. The *mise-en-scène* resists unification: the actors and the environment do not seem to belong to the same stage image.

Between 1922 and 1925, the collision of realism and abstraction in the stage image at the Meyerhold Theatre had been restricted to the director's contrasting use of costume and stage design. In photographs of *The Government Inspector*, however, this conflict appears to have been extended to encompass the construction of the performance space. In the 1926 production, Meyerhold created two coexistent areas within the stage space, one realistic and one abstract in tone. The only feature of the design that remained in place throughout the performance was a curved back wall, made of polished dark wood and inset with a series of eleven doors. Meyerhold's own description of the space highlights its potential versatility, conceived of as a dark, quiet background to the action:

The stage will be of almost oval form, its space delimited and moved forward close to the audience. A polished surface must be selected, such as will be associated with the era of the 1830s to 1840s. Let us take mahogany, that is, polished panels of mahogany facing the audience. They must be dark so as not to distract the viewer; they'll make a quiet background. Eleven doors open out of these polished surfaces.

(Meyerhold in Hoover 1988: 151)

The simplicity, almost blandness, of the playing area provided an unobtrusive and neutral background for the action on stage, with Meyerhold's only reference to representation being that the dark wood evokes a certain era. Against this quiet background, the majority of the playing space remained empty until the two central doors opened and trucks, like 'trolley cars,' were wheeled to a downstage centre resting place (Hoover 1988: 151). These wheeled trucks constituted the second aspect of the design and the main playing space for the production, with the majority of the action taking place on them. According to Hoover, only five of the fifteen episodes of the production were not played on these moving platform stages (Hoover 1988: 151–152).

In *The Government Inspector*, the use of a large empty space surrounding the main playing spaces highlighted the constructed nature of the stage environment by presenting the audience with a large area of the stage that did not contribute to the representation of the fictional world of the playtext, a space which has no identity beyond that of the

stage of a theatre. The small platform stages were placed within this overtly theatrical space. Measuring just 3.5 metres by 4.25 metres, these trucks were an obvious expression of the restricted stage spaces that characterized Meyerhold's work with the relief stage. Meyerhold emphasized the restriction of the space by creating highly populated tableaux within the small spaces (Figure 12). The use of a large crowd gathered into a restricted space fulfilled a metaphorical function, expressing in the stage image the sense of oppression that Meyerhold believed should be associated with Gogol's Russia. Rudnitsky describes the opening sequence, the Mayor's announcement to his local officials of the imminent visit of an inspector in an episode entitled 'Chmykhov's Letter':

More and more officials appeared during the episode. One after another, they pushed their way through to the table and sofa, shoving and 'reinforcing' each other. The impression of closeness was continually increased.

(Rudnitsky 1981: 395)

Spatially, the densely populated and highly restricted tableaux were directly juxtaposed with the large, empty stage space that surrounded them. A further collision between the two spaces can be seen in the stylistic decisions made regarding the decoration of the platforms. Aside from being highly populated, the miniature wheeled stages were also highly detailed, indicating a level of realism that was in direct conflict with the heightened theatricality of the surrounding stage environment. As Gvozdev, cited by Rudnitsky, describes the settings on the trucks:

It looks like a staging by the Moscow Art Theater [...] A piece of the real life of the 1830s.

(Gvozdev in Rudnitsky 1981: 394)

The realistic construction of scenes on the trucks enhanced the juxtaposition between the theatrical space and the fictional spaces that combined to create the stage image. The placement of highly realistic fragments into a larger non-representational context consequently provides a clear link between Meyerhold's theatre and the collage practices of the cubist artists. Like Meyerhold's stage, the collage canvas cannot be equated with a specific geographical location, as Max Ernst highlights in his description of collage as 'the meeting of two distant realities on a plane foreign to them both' (Ernst in Copeland 2002: 14). The surface of the canvas does not become synonymous with any of the fragments that inhabit it, but remains independent of them all, existing as a space that is associated with the process of art-making, the tool with which the artist works.

Like the imitation chair caning in Picasso's collage, the overtly constructed nature of Meyerhold's production is emphasized through the collision of art, reality and representation. In Picasso's work, the piece of printed oil cloth has a *trompe l'oeil* effect; it appears at first glance to be a real piece of chair caning. It consequently draws the



viewer's attention to the constructed nature of the canvas on which it is placed (the canvas is an artistic construction; the chair caning, apparently, is not). In the same way, Meyerhold's realistically constructed platform stages instigate a similar process of recognition, highlighting the theatricality of the surrounding stage space through their realism. However, like the oil cloth, these stages are on closer inspection as constructed as the environment by which they are surrounded. Consequently, the collage of the realistic and the abstract calls into question the construction of the canvas or the stage as a whole: the theatrical space is constructed, but the fictional spaces are deceiving the viewer.

The collision of realism and abstraction is a collage process, allowing the audience member to disassociate the actual and fictional spaces in which the performance takes place. This disassociation is initiated through the coexistence of both spaces on stage simultaneously, in the same way that the collage simultaneously presents the viewer with every image fragment comprising the canvas. Meyerhold's theatre addresses the question of actual and fictional space in performance through a collage-like process. Through retaining an element of naturalistic space, Meyerhold ensured that his theatre, like the cubist canvases, did not move into pure abstraction. Meyerhold's theatre functioned not in the abandonment of verisimilitude, but in its collision with abstraction, as is apparent in the spatial construction of *The Government Inspector*.

In addition, the juxtaposition of realism and abstraction re-emphasizes the theatricality of the stage image: in the instance of the realistically costumed actor set against the abstract setting, both space and actor, in their mutual juxtaposition, become theatrical constructs. The audience is not merely expected to look and to identify with the stage image, but to understand that the image is meta-theatrical and to engage consciously with the process of watching theatre. This collage technique is arguably, for Meyerhold, a more effective way of emphasizing the theatricality of the stage environment than complete abstraction in both set and costume, as each element of the stage image serves to distance the other in a cycle of estrangement – they are juxtaposed. Rather than dissolving one element (stage space, set or performers) into another, Meyerhold's stage image retains the individuality of each aspect, or collaged fragment, of the production. The resulting space is clearly theatrical (the edges of the theatre building are never lost, never blended into the stage set) but is equally clearly connected to the real world through its references to reality (in the realist costumes of the actors, for example). The elements of the stage image represent a philosophical collage, uniting within the stage space theatricality, reality and cultural life. The unification of these elements allows the production to function as art (within the context of other artistic enterprises, such as those of the visual artists), to explore the uniqueness of theatre as an art form (to engage with the theatricality of performance) and consequently to exist as a fantasy world filled with possibilities and capable of igniting the audience's imagination. Simultaneously, through the link with reality seen in the costuming, the director allows the audience an entry point into his theatrical world. Meyerhold's stage universe functions best in its ability to sit between



fantasy and reality: to open up possibilities, but not to deem them unobtainable, arguably the key to successful political theatre.

### Collage and the Alternation of Images: Creating Dialogues

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Bely classifies the second process involved in art-making as temporal, that is, the alternation or combination of images. In his production of *The Government Inspector*, Meyerhold's use of small platform stages not only facilitated juxtaposition within the stage image, but also controlled the temporal flow of images across the production. The trucks allowed the director to present the production's episodes as a series of discrete moments, constructing the play's different fictional locations as independent entities. Read against the wider stage space, the platform stages functioned as a collage device to create a sense of dissonance in the stage image. Read against each other, these platforms facilitate the collision of different spaces and times during the theatrical event. The multiplication of spaces through the agency of the platforms further deconstructs the notion of an extended fictional location for the production, turning the performance as a whole into a collaged canvas on which different fragments of space and time meet.

In the same way that the system of curtains designed by Golovin was intended to maintain the rhythmic structure of *Masquerade*, Meyerhold's trucks for *The Government Inspector* provided a solution to the production's multiple scenic locations without resorting to large-scale set changes. The truck system involved the alternation of two separate wheeled platforms: whilst one platform was being used on stage, the second was free backstage to be set for the next episode. When an episode had been played, the truck on stage could be wheeled off and the second wheeled on without any delay or disruption in the pacing of the production. However, Gogol only specifies a limited number of geographical locations in the text of *The Government Inspector*: Joshua Cooper's translation identifies just two, a room in the Mayor's house and the town inn (Gogol, trans. Cooper [1972] 1990). In Meyerhold's production, the number of locations required was substantially multiplied: in Worrall's 1972 reconstruction of Meyerhold's production, ten independent locations are identified, including seven different rooms in the Mayor's house and three locations in the town. In addition, three sequences took place in indiscriminate or composite spaces that did not have specific place or space markers to aid their identification. These spaces were associated with episodes that had a predominant fantasy or dream motif, namely episodes eight and nine (entitled 'An Elephant Brought to its Knees' and 'Bribes') and the final sequence, episode fifteen ('Unprecedented Confusion'). The use of indiscriminate spaces in these episodes intensified the sense of unreality associated with them, suggesting that the action took place in a void, a non-specific dream-space, or even, a performance space: the stage of a theatre.

The fact that Meyerhold chose to increase the number of fictional locations required for his production of *The Government Inspector* suggests that his use of platform stages had a different motivation to that underlying his use of curtains nine years earlier in

*Masquerade*. In the text of *Masquerade*, Lermontov specifies a series of different locations required for the performance: the system of curtains designed by Meyerhold and Golovin was intended primarily to overcome a problem presented by the text and created by the playwright. In *The Government Inspector*, however, Gogol does not present the director with this problem: the number of spaces required is relatively small, and the multiplication of these spaces is motivated by Meyerhold. Through the introduction of locations not specified in the original text and the use of trucks to accommodate these spaces, Meyerhold multiplies the number of locations that must be manifest in the performance space and consequently increases the potential to disrupt the spatial unity of the stage. The multiplication of spaces also contributes to the number of possible meanings that the audience can infer from the *mise-en-scène*, suggesting that meaning is not only contained in the individual settings, but also in the relationship of one setting to the next; that is, not just in the fragments, but also in their combination.

Each time a truck was wheeled onto the stage, the audience was presented with a fragment of a geographical location that was required for the performance of Meyerhold's production of *The Government Inspector*. In the context of the early twentieth century cultural matrix, and by virtue of their naturalistic appearance, these spatial fragments can be read like the fragments in a collage, that is, as representative of an extended geographical location that exists elsewhere and a small section of which is being temporarily transposed to the stage. Unlike the sets of the Moscow Art Theatre, which were intended to suggest to the audience that the rooms on stage continued beyond the visible playing area, there is no need for the audience to identify the stage space at the Meyerhold Theatre as continuing beyond their line of vision. Each truck is restricted in size, with clearly delineated edges containing the realistic representation that inhabits it, and as such each represented an independent and discontinuous piece of another world, briefly placed onto the canvas of the stage. Like the fragments of a collage, the trucks are discontinuous pieces of images selected and placed onto the canvas in an arrangement that frequently seeks to highlight the temporary nature of the composition: they are easily placed onto the stage space and easily removed. Cubism, and in particular cubist collage, pre-suppose the end of a unified fantasy location for the artwork by providing a variety of locations each represented by an image fragment. In the same way, in Meyerhold's theatre, the stage becomes a neutralized space, a space that exists outside of the notion of fictional identity. Meyerhold's use of the trucks represents a device functioning in the same way as the fragments of the collaged canvas: both trucks and image fragments aimed to free the work of art from the notion of linear space.

*The Government Inspector* was a historical project for Meyerhold. The images of Gogol's Russia which the director presented to the audience were historical fragments that appeared and disappeared, dreamlike. The use of the restricted space of the platforms distorted the historical aspect of the image, informing the spectator that these fragments of another world were not merely being presented to them, but were also being commented on by the director: through the collage-like structure of the performance, Meyerhold is engaging with the problems of presenting history on the stage. As Roland Barthes claims:

[T]he life of someone whose existence has somewhat preceded our own encloses in its particularity the very tension of history, its division. History is hysterical: it is constituted only if we consider it, only if we look at it – and in order to look at it, we must be excluded from it.

(Barthes [1981] 2000: 65)

Meyerhold presents the audience with life in Gogol's provincial town as a series of fragmented images, museum pieces, disconnected from the reality of the theatrical experience. However, there was nothing nostalgic in Meyerhold's interpretation of Nikolayan Russia. The director sought, as Barthes suggests, to cross the division between past and present by critiquing the history he presented. His conclusions are not sympathetic, and the crowded platforms mock the mayor and his officials, making them grotesque figures of comedy. Through the platforms, however, the characters are not merely mocked, but also rendered as ineffectual and outdated. They are confined within an extremely restricted fictional world. For the majority of the play, they have no influence on the wider non-representational stage space. It is this wider stage space that is free from fictional location and is consequently presented to the audience as a real space, a self-acknowledged stage: the stage at GosTIM, the State Meyerhold Theatre, as it was by then known, was part of the real world and the real Revolution that had seized it. The characters of *The Government Inspector* have little access to this world, and cannot control it. They are presented to the audience as outdated figures with outdated views.

Meyerhold's use of the trucks has an additional collage effect in how meaning is communicated to the spectator: the collagist's use of fragments allows the viewer to engage with meanings outside of the realm of narrative. When the stage space is conceived of as a collaged canvas in which the moving platform stages function as image fragments, it is possible to construct implicit meanings in Meyerhold's production of *The Government Inspector* that function outside of the narrative of Gogol's text. *The Government Inspector*, which in Gogol's text has five acts, had in Meyerhold's production fifteen such episodes, each individually titled. Although innovations such as the system of curtains used in *Masquerade* indicate traces of a developing episodic structure in Meyerhold's pre-revolutionary work, it was in his post-revolutionary productions that the principle was most fully realized. The episodes in his 1924 version of Ostrovsky's *The Forest*, for example, were largely self-contained, signalling a new development in Meyerhold's fragmentation of time and indicating a non-linearity in performance. As Braun describes the textual divisions in *The Forest*:

Meyerhold largely ignored the play's original time sequence and rearranged Ostrovsky's text according to the principles of montage. Altering little of the actual dialogue, he divided the original five acts into thirty-three episodes, shuffling them into a new order, and inserting pantomime interludes for the sake of effective contrasts of mood and tempo.

(Braun [1969] 1998: 191)

The important structural innovation in Meyerhold's production of *The Forest*, therefore, was not the division of the text into episodes, the fragmentation, but the re-combination of these episodes according to the 'principles of montage'.<sup>58</sup> There was no need for the images, or episodes, to progress linearly; they are instead arranged thematically or rhythmically to serve the higher purpose of the rhythmic structure of the production. In his comparison of Meyerhold's theatre practice with that of Stanislavsky, Leach identifies a key schism in the directors' aesthetics by distinguishing between tasks and motifs. The division of the text into segments was an important element in the construction of the performance in each director's aesthetic. Leach's analysis, however, differentiates between the 'bits' of the Stanislavskian performance and the 'bricks' of a Meyerholdian approach. Arguing that the 'bits' employed by Stanislavsky were defined by tasks, whereas Meyerhold's 'bricks' took their identity from motifs, Leach claims:

Each 'brick' therefore was more self-contained than a Stanislavskian bit, and moved *towards* a 'number', as in a cabaret, or a 'turn', as in the circus.

(Leach 2003: 125)<sup>59</sup>

The use of motifs rather than tasks clarifies Meyerhold's approach to the construction of the performance and to how the actor was to engage with her part. Stanislavsky's emphasis on tasks demonstrates the linearity of the Art Theatre's approach, both in terms of the construction of the performance and in the portrayal of the characters. By its nature, a task is goal-based, implying a linear, teleological progression towards a final point. In their combination, tasks, particularly constructed theatrical tasks such as those employed in Stanislavsky's System, must progress linearly, one after another, until the ultimate goal is achieved. This emphasis on progression towards an end point permeates Stanislavsky's approach to theatre, and is particularly apparent in the division of the play into objectives that are combined to create the overriding super-objective. In contrast, Meyerholdian motifs need not be goal-based. A motif is an identifiable pattern of sound or movement; like the *commedia lazze*, it is a goal in itself. Motifs need not progress linearly and more than one can be engaged with at any given moment. The motifs of a production, therefore, can be collaged to create non-narrative meanings through their juxtaposition; Stanislavsky's tasks, by their nature, cannot. This is evident in Leach's comparison of Meyerhold's theatre to the circus or cabaret, where the acts ordinarily do not contribute to an overriding narrative, but instead are arranged to create a mood or atmosphere. Meyerhold's reconciliation of narrative-based texts with cabaret or circus-influenced structures highlights the director's concern with theatre's potential to communicate meaning on both a narrative and a non-narrative level.

Episodes five, six and seven of *The Government Inspector* demonstrate Meyerhold's collaged construction of the performance through juxtapositions across episodes. An analysis of the spatial construction of the episodes demonstrates the connection between spatial structure and theme in Meyerhold's theatre and indicates how the director

constructed meaning through the juxtaposition of the fragments. In these three sequences, meaning is implied through the collision of spatial structures, suggesting echoes between characters that go on to inform the spectator's reading of the play's narrative. The transitions between episodes five, 'Filled with the Tend'rest Love', six, 'The Procession' and seven, 'Behind a Bottle of "Tolstobriucha"', characterize Meyerhold's emphasis on juxtaposition in his construction of the performance. 'Filled with the Tend'rest Love' and 'Behind a Bottle of "Tolstobriucha"', episodes five and seven, were staged on the platform stages. In episode five, the location was the Mayor's wife's bedroom; in episode seven, another room in the Mayor's home, presumably, judging from the sofa and the presence of all the town officials and the Mayor's family, a reception room. Episode six, dividing the two, employed a contrasting spatial structure, as described in Worrall's reconstruction:

The lights went up on a stage which was now bare, except for a light coloured metal balustrade running across its entire width and positioned across the rear.

(Worrall 1972: 86)

The balustrade divided Khlestakov, who appeared downstage of it, from the town officials following him, who were crowded into the space upstage. This staging maintained the principle of restricted space, established by the trucks, by focusing the spectator's attention on a fragment of the stage that was long and narrow (and reminiscent of the relief stage), rather than square, expanding the audience's field of vision across the width of the stage to the wings, emphasizing the restriction of both playing spaces through the juxtaposition in their shape.

Episodes five and six of his production reflected Meyerhold's own conception of the play more than that of the playwright. Episode five, 'Filled with the Tend'rest Love', featured a fantasy sequence devised by Meyerhold, and episode six, 'The Procession', was conceived entirely by the director, and does not appear in Gogol's text. Through his construction of the two episodes, Meyerhold created two parallel sequences of revelry, each revolving around one key character. Consequently, the director set up two contrasting carnivalesque events that suggested similarities between the behaviour of their central characters: the Mayor's wife in episode five and Khlestakov in episode six.

Episode five constituted an exploration of the vanity and sexuality of the Mayor's wife, Anna Andreevna. The carnivalesque element was suggested by a rapid series of costume changes, described by Worrall as 'a firework display of dresses', watched by the 'voyeur' Dobchinsky who 'stood transfixed by a wave of lust' (Worrall 1972: 85, 86). In episode six, Meyerhold's staging of Khlestakov's procession was equally, although contrastingly, carnivalesque in its structure. The drunken conman, having convinced the Mayor that he is the Government Inspector, leads a parade of the town officials through the streets of the city to musical accompaniment. These contrasting, even (within the context of 1926) stereotypically female and male, carnival sequences function as fragments of a larger idea, explorations of carnival behaviour that suggest to the audience a connection between the



Figure 1: Picasso, Pablo (1881-1973): *Les Femmes d'Alger* (Paris, June-July 1907).

New York, Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). Oil on canvas, 8' x 7' 8" (243.9 x 233.7 cm). Acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest. 333.1939 © 2014. Digital image, The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence.

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Figure 2: Malevich, Kasimir (1878–1935): *The Knife Grinder or Principle of Glittering* (1912–13).

Yale University Art Gallery. Oil on canvas 31 5/16 x 31 5/16 in. (79.5 x 79.5 cm).  
Photo credit: Yale University Art Gallery.



Figure 3: *Sister Beatrice* by M. Maeterlinck, directed by Vs. Meyerhold. Theatre of V. F. Komissarzhevskaya, 1906. V. F. Komissarzhevskaya in the role of Beatrice (hands folded on her chest). Paper, photoprinting (9x13.7 cm).

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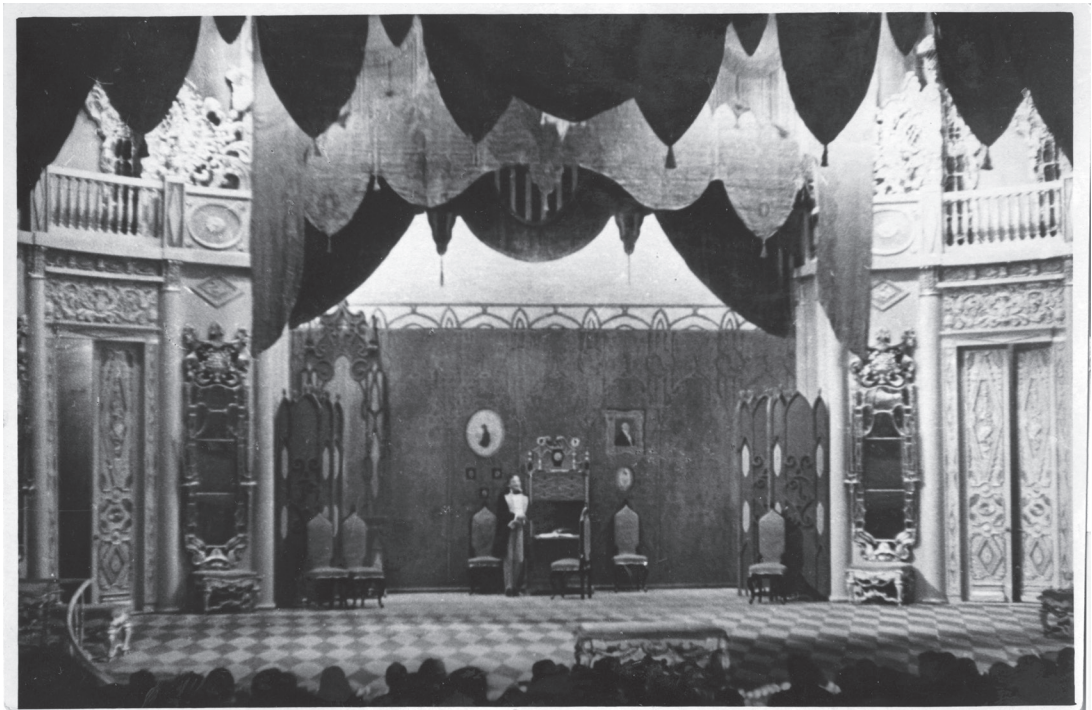


Figure 4: *Masquerade* by M. Y. Lermontov, directed by Vs. Meyerhold. The Leningrad State Pushkin Academic Dramatic Theatre, 1938 (original production 1917, Alexandrinsky Theatre). Act two. N. Novsky as Shprikh. Photograph taken 1938-1939.

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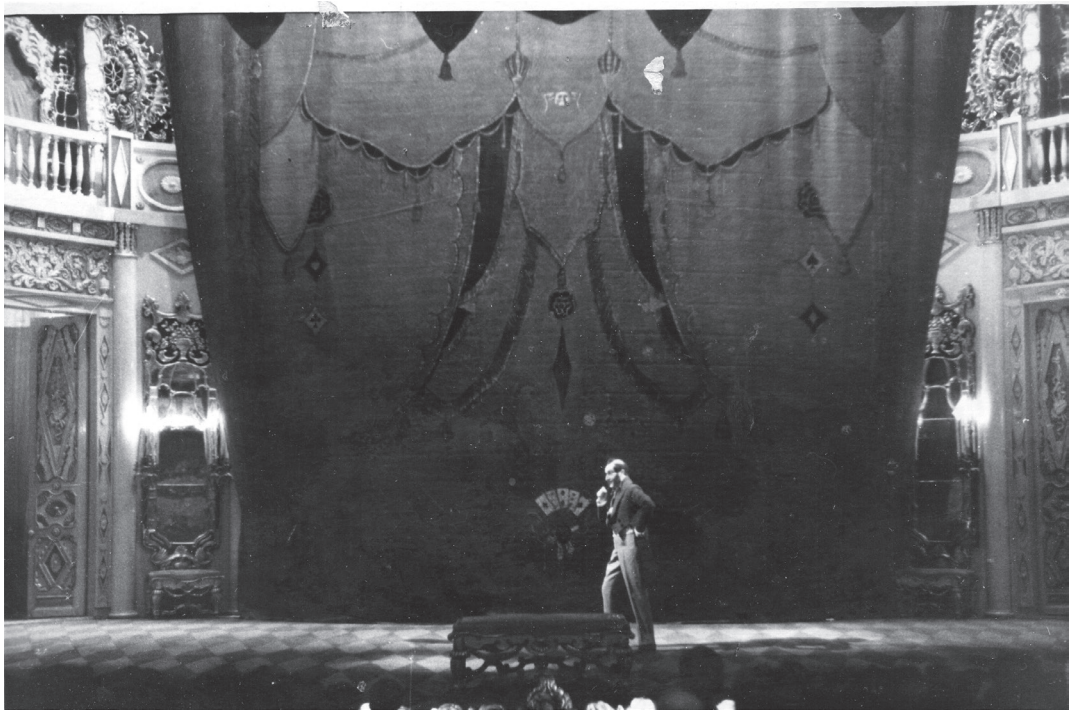


Figure 5: *Masquerade* by M. Y. Lermontov, directed by Vs. Meyerhold. The Leningrad State Pushkin Academic Dramatic Theatre, 1933 (second version of the staging, original production 1917, Alexandrinsky Theatre). Act three. Y. M. Yuriev as Arbenin. Photograph taken 1933 (museum estimate) by O. N. Grigor.

© The St. Petersburg State Museum of Theatre and Music.



Figure 6: Metzinger, Jean (1883-1956): *Two Women* (ca. 1913).

Oil on canvas, 92x66cm. Gothenburg Museum of Art, Sweden.

© ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2014.

© Photo Gothenburg Museum of Art, Sweden.





Figure 7: Duchamp, Marcel (1887-1968): *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* (1912).

Oil on canvas, 1912 57 7/8 x 35 1/8 inches (147 x 89.2 cm) Philadelphia Museum of Art: The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection, 1950.

© Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris / Estate of Marcel Duchamp.

© Succession Marcel Duchamp/ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2014.



Figure 8: Elisofon, Eliot (1911-1973): *Marcel Duchamp Descending a Staircase* (1952).

© Eliot Elisofon/The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images.



Figure 9: Biomechanical étude: 'Archery' ('Shooting the Bow'). Photograph by A. A. Temerin. Performed by Z. Zlobin, L. N. Sverdlin, I.V. Hold (Meyerhold), R.M. Genina. ГЭКТЕМАС (GEKTEMAS), 1927 (13x18 cm).

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Figure 10: *The Magnanimous Cuckold* by F. Crommelynck, directed by Vs. Meyerhold. Meyerhold Theatre, 1928. THE COWHERD ('Marcel - an ass; Jean Captain - a pig!') Z. Raikh as Stella, Nikolai Kustov, and actors Tsyplyuhin, Neshchiplenko, Zlobin, Schulmann, Sverdlin, Shorin as the village men. Photograph.

© Federal State Budget Institution of Culture "A. A. Bakhrushin State Central Theatre Museum", Moscow.



Figure 11: Picasso, Pablo (1881-1973): *Still Life: The Cane Chair* or *Still Life with Chair Caning* (1911).

Paris, Musee Picasso.

© Succession, Picasso/DACS, London 2014.

© 2014. Photo Scala, Florence.





Figure 12: *The Government Inspector*, by N. Gogol, directed by Vs. Meyerhold. GosTIM, 1926. Episode 15 ('Unprecedented Confusion').

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Figure 13: *The Government Inspector*, by N. Gogol, directed by Vs. Meyerhold. GosTIM, 1926. The Dumb Scene (dolls).

© Federal State Budget Institution of Culture “A. A. Bakhrushin State Central Theatre Museum”, Moscow.



Figure 14: *The Government Inspector*, by N. Gogol, directed by Vs. Meyerhold. GosTIM, 1926. Episode 7 ('Behind a bottle of "Tolstobriucha" (this is the strong drinking kind)') A. Kelberer as the visiting officer, Chikul as Kazachok, Neustroev as the Bear with Jug, Z. Raikh as Anna Andreevna, P. Starkovsky as the Mayor, E. Garin as Khlestakov.

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Figure 15: Cartoon by unknown artist, under the pseudonym "Tom". Vs. Meyerhold. The 1910th: 'Today here, and tomorrow there'. Paper, ink, feather (15.6x18.9 cm).

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Figure 16: Cartoon by Mikhail Slepian: 'Mystical "profession de foi" of Meyerhold: Balagan – that's me'. Published in the journal *Theatre and Art*. 1907. №2. Page 34.

© Federal State Budget Institution of Culture "A. A. Bakhrushin State Central Theatre Museum", Moscow.





Figure 17: Sapunov, Nikolai (1880 – 1912): Sketch of decoration for the play *Balaganchik* [*The Fairground Booth*] by A. Blok.

Image property of the State Tretyakov Gallery. © State Tretyakov Gallery.

characters made through the collage principle of juxtaposition. The Mayor's wife and the false inspector become parallel characters with complementary characteristics, reflecting Meyerhold's belief that Anna was a 'Khlestakov in skirts', a female parallel to the sinister conman (Worrall 1972: 85).

The transition into episode seven further exploits collage principles to endorse this parallel, featuring the two characters side-by-side as the scene's focal point. Episode seven, 'Behind a Bottle of "Tolstobriucha"', was an adaptation of Gogol's third act, showing Khlestakov's seduction of Anna through a fictional description of his life as a government official. In addition to the shared narrative focus on Anna and Khlestakov, Meyerhold further implied the similarity between the characters in his construction of the stage space. The connection between the previous episodes was highlighted by the coexistence of their staging in episode seven: according to Worrall, the balustrade used in episode six remained on stage, but was split in the middle to allow a platform to be wheeled on. The spatial collision of episodes five and six prepares the audience for the meeting in episode seven of the two characters Meyerhold perceived as alter-egos.

Meyerhold's belief that Anna and Khlestakov were parallel characters, and his construction of the staging for these episodes to highlight this parallel, clearly has implications for the reading of the sequence, emphasizing how the collage process allows the spectator to construct non-narrative meanings through the collision of episodes: particular implications emerge regarding the construction of the two characters and the spectator's understanding of their motivations. In Meyerhold's production, Khlestakov's relationship with Anna is explicitly constructed as sexually motivated, as is evidenced, for example, in a piece of business in the episode entitled 'After Penza'. The Mayor mentions to Khlestakov that he wishes to send a note to his wife, and Khlestakov is obliged to produce a sheet of paper. During his search, Meyerhold had Garin's Khlestakov 'pawing through the bedclothes', noting that 'Khlestakov [...] is all fantasies about the wife' (Meyerhold in Chambers and Krizhanskaya 1998: 77). Through establishing the two characters as parallels, Meyerhold confused the sexual identity of each, implying Anna's status as a sexual predator and Khlestakov's femininity. This femininity was an aspect of the character that was further emphasized through the construction of a more masculine counterpart in the form of the Silent Officer, a melancholy and completely silent figure, invented by Meyerhold, who shadowed Garin's Khlestakov throughout the production. This confusion of gender roles not only contributed to the comedy of the production, but also to its general sense of unease, undercutting the absolute implications of a male-female binary and adding to the impression of an unstable world in which everything is not quite as it seems.

The key to understanding the function of the fragmentation of spatial and temporal processes in Meyerhold's later work can be found in a series of lectures he gave in 1929, published in 1930 under the title 'The Reconstruction of the Theatre'. In these lectures, Meyerhold expressed his belief in the practicality and potential universality of trucks similar to those used in *The Government Inspector*, and argued for them as the basis for the construction of a new theatrical space:



[W]e must destroy the box-stage once and for all, for only then can we hope to achieve a truly dynamic spectacle. By making the stage machinery sufficiently flexible to present a series of rapidly changing scenes, we shall be able to abolish the tedious unity of place and the compression of the action into four or five unwieldy acts. The new stage will have no proscenium arch and will be equipped with a series of platforms which can be moved horizontally and vertically to facilitate transformation scenes and the manipulation of kinetic constructions.

(Meyerhold 1930, trans. Braun [1969] 1998: 257)

In a direct parallel to the loss of geographical location found in cubist collage, Meyerhold equates the use of trucks with the dissolution of the Aristotelian Unity of Place. The introduction of trucks allowed a new flexibility in the facilitation of multiple episodes: the trucks enabled Meyerhold to shift action quickly from one location to another, and implicitly, from one time to another. Fragmentation furnishes the director with the potential to transcend linearity in his construction of time and space. Through the use of these trucks, traditional notions of the unity of space, not in the Aristotelian, but in the positivist, sense, were subverted. Spaces, and by implication times, could be superimposed one upon another: the stage does not recognize the spatial and temporal boundaries of quotidian reality.<sup>60</sup> Each truck represents a different spatial and temporal fragment, connected to the other fragments outside the boundaries of linear space and time, suggesting that events or moments on stage are connected not just through narrative progression but also thematically, rhythmically, through characters (as in Khlestakov and Anna) and even through formal constructions such as shape or colour. Like the fragmentary images of the collage, the connection that each episode appears to have to the previous and next episode is by virtue of its presence on the same canvas, in the same stage space. The placement of each truck in the same downstage position encourages the audience member to construct these connections.

Meyerhold's production of *The Government Inspector* raises questions regarding the relationship between the spatial and temporal organization of the performance, and the collage process becomes an articulation of space that facilitated a multiplication of spatial and temporal identities. Meyerhold appears to have developed a theatrical world that functioned according to its own spatial and temporal rules, introducing not only a collage-like construction of the performance itself, but also facilitating a remodelling of spectatorship founded on collage principles, creating a theatrical experience for the spectator that echoed the viewing of a cubist canvas.

## Chapter 5

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### Spectatorship





The structure of the cubist canvas is such that a conscious awareness of the moment of reception is embedded into the artwork, placing the role of the spectator at the centre of cubist practice. This concern with the mode of spectatorship is particularly apparent in the cubist appropriation of collage. As an expressive device, collage constructs a specific and unique model of viewing, which was implicitly adopted by the avant-garde artists as the practices of fragmentation and juxtaposition became a significant part of their *oeuvre*. Although the choices of the artist can infer specific readings of the collaged canvas, the collage technique itself is such that it precludes closure and completeness, even within the moment of reception, giving the artwork a sense of something deferred and placing the ultimate responsibility for meaning making with the viewer. Uncertainty motivates the avant-garde use of collage, as Picasso observes:

[Through collage, the] displaced object entered a universe for which it was not made and where it retains, in a measure, its strangeness. And this strangeness was what we wanted to make people think about because we were aware that our world was becoming very strange and not exactly reassuring.

(Picasso in Perloff 1986: 44)

Picasso sees the artwork as fulfilling a vital function as a mediator between the viewer and modernity: it is intended to 'make people think', to engage them actively with the canvas and, by implication, with the world that it represents. The use of non-realist techniques within this representation is what invites the viewer into an active participation with the artwork. Breaking the association between artistic practice and everyday visual engagement with the world (the process that Kockelkoren and Panofsky associate with linear perspective), the use of collage makes the experience of viewing the artwork conscious and deliberate for the spectator.

However, this consciousness in reception could arguably be applied to any of the non-realist painting techniques employed by the avant-garde: from the conflicting planes of cubism to the multiple lines of rayonnism, or the ethereality of the symbolists. The cubist mode of spectatorship constructed through the use of collage is more complex than the simple encouragement for the spectator to think. Collage constructs a specific and distinctive model of spectatorship, a way of viewing that encourages the spectator to be active, allows them to be empowered, establishes them as in relationship with others and engages them with multiple processes and realities.

## Collage as Active Spectatorship

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The construction of the collaged canvas is such that whatever meaning might be created in the artist's process, these readings are secondary to the experience of the canvas by the viewer. This is most apparent in works where collage is used as a chance mechanism, for example, by the surrealists as an access to the subconscious, or by the Dadaists as an expression of their experience of the First World War. These works profess no conscious construction of meaning on the part of the artist and as a result, the impetus for the ordering of their reception is with the viewer. Not all collage practice, however, functions according to the principles of chance, and even in collage where content is structured by the artist, meaning is dependent on the viewer making choices regarding their own viewing experience. Picasso, in his *Bar Table with Bottle and Wine Glass* (1912), for example, may have intended to imply a corrupt and foolish 'drunkenness' in French society by placing politicians statements from newspapers within drawings of wine bottles (see Leighton 1989), but this sort of commentary only functions if the viewer chooses to read the newspaper print, rather than simply engaging with it as a formal, aesthetic element within the canvas: it is dependent on the active decision of the viewer.<sup>61</sup>

Significant in the promotion of active spectatorship in collage practice is the identity of the various elements that comprise the image. Kuspit notes that the fragments chosen by Picasso and Braque fell into two categories: they were either fragments of reality, often quotidian in nature (newspapers, wine bottle labels and so forth), or they were *trompe l'oeil* representations of reality (oil cloth printed as imitation chair caning, for example). The first category Kuspit classifies as 'purely worldly elements [...] fragments of dailiness'; the second are 'mixed or impure elements [...] residual images of an imitated nature' (Kuspit 1989: 55). The combination of these fragments is such that each enters into a relationship with the other elements surrounding it, and this relationship alters the viewer's perception of each individual fragment. In practice, this results in a constant shifting in the reading of the canvas: the viewer might see and read fragment A as a newspaper clipping. They then encounter fragment B, which may alter their reading of fragment A. The reinterpreted fragment A, however, will then alter the reading of fragment B and so forth. The result, as Kuspit notes, is a canvas in a state of constant flux, which resists a definitive reading:

Collage is a demonstration of this process of the many becoming the one, with the one never fully resolved because of the many that continue to impinge upon it. Every entity is potentially relevant to every other entity's existence, is potentially a fragment in every other entity's existence. This is the relativistic message of collage: the keeping in play of the possibility of the entry of the many into the one, the fusion of the many into the one. Conrescence is, in effect, never finished, however much there may be the illusion of completeness.

(Kuspit 1989: 42)

The collage is a space of constant and shifting interactions, placing the viewer in a position of interpretation and reinterpretation of the image fragments. It is impossible to complete this process and resolve the canvas to a state of stasis. Reception is not only active, but also irresolvable, continuous and absorbing for the viewer.

### **Collage as Empowered Spectatorship**

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The active role of the spectator leads to an empowerment of spectatorship as it functions in the cubist collage. This can be seen in the construction of the canvas as surface in cubist practice, as already considered in this volume. Unlike the fixed vanishing point of linear perspective, which directs the viewer's eye towards a specific point on the canvas, encouraging a particular structure and order for the viewing experience, the collage has no dominant area and an equal weighting across its surface. The viewer's eye, not necessarily directed to any specific location, has a greater freedom to construct a personal viewing experience. The eye may roam freely over the canvas, and the viewer is in charge of constructing their own experience at a fundamental, visceral level.<sup>62</sup>

This empowerment of the spectator deconstructs any hierarchical relationship between art maker and art viewer, passing agency and responsibility to the spectator. In her analysis of the collages of Max Ernst, Felicia Ronca appears to entirely reverse this hierarchy through the removal of any presence of the artist in the work at all:

What [Ernst] sought was essentially a visual equivalent to the verbal idiom with its pre-established context (black type on white page) where significant transformations might occur with a minimal amount of stylistic intervention by the artist [...] Thus, the presence of the artist is often virtually undetectable in the final product. Bereft of obvious stylistic clues, the spectator is forced to become a 'reader' and interpret the collage for himself as if it were a text or a poem.

(Ronca 1979: 42)

The use of artistic technique as a mediator in order to extract entirely the presence of the artist results in a radical empowerment of the spectator. Ronca's argument may not be valid for all cubist collage practice: the realization of the artwork as mediated by an artist is a vital aspect of the cubist aesthetic. In addition, in instances when these works are encountered at a period of significant historical distance, and within the context of historiographic understanding of artists, movements and so forth, the identity of the artist is far from obscured in the moment of reception (even when the artist is Ernst). However, the complexity of collage flux, and the (in some instances, deliberate) obfuscation of meaning in the collaged canvases, certainly encourages an active and empowered mode of spectatorship, requiring viewers to 'read' these works, even at historical distance, as Ronca suggests.

## Collage as Relational Spectatorship

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Ronca's observation of the absence of the artist is an extreme expression of the way in which collage empowers the spectator. In her case, absence appears to be used as a metaphor in order to allow the significance of the viewer's role to emerge. In reality, the obviously constructed nature of the collage does not allow for the complete removal of the artist in the moment of reception. Particularly significant in the model of collage spectatorship is that the viewer must know and be conscious of the process in which they are engaged. There is nothing natural, or inevitable about collage. In viewing the cubist canvas, the spectator is aware of both the process of the construction of the artwork by the artist and their own process of interpretation and observation. According to Polkinhorn, this awareness of creation and reception is fundamental to the functioning of the collage aesthetic:

For collage to be perceived as such, the phases in the composition process must be discernible: that is, one must *know* that collaging has occurred in the course of art-making. The artist must construct signs whereby the viewer is told that collaging has occurred.

(Polkinhorn 1989: 219)<sup>63</sup>

The codes by which the collage has been constructed are evident and apparent to the viewer in the moment of reception: collage is a conscious visual language. To engage with the collage is to engage not only with the artwork itself, but with the extended moment of creation that has occurred in the work of the artist. In this sense, the process of collaging is not restricted to the artist's studio, but is extended into the encounter with the viewer. As such, collage allows a relationship to develop between the process of making the work and the moment of its reception. Rebecca Jones observes the significance of relationship in collage as it is constructed in contemporary culture. Drawing on Eduardo Kac's work on telepresence, she notes:

Eduardo Kac once commented that if the art object and the artist are eliminated (taking off from Duchamp's questioning the art object) then art comes to be about relationships and interactions within a network.

(Jones 2007)

In their reference to Duchamp, Jones' and Kac's elimination of the categories of art maker and object makes an interesting connection between contemporary work on telepresence and the innovations of the early twentieth century avant-garde. The use of appropriated objects in both collage and Duchamp's Ready-made sculptures demonstrates the impulse to question the identity of the art object and disrupt the creator-created binary. If the process of viewing the artwork is seen as active, and, implicitly, creative, then the moment

of reception becomes a moment of relationship: between viewer and object, viewer and artist, artist and object. The extended temporal nature of this relationship, as a network of shifting moments, parallels the reception of the artwork with the reception of a staged performance, in which the relationship between actor, spectator, writer, director and so forth is fundamental to the function of the experience.

### **Collage Spectatorship as Engagement with Multiplicity**

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When considered as a technique employed by the cubist artists, collage practice is made distinct by its location on a surface (that is, on the artist's canvas). As such, collage must respond to the unique conditions of canvas art, particularly in terms of construction (the surface) and reception. The consideration of fine art practice in its relationship to performance, particularly in the instance of collage that has been expounded as idea beyond visual arts practice, brings with it the temptation to collapse terms such as collage, assemblage (collage in three dimensions, for example, sculptural collage) and montage (collage in four dimensions, for example, in film). This collapsing of terms, however, is problematic in that it does not allow for the distinctive model of spectatorship that collage constructed for the visual artists.

The relationship between collage and montage theory in particular highlights this issue. The montage device arguably does fulfil the criteria of an adaptation of collage that functions in both the third (spatial) and fourth (temporal) dimensions. Marjorie Perloff classes montage as a 'cognate' of collage, a temporal expression of a spatial device:

It is customary to distinguish between collage and montage: the former refers, of course, to spatial relationships, the latter to temporal; the former to static objects, the latter, originally a film term, to things in motion. Accordingly, *collage* is generally used when referring to the visual arts; *montage*, to the verbal.

(Perloff 1986: 246, footnote 5)<sup>64</sup>

Despite the differences between the terms, Perloff's ultimate conclusion is that '*collage* is the master term, montage techniques being an offshoot of early collage practice', quoting Denis Bablet's claim that 'a collage can be a montage and a montage a collage' (Perloff 1986: 246, footnote 5).

This definition, however, allows for far too much slippage between the terms. As Perloff observes, the term 'montage' originates in film, denoting, in the first instance, simply the process of editing: the Russian *montazh* or the French *montage* (Nowell-Smith 1991: xiii–xvi). This usage is akin to the pre-avant-garde use of the term 'collage', an adaptation of the French verb *coller*, meaning 'to glue'. Both terms underwent a redefinition during the early twentieth century, eventually coming to imply a more complex process than the mechanics of combining fragments. Although film's most well-known advocate

of montage as a theory is Meyerhold's contemporary Sergei Eisenstein, avant-garde cinematic montage predates his work and is initially attributed to the film-maker Lev Kuleshov. Kuleshovian montage, however, is less sophisticated than Eisenstein's theory, positing that images can be combined for specific effect, and that the meaning of an image can be altered when it is placed in combination with other images, resulting in the well-known representation of montage theory as  $A + B = C$ . Kuleshov experimentally verified the latter principle by showing an audience a shot of an expressionless face followed by an image of either a bowl of soup, a body in a coffin or a child playing, and evaluating the spectators' responses. The results are described by Kuleshov's pupil, Vsevolod Pudovkin, later a contemporary of Eisenstein:

When we showed the three combinations to an audience which had not been let into the secret, the result was terrific. The public raved about the acting of the artist. They pointed out the heavy pensiveness of his mood over the forgotten soup, were touched and moved by the deep sorrow with which he looked on the dead woman, and admired the light, happy smile with which he surveyed the girl at play. But we knew that in all three cases the face was exactly the same.

(Pudovkin in Macgowan 1965: 236)

In contrast, Eisensteinian montage focuses on 'collision', a process of juxtaposition similar to the combination of fragments in avant-garde collage (Eisenstein [1991] 1994: 13). In his article 'Beyond the Shot', Eisenstein advocates a multi-levelled montage technique, incorporating collision both within the individual image and in the assembly of the images, providing a direct link between the shot, or image, isolated and the shot in sequence:

So, montage is conflict.

Conflict lies at the basis of every art. (A unique 'figurative' transformation of the dialectic.)

The shot is then a montage cell. Consequently we must also examine it from the point of view of *conflict*.

Conflict within the shot is:

potential montage that, in its growing intensity, breaks through its four-sided cage and pushes its conflict out into montage impulses between the montage fragments [...].

(Eisenstein 1988: 144–145)<sup>65</sup>

Eisenstein's personal and professional links with Meyerhold are well documented, not least by the film-maker himself (Eisenstein 1995: 106). Marjorie Hoover's use of the phrase "cinematification" of the theater' to describe Meyerhold's work on *The Government Inspector* reflects the cross-over between Meyerholdian and Eisensteinian techniques during the post-revolutionary period (Hoover 1988: 153).<sup>66</sup> The fifteen episodes of *The*



*Government Inspector* were presented to the audience independently, as linear fragments parallel to the cinematic shots. Although the transitions between episodes were smooth, designed to maintain the rhythmic flow of the production, the movement from one episode to the next was still emphasized. No attempt was made to hide the boundaries between the episodes and often these transitions were highlighted by the dimming of the stage lights, mimicking the cuts in a film edit. The spatial and rhythmic contrasts in the combination of the episodes demonstrated Meyerhold's concern for what Eisenstein terms 'collision'.

There is, however, a necessity to consider what makes collage practice unique from montage in order to understand Meyerhold's relationship with the cubist artists, particularly in reference to the construction of spectatorship. There is a key difference between collage and cinematic montage: montage theory relies on linearity in reception. The final impression of the sequence of shots relies on the viewer engaging with each image in turn, committing the first shot to memory, A, and then combining the memory of the first shot with the second shot, B (or the memory of B, as film footage is constantly moving), in order to form the impression, C. Therefore, C is not simply A plus B but the memory of A plus (the memory of) B. In contrast, the fragments of a collage are not presented to the audience in such a linear sequence, even though the viewer may choose to impose linearity by focusing on one aspect of the image at a time. The simultaneous reception of all the elements of the collage is what makes its use of fragmentation and juxtaposition different to that of montage. Collage does not rely on the viewer's memory of an earlier image with which the current image is juxtaposed. Instead, both images are concurrently manifested on the canvas. The simultaneous presence of image fragments allows the viewer to engage simultaneously with more than one reality. Through the displacement of the fragments from their role in reality onto the collaged canvas, Harold Rosenberg claims that 'collage invites the viewer to respond with a multiple consciousness' (Rosenberg 1989: 64).

The collage spectator, then, is not only active in their thinking engagement with the canvas, empowered by their role as vital to the construction of the work, and engaged in a series of networked relationships. In addition, they are engaging with a new construction of viewing on the canvas, operating in a multiplicity of consciousness in which they are able to engage simultaneously with more than one reality. It is these aspects of spectatorship that the collage canvas offered as possibilities to the early twentieth century avant-garde and that are also apparent in Meyerhold's construction of the spectator in his theatre.

### **Meyerhold's Models of Spectatorship**

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Meyerhold is a rare example, as Stourac and McCreery point out, of a practitioner who tried seriously to analyse the effects of his works on audiences. A code was developed

for the notation of response [...] he attacked the hegemony of text-centred criticism as well as denarrativizing productions and drawing the audience from being passive addressees to co-creators.

(Bennett [1997] 2001: 6)

Susan Bennett's description of Meyerhold's attitude towards the audience highlights both his serious commitment to the study of spectatorship and the similarities between his practice and that of the cubist collagists. Meyerhold's desire to understand audience response is embodied in his work on the notation system to which Bennett refers, alongside other methods devised by the director in order to track the reception of his practice. Leach provides a survey of these practices, which included questionnaires handed out to the audience (for his production of *Mystery Bouffe*) and the 'Record of Spectator's Reactions,' used throughout the 1920s and 1930s:

This consisted of a large chart with spaces for recording the play, the date, the cast and the running time, as well as comments on the type of audience, how full the house was, and so on. The chart itself was arranged in a series of columns, each column representing a small duration of time – not more than two minutes. Down the left-hand margin was a series of possible reactions. Any audience reaction was then noted in the column indicating the time it occurred.

(Leach 1989: 43–44)

This structured and detailed approach to the recording of audience response is symptomatic of Meyerhold's commitment to the theoretical and practical understanding of the role of spectatorship at his theatre. For Meyerhold, theatre could only exist in front of an audience and no performance was complete until it was being watched. Drawing again on Leach:

For Meyerhold, the audience was the vital fourth dimension without which there was no theatre. The other three 'dimensions' – the playwright, the director, and the actor, worked to no avail if they had no audience, for it was somewhere between them and their audience that theatre 'happened'.

(Leach 1989: 30)

This idea is borne out by Meyerhold's essays. In his 1907 article 'First Attempts at a Stylized Theatre' he describes 'two distinct methods' of constructing a performance both of which explore the relationship between 'the four basic theatrical elements (author, director, actor and spectator)' termed 'dimensions' by Leach (Meyerhold 1907, trans. Braun [1969] 1998: 50). The first method, the Theatre-Triangle (Diagram 1), dismissed by Meyerhold as ineffectual, is described as:

A triangle, in which the apex is the director and the two remaining corners, the author and the actor, the spectator comprehends the creations of the latter two through the creation of the director.

(Meyerhold 1907, trans. Braun [1969] 1998: 50)

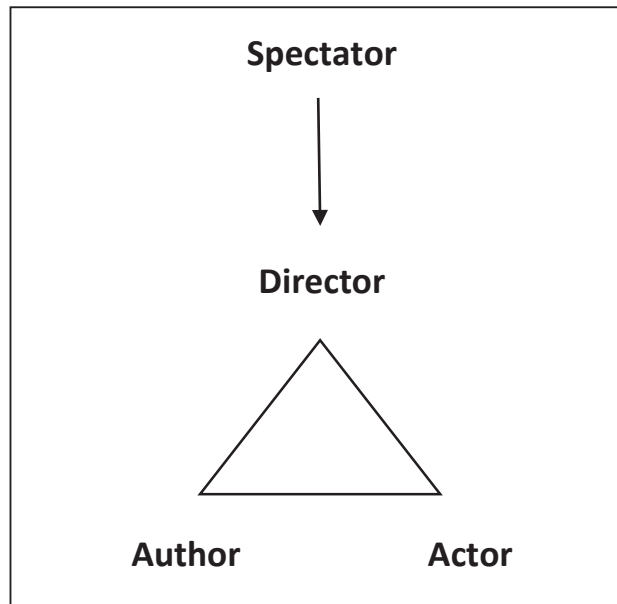


Diagram 1: Meyerhold's representation of the 'Theatre-Triangle', from his essay 'First Attempts at a Stylized Theatre', as translated by Edward Braun ([1969] 1998: 50). © Braun, Edward, [1969] 1998, *Meyerhold on Theatre*, Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

Meyerhold equates this system with a symphony orchestra in which the conductor's interpretation is paramount and the musicians are dependent on the conductor for guidance throughout the performance. As a result, he concludes that this method is inappropriate in theatre, an art he sees as fundamentally collaborative:

So I contend this: true, a symphony orchestra without a conductor is possible, but nevertheless it is impossible to draw a parallel between it and the theatre, where the actors invariably perform on the stage without a director. A symphony orchestra without a conductor is possible, but no matter how well rehearsed, it could never stir the public, only acquaint the listener with the interpretation of this or that conductor,

and could blend into an ensemble only to the extent that an artist can recreate a conception which is not his own.

(Meyerhold 1907, trans. Braun [1969] 1998: 51)

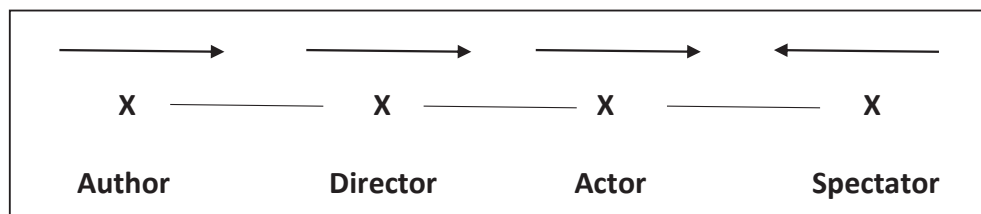


Diagram 2: Meyerhold's diagram of the 'Theatre of the Straight Line', from his essay 'First Attempts at a Stylized Theatre', as translated by Edward Braun ([1969] 1998: 50). © Braun, Edward, [1969] 1998, *Meyerhold on Theatre*, Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

As an alternative, Meyerhold posits the Theatre of the Straight Line (Diagram 2). This method is described as:

A straight, horizontal line with the four theatrical elements (author, director, actor, spectator) marked from left to right [...] The actor reveals his soul freely to the spectator, having assimilated the creation of the director, who, in his turn, has assimilated the creation of the author.

(Meyerhold 1907, trans. Braun [1969] 1998: 50)

Alongside a greater degree of input for the performer who is no longer under the constant supervision of the director, Meyerhold's Theatre of the Straight Line also facilitates a degree of freedom for the spectator. In the Theatre of the Straight Line, the actor can, in Meyerhold's words, stand 'face to face with the spectator (with director and author behind him) and *freely* [reveal] his soul to him, thus intensifying the fundamental theatrical relationship of performer and spectator' (Meyerhold 1907, trans. Braun [1969] 1998: 52).<sup>67</sup> The conscious realization of this 'fundamental' relationship is an enduring principle of Meyerholdian theatre, a model of cooperative creativity in which actor and spectator are both actively and imaginatively engaged:

[The Theatre of the Straight Line] forces the spectator to create instead of merely looking on (for a start, by stimulating his imagination).

(Meyerhold 1907, trans. Braun [1969] 1998: 50)

Meyerhold's models of theatrical spectatorship are evidently simplifications of the process of the creation and reception of performance as it is now understood. However, they are enlightening, in that they reflect the director's approach to the role of the audience and the relationship he wished to construct between the auditorium and the stage. Through his inclusion of the spectator as one of his 'four basic theatrical elements', Meyerhold implies that the audience have a specific role to play in the performance: without them the theatrical experience is unfinished. However, their role is not identical to that of the performer; the only way in which the audience can fulfil their role is, in fact, to maintain their unique identity as external to the theatrical process. Their function in the performance event is defined by their status as outsider.

### **Inside/Outside: An Awareness of Looking**

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As the analysis of *Sister Beatrice*, *Masquerade* and *The Government Inspector* has highlighted, Meyerhold's work is a site of tension between the acknowledgement of reality (the world outside the theatre building) and the incorporation of that reality into the theatrical event to the extent that an external, objective and detached viewpoint is no longer a possibility. His deconstruction of an externally verifiable, objective viewpoint for the spectator is one facet of his work that has been seen to align with the cubist worldview. The deconstruction of objectivity is reflected in the multiple perspectives represented simultaneously within the cubist artwork, an object seen from more than one angle at once. In Meyerhold's theatre, the spectator is similarly seen as an observer without an objective vantage point: internal to the process, yet placed at a distance from it.

A clear example of this process in practice can be seen in the final moments of Meyerhold's production of *The Government Inspector*. In this sequence, referred to as the Dumb or Mute Scene, Meyerhold used the suspension of action into stillness in order to create a *coup de théâtre* where the objective viewpoint of the audience member was fundamentally deconstructed, contributing to a theatrical moment where the audience were both implicated in the action on stage and caught in a net of uncertainties that the director refused to resolve. In the final moments of Gogol's text, in response to the news that the town officials have been tricked, and that the real inspector from St. Petersburg has arrived, the playwright calls for a tableau:

The words uttered strike them all like a thunderbolt. A sound expressive of astonishment breaks, with one accord, from the mouths of the ladies; the whole group makes a sudden shift of positions, and then stops petrified.

(Gogol, trans. Cooper [1972] 1990: 315)

Gogol goes on to describe, in detail, the positions that should be taken up by the actors, concluding that:

This position is held by the petrified group for almost a minute and a half. The curtain is lowered.

(Gogol, trans. Cooper [1972] 1990: 316)

In Meyerhold's production, however, the announcement of the real inspector's arrival was accompanied by the sounding of a gong and the lowering of a curtain to obscure the stage. On the curtain were printed the words:

A Government Inspector, appointed by Imperial Degree, has arrived from St. Petersburg. He is waiting at the inn and requires your presence there immediately.

(Worrall 1972: 94)

The curtain was then raised, revealing not the actors frozen in positions of horror, but instead a crowd of waxwork dummies. The replacement of the actors with dummies ensured that the production ended in total stillness, demonstrating that Meyerhold had not abandoned the principle of using the static tableau to embed a visual image onto the memories of the spectators seen in his symbolist-influenced productions with Komissarzhevskaya.<sup>68</sup> The effect of the Dumb Scene, as described by Harold Clurman in the context of his impressions of the whole production, was strikingly similar to the effect Meyerhold had sought in his work on *Hedda Gabler*:

A strange feeling comes from this production: it is very funny and it is very tomb-like. It has a definite macabre quality – cold, beautiful, grimacing, distorted and graceful [...] It makes one feel as if one entered a cryptlike room where the lights were low: and suddenly one came upon a beautifully dressed, extravagantly expressive people who on closer examination are found to be inert and dead... The production ends with the actors running offstage laughing while we see their prototypes who are puppets. Meyerhold's *Revizor* [*The Government Inspector*] is a masterpiece, but somehow not a warming one: it leaves one slightly uncomfortable.

(Clurman 1998: 80)

This final moment of the play is clearly significant in terms of understanding the meaning of the production. Meyerhold therefore takes the implication of Gogol's text, that the town officials are metaphorically petrified by the imminent arrival of the real inspector, and realizes a representation of the metaphor on stage: the characters are not turned to stone by their fear, but instead become wax effigies.

Through the use of dummies rather than actors for this image, Meyerhold created a stage moment that seemed nearer to the conventions of sculpture than those of theatrical performance. The advantage of the dummies in the construction of the image was that they provided absolute stillness and precision, allowing the audience time to observe the

complex arrangement of figures. Worrall notes that despite the length of the production, the audience were captivated by Meyerhold's *coup de théâtre*:

It was already five minutes after midnight but the audience, instead of hurrying away, sat motionlessly in the lighted auditorium, as they contemplated the spectacle of grotesque effigies. They watched for at least the full minute and a half, which Gogol asks they should, and even longer. In achieving this alone, Meyerhold had stage-managed a minor miracle.

(Worrall 1972: 94)

In its complexity and detail, Meyerhold's Dumb Scene is reminiscent of other visual art conventions, for example, of nineteenth century Russian genre painting. In terms of construction and style, there are similarities, for instance, between Vasily Perov's *A Monastic Refectory* (1865–1875) and Meyerhold's construction of the Dumb Scene (Figure 13). In both images, the space is crowded with characters, each of which has an individual personality reflected in their stance and expression. In the painting and the arrangement of the dummies, repetition of lines and shapes give the image a spatial unity, for example in the robes of Perov's monks or the shapes of Meyerhold's performer's dresses. The satirical content of Perov's painting is as evident as that of Meyerhold's production: in the artwork, Perov portrays the abuse of power through the drunken monks who feast whilst a peasant begs for food in front of them. In Meyerhold's production, the implicit substitution of St. Petersburg for the non-specific provincial town of Gogol's text portrayed a similar abuse of power by an authority. The role of the artist in shaping social conscience underlies both Meyerhold's theatrical image and the work of the Russian genre painters, typified by Perov. As the final image of his production, Meyerhold's Dumb Scene held a special significance in the performance. The last impression of *The Government Inspector* that Meyerhold attempted to imprint on his audience's memory was one that recalled the visual arts: the frozen dummies bringing to mind the conventions of sculpture, and their arrangement evoking the style and socio-political commentary of the Russian genre painters.

Returning to the implications of the cultural matrix, and the appearance of key cultural shifts across different disciplines, Meyerhold's interpretation of the Dumb Scene also engaged with similar concerns to those apparent in the cubist approach to spectatorship. Cubist practice, analytical or synthetic, collaged or otherwise, functions as an exploration of the artist's visual engagement with the world. Consequently, cubist art by virtue of its self-reflexive impulse becomes not just art about looking at the world, but also art about looking at art. Vargish and Mook explore the notion of looking as it is represented by the cubists:

Cubist paintings say, 'This is what I *observe* and *have observed* about this visual reality. I offer it to you as an *observation*.' Cubist paintings are improvisations on the



representation of visual reality, on what we take to be space and the relations of objects to space. The mediation, the observation and the representation of the visual reality, has become the primary subject of the painting.

(Vargish and Mook 1999: 83)<sup>69</sup>

In his construction of the Dumb Scene, Meyerhold's work suggests that his theatre explores an aesthetic that places the process of looking, and what that implies about the worldview of the audience, above realistic representation on stage. Meyerhold's objection to the exclusion of elements of allusion or suggestion, which he saw as the inevitable consequence of theatrical naturalism, has already been noted as motivation in his rejection of the aesthetic embodied by the Moscow Art Theatre.<sup>70</sup> For Meyerhold, the naturalistic performance is complete in itself; the audience can bring nothing more to the production, and there is nothing 'left unsaid' (Meyerhold 1906-1908, trans. Braun [1969] 1998: 25). As such, the naturalistic theatre excludes any active notion of observation, and the observer must remain passive, seated behind the fourth wall. In contrast, Meyerhold's aesthetic of observation was highlighted in *The Government Inspector*, a text the Moscow Art Theatre had tackled on more than one occasion, including the 1921 production starring Mikhail Chekhov. The climax of Meyerhold's production appears to be constructed to question the notion of one-way, audience to stage, observation in theatre. Meyerhold's composition of the sequence functions as a three-stage comment on the nature of looking.

Firstly, Meyerhold establishes a parallel between the stage and the auditorium. In the Mayor's final speech at the end of act five, a tirade against himself, Khlestakov and the town officials, the director chose one line to be delivered directly to the audience: 'What are you laughing at?' the Mayor asks the spectators in the full flow of his fury, 'You're laughing at yourselves!' (Gogol, trans. Cooper [1972] 1990: 313). The audience are consequently informed of a similarity between the situation on stage and their own lives: by laughing at the Mayor, they laugh at themselves. They are also made aware that, rather than simply watching the action hidden behind a metaphorical fourth wall, they too are being watched. On stage, the Mayor has seen and noted their enjoyment of his fruitless rage. This parallel is then emphasized by the Dumb Scene itself and the use of the frozen dummies. The shock of the audience at this moment would have mirrored the shocked expressions engraved on the dummies' faces. Just as the Mayor predicted, the audience were now looking, and laughing, at themselves.

Finally, then, the frozen dummies stared out at the audience, a concrete reminder that the actors at the Meyerhold Theatre could, and would, turn and look out at those who should be watching them. The whole sequence embodies the process of being observed, it is a reversal of spectatorship: the audience, looking to the stage, are only met by stares straight back. They are looking at looking, caught in a cycle of observation. Through the fixed gaze of the dummies, ironically, an object, the audience find themselves objectified, engaged in a process of multiple observations.

Through constructing a stage moment that engages the audience in a cycle of observation, Meyerhold's theatre echoes the emphasis on observation embodied in the cubist artwork. In viewing the cubist canvas, the spectator is aware of both the process of the construction of the artwork by the artist and their own process of interpretation in observation. Like Polkinhorn's suggestion that collage practice can only function when the viewer is aware that collaging has taken place, the spectators at the Meyerhold Theatre are placed in a position where their own observation of performance is located at the forefront of their experience. In the final moments of *The Government Inspector*, the process of observation inherent in theatre is made manifest in the waxwork dummies. Like the collaged artwork, Meyerhold's Dumb Scene engaged the audience member consciously with the process of creating and viewing theatre.

### **Equality and Discourse: Field Theory and Theatre**

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The cubist aesthetic shifted focus from the object of representation towards the notion of observation. This process picks up on the themes of spectatorship seen in collage practice, where the spectator is active and empowered, a vital element in the process of art-making, and is placed in a network of relationships with the artwork and the artist. The shift in focus in the cubist aesthetic has significant implications for the notion of observation, as addressed by Vargish and Mook:

As we offered our description of this change in value [the shift in emphasis from representation to observation associated with Cubism], we found ourselves constantly in danger of raising a question that threatens the logical consistency of our analysis: if one replaces the realist observer and object with the middle ground of observation, then what becomes of that realist distinction? Doesn't the very concept of observation require an observer and an object?

(Vargish and Mook 1999: 104)

Vargish and Mook's concern echoes the issues expressed by Kac and Jones in their analysis of Duchamp's questioning of the art object, with the conclusion that cubist art implies a shift to a new form of encounter for artists, their works and viewers. For Jones and Kac, this is expressed as a network. Vargish and Mook call it the 'middle ground of observation', but the implication is the same: works from this era are constructing a new spectatorial experience. The problem that Vargish and Mook identify is, indeed, also reflected in the final moments of *The Government Inspector*. Through his interpretation of the Dumb Scene, Meyerhold created a cycle of observation in the performance space, the audience looking at the stage, the dummies staring out at the audience. However, Meyerhold's sequence does not genuinely reflect the end of the 'realist distinction' of observer and observed, but rather a multiplication of their roles, or, in the case of the

dummies, their perceived roles: it is temporarily impossible to divide those involved in the performance event into the categories of observer and observed.

As a solution to the problem of observation in cubist art, Vargish and Mook posit the application of a principle drawn from the sciences, Field Theory:

What was it that enabled modernism to leave open the question of how one can focus on the act of observation without sustaining the dichotomy between observer and object? The answer, an answer that applies to Cubism and modernist narrative as well as physics, lies in the development of the concept, metaphor, and method of the *field*.

(Vargish and Mook 1999: 104)<sup>71</sup>

Although Vargish and Mook date the first use of the term to Michael Faraday's description of the magnetic field in 1845, in order to apply it to their own interdisciplinary purpose, they offer a more general definition than that adopted by physicists:

A field is a spatial and/or temporal model or representation in which all constituents are interdependent and in which all constituents participate and interrelate without privilege.

(Vargish and Mook 1999: 105)

Vargish and Mook's application of Field Theory to cubist art is as intriguing in what it does not say as in what it does. Their analysis focuses primarily on the spatial-formal implications of Field Theory in art, addressing the spatial interpenetration of object and background on the canvas. By using Field Theory as a framework, Vargish and Mook argue that they can provide an explanation for the formal vocabulary of the cubist artists (for example, their use of geometric shapes):

These developments eroded the demarcation between objects and the space surrounding them because the objects and the space were presented by the means of the same visual constituents. Object-space and background-space leaked into each other, participated in the reciprocal representation, and became a *field* according to our definition. The spatial flow between background and object creates the 'interdependence' of the painting's constituents while the facet-language permits their common participation without privilege.

(Vargish and Mook 1999: 112)<sup>72</sup>

On the level of image construction, these ideas are equally applicable to Meyerhold's theatre, as can be seen in Worrall's analysis of Meyerhold's production of *The Magnanimous Cuckold* (Worrall 1973), where the repetition of geometric forms found in Lyubov Popova's constructivist-influenced set can be seen in the lines of the actors' bodies, facilitating a degree of spatial interpenetration on the stage. Worrall identifies

this aesthetic as cubist, or cubo-futurist, influenced. What is missing from Vargish and Mook's analysis, however, is any discussion of the notion of observation outside the confines of canvas construction: in terms of the artwork and the viewer, rather than in terms of the object and the artist. For Meyerhold, it is the presentation of the work to the audience (the fourth 'basic theatrical element') that is most important in the realization of the production. The cubist artwork, in Vargish and Mook's analysis, appears to place preference on the observation process as represented within the artwork itself rather than on the artwork's moment of reception by the viewer.

This brings to light an underlying assumption in the comparison of theatrical practice to visual art: the artwork or canvas is seen as parallel to the stage, and the performance event in front of the audience as parallel to the viewing of the artwork, the moment of reception by the spectator, even the art exhibition. Meyerhold's theatre posits the moment of reception as a vital element of the theatrical experience: the performance is unfinished in rehearsal, not complete until it is seen by an audience. If the performance event is considered akin not to the art exhibition but to the canvas itself, Vargish and Mook's description of Field Theory seems to constitute an adequate description of the performance event at the Meyerhold Theatre, in the sense that it suggests the interpenetration of all constituent elements 'without privilege'. Meyerhold's active and empowered approach to the spectator, his desire to construct relationships between the performer, spectator and performance event, and his attempts to transgress the actor-audience boundaries represent a fully realized application of Vargish and Mook's modernist Field Theory to theatre.

The defining feature of Field Theory is the equality of all elements within the field and the interpenetration of every element with every other: Field Theory is based on the principle of reciprocal relationship. In his approach to the audience as the theatrical 'fourth dimension', Meyerhold clearly sees the spectator as significant in the realization of his aesthetic. Meyerhold's Theatre of the Straight Line model implies the reciprocity of the actor-audience relationship within the performance as indicated by the direction of the arrow connecting the spectator to the rest of the diagram (see Diagram 2). This reciprocity is demonstrated by two observations of actor-audience interaction in Meyerhold's theatre. The first is Meyerhold's reflection on the potential influence of the performer on the spectator, as outlined in his essay 'The Reconstruction of the Theatre':

We can induce the spectator to join us in examining a wide range of topics presented as a debate, but employing dramatic situations and characters. We can persuade him to reason and to argue. This ability to start the spectator's brain working is just one of theatre's properties. But it has another, quite different property: it can stimulate the spectator's feelings and steer him through a complex labyrinth of emotions.

(Meyerhold 1930, trans. Braun [1969] 1998: 253)

Conversely, Oliver M. Sayler highlights the effect of the audience on the performance, in his observations of Meyerhold's 1910 production of *Don Juan*:

*Don Juan* in rehearsal was antic and jolly. In performance it was sheer joy, – the joy of the theatre as theatre ... the give and take between audience and actor [was] dynamic and almost incessant.

(Sayler in Leach 1989: 30)

Meyerhold was clearly conscious of the two-way relationship between stage and auditorium. However, he did not regard the audience's role as identical to, or interchangeable with, that of the actor. The audience member came from outside the theatre building and consequently represented a different spatial and temporal framework to that constructed on stage. The roles of the performer and spectator were unique, yet still had an equal weighting in the function of the Meyerhold aesthetic, and neither could fully exist without the other.

The cubist collage similarly comprises a field in Vargish and Mook's definition of the term. Within the temporary shared spatial location of the canvas, the fragments of the collage interpenetrate with equal weighting. Like the collage fragments, the elements gathered for the theatrical performance are connected primarily by the virtue of their shared environment. The spectators become one element in this environment, a part of the performance event. Their occupation of the space is, however, temporary, and, like the collage fragment, they maintain the traces of their original context. In order to function as a collage fragment in the production, the audience must interact with, but remain independent of, the other fragments in the space. They are internalized as part of the theatrical canvas but still detached, carrying traces of their identity outside the theatre building. It is through this double status as both internal and external to the performance event that Meyerhold's manipulation of the role of the audience achieves its political potency. In attempting to determine the role of the arts in post-Tsarist Russia, artists were particularly preoccupied with the question of the utility of art, constructing cultural work as relevant and vital to daily life. This motivation is reflected in the artistic activities of groups such as the Proletkult, the constructivists and the street artists. Under the Soviet system, these cultural movements sought to become useful agents of the Revolution, and to discover a way in which art can function when being revolutionary no longer meant subverting the extant power structure.

As a result, in Soviet Russia, theatrical performance found itself striving to move outside the walls of the theatre building and finding a place of relevance in the real world. For Meyerhold, the audience completed the collage of the performance event because they provided this vital link to the day-to-day reality of the Soviet Revolution, as can be seen from the director's 1920 article 'On the Staging of Verhaeren's *The Dawn*':

The audience has changed so completely [from the audience pre-1917], that we, too, need to revise our opinions. We have a new public which will stand no nonsense – *each spectator represents, as it were, Soviet Russia in microcosm* ... Now we have to protect the interests not of the author but of the spectator. The interests of the audience have assumed a vital significance.

(Meyerhold 'On the Staging of Verhaeren's *The Dawn*' 1920,  
trans. Braun [1969] 1998: 170–171)<sup>73</sup>

The audience bring into the theatre building an identity that Meyerhold did not want to suppress. The notion of reality in early Soviet life operated on more than one level. The government constructed an image of reality through the media and, after 1934, in Socialist Realism in the arts. This government-endorsed image of real life both informed and conflicted with the notion of reality envisioned by the artists and transposed onto the streets through their monuments and street art projects. In addition, of course, both the governmental and the artistic ideals of reality clashed with the day-to-day life (the *byt*) of the Russian proletariat. Under the auspices of Stalin's Five Year Plans, the element of drudgery and monotony implied by the term *byt* (an even more quotidian version of 'quotidian') was offset against the remarkable achievements of the Russian populace in the creation of cities like Magnitogorsk and the superhuman efforts associated with the Stakhanovite movement. As a result, the daily living conditions of the Russian people contrasted with a belief that somewhere, just around a corner, utopia was being built. The Soviet Revolution, forced to work out its practicalities on a daily basis, had a similar deconstructive effect on the common perception of reality as anti-positivism had previously had amongst the intelligentsia. Reality was no longer transparent. Somewhere another dimension existed: life was no longer defined by what you saw, but by how you had the potential to look. It is this potential reality with which Meyerhold's theatre engaged.

Through the new Soviet audience, each member of which was a 'microcosm' of the new society, Meyerhold formed a connection between life and theatre: the daily realities of building the communist utopia were connected to the utopian potential of the stage. Meyerhold's work did not present unmediated utopian visions of the future Soviet society and his stage was not simply a site of wish fulfilment or escapism from the drudgery of *byt*, but a place where life and art could collide and potentially affect one another. To fulfil this function, it was necessary that Meyerhold's approach to the audience implied the interpenetration of theatrical space and time with the space and time outside the theatre walls. Through this interpenetration, stage and auditorium can create a field: a place of equality and discourse between art and life.

## Subjectivity, Objectivity and the Ultimate Role of the Spectator

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In the moment of shift from object to observation, both Meyerhold's theatre and the cubist artwork engaged with the deconstruction of objectivity that fascinated the early twentieth century avant-garde. The rise of a subjective worldview, which cannot be reduced to positivist notions of the absolute, was the foundation for the philosophy of the anti-positivists, from Poincaré, to Ouspensky, to Bergson. These ideas are apparent in the work of the cubist artists, both indirectly (through the cultural matrix) and, in some instances, directly: Bergson's definition of temporality as dual, comprising the mathematical and the durational, was a key reference point for the cubist artists, including Picasso, Braque and Gris.

Bergson's overriding philosophical project is concerned with the division of quantities into those which are measurable, referred to as the extensive quantities, and those which are not, the intensive quantities. In order for a quantity to become extensive, Bergson argues, it must be possible to conceive of it as existing in units, and of these units as being added to, containing in the higher values all of the values beforehand: in order to identify three metres, one must be able to see two metres as being contained within three. Intensive measurements do not have this, vital, quality. To Bergson's mind, the division of time into units and the subsequent attempts to turn time into an extensive quantity are distortions of the true nature of temporal progression. Bergson's argument is that in order to measure time (to make it extensive) it must be distorted: spatialized, turned into units and universalized. Bergson sets up this mathematical time in opposition to a subjective notion of time, his duration, or *durée*, immeasurable time as experienced by the individual. In life, Bergson argues, this true, subjective time is substituted with constructed, mathematical time.

Bergson's ideas form part of the basis of cubism's anti-positivist aesthetic. His belief in a subjective notion of time was significant for the cubist artists, in that it freed the spatial structure of their art from linearity and logic and posited a rhythmical organization of space that could act directly on the viewer's consciousness. According to Antliff and Leighton, this concept of rhythmic space can be found in both Bergson's philosophy and in Gleizes and Metzinger's influential manifesto *Du Cubisme* (Antliff and Leighton 2001: 85). Meyerhold's production of *The Government Inspector* reflects the influence of both of Bergson's temporal models. The linear temporal progression of the plot as specified by Gogol is identifiable in the performance, forming a parallel to Bergson's mathematical time: despite the division of the play into episodes and the alteration of some elements of the text, Meyerhold maintained the overall order of the plot as specified by Gogol (unlike his earlier work on *The Forest*). However, the linear progression of the play's plot was interrupted in Meyerhold's production by the introduction of tangential sequences, following the thought processes or fantasies of an individual character. These divergences into fantasy or dream time reflect the subjective temporality of Bergson's *durée*, and the subjectivity in perception advocated by the anti-positivist and cubist movements as a whole.



Of the tangential sequences devised by Meyerhold, arguably the best-known is episode five, 'Filled with the Tend'rest Love', featuring the mayor's wife, Anna Andreevna. Prompted by a line in the text suggesting her vanity, Meyerhold created an episode exploring Anna's self-image as seductress, where a number of soldiers appeared out of her wardrobe whilst she dressed, declaring their love for her and presenting her with gifts, one even shooting himself after her rejection.<sup>74</sup> Through this sequence, Meyerhold makes the character's motivation manifest to the audience, creating a subjective viewing experience in which the spectator engages with the world of the play through the eyes of one character. Other sequences sat between the reality of the plot and the fantasy of the characters. Significant amongst these was Meyerhold's work on the text's bribe scene (act four/episode nine), in which the town officials offer Khlestakov bribes to secure favours or protect their own interests. Meyerhold's interpretation was dream-like in its construction: Khlestakov, passed out drunk downstage, was offered bribes simultaneously by all the officials. Unlike 'Filled with the Tend'rest Love', which introduced fantasy time through the expansion of an idea in the text, Meyerhold's bribery sequence functioned as a contraction of Gogol's scene and the dream-like construction re-cast an element of the plot. Whereas the former sequence shifted the audience's perspective, presenting them with the opportunity to view the world of the play through the eyes of an individual character whilst leaving the plot intact, in other words, functioning as a tangent, the latter undercuts the validity of the plot itself, which could now be nothing more than Khlestakov's dream.

It is the unsettling realization that the performance could equally be interpreted either as a series of events common to all characters or as the fantasy of one character that highlights the function of subjectivity in Meyerhold's theatre, particularly as the director refuses to resolve this apparent paradox. The introduction of fantasy time removes any sense of a reliable, objective viewpoint that the theatrical performance can offer, bringing to a head the steady redefinition of the relationship between the audience and the performance event occurring in Meyerhold's theatre since 1906: Meyerhold's metaphorical reading of *The Cherry Orchard*, with its representation on stage of Ranevskaya's state of mind, comes to its fullest realization in this moment. In his early rebellion against the Art Theatre, Meyerhold attempted to engender intimacy between the stage and the auditorium by replacing the objective distance of verisimilitude with a subjective intimacy akin to the relationship between worshipper and icon. In his production of *Masquerade*, the fluctuation between depth and relief space alternately invited spectators into the performance as confidantes and alienated them as observers. *The Government Inspector*, in contrast, did not merely reject objectivity in favour of subjectivity, but instead deconstructed the possibility of objectivity itself.

Here, Meyerhold's practice echoes the flux of the collage canvas, which underwrites the active and empowered mode of spectatorship. Each moment of the production is altered in its relationship to every other moment. Because the director chooses to construct the performance as a series of episodes and because each episode has a shifting perspective for the spectator, the production's sequences begin to function as collage fragments, each

one with the potential to re-write the perception of every other. The spectator's role shifts from that of observer to that of interpreter. The multiple worldviews contained within Meyerhold's production of *The Government Inspector* entirely discard the categories of subjective and objective experience.

This empowerment of the spectator is demonstrated in Meyerhold's construction of the final moments of *The Government Inspector*. Through the cycle of observation emerging from his interpretation of the Dumb Scene, Meyerhold creates a moment of suspension in the theatrical process: the play is over, but real life has not yet recommenced. In order to break the cycle of observation, the audience must be active, they must signal the end of the suspended moment through a physical action (leaving the theatre, starting to applaud). Meyerhold makes the spectator's role a tangible and physical one. In the same way that the audience must intellectually define the boundaries of the production, they must also define the production's end, its ultimate physical boundary. As Einstein posits through relativity theory, in a world without absolutes, the definition of truth rests with the observer: in Einstein's world, the measurer is king, defining the ever-shifting boundaries from which the measurements must be taken. In Meyerhold's theatre, the impetus rests with the audience member, who must define the boundaries of the production. The spectator's role, in other words, is the construction of truth. There is no pre-determined objectivity to resort to, and the spectator is empowered as creative partner alongside the writer, actor and director.

## Chapter 6

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Documentation



In this final chapter, emphasis shifts from the use of the visual arts as a framework for the analysis of Meyerhold's theatre towards the role of visual arts practices in the documentation of the director's work. Suggested as one of the potential relationships between theatre and the visual arts in chapter one, the question of documentation in Meyerhold's theatre indicates the intimacy between these visual practices and the director's legacy: the wealth of visual documents that exist in the Meyerhold archives and the sense of immediacy that is engendered in viewing these documents highlight the potential of visual arts practice in shaping the ongoing understanding of Meyerhold's theatre. Analysis of these documents themselves, and of the ways in which they have been used and the transmission processes that they represent, can uncover a greater understanding of how Meyerhold's legacy has been constructed in the West, amongst primarily non-Russian speakers, indicating that, in their multiplicity of perspectives and angles, perceptions of Meyerhold's theatre have, in effect, become something akin to cubist art.

There is a wealth of preserved visual material associated with Meyerhold's practice: designs by artists, the director's own sketches, photographs of productions and of rehearsals, even (very limited) film footage.<sup>75</sup> There are materials relating to every stage of the creative process, from the inception of ideas, through development in rehearsals, to the final product and its reception by the public and critics. Reviews of Meyerhold's productions are not only littered with references to the visual arts (see Voloshin's comments on *Sister Beatrice* as an example), but are also copiously illustrated with artist's impressions and caricatures. The visual documentation of Meyerhold's theatre is an extensive resource for the theatre historian, providing multiple perspectives on the director's process, as well as the resulting productions. However, in some cases, these visual materials exist within a wider cultural context, not simply documents of a historical theatre, but also examples of independent artistic practices. Caricature and photography have been selected as case studies of two categories of Meyerhold documentation in which the document and the artwork are intertwined.

As independent artistic practices, both photography and caricature are closely connected to cubism. John Pultz and Catherine B. Scallen, curators of the 1981 exhibition 'Cubism and American Photography, 1910–1930' at the International Museum of Photography (Rochester, New York), saw cubism as a decisive influence on photographic style, claiming that 'by the end of the '20s cubism-derived modernism dominated photography' (Grundberg 1981). The relationship between the two forms was not one-

way: Paul Hayes Tucker suggests that photography influenced Picasso's working practice and formal vocabulary during the development of cubism as an aesthetic (Tucker 1982). Picasso worked from photographs in his portraiture, photographed his own work and took photographs of his subjects as he painted them. It is this third process that interests Tucker, particularly in relation to a series of sketches, paintings and photographs produced in 1909 in the village of Horta de San Juan. In a close analysis of Picasso's photographs, Tucker identifies a series of formal features, resulting directly from the camera's mechanical processes, which are reproduced in the artist's sketches. These include a distortion in perspective, the compression of space, and, crucially, the process of halation, which produces a similar effect to the *passage* of Cézanne. These features, considered flaws in the mechanical technology of early photographic equipment, are turned by Picasso into aesthetic features in painting. Tucker notes that:

Although Picasso may not have been aware of all the materials and methods, he would have recognized, even if he only owned a Kodak-type camera, the basic characteristics of the medium – its ability to create ambiguous spatial relationships through the blending of dark and light planes; the ease with which forms could be lost in the shadows or bleached in the light; the way it produced lines solely through tonal gradations; the way it could suggest shimmering light or totally disregard local colour and texture; and finally, how it could achieve an unrivalled simplification.

(Tucker 1982: 289)

It is Picasso's work, again, that provides a context for the relationship between cubism and caricature. Adam Gopnik discusses the use of caricature in Picasso's portraits, observing that some sketches from the artist's notebooks are not only caricatured in style, but even include speech bubbles (Gopnik 1983: 372). For Gopnik, this use of caricature is mediated by the conventions of primitivism:

The grammar and vocabulary of the high Cubist portrait need not be seen as pure invention but as a *pas de deux* between high and low [...]. In particular, Picasso's familiar but deeply idiosyncratic use of primitive forms [...] must be seen as essentially a way of bringing the latent strategic potential of the caricature onto the field of vanguard art.

(Gopnik 1983: 372)

In relation to his mediation of the caricature through the primitivist lens, Gopnik claims that Picasso 'knew exactly what he was doing' – it was, in other words, a conscious dialogue constructed between the two practices, a deliberate incorporation of caricature into cubist portraiture (Gopnik 1983: 374).

The interconnectivity between cubism and photography or cubism and caricature is not restricted to these instances of causal overlap. Again, similarities in form and intent

indicate connections on the level of Hayles' matrix. Of caricature and cubism, Gopnik observes an empathy that goes beyond any perceived high/low art boundary:

The affinity of cartoon and caricature for Cubism [...] recalls those extraordinary occasions in the history of art when popular imagery and vanguard style have been bound together by a deep, shared system of form.

(Gopnik 1983: 371)

The formal conventions of the caricature, as Rudolf Arnheim notes, are those of deformation or deviation from the real (Arnheim 1983). Indeed, all three practices are, to use Matthew Reason's terminology, instances of 'subjective, transformational truth' (Reason 2008: 7). That is, they are practices concerned not with capturing a literal copy of the world as it is, but with its transformation into a new creative act, an act that may say more about the world than a literal reproduction can. Tucker cites Gertrude Stein's observations of Picasso's use of photographs, which indicate the role of the photograph in the artist's essentially transformative process of art-making:

I was very much struck at this period when cubism was a little more developed [1911–1913?] with the way Picasso could put objects together and make a photograph of them. [...] To have brought the objects together already changed them into other things, not to another picture, but to something else, to things as Picasso saw them.

(Tucker 1982: 297)<sup>76</sup>

This transformative potential of the photograph or caricature underwrites the consideration of these practices as documentation, particularly within the context of an era that also produced the pictorial vocabulary of cubism. Photographs and caricatures of Meyerhold's theatre, produced during the first half of the twentieth century must be understood not only through the complexities of each form as artistic practice, but also through the lens of visual art as it was understood in that era. Through the exploration of these visual practices as documents in action, wider conclusions can be drawn, not only relating to how Meyerhold's theatre is read today, but also to the vital necessity of visual arts contextualization for the theatre historian.

### **The Meyerhold Archives and the Significance of Visual Documentation**

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By the late 1930s, Meyerhold had become *persona non grata* in the USSR. The State Meyerhold Theatre was officially closed in January 1938; Meyerhold was arrested in June of the following year, and executed a little over seven months later. After the director's death, Stalin secured the complete suppression of Meyerhold's work within Russia, extending as far as an embargo on mentions of the director's name



in publications relating to his own productions, as if, as Laurence Senelick observes, ‘the *mise-en-scène* had been generated spontaneously’ (Senelick 2003: 157). Despite this government directive, the extant archive materials relating to Meyerhold and his theatre are extensive, due in no small part to documents hidden and preserved at great personal risk by Sergei Eisenstein.

Today, the documents comprising the Meyerhold archives are held in three main locations in Russia and include written and visual materials, which give testament to the director’s status as theatre maker, theorist and pedagogue. In addition, the archive material demonstrates Meyerhold’s ongoing desire to document his own practice, from his extensive collection of theatre reviews, through to his audience response records, and, of course, the photographs of his productions. The scope of the material is vast – running into thousands of documents and images (Syssoyeva 2010) – although the wider availability of the documents, through their publication in Russian, is more restricted. Oleg Feldman’s four volumes, published between 1998 and 2006, provide the most recent – and most wide-ranging – series of publications from archive material and are a demonstration of the scope of the holdings available, covering only, as Syssoyeva notes, Meyerhold’s career between 1896 and 1905 (and some brief material from 1918). This restricted insight into the director’s *oeuvre*, representing only nine years of a 44-year career, covers a total of 1,700 pages (Syssoyeva 2010).

Feldman’s publications draw on materials from one of three Russian archives (RGALI, the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art). In addition, significant collections of documents are held at the St. Petersburg State Museum of Theatre and Music, and at the Bakhrushin State Central Theatre Museum (Moscow). As little is available in English on the holdings at these archives and on their formation and purposes, what follows is a brief introduction to the archives and the Meyerhold documentation they contain, giving an overview of the type and volume of materials dedicated to Meyerhold available to Russian-speaking scholars of his theatre.

Formed in 1941, the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (*Russiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Literatury i Iskusstva*, RGALI) is the main Russian holding for materials relating to the arts, literature, music, cinema and architecture. From 2006, the organization has been steadily transferring its holdings into digital form and making materials available online through an interface in both Russian and English ([www.rgali.ru](http://www.rgali.ru)). The RGALI Meyerhold archive consists of materials acquired in 1948, a collection of 3,700 documents entitled the Meyerhold Personal Fund, as well as the papers from the State Meyerhold Theatre (GosTIM) numbering approximately 2,000 documents (Syssoyeva 2010). The material consists of Meyerhold’s own diaries, notes and essays (both relating to specific productions and more general reflections on theatre practice and theory), correspondence between the director and others (including collaborators, writers, artists, friends and family) and visual materials (sketches, photographs and caricatures), alongside more prosaic documents relating to the running of GosTIM (arrangements for payments, exhibitions and foreign tours).

In contrast to the holdings at RGALI, the Meyerhold collection at the St. Petersburg State Museum of Theatre and Music consists primarily of visual materials and objects related to productions. These holdings total more than 2,000 items and span Meyerhold's career, from his pre-revolutionary work with Komissarzhevskaya, through his post-revolutionary productions. Materials highlighted in the Museum's permanent collection are those relating to *Masquerade* and *The Magnanimous Cuckold*. The significance of *Masquerade* as a production of choice is clear: the main building of the Museum is housed in Ostrovsky Square, previously the home of the Imperial Theatres management, and overlooking the Alexandrinsky Theatre where Meyerhold's production took place. The collection comprises set and costume designs, models, photographs, posters and programmes, alongside personal items and artefacts, including Alexander Golovin's portrait of Meyerhold, completed during the preparation and rehearsal period for *Masquerade*. The archive considers its holdings to be wide, but not complete, relating primarily to the director's work in St. Petersburg and includes materials from the archive of Meyerhold's collaborator, Vladimir Soloviev. Reflecting on the completeness of the archive, Alexandra Tuchinskaya notes that the Museum continues to receive materials on Meyerhold: 'we cannot tell [if] we have all [the] information and materials of [the] creative biography of Meyerhold because it permeates through the history of Russian theatre' (personal communication).<sup>77</sup>

The holdings of the Bakhrushin Museum in Moscow relate primarily to Meyerhold's productions and contain materials from GosTIM archived immediately after the closure of the theatre in 1938. The holdings were supplemented after the posthumous rehabilitation of Meyerhold in 1956, with new material submitted. The archive holds in excess of 21,000 items relating to Meyerhold, including designs, costume sketches, production photographs, director's copies of playtexts and musical scores, with materials also displayed in the GosTIM Museum and at the Bakhrushin Museum.<sup>78</sup>

### **The Meyerhold Archives and the West**

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For scholars outside of Russia, access to the Meyerhold archives has substantially increased since the Gorbachev era, with greater ease of travel between Russia and the West and the recent digitization of documents allowing access to Russian material from abroad. Accessibility overall, however, is still limited, and printed materials from Russian publishers concerning Meyerhold's practice are difficult to acquire in the United Kingdom. In addition, only a very small proportion of the Meyerhold documents available have been translated into languages outside of Russian and an even smaller percentage into English. Although this restriction may result from the suppression of Meyerhold by Stalin and the political complications of the Cold War and the Iron Curtain, there is also a sense in which the volume of material itself is problematic: the 'embarrassment of riches' (Syssoyeva 2010) held at RGALI has made a selective approach essential in engaging with

the Meyerhold archives, and, by necessity, the impression of Meyerhold that is widely available, particularly in translation, will be restricted.

The selection of materials for translation – and thus transmission – to the West clearly indicates the mediated nature of interactions with Meyerhold and his theatre outside of Russia. It also brings into focus the significance and complexity of visual documentation in engaging with Meyerhold's theatre practice. Photographs of Meyerhold's theatre imply a level of accessibility that written documentation, with its inevitable language barrier, does not possess. Through projects like the RGALI digitization and the Global Performing Arts Database ([www.glopad.org](http://www.glopad.org)), extensive collections of images of Meyerhold and his theatre are instantly accessible via the Internet. These images give a sense of immediacy, a moment of connection to Meyerhold's practice, and are often the first point of contact with his theatre for non-Russian speakers. The director's emphasis on *mise-en-scène*, the construction of the stage image and his interaction with the artists of the avant-garde give these photographic images additional kudos: if Meyerhold was a director-scenographer motivated by the visual construction of his theatre, then photographs become a point of access for those distanced from that practice by both time and space. In the words of Danielle Sallenave: 'our memories of theatre are frequently memories of photographs of theatre' (Sallenave in McAuley 2008: 9).

It is important not to underestimate the value of the visual documentation of Meyerhold's theatre. These images provide a vital insight into the director's visual aesthetic, highlighting the intricacy of the moment-to-moment construction of his performances and their reception as a visual event by the audience. Photographs have been vital in developing understanding of Meyerhold's practice overseas, particularly in the transmission of biomechanics. In this instance, photosets of Nikolai Kustov performing biomechanical exercises (published in Gordon 1974) and their recreation by Gennady Bogdanov (held at the Mime Centrum Berlin) allow the viewer an insight into the physical structures of Meyerhold's études, which, in written descriptions, were unclear, even deceptive (Skinner 2012). Photographs of Meyerhold's productions have inspired seminal writing and analysis of his theatre by historians, such as Worrall's explorations of cubist and futurist structures in *The Magnanimous Cuckold* (Worrall 1973) and the careful construction of stage shapes through the positioning of the actor's body in *The Government Inspector* (Worrall 1972). Not only do photographs aid in the recreation of these productions for the reader (for further examples, see Law 1982 or Chambers 1998), but they highlight the functioning of Meyerhold's theatre as an organization: the centrality of biomechanical training and the enhanced level of physical control that Meyerhold intended the system to impart to the actor can be seen in both the photographs of Kustov and the images from Meyerhold's productions. The wealth of examples of photographs of Meyerhold in rehearsal supplements these training and production images, echoing the tripartite structure of his practice: theatre as pedagogy, theatre as experimentation in rehearsal and laboratory, and theatre as production in performance.

The photographs of Meyerhold's theatre are of clear documentary value in the study of his practice. In addition, there is a large body of sketches and caricatures dedicated to Meyerhold's work that function as a different sort of documentary material. These images operate according to the principles of caricature practice, using exaggeration and minimization in order to express opinions on the director, his career and his theatre. Some of the images are intentionally mocking, others are friendly; some series of images communicate an opinion of Meyerhold's work, others an aspect of his stylistic or aesthetic practice. Taken as a body, the images expand Western understanding of Meyerhold's theatre as it was constructed by the director and as it was received by its original audiences. The subjectivity of caricature has an additional documentary benefit, in that it communicates not just visual structure, but opinions and experiences.

These examples demonstrate the potential utility of visual documentation to the study of Meyerhold's theatre, particularly in instances when geographical or linguistic barriers can restrict access to written material. The location of the photograph and caricature as independent artistic practices in the first half of the twentieth century complicates their documentary function, however, suggesting the need for an integrated approach to understanding the materials that contribute to the reading of Meyerhold's theatre. The subjectivity of photographs and caricatures, as the work of visual artists, expands the understanding of Meyerhold's visual world, as well as the understanding of his theatre practice. Above all, these images must be read as artworks and as documents, and as a space of interaction between the two.

### **The Photograph: Document as Artwork**

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Despite the vital role of photodocumentation in extending accessibility to Meyerhold's practice, engaging with photographs of the director's theatre is more complex than the apparent transparency of the photographic images implies. The optical viewpoint of the camera is constructed and does not see in the same way as the human eye: Reason notes photography's 'inherent limitations such as the restriction of the image to two dimensions and the distorting and flattening effect of the camera lens' (Reason 2003–2004: 46). Thus, even with an isolated stage moment, a photograph of a theatrical performance can never fully capture the visual experience of the viewer present at that event. Photographic realism is no less constructed than stage realism, as Reason articulates:

[Photography] does not reproduce the real but 'realism' in that the camera is a machine designed to mechanically reproduce the dominant idea of representative reality, based upon geometric perspective, with the acceptance of the validity of that 'reality' deeply ingrained.

(Reason 2003–2004: 47, drawing on McQuire 1988: 18)

The photograph is a carefully constructed and ideologically loaded image, with its own representational structure, whose complexity is further multiplied in a theatrical context. The key to understanding this complexity lies in the different temporal structures of the two disciplines. Reflecting on his role as photographer, Henri Cartier-Bresson observes:

Above all, I craved to seize the whole essence, in the confines of one single photograph, of some situation that was in the process of unrolling itself before my eyes.

(Cartier-Bresson in Sontag 1979: 185)

Photographs of theatre are the meeting point for two distinct art forms. Theatre is rooted in a temporal continuum; photography abstracts discrete moments from this continuum, using mechanical technology to capture an instant. Both are defined by their relationship with temporality, but photography is a medium that is, in theory, entirely released from the constraints of temporal linearity in its construction or reception. If it is that same linearity that defines the theatrical experience, photographic images of theatre become the site of technological, methodological and philosophical tensions. Cartier-Bresson encapsulates the challenge of theatre photodocumentation, that is, to translate into one moment the sum of the many moments that create an experience.

Through photography, the performance is given permanence. Ephemerality may define the theatrical experience, but it is the theatre historian's curse. Photographs appear to be a direct link to the theatre of the past, hence their seductive power in the study of Meyerhold's practice: they seem to be a place of close contact with the director's original work. Since the creation of the camera, photographs have been used as proof; in Susan Sontag's words, they are an 'inventory' (Sontag 1979: 22). The photograph has a semblance of objectivity through its mechanical recording of the moment, seeming superior to the artist's impression or the eye-witness report. Drawing again on Sontag, 'Photographs seem, because, they are taken to be pieces of reality, more authentic than extended literary narratives' (Sontag 1979: 74). Yet, discussions on the 'truth problem' of photography are readily available, and Sontag and Barthes ([1981] 2000) – amongst others – highlight the problems inherent in the seemingly transparent nature of the photograph as document. In Gay McAuley's eyes, it is the conflation of truth and lie in the photograph, its representational conventions, which associate the medium with theatre:

What is perhaps the most fascinating thing about this fascinating medium is that photographs both lie and tell the truth, tell the truth even as they lie and in this, as in so much else, there is a deep affinity between photography and theatre.

(McAuley 2008: 13)

The complexity of photodocumentation is highlighted by a photograph of Meyerhold's production of *The Government Inspector* (Figure 14). This image can be found on the Global Performing Arts Database, and is readily available online. However, the GloPAD

attribution for the photograph is sparse, stating that the image is of *The Government Inspector*, but not providing a date for its creation, or the name of a photographer. According to Nikolai Pesochinsky, the Global Performing Arts Consortium Regional Director for Russia, there are three sets of photographs of Meyerhold's production, by photographers Temerin, Nappelbaum and Braksburg respectively (personal correspondence). It is unclear from which set this image is taken.

As a piece of historical documentation of Meyerhold's theatre, this photograph cannot stand alone. Meyerhold's production ran from its première in 1926 until the closure of his theatre in 1938. From the GloPAD attribution, it is impossible to know when in the 12-year life-cycle of the production the image was created. Pictured from above, it is difficult to identify the actors and the viewer must make assumptions: presumably the seated actor is Erast Garin, who played Khlestakov, but the face is unclear. The combination of the central truck, on which the actors stand, and the balustrade visible at the left-hand side of the image informs the knowledgeable viewer that this is potentially episode seven – Gogol's act three – a rare occasion on which both set pieces were used simultaneously. None of this information can be gathered from the image alone, all requires an external understanding of the production and its context within the Meyerhold *oeuvre*. Most striking, however, and most problematic for the theatre historian, is the diagonal angle from which the image is taken. The frame is divided in two, the group of figures stage left contrasted with the solo figure stage right. The group embodies a dynamic tension that the solo figure does not have. The diagonal lines across the image from the lower left-hand corner to the upper right-hand corner – the edge of the stage, for example – give the photograph a further sense of dynamism, pulling the eye rapidly across the image. This dynamism collides with the line of movement implied by the group of figures, whose momentum runs on a perpendicular axis. The tension between these lines of movement is not embedded in the stage image as seen by the spectator from the front. Instead, it is the result of a well-taken photograph.

Photographer John Berting claims that:

Photos that are creative in nature will be of little use to the directors of a performance, creative photos are done to satisfy the photographer and the show is incidental. Documenting the director's creative vision is what's really happening in most cases.  
(Berting in Skinner 2003)

The choice of angle in this image calls into question the purpose of the photograph. In 2003, I carried out a consultation with theatre photographers, recruited through the website photography.net, regarding their perceptions of their own practice. Photographers were asked to reflect on their role, the challenges of theatre photography and the tension between creativity and documentation as they had experienced it in practice.<sup>79</sup> From this consultation, the perceived purpose of the image emerged as key in determining the degree of artistic or creative 'interference' permitted: the potential use of the photograph



was the first factor to be considered. The distortion of ‘truth’ in the theatrical photographic image arguably begins with the context and purpose of the image’s creation (see Reason 2006). Theatrical productions are rarely photographed during a performance and photo-calls are likely to be staged in order to give the photographer ample time to create pleasing images, possibly by actively ‘interfering’ with the stage image, for example, by rearranging the actors. In addition, not all theatre photographs are produced solely for documentary purposes and there is no way of understanding the motivation behind the photographs taken of Meyerhold’s work.

Many of the photographs of Meyerhold’s theatre cannot be associated with a particular photographer or assigned to a specific photoset. As such, the intention behind the production of the image and Meyerhold’s degree of involvement in the documentary process is difficult to determine. The question of intention and motivation in the creation of the image is vital: as Reason’s work on dance photographers Chris Nash and Lois Greenfield reveals, the intention and aesthetic of the photographic artist significantly inflects the photographs produced (Reason 2003–2004, 2008). As a meeting point of the theatre maker (in this instance, Meyerhold), the production, and the photographer, the theatre photograph can represent any one or more of multiple perspectives on the production and multiple aesthetics. The degree to which the photographs represent Meyerhold’s theatre as Meyerhold intended is not immediately apparent. The director is, of course, not assumed to be an unbiased recorder of his own work; but the intent of a photographic document is clearly different if an image has been posed by Meyerhold in order to reveal what the director wished the viewer to see.

As part of the same 2003 consultation, the photographers were also asked to consider the boundary between creative and documentary photography, if such a boundary exists. In light of the photographer’s choices in the photograph of *The Government Inspector*, their definitions of the terms make interesting reading: Tim Welch, for example, mentions the use of unusual angles ‘to spice up a scene’, and according to Jochen Schrey ‘if you [shoot] nearly the complete stage, it is documentary, if you zoom in it starts being creative’ (Skinner 2003). The combination of the unusual angle and the framing of the space suggest that, by the photographers’ definitions, this image from *The Government Inspector* is creative photography. Even if the photographer did not specifically rearrange the stage to create a pleasing visual image for example, the angle and framing decisions alone interfere with the reading of the theatrical space. It is difficult to separate reading the photographic message from reading the theatrical message.

There is, however, another potential explanation for the choice of angle in this photograph. Unlike shots taken from the auditorium, this diagonal provides the historian with little information about the audience’s perspective. Instead, the image records a different set of interests, the director’s construction of the *mise-en-scène*, what Berting calls ‘documenting the director’s creative vision’. However, even accepting that the image results from the director’s need to record his production rather than the photographer’s desire to create a work of art does not significantly reduce the variables. This may not



diminish the documentary significance of the image, but the value is clearly contextually different. The photograph is a potentially useless, even deceptive document. Without even the name of a photographer, the theatre historian is stranded.

The problems of photodocumentation embodied in the photograph of *The Government Inspector* result primarily from the collision between photography and theatre as unique media. This issue cannot undermine the value of the ample photographic evidence of Meyerhold's theatre. After all, these problems no more invalidate photographic images as historical source material than the potential for bias invalidates an eye-witness record. However, ignoring the tensions between photography and theatre indicates a distinctly reductionist approach to both art forms. Rather than minimizing the 'problems' of photodocumentation, the differences between the media can become the starting point for an analysis of theatre that identifies and exploits these tensions in order to engage with a more informed and productive understanding of Meyerhold's practice. Meyerhold's use of different temporal structures, and particularly his theorization (both on paper and in performance) of the coexistent principles of the static and the dynamic in theatre, can inform the reading of photographs of Meyerhold's productions in order to engage with the images in a way that can uncover more about the director's practice than simply revealing the structure of the stage image.

The emergence of photography as a creative strategy amongst the artists of the early twentieth century avant-garde significantly inflects Meyerhold's use of photodocumentation. Practitioners with whom Meyerhold was closely associated employed photography as part of their image construction, with photomontage developing as a key practice for artists including Tatlin, Stepanova and Rodchenko. Rodchenko's iconic poster image created for the Leningrad Department of State Publishing (LenGIZ), featuring a photograph of Lilya Brik with the word 'Knigi' ('books') exploding from her mouth, functions as both an example of the use of photography within the avant-garde aesthetic and an illustration of the connection between Meyerhold and these artists: Brik was Mayakovsky's lover; Mayakovsky, Meyerhold's playwright; and Rodchenko, the designer for Meyerhold's production of Mayakovsky's *The Bedbug* (1929). There is a sense of fluidity in the way in which these aesthetics moved amongst the avant-gardists, and also a clear connection between Meyerhold as theatre maker and the practice of the artists he worked alongside.

The avant-garde artists saw in the photographic image a layering of temporal frameworks. Artist László Moholy-Nagy comments that 'photography [...] imparts a heightened, or (in so far as our eyes are concerned) increased, power of sight in terms of time and space' (Moholy-Nagy in Wells 2003: 93). Coupled with the interdisciplinary focus of avant-garde artistic practice, it is clear that the use of photography in the 1910s and 1920s was more than Sontag's 'inventory' of events, more than a purely documentary process. The photograph was epitomic of the sensibilities of the new century, embedded in the cultural matrix, a source of mechanically produced instant art that questioned temporal and spatial absolutes. Photomontage, in particular, highlighted the creative potential of photography as an artistic and political tool.

Bearing in mind Meyerhold's place in avant-garde circles and his connections with artists like Rodchenko, it is unlikely that the director saw photography as a straightforward documentary practice, intended to do nothing more than record the positions of his actors during a performance. The framing of images such as the diagonal shot of *The Government Inspector* (Figure 14) indicates an engagement with the photograph as a work of art. In addition, Meyerhold's connections to the avant-garde indicate that an understanding of photography as a practice is likely to be connected to his understanding of the function of the image in a wider sense within his theatre, as a model and metaphor for the relationship between the static and the dynamic, an alternative temporal structure drawn from a complementary discipline.

Reflecting on his production of Alexei Faiko's *Bubus the Teacher* (1925), Meyerhold states that:

Directing is not a matter of static groupings, it is a process – the influence of time upon space. Beyond the spatial idea it includes the temporal idea, which is rhythmical and musical. Look at a bridge and you see what might be a leap frozen in metal. Movement, that is, not something static.

(Meyerhold, trans. Schmidt 1981: 156)

Here, Meyerhold is addressing an issue at the crux of both theatrical presentation and artistic representation: the relationship between stillness and movement. In his description of the bridge as a 'leap frozen in metal' Meyerhold proposes a very specific reading of the notion of the image: his implication is that the stationary is not necessarily static. In reading the bridge as leaping through space, he explores the temporal aspect of a spatial structure by implying a dynamic process located within the form of the bridge, an 'active stillness' (Williamson 1996).<sup>80</sup> The choice of a bridge for this analogy is significant, in that it implies a sense of movement operating within the image outside of the confines of narrative. By projecting movement outside of a narrative structure, what Meyerhold sees is pure movement: the static has, within itself, an element of dynamism. Meyerhold's description is strikingly similar to Cartier-Bresson's observations on photography, the 'craving' of a 'whole essence' restricted within the static moment, lifted out of the flow of linear time, but at the same time, implying a sense of movement that operates beyond the confines of the image.

This differentiation of temporal experience between art forms was of significant interest to the early-twentieth-century avant-garde. Gertrude Stein sought to produce a playtext that would engage with the audience using the unique perceptual tenets of canvas art, a similar temporal structure to that seen in the instantaneous art of the photograph. Of painting, Stein claims:

The business of Art as I tried to explain in *Composition and Explanation* is to live in the actual present, that is the complete actual present.

(Stein [1935] 1957: 104–105)

Stein goes on to apply this principle of the perpetual present seen in the artwork to the construction of the playtext. In her description of her opera *Four Saints in Three Acts*, Stein notes that:

All these things [the events in the lives of the saints] might have been a story but as a landscape they were just there and a play is just there.

(Stein [1935] 1957: 131)

Stein distinguishes the narrative function of theatre from its potential to engage the audience with a single staged moment akin to a landscape painting. Stein's association with Picasso is well documented, as is her patronage of his artistic endeavours and, alongside her brother Leo, her extensive collection of his works. This instantaneity of a moment ('they were just there') also echoes the 'instantaneous present' that Polkinhorn sees in the cubist collage (Polkinhorn 1989: 220). Each exploration is different, but the central tenet is the same: the embedding of movement, even temporality, into the static moment.

Much can be gained from the reading of Meyerhold's photographs in this context. Meyerhold's interest in the relationship between static and dynamic images has already been seen in action, in the tableaux constructed for *Sister Beatrice*, or the final Dumb Scene of *The Government Inspector*. The interest in the function and structure of the static moment suggests a similarity between the function of the photograph and that of Meyerhold's tableaux. This can be seen in the director's use of the wheeled trucks in *The Government Inspector*, in which a static tableau was used to precede the commencement of each episode, a device described in Worrall's reconstruction:

[T]here would be a tableau lasting a number of seconds then, almost magically, the figures would slowly come to life.

(Worrall 1972: 78)

Discussing the creation of the photographic image, Hart Crane claims that 'speed is at the bottom of it all, the hundredth of a second caught so precisely that the motion is continued from the picture indefinitely: the moment made eternal' (Crane in Sontag 1979: 65). Like the photograph, speed was at the bottom of Meyerhold's staging device. The trucks were wheeled to their downstage resting place with the actors already in their – static – positions. The movement of the truck was a relatively smooth and almost instantaneous process, particularly when compared to a laborious large-scale set change. The sense of movement from upstage to downstage highlighted the arrival of each episode as significant. This movement echoed the hundredth of a second for which the camera shutter is closed, the obvious mechanics of the staging device calling to mind the sound that accompanies the shutter release and draws our attention to the mechanical process of image making, a sound that Barthes sees as symbolic of time itself (Barthes [1981] 2000: 15). Like the camera, the trucks initiated an image into the stage space.

Meyerhold chose that this image, when revealed, was static and remained long enough for the audience to register its stillness. Like Crane's photograph, these static moments resonated with temporality. They were suspensions of movement, made significant by their juxtaposition to the flow of time: they were photographic. As such, the spectator was engaged simultaneously with a number of temporalities. The still image drew attention to the movement that has been suspended, highlighting the temporal flow of the production as a whole. It functioned as respite for the spectator, a thinking time. The photograph is not only a moment suspended, but also a contraction of a series of moments, encapsulating the extended essence of an event. The photograph implies a sense of narrative time that can only be accessed by the viewer making a projection about the events that preceded or followed the moment of the image. Similarly, Meyerhold's tableaux were contractions of the episode to follow. They asked the spectator to make a temporal projection, a 'guess' at the narrative to come. As the episode was played out, this guess exists as an alternative reality that may, or may not, coincide with what happens on stage. 'Frozen movement', according to Steven Berkoff, is 'retained in the mind's eye almost as stills' (Berkoff 1988: 77), allowing Meyerhold to access an additional time frame, the cognitive time during which the spectator engaged with the performance after it had finished, back in the 'real world'. Imprinted on the spectator's imagination, the stage image becomes a photograph.

### **The Caricature: Artwork as Document**

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The 'truth myth' of photography is that the experience of the photograph is so similar to the daily visual experience of the world that it is difficult to identify the constructed nature of the image. In contrast, the visual language of the caricature is intentionally divorced from verisimilitude, using a formal structure in which the exaggeration and minimization of certain features of the object of representation construct a specific relationship between the artist, object, artwork and viewer. The caricature works through the balance of features exaggerated and minimized not only to ensure recognition of the subject, but also to impart the artist's opinion of that subject to the viewer; in the words of Arnheim, 'caricature is a spectacular demonstration of expression by deviation' (Arnheim 1983: 320).

The documentary status of these images is interesting, in that, even more so than the photographs of Meyerhold's theatre, the caricatures are clearly independent works of art. The skill used in their construction is apparent to the viewer. Many are attractive, well drawn and have a clear aesthetic value. However, they are also closely and irrevocably tied to Meyerhold's theatre practice. As commentaries on the director, his life and his performance styles, these images only function within a contextual understanding of Meyerhold. As with any caricature, access to the wit with which the image has been constructed is only available for a viewer who understands the frame of reference, the

intentions of the artist and the target of the representation: to a viewer, that is, who gets the joke.

As such, despite their status as independent artworks, the Meyerhold caricatures are also heavily dependent on context. Their primary value, more than seventy years after the director's death, is as documents that elucidate aspects of Meyerhold's life and work. The use of caricatures, particularly in news publications, was common in early twentieth century Russia. Many reviews of theatre performances were accompanied not by reproductions of photographs of the show, but by caricatures depicting the performers, director and setting. As such, documentation of Meyerhold's theatre across his career boasts reams of caricature sketches. Now held in archives, and occasionally discussed in Russian publications on the director (by Binevich and Titova, for example), these images allow the contemporary viewer a unique access point with Meyerhold's theatre not only in its performance, but also in its reception.<sup>81</sup>

It is this inclusion of reception in the process of documentation that is the most striking feature of the caricatured representations of Meyerhold's theatre. Due to their open manipulation of their subject matter, the caricatures provide an insight not only into the aesthetics of Meyerhold's theatre (as is seen in photographs or scenographic sketches and designs), but also into the opinions that were associated with his practice, and the critical responses that it received. The caricatures that Binevich (1978) deals with, for example, ran alongside editorials and reviews, and were thus intended to communicate both the form of the production and a number of responses to it (be those critical – that is, of the critic, the reviewer or the caricature artist – or to do with the public reception of the work). The 'truth problem' of photography is seen as complicating the value of photographs as objective records of performances. The different levels of subjectivity in the caricature, however, far from restricting the value of these artworks to scholars of Meyerhold's theatre, in fact increase their use. They function as an insight into Meyerhold's theatre not in terms of its external visual appearance, but as an artefact in action within its own original context.

Meyerhold's work boasts an association with an extensive number of caricaturists: it seems, in fact, that the director was something of a favourite amongst these artists. Binevich's analysis names thirteen caricaturists whose work on Meyerhold he considers significant. In addition, sketches are easily available from a further five artists, and there are a number of images that have no obvious attribution, and thus remain anonymous. Meyerhold also showed an interest in the style of the caricature, working closely with the Kukryniksy on his production of *The Bedbug* (1929). In this instance, the Kukryniksy provided the designs for the first act of Mayakovsky's play, set in the present day. These caricature-influenced settings provided a striking contrast to the constructivist designs for act two, set in the future and created by Alexander Rodchenko. Meyerhold's choice of the caricature style for the first act designs provides an interesting point of contact and dialogue between the director, who had frequently been the subject of caricatures, and the form itself, as well as highlighting the satirical potential that Meyerhold saw in both the artistic style and the playwright.

Aside from these design-related caricatures associated with Meyerhold's theatre, there is a body of caricatures that comprise the documentary responses to the director's work. These sketches appear to fall into four categories. The first are 'personal caricatures': these are the most familiar kind of caricature sketches, drawings of the director himself, which play on his distinctive physiological features (most frequently, his large nose and shock of grey hair). They are either stand-alone images (in which just Meyerhold appears and is in himself the focus of the humour), or comparative images, in which the director is compared with another figure: one example shows Meyerhold with his collaborator and playwright Yury Olesha, and focuses, for obvious reasons, on the physical contrast between their builds, Meyerhold depicted as tall and thin, Olesha as short and round. These drawings poke fun at Meyerhold's appearance – some more gently than others – and although interesting in establishing his public persona, they are of limited interest in the wider documentation of his practice.

The second category of caricatures contains drawings that are also personal in their target, focusing not on Meyerhold's appearance, but on key features of his personality, or, more significantly, his career. A favourite theme in these drawings is Meyerhold's extensive influence as a director, particularly immediately before the 1917 Revolution, drawing, no doubt, on his 'double life' during this period (working in both the Imperial Theatres and as Doctor Dapertutto). Examples, such as a sketch entitled 'The Overloaded Director', show Meyerhold bowing under the weight of his responsibility, the caption indicating that the director would be unable to stomach any lightening of his load. Another example, from 1916, shows a decidedly downcast Meyerhold shuffling his different responsibilities (including the Alexandrinsky and Marinsky theatres) with multiple arms (Figure 15). The interest in Meyerhold's many roles during this period not only confirms the level of his productivity, but also gives some indication of what aspects of the director's career choices were attracting attention. In addition, the fact that neither image presents a particularly positive response to Meyerhold's prolific output gives some indication of how the director was perceived. A further, particularly interesting, example of this kind of sketch is a much later work by Nikolai Radlov (1937), entitled 'You are the Highest Court for Yourself'. This image shows a chained Meyerhold standing below the pointing finger of a judge (also Meyerhold) in front of a guard (another Meyerhold) and two jury members (predictably, also Meyerholds). The implication, presumably, is that Meyerhold is responsible for his own fate, or even his own worst critic, an observation that would become particularly striking in light of the circumstances surrounding the director's actual trial and execution in 1939–1940.

The third set of caricatures represents a clear shift in their subject matter, away from the director himself and onto the formal construction or aesthetic qualities of his work. Binevich (1978) surveys a range of this sort of image, including a satirical sketch by artist M. Slepyan depicting a performance of *The Fairground Booth* in which Meyerhold as Pierrot can be seen downstage, whilst upstage sit the long table of 'mystics' (Figure 16). As a record of Meyerhold's staging, the image is a reasonably

accurate representation, as can be seen from a comparison with a sketch of the opening sequence by Nikolai Sapunov, who provided the design for the production (Figure 17). Both images contain the key features of the staging: the table of mystics, the reclining Pierrot and the cut-out shape downstage. What Sapunov's sketch also communicates is a sense of the desired atmosphere of the sequence, a symbolist ethereality in the darkness and shadows. The caricature supplements the design sketch in its clearer representation of the mystics and their differentiation from Pierrot: whereas Pierrot is represented as a three-dimensional human being, the mystics sit behind the table, with only human heads and hands visible, reflecting Meyerhold's use of cardboard cut-outs for their bodies in the performance.

*The Fairground Booth* sketch functions as documentation of performance, in a form that allows one aspect of the production, the contrasting approach to different characters, to be more clearly elucidated. Amongst the caricatures dealing with the formal construction of Meyerhold's work, however, are a series of sketches that go beyond documenting the stage image, into an almost meta-artistic process in which the style of the production is represented in the style of the drawing itself. These sketches draw on the stylistic conventions of art movements, which are mimicked and sometimes mocked, in order to represent to the viewer an impression of Meyerhold's creative intentions. Lyubimov's drawing of *Hedda Gabler* is one such work, in which Komissarzhevskaya, as Hedda, is represented in a series of dots reminiscent of the conventions of pointillism, giving a sense of the symbolist style that Meyerhold had sought in the production. Indeed, Binevich observes that Lyubimov's sketches:

Tell us more about the appearance of Sapunov's design than all the descriptions which appeared in the press at the time. Moreover, the 'attractiveness' of his cartoon is doubtless the result of the production decisions made by Meyerhold and Sapunov.

(Binevich 1978: 214)<sup>82</sup>

In other words, the sketch is not simply a representation of Meyerhold's production, but Lyubimov in fact owes the aesthetic success of his image to his ability to engage with the performance style that Meyerhold and his designer Sapunov had created: it is the mimicry of this style that not only makes the cartoon function, but also makes it aesthetically pleasing. The incorporation of the formal qualities of the production is expanded in Troyansky's cartoon of Meyerhold's *Sister Beatrice*. This image, called in Russian a '*mnogo-kartina*', that is, a picture made from many pictures, depicts a series of the formal tableaux that Meyerhold used to construct his production. The cartoon becomes an echo of the temporal structure of the performance, allowing the viewer to understand not only how the production looked, but also how it progressed in time; a series of static images, related to one another as one might relate the images in a comic strip.

Amongst those images representing Meyerhold's staged work, there is a subset of drawings whose unique construction means that they should be considered a separate



category of caricature. These are sketches that intentionally include the moment of reception: images, in other words, that incorporate some indication of spectators and their response. The inclusion of the spectator highlights the complex way in which the caricaturist deals with the questions of subjectivity and objectivity in documentation. The subjectivity of the caricature and its status as an artwork, which, like cubism, has a self-acknowledged relationship to the notion of observation, mean that these sketches include an element of reception in their structure at a fundamental level: that is, the caricatures contain within them the opinion of the artist, and, when the subject of representation is a theatrical performance, this will inherently be an engagement with the moment of reception. In the caricature, the artist stands in for the theatrical spectator, and when Lyubimov represents Meyerhold's *Hedda* as a mass of pointillist dots, he communicates his experiences of viewing *Hedda Gabler* to the observer.

When the caricaturist includes an image of the spectator within the sketch itself, the caricature embodies a further level of production and reception analysis. In these instances, the viewer sees not only the artist's impression of the production (and of the moment of reception), but also a form of meta-reception, in which the artist represents what they have observed about the reception of others. The representation of the spectator is, in some instances, very literal: one sketch of *Hedda Gabler* shows Komissarzhevskaya (as Hedda) standing before a mass of applauding hands. Alternatively, the public can be represented by a single figure substituted for the audience as a whole. This sort of construction can be seen in Kalibanovsky's drawing of Komissarzhevskaya literally contorting herself into knots trying to perform Meyerhold's direction before a single seated spectator (reproduced in Binevich 1978). The status of the seated figure is confirmed by the image's caption, which reads: "The diligent spectator, having dislocated his eyes and his brain in a futile attempt to understand [Meyerhold's] staging, consoles himself with the old Russian proverb: "the unreachable cannot be reached"" (Binevich 1978: 213) – in essence, the equivalent to dismissing something because 'I can't make head nor tail of it'.<sup>83</sup> Here, the confusion at Meyerhold's symbolist interpretation of Ibsen's play in even the most dedicated and sincere spectators at the Komissarzhevskaya Theatre is expressed through one representative figure, Kalibanovsky's 'diligent spectator'.

It should be noted, as Binevich points out, that not all the caricatures are derisive in their intent, and the range of cartoons of Meyerhold represents various opinions and responses – as is clear from the comparison of the applause cartoon with Kalibanovsky's sketch. The power of the caricature as document of Meyerholdian theatre is that the conventions of the form allow for an analytical engagement with the director's practice within the image. These sketches present an alternative way for non-Russian speakers to engage with Meyerhold's theatre, beyond photographs, drawings and designs, and as such, they have a potentially significant role to play in the transmission of Meyerhold's theatre in the West.

## **The Significance of Visual Arts Contextualization for the Meyerhold Historian**

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As visual practices that held a significant place in the documentation of Meyerhold's work, the reading of photographs and caricatures facilitates historical engagement with the director's aesthetic. An understanding of the documents as artworks, and vice versa, allows for a greater degree of contextualization of the visual materials in the Meyerhold archives. This process of contextualization is vital if Meyerhold's theatre is to be understood through the agency of visual sources.

The cultural context of the rise of photography as an artistic practice in the 1910s and 1920s helps to locate Meyerhold's relationship with the photodocumentation of his theatre, as does his interest in the interaction between static and dynamic structures. There are tensions in the photographic image: the multiple time frames that meet, the collision of constructed codes with a superficially realistic representation and in light of digital advances, the potential to turn photographic 'truth' into forged lie. These tensions lead to a vast and highly considered body of photographic philosophy that sees the complexity of the photograph not as a problem, but a challenge. But where does this leave historians wishing to engage with the photodocumentation of Meyerhold's practice? Ultimately, the reading of these images should allow for an understanding of Meyerhold's relationship both with the image as a static and dynamic construct, and with the rise of photography as a creative medium. It is not enough to advocate a cautious reading of images about which, for the most part, there is limited contextual or historical information. This caution would be nothing more than that advocated for any historical document. The photograph, like the text written in Russian, has its own language, and this language is a cultural and contextual one, which must be decoded when engaging with the artefact. As such, Meyerhold's understanding of the language of an image, his reading of the leaping bridge, becomes the key to deciphering photographs of his theatre.

The alternation of movement and stillness and the use of varying speeds in performance formed part of the careful, musical-rhythmic construction of the production that Meyerhold considered vital in his creation of the performance as a temporal whole. This rhythmic structure cannot be conveyed by a photograph as long as the photograph is considered a static moment. In these readings, photographs, as Barthes ([1981] 2000) and Christian Metz (2003) argue, are synonymous with death. The photographic moment is abstracted from the constant flow of images in time from which the human experience of the world is constructed. The photograph, by way of preserving the moment as an image, lifts it out of the flow of time from which it derived its relevance, even its significance. The frozen photograph, to use Barthes' imagery, is as much a death mask as it is a guarantee of immortality (Barthes [1981] 2000: 32). However, when the photograph is read as a suspension of dynamism, echoing the suspended moments of motion in Meyerhold's productions, the images become less about preserving one momentary pose and more

about the implications for movement and rhythm that they contain. They are images that capture, as Cartier-Bresson puts it, a 'whole essence'.

Caricatures deal not only in subjective representations of objects or people, but in the communication of ideas. If this is the case, then the transmission of Meyerhold's work from Russia to the United Kingdom could be seen as a process of caricature, in which the selections made by scholars have contributed to a complex and fragmented reading of Meyerhold's attitudes and practices. Engaging with Meyerholdian theatre in a British context is a complex process of negotiation with issues of disrupted transmission, political complications (including the restrictions caused by the Cold War and the Iron Curtain) and cultural difference. Meyerhold's ideas, as much as the language of his essays and notes, need to be translated. The application of caricature as a metaphor for this process of transmission or translation uncovers the highly constructed nature of 'Meyerhold' in Britain. The fact that engagement with the director's thinking is mediated in British theatre practice is often hidden as a result of the now wide-ranging awareness of Meyerhold's work and the ready accessibility of seminal books on his theatre (by Braun, Leach, Law and Gordon, and Hoover, for example). However, the very first appearances of Meyerhold in publication in the United Kingdom were commentaries on Russian theatre, inflected by the experiences of their writers, who exaggerated and minimized aspects of the director's practice to chime with their own agenda in the communication of work from a Soviet context to the West. They are, in other words, caricatures of Meyerhold.

The earliest period of transmission of Meyerhold's ideas to Britain, prior to the Cold War and imposition of the Iron Curtain, featured two primary texts: *Moscow Rehearsals*, by Norris Houghton (1938), and André van Gyseghem's *Theatre in Soviet Russia* (1943). Each text presents a view of the director in which one facet of his practice is emphasized above all else. In Houghton's reading, Meyerhold is portrayed as outsider, a director whose work is in conflict with the theatres more readily endorsed by the Soviet government, significantly his *alma mater*, the Moscow Art Theatre. Houghton's approach to Meyerhold centres on his relationship to the work of Stanislavsky and the practices of the Art Theatre, that is, Meyerhold in binary opposition to Stanislavsky. Every area of analysis returns to the binary: Meyerhold is seen as Stanislavsky's opposite in his approach to the actor, the art of directing, the use of convention, the nature of spectatorship, characterization, system of work (Houghton claims that Meyerhold has none), style of prompt book, rehearsal technique, speed of rehearsals and even number of run-throughs prior to performance.

The overall effect is of an oppositional relationship between Meyerhold's and Stanislavsky's theatres, which is so fundamental that it cannot be ignored. The construction of binaries in Houghton's work suffuses the chapter well beyond its initial subject matter of the Meyerhold-Stanislavsky opposition: practitioners can be concerned with art or politics, for example, but not both (Meyerhold is the latter); the individual or the collective (Meyerhold is the former); directing or acting (Meyerhold is, again, the former). There is no room for slippage here: Meyerhold must be either one thing or another. This has the overall effect of defining Meyerhold as 'not' something else; he becomes a practitioner of

absence rather than presence. Houghton enforces this through a series of comments on the impossibility of studying Meyerhold's work and the variety of styles in his *oeuvre*. The only through-line that Houghton can identify, he concludes, is arguably also a reference to absence: that of Meyerhold as 'arch-destroyer' (Houghton 1938: 107). The image that emerges of Meyerhold, then, is a caricature of the director as the rejector of Stanislavsky and of the conventions of pre-revolutionary theatre, an incomprehensible genius dictator Meyerhold.

Five years later, Van Gyseghem presents a different, but equally caricatured, approach to Meyerhold's work. Unlike the disjointed Meyerhold seen in Houghton's analysis, Van Gyseghem emphasizes continuity above all else. Retaining, in effect, Houghton's art-politics binary, he reads Meyerhold's work as overwhelmingly and exclusively political in nature: his caricature is not director-dictator Meyerhold, but Bolshevik Meyerhold. In fact, in a move which echoes the open subjectivity of the caricature artist, Van Gyseghem begins his book with an outright statement of purpose, which makes his political leaning extremely clear:

It is because I believe that the sickness of our social system [in Britain] as a whole is responsible for [...] narrow-mindedness, prejudice, and stupidity that I have turned enquiring eyes towards the theatres of another country, with another social system.

(Van Gyseghem 1943: 5)

Van Gyseghem is evidently working within the frame of an idealized image of Soviet Russia – a better alternative to the British politics with which he is acquainted. This is reflected in the style of the text, which is overwhelmingly narrative-driven, heroic in tone, and includes a series of extended descriptions of Russian workers:

Fascinated, we stare around us. Is this then the population of Moscow? Are these the myriads of people who made the Revolution, and for whom the Revolution was made? Upon their faces is written their histories, rough faces that the wind and rain have ploughed into furrows, faces a little blurred from time [...] young faces are in the majority, many of them too flat to be beautiful, but strong and confident.

(Van Gyseghem 1943: 15)

Where in Houghton's reading the Meyerhold Theatre has been abandoned by the proletariat, Van Gyseghem and his colleagues find themselves 'picked up by the tide of movement and swept into the heart of the crowd [of workers] that is surging into the theatre' (Van Gyseghem 1943: 14). In contrast to Houghton, who sees his St. Petersburg period as indicative of Meyerhold's decadent and aristocratic leanings pre-1917, Van Gyseghem avoids all discussion of symbolism and the Komissarzhevskaya era, a time marked by her role as individual 'star' of her own theatre and which does not sit well with a reading of Meyerhold's work emphasizing a collective, political through-line. This period

is undoubtedly better suited to Houghton, where it functions as a clear representation of Meyerhold's individual genius and mysticism, in his anti-collective, anti-Stanislavsky reading.

The necessity of selection in approaching the Meyerhold archive has already been noted. What becomes apparent here is that this process of selection is by its nature likely to produce multiple readings, caricatures or perspectives on the director. The more caricatures of the director that exist, the more images of him are available through which to interpret his practice. The use of caricature as a tool for reading transmission processes uncovers this multiplicity in Meyerhold's image in the West, leading to a multiplication of understandings and applications of his work in Britain today: we are ultimately dealing not with one Meyerhold, but with a multitude. The processes of the photographer and caricaturist enable the historian not only to read Meyerhold's theatre, but also to read their own reading, to understand the process by which certain understandings have become embedded in Meyerhold scholarship. This self-reflection is rooted in the cultural contextualization of the visual arts in Meyerhold's practice, as inspiration, process, artwork and document.

## Re-reading Meyerhold, part two

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In contrast to the problems caused by the restrictions surrounding access to Meyerhold's work, there is also a sense in which the circumstances of his death give the director a level of significance as a case study. This is particularly apparent in the questions surrounding the transmission of Meyerhold's theatre from Russia to the West. The complications of this process of transmission are unique, in that the journey of the director's work outside of Russia began before his death (with Houghton and Van Gyseghem), was suspended as a result of his suppression and re-started in the 1960s by Braun and others. There is a duality in the transmission of his theatre, allowing different levels of engagement and different problems of accuracy, fact and interpretation to emerge. The process of transmission, which in many instances is a silent one whose mechanics are hidden, becomes in Meyerhold's case a fundamental aspect in contemporary engagements with his theatre. The director is an interesting case for the consideration of wider issues, including theatrical transmission and documentation, the practices of theatre history and the cross-cultural engagement with theatre practice. The reading of his theatre as cubist is one such case study, which emphasizes certain aspects of Meyerhold's aesthetic, as well as highlights the potential utility of visual arts practice as a detailed analytical framework in theatre historiography.

Meyerhold's connections with cubist art clearly function at more fundamental level than that of causal overlap. In the words of N. Katherine Hayles, they are an example of two disciplines, with a shared cultural context, which 'base the theories they construct on similar presuppositions' (Hayles 1994: xi). For the researcher of Meyerhold, the presuppositions of the cubists can uncover key aspects of the director's aesthetic, indicating themes in his practice that supplement our understanding of him not just as theatre maker, but as theatre maker contextualized at the beginning of the twentieth century. One of the most pervasive of the themes that emerges from this reading of Meyerhold's practice is his attitude towards the question of representation. The cubist approach to art-making, which retained the object of representation often in an ironic reference to the paraphernalia of the still life or the conventions of portraiture and figure drawing, constructed abstraction as a dialogue with realism. The director's relationship to the naturalism he learnt at the Moscow Art Theatre was not a pure rejection, but rather a complex modification, retaining traces of realism within a heightened, theatrical context.

In Meyerhold's theatre, this dialogue between realism and abstraction permeates his practice. The object of representation is no less significant for Meyerhold than for his cubist counterparts, although its definition is more varied in a theatrical context. Whether

the 'object' of theatre is the playtext, the body of the performer or the world outside the auditorium, Meyerhold approaches each as a resource to be mediated through the balance of his realist/abstracted aesthetic. This is seen in the manipulation of depth and surface, in the geometric universalization of the actor's body through biomechanics, in the collage-like dissonance in the stage image and in the integration of the spectator. As such, his theatre sits provocatively between verisimilitude and abstraction, a position that radically unsettles the spectator's experience through its deconstruction of absolutes. Arguably, complete abstraction is a more stable form of representation than the mediated verisimilitude of Meyerhold. The collision of the abstract and the realist functions to expose the falsehoods of naturalism, and that which looks real becomes more deceptive than anything else that is presented on the stage.

Thematic also in the reading of Meyerhold's work as cubist, and a facet of the realism/abstraction dialogue, is the manipulation of temporal and spatial models using anti-positivist philosophy. The cubist engagement with theories of the fourth dimension, and in particular the collapse of the different dimensions into a single space-time, suggests an alternative understanding of Meyerhold's approach to temporality in performance. The extension of the text into fantasy time, the division of the play into free-standing episodes or the use of images and tableaux to collapse extended temporal experience into one moment, similar to Gertrude Stein's plays as paintings, suggest Meyerhold's interest in temporal structures that operate outside of the confines of linear or teleological temporality. There emerges, in Meyerhold's theatre, a painterly, even cubist, perception of time and space.

It is the application of cubism as a frame through which to read Meyerhold's theatre that aids the elucidation of these aspects of the director's aesthetic. The similarities that can be identified between Meyerhold's practice and the cubist canvases allow for the reading of his theatre as a radically unsettling, anti-positivist world, in which time and space, reality and abstraction intermingle: Meyerhold's is a theatre at the edge of reality. What is most significant is that these similarities emerge through a process of difference: it is the different temporal and spatial structures, the different modes of representation and the different conditions of reception that mark visual art and theatrical performance which prompt the identification of these aspects of Meyerhold's theatre. The use of models from the visual arts allows the reader to engage with a temporality in theatre akin to that in the still image: an opportunity that the reception of theatre as a medium embodied in linear temporal progression does not usually give pause to consider. The reading of Meyerhold's theatre through the lens of cubism reconnects the director's work to the cultural conditions of the early twentieth century and the redefinition of the terms 'time' and 'space', and, through models like Hayles' matrix, integrates his practice alongside that of his contemporaries in disciplines as diverse as the visual arts, literature and physics.

The identification of these themes implies an expansion in the understanding of Meyerhold's practice. As such, this volume ends where it began, with the call for the ongoing re-reading of Meyerhold's theatre in a range of cultural, social and political contexts. In the previous chapter, the metaphor of the caricature was used to explore

early English language publications on Meyerhold. 'Caricature' can have reductive connotations: this is not the implication here. The caricature serves as a metaphor for the process of transmission, the way in which Meyerhold has been understood in countries like the United Kingdom, which he never visited and to which his connections were limited. It would be equally possible to substitute 'caricature' for the term 'perspective', allowing a return to the cubist notion of motor space. What is particularly appealing about this metaphor is the way in which the cubist multiple perspectives exist simultaneously within the frame of the same canvas in order to build a more complex understanding of the object represented. There is an advantage in the many perspectives on Meyerhold, emerging both during the director's own era and at distance from him and from Russia: that is the advantage of multiplicity. In his study of retranslations of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in Dutch (2007), Jan Willem Mathijssen argues that the process of retranslation and re-reading gives the Dutch an expanded understanding of Shakespeare's work that can never be acquired by the English. The wealth of material available in Russia and the Russian cultural understanding of Meyerhold cannot be rivalled, but perhaps there is, in the multiple perspectives implied by transmission, translation, retranslation and reinterpretation, a unique role for Meyerhold scholarship in other contexts as well.

When Robert Leach concludes his consideration of biomechanics in Alison Hodge's volume on actor training, he asserts the potential of Meyerhold's system for the twenty-first century:

Because it has seemed strange in an age dominated by the naturalistic acting styles of Stanislavsky, Strasberg and their followers, the virtually limitless potential of biomechanics has long been obscured. Perhaps it will become apparent again in the new millennium.

(Leach 2000: 52–53)

The potential wealth of biomechanics for the performer is echoed in the wealth of Meyerhold's historical theory and practice for the researcher. The political, social, cultural and theatrical concerns represented by Meyerhold's theatre provide a range of paradigms through which the director may be considered. The multiplicity of his context implies a multiplicity for the historian, researcher or practitioner engaging with his theatre, a wealth of potential readings to be considered, and each approach adds another perspective to our understanding of the complexity of his theatre. Much has been accomplished in Meyerhold scholarship in English since the 1960s; fortunately, there is still much more to be explored.



## **Appendix**

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Russian art and Meyerhold's theatre: A timeline



The timeline is included here to give the reader a year-by-year account of select events in Russian and international avant-garde art against major developments and productions in Meyerhold's career, in order to cross-reference events of significance in both fields.

Where possible, the date of an event is given to allow more in-depth, month-by-month analysis. For art exhibitions, the city in which they took place is also given. This is to allow the reader to cross-reference Meyerhold's geographical position with events taking place in the visual arts.

The timeline has been constructed through material drawn from a number of sources. It is particularly indebted to the work of Robert Leach (1989), and also draws on Braun ([1969] 1998; [1995] 1998), Gray ([1962] 1971), Talbot Rice (1963a), and the website of the Museum of Modern Art ([www.moma.org](http://www.moma.org)).

YEAR	CULTURAL DEVELOPMENTS AND SIGNIFICANT WORKS	MEYERHOLD
1870	Foundation of the 'Society for Circulating Art Exhibitions' ( <i>Peredvizhniki</i> /Wanderers)  Pavel Tretyakov starts building up his art collection	
1874		Born (28 January old style)
1875	Perov: <i>A Monastic Refectory</i> (1865–1875)	
1881–1887	Surikov: <i>The Boyarina Morosova</i>	
1890s	Imperial Theatres start using professional painters for décor	
1892	Tretyakov donates his collection to the City of Moscow	Starts acting in amateur dramatics in Penza



1893	Dmitri Merezhovsky publishes essay <i>On Reasons for the Decline of Contemporary Russian Literature and On New Literary Trends</i>	
1895		Reads law at Moscow University
1896	Chekhov: <i>The Seagull</i>	Transfers to Philharmonia to study acting
1897	Lev Tolstoy publishes <i>What is Art?</i>	
1898	Moscow Art Theatre opens (June) World of Art formed First edition of <i>World of Art</i> journal	Graduates from Philharmonia and is awarded gold medal for best actor  Joins newly formed Moscow Art Theatre
1899	First World of Art Exhibition (Stieglitz Art Institute, St. Petersburg)  Symbolists form Scorpion Publishing House (Moscow)  First publication of almanac <i>Northern Flowers</i>	
c. 1900	Division of World of Art into two schools: Moscow School (emphasis on line) vs. Petersburg School (emphasis on colour)	
1902	Larionov's expressionist period begins	Leaves Moscow Art Theatre  Travels to Italy  Forms Fellowship of the New Drama (provinces)
1904	Shift in interest in Russian art from Munich to Paris  <i>Northern Flowers</i> replaced by <i>Scales</i>  Last edition of <i>World of Art</i> Journal	

## Appendix: Russian art and Meyerhold's theatre: A timeline

1905	Kuznetsov: <i>The Blue Fountain</i>	<i>Death of Tintagiles, Schluck and Jau, Snow, Comedy of Love</i> , Theatre Studio (Moscow)
1905–1906		Collapse of Theatre Studio Brief period in the provinces Invited to join Komissarzhevskaya Theatre, St. Petersburg
1906	Formation of Proletkult End of Larionov's expressionist period Last World of Art Exhibition (St. Petersburg) Golden Fleece Group unveiled First issue of <i>Golden Fleece</i> almanac Blok: <i>The Fairground Booth</i> Kustodlev: <i>Death Stalks the Streets</i>	<i>Hedda Gabler</i> , Theatre of V.F. Komissarzhevskaya (10 November) <i>Sister Beatrice</i> , Theatre of V.F. Komissarzhevskaya (22 November) <i>Fairground Booth</i> , Theatre of V.F. Komissarzhevskaya (30 December)
1907	Kliun meets Malevich Picasso: <i>Les Demoiselles D'Avignon</i> Goncharova: <i>Madonna and Child</i> (1905–1907)	Sees productions by Reinhardt in Berlin (April) <i>Spring Awakening</i> , Theatre of V. F. Komissarzhevskaya (15 September) <i>Death's Victory</i> , Theatre of V. F. Komissarzhevskaya (6 November)
1908	Salon of the Golden Fleece, organized by Ryabushinsky (Moscow, April, May) 'Analytical cubist' period begins (Gris) Picasso: <i>Woman with a Fan</i> Picasso: <i>Three Women</i>	Leaves Komissarzhevskaya Theatre (January) Provinces: Ungern, Vitebsk, Minsk, Kherson, Poltava, Kiev, Kharkov (productions include <i>Sister Beatrice</i> and <i>The Fairground Booth</i> )

		Appointed director of opera and drama at Imperial Theatres, St. Petersburg (April)
		Begins 'double life' as Dr Dapertutto
		Contributes to <i>Theatre: A Book about the New Theatre</i>
1909	Foundation of the Knave of Diamonds group  Larionov begins his primitivist work  Golden Fleece exhibition (Moscow) Goncharova and Larionov emerge as key figures, also shows French artists from Shchukin's collection  Marinetti's Futurist Manifesto published in Russian (shortly after publication in <i>Figaro</i> in Italy)	<i>Tristan and Isolde</i> Marinsky Theatre, St. Petersburg (30 October)
1910	Costakis dates start of the avant-garde from this year  First <i>Union of Youth</i> Exhibition (St. Petersburg, March)  Vladimir Izdebsky introduces Munich School in Odessa: nucleus of the <i>Blaue Reiter</i>  Knave of Diamonds Exhibition (Moscow) establishes Russian art as a school in its own right, Malevich is introduced, some <i>Blaue Reiter</i> and minor French works are also shown (December)  Picasso: <i>Portrait of Ambroise Vollard</i>	<i>Adoration of the Cross</i> , Tower Theatre, St. Petersburg (19 April)  <i>Columbine's Scarf</i> , House of Interludes, St. Petersburg (12 October)  <i>Don Juan</i> , Alexandrinsky Theatre, St. Petersburg (9 November)  Travels to Greece
1911	Beginning of Larionov's rayonnist period	<i>Harlequin, the Marriage Broker</i> , Nobles' Assembly, St. Petersburg (8 November)

		<i>Orpheus</i> , Marinsky Theatre (12 December)
1911–1912	Picasso: <i>Still Life with Chair Caning</i> or, <i>Still Life: The Cane Chair</i>	
1912	Larionov and Goncharova separate from Knave of Diamonds (February)  First Donkey's Tail Exhibition by Goncharova, Larionov, Malevich, Tatlin (Moscow, 11 March)  Popova sees Shchukin's collection  'Synthetic cubist' period begins (Gris)  Tatlin: <i>The Sailor</i>  Popova: <i>Man+Air+Space</i>  Duchamp: <i>Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2</i>	Works with the Cooperative of Artists in Terioki ( <i>Lovers</i> , <i>Harlequin</i> , <i>the Marriage</i> <i>Broker</i> , <i>Adoration of the</i> <i>Cross</i> , <i>Crimes and Crimes</i> )
1912–1913	Popova and Udaltsova study in Paris with Metzinger and Le Fauconnier, and probably see the 1913 Futurist Paris exhibition  Malevich: <i>The Knife Grinder</i>	
1913	Tatlin visits Paris, meets Picasso and sees his first 'construction'  <i>Apollon</i> publishes an article on Boccioni's sculpture  Rozanova publishes <i>The Bases of the</i> <i>New Creation</i>  Apollinaire publishes <i>The Cubist</i> <i>Painters</i>  Larionov officially launches rayonnism at the Target Exhibition (Moscow)  <i>Victory over the Sun</i> performance (December)  Mayakovsky: <i>Vladimir Mayakovsky</i> , <i>A Tragedy</i>	<i>Electra</i> , Marinsky Theatre (18 February)  Visits Paris (June)  Starts his own studio at Tenishevskoe High School, St. Petersburg (September)  Publishes <i>On the Theatre</i>

Braque: *Woman with a Guitar*

Metzinger: *Two Women*

- |              |   |  |
|--------------|---|--|
| 1913–1914    | Tatlin makes first painted relief (winter)  |  |
|              | Malevich: <i>An Englishman in Moscow</i>  |  |
| 1914         | <i>Technical Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture</i> (1912) published in Moscow   | First edition of the journal <i>Love for Three Oranges</i> (February)                    |
|              | Kandinsky returns to Russia after outbreak of the First World War (November)  | <i>Fairground Booth/Unknown Lady</i> , Tenishevskoe Auditorium, St. Petersburg (7 April) |
|              | Puni: <i>The Card Players</i>   |  |
| 1914 or 1915 | Goncharova and Larionov leave Russia for Paris to design for Diaghilev's <i>Ballets Russes</i>                                      |  |
| 1914–1915    | Popova's 'mature Cubo-Futurist period' (Rowell 1981: 18)  |  |
| 1915         | <i>Tramway V</i> Exhibition: first futurist exhibition (Petrograd, February)  | Directs film <i>The Picture of Dorian Gray</i> (December)                                |
|              | Malevich meets Tatlin   |  |
|              | 0.10 Exhibition: The Last Futurist Exhibition (Petrograd)   |  |
|              | Malevich announces Suprematism (December)   |  |
|              | Malevich's earliest interest in architectural projects  |  |
|              | Popova: <i>Portrait of a Philosopher</i>  |  |
| 1915–1916    | Tatlin working on corner constructions  |  |
| 1916         | Third (first published) edition of Malevich's <i>From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism: The New Realism in Painting</i> (January) | Directs film <i>The Strongman</i> (December)   |
|              | The Store Exhibition, organized by Tatlin, introduces Rodchenko (Moscow)  |  |

Cangiullo: *Piedigrotta*

1917		<i>Masquerade</i> , Alexandrinsky Theatre (25 February)
1918	Rozanova dies of diphtheria (8 November)	Joins the Communist Party, becomes head of T.E.O., Petrograd (August)
		<i>Mystery-Bouffe</i> , Theatre of Musical Drama, Petrograd (7 November)
1919	Tenth State Exhibition: <i>Nonobjective Creation and Suprematism</i> (Moscow, January)	Arrested by White Army whilst in the South (September)
	Nineteenth State Exhibition (Moscow, December)	Publishes fairytale play <i>Alinur</i> , edits journals, periodicals, bulletins, etc.
	First <i>Free Exhibition</i> at the Winter Palace (Petrograd)	Directs Municipal Theatre at Novorossiysk
	Malevich starts teaching in Vitebsk	
	Lissitsky paints first Proun	
1919 or 1920	Malevich organizes UNOVIS	
1919–1920	Tatlin: <i>Monument to the Third International</i> (design and model)	
1920	Kandinsky founds Inkhuk	Released on parole (January)
	Obmokhu Exhibition, including Stenberg Brothers and Kasimir Medunetsky (Moscow, May)	<i>The Dawns</i> , RSFSR Theatre No. 1, Moscow (7 November)
	Lenin presents resolution/ultimatum to Proletkult (8 October)	
	Alexei Babichev takes over leadership of Inkhuk, starts forming constructivist programme (November)	
	Pevsner and Gabo write the <i>Realistic Manifesto</i>	
	<i>Exhibition of Four</i> , featuring Kandinsky,	

Rodchenko, Stepanova and  
Sinezubov (Moscow)

Lissitsky moves to Moscow to lecture at  
Vkhutemas

1921

Nine sessions of the Working Group of  
Objective Analysis at Inkhuk on  
'construction vs. composition'  
(January–April)

First Working Group of constructivists  
emerges as a unit (March)

Third Obmokhu Exhibition, including  
first display of Rodchenko's hanging  
constructions (Moscow)

Popova designs Tairov's *Romeo and  
Juliet* (May)

Constructivism developed as an ideology  
at Inkhuk (Summer–Autumn)

Constructivists plan to publish *From  
Figurativeness to Construction*

Rodchenko gives a paper on 'line'  
at Inkhuk (Autumn)

5 x 5 = 25 Exhibition by Rodchenko,  
Stepanova, Vesnin, Popova and Exter  
(Moscow, September)

El Lissitsky lectures at Inkhuk  
(23 September)

Second reorganization of Inkhuk under  
Osip Brik, Boris Arvatov, Nikolai Tarabukin;  
twenty-five Inkhuk artists announce their  
withdrawal from laboratory art (i.e. theory)  
to concentrate on production art (November)

Inkhuk commission Popova's article on  
production art

Kandinsky leaves Inkhuk for the  
Bauhaus (December)

*Mystery Bouffé*, RSFSR  
Theatre No. 1 (1 May)

Becomes director of the new  
State Higher Theatre  
Workshops, Moscow

Zinaida Raikh joins GVTM  
(Autumn)



	Split in Inkhuk: First Working Group of Objective Analysis splits	
	Tairov: <i>Notes of a Director</i>	
1922	AkhRR started (May), first AkhRR exhibition (Moscow, May)	<i>Doll's House</i> , Actors' Theatre, Moscow (20 April)
	Electroorganism manifesto	<i>Magnanimous Cuckold</i> , Actors' Theatre (25 April)
	Electroorganism Group Exhibition (Moscow)	State Higher Theatre
	Malevich moves to Petrograd with UNOVIS	Workshops becomes part of GITIS, Moscow (State Institute of Theatrical Art); soon breaks away, becomes the Meyerhold Workshop
		Starts lecturing and publishing articles on biomechanics (in his review of Tairov's <i>Notes of a Director</i> , and in pamphlet <i>The Set Roles of the Actor's Art</i> )
		<i>Death of Tarelkin</i> , GITIS Theatre (24 November)
		Heads Theatre of the Revolution, Moscow (until 1924)
1923	Mayakovsky starts <i>Lef</i>	<i>Earth Rampant</i> Meyerhold Theatre, Moscow (4 March)
	Moscow's <i>Theatrical Art</i> Exhibition (June)	Named 'People's Artist of the Republic' (28 March)
		<i>Profitable Post</i> , Theatre of the Revolution, Moscow (15 May)
		<i>Lake Lyul</i> , Theatre of the Revolution (7 November)

c. 1923– 1924	Popova and Stepanova start working in the textile industry	
1924	First AkhRR exhibition in Leningrad (February)	<i>The Forest</i> , Meyerhold Theatre (19 January)
	First Discussional Exhibition of Association of Active Revolutionary Art (Moscow, May)	<i>D.E.</i> , Meyerhold Theatre (15 June)
	Popova dies (May), posthumous exhibition held (December)	
	Trotsky publishes <i>Literature and Revolution</i> (Moscow)	
	Malevich becomes leader of Inkhuk (now Ginkhuk)	
1925	<i>Lef</i> folds	<i>Bubus the Teacher</i> , Meyerhold Theatre (29 January)
		<i>Mandate</i> , Meyerhold Theatre (20 April)
1926	Ginkhuk exhibits Malevich's <i>ArkHITEKTONIKI</i>	Meyerhold Theatre is granted state subsidy, becomes State Meyerhold Theatre or GosTIM (August)
	Rodchenko begins to use photography	<i>The Government Inspector</i> , State Meyerhold Theatre (9 December)
1927	First publication of <i>Novy Lef</i> (January)	Begins work on <i>I Want a Child</i> (1927–1930)
	Rodchenko exhibits photography for the first time, Society of the Friends of Soviet Cinema (Moscow, summer)	
1928	'Ten Years of Soviet Photography' exhibition (Moscow and Leningrad, March)	<i>The Magnanimous Cuckold</i> , State Meyerhold Theatre (26 January)
		<i>Woe to Wit</i> , State Meyerhold Theatre (12 March)

# Appendix: Russian art and Meyerhold's theatre: A timeline

		Travels to Paris with Zinaida Raikh (July)
1929	Publication of Moholy-Nagy's <i>Painting, Photography and Film</i> in Russian	<i>The Bedbug</i> , State Meyerhold Theatre (13 February)
	Malevich's final retrospective, Tretyakov Gallery (Moscow)	<i>The Second Commander</i> , State Meyerhold Theatre (24 July)
	Tatlin begins work on the <i>Letatlin</i> flying machine	
1930	Mayakovsky's death (14 April)	<i>The Bathhouse</i> , State Meyerhold Theatre (16 March)
		Tours to Paris and Berlin (April)
		<i>D.E. (Give us Europe)</i> , State Meyerhold Theatre (7 November)
1931	Tatlin retrospective (Pushkin Museum, Moscow)	<i>The Final Conflict</i> , State Meyerhold Theatre (7 February)
	Exhibition of the Photography Section of October (Moscow, May)	<i>A List of Benefits</i> , State Meyerhold Theatre (4 June)
	Exhibition of Photomontage (Gorky Park, Moscow, June)	
1932	Exhibition on Mayakovsky (Moscow)	<i>Don Juan</i> , State Academic Drama Theatre Leningrad (26 December)
1933	'Fifteen Years of Artists of the RSFSR' exhibition (Moscow)	<i>Prelude</i> , State Meyerhold Theatre (28 January)
		<i>Krechinsky's Wedding</i> , State Meyerhold Theatre (14 April)
		<i>Masquerade</i> , State Academic Drama Theatre Leningrad (25 December)

1934	All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers (September), emergence of Socialist Realism increases restrictions on the artistic experimentation characteristic of the avant-garde	<i>The Lady of the Camellias</i> , State Meyerhold Theatre (19 March)
1935	‘Seventeen Years of the Artists of Soviet Theatre’ exhibition (Moscow) ‘Exhibition of the Works of Masters of Soviet Photography’ exhibition (Moscow)	<i>The Queen of Spades</i> , State Academic Maly Opera Theatre Leningrad (25 January) <i>33 Swoons</i> , State Meyerhold Theatre (25 March)
1936	Spanish Civil War begins (18 July)	
1937	Picasso: <i>Guernica</i> ‘First All-Union Exhibition of Soviet Photography’ (Moscow and Leningrad)	<i>The Stone Guest</i> , State Meyerhold Theatre (10 February)
1938	Stanislavsky’s death (7 August)	Closure of the State Meyerhold Theatre <i>Masquerade</i> , State Academic Theatre in the name of Pushkin Leningrad (29 December)
1939	The Second World War begins, Russian troops invade Poland (September)	Contributes to Stanislavsky’s production of <i>Rigoletto</i> , Stanislavsky State Opera Theatre, Moscow (10 March) All-Union Conference of Stage Directors (opens 13 June, Meyerhold speaks 15 June) Arrested (20 June) Murder of Zinaida Raikh (14 July)
1940		Trial takes place (31 January) Execution (2 February)

## Endnotes

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1. The terminology 'visual arts' has been selected here to indicate the work with which Meyerhold's theatre will be compared. Finding a term that adequately explains the aspects of this discipline has been a problematic process. The deliberate disruption of accepted models by the artists of the avant-garde has made the question of terminology in that era, and subsequent eras, a complex one. The term 'fine art', often used to describe these sorts of works, is an ideologically loaded and as such, inappropriate, one, particularly in light of the deconstruction of artistic hierarchies that was at the heart of the avant-garde project. 'Canvas art' is similarly problematic, in that some of the practice discussed in this volume does not occur on a canvas (photography for example), although the term does have the advantage of highlighting the two-dimensional surface on which the artistic practice addressed here takes place. 'Gallery art' is also an inadequate term, again in light of developments at the start of the twentieth century in which the art gallery was no longer the only venue for the display of artworks, with the rise in private collections advocating the home of the bourgeois collector or patron as an equally valid venue. The advantage of terms such as 'canvas' or 'gallery' art is that they forefront the differences between theatre and visual art: that is, the different modes of construction and reception that define the artistic practices. It is this process of differentiation that has also driven the decision to select visual art as the term of choice for this study. 'Visual art' implies a specific mode of reception and engagement with the artwork in which the visual (over the aural or tactile) is placed at the forefront. The term is obviously flawed and inadequate in some ways: the intention is not to imply that the visual artworks do not evoke aural or tactile responses, or that the theatre is not, in itself, a visual art form. The intention is to highlight the visual nature of reception in artworks created through painting, collage, photography and drawing, and to allow the reader to differentiate between the arts in general (that is, wider cultural practices), the theatre arts, and the art of the painter, collagist, photographer or caricaturist.
2. Rudnitsky's comparison is between Meyerhold's 1906 production of *The Fairground Booth* and Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon*.
3. Worrall's analysis, along with the work of Nikolai Tarabukin (see chapter one), establishes a precedent for considering Meyerhold's theatre in the context of

cubism. For Worrall, cubo-futurism, as seen in Meyerhold's *Magnanimous Cuckold*, is one of a series of early twentieth century cultural practices in evidence in the production (including futurism, constructivism, semiology and formalism). This volume considers cubism in greater depth, as an expressive strategy in both its European and Russian forms, and as a tool for the analysis of Meyerhold's theatre. Topics that Worrall addresses – notably the futurist emphasis on movement, the interpenetration of subject and ground in cubist art and the focused analysis of *The Magnanimous Cuckold* – have not been considered here in any depth. Instead, this volume focuses on different aspects of cubist practice and on cubism as a framework for engaging with Meyerhold's construction of temporal and spatial structures in performance. The desire to contextualize Meyerhold's theatre is similar, as, of course, are the philosophical frames of the era; the scope and use of cubism is unique, and it is my hope that this work can be read alongside that of Worrall to create a new understanding of the relationship between cubist art and theatre, particularly in the case of Meyerhold.

4. Hereafter Meyerhold 1930.
5. The use of the term 'abstraction' in this volume is intended to indicate a theatrical or artistic aesthetic in which representational conventions are used to forefront the ways in which the work is consciously different from reality (i.e. how it has been abstracted from the real). As such, it is frequently used in opposition to realism. It should be noted that this is done without the intention to imply any simple binary between the two aesthetics, but with the acknowledgement that (a) realism is a highly conventionalized form and (b) the relationship between the realist and abstract, particularly in the early twentieth century and particularly in the sense of conventions of representation, is complex and nuanced. The term 'anti-realist' is used when the intention is to establish an idea as in deliberate, specific and conscious conflict with the conventions of realism.
6. The terms 'avant-garde' and 'modernism' are, of course, contentious and debated. Warden (2015) gives a comprehensive introduction to the discourses surrounding the terms, highlighting their multiplicity and plurality. For the sake of clarity, it is necessary here to provide some boundaries for the use of these terms in this volume, and, whilst bearing in mind the complexity of the discourses at stake, to indicate some working definitions. The term 'avant-garde' is used in the sense of Richard Schechner's 'historical' avant-garde (Schechner 1993); that is, to designate artistic and cultural practice occurring during the *fin-de-siècle* and the early twentieth century, particularly as expressed in a series of movements occurring in quick succession in Europe and Russia: naturalism, symbolism, cubism, futurism, suprematism and so forth. Bearing in mind Peter Child's suggestion of both time-based and genre-based definitions of modernism (Childs 2000), the term 'modernism' is used here to indicate a specific moment in which common concerns emerged across a range of cultural, philosophical and scientific practices, within the

- context of certain political and social developments. The result is a definition that takes into account both the time-bound (the historical moment of modernism) and the genre-bound (the emergent characteristics of work – be that literary, artistic, theatrical, scientific or otherwise – produced during that period). Where there is a need to indicate a time period, rather than this combination of temporal, philosophical and formal factors that ‘modernism’ encompasses, the periods will be referred to directly, as either the *fin-de-siècle*, the early twentieth century or by using particular dates.
7. This article, ‘Craving the Whole Essence: The Photograph as Document, Artwork and Framework in the Theatre of V. E. Meyerhold’, was published under my maiden name, Amy Simpson.
  8. For an accessible introduction to quantum designed for a non-specialist audience, see Feynman ([1985] 1990).
  9. Emphasis in Perloff.
  10. Bergson’s philosophy is dealt with in greater depth in chapter five.
  11. My translation from the Russian.
  12. The full extent of Shchukin’s collection can be viewed on line at [www.morozov-shchukin.com/html/Acollection.html](http://www.morozov-shchukin.com/html/Acollection.html) (accessed 19 November 2013). Ivan Morozov, Shchukin’s partner, also acquired significant Picasso works, notably his cubist *Portrait of Ambroise Vollard* (1910).
  13. Correspondence with RGALI (The Russian State Archive of Art and Literature), which holds the majority of the Meyerhold Archive, has confirmed that there is no mention of Shchukin in their holding. It should be noted, however, that due to the extremely large collection of material associated with Meyerhold available, it is not possible at this stage to entirely rule out a visit by Meyerhold to the Shchukin collection.
  14. The relationship between the Russian and European avant-gardes was a complex, and at times fraught, one. The Italian and Russian interpretations of futurism serve as an example: despite their shared name, and some overlap in concerns, the Russian and Italian movements were not particularly close in either intention or practice, and according to Camilla Gray, F. T. Marinetti rejected the Russians as ‘false futurists’ (Gray [1962] 1971: 94).
  15. Camilla Gray provides an overview of the development of Russian fine art in the years between 1905 and 1921 in her volume *The Russian Experiment in Art* (Gray [1962] 1971).
  16. A selection of painted and photographic portraits of Meyerhold can be viewed online at the Global Performing Arts Database (GloPAD), [www.glopad.org](http://www.glopad.org) (accessed 21 January 2014).
  17. The article by the Kukryniksy is not available in English translation. For this volume, translations have been provided by Natalie Vinokurova.



18. After 1906, Meyerhold worked predominantly in St. Petersburg (c. 1906–1917) and then in Moscow (1918 until his death). There are brief periods during which the director worked elsewhere, but the majority of his work was carried out in these two cities.
19. Mikhailova's emphasis.
20. Feigelman's article is not available in English translation. For this volume, translations have been provided by Natalie Vinokurova.
21. Feldman's introduction to Tarabukin and collection of his articles is not available in English translation.
22. See Re-reading Meyerhold, part one.
23. Examples of recreated productions can be found in the 1996 Yale University version of *The Government Inspector*, in collaboration with the St. Petersburg Dramatic Academy, directed by David Chambers (materials relating to this production are available in *Theater*, volume 28). An evening at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in December 1981 also saw the reconstruction of Meyerhold's production of *The Magnanimous Cuckold*, including a recreation of the set model (see the programme for the event, edited by Alma Law and Mel Gordon, 1981).
24. Copeland's use of the term is possibly also an adaptation. In the footnotes and bibliography for his article, Copeland refers to Donald B. Kuspit's article 'Collage: The Organizing Principle of Art in the Age of the Relativity of Art' (in Hoffman 1989: 39–57).
25. The relationship between realism and cubism is discussed, for example, by Guillaume Apollinaire in *The Cubist Painters* (trans. Read 2002), within the wider context of his understanding of the purpose of art as a creative rather than representational practice.
26. Christopher Green discusses the influence of African masks on the formal structure of Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger* (Green 2001: 7). Other chapters in the same volume return to the issue (Leighten and Lomas, for example).
27. Hereafter Meyerhold 1906–1908.
28. Much has been written on the relationship between Meyerhold and Stanislavsky and their respective stage practices (see, for example, Leach 2003; Braun [1995] 1998).
29. Meyerhold's emphasis.
30. It is hard to take Chekhov's suggestion that the play should be read as a farce at face value, particularly as his evidence to support the claim is that only one character, Varya, ever weeps. This is in direct conflict with the script itself which suggests that, in addition to Varya, both Ranevskaya and Gayev appear weeping. The text does, however, contain moments of light comedy (Charlotta's conjuring scene, for example, or Trofimov's fall down the stairs), and Worrall suggests that Chekhov's character construction is more in style of vaudeville types than fully developed naturalistic characterization (see Worrall 1996: 155).

31. Meyerhold also notes the incompleteness of this comparison and his own belief in the uniqueness of Chekhov's writing, by adding: 'I have used the comparison only because I am unable to express it exactly. You are incomparable in the greatness of your work' (Meyerhold in Rudnitsky 1981: 44).
32. Samuel Y. Edgerton, Jr. discusses Giotto's construction of perspective in *The Renaissance Rediscovery of Linear Perspective* (Edgerton 1976: 13–15).
33. See Tamara Talbot Rice (1963b) for a detailed description of the russification of iconography. Typical characteristics of Russian icon painting include the introduction of steeply sloping shoulders on the figures of worship.
34. Hereafter Meyerhold 1911–1912.
35. Regarding city names, Alma Law notes: 'The city founded by Peter the Great was called St. Petersburg until August 1914, Petrograd until January 1924, and Leningrad until September 1991' (Law in Gladkov 1997: xiv).
36. The connection between the object of representation in cubist figure painting and the formal vocabulary of the artists is interestingly reinforced in the habits of the collectors of cubism. Albert Kostenevich notes that Shchukin and his partner Ivan Morozov began their cubist collections by selecting portraits to which they had some sort of personal connection, indicating a desire to identify the mechanics of representation through a knowledge of the object existing outside of the image: 'The first Cubist canvasses to appear in his collection may have convinced him of some strange, paradoxical closeness to nature. He was acquainted with Picasso's girlfriend, Fernande Olivier, and may have guessed that *Woman with a Fan* of 1908 represented her image transformed. There is nothing surprising in such a basic approach to Cubism. Ivan Morozov – for whom Cubism remained an alien movement – worked in similar fashion, buying one of the best Cubist canvas, the *Portrait of Ambroise Vollard*, probably simply because he was acquainted with the dealer' (Kostenevich 2010).
37. Other dates are suggested for the opening of the futurist exhibition: for example, Linda S. Boersma places the opening on 3rd March 1915 (Boersma 1994: 28). This discrepancy may result from the transition between the Julian and Gregorian calendar, which took place relatively late in Russia in 1917, and causes a difference of 13 days to appear between dates depending on the system of nomenclature that is adopted.
38. Udaltsova returned in February 1913, Popova in May of the same year.
39. Meyerhold's outline of the Studio Programme for 1916–1917, as published in his journal *The Love of Three Oranges*, can be found in Braun [1969] 1998: 153–156.
40. Hereafter Meyerhold 1907.
41. Hereafter Meyerhold 1922.
42. Jonathan Pitches outlines an alternative reading of biomechanics as influenced by Newtonian determinism in his *Science and the Stanislavsky Tradition of Acting* (Pitches 2006: 53–85).

43. Braun states that '[in his 1922(?) lecture *Tartuffes of Communism and Cuckolds of Morality*, Meyerhold claimed that] his system had no scientific basis and that its underlying theory rested on "one brochure by Coquelin". He must have meant Constant-Benoît Coquelin's *L'art et le Comédien* (1880) or *L'art du Comédien* (1886)...' (Braun [1969] 1998: 202). In claiming this as his sole influence, Meyerhold possibly exaggerates, and on other occasions (including his lecture on 'Biomechanics', also 1922 – see Braun [1969] 1998: 197–200), he acknowledged other influences, such as Taylor's economy of work theory and William James' Reflexology (popularized in Russia by Pavlov's infamous dog experiments). Some commentators also claim that the Lesgaft theory of sport psychology had a significant influence on the director at this time (see Law and Gordon 1996).
44. I have written about the development of ensemble through biomechanical training elsewhere (see Skinner 2013).
45. This statement is made with some caution. Meyerhold did not abandon the psychological characterization work that was developed by Stanislavsky, and it should be noted that to observe the clear distinction between actor and character in Meyerhold's theorization of acting is not to imply that there is no psychological engagement with character for the biomechanical actor, or that Meyerhold's approach to actor training in any way impedes characterization. It is clear, however, from Meyerhold's writing that his understanding of acting was that the actor performed with a degree of self-awareness that necessitated a consciousness of the division between actor and character.
46. Meyerhold's emphasis.
47. It should be noted that the term 'reductive' is not meant pejoratively in this context, but is used to imply a process of universalization similar to that undertaken by the cubists in their reduction of the human form.
48. It should be noted that Kostin is emphatic in his claims that Tatlin's work does not constitute cubism in the sense of French *Cubisme*, but is a Russian adaptation of the form.
49. The curvature of the spine in biomechanics can be related to the actor's use of *gruperovka*, a centre point for the exercise located in the sternum. The performer's curved shoulders and spine can indicate a sense of grouping around this central point, the core of biomechanical movement.
50. Worrall describes some of the structural echoes between the actors' bodies and Popova's construction: 'A simple pace forward, which establishes an inverted "V" shape, can be balanced in the upper half of the body by an extension of one arm in front and upwards, while the other is held downwards and back. In this position, the body is a precise reflection of the three possible patterns in the framework. The arms are reinforced by the cross-beams, the body by the upright sections and the legs by the V-shaped crosses on the revolving doors' (Worrall 1973: 27).

51. The term 'viewer' is used in this instance to indicate the viewpoint from which the exercises are observed in the extant photographs and video footage (both from Meyerhold's era and from contemporary practitioners). It is not to imply that the biomechanical études were intended for an audience: they were primarily training exercises. The identification of a located viewer and the planes associated with this is not conjecture: the photographs of Meyerhold's études have been created by those working closely with practitioners in order to document the director's work, and the choice of positioning of the photographer or videographer is clearly intentional.
52. Copeland's emphasis.
53. My translation from the French.
54. The effect of viewing cubist and collaged canvases is explored in more depth in chapter five.
55. Worrall also addresses the question of simultaneity in his discussion of *The Magnanimous Cuckold*. Exploring the idea of history as something that is 'both moving and eternally present, on an analogy with a clock' (Worrall 1973: 32), he notes: 'That this preoccupation with the face of the clock and with history as linear flow is a comparatively recent one is testified to, in another context, by what Marshall McLuhan has defined as the encroaching predominance of the single sense of vision during the sixteenth century. In becoming a slave to appearances (the face of the clock) man became a slave to the linear concept of history as well as to the notion of cause and effect. There would seem to be a clear connection between this new concept of time, which entered European consciousness during the sixteenth century, and the emphasis on vision, with the development of flow staging, movable scenery and their culmination in the forms of stage Naturalism. If it is suggested that what Meyerhold did with the "face" of stage Naturalism in "Nora" was to reverse it, in doing so he reversed a whole historical pattern. In reversing the face he rediscovered the workings' (Worrall 1973: 33). Here, simultaneity is seen as a view of history, and Worrall finds evidence for it in the formal construction of the stage space (the wheels and cogs of Popova's construction echoing the inner workings of a clock). Although there are some similarities between this idea and Polkinhorn's use of the term, the emphasis in collage practice is more on the reduction of time to instantaneity, and the development of multiple consciousness that this prompts.
56. The full description can be found in Russian in Vendrovsskaya (1967: 432–440).
57. Even by Meyerhold's second constructivist-influenced production, *Tarelkin's Death* (1922), his use of the *prozodezhda* had been significantly modified, with each pair of overalls featuring an individual design developed by the production's designer, Popova's colleague Varvara Stepanova. *Earth Rampant* (1923), the following production at the Meyerhold Theatre, showed further movement away from wholly functional costuming, the *prozodezhda* having been replaced by soldiers' uniforms, in line with the First World War and 1917 Revolution setting. By *A Profitable Post* (1923), the *prozodezhda* had been abandoned completely.

58. For more discussion of the relationship between collage and montage, see chapter five.
59. Leach's emphasis.
60. The implications of the trucks used in *The Government Inspector* as devices for transcending spatial and temporal unity can be seen most clearly when they are traced back to their ancestry in the ancient Athenian theatre. The Greek *ekkuklemata*, trucks of a similar nature to those used by Meyerhold, had the primary function of revealing an already constructed tableau to the audience, bringing outside, into the open air, the secret acts that had taken place inside. J. Michael Walton describes the form and function of the *ekkuklemata* in the Athenian theatre: 'Functioning in all probability as a simple platform wheeled out from inside the *skene*, the *ekkuklema* was a practical demonstration of the tableau. Stage furnishings, dead bodies or, in an extreme Aristophanic example, the playwright Euripides at work in his study could be presented with the maximum of convenience and withdrawn with the minimum of fuss. Here [...] we do not have simply a solution to a problem: how to present what would logically stay indoors. Instead we find the basic stage principle of the 'reveal', the sudden display of a prepared visual sequence to give enhanced significance' (Walton [1996] 1998: 40). Consider the function of the *ekkuklema* within Aeschylus' *Oresteia* trilogy in connecting the climactic moments of the first two plays, *Agamemnon* and *The Libation Bearers*. Each play climaxes with a revelation on the *ekkuklema*: in *Agamemnon*, the murdered king is revealed; in *The Libation Bearers*, murderer becomes victim as the body of Clytemnestra emerges. Each moment of revelation indicates the intrusion on the fictional setting of the play of a stage space that has a purely theatrical function, bearing a scene from another fictional location. The two represented locations, outside and inside, are collapsed into a composite theatrical space. Simultaneously, each moment of revelation also lifts the performance out of the fictional time of the playtext into a universalized time, encouraging the audience to make connections between the two separate performances. This is a didactic device that functions within the realms of mythology. The audience are encouraged, through the re-appearance of the *ekkuklema*, to see Clytemnestra's murder as a consequence of Agamemnon's murder. The repetition of the staging device served to highlight the playwright's opinion of the dangers of revenge culture, as well as to locate the murders in relation to one another, within the context of the three plays as one entity, and within the myth cycle of the Curse of the House of Atreus.
61. Analysis of these collages by Picasso can be found in Leighton (1989: 121–170). Further arguments for the importance of reading Picasso's fragments rather than simply considering them to be part of the formal construction of the artwork are highlighted by Rosenblum (1989: 91–120), who argues that the analysis of cubist art has been predominantly focused on the formal innovations of the movement at the expense of any consideration of the subject matter of the artworks. Rosenblum

- concludes that: 'The question, simply, is this: could it really have been that Picasso and his fellow Cubists chose the words, the newspaper clippings, the calling cards, the cigarette-paper packets, the advertisements, the bottle labels, even the kind of typeface (roman, italic, gothic) with total indifference to their potential verbal meaning or associative value?' (Rosenblum 1989: 92).
62. It should be noted that the construction of some collaged works does imply a specific viewing experience as intended by the artist. This is particularly true of futurist collage, where the artist intends to construct a sense of movement across the canvas surface in order to construct the artwork as dynamic. A clear example can be found in Carlo Carrà's collage *Free-Word Painting – Patriotic Festival*, where the artist uses the layering of fragments to create a dynamic circular motion, guiding the viewer's eye in a spiral across the surface of the canvas.
  63. Polkinhorn's emphasis
  64. Perloff's emphasis.
  65. Eisenstein's emphasis.
  66. Kuleshov and Meyerhold are known to have worked in close proximity in the early 1920s (the period during which Meyerhold developed biomechanics and Kuleshov worked on cinematic montage), sharing the same building in Moscow. Leach suggests the cross-over of students between the two masters, indicating that each was at least aware of the other's work during this period. This is evident in the experience of Eisenstein, who is known to have worked at the Meyerhold Workshop from 1921 and the Kuleshov Workshop from 1923 (see Leach 1989: 121).
  67. Meyerhold's emphasis.
  68. See chapter two.
  69. Vargish and Mook's emphasis.
  70. See chapter two.
  71. Vargish and Mook's emphasis.
  72. Vargish and Mook's emphasis.
  73. My emphasis.
  74. A brief film clip of this sequence can be seen online at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qSuhgGYVT\\_0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qSuhgGYVT_0) (accessed 9 December 2013). 'Filled with the Tend'rest Love' begins at 1 min 13 seconds into the footage.
  75. See endnote 74.
  76. The dates are inserted by Tucker.
  77. This summary of the holdings of the St. Petersburg Museum of Art and Literature is indebted to Alexandra Tuchinskaya, Principal Researcher, who provided information on the museum for this publication. The quotation from Tuchinskaya is from correspondence with the author. Access is available to the archive by prior arrangement, and materials can be scanned and emailed for an agreed cost, subject to copyright agreement. An online listing for the Meyerhold holdings at

the St. Petersburg Museum of Art and Literature can be found through the Global Performing Arts Consortium ([www.glopac.org](http://www.glopac.org)).

78. This summary of the holdings of the Bakhrushin Museum is indebted to Maria Cherkavskaya, Head of International Relations at the Bakhrushin, who provided information on the museum for this publication. Access to the archive is available by prior arrangement, and materials can be scanned or photocopied for an agreed cost. An online listing for the Bakhrushin Meyerhold archive (fund 688) can be found at: <http://www.gctm.ru/collection/archives/688/> (accessed 17 January 2014).
79. This consultation with theatre photographers was carried out between October to November 2003. Participants in the consultation were a combination of professional and amateur practising theatre photographers, recruited through an Internet photography forum. The photographers answered questions on the philosophical and technical problems presented by theatre photography as practice. The responses included here have been selected from contributions by the twenty two participants.
80. The term 'active stillness' is taken from Teleory Williamson's review of the Otrabanda Company's production of Blok's *The Fairground Booth* (La Mama Experimental Theatre Club, New York, 10th May 1996). Williamson uses the term in relation to a section of the production in which the characters 'pose in unison to begin a ghoulish dance', claiming that '[t]his pose, reminiscent of Egyptian hieroglyphic figures, exemplified the active stillness found in Meyerhold's posturing' (Williamson 1996: 512). The notion of active stillness is exemplified in Meyerhold's use of the *raccourci*, a static position that Sergei Eisenstein describes as 'dynamics frozen for a moment' (Eisenstein in Law and Gordon 1996: 169).
81. A selection of caricatures relating to Meyerhold and his theatre can be viewed online at the Global Performing Arts Database (GloPAD), [www.glopad.org](http://www.glopad.org) (accessed 21 January 2014).
82. My translation from the Russian.
83. My translation from the Russian.



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*This book not only adds to this burgeoning field but simultaneously opens up new and uncharted paths for future practice and scholarship. It does so in the clearest of ways while introducing innovative perspectives and creating new, unfamiliar parallels and dialogues.*

Dr Claire Warden, De Montfort University

*Meyerhold and the Cubists is a very readable and interesting book, crossing disciplines effectively and confidently. The author persuasively dives into primary sources, and illuminates our understanding of well-discussed productions from a new perspective. She should be congratulated on an innovative structure and imaginative approach to the revisioning of Meyerhold. It is a publication to be celebrated.*

Professor Jonathan Pitches, University of Leeds

This book offers a rich analysis of collage practices in the theatre of Vsevolod Meyerhold. Focusing on the philosophical and formal tenets of the form, and supporting her analysis with wide-ranging examples from both theatre and fine art, Amy Skinner develops collage as a framework for reading the whole of the theatrical experience, from scenography and *mise-en-scène* to text and spectatorship. An innovative exploration of the influence of collage on twentieth- and twenty-first-century theatre, *Meyerhold and the Cubists* will be essential reading for theatre scholars and practitioners alike.

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