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Theatre Topics, Volume 17, Number 1, March 2007, pp. 37-50 (Article)

Published by The Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: 10.1353/tt.2007.0001

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Theatre Squared: Theatre History in the Age of Media

Sarah Bay-Cheng

> Recordings deal with concepts through which the past is reevaluated, and they concern notions about the future which will ultimately question even the validity of evaluation.
>
> —Glenn Gould, "The Prospects of Recording"

In 1964, Canadian pianist Glenn Gould quit live performance in favor of perfecting recordings of his performances. In an essay published two years later, "The Prospects of Recording" (1966), Gould explained his decision by predicting that in the next century, the live concert would reach "extinction." Far from a lamentable course of events, Gould embraced the end of the live performance as the opportunity for "a more cogent experience [of music] than is now possible" (47). The end of the live concert may never come, but Gould's comments are eerily prescient of contemporary performance and its reliance on recording technology: first film, then video, and, more recently, digital recording. Much attention has been paid to the impact of these technologies on live theatre production and reception, but little criticism to date has considered the impact of recording technology on theatre history, on the archive in the making. And yet, moving images on screens have become a dominant, arguably *the* dominant, mode of viewing throughout our increasingly mediatized culture. From portable DVD players to video iPods to cellular phones, modern culture communicates onscreen. This essay is a preliminary consideration of the impact of recording technology on the study of theatre history, and a proposal for a critical means for assessing the phenomenon and effect of recorded, or mediated, theatre. "Mediated theatre" may be broadly defined as any theatrical performance originally created for live performance (that is, live actors in visual proximity to a live audience, although this distinction is hardly absolute) and subsequently recorded onto any visually reproducible medium, including film, videotape, or digital formats, presented as two-dimensional moving images on screens.

There is a danger, of course, in too broadly grouping various recording technologies. Variations in recording processes (collaborative, individual), apparatuses (celluloid, analog videotape, digital devices), and receptions (public projections, private viewings) have discrete histories, methods, and results, not to mention very different modes of viewing in social, economic, and cultural contexts. While undoubtedly distinct, these media share certain characteristics of image construction, conventions of time and space, and mutual reliance on screens that we may usefully juxtapose against embodied performance in the theatre. At the risk of oversimplifying, then, I would like to introduce a discussion of mediated theatre, broadly construed, for the purposes of understanding the process of capturing live performance in moving images, and the methods by which these images within the frame of the screen—the theatre squared—can be used in theatre history analysis and teaching.

The Rise of Mediated Theatre

Perhaps the most obvious influence of visual-recording technology on theatre history is the emergence and growth of the moving-image archive, an expanding collection of mediated-performance representations that includes film, television broadcasts, rehearsal videotapes, documentaries,

and digitally recorded productions. These collections are diverse, including institutional collections in libraries as well as private video and film collections. The professional organization, the Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA), asserts that such an archive will eventually provide the same archival value as textual artifacts currently do. According to the AMIA web site (amianet.org), "[a]s our culture is increasingly shaped by visual images in the digital age, historians may soon rely on moving images as much as on the printed word to understand 21st-century culture."

Within theatre studies, the use of videos is already widespread. Drama anthologies, for example, increasingly list not only examples of further reading, but also video resources for plays within them.[1] Many theatre and performance classes—from Shakespeare to contemporary performance art—use videos to illustrate aspects of theatre performance. Given the limitations of theatre productions in many locations, mediated theatre is often the best way to expose students to a range of performance traditions, styles, and genres. Even within a major theatre city, one cannot always ensure access to a Greek tragedy, a Restoration play, and Bunraku puppetry in the course of a single term, so video documentation of varying types can make these performances available to students according to the exact timing of the professor. To the best of my knowledge, no survey yet exists cataloging the use of mediated theatre in classrooms, but certainly there is enough demand to drive the increased range of video databases that have emerged. In addition to collections primarily for scholarly use, such as the videos and films housed in the Billy Rose Collection at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts (and available only onsite), commercial databases like the Broadway Theatre Archive, Theatre Arts Video Library, and Insight Media promote mediated theatre for classroom use. Despite the prevalence of such media, how many courses include an analysis thereof within their theatre studies?

This is not only a question for the classroom. Outside of academia, it is impossible to deny the dominance of moving images in the reception of theatrical performance. For one thing, the audience for mediated theatre is growing. Amid the usual hand-wringing over aging subscribers and the loss of young audiences to mass screen entertainment, live theatre is now threatened by its own media double. According to the National Endowment for the Arts' (NEA) *2002 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts* (*SPPA*), only 22.3 percent of adults attended at least one live theatre performance during the previous twelve-month period, while 21 percent watched at least one recorded version of a theatre performance.[2] This may be startling enough, but when comparing the numbers of live attendance to mediated viewings, adults who attended at least one live theatrical performance viewed twice as many productions of mediated theatre for musicals, and three times as many productions for nonmusicals. Moreover, while attendance at live theatre declined between the 1997 and 2002 *SPPA* reports, the percentage of adult Americans watching mediated theatre grew (17).

Mediated theatre is thus not only prevalent within theatre education, it is also threatening to become the theatre archive of the future. Ironically, theatre is simultaneously drained (of live audiences) and sustained (via increased viewership) by media, and accordingly theatre performance has begun to anticipate its own media history. Take, for example, the national multisite theatre festival *365 Days / 365 Plays*, written and organized by Suzan-Lori Parks (coproduced with Bonnie Metzger). This yearlong festival of plays is intended "to create a new geography for artistic productions in the Internet age"[3] by combining live performances with digital records. The information packet for the festival advises potential participants that "[y]ou are responsible to video document" the performance for the purpose of either uploading video to a central *365 Days / 365 Plays* web site or posting it on an independent web site. Parks is smart to document an expansive, multisite, simultaneous event like this, and she shares the thinking of many social-media theorists who cite *wiki*-technology (most widely known through the interactive online encyclopedia *Wikipedia*) and other digital social-networking tools as exciting possibilities for collaboration and community.[4] However, Parks also conceives the project as a grass-roots *theatre* event, one that does not conflate (at least in its stated intention) live performance with the mediated record. The function of the media is, at least in part, to archive the live theatrical performances.

Theatre has long lamented (and cherished) its mass-media limitations, but such a move suggests the potential for performance archives in the mass-media environment. Practically speaking, I think Parks's approach will become the norm, if it is not already. It certainly is in other fields: media-arts shows, festivals, conferences and juried exhibitions of performance art, interactive technology, and mixed-reality performance (the integration of live actors and virtual agents) often require video documentation for consideration and participation. With the affordability and flexibility of digital-recording devices and ease of distribution (e.g., web sites like YouTube and MySpace), moving images are rapidly becoming the primary currency for artistic exchange. This, it seems to me, is the new "geography" that Parks seeks, and it presents new challenges for interpreting moving images as evidence of live performance.[5]

This is surely a critical development for emerging theatre artists, who will be well served by training programs that encourage and develop their digital and media skills (e.g., web-site design and digital video production, as well as more typical acting for the camera courses). However, it also has significance for students of theatre history. As letters give way to disposable e-mail, journals to blogs, and promptbooks to video documentation, the theatre history archive of the future will no doubt become increasingly dependent on (if not overwhelmingly devoted to) moving images on screens. Certainly mediated theatre can preserve theatre performances in more complete, more accessible forms than existed for much of theatre history. Patrice Pavis, for example, in his *Analyzing Performance: Theater, Dance, and Film*, suggests that "[e]ven when filmed with a single camera from a fixed position, a video recording is a testimony that effectively restores the thickness of signs; it allows an observer to grasp a sense of the performance style, and to keep sequences and the use of different materials fresh in the memory" (43). Of course, Pavis does not see the video as a historical record per se, which he locates instead in theatre archeology that "resists technologies of reproduction" (44).[6] In its apparent completeness, however, mediated records of a theatrical event complicate Pavis's distinction between an archeology that resists representation and a media record devoid of presence.

While few, if any, would argue that moving images are transparent, undistorted windows to the performance itself, moving-image records do grant a unique insight (and challenge) to performance analysis, while simultaneously masking their own mediation. As Pavis himself notes in *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*, media recordings of theatre can, according to the will of the media director, "choose either to erase the most visual and stagy aspects of theatricality by looking for 'cinematic effects' and naturalizing the acting style and sets, or to display this theatricality, underlining it with an abstract set and half-sung diction, as if the camera were reporting from the theatre itself" (111). Mediated theatre is seductive in its totality. It appears to be the thing itself, particularly for a viewer for whom the live theatre is at best an occasional event, but for whom moving images—through games, the Internet, reality television, video, cinema—are the stuff of life itself.[7] The media recording of theatre certainly is *a* thing itself, but the more sophisticated the recording and projection, the less we observe the line between the performance and the media. This is the phenomenon that film theorist André Bazin observed in his "Theatre and Cinema—Part Two." Analyzing theatre on film, Bazin draws attention to what he calls the middle stage between presence and absence: "It is false to say that the screen is incapable of putting us 'in the presence of' the actor," for in the film "[e]verything takes place as if in the time–space perimeter which is the definition of presence" (97–98). We observe film, knowing that the moving images are a recording of the reality distant from us, the viewers, and yet we are present for the projecting of the film itself. While Bazin focused his inquiries on the cinema, we might expand this argument to all recorded media.[8] Both present and absent, the recorded performance cannot be simply a transparent window to the performance it records, nor can it be dismissed as irrelevant to the theatrical performance.

The emergence of mediated theatre necessarily complicates critical theatre historiography and pedagogy, particularly the records (and recordings) that live performances leave behind. Indeed, as the sophistication of recording technology steadily improves and theatre and dance productions are

conceived with an eye toward their own mediated preservation, it will become increasingly difficult to argue, as Robert Knopf does, "that theater performance, by virtue of its 'live-ness,' disappears as soon as it is spoken, *leaving texts (scripts) as the primary record* and most widely consumed 'artifact' of the theatrical event" (6). Film, video, digital-motion capture, even video cellphones have all become mobile, ubiquitous tools for recording live performance. Are these really less reliable, less accurate, or less authentic than the textual documentation that preceded them?

Viewing mediated theatre—an activity distinct from both reading dramatic texts and watching live performance—will thus become an essential tool for theatre and performance historiography. Others, arguably beginning with Hugo Münsterberg's 1916 essay on the photoplay, have debated the audience response to theatre and theatrical production in the age of media,[9] but I am interested here in media as an analytical tool for studying past performances. This approach to moving-image records follows earlier shifts away from the text as a privileged marker of theatrical meaning. As David Saltz writes in his editorial comment for *Theatre Journal* (May 2006): "Happily, the days when theatre scholars habitually located meaning exclusively in dramatic texts are well behind us" (173). Of course, Saltz's comments are hardly at odds with a historiography that culturally contextualizes performance, or what some have referred to as "theatre as social history."[10] And yet, the move away from the text in favor of the performance event seems a forerunner to the replacement of textual artifacts by the recorded mediated performance in the archive. If, as Saltz suggests, "the performance event is a vital site for generating meaning" (173), then the viewing of the event itself, even through the mediating gaze of a camera lens projected on a screen, may seem preferable—more immediate even—than the written record.

Such new directions, to say nothing of the cognitive turn in theatre and performance studies (which a more exhaustive study than this would include), force the reevaluation of moving images in theatre history. In other words, how can we use the moving-image archive as a source of historical evidence? Rather than resist or lament such a development, we need to expand the tools of theatre history to include the formal analysis of moving images *of theatre performance* as a critical part of the theatre archive of the future, and as pedagogical tools today. This is not simply the application of formal frame analysis to theatre videos, nor another comment on the adaptation of theatre to film and television (of which there are already many excellent studies),[11] but rather a new methodology for understanding the media exchange between the live performance event and its record in moving images. The question is, then, how do we analyze mediated theatre as evidence of live performance?

The Dramaturgy of Distortion

It is worth recalling Joseph Donohue's essay "Evidence and Documentation," in which he admonished theatre historians to, among other things, remain "true to sources" (194). Perhaps, then, the best way to interpret mediated theatre as historical documentation is to make visible—whether or not they are clearly defined in the recording itself—the gaps and distortions made by the moving screen images to the live performance. The following are key elements to a critical methodology of mediated theatre as a "dramaturgy of distortion." This term derives in part from Sergei Eisenstein, who identified the shot as "[t]he minimum 'distortable' fragment of nature" (5), and from theatre director Elizabeth LeCompte, who in a 1981 essay, "Who Owns History?," called all descriptions—textual and mediated—of live physical actions "distortion" (51). Formally, the recording of performance is always a distortion of the live event, radically reorganizing space, composition, and time. While others have articulated the recording of theatre on film and television either through the vocabularies of adaptation (e.g., Bazin and Stanley Kauffmann) or as documentation (e.g., Pavis), mediated theatre is perhaps best understood as the distortion of performance.

This is not to say that theories of adaptation and documentation are not useful in articulating the effects of mediated theatre. However, there are certain limitations. For example, theories of media

adaptation often become conflated with theories of translation that, as James Naremore argues, tend to "valorize the literary canon and essentialize the nature of cinema" (8). Similarly, the language of documentation suggests that the recording device operates much like an unassuming viewer to the performance, accurately recording the performance as it happens in complete and authentic detail, as Pavis articulates in *Analyzing Performance*. In mediated theatre, however, both the live performance (if only implied) and the recorded versions are visible, but the view of the performance is radically revised by the apparatus. Thus, we are faced with a problem of ontology: What is the moving-image record in relation to the live performance? Is it simply the transfer of signs from one system to another, or is it the reorganization of those signs? While aspects of adaptation and documentation are undoubtedly present in the media record, analyzing the various aspects of distortion can give us a clear sense of the reorganization of the viewer's vision from the live performance to its media version, thus facilitating the use of mediated theatre as historical evidence and the teaching of the mediated archive to theatre students. By describing the inherent distortions of the recording apparatus, we can imaginatively reassemble the live performance recorded as it occurs and can discern the changes made specifically for theatre productions that have been physically altered for mediated performance (e.g., the BBC's production series of Shakespeare's plays).

What are these distortions? The answers are necessarily formalist. To make the live performance visible in the media recording, it is essential to understand the basic construction of the image as it constrains and, arguably, constructs the live performance. The physical structure of the screen—television, film, computer, iPod, or cellphone—literally squares the theatrical event and thereby profoundly changes the performance, including both its production and reception. I will not attempt to theorize the profound political and cultural shifts that occur when live performance is recorded and viewed as media, which others have effectively analyzed.[12] Rather, I will attempt here to outline the three most essential formal changes that occur when live performances appear in mediated versions, for the purpose of developing a critical approach to moving-image records as evidence in theatre history. The following then is a preliminary overview of the changes wrought by the media exchange of theatre onto screens, and the visible, material distortions that exchange creates in terms of space, composition (camera placement), and time (editing).

Distortion #1: Space

All recorded versions of live performance distort the performing space. This may seem commonsensical, but the distortion of the screen is far more pronounced than it first appears, as the following exercise illustrates. At the beginning of every semester, a film colleague of mine takes his students through a relatively simple exercise. He turns on a camera attached to a monitor, and faces the monitor toward the space that the camera records. While watching the monitor, his students then tape out the edges of the frame on the floor. Following the seemingly square lines of the frame, the actual shape on the floor is a far cry from the proscenium arch to which critics compared the early cinema frame. In fact, the result is a nearly perfect inverse of the typical theatre ground-plan illustrated in introductory theatre textbooks. A typical theatre ground-plan often looks something like the one depicted in figure 1. Drawn according to the visual limits of the proscenium arch (although often used for different stage configurations), this common illustration of the stage designates the edges of sight-lines from the wide downstage space to the more narrowly visible upstage. In the screen frame, although appearing to be rectangular, the cinematic space creates a ground-plan that is an inverse of its theatrical counterpart, as seen in figure 2.

Hugo Münsterberg was the first to observe this difference and its effect on the viewer's perception in his essay *The Photoplay* (1916):

> The theatre stage is broadest near the footlights and becomes narrower toward the background; the moving picture stage is narrowest in front and becomes wider towards the background.

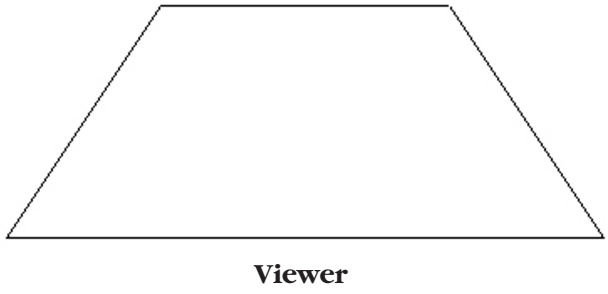

FIG. 1. A typical theatre ground-plan.

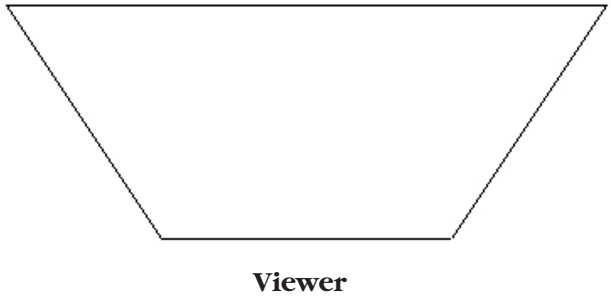

FIG. 2. In the screen frame, the cinematic space creates a ground-plan that is an inverse of its theatrical counterpart.

> This is necessary because the width is controlled by the angle at which the camera takes the picture. . . . Whatever comes to the foreground therefore gains strongly in relative importance over its surroundings. Moving away from the camera means a reduction much greater than a mere stepping to the background of the theatre stage. (80–81)

The reversal of space that Münsterberg describes explains why television studio sets appear oddly crowded in person although their proportions seem perfectly normal onscreen. This fundamental spatial difference demonstrates an essential distinction between theatre and recorded media. If we think of the widest part of either space as the "space of projection" (a term that recurs in descriptions of both theatre and media), then theatre is spatially *extroverted* (coming toward us), while the screen is spatially *introverted* (pulling away from us). Consider, too, the common descriptions of performing in the theatre, such as "projecting to the back of the house" and "cheating out." These derive from the common sense of the stage performer who must propel character and action across the edge of the stage into the audience; in other words, theatre comes to us.

Moving images, however, are always locked within the frame.[13] As Eisenstein noted, "[t]he frame is much less independently workable than the word or the sound" (5). Since the frame can be neither broken nor manipulated by the director, moving images must draw the viewer through the frame into the space of the film in order to create the illusion of presence. German film theorist Siegfried Kracauer, for example, viewed film primarily as the extension of the photographic frame, which "marks a provisional limit; its content refers to contents outside that frame; and its structure denotes something that cannot be encompassed—physical existence" (19–20). Watching a film, viewers are aware of the frame as only a piece, a fragment of the larger reality extending indefinitely beyond our view. The cinema has no offstage space, no wings. In this sense, Bazin argued that the screen frame was "not a frame like that of a picture but a mask which allows only a part of the action to be seen" (105).

Bazin's insight is critical to the distinction between stage space and screen space. It is no coincidence, I think, that projection in the theatre means to articulate toward the audience, while cinematic projection points past the viewer in the direction of the screen. Although it is common to talk of theatre as an active viewing experience (i.e., the viewer can respond in real time to performers who can sense her) and film as a passive one (i.e., the performers carry on whether or not they are observed), the physical structure of the two forms suggests the opposite. Whereas theatre must project out toward the audience, screens pull the viewer toward the frame. Perhaps the most famous depiction of this screen sense is Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954), which uses the window frame as a metaphor for the voyeuristic position of the screen viewer. Indeed, the protagonist L. B. Jefferies (James Stewart) is, like the film viewer, trapped on one side of the frame. He sits, permanently immobilized with a broken leg and able only to look through his window, though trying relentlessly to push his gaze through the frame and into the space of the action beyond it.

While watching mediated theatre, one should be aware that the gaze has been reversed. What was formerly intended to push toward the viewer is now pulling away. Areas of the stage that were previously expansive have become narrowly compressed. The entire performance has been pushed back on itself. This is perhaps why many recorded versions of theatre seem so anemic compared to their live performances. Without additional augmentation to the screen mise-en-scène and attention to the physical reversal of attention, the gaze of the viewer is pulled into an empty space. With nothing pulling us in and the performance now retreating from us, the screen version can appear lifeless and stale. The best-recorded versions, then, are those that account for and address the structure of the space and direction of the viewer's gaze, by penetrating the stage space so as to make it a dynamic environment by moving the camera into the stage space much like the camera moves through cinematic space. Watching the recorded version, the archival viewer must watch for the compensations of the screened performance, particularly the placement of the camera as an active viewer, penetrating the space of the performance in order to guide the screen viewer's eye into the screen space. The camera often violates the fourth wall from the outside so that the viewer can move into the performance, thereby fulfilling the desire for the gaze to move into the imaginative space of the performance. The camera's penetration of performance leads us to the analysis of its position—specifically, the framing of the action and the emphasis it creates within the performance.

Distortion #2: Composition / Camera Placement and Movement

Because the camera always inverts stage space, no single camera position can adequately contain the stage space. Anyone who has ever aimed a video camera at a stage instantly recognizes the problem. The stage is simply too large for the camera to capture in its entirety, since the most expansive part of the stage (downstage) is also the narrowest for the camera. The single-camera solution to this fundamental problem is either a continual panning from side to side and zooming in and out—techniques endemic to home movies—or the deadly back-of-house static camera in which the performers scurry about the stage as tiny, blurry versions of themselves against the expanse of the theatre architecture. Both camera techniques omit vital details as well as a more general sense of performance experience by the human observer, even one in the same location as the camera.

To compensate for this skewed vision, the camera's placement—visible through its framing—must penetrate the stage space and divide the space of performance into smaller areas. The camera's placement, movement, and angles further break up the materials of the stage—bodies, gestures, objects, and space—into screen-compatible chunks. The frame thus creates meaning on the screen by focusing the vision of the viewer (through its surrogate, the camera) on a narrowly defined area of the larger reality extending beyond the limits of the frame. Of course, as Stanley Kauffmann has pointed out, theatre directors had been focusing and controlling the attention of viewers long before the invention of the moving-picture camera. However, he also tellingly calls the control of the screen image "a happy slavery" that commands "our shifts of attention with no chance of our demurral"

that we might find in the theatre (105). The placement of the camera and its subsequent framing of performance divides the space and the action into discrete shots, which the camera constructs by invading the theatrical space.

The techniques by which the camera enters the stage space vary, including zooms (the shift from a wide-angle lens to a telephoto lens), dolly shots (the physical movement of the camera forward or backward), and cuts (abrupt transitions from one viewing position to another). Like Kauffmann's comparison between directors in film and theatre, early television critics saw camera movement as analogous to the work of the stage director, differing only in tools and technique. Mary Hunter, for example, went so far as to equate the work of a stage director with camera positions. According to Hunter, the stage director "must direct the audience's attention about the stage as precisely as the camera moves from one point of interest to the next" (47). But the camera is not simply a matter of selecting the place one looks at; it fundamentally alters the act of looking, in part by dictating exactly where we look and what we see. The camera not only sees things we do not and cannot see by ourselves, but it also alters what we *think* we see through the change in spatial perceptions.

It is a mistake, then, to equate the camera with the theatregoer's own vision. Although many critics claim the analogy, the similarities between the shifting eye of the viewer and the movement of the camera are false. In his essay "Convention, Construction, and Vision," David Bordwell argues against the notion that cinematic conventions derive from perceptual experience, noting that the shot / reverse-shot device, for example, "has no exact correlate in ordinary perceptual experience" (89). Because the camera can perceive detail and alter its focus at will, it simultaneously exceeds and replaces the human eye. The goal for most theatre on screen is to make the camera appear as if it were the eye of the theatre viewer, but unlike the human eye, the camera actually dissects the larger space visible to the viewer in the theatre into carefully constructed, predetermined (by someone else) fragments that create a collage of the action. Able to capture smaller details and a greater sense of interiority through close-ups, tightly framed shots, and editing rhythm, the camera functions as a kind of performer-observer. It penetrates the performance, but remains apparently invisible to the characters within the drama.

For the purposes of mediated theatre analysis, the camera is not the unchained, omniscient, and omnipotent viewer of the cinema (in which the world is virtually limitless, potently articulated in the 360 degree pan); nor is it tied to a single viewing position, as is the viewer in the physical theatre. In recording live performance, whether in a theatre or studio, the camera is contained within a particular physical space, but it can penetrate that space in an infinite number of ways, and it can occupy virtually unlimited positions within it, including that of a performer. The use of point-of-view shots and close-up shots, for example, use the camera as a temporary stand-in for the characters. These shots bring the viewer into closer proximity than is typical of live theatre and often invite identification with the character through whose eyes we view the world. Whereas the stage keeps all figures at roughly the same distance from the viewer, the camera's mobility allows the viewer's proximity to the performance to change throughout the performance by moving closer for emotional impact and pulling away to create either emotional distance or isolation.

Viewing mediated theatre thus requires attention to the framing of each shot and similar attention to the composition created within the structure of the frame. Where is the camera in relation to the action it records? Does it take the place of another character, as in point-of-view shots, or is it merely an intimate observer? How does the framing of the shot emphasize proximity between characters? Are they thrust together in a narrow two-shot or separated by cuts in a shot / reverse-shot?

Louis Malle's *Vanya on 42nd Street* (1994) provides a particularly useful example of framing in mediated theatre. Malle's framing exhibits an engaged relationship with the performance in the theatre. The frame is dynamic, continually shifting and floating through the theatrical space, even intruding into personal, off-stage conversations that become interwoven with the stage performances.

Throughout the film, Malle keeps the camera close, even subservient to the actors and director through a series of tightly framed low-angle shots. The camera often sits just below the sight-lines of the actors, recording their dialogue as if by accident and creeping through the production almost from the position of the family pet. Although produced as a commercial film (as opposed to a media recording of a live performance), Malle's *Vanya* uses many of the standard conventions of mediated theatre: it confines the camera to a theatre space, establishing the performance context early with an opening shot of the actors' entry into the theatre itself.[14] The intrusion of the camera into the intimate, dimly lit scenes provides much greater intimacy than any stage production of *Uncle Vanya* could afford, allowing actors to whisper, mumble, and sigh with more subtlety than would be possible in live performance. In observing the recorded performance, we should remain aware of the camera's placement in the action and its construction of each shot. Through the camera, someone has placed us in the performance, with all the emotional and intellectual impact of that position.

Distortion #3: Editing

The third and final domain of distortion is the manipulation of time and rhythm through editing. Here, too, it can be seductive to think that the process of editing in mediated theatre echoes the theatregoer's own vision. Film historian Barry Salt is not alone when he compares cinematic editing to "what a spectator before the scene would see, standing there and casting his glance from this point to that point within it" (164). But as I have attempted to explain in the analysis of framing, the camera always exceeds the visual capacities of the live viewer; due to the limitations of space, it cannot simply situate its audience in close proximity to the action, it must occupy the stage space. Similarly, the temporal quality of editing—the ability to compress and extend time—differs radically from the stage. While time on stage can certainly be slowed (as in Sheryl Sutton's technique of "floating" in Robert Wilson's *Deafman Glance* [1970]) or even speeded up, the timing of the theatre performance is always constrained by physical limitations of the actors' bodies. The media recording of a performance, however, can manipulate the timing of the action in innumerable ways, including suspense through the elongation of a shot's duration and urgency by shortening the duration of several shots, cut close together.

Some might argue that a constant shot from a single camera in fixed position eliminates the need to discuss editing in some performance recordings. Not so. Although we are accustomed to referring to editing predominantly in terms of montage or cuts, particularly in the wake of films and television densely packed with cuts of every shape and angle (Outkast's recent *Idlewild* [2006] serves as an example), editing is fundamentally the temporal *and* spatial arrangement of images, including the long take that in the extreme may avoid cuts altogether.[15] Early film theorists and directors explicitly sought to contradict the widespread belief that the early films were like the stage by defining what they called the unique "language of cinema," defined in part as the editing of "nature." More recently, film historians have argued that early cinema did not exclusively evolve from the stage, but that the cinema's use of editing, even before the first cut, articulated an approach to space and time independent of the theatre. For example, in the introduction to his *Early Cinema*, Thomas Elsaesser observes that "'[s]imultaneous playing areas' and 'editing within the frame' are features of early cinema" that deviate from theatrical forerunners (13).

In the broadest sense, editing is the arrangement of moving images through manipulations of space and time, combinations of visual (and aural) elements, and rhythms such that patterns of meaning emerge. As productions anticipate their own documentation and the potential for media production, attention to editing has become an increasingly common tool for mediated theatre. The use of multicamera setups and studios for live performance recording are now, happily, far more prevalent than the single, wide-angle stationary camera. In the moving-image archive, then, we must take special note of the use of editing as perhaps the most visible distortion of the performance.

The organic continuity of the theatre can only be illusorily recreated on screen through the careful assemblage of its fragments.

In mediated theatre, there are two basic techniques for editing: one emerges from cinema, the other from television. The cinematic approach records a scene first in a wide-angle master shot, followed by the same scene shot from different angles and distances. In the editing process, the parts of various perspectives and shots are arranged in a sequence designed to convey a narrative in a continuous and fluid manner (i.e., parallel editing), as in D. W. Griffith's films. This approach also creates the opportunity for more experimental montage by using the juxtaposition of noncontinuous elements for aesthetic rather than narrative impact. Such an approach to editing was the foundation for the experiments by Russian filmmakers in Lev Kuleshov's laboratory, made famous through the work of Eisenstein. For Eisenstein, the juxtaposition of shots, or montage adopted from the French, was the essence of filmmaking itself. As he wrote in his influential essay "The Cinematographic Principle and Ideogram": "Cinematography is, first and foremost, montage," the combination of shots that "are *depictive*, single in meaning, neutral in content—into *intellectual* contexts and series" (28, 30, emphasis in original). In this approach, each scene is broken down into pieces that can be assembled and reassembled to articulate the performance as it occurred.

But the arrangement of individual shots is only one type of editing available to recorded theatre. The other, modeled on the television studio, places multiple cameras in various locations, each one controlled by an individual operator and coordinated by a director with all camera perspectives visible simultaneously. In this setup, the action can occur uninterrupted, either on a studio stage or in the theatre itself, while the director alternates the master view through the various cameras' views. This style of editing results in a similar composition of shots, angles, and movements, but it does so without interrupting or repeating the performance as it occurs.[16] It is this latter technique that has most often been compared to theatre, as a replication of the theatregoer's vision from the audience. As I mentioned above, however, the camera does not often remain contentedly on one side of the footlights, letting the performance come to it; instead, the shifting between cameras and penetration of the stage space serves to construct the gaze of the viewer as being physically within the performance. One watches not only from the traditional perspective of the audience, but also as a fellow cast-member. Moreover, editing standardizes the multiple perspectives and attentions of a diverse live audience into a single directional choice—a uniform viewing position regardless of where the media viewer sits.

Essential to both methods is the fragmentation of both action and actor. After the camera breaks the performance into pieces, it is the responsibility of the editor (and then the viewer) to reassemble the fragments into a coherent whole. So also is the actor's body cut into pieces and reassembled by both the structural editing of shots and in the viewer's own memory of full-body shots. The assembly of these fragments introduces an area of criticism previously unknown in the theatre: whereas theatre analysis includes attention to space and visual composition through considerations of design, blocking, lighting, and theatre architecture, editing has no true visual parallel in the theatre.[17] In the mediated theatre, then, editing has a function quite outside the original live performance. In its analysis, the viewer is always picking up the pieces of performance and putting them back together. To evaluate the impact of editing on mediated theatre, we should pay close attention to three critical aspects of the editing: *pace*, or how long each shot lasts; *rhythm*, the pattern established by the duration of shots and the transitions between them; and *juxtaposition*, which shots occur after one another.

Conclusion

One could (and probably should) expand these areas of formal analysis to include manipulations of color, lenses, lighting, and more sophisticated distinctions among celluloid shadow projection, television pixels, high-definition video, computer-graphic imaging, and many more emerging

technologies that will undoubtedly influence the way theatre is produced, received, archived, and re-viewed. What I offer here is more limited in scope: to argue for the centrality of moving-image analysis to theatre history, and to suggest the preliminary points of formal comparison between live and mediated theatre central to that analysis. Glenn Gould was wrong (at least for now) about the total elimination of the live music concert, but one cannot ignore the saturation of contemporary performance by media, nor can one deny that the moving-image archive radically complicates long-held notions of presence, text, and evidence in theatre history. As we write, watch, and teach theatre, awareness of and familiarity with mediated performance must become part of our theatrical vocabulary. To suggest this is not to deny either the power or the pleasures of live performance; rather, it is the only way to preserve them for a future that must brush up on its Shakespeare, but will intuitively know its screens.

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Notes

My thanks to *Theatre Topics* editor Jonathan Chambers and to the reviewers of this essay for their insightful comments and suggestions.

1. For example, W. B. Worthen's *Wadsworth Anthology of Drama* (New York: Heinle, 2006).

2. For his cogent assessment of the report as it pertains to performance studies, see Philip Auslander, "No-Shows: The Head Count from the NEA," *TDR* 49.1 (2005): 5–9.

3. *365* public web site, 16 Oct. 2006 <http://www.publictheater.org/365/>.

4. For a useful overview on social-networking theory, see L. Keeble and B. Loader, eds., *Community Informatics: Shaping Computer-Mediated Social Relations* (London: Routledge, 2001). For ongoing discussions of social networks, media, and art, see the Institute for Distributed Creativity, <http://www.distributedcreativity.org/>.

5. Although I have to this point used the word "live" to denote the difference between a production experienced in a common physical space between performers and viewers and a performance viewed, at least in part, on some kind of screen, I am aware that this basic distinction seems to be collapsing under the weight of media experience and expectations. This new realm of performance theory—what Ralf Remshardt has called the "post-actor, post-human 'redefinition of the real'"—poses new aesthetic concerns for the evaluation of media documents as evidence of performance. As Philip Auslander argues in his *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, "live performance itself has developed since [the advent of television] toward the replication of the discourse of mediatization" (23–24), resulting not in media technology, but "media epistemology" (32). Or, more fundamentally, as Matthew Causey asserts: "Performance has taken on the ontology of the technological" (394). While I am sympathetic to this argument and excited by the new theoretical possibilities it suggests, for the purposes of historical analysis it is necessary to mark the formal distinctions between live, at least mostly unmediated performance, and recorded versions of those performances. However, intermedia theatre and mixed-reality performances that both project and record their performances simultaneously will no doubt require new methodologies of analysis and preservation. While such considerations are beyond the scope of this essay, recent examples of theoretical work in this area can be found in Gabriella Giannachi, *Virtual Theatres* (London: Routledge, 2004), and Freda Chappel and Chiel Kattenbelt, eds., *Intermediality in Theatre and Performance* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006). For examples of digital-media archives, see: media art net <http://www.mediartnet.

org>, archive.org <http://www.archive.org>, rhizome.org artbase <http://rhizome.org/art/>, and the database of virtual art <http://www.virtualart.at/common/recentWork.do>.

6. To be fair, Pavis has revised this position somewhat in his analysis of media in performance; however, he has not to my knowledge reversed his position on the available semiotics of the mise-en-scène in video documentation.

7. For example, Robin Nelson's "New Small Screen Spaces: A Performative Phenomenon?" argues that through a process of remediation, screen viewers become self-aware not only as viewers, but also as active agents in the performance.

8. Indeed, Bazin saw television as a related though more complicated example, since live television both isolates the actor from viewers and makes her aware of them as an unseen yet tangible audience. For this reason, Bazin concludes that missed lines are doubly painful for the television viewer, who sees the actor in an "unnatural solitude" (98).

9. For representative examples, see Egil Törnqvist, *Transposing Drama: Studies in Representation* (Oxford: Macmillan, 1991); Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs, eds., *Theatre to Cinema: Stage Pictorialism and the Early Feature Film* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997); and Robert Knopf, ed., *Theater and Film: A Comparative Anthology* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2005).

10. For example, R.W. Vince's "Theatre History as an Academic Discipline," *Interpreting the Theatrical Past: Essays in the Historiography of Performance,* ed. Thomas Postlewait and Bruce A. McConachie (Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1989) 1–18.

11. For representative examples, see Dudley Andrew, "Adaptation." *Concepts in Film Theory* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1984) 96–106; Martin Esslin, *The Field of Drama: How the Signs of Drama Create Meaning on Stage and Screen* (London: Methuen, 1987); and Robert Stam, ed., *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005). For a useful reference guide to cinematic adaptations, see John C. Tibbetts and James M. Walsh, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Stage Plays into Film* (New York: Facts on File, 2001). For a less theoretical perspective, see Phyllis Zatlin, *Theatrical Translation and Film Adaptation: A Practioner's View* (Cleredon, UK: Multilingual Matters, 2005). On the topic of Shakespearean film and television adaptation, there is an extensive bibliography, much of which can be found in Courtney Lehmann, *Shakespeare Remains: Theatre to Film, Early to Postmodern* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2002), and in Kenneth S. Rothwell, ed., *A History of Shakespeare on Screen: A Century of Film and Television* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999).

12. See, for example, Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (London: Fontana, 1974), and Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993). For a broader consideration of performance as historical material, see Richard Cándida Smith, *Art and the Performance of Memory: Sounds and Gestures of Recollection (Memory and Narrative)* (London: Routledge, 2002).

13. This is not to say that cinema cannot project itself toward the audience. Much more so than television, IMAX and 3-D films can overwhelm the senses of the viewer; however, these extreme examples are still dependent upon the frame, although in the case of IMAX, the frame has been stretched to the limits of human peripheral vision. This impulse goes back to the origins of cinema itself. For a fascinating early study on the history of large-screen projection, see Kenneth MacGowan, "The Wide Screen of Yesterday and Tomorrow," *Quarterly of Film Radio and Televison* 11.3 (1957): 217–41.

14. Not coincidentally, Jonathan Demme's film of Spalding Gray's *Swimming to Cambodia* (1987) begins with a similar tracking shot of Gray walking through the streets of New York to the theatre. In both instances, these

establishing shots locate the performance in a specific place, New York City, and further lock the camera (and the performers) into the physical space of the theatre. This is a critical difference between cinema, which offers the world broadly for visual consumption, and mediated theatre, which focuses itself narrowly into the space of the theatre itself.

15. This is not unique to mediated theatre. Hitchcock's *Rope* (1948) is a well-known instance of an entire film appearing to occur within one continuous take.

16. The best way to observe and analyze this style of editing is by watching any kind of truly live television event, namely awards shows and sporting events. Among American televised sports, baseball is a particularly effective example, since the action is relatively slow compared to sports such as basketball, soccer, and hockey, and because the distance between players makes the shot selections, framing, and editing readily apparent (unlike American football, which relies overwhelmingly on the overhead long shot). Baseball also lends itself to the narrow juxtaposition of two opposing characters—pitcher and batter—with the suspense of each pitch creating a dramatic arc, not unlike that found in the theatre. Although many have compared baseball to poetry, for me, it is the most theatrical of all major sports.

17. I specify a visual parallel because one could make the argument that the pace and rhythm of a theatre performance is controlled by both the textual rhythms of the play itself and the oral rhythms of the actors' performances.

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