

Art | Theory | Criticism | Politics

# OCTOBER

# 14

Catrina Neiman

*An Introduction to the Notebook of  
Maya Deren, 1947*

Maya Deren and  
Gregory Bateson

*An Exchange of Letters*

Maya Deren

*From the Notebook of 1947*

Annette Michelson

*On Reading Deren's Notebook*

Sergei Eisenstein

*Letters from Mexico*

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*Bayreuth: The Centennial Ring*

Jean-Jacques Nattiez

*Chéreau's Treachery*

Pierre Boulez and

Michel Fano

*A Conversation*

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*Cover photograph: Siegfried, Act II. Bayreuth, 1978.  
(Photo: Wilhelm Rauh.)*

GREGORY BATESON, who died earlier this year, gained his initial reputation as an ethnologist working in the field in Bali and New Guinea with Margaret Mead. His later work combined cybernetic theory and anthropology. In 1946, while lecturing at the New School for Social Research, he met and began an exchange of ideas with Maya Deren.

PIERRE BOULEZ conducted the Bayreuth Festival centennial *Ring* from 1976-80. The conversation published here was recorded during the 1978 festival season.

MAYA DEREN's film practice and theory, begun in the 1940s, laid the basis for the development of independent cinema in this country.

SERGEI EISENSTEIN wrote the letters published here while filming *Que Viva Mexico!* in 1931. This period was marked by intensive reading, drawing, and correspondence during the intervals between shooting.

MICHEL FANO is a composer, filmmaker, and sound engineer, and a collaborator on the films of Alain Robbe-Grillet. Among his principal contributions is *Le territoire des autres*.

JEAN-JACQUES NATTIEZ, author of *Fondements d'une sémiologie de la musique*, teaches at the University of Montreal, where he has directed a program of research into the structure of the music of Northeast Canadian Eskimos. He is currently at work on a detailed analysis of the centennial production of the *Ring*.

CATRINA NEIMAN is a coeditor of *The Legend of Maya Deren*. Her colleagues Millicent Hodson and VèVè Clark provided suggestions concerning her introduction, and Francine Bailey printed the photographs accompanying the Deren material. Teji and ChereI Ito provided the stills from the Haitian footage.

## Art and Anthropology: The Crossroads

*The notes, correspondence, and photographs published here for the first time are excerpted from Ritual, the second of three volumes of The Legend of Maya Deren (1917-61). The Legend, which presents Deren's collected works in the form of a documentary biography, is being published by Film Culture. It has been organized by four women who together represent Deren's major areas of accomplishment: film (Catrina Neiman), photography (Francine Bailey), dance (Millicent Hodson), and Caribbean studies (VèVè Clark). The originals of the Deren documents are housed in the Special Collections of the Boston University Library.*

### An Introduction to the Notebook of Maya Deren, 1947

CATRINA NEIMAN

#### I

Much of Maya Deren's work is still unknown, and it is far broader in scope than is generally realized.<sup>1</sup> She contributed much that is not recorded in the annals of avant-garde film. Her extensive writings show her to be a theoretician of some stature and an interpreter of our culture as well as those in the Caribbean and Asia. She was also a professional photographer and published portraits of artists and writers she knew in New York in the forties and fifties: Duchamp, Breton, Ossip Zadkine, Anais Nin, Julie Harris, Janet Collins, among many others. Longer still is the list of more obscure figures, women artists and scientists, anonymous Haitians.

Deren documented both modern and traditional art forms, the virtuoso performance and its communal counterpart. As an artist herself, she experimented with the use of certain traditional forms in structuring her own films—haiku poetry, Chinese boxing, children's games, circus acts. Several of these projects she left unfinished. They are, however, abundantly documented. The notes published here were written in the course of planning what Deren called her "Film-in-Progress" (1946-47), the most provocative of all her abandoned projects. The reasons for its failure reveal as much about Deren's integrity as an artist as do any of her completed works. She describes the fate of this film in the preface to *Divine*

1. A complete bibliography is available in *Film Culture*, 39 (Winter 1965), which contains an astute selection of Deren's notes, essays, and letters.

*Horsemen*, her book on the Vodoun religion.<sup>2</sup> She had arrived in Haiti in September of 1947, laden with cameras and recording equipment.

Among my papers was a carefully conceived plan for a film in which Haitian dance, as purely a dance form, would be combined (in montage principle) with various non-Haitian elements. . . .

Today, in September 1951 . . . the filmed footage . . . lies in virtually its original condition in a fireproof box in the closet; the recordings are still on their original wire spools; the stack of photographs is tucked away in a drawer labeled "TO BE PRINTED," and the elaborate design for the montaged film is somewhere in my files, I am not sure where.<sup>3</sup>

Deren felt compelled to list the disposition of these materials in order to emphasize just how much time and effort she had invested in her project, "undertaken by one who was acknowledged as a resolute and even stubbornly willful individual."<sup>4</sup> The film had been conceived, worked out on paper, and discussed with anthropologists, among them Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead. They had warned her of the problems she would encounter in comparing Haitian dance with other forms (Balinese and Navajo). But Deren was constructing a work of art, a cross-cultural "fugue" of ritual gestures and objects, and she had persisted in her vision—until she arrived in Haiti. Once there, she soon came to feel that she could not film the dances for her own purposes without regard for their religious context. Conceding defeat as an artist, she "abandoned [her] manipulations" and devoted herself to understanding "the irrefutable reality . . . of Vodoun."<sup>5</sup>

## II

P. Adams Sitney has remarked that Deren's film career was "radically deflected" by her work in Haiti.<sup>6</sup> One might, in fact, make the reverse claim, that her interest in Haitian dance was initially deflected by her discovery of film. She had first planned to visit Haiti in 1941, presumably to write about dance and religious possession. She had, during the preceding year, become interested in the work of Katherine Dunham, anthropologist and choreographer, whose writings and concerts were just then bringing Afro-Caribbean dance forms to the attention of North Americans. Deren persuaded Dunham to employ her as an assistant in

2. Deren's book *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (London, Thames and Hudson, 1953), on the rites and cosmology of Vodoun, remained out of print for over a decade and was reissued in 1970 with a new introduction by Joseph Campbell, editor of the series of works on mythology in which the book had originally appeared (New York, Chelsea House Publishers, 1970; reprinted by Dell, 1970).

3. *Divine Horsemen*, p. 5.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

6. P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1974, p. 38.

the hope that they could collaborate on a book about dance. Deren had in mind a book for children on the origins of dance movement from an anthropological point of view, illustrated with simple drawings of "the poetry of motion."<sup>7</sup> That project was also abandoned.

In 1941 Deren arrived in California, having traveled cross-country with Katherine Dunham on the tour of *Cabin in the Sky*. Deren had absorbed a great deal from Miss Dunham in that time and now undertook her own study of Haitian ritual. Her three-part essay "Religious Possession in Dancing" was published in 1942.<sup>8</sup> It was the entry of the U.S. into the war, Deren claimed, that prevented her from going to Haiti to further her research. Soon afterward, while living in Hollywood, she met and married Czech filmmaker Alexander Hammid. He taught her the mechanics of photography and film, and it was their collaboration on *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943) that convinced Deren that cinema was her medium. In the next four years she produced the body of films and writings for which she is best known today. Two of these early works, *Choreography for Camera* (1945) and *Ritual in Transfigured Time* (1946), use dance rather than literary or theatrical devices as their structural dynamic. While revealing Deren's own inclination toward choreography, these films retain something of Dunham's spirit as well. Deren's principal performers, Talley Beatty and Rita Christiani, were dancers she had known in the Dunham Company.

Deren never acknowledged a debt to Katherine Dunham, even in *Divine Horsemen*. It is Gregory Bateson whom she credits with attuning her to "what distinguishes culture from culture" and Joseph Campbell with "sharpening [her] awareness of that which man has in common."<sup>9</sup> *Divine Horsemen*, Deren added, "is an effort to unite these points of view according to a third—that of the artist. . . ."<sup>10</sup> Bateson and Campbell were both important influences and among Deren's close friends—Bateson before her Haitian journey, Campbell afterward. Dunham, however, had provided a considerable example for the synthesis Deren herself would seek in art and anthropology.

### III

"The elaborate design for the montaged film" mentioned in *Divine Horsemen* has not been located in Deren's files. What is known of her plan is outlined in one of her many grant applications.<sup>11</sup> Her intention was to combine elements of

7. Letter to Dunham, February 17, 1941; from the Katherine Dunham Collection, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale.

8. *Educational Dance*, March, August-September, 1942. This short-lived UCLA journal had the previous year carried one of Dunham's major early articles, "Form and Function in Primitive Dance," October 1941.

9. *Divine Horsemen*, p. 12.

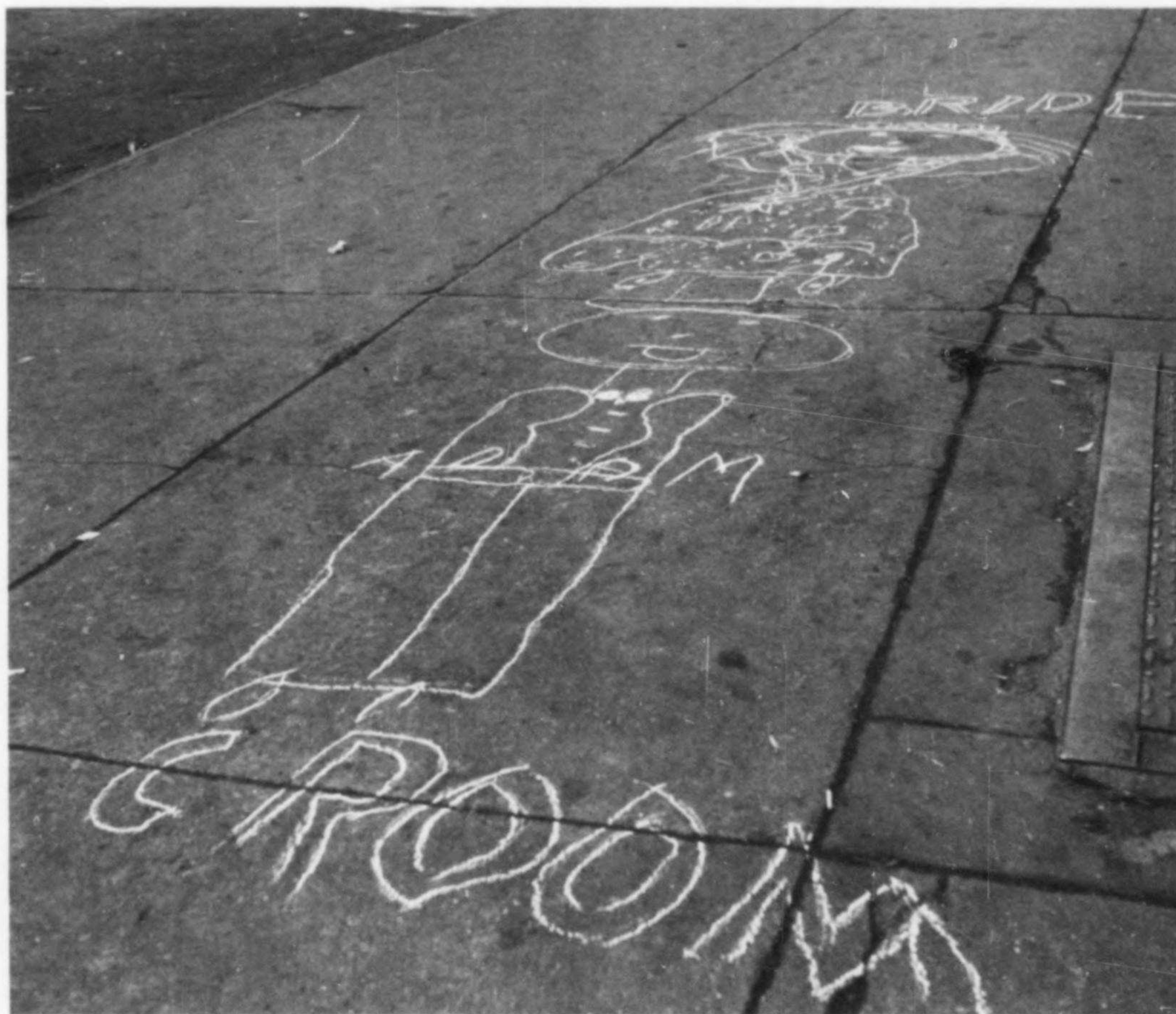
10. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

11. "Film in Progress. Thematic Statement." Application for the Renewal of a Fellowship for Creative Work in Motion Pictures. February 9, 1947; in *Film Culture*, 39 (Winter 1965), 11-17.

Balinese and Haitian ritual with those of children's games, filmed on the streets of New York. Deren had long observed children. She had filmed sequences of a child at play to use in *Ritual in Transfigured Time* but had eliminated these at the last moment. Now she would take up the idea once more, characterizing the games of children (and those of adults, like football and chess) as forms of secular ritual. As she wrote:

All the quality of children's games which fascinated me and induced me to consider it as a theme for the film-in-progress were . . . [their] universality . . . , the intense illusion of reality which they had for the players, the immaculate attention to seemingly irrelevant detail, the element of self-subordination and even ordeal. . . .<sup>12</sup>

12. *Ibid.*, p. 14.



Also implicit in her analogy, of course, are the constructions of art. The example of Duchamp, another mentor to Deren, strongly pervades her thinking at this time. The identification of art with game is suggested repeatedly in her films and notes of this period—most frequently in the image of chess, but in other types of play as well.

In a later passage of her "Thematic Statement," Deren voices her fear that, by juxtaposing games with rituals, she runs the risk of the rituals being observed with the same "amused tolerance" with which we observe the doings of children (and artists, she noted). In order to protect the integrity of the rituals, she felt compelled "to enlist the advice of anthropologists." It was at this point that she sought out Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead, who gave "most generously of their information, perceptions of cross-cultural equivalents, and their understanding of the relation of art forms to culture contexts."<sup>13</sup>

13. *Ibid.*



Sidewalk Chalk Drawings, ca. 1948. (Photos: Maya Deren.)

Bateson and Mead were among the anthropologists participating in the lecture series sponsored by Franziska Boas in 1946, "The Function of Dance in Human Society." Attending these lectures, Deren became aware of the work done by Bateson and Mead in Bali in the late thirties. Over a two-year period, Bateson had shot some 22,000 feet of film, material later used in a series of films on subjects ranging from *Bathing Babies* to *Trance and Dance in Bali* (1951).<sup>14</sup> The original footage, extraordinary in its range and objectivity, represents the first extensive venture in ethnographic filmmaking. In 1942 Bateson and Mead published an equally pioneering monograph, *Balinese Character: A Photographic Analysis*,<sup>15</sup> based on their vast photographic archives. In this work they examine posture and gesture frame by frame. Mead outlines the distinctive character or "ethos" of Balinese life, and Bateson reflects on the methods of photographic analysis.

Deren had access to *Balinese Character*. What she had not expected was that Bateson would give her the Balinese footage to use as she wished. Her decision to work with Bali was therefore a purely pragmatic one. Prior to meeting Bateson she had "spent considerable time" researching the rites of Southwest Indians, presumably trance dance, for possible inclusion in the film.<sup>16</sup> However, as Mead pointed out, no films of the Navajo existed then.<sup>17</sup> Deren would have had to go there herself. She investigated this possibility<sup>18</sup> but dropped the idea because, as Mead recalled, Bateson thought that Bali and Haiti were enough to handle. The comparison between Bali and Haiti, in Mead's view, was legitimate; both were "high cultures." Haiti's Vodoun was a derivation of ancient West African forms. Bateson, at first, was wary of combining South Seas with Caribbean forms, but Deren managed to convince him.

The initial encounter between Maya Deren and Gregory Bateson is reflected in their exchange of letters during December 1946, published here. This correspondence addresses itself both to the proposed content of Deren's film, an issue

14. "The following films in the series 'Character Formation in Different Cultures,' produced by Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead for the Institute for Intercultural Studies, were released in 1951 by the New York University Film Library, New York, NY 10003. All are 16mm, black and white, sound:

*A Balinese Family*, 2 reels

*Bathing Babies in 3 Cultures*, 1 reel

*Childhood Rivalry in Bali and New Guinea*, 2 reels

*First Days in the Life of a New Guinea Baby*, 2 reels

*Karba's First Years*, 2 reels

*Trance and Dance in Bali*, 2 reels"

(Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, New York, Chandler, 1972). The original footage is housed at the Museum of Natural History, New York, and at the Eastern Pennsylvania Psychiatric Institute, Philadelphia.

15. Special Publications of the New York Academy of Sciences, vol. 2.

16. Letter to Henry Allen Moe, John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, February 9, 1947.

17. Interview with Margaret Mead for *The Legend of Maya Deren*, September 21, 1976. All references in this paragraph to Mead's recollections paraphrase this interview. Dr. Mead was unaware of the footage of Navajo life shot by anthropologist John Adair in 1938, only recently made available for public screening.

18. Letter to Moe.

for the anthropologist, and to the artist's problem of structure. While Deren had won the former argument, justifying the inclusion of Bali on artistic grounds, it was an idea of Bateson's, interestingly enough, that clarified the form of the film. That idea Deren cites as follows:

The form which I have in mind for this film . . . is one which has been approximately described in an analysis by Gregory Bateson of the South Seas exhibit of the Museum of Modern Art.<sup>19</sup> This exhibit combined art objects from different cultures in such a relationship as to itself constitute a progressive and even climactic art object. Mr. Bateson praises the exhibit precisely for the fact that each grouping of materials was true to the individual culture which it represented, at the same time that these groupings were so arranged in reference to each other as to create a 'sensible' pattern which transcended them all and even strengthened them, each in their individual terms as well, and he goes on to liken the organization of the whole to a "symphony, which consists essentially of a single temporal sequence of sounds (where) unity is achieved by earlier pre-figuring of themes which will be picked up and developed in some later movement, so in this exhibit, the spectator is allowed to see ahead something of what he will later experience. It is this unity which causes the spectator to say 'it makes sense.'"<sup>20</sup>

Deren wrote her "Thematic Statement" in February 1947 as part of her application to renew the Guggenheim Foundation fellowship she had received the previous year. It was the first Guggenheim grant "ever given for creative work in the field of motion pictures" and the only grant she would receive. Bateson and Mead were to help fund her expedition to Haiti, under the auspices of their Institute for Intercultural Studies, in return for a copy of her raw footage. The Guggenheim fellowship had freed Deren, then, to devote most of her time to the film-in-progress. She continued, though, to lecture in and around New York and wrote several articles on film before leaving for Haiti that fall.

Within a week of completing her "Thematic Statement," Deren began work on the Balinese film. She noted her observations on index cards, typed these in triplicate and cross-referenced them with the sequences she selected to use. She then duplicated what amounts to five reels of film and over a hundred stills.

For a little over a month Deren kept a notebook, entertaining her spontaneous reactions and thinking them through aloud. Half-handwritten, half-typed on loose-leaf paper, these notes are unique among her documents. Here she explores the personal and professional conflicts that arise in the course of making a film.

19. Gregory Bateson, "Exhibition Review, Art of the South Seas," *The Art Bulletin*, XXVIII, 2 (June 1946).

20. "Thematic Statement," pp. 15-16.



*Stills enlarged by Maya Deren from her Haitian footage, 1947-48.*

Her articles for amateurs on film technique reflect her awareness of her own filmmaking process. But only in these notes do we find her considering that process firsthand, as an artist engaged in construction, as a woman artist embracing technology.

The notebook is particularly valuable as a record of the various perspectives which Deren brings to bear on her task. First, she views the Balinese footage as raw material to be molded in the image of her own creation. She selects a gesture or a mask for its formal value with respect to her overall plan. At times she complains of Bateson's framing that he has included too much or too little "context." Her vision is constrained by his. Through the eyes of Gregory Bateson, Deren becomes aware of the ethnographer's problems and improvised solutions. Her vision is expanded by his. Once she accepts his frame of reference, she speculates on what she sees within as well as what lies beyond. As viewer of this film, and as filmmaker, she offers a complex meditation upon cinema in all its aspects.

#### IV

Deren had begun to reconsider the emphasis on deeply personal themes in her own films and the necessity of using herself as protagonist. *Ritual in Transfigured Time*, just completed, was the last film in which she would appear. Her writing at this time, especially the "Thematic Statement," emphasizes the need to "de-personalize" her art. Hence her interest in the forms of ritual as manifesting anonymity and universality, forms which she hoped to incorporate. The way in which Deren observed ritual, then—on film or later in the Haitian *hounfor*—must be seen in terms of her own needs and goals. Consider, for example, the title of her chart classifying rituals and children's games: "Rituals Minimizing Personal Identity." "These categories," she noted, "are only roughly



drawn on the basis of preliminary research, and are subject to modification and change.”<sup>21</sup>

In her preface to *Divine Horsemen*, Deren warns the reader that hers is not an orthodox anthropology. She is confident that Vodoun, like any work of the imagination, is intelligible in and through its forms, its myths and rites, its drums and dance. And it is these which she, as an artist, feels especially well “trained” to grasp. She then acknowledges the insight of Gregory Bateson, as one of the few anthropologists to possess “sensitivity to form and to the clues it provides for meaning.”

It is in the form of the artifacts and acts of a culture that the distinguishing *ethos* of a culture is stated, and a major discussion of *ethos*, in relation to the anthropological analysis of a culture, is contained in *Naven*, a study of the Iatmul tribes, by Gregory Bateson.<sup>22</sup> Chronologically, it is to Mr. Bateson, in fact, that my first acknowledgments are due. Before I went to Haiti and before this book was ever contemplated, I had the good fortune to have many extended conversations with him concerning the nature of cultural organization, particularly in reference to Balinese, British and American culture. It was the non-sectarian quality of his anthropological intelligence—his readiness to engage every sensibility and every possible point of view in the effort to illuminate the structure of society—that, in my eyes, once more reaffirmed anthropology as the *study of man*, restoring to both words their major meaning. And those conversations altogether represent an

21. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

22. New York, Cambridge University Press, 1936.

influence which I am sure pervades this book, particularly in that it sharpened my observation of significant details and differences and my respect for the particular ethos of Haitian culture.<sup>23</sup>

Deren's early discussions with Bateson are preserved in her notebook. She mostly addressed issues raised in his lectures, which she was attending then at the New School for Social Research. Bateson had recently participated in the Macy Conferences on Cybernetics and had begun applying systems theory to cultural patterns. This approach to anthropology reflected his conviction, strongly influenced by his father's work as a geneticist, that the types of symmetry characteristic of nature were also inherent in the constructions of man, "that we might expect to find the same sort of laws at work in the structure of a crystal as in the structure of society. . . ."<sup>24</sup> In 1946 Bateson too had been appointed a Guggenheim fellow for "the formulation of a nucleus of theory relating to the concepts of culture, personality and character formation and the extension of this theoretical nucleus to cover the phenomenon of cultural change."<sup>25</sup> The British anthropologist had by this time already put forth a body of original theory. The book Deren mentioned, *Naven*, is a milestone monograph in ethnology, as much acclaimed for its challenge of conventional social science as for its analysis of ritual.

Deren was generally impressed with Bateson's work. She was, however, skeptical about his theoretical comparison of "national character," contrasting, for example, British with American parent-child relations, work he had done in collaboration with Margaret Mead. The schemas he had formulated to describe these relations—exhibitionism/spectatorship, dominance/submission, succoring/dependence—were, Deren felt, too categorical, even simplistic, as was his cybernetic model of cultural change. The greater part of Deren's notes is devoted to a consideration of what she saw as an overly mechanistic view of man. One set of typed notes (March 16) is specifically addressed to Bateson himself. In these Deren confronts him on his own ground, constructing her own systematic model in refutation of his.

Maya Deren was not unequipped for this task. Her background in the social sciences was considerable. From her father, a physician and psychologist who had worked with Pavlov in Russia, she had learned much about psychiatric theory. Her own studies in gestalt theory with Kurt Koffka at Smith College provided the basis for her thinking about the constructive process of perception, in particular about the "habits of vision" formed by American audiences.<sup>26</sup> Her interest in a

23. *Divine Horsemen*, p. 12.

24. Bateson, "Experiments in Thinking About Observed Ethnological Material," *Philosophy of Science*, 8, 53-68. Paper read at the Seventh Conference on Methods in Philosophy and the Sciences, 28 April 1940, at the New School for Social Research, New York; reprinted in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, p. 75.

25. Records of the John Simon Guggenheim Jr. Memorial Foundation, New York.

26. See especially her *Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film*, Yonkers, Alicat Book Shop Press, 1946; reprinted in *Film Culture*, 39 (Winter 1965). Bateson also employs the Gestalt concept of "habits

physical theory which could take the conditions of observation into account led her to write a paper on seventeenth-century precursors to the theory of relativity, often mentioned as having informed her understanding of time-space relations in cinema.

The camera was for Deren the modern instrument which could most naturally reflect its own conditions of observation: "local" time and place and their changes, "the inalienability of subjective position."<sup>27</sup> For her it was through personal, subjective experience that we gain access to the universal. Though among the most personal ever made, her films were addressed "to the poet in every man."

To Deren, Bateson was proceeding in the reverse direction, constructing abstract paradigms based on computer theory, a reductivist theory of mind which did not necessarily hold true for individuals. In her notes criticizing Bateson on this point she cites her essay *An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film* (1946) as being concerned precisely with that individual consciousness.

In her notes on Bateson's lectures, Deren parallels William Blake's assertion, in his annotations of John Locke's "Essay on the Human Understanding,"<sup>28</sup> of the primacy of man's imagination over and against the rigid, abstract constructs of the scientist and philosopher. Bateson's was not, however, such a rigid mind, as Deren's acknowledgement to him in *Divine Horsemen* suggests, and they did have much in common: an interest in psychiatry and communications, in anthropology and art, in play and dream. Both deeply loved poetry. Bateson, in fact, quotes Blake throughout his writings and has always seen himself as Blakean with respect to his own profession.<sup>29</sup> He would take the artist's side, for example, in a recent argument with Margaret Mead about the shooting of ethnographic film.<sup>30</sup> Mead insisted on the most conservative, least imaginative method: wide-angle lens and tripod. Bateson disdained this literal representation of objectivity. His argument for the hand-held camera, moving in the midst of and "interpreting" the action, recalls Deren's cinematography in Haiti. "She was right in there with the goat," Mead remarked of the footage, critical of Deren's extreme "subjective position"—her "poetic" ethnography and her participatory approach to observation.<sup>31</sup>

Deren cited Bateson's willingness to lend her the Balinese footage as "an act

of looking" (for temporality, narrative, cause and effect, etc.) in his 1942 article "Social Planning and the Concept of Deutero-Learning," in *Steps*, pp. 159-176.

27. Deren, *Anagram*, p. 12.

28. See Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry, A Study of William Blake*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1947.

29. See especially Bateson, "Metalogue: What is an Instinct?" in *Approaches to Animal Communication*, ed. T. Sebeok, The Hague and Paris, Mouton & Co., 1969; in *Steps*, pp. 38-58.

30. "For God's Sake, Margaret," Interview with Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead by Stewart Brand, *Co-Evolution Quarterly*, Summer 1976, 32-44.

31. Interview with Mead for *The Legend of Maya Deren*.

of cross-professional cooperation which could serve as a model precedent in the face of professional sectarianism."<sup>32</sup> Similarly, his review of the South Seas art exhibition concludes with the pronouncement:

It is evidently important to bring together anthropological knowledge and artistic sensitivity. Such work may always require two persons, each with his special skill, and always there will be pitfalls. The artist may try to verbalize his conclusions in totally erroneous phrasings of why some arrangement seems to him to be artistically appropriate, and the anthropologist will probably err in trying to push the conclusions toward too sharp a precision. But there is real hope that collaboration along these lines might lead to some advance in our understanding of the tangled emotional themes expressed in man's diverse artistic conventions.<sup>33</sup>

## V

Margaret Mead's most vivid memory of the proposed film on ritual and children's games was of seeing Deren trace hopscotch lines in the air. Deren repeatedly invoked this image to illustrate the way in which we define an artificial, ritual space, a frame of reference, boundaries that may not be crossed or stepped upon. This drawing of lines has, as we have noted, something of ritual and art; for Deren it meant the placing of faith in an authority that transcends the self—an authority, nevertheless, constructed by man. This theme underlies all of her interests in the forms of art and religion, the paradigms of science, the games of children, and is made explicit in two statements which frame her own work as an artist. *Meshes of the Afternoon* portrays a woman's dream in which "the imagined achieved, for her, such force that it became reality."<sup>34</sup> This reflection is elaborated in one of the last articles she wrote, "Some Metaphors for the Creative Process":

There is another metaphor for this process of creating a structure which conveys, perhaps, something of the situation of the artist. He is very much like that classic figure of animated cartoons who . . . is running along and, in complete concentration on his purpose—carried along, as it were, by the momentum of the act—runs right off the edge of a cliff without noticing it and continues running in mid-air until, looking down, he becomes aware of his unnatural situation, and in that moment, and because he perceives it as extraordinary and unnatural, is unable to sustain it, and falls.

32. "Thematic Statement," p. 14.

33. "Exhibition Review," p. 122.

34. Deren, Program Note for *Meshes of the Afternoon*, ca. 1945, in *Film Culture*, 39 (Winter 1965), 1.

So the artist, beginning in reality—in that which already exists—starts moving toward a vision, an Idea, and, with the cumulative momentum of that dedicated concentration, crosses the threshold from that which already exists into the void where, still moving forward, he creates a plane of earth where his foot has been, as the spider, spinning from his own guts, threads his ladders or highways through once empty space.<sup>35</sup>

Deren's productivity extended far beyond writing and the making of films. She inaugurated experimental filmmaking as a viable profession in America—its channels of distribution, lecture circuit, workshops—composing a network existing entirely outside that of the commercial industry. And in order to protect the independent film from the values of "mainstream" cinema, she advocated an aesthetic of economy, which depended on "visualizing as much as possible in advance. It is much cheaper to make mistakes in one's mind than on film, *and this is the key to freedom in film-making: to use one's imagination as a means of independence*, for it can make possible an economy which eliminates dependence upon the financial approval of backers, distributors, etc."<sup>36</sup>

Even Deren's colleagues were largely mystified by her ability to make films on shoestrings. "She could get a cast of thousands; she could tap invisible sources."<sup>37</sup> "Everyone wanted to know her system."<sup>38</sup> Although Deren shared her knowledge and her methods, she was forced to protect herself, the fruits of her ingenuity. She considers the problem at length in these notes, in response to a comment by Margaret Mead on the ways of witches. Deren concludes that witches are those who, like herself, survive by seemingly mysterious means.

One of the many legends surrounding Deren casts her as a witch. Her involvement with Vodoun would reinforce the image of Maya as occult priestess, the exotic "angle" of her story which most journalists still find irresistible.

In her notes Deren analyzes this identification in terms which forecast much current feminist thinking. She saw herself in the figure of Lilith, Adam's apocryphal mistress who, rather than abide by his rules, chose to leave the garden of convention. When the name of Maya Deren was recalled to Gregory Bateson after thirty years, his first, impulsive response was "Lilith." "Why Lilith?" "Because," he replied, "that was her order; that was her goddess." Bateson remembered little more. He responded to Deren's notebook by saying he could add nothing that could not be gleaned from her own reflections.<sup>39</sup>

35. *Village Voice*, July 21, 1960, reprinted in *Film Culture*, 39, p. 53.

36. Deren, "Burglars and Triggers," *Village Voice*, June 1, 1961, in *Film Culture*, 39, p. 56.

37. Interview with Leo Lerman for *The Legend of Maya Deren*, August 14, 1976.

38. Interview with Miriam Arsham for *The Legend of Maya Deren*, July 17, 1976.

39. Preliminary telephone interview with Gregory Bateson for *The Legend of Maya Deren*, October 16, 1976.

## An Exchange of Letters between Maya Deren and Gregory Bateson

December 9, 1946

Dear Gregory Bateson:

I have just finished reading your article on the South Seas exhibit (I hope I may keep it), and I regret enormously that I had not read it before our discussion Saturday night, for it clarifies in my own mind the pattern which is basic to this projected film and provides me also with an objective point of reference, which I could have so well made use of in trying to make myself clear the other evening.

For what is to me, at this moment, exciting about your article is that whether or not d'Harnoncourt intended it that way consciously, or even whether or not it actually came out that way, is almost irrelevant to the fact that the pattern which you describe is very close to what I had in mind about the film. That is (leaving aside the actual intention or the degree of its realization in the Museum exhibit), you say that it is possible to create a transcendent horizontal pattern of development by cutting through a series of, as it were, vertical integrities without violating these latter, or falsifying them, or even distorting them. As a matter of fact, you praise the exhibit precisely for the fact that each grouping of materials was true to the individual culture which it represented, at the same time that these groupings were so arranged in reference to each other as to create a "sensible" pattern which transcended them all and even strengthened them, each in their individual terms as well.

It is this concept of relationships upon which I wished to build my film, and when, upon first reading your article, I felt that you had actually stated it, I immediately suspected that perhaps my personal preoccupation had induced me to impose upon someone else's thinking my own organization. But I have gone over it twice since, and I still get the same answer, and I hope it is not a misinterpretation.

And if I have understood you correctly, then you have yourself answered any number of the reservations and objections which both you and Miss Mead posed the other evening, and which I answered rather with intuitive passion than coherence. My problem, in a sense, was to build a fugue of cultures. But each voice must have its own melodic integrity. Consequently, my preoccupation with searching out a variety of cultures which had retained, in their own terms, their homogeneity was not based upon my personal interest in exoticism, but out of the need to have a variety of homogeneous structures which would relate to each other in the film rather than blend into each other in the "melting pot" manner. The Irish cop in Central Park did not belong in the pattern I had in mind largely for aesthetic considerations: the cultural pattern which he represented was so familiar that it would not carry the impact of a form. Had it been a question of an Irish wake, it would have been quite another matter.

For it seems to me that, whereas a casual, social action can be understood only in terms of the cultural whole, the artifacts of a culture contain that whole

within it; in the first case, the event or the image is part of the whole, whereas in the second case it is a kind of miniature of the whole. In thinking back over the films which you ran at the house, I suddenly realized that, taken singly, without footnote, explanation, or other context, the nursing baby and the mother could have been any mother or baby, and that even a good deal of the action between them—isolated as single images—might be understood in terms of personal temperament of the mother or some special family situation. But the moment that baby began to dance, it could only have been a Balinese baby.

My problem then becomes to discover in the various cultures or artifacts such force that they carry the entire culture in their arms, so to speak, and so bring to the larger pattern the vertical dimension of their singular reference. Were I to use a more casual movement or image, it would tear loose from its context and would bring nothing but itself, in very immediate and flat terms, to the film. This would make for the false, synthetic, superficial continuities of which you were very justifiably suspicious.

It is precisely because I am so concerned with this vertical dimension—without it, the film would be a kind of quick-costume-change business—that I turn to the scientists in the field. For were I to violate the meaning of any of these culture-images by failing to use them truly, I would defeat my own purpose. And the same would be true if out of sheer ignorance I neglected to use something which could suit my pattern very well. Although I was very anxious to see much more of the Balinese material than we were able to look at the other evening (and I know that you brought much more with you), I felt that if I could make clear the sort of thing I was looking for, you would be in a much better position to help me, and it would, in the long run, save a good deal of time. It was for this reason that I permitted myself to leave the film in the briefcase while I blundered about thinking out loud and trying to verbalize a series of concepts which are actually visual and filmic and still in the process of developing themselves.

It might be simpler, also, if I tried to see at least some of the material at those times when it may be shown in some other connection—such as your lectures at the New School (if you ever run anything there), or if Miss Mead gives another lecture as she did at the Boas studio. Do you have any other ideas as to how I might proceed?

Please forgive me for keeping both of you so late the other evening. I'm tremendously grateful for your interest and effort.

If and when you finish the *Anagram* and have a little time, I would be very, very interested in having your ideas about it. I hope you realize that the emphasis upon form, which may seem to you, in your field, superfluous, is on the contrary tremendously necessary in the contemporary art field, where a work of art is thought to be a personal finger painting of some kind.

Thank you again.

Maya Deren

December 12, 1946

Dear Maya:

Excuse the dictated form, but I want to get this written down so that we can go through the points one by one without interrupting each other's trains of thought.

Yes, of course a cross-cultural fugue is certainly a possible art form, and this is what the museum exhibit in large measure achieved. The question is what are the conditions for such a synthesis of diverse ingredients.

My secretary, who knows about such things, tells me that a fugue is essentially built around a *single* theme and its developments, contrapuntally organized, so that is not the word we want; but I suppose it will do.

We face the general question of what must be the relations between two artistic statements (e.g., two musical themes or two rituals, or if you like, a poem and a painting) such that a combination of these two shall itself be an art form.

Clearly, there are various possible relationships between the two themes. One theme may serve as a background to the other so that the relations between the two would be comparable to the famous figure-ground relation of the gestalt psychologists. [Or] the two themes may be essentially synonymous, carrying the same emotional impact and containing the same or approximately the same symbols, and while strict synonymy is certainly unnecessary and probably would be tedious, some degree of overlap is, I think, essential.

Beyond these simple cases, we come to the much more complex ones which begin to be interesting from your point of view. There are the possibilities which the Museum of Modern Art worked on. Note first of all that the Australian section of that exhibit was not a part of the "fugue." Its basic theme was not connected with the reproductive cycle, and its only function that I could recognize was that of a limbering-up exercise—to prepare the audience for the sexual thesis. Note also that the Australian material presented a very special problem which is very relevant to your plans. Australia is not a part of the culture area which extends from New Guinea to Polynesia. None of the idioms of Australian art are shared with the rest of this area. But in the rest of the area there are continual cross-echoes. It is as if a vocabulary of artistic expression had been scattered over the area, and each people had built up out of this vocabulary their own syntax and their own set of things that they wanted to say.

When you plan to combine, e.g., Navaho with Haiti, you are facing something more than the problem of combining New Guinea with Maori. D'Harnoncourt was curiously lucky in that he had to deal with a culture area and *thought* that he was doing an historical study. He therefore put in the system of vistas, which permitted the common vocabulary of the culture area to give unity to the whole exhibit.

I seriously think that you would do well to concentrate on two cultures

from a single cultural area—either two cultures of the Southwest or two negro cultures in the Caribbean. To combine Haiti with a Southwestern culture is going to raise all sorts of difficulties.

The possible ways in which themes may be related to each other will also include all those cases which could be diagrammed by personifying the themes and then saying that the relationship between the themes is comparable to a human relationship. The possible combinations will then include all the possibilities of human relationship: dominance-submission, masculine-feminine, succoring-dependence, spectatorship-exhibitionism, etc. Indeed, these possibilities have been frequently exploited in musical duets and so on—beautiful stuff in Indian duet love songs with contrapuntal relationships between the male and female voices. The trouble is that these paired adjectives are very inadequate descriptions of human relationships, that in fact, to make a pair, the dominance and the submission have to be of such special sorts that the submission is the sort of submission which is appropriate to that particular sort of dominance. Further, there is a whole mass of complexities which spring from the fact that polarities of this kind can be linked together. Dominance may be linked with spectatorship, and submission may be linked with exhibitionism, or the pair of polarities may be reversed—dominance being linked with exhibitionism, etc.

The important thing is that there shall be ethological system [*sic*] of some sort underlying the relationship between the two contrasting elements.

Beyond this it is probably necessary for the two elements to be talking about the same thing—e.g., sex, or drawing a hopscotch line, or whatever.

What I am trying to say is that to orchestrate two themes together it looks to me as though you require to meet at least two types of limitation: a) the two themes must deal with the same thing, and b) they must talk about that same thing in tones of voice or ethoses which are musically relevant.

There is, however, another point which could be worked on; namely, to make a positive comment on discrepancy. I mean the sort of thing that T. S. Eliot does with a mass of juxtapositions so designed that the total work of art says, "It is all dust and ashes in the mouth." But I suspect that there is a discontinuity and not a continuous series of gradations between artistic statements of relationship at one end of the scale and artistic statements of heterogeneity at the other.

By the way, I wonder if two themes related in terms of exhibitionism and spectatorship is not another way of saying two themes with a figure-ground relationship between them.

Now, to come to this business of drawing hopscotch lines—interpreting this metaphor in its widest, I presume it means everything, from laws to the almost hypnotic concentration on an arbitrary goal that you might find in games or competitive contests, to the strong barriers which prevent one from saying in a conversation something which would break the fabric of the conversation, and so on, the whole gamut of definable and undefinable controls on behavior; and that it includes both positive and negative controls—"thou shalt" and "thou shalt

not"—and all the controls which are not verbal and are not even felt as commands but rather are felt as part of the structure of the universe—tram lines which we follow because "that is how we do things" or "it is done."

As far as I know, the artist who has most consciously concerned himself with the problem of the hopscotch line is Blake, and he will serve as well as another to use as a figure of speech—the counterpoint relations in the *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, which, alas, are never really worked out into any coherent artistic form. What he does, mainly, is to try to build mythology or other artistic forms on an imagined contrast between the world of rules and a world totally lacking in rules, but what you are trying to do is to combine two worlds, each with different sorts of hopscotch lines.

Yes, I think the answer has got to turn around a pair of themes, each of which is the topological inverse of the other—e.g., one culture which sees its hopscotch lines as permitting freedom of movement between the lines, while the other culture sees the same lines as forbidding movement across the lines. Granting that mathematically there is no difference between such systems, psychologically there is, and I think differences of this order would give you themes sufficiently related to be coordinated into a single artistic structure.

I hope some of these thoughts may be useful.

Yours sincerely,  
Gregory Bateson

From the Notebook of  
Maya Deren, 1947

February 16

The minute I began to put the Balinese film through the viewer, the fever began. It is a feeling one cannot remember from before but can only have in an immediate sense. I mean, like pain, one remembers having had pain, and even the reaction to the pain, but the exact pain itself proper cannot be recreated by memory except rarely.

Psychosomaticism is the re-creation in immediate terms of unrecollected memory.

Anyway, here, suddenly, is the strange fever and excitement. Is it because in holding film in one's hand one holds life in one's hand?

S.<sup>1</sup> and I had an argument yesterday. I complained that the viewer was bad, and that I couldn't see properly, so he said that there weren't any that were really better, and that I would be better off using a projector. But my feeling was against that.

The immediate physical contact with the film, the nearness of the image, the automatic muscular control of its speed—the fact that as I wound, my impulses and reactions towards the film translated themselves into muscular impulses and so to the film directly, with no machine—buttons, switches, etc.—between me and the film. All this seemed for me very important, especially in relation to a film which was not mine. This physical contact creates a sense of intimacy. It is not an image independent of me, projected on a wall, of which I am a spectator. It is immediately, directly, uniquely for my eyes. It comes to life out of the energy of my muscles.

Later, of course, I shall use the projector to get proper speed, etc. But first this ultimate copulation between me and the film must take place, and out of it will be born the independent child which will be projected at the Provincetown Playhouse while I sit in a bar across the street.

Truly "by Maya out of Film." It is the film machine which is the impregnated woman. Is it out of this that the male artists' respect for their medium comes—that they are less spontaneously self-expressive and concern themselves with the machines of the instrument which they impregnate, whereas most women artists are best when they are sort of spontaneous? I mean that women should be, for example, singers—themselves the source of the action—whereas men are com-

1. S. = Sasha (Alexander) Hammid, filmmaker and Deren's husband (1942-47); G. = Gregory Bateson; M. = Margaret Mead. (The annotations to Deren's notes are by Catrina Neiman.)

posers—impregnating the orchestral instruments? Or women be actresses, but hardly playwrights, which is the same principle.

Yet, I once said it in reverse. That woman expresses herself through the creation of another human being—be it child, or the lover she inspires, or the husband she protects and encourages, whereas men express themselves directly.

Now I have said the inverse. That as artist, woman is her own medium, whereas men impregnate something. One day I must think this through.

In any case, for me, this physical contact with the film instrument seems always to have been initially important. The Rolleiflex which I can hold in my hands, steady with my neck, press against my chest and hold my breath at the moment of snapping the shutter; or the Bolex, with the vibration of the motor running down my arm—I would like to shoot by hand altogether but of course this would limit the camera. Like a cat, it sometimes permits itself to be held warmly. But there are times when you have to let it stand on its own tripod legs.

I think one must at least begin with the body feeling. Once established, we understand each other and can work better together, separately.

I wish I could immerse myself in the Balinese film. Damn this cutting article. . . .<sup>2</sup>

February 19

Well, by staying up all night I finally finished that cutting article. A good one, I think. I didn't have time to go into rhythm at all, but how can one discuss that in general terms anyway? This article is a good example of what can happen if you consciously abstract a principle from a skill and reapply it on a higher level. I mean, most of the cutting techniques which I mention are already used in Hollywood films, but on their lowest pragmatic level.

This is the limitation of pragmatism—it is noncreative by being nontheoretical.

Consciousness of what has been done, and then the principle applied on a higher level.

Now, thank god, I can get to work on the film. Must remember to make that point about creative consciousness to Mead sometime as she seems to see creativity and consciousness somehow antithetical.

2. "Creative Cutting," *Movie Makers*, May, June, 1947.

February 21

At the lecture at Sarah Lawrence last night,<sup>3</sup> a new point came up. There was this painter character who kept insisting that since the screen was a two-dimensional area, it was liable to composition in terms of plastic principles. Whereupon I agreed that it was two-dimensional, but that adding the dimension of time (rather than the dimension of space) made it metamorphic.

This metamorphosis point . . . is important. It is how time operates on a two-dimensional surface. Amazing how difficult it is to get those kids to realize time and to think of a construction extending into time instead of into space. What has this to do with attention spans and retentiveness? Often their memory is space-fixed. They simply don't remember the *becoming* of an event, but only each part of it as a *being*.

February 22

Last night the Bateson theory lecture and the mix-up about Balinese "startle."<sup>4</sup> I suspect it doesn't sit in there right because it is a "symptom" of something which is an order, and is not itself an order in the sense that other "feedbacks" are orders. Anyway, that dominance-submission<sup>5</sup> business feels very wrong somehow, but I don't dare speak as strongly as I should like to because I haven't the right thing to offer instead.

At least if he [Bateson] would use arrows of dynamic movement (what the hell is the name of them?) rather than those directional signposts!

T I M E   T I M E   T I M E — not SPACE

E N E R G Y — not M A T T E R

3. One of Deren's lectures on cinema, Sarah Lawrence College, New York, February 20, 1947.

4. The behavior Bateson and Mead have called "startle" in Bali is described in their book, *Balinese Character: A Photographic Analysis*, New York Academy of Sciences, Special Publications, Volume 2, 1942, p. 147: ". . . In Balinese social organization, instead of dominance-submission [see Note 5] based on fear of the superior individual, we find what may be described as *startle* systems, in which the behavior of the superior is characterized by suddenness in speech and gesture [clipped words as opposed to the inferior's long, smooth periphrases]. . . . The emotion which we are here calling 'fear' or 'startle' enters into a great many contexts where there is nothing of which to be afraid. Especially in the theater, the Balinese constantly portray a quick, heightened awareness which has in it something of fear." A dance is described; it "begins rather slowly in a sitting position and works up with sudden rhythmic rising movements till the man is almost erect."

5. "Dominance-submission," along with "exhibitionism-spectatorship" and "succoring-dependence," are the pairs of bipolar, complementary characteristics formulated by Bateson as indices of national character, parent-child relations, etc. See "Morale and National Character," *Civilian Morale*, ed. Goodwin Watson, 1942, Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues; reprinted in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (collected essays of Gregory Bateson), New York, Chandler, 1972, pp. 88-106.

All photographs accompanying these notes are stills enlarged by Maya Deren from the Balinese footage by Gregory Bateson, 1938-39.



February 23

It is strange how energy is never lost. When I did that paper on Haitian possession,<sup>6</sup> I had no idea of making films. The dance project for which it was designed did not work out,<sup>7</sup> and I thought: Well, now it is all finished. And then went on to make films, and it lay all this while in my files—since 1941—and was forgotten until now. And suddenly in this film it becomes relevant now in 1947. I dig it out and Métraux<sup>8</sup> says it is one of the best things he has ever read on possession.

Altogether a much welcomed morale boost, and a wonderful “in” to Haiti to boot.

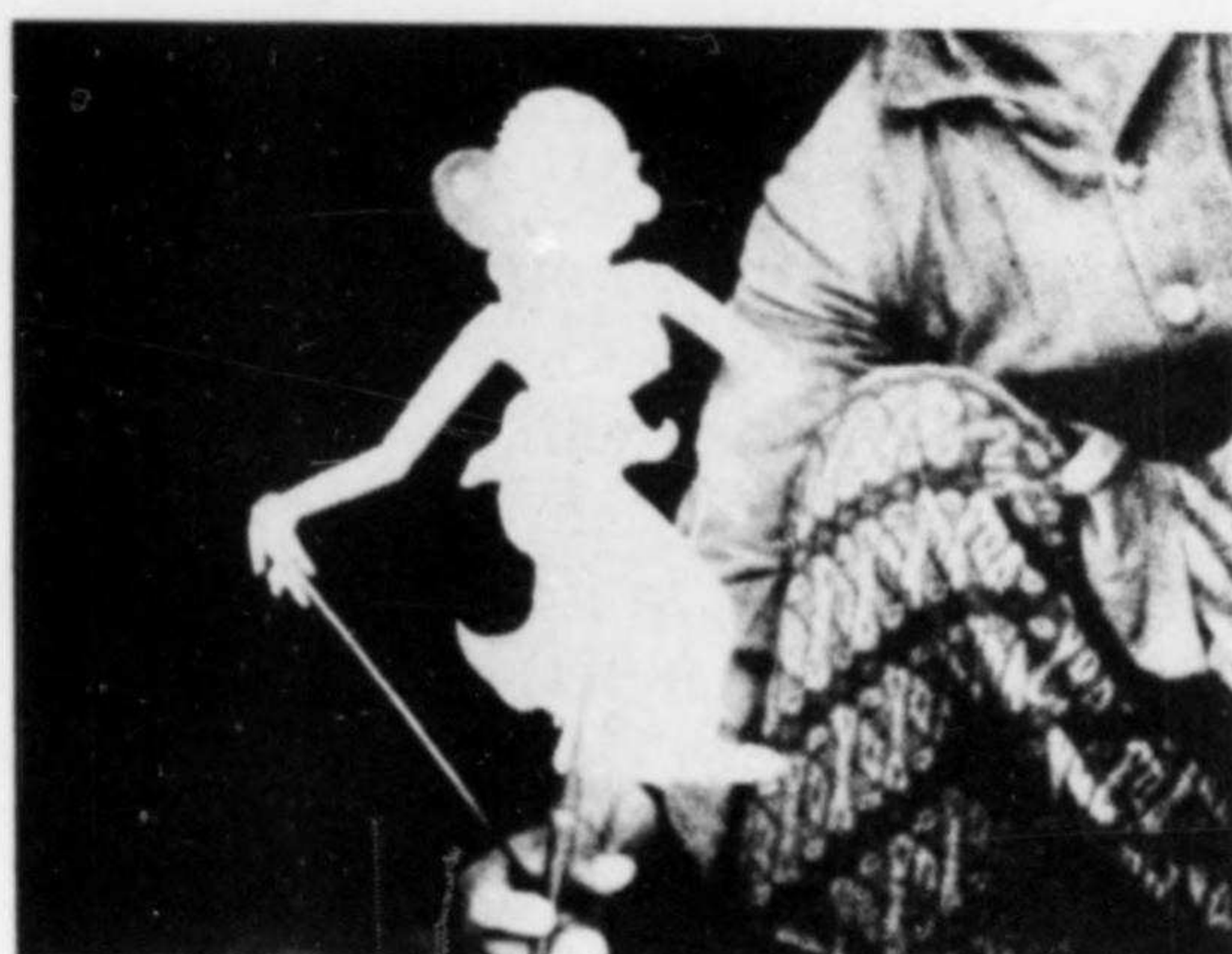
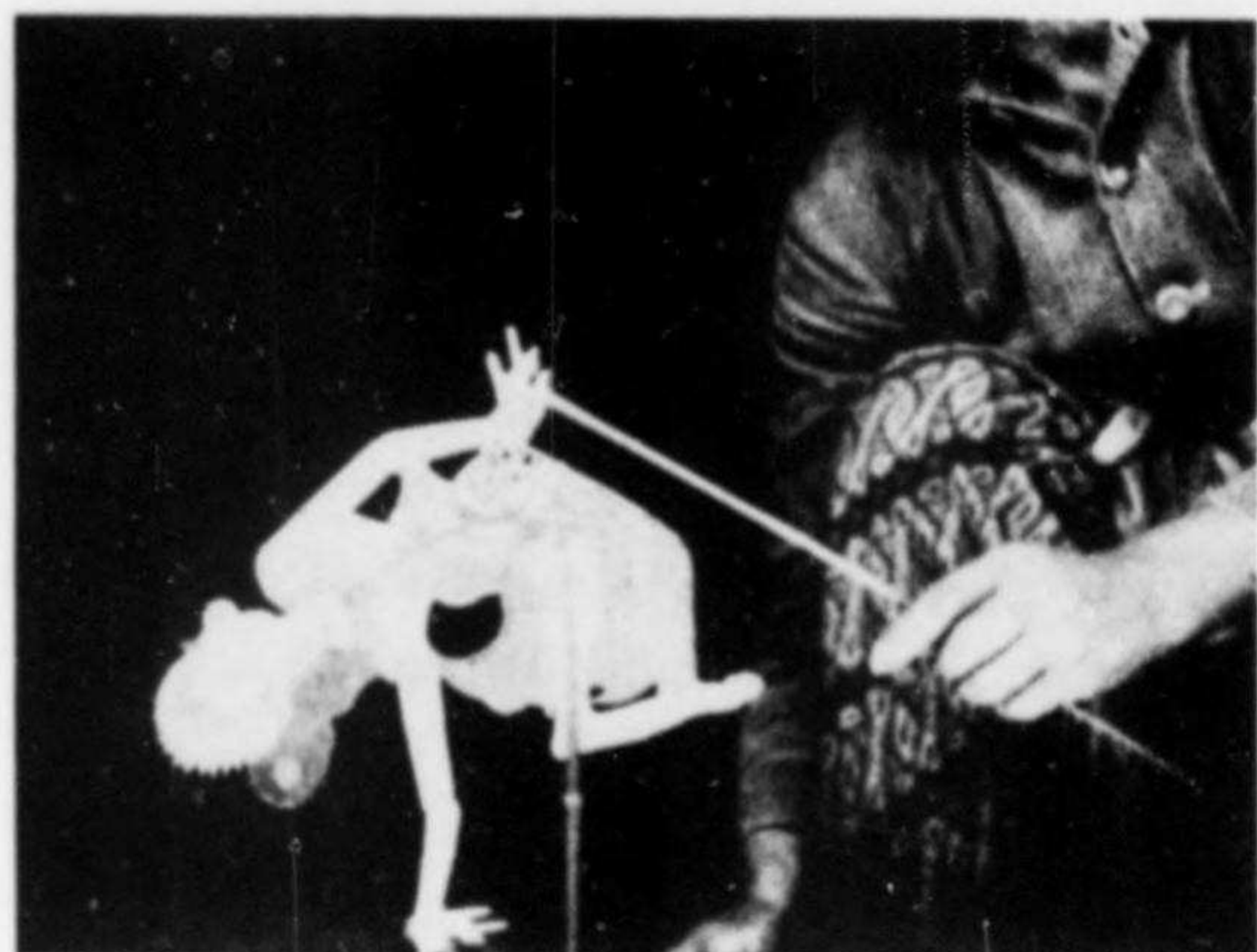
I really didn't expect such a good reception for it. Reading it over on the way out, I rediscovered that whole section on the hysterical release of a subconscious system of ideas. I had completely forgotten this point and the one about deep-rooted psychic insults—which certainly the Balinese has in his childhood.

And on the way back that whole discussion with S. who said maybe I would

6. “Religious Possession in Dancing,” *Educational Dance*, March, August-September, 1942.

7. Nothing is known about this dance project.

8. Anthropologist Alfred Métraux worked in Haiti in the forties and fifties. He studied Vodoun extensively, publishing many articles throughout this period. In his book *Voodoo in Haiti* (New York, Oxford, 1959), he surveys the various studies of Vodoun and says of Deren's *Divine Horsemen*: “In this very brief catalogue of our principle sources a very particular place must be reserved for a book written by the American film camerawoman, Maya Deren, who in *Divine Horsemen* proved herself to be an excellent observer, though her book is burdened with pseudo-scientific considerations which reduce its value” (p. 21).



eventually abandon film and become an anthropologist. And my insistence that I would never be satisfied analyzing the nature of a given reality but would want to make my own. And his answer that that attitude brought to anthropology might make a new branch of it. And my answer that perhaps in introducing the anthropological attitude into film I was making a new branch of film. Well—maybe. . . .

Anyway, I don't see why you have to leave facts and ideas out of art. Why not coordinate the whole business in the creative terms of art?

This morning that review of the Einstein book said that one of the methods was the *imaginative* hypothesis. The method of art and science is essentially the same. Experimental or applied science stands in relation to pure science as crafts do to arts. There is the craftsman and the artist, and we couldn't live without either. Bless them both.

February 24

Today a great and somewhat heated discussion with Gregory about that old business of his linear analysis of nonlinear systems. I still insist that learning to walk will not lead to flying. . . .

I feel that his dominance-submission, succor-dependence structure is wrong. That is, he builds up a whole structure of feedbacks, etc., because he starts off with such a linear, simplified process. He gets a kind of Ptolemaic system. It is better to complicate the premise by one dimension—time—and have a simple analytical

structure flow from it than to keep the premise simple at any price only to have a very complex superstructure.

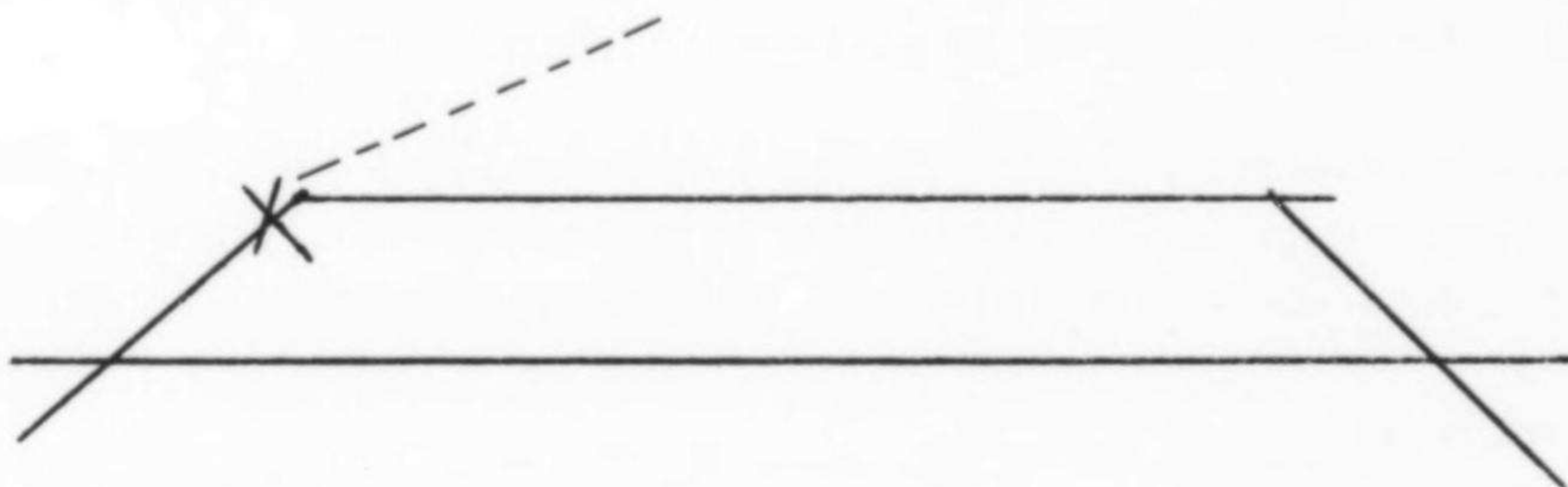
That is, that if the dominance-submission structure is, as he drew it  $a-b-a^2$  then, if  $b$  is necessary to  $a^2$ ,  $a$  cannot be said to dominate  $b$ , rather it is a reciprocal relationship which will give, eventually,  $b^2$ .

G. answered that, in isolating  $a-b-a^2$ , he was studying the arc of a circle (at last he has moved to circles) for which the circle, as a whole, is understood. But  $a-b-a^2$  is not a circle. A circle is  $a-b-a$ .  $a-b-a^2$  is a spiral. And a spiral has no arc, for it has no constant radius.

That bass-man lecturer last night sure had a nerve screwing up that Hegelian system, and being obviously oblivious of the entire literature of Marxist analysis, which *does* take up *energy*, motion, values, etc. . . .

If someone from politics got up to give a lecture on New Guinea without having read the literature in the field or been there, the anthropologists would be horrified out of their wits, and properly so. Yet these people get up and lecture on social systems without having read Trotsky or Lenin or Hook. A hell of an attitude for people who make a fetish of scholarship!

February 24



Bateson's treatment of the frustrated Balinese climax principle<sup>9</sup> has always bothered me, particularly as illustrated by that diagram of the ascending line,<sup>10</sup> stopped off with a cross, and then just a dotted line indicating, I suppose, where it should have gone. It did not seem as simple a thing as a conclusive negative abortion. Being part of the sociological structure, it would have some kind of

9. Gregory Bateson, "Bali: The Value System of a Steady State," (1949), *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, pp. 107-127; and "The Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis and Culture," *Psychological Review*, 1941 (48), 350-55.

10. Deren reproduces Bateson's diagram at this point in the notes.

functional relevance, unconscious, to be sure, and therefore not purposive in any immediate sense. But even if it did not have some purpose, it must have a positive effect. It could not be as arbitrary as all that in terms of *its own logic*.

Actually the thing clarified itself for me in the course of writing that cutting article, and especially when I re-read what I had written to the effect that intensified duration, or at least continuity, was achieved by never permitting a single movement to be completed—as in the dance film leap.<sup>11</sup>

Actually, that line, after it gets ascending, does not merely disappear at the point of the X on Bateson's diagram. What happens is that the energy which would be required for the ascendant acceleration of a climactic curve is channelized instead into a plateau of duration. The duration in time, therefore, is enormously extended and can even withstand interruption, as an accelerating curve cannot.

Certainly, this principle applied to sexual activity even in occidental culture is not considered a negation but, on the contrary, valued as a considerable achievement.

One might say, in terms of sociological structure, that the purpose of the frustration of climaxes is the channelization of energy which would, in climactic activity, be *spent* and really dissipated in conclusive exhaustion—that it is converted into a tension plateau which serves the continuity both of personal and communal relations.

February 25

This morning went to dig up stuff on political science—Hook, etc.—and began reading it myself. The hard brilliance, the sharp darts of mind in those things are like brisk fall or spring mornings after the gray, stuffy pedantry of Haskell, etc.

Oh, to hear a nice polemic battle again!

With Sasha discussed the spiral problem and he showed me how he makes his out of two centers.<sup>12</sup> That structural tension is the tension between the two centers. And he pointed out that his arithmetic spiral which did not accelerate is to the logarithmic spiral as the arc of a *circle* is to the arc of a *parabola*. A very nice point.

A very nice point also in the dictionary, which defines the spiral in terms of a

11. "Dance film leap" refers to the last sequence of Deren's *A Study in Choreography for Camera* (1945), with Talley Beatty.

12. Refers to Hammid's spiral paper sculpture, which slowly revolved when suspended over the flame of a candle, in their living room.

"receding" from the center. Thus the spiral *must* be defined in terms of *movement and time*, whereas the circle can be defined only in terms of space. A parabola also defined in terms of movement and time—"extension" of the legs into infinity, etc. . . .

February 28

Roll 5. These shots of the dragon will not be very useful, I think. He seems to have been torn from some context, and one has the feeling that he was asked to come out so that he could be photographed. He belongs in the context of some ritual activity; without it—isolated by himself—he has only the irreverent, weightless pathos of the fallen streamers and the confetti of a Sunday morning ballroom after a masquerade.

There are two close-ups in the beginning, though, which in their framing conceal his lack of context, and in these he is strong enough to project an "understood"



context into the areas beyond the frame. This is somewhat similar to the effect which a strong spatial orientation within the frame—as a person looking sharply to the left—has.<sup>13</sup> This projection of the dragon is not in terms of directional orientation, but an emanation of aura beyond the frame. In both cases, however, we understand what we do not see in terms of what we do see.

Roll 2. I am struck repeatedly by a sense—as in the crowd of people in the beginning or later when the man seems to be doing a kriss dance<sup>14</sup> all by himself and then is brought out of trance or at least held on a lap, and then again in that row of dancers, before they dance—I am struck by the tremendous distance between nonaction and action (as in the dancing girls) or waiting for action—either their own or that of a performer—in the crowd. Apparently inaction and action are such distinct orders that they do not make a transition from one into the other except abruptly. The dancers, for example, do not prepare (interiorly, in the sense of “getting into the mood” of occidental performers) nor do they “become” active. First there is inaction: a kind of vacuous waiting, and then suddenly there is action, quite abruptly. This carries through in the complete lack of identification between audience and performer and explains, perhaps, something of that curious indifference. This throws a strange light on the exhibitionism-spectatorship category in reference to Bali. In our culture the tension between exhibitionist and spectator is one of identification: the spectator either would like to be capable of the acts of the performer or identifies himself temporarily, and this enviable and envied “model” role is the incentive for the performer. This holds true certainly for the British parent-child relationship, and actually holds true for the American set-up too, if one sees the American as not wanting to grow up and therefore, in this case, the adult identifying with the child-exhibitionist.

But certainly there is no inter-identification between spectator and performer in Bali. One cannot become the other. They are, within that context, different orders without transition between them. There is no identification and transition across these orders any more than across caste lines. Identification—the idea of becoming something else—is a democratic, not a hierarchical concept. In any case, it is dynamic, not static and circular. Yet it is this dynamic which is the tension which we understand by spectatorship-exhibitionism, and I feel it does not sit very comfortably on Bali. Exhibitionism contains, actually, such maxim[iz]ing

13. Deren discusses this particular example of spatial orientation within the frame (looking sharply to the left) as illustrated in her own films in “Creating Movies With a New Dimension: Time,” *Popular Photography*, December 1946.

14. The kriss dance in Bali is a trance dance in which the sword (kriss) is turned in upon the self. See Bateson and Mead, *Balinese Character*.

concepts as competition,<sup>15</sup> for it is a competition for the attention of the spectator, and certainly this is not, nor can [it] be, in the logic of the situation, true of Bali. The indifference of audience to performer and performer to audience—and it is entirely mutual—is a statement of categorical difference, excluding entirely the potential of transitions, becomings, identifications, etc., which is basic to our audience-performer relationship.

In any case, exhibitionism is a personally motivated activity. One exhibits "oneself" in very personal, individualized terms, and in this is the entire incentive in the child, certainly. In theatricals here, there is always the idea of the *one who performs* as if he were someone else, but it is rather a statement of personal virtuosity in exhibitionism, and this is retained by the careful attention, in programs, for instance, of naming the real person as individual, as well as the role he performs. The star system is exactly an example of this. But how, then, can this same term *exhibitionism* be applied to Balinese performers who are essentially anonymous—in the sense that the dancer's achievement as a dancer does not raise her social caste position as it does here—and who do not exhibit themselves in terms of original, individualized activity, but who perform prescribed patterns? And certainly, how could it be "exhibitionist" (an ego attention statement and satisfaction) in the trance dancers when this is characterized by amnesia for the period of performance, and there the amnesia is true also of the audience in the sense that they treat the little girl, afterwards, just like any other little girl, and not as the little girl who danced so well? A condition of exhibitionism is an acute consciousness of exhibiting oneself, and this the little girls in amnesic trance certainly are not. Nor do they have "memories" of their moments of glory, so to speak—trunks of souvenirs, or the dress they performed in the night the Prince of Wales sat in the right box. No—*exhibitionism* is the wrong word.

I think it has something to do with those two stages of trance which I have noticed: the stage in which the body of the little girl is emptied of "mortal individual content," so to speak, and only after it has been emptied, are the holy clothes draped on her, for now it is not the little girl any longer, and now they decorate the house (the body as a tube) and hope a deity will move in. And the caprices are not of the little girls before they are vacuated, but the caprice is of the deity or angel who enters her body for a moment, makes a movement using her arms, then darts out and leaves her standing empty and waiting, and then comes in again, and then out again, and then eventually comes in, takes over the body, does a dance, and then is sent back to its regions. After all, if it moved in right

15. Deren used the term "maximating," referring to the sociological concept of "maximizing" (one's wealth, prestige, etc.), evidenced in competitive behavior. Bateson discusses the apparent lack of "maximizing" behavior in Bali, and the society's alternatives in "Bali: The Value System of a Steady State," in *Steps*.



away it would reveal an unseemly anxiety to appear. The angels, after all, must indicate a certain capricious reluctance vis-à-vis their worshippers. It would be entirely unseemly for them to arrive at the merest beckon.

The gap between action and inaction—the waiting to be active rather than becoming active—is clear in the last shots, where the dance begins with a file of girls moving slowly forward. The front ones dance already, but at the end of the line are two waiting for the line to advance forward from the wall so they can step in.

Roll 8. Sanoer, *Baris Gede*.<sup>16</sup> The extreme precision of this ensemble dancing is of so formal a character that it looks a little strange taking place outdoors without an enrapt audience in view. I'm uncomfortable both when the indifferent audience is visible and when there is no audience visible. I think what is bothering me is that the lack of a defined dance platform or area defined by spectators, etc. means that a physical statement of the existence of context is missing. Our theater stages are a physical definition of contextual limits; but in Bali the entire society is the context, and there seem to be no physical contextual limits defined. I can't remember a "stage" in any of the film which I have seen. Nor does the audience create, out of concentrated attention, the idea of a "stage." I wonder how much trouble this casual lack of contextual definition in physical terms is going to give me. On the

16. *Baris Gede*: "A type of dance, usually danced by men in formation carrying weapons (spears, bows, or shields)" (Mead and Bateson, *Balinese Character*).

other hand, it does blend well with the children's games and rituals which have a similar lack of physical contextual definition very often: the enrapt hopscotch players in the midst of the indifferent street pedestrians. Well, I'll see.

I think that close-shots and medium-shots which evade the contextual statement, so that context is understood in the terms emanated by the object in the frame, will be most useful in the Balinese material.

March 1

Since this witch stuff keeps running around in my head, I had better get it down—all "tidied up," so it won't keep popping itself up in everything I do today.

Yesterday G. brought up the question of why does the Balinese witch, in "seeking out hostility," go around trying to pick a quarrel whereas the Balinese pattern would logically require something less personal and individual in the way of an action. He complained that I had not paid sufficient attention to this "seeking out of hostility." As a matter of fact, I remembered very distinctly that he had said that at my party I had done something like that, but he said it without real conviction and I had not answered, for although I knew it was not so, I did not know why it was not so, and I knew that if I waited until a few more pieces of the jigsaw fell into my mind I could, at a certain moment, make them jell. It was no good looking for the pieces, because then I would be selecting them according to an anticipation of something and eliminating those which did not conform with my anticipation and then trying to jam them together into a picture which was not the picture at all. It's sort of a matter of sticking around with an ample skirt wide open so that all the pieces fall into your lap, and then [you] try to piece them together. The anxious gathering together of one's skirt and making a beeline for home to piece things together usually means just simply not having on hand some of the critical joining points. They may not be large, and they may not be significant in themselves (or seem so), but oh brother they do tie things together in a critical fashion. The trouble with the people who collect data is not that they do collect it, but that they do not collect it receptively enough. They don't get rid of their anticipations enough to register everything. But of course all this is just another way of saying what I've been saying for four years about the experience of art—that the condition of receptivity is primary and must precede any analysis.

Anyway, I answered G. by saying something about the fact that a witch had to violate the Balinese pattern of impersonal relations and therefore sought out personal relations so that she thereby was bad for violating the pattern. That made sense, he agreed, and we went on to discuss something else. But this morning I kept being troubled by the fact that I had suddenly answered with such ease a question I had not attempted to answer before, and that actually made me feel that

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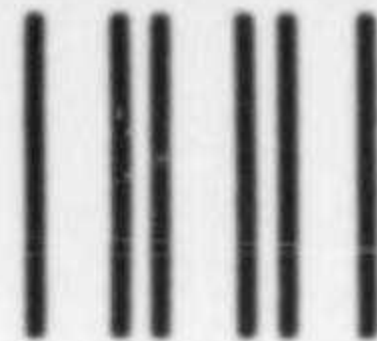
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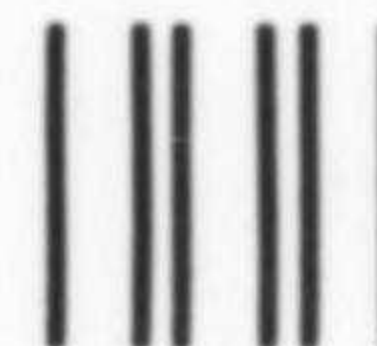
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perhaps I was saying more than I thought I was saying—that perhaps actually I had gotten hold of a system on a higher plane of generalization (without being conscious of it) and that, having this in me, I was now able to answer these more specific problems.

So I began to dig at my own statement to discover its structure, and sure enough, there it is—the answer of M.'s idea of witches killing babies, and why it never made sense to me, and what I had been digging at in interpreting, to Sasha, Margaret's statement about my being a witch by telling him that she was really referring to a personality structure (she never used this idea, but that was the only way I could accept the concept of witch as applied to me, since I was neither intentionally evil and yet agreed that there was something in common), and why, in reference to the same object—myself in this case—I could also use terms like *deviant*, *catalyst*, and such concepts as an independently integrated order which was not referable to actuality, and why I instinctively agreed that cats belonged to witches, and why it had sort of impressed itself on my mind that whereas the usual image of a witch is a highly formalized creature—always doing things in a mysteriously just-so way—suddenly the Balinese witch was a peculiarly informal creature. And, of course, there it is all sitting together once one doesn't insist on characterizing a witch, unconsciously, in moral, value terms.

A witch is, actually, a successful (in the sense of surviving) deviant. You have a cultural, ideological, social, what-not pattern which is, for that society in question, normal (and, importantly, this is understood as a synonym for *natural*). Most people survive because they conform to these patterns—because they behave normally. Then suddenly you have someone not behaving “normally,” and usually they cannot survive, since having rejected the system and its support they go under, so to speak, and are referred to as “subnormal,” “maladjusted,” and other such terms which have a negative relation to the standard norm. But then suddenly you get a deviant which survives, and since it does not draw its support from the normal pattern—and since the normal people only consider themselves as natural—that deviant is understood as drawing its support from “unknown,” “supernatural” sources. This “independence” of the accepted, natural pattern upon which the normals are dependent jibes, of course, with the universal attributes of witches as being “solitary,” owning cats (since cats share this independence), etc.

But it goes further than that. For the survival of the witch independent of the accepted pattern means that she is simultaneously a manifestation of a non-“normal” order which is apparently integrated and strong enough to sustain life. But it is characteristic of the “normal” that he cannot conceive of the simultaneous existence of dualities—that his way is the only possible way—and consequently the sheer existence of another order capable of sustaining life is a threat

and a source, potentially, of destruction. They are afraid, for they think: If we cannot survive without our order, how can she survive in solitude? Hers must be indeed a very powerful order to exist so independently, without all the intercooperation and individual compromise which we have to go through to survive. And if it is so powerful, then it could destroy us. We must try to destroy it first.

Thus they ascribe to a deviant a hostility and an antagonism which comes from their own limitation—their inability to conceive of simultaneous dualities. They cannot imagine the simultaneous existence of two orders without imagining an antagonism between them. And it is interesting that basic to the myth of witches there is the idea that if you just leave them alone they might not bother you. Which of course is true. It is only when one tries to make them surrender their own order that they put up a fight. It's a matter of not wanting to get pushed around. And since they can't resist trying to push her around, she answers with a defensive hostility and antagonism which they, in their arrogance, do not understand as defensive simply because they think their state is the normal one. They cannot see that what for them is a "state" is, if imposed on her, a "first derivative" from her point of view; that her action is a "reaction," the second, not the first, step in a time structure. (This is all relevant to what is wrong with Bateson's isolation of *a-b-a* for what is first derivative, for one is not first derivative for the other. I'll have to write up the diagrams I arrived at at his lecture last night.)

Thus the normals not only anticipate a hostility in the deviant but actually create it.

But why do they not consider the matter settled when they destroy that deviant—and why are there such complicated rules for how to kill a witch? Because unconsciously they know that she is not an isolated, individualized freak, but that she is the manifestation of an abstract order, and that if they kill one or a dozen there are and will be still others as manifestations of that order, that there is some kind of order which has its natives, so to speak, that the race of Lilith flows through the blood of the world, and they imagine it as a forever threat to the race of Eve. And Lilith has all the independence-attributes of the witch.

Tied up in this is also the mythological idea that you must cross yourself if you see a witch (or not look at Medusa), etc. For to see is not to see simply a woman, but it is to see a deviant order which *you may recognize*, since something of the blood of Lilith is in everyone, and you may be "bewitched" by the vision of the fact that it does survive and does live, and this triumphant recognition may induce you, if you carry enough of Lilith's blood in you, to abandon the normal order and partake of the deviant order when you see that it can sustain life in the person of a surviving deviant. One is held to the normal partly by the threat that to depart

from it is to die; but if one sees that it is possible to live, then the threat doesn't hold.

This is why, essentially, Lilith and witches are thought of rather in catalyst terms, for their sheer existence and presence is effective in the above sense. Witches do not make signals in terms of the codified signs of the normal; they make signs out of the nature of their own order, and these signs are recognized by potential witches, and that recognition (which escapes the normals) seems a mysterious thing. Note that the active element is in the fact of recognition, and that the existence of the sign, in the catalyst sense, creates energy or action without being the source of energy or action.

Nor can the signs be translated into signals, for they derive from different orders.

Of course, all this is actually stated in the mythology of witchcraft. I let myself be sidetracked by G.'s abrupt and so secure and so repeated distinction between witches and witchcraft. I never agreed to that distinction and felt that there was not really a distinction (one must trust that mythology is making some deep kind of sense, and that if witchcraft belongs to witches in mythological statements it probably does go together on a deep level). Now it is clear that the mythology of witchcraft is an effort to explain the process of catalytic action as opposed to interactive action. Witchcraft is an activated projection, in material terms, of how a witch functions. Note that her activities involve "signs," not signals (as in kabbalistic signs); that it always works indirectly—that is, with a minimum or no contact between the person acted upon and the witch and her craft, which is a crude but accurate statement of catalytic action—and that it is thought of as a kind of self-hypnotic action—which is a crude statement of the fact of "recognition."

Well, I now consider that a good deal of the problem of deviants, witches, etc., has been, as G. would put it, tidied up.

Including the idea that the "pure" soul—or the pure-blooded Eve—is not susceptible to witches.

P.S. Sudden thought, two hours later: So I was right in presuming, on their second visit, that M. and G. were, like myself, deviants, for anthropology is the study of deviancy from one's social norm and is, theoretically, best advanced by deviants who, being deviant, have a respect for the existence of deviant orders—for at least dualism. But it must be undertaken with the intent to respect deviancy, and that respect must be maintained. It must not be undertaken with the intent to resolve deviancy into "normalcy." There is no such thing as a "normal deviant." "Deviancy" is not a state, it is a statement of relationship to a given norm.

(Although it is true that witches, once admitted as witches, do not hex each other.)

Roll 9. I'm beginning to get the feeling of how this Balinese material is going to sit in the film—as the sort of suspended constant. Something of the feeling that I was trying to get into the section [in *Ritual in Transfigured Time*, 1946] where the party freezes, then cut to Rita moving, then return to the party frozen; or the girls into statue-Rita walking away relationship; or the Rita normal time held against the declining time of the woman with the skein. It's that feeling of suspended sameness between different shots and the suspended sameness within the shot, and when the movement ends it is not so much a completion as a suspension . . . a sort of freeze.

In the middle of a wonderful shot of the masked, tailed figure squatting on the ground, someone comes up to fix his tail which has sort of fallen over. But the dancer is not disturbed or embarrassed. This business of the clothes coming off and no embarrassment or interruption—it feels almost a familiar psychological image, but I can't place it yet. It has something to do with it not being a failure, as such an event is in our culture. I can't quite get a hold of it. Perhaps it has something to do with this: that on the stage here, such a falling of clothes is a disaster because it is like the falling of a mask which is supposed not to look like a mask but to convey the illusion of a reality. But in Bali the theatrical is not supposed to be an illusion of reality (this ties in with the nonidentification business and the impersonality of the performer), so it is not felt as a failure of an illusion of reality, since this is not its intent. On the contrary, the point about Balinese theatricals is that they can be done only if they are accepted as false, and maybe the necessity of calling attention to the falseness of it by an adjustment of masks, tails, skirts, etc., is actually a condition of the theatrical. That is, if these "accidents" did not happen, the thing might begin to seem too real. Certainly the Balinese are skillful enough craftsmen to make the clothes stay together if they really wanted to. This is almost, I think, a deliberate negligence—the control of accident to which I have several times referred.<sup>17</sup> The creation of a condition in which a certain accident can occur. Yes, I think that's it. I think the clothes are supposed to come off in theatricals where the emotion is never supposed to become real. It's a sort of frustrating of the climax of the represented emotion when it is constantly interrupted for such reasons. With this sort of clothes-fixing going on, one can hardly forget that this is all make-believe. The idea of watching the shadow-play from both sides of the screen (which sort of puzzled G. at one point) is part of this too, I think. As is the fact that clothes don't seem to fall off in the

17. Deren frequently refers to "the control of accident" in filmmaking in her articles on technique: "Efficient or Effective," *Movie Makers*, June 1945; "Creating Movies with a New Dimension: Time"; "Creative Cutting"; as well as later pieces reprinted in *Film Culture*, Winter 1965.

kriss dance, where they seem to mean business for a change, sort of. The adjustment of clothes is a constant attention to propriety—not in our moral sense—but in the sense that one must not forget that one must be dressed in some way. The occidental idea—in the smartest circles—is to get so well dressed up beforehand that you don't have to think about your clothes and can concentrate on expressing your personality when you get to the party. Every fashion magazine carries at least three articles a year stressing the necessity of not letting your clothes be more important than you, either in their appearance or in your own attitude towards them. Don't wear things which make you uncomfortable, or which make you aware of them. Once you've put yourself together, forget what you're wearing and be "yourself." This is of course exactly the opposite point from that which the Balinese are making when their clothes keep coming off and requiring attention. I feel that it's this point that the come-apart clothes are making, and not a tactile or masturbatory point, which only holds here in the dream of being naked in a room full of people. I mean that in Bali physical nakedness is obviously not a projection of psychological nakedness, as it is with us. When clothes fall off they have to be adjusted in Bali for theatrical, not personal reasons.

Freud wouldn't do so well in Bali. Hooray for the Balinese.

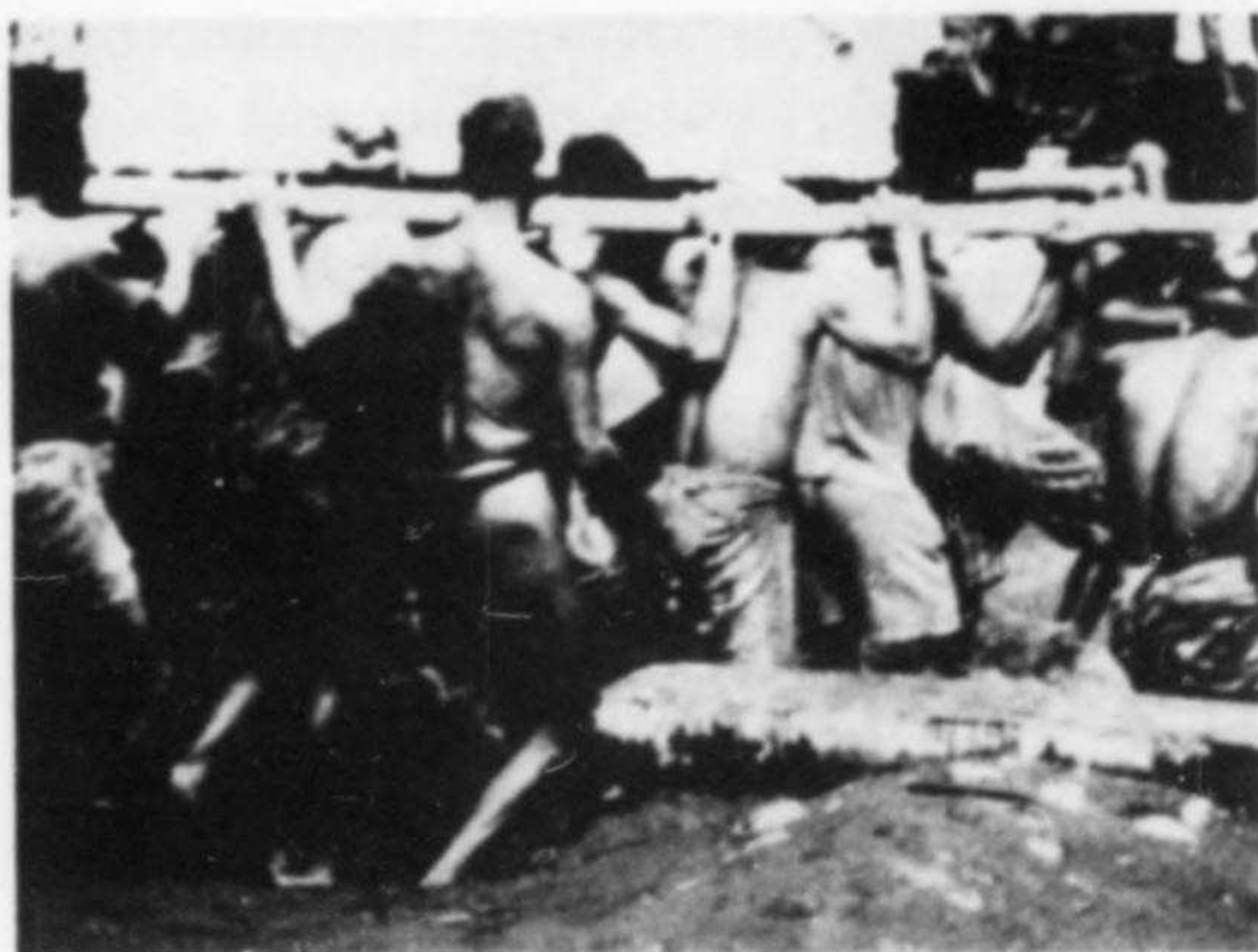
Roll 12. Dragon, also other dancers. Here again those movements and choreographic patterns which can only be described as a sort of jockeying for position on the part of the group dancers. They are the sort of side to side, tentative forward and retreat, a going forward and returning back, which is a little like the patterns in a boxing match when the opponents are sizing each other up. This gives a strange, ambivalent feeling both of fear and cunning at once. One keeps waiting for the charge. A perfect, subtle technique for sustaining a tension, sort of.

On reading over that clothes-come-apart business on the previous page in that section on the kriss dance—here a hurting of oneself is the climax—the transition from theatrical to reality, which must not occur. It's a part of that business that make-believe is fine as long as it remains make-believe.

I was wrong about that "stage" business. In this roll there are a number of shots in which the deliberate seating of the audience and their relatively consistent attention do set physical contextual definitions in a stage sense.

Sasha was right about those undersized masks. Their function, he said, was to make a proportion which makes the body sort of giantlike and monumental. As it does indeed in this roll. Wish I had some close-ups in which the intended monumentality was not corrected by exterior things like trees, other people, etc.

Roll 13. Here a young man is seated and grasps an urnlike thing in front of him,



and his body rotates and weaves like that of the little girl as she grasps the shaking stick. Do they always grab hold of something like that when going into trance?

In the middle of this is a strange incident where the young priest (?) takes the mask off of a seated dancer in the middle of the arena. Then another man presses a pole at the now unmasked dancer, who is either in a daze or is sullen because his mask was removed. What is this all? It certainly does not seem like part of the theatrical.

Does it really take that many men to carry that bamboo scaffolding on which the casket sits, or is it mainly an excuse to get so jampacked together?

March 9

Roll 150. First half of this roll consists of a man first sawing, then chopping a plank. There is here again, as in the beginning of the carving, that curious semi-lethargic disinterest of a worker doing something that he had agreed to do but was not even interested enough to do it efficiently. Again that slipping of the board out of position and adjusting it, over and over, with no effort to stop and fix it, once for all. Was this something he was doing for the camera, and is his disinterest a kind of sabotage of the "bribery" involved? Or are they always disinterested in the period where the rough work has to be done, becoming interested only when it comes to the finer points, as in the carving sequence? Or is this some expression of a general lack of urgency and anxiety towards purposive, material activity?

Roll 151. Are the rather deep holes dug into the ground into which the older girl places the baby before leaving and in which one of the older children has been sitting . . . are these common? At first it was not visible that there were the holes,



and suddenly, when they became apparent, it gave me a very strange feeling, for the feeling of digging into the ground seemed somehow alien to the Balinese character. The sinking of the baby into the ground by putting it into a hole was strange; as was the entire idea of the Balinese fussing around with earth and burrowing into it.

I think I understand now why I am having such difficulty eliminating shots or rolls. For the quality of Balinese posture, attitudes, quietness, combined with the extremely long shots, end by giving everything almost a sort of ritualistic character. Right from the beginning the same thing has happened over and over to me. I will start cranking off the reel, and a scene will appear in which nothing much is happening. And I will say to myself: "Well, there's no movement or action in this shot, this is no good." And I continue cranking and very quickly come to the point of being very bored with it and hoping the next shot will show up, but I keep cranking, and the same thing goes on and on and on, and gradually it becomes a kind of suspended state of mind which I feel I could watch indefinitely. There is some point there in the watching where, just because nothing is happening in the developmental sense, and just because the shot keeps lasting, the scene crosses some strange boundary from "activity" into "state." When one is quite convinced that nothing will happen and ceases to watch for action, a sense of being transfixed in a state begins to happen. And this is especially so when there is practically no action, as in the group of men sitting around in this roll, or the children just sort of sitting. And this is quite different from the violent excitement of the shots of the little girl going into trance, and is quite different also from the lyric tension of the extremely sustained dance movements.

The extremely disinterested length of these shots, and the slow, easy pan which sometimes occurs over very quiet groupings is—whether it is so intended or not—a kind of Balinese subjective camera. One has a feeling that one is watching the way a Balinese watches, that kind of quiet, sustained staring, or rather gazing, since there is no intensity in it.

I would like to use, in the film, this subjective Balinese-eye effect of the camera . . . one in which Bateson just watches for no special reason except that he is watching . . . *not looking for something*, which one feels in some of the shots of sort of busy action, but just plain watching and not even caring what he sees. I must keep an eye out for a lyrically composed scene which he watches for the full run of the camera. And it might even be possible to extend this by printing the same thing twice and joining it tail to tail on an identical frame. Or, of course, by intercut, possibly.

March 16

I've now been able to clarify in my own mind, to some extent, the sources of my dissatisfaction [with] Friday's feedback lecture.<sup>18</sup> My understanding of the scientific method is no doubt somewhat primitive in the refined details, but in general principle I believe it consists of first distinguishing between any given state and those operational variables of which it is the emergent; and second, by determining what variable relationships between those variables result in any state. My dissatisfaction with the lecture was a dissatisfaction with a basic gliding over of the fact that the state of a machine and the way it works are not the same thing: a distinction between the total mechanism and its operational mechanics. (A refrigerator—a mechanism maintaining a certain temperature—may do so by a variety of operational means). And this lack of distinction led to a failure to isolate at least the most important variables in both, and this to a failure to even touch the whole problem of variable combinations of variables.

I cannot see that a formulation which does not contain within it sufficient variable definition to distinguish Balinese from Iatmul can be of much value. The feedback described could fit both. First I want to distinguish between a mechanism and its operational mechanics. In man, for example, the operational mechanics are substantially the same throughout his lifetime. At five, fifteen, and forty-five years of age the lungs, the heart, circulatory system, etc., operate the same basic way. But the organism changes, and changes developmentally, which is not the same as the deterioration of a machine over time—wear and tear, etc. The distinctive feature of

18. See for background, Bateson. "Bali: The Value System of a Steady State," in *Steps*.

man is precisely that he doesn't just plain wear out from a given point of original perfection. I think this whole thing of deterioration, in order that it not be confused with development, should be put under the heading of "tolerance," which is where it belongs anyway—machine friction, building stability, etc., being usually dealt with in that category. In an organism it comes under the heading of tolerance too—and is quite distinct from development. And I would further distinguish between mechanism and organism in that both have, at all times, limits of tolerance, but only the latter is capable of development . . . that is, it is capable of changing its limits of tolerance by changing its own nature. Offhand I would say that only an organism containing its own source of energy was capable of development and variable tolerance, but that is not at the moment important. To get back to the first distinction, as between a *mechanism* and its *mechanics*. Both or either can be characterized by the following variables, which I shall designate as A and A', as the simplified polarities.

Either of them may be *A on-off* or *A' genetic* (this is probably not a good word, but I mean that A would either be all there or not function at all, whereas A' *becomes* functioning by functioning). A would be a total, whereas A' would be gradual.

The second variable seems the same thing as the first but can split from it under certain conditions. Again, the words may not be good, but I would say that *B* is a *simultaneity* whereas *B'* is a *sequence* in time. Thus, in matters of complementary relationships one can have a state of simultaneous complements (or correctives) or a state of sequential complements. B would be a *static state* whereas B' would be an *oscillatory steady state*.

The third C category would be *C constant* or *C' developmental*, and this last variable has somehow a subvariable (this needs tidying) which consists of (c) cumulative or (C) dynamic. That is, a development may be durational or cumulative—as when a constant heat makes a progressive burn—or it may be dynamic, which would be an inconstant energy. The C of this variable, constant, either (c) fixed or (C) plateau.

And finally (and this is perhaps a lower order of variable), it can be either D symmetrical or D' asymmetrical. Thus the old architecture was balanced in symmetrical terms, whereas the new architecture, with its cantilever principles, is asymmetrically stable. The whole lever principle or the pulley system are asymmetrical stable statements.

Now, if we put the Mechanism on one side, and the Mechanics on the other, and take first Architecture, which is in a sense the simplest of mechanisms, we get the following (*V* stands for possible variation):

	<u>Mechanism</u>	<u>Mechanics</u>
	A (on-off)	A (on-off)
	B (simultaneous)	B (simultaneous)
	C (constant)	C (constant)
V	D or D'	D or D'

That is, in a building you can have a D mechanism operating on D' mechanics (as may be necessary in the case of unstable rockbeds, etc.) or vice versa, or DD or both DD', but you can't change ABC on either side or you don't have a building.

Theoretically (I say this because I can't think of an example) or conceptually, one could have a machine which was just as stable as a building, with the one exception that anything having an energy transfer principle (which all machines have) would be, on the Mechanics side, a B'—a sequential element. I also say conceptually, because it is difficult to conceive of an absolutely constant energy, since it is usually oscillatory. Thus, on the mechanics side you would probably have a cC, Cc, or a C' (c). Otherwise, if electric current were neither sequential nor oscillatory, an electric light would fill the bill.

The steam engine of the feedback variety which you described would probably line up like this:

	<u>Mechanism</u>	<u>Mechanics</u>
	A	A'
V	Cc, CC, or C'c	Cc, CC, or C'c
	B	B'
V	D or D'	D or D'

Thus, while the mechanism itself is an on-off A, its mechanics, involving energy transfer, are A', genetic. It is also simultaneous in itself, but sequential in its operation. (This is the point we began to argue the other night—the time lag possible in a sequential system.) Both sides are either constant (that is, unchanging) on a fixed or plateau principle, or either side can be developmental, but only on a culminative basis. . . . That is, a constant mechanism can culminate in a change, or it can operate in terms of culminative valve principles.

And the main property of such machines, and of that governor feedback you drew, is that the corrective governor is built-in and depending upon a built-in error. There is to me a very important and basic difference between a sprinkler system which gets set off at a certain heat in the room and keeps running until the fire department comes in to turn it off but is not otherwise part of the room—there is

to me a basic difference between an emergency valve of that kind and a valve or governor built into a mechanism whose constant functioning is part of the vital operation of that mechanism at all times. In that steam-governor engine, the governor is in the line of energy transfer. And it, in turn, is dependent upon a functioning error which is also built into the machine. At this point it would be possible, for instance, to say something about Bali and Iatmul, namely, that in Bali you have an emergency valve in the idea of exile, but the system itself has neither error nor corrective built in. ("If he didn't give the ceremonial, no one ever would again" is a clear statement of a system without built-in corrective.) Iatmul, I think, is probably full of built-in errors and their complementary built-in correctives.

In Bali, however, you have two operational mechanics, and the whole could be formulated, perhaps, as follows:

<u>Mechanism</u>	<u>Parent-Child Mechanics</u>	<u>Adult Mechanics</u>
A	A'	A
B	B'	B
C	C	C
D'	D'	D'

In other words, Bali is a hell of a lot more like an architectural structure than it is like a feedback mechanism such as you drew. For one thing, both sides are on-off. And the simultaneity statement B is borne out not only by the absence of time sense in Bali altogether, but by the condition of the simultaneous elevation-support complement which is a pure architecture—a nonoscillatory, non-sequential structure. Certainly it is C on both sides and, like much modern architecture, D' on both sides. I would therefore describe Bali as a static state, not a steady state, and certainly not dynamic. I might add that in architecture, stresses and strains are simultaneously, not sequentially, resolved, except in mobiles such as bridges.

Iatmul might be described as follows:

<u>Mechanism</u>	<u>Mechanics</u>
A (always Iatmul)	A'
B	B'
C	C'c
D	D

Thus, Iatmul might be described as a steady state of compensatory sequential oscillation with error and corrective built in.

America would be an A (until a revolution) A', BB', C or C'c (revolution) C or C'c, D'D mechanism.

At this point, I'd like to do a job on animals and people. An animal will look something like this:

A'	A'
B	B'
CC	C'c
D?	D'

(I am not referring to purely physiological functions, but rather to psychological functions.)

And a man will look like:

A'	A'
B'	B'
C'C	C'C
D'	D'

The point is that man is the only one of the lot with C' (dynamic change) over on the left-hand side. This is what you have otherwise referred to as deuterio learning.<sup>19</sup> The extent to which it is present in animals is negligible, except in their infancy. It is also what you have called "irreversible consciousness," and it is the "consciousness within himself" that I have dedicated my whole anagram<sup>20</sup> to, basically. It is the only place where, through consciousness, time perspective is present along with the sequential operation of the organism (psychological, not physiological sense). The fact is that a constant oscillatory system is essentially the same thing as a circular or elliptical or cyclic system, it comes back to where it started if you reverse the negative half of a sine curve.

All the other systems besides man himself are at most developmental on the culminative basis, except for Great Britain which avoids this problem by an

19. "Deuterio learning" is Bateson's term for the type of learning which, as opposed to rote learning, takes the context of the learning situation itself into account, i.e., "learning to learn," and being able to transfer knowledge gained from one learning context to another, so that the rate of learning is thereby increased. See Bateson, "Social Planning and the Concept of Deuterio-Learning" (1942), reprinted in *Steps*, pp. 159-176. In this essay, written in response to Margaret Mead's "The Comparative Study of Culture and the Purposive Cultivation of Democratic Values" (1942), Bateson analyzes human "habits of looking" (a Gestalt concept with regard to how we see cause and effect, ends justifying means, etc.).

20. Deren, *An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film*, Yonkers, Alicat Book Shop Press, Outcast Series, No. 9, 1946.

extraordinarily high tolerance structure. But there is no society or organization *designed to change itself*, and this is what the whole hitch is. Either he builds in both error and governor, or he builds in just the error and gets a revolution.<sup>21</sup>

Man is distinguished for consciousness, time perspective, and original energy. So is anything that lasts. And in consciousness is understood value. Consequently, it would seem to me that any effort to pattern a society should take its cue from that distinctive feature in man which is unlike machines, and which makes him capable of building machines. And I might further point out that it's the deviants who are most characterized by the special attributes of man. Man is a spiral system, the more accelerated the spiral, the more idiosyncratically (among all the things of the universe) man he is.

This whole system probably has lots of nonsense in it, but it was a hell of a lot of fun to construct.

March 20

To recognize the irrevocable, inviolable relationship between ends and means should not mean a confusion between them, or a merging together of them, or a failure to recognize their hierarchical structure.<sup>22</sup>

That morality which automatically makes synonymous understanding and approval or forgiveness is a most oversimplified, barbaric extension of sixteenth [century] religious systems. Since the inevitabilities of inconscient nature are outside the pale of moral judgment or are "morally" good as an extension of deity, the tendency is that, since science began as an effort to understand the natural universe, it was dealing in matters either "morally good" or beyond the pale of moral judgment. This original linking of a method—understanding—with a value—moral goodness—was then preserved in reference to the activities of conscient beings. To preserve this linkage is to humiliate consciousness—to say to a man you cannot help yourself no more than nature can help itself—therefore to understand the causation of your inevitabilities is to know all there is to know of you.

It is for this reason that I reserve understanding, forgiveness, until a moment of final judgment.

21. Elsewhere in this notebook Deren had observed that Marxism is the "only theory of politics which designed a mechanism capable of changing itself—as in the concept of the withering away of the state." (n.d.)

22. Cf. Mead's "The Comparative Study of Culture . . ." and Deren's *Anagram*. . . .

The causation formula of a man contains the X of his values. If they do not function, if indeed he operates as if it did not exist, he has reduced himself.

And time perspective is just part of this X or, rather, is an expression of its operation and will affect the entire formula of action.

Thus, if some absolute value is the primary determinant, the activities by which it is achieved may be variable. If the activities are constant—being a function of variable forces outside—one must assume that it is the value which is variable. I mean that one may say that, essentially, the course of a man's life can be plotted in terms of 3 elements: A—intrinsic value; B—exterior necessity; C—method. B is obviously a variable. Consequently it must add up either that  $BA=C$ , or that  $BC=A$ , or that  $AC=B$ .

If the activity is constant, then the value must have been adjusted to exterior necessity.

## On Reading Deren's Notebook

ANNETTE MICHELSON

*Life depends, above all, on the path which leads from the Dionysian forest to the ruins of the classical theater. This must not be merely stated; it must be repeated with the stubbornness of faith. It is insofar as existence avoids the presence of the tragic that it becomes trivial and ludicrous. And it is insofar as it participates in a sacred terror that it is human. It may be that this paradox is too extreme and difficult to sustain; it is, nevertheless, as essential to life as blood.*

—Georges Bataille

We have always known that Deren wished to make a film of ritual, and we have known as well that this was no mere wish. It was a project carefully considered, intensively researched and planned. In presenting the textual evidence of 1947, we offer once again documentation of a filmmaker's evolution and resolve, inscribed with the immediacy of the diaristic soliloquy. It is our hope that this publication may facilitate a new stage of inquiry into the theory and practice of America's independent cinema, sharpening and confirming speculative impulses hitherto constrained by the deliberate pace of posthumous publication. Deren's work is not alone in question, and it therefore seems incumbent upon us to point out, however tentatively, the relations that most suggest themselves, linking this text and the "Notes for a Film of *Capital*,"<sup>1</sup> which had seemed to its author to mark, two decades earlier, the closure of cinema's analytic enterprise.

I will claim, then, that Deren's work and role, epitomized in this extension of her theoretical program, solicit a redefinition of the scope and thrust of her intervention considered as a whole, and that we must reread her work as reopening, within the historical context of postwar America, the questions posed

1. Sergei Eisenstein, "Notes for a Film of *Capital*," *October*, 2 (Summer 1976), 3-26.

by the direction, shape, and scale of a project which had by that time acquired the status of a paradigm within the history of film: that of Eisenstein.

What, most generally and immediately, might impel one to make such a claim? The sense of a constant and intimate articulation of theory with practice, of a relentless concern with systematization, the determination to ground innovative practice in theory. And, of course, the manner in which both practice and theory stand in a relation of fruitful, unresolved tension, of variance with those of her time. Tracing the development of Deren's work and of her role, one discerns a particular logic evident only once before in the history of the medium.

Eisenstein, coming from theater, had begun as the heir of Griffith and the student of Kuleshov; Deren, coming from the theater of dance, begins as the legatee of Cocteau<sup>2</sup> and as apprentice to Hammid. For both, theory and practice have as a central concern the radicalization and refinement of editing techniques, and they develop toward the crucial, climactic elaboration of a totalizing, transcultural project that is to synthesize and extend the formal and theoretical gains of their earlier innovative work. Neither project was, as we know, completed; their monumental remains now lie in the archives of film museums. Such is the most general outline of parallel trajectories, suggestive nonetheless of more than interesting coincidences and analogies. And within this rough retracing, a number of specific considerations solicit our particular attention.

The first of these is that the fragmentary character of these projects, their forced suspension, their subsequent and respective diversions and sublimations, suggest more than the pathos of personal defeat. They point, rather, to the contradictions inherent in the situations of two filmmakers at variance with the dominant practice of their times, with its economy and its labor structure. Turning from that practice and that structure to alternative modes of production (supported in both instances by private patronage) proved the condition for the working confrontation with foreign cultures. And this confrontation, in turn, confirmed the problematic nature of their relations, as artists, both to their own cultures and to those of their chosen arenas of enterprise. Like Eisenstein, turning to Mexico from his disastrous experience as the visiting artist-revolutionary imperially summoned and dismissed by the American film industry, Deren approached her work in Haiti with the eagerness and euphoria of the discovery of the new-found land. Like Eisenstein, she knew that she must "permit the culture and the myth to emerge gradually in its own terms and its own form." And she was later to speak of the felt necessity, upon her encounter with the seductions of Haitian culture, for a "discretion," balanced by "a sense of human bond which I did not fully understand until my first return to the United States." She then

2. For an extended development of these considerations, see Annette Michelson, "Film and the Radical Aspiration," in Gerald Mast and Marshall Cohen, eds., *Film Theory and Criticism*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1979, pp. 617-75.

continues, in a passage that reads like a blow-by-blow description of Eisenstein's progress through America in 1930:

At that moment I became freshly aware of a situation to which I had grown inured and oblivious: that in a modern industrial culture, the artists constitute, in fact, an "ethnic group," subject to the full "native" treatment. We, too, are exhibited as touristic curiosities on Monday, extolled as culture on Tuesday, denounced as immoral and unsanitary on Wednesday, reinstated for scientific study Thursday, feasted for some obscurely stylish reason Friday, forgotten Saturday, revisited as picturesque Sunday. We too are misrepresented by professional appreciators and subjected to spiritual imperialism. . . . My own ordeal as an "artist-native" in an industrial culture made it impossible for me to be guilty of similar effronteries toward the Haitian peasants.<sup>3</sup>

Work on the film of ritual was, then, like that of Eisenstein's Mexican project, grounded in the sense of alienation and of a bond, newly discovered, with the colonized culture. And Deren remarks, in a phrase which might also have been Eisenstein's, "It is a sad commentary upon the usual visitor to Haiti that this discretion seemed to the Haitians so unique that they early formed the conviction that I was not a foreigner at all but a prodigal native daughter finally returned."<sup>4</sup>

From these work projects, both gained access to a dimension of experience which was undoubtedly decisive in every later enterprise: a glimpse, widely sought but denied to many of their generation, of the meaning of community in its most absorbing and fulfilling instance: of collective enterprise grounded in the mythic. One may, in fact, see both Deren and Eisenstein as fellows in a program defined by the group of intellectuals, gathered in 1937 around Bataille, who defined their aims as follows:

The precise object of the projected activity may be termed a *sacred sociology* insofar as it implies the study of social existence in all its manifestations in which the active presence of the sacred appears. It thus proposes to establish points of convergence between the basic and driving impulses of individual psychology and the directional structures which command social organization and direct its revolutions.<sup>5</sup>

Deren had come to the theory and practice of film with a preparation of a kind unique in her lineage: that of her Marxist studies and involvement in the Trotskyist youth movement. This had undoubtedly predisposed her to a sense of

3. Maya Deren, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1953, p. 8

4. *Ibid.*

5. See "Note sur la fondation d'un Collège de Sociologie," in Georges Bataille, *Oeuvres Complètes*, Paris, Editions Gallimard, 1970, vol. I, p. 492.

community, of shared goals and collective experience. It also provided a context and stimulus for the development of a theoretical impulse. Rejecting, as the Russians had, the native pragmatism of Hollywood ("it is noncreative by being nontheoretical"), she quickly developed a preference for the anonymous forms of ritual over the individualistic psychology of dramatic narrative in film, and speaks, in *Anagram*, of how "in ritual, the human being is treated, not as source of dramatic action, but as a somewhat depersonalized element in a dramatic whole," and she is careful to add that the effect is "not of reduction, but of enlargement."<sup>6</sup> So too, for Eisenstein, the sense of individual action (and, indeed, of his own) as vectorial in the historical process, had obviously provided the basis for the cinematic form of his early work. He was, however, to realize from his contact with oriental theater that

when a common cultural heritage and conducting agent exist it is perfectly possible to communicate by means of those general, emotionally charged complex units, lacking the sharp individualization of a precise, private, conceptual order. And this may, furthermore, act to enlarge the sphere of communication. It is interesting to note that this method has the advantage of a generalized evidence conferred by the symbol; it may sacrifice a certain intellectual sharpness and precision, but it became, for that very reason, the means of communication between untold numbers of people in the East.<sup>7</sup>

And he remarks, as well, that "at present, we can say that the scientific systems of the Chinese are based not on principles of abstract thought but on those of sensual thinking. Or, in other terms, that Chinese science is constructed not on the model of scientific systems but in the image of the work of art."<sup>8</sup>

Deren had from the first envisaged a cinema recharged, as it were, with the energy of dance. Speaking of *Ritual in Transfigured Time*, that exercise in variational change and process distilled from the kinetics of the social institution of the cocktail party, she describes it as a dance film, but more particularly as one in which "shots are held together not by the constant identity of an individual performer, but by the emotional integrity of the movement itself, independent of its performer . . . continuity of movement between disparate individuals so identified, in which the cinematic unity is a statement of common motivation shared by the individual elements."<sup>9</sup>

6. For this and subsequent references to *Anagram*, see Maya Deren, "An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film," *Film Culture*, 39 (Winter 1965).

7. S. M. Eisenstein, "A l'Enchanteur du Verger des Poires," in *Cinémastisme: peinture et cinéma*, Brussels, Editions Complexe, 1980, p. 150.

8. *Ibid.*

9. Maya Deren, "Ritual in Transfigured Time," *Dance Magazine*, December 1946, repr. *Film Culture*, 39 (Winter 1965).

Observing, in 1947, the Balinese footage shot by Mead and Bateson, she sees with a sense of mounting excitement the sacred rites therein enacted as totalizing in their design. To her impulse towards theorization corresponds the sense of a total order, the compelling necessity of every detail, *the aesthetic distillation of obsession*. She seizes upon the relation of accident to design, the attitude toward costume and disrobing, the distancing of theatrical effects, the elimination of transitions within Balinese performance structure. She establishes, in fact, an inventory of what was later to become modernist performance style. Reading Balinese performance as a social text, she discovers an instance of the complex integrity of form observed at home in children's games as played on the streets of New York. Speaking of the configuration of hopscotch as "inviolable," and of the relation of that inviolability to the problem of formal autonomy which, as our pioneer filmic modernist, she defined for her generation, she says, "its prestige is contingent upon satisfaction of the form itself as authority, and that form may still be completely independent of any functional relation to actuality." Like Webern citing Hölderlin, she believed, in effect, that "to live is to defend a form." She seems to have sensed the distance between form and function in the children's game as an analogue of the boundary dividing secular from sacred, and it is in the respect for the integrity of the form and of those boundaries that she sees ritual as "classicist in nature."

Her analysis of the Balinese material, then, is propaedeutic in the development of the planned film, and it is more than that. The work envisaged is to be composed of three ritual forms: children's games, Balinese and Haitian rituals. "I wish to build the film, using the variations between them to contrapuntally create the harmony, the basic equivalence of the idea of form common to them all."

And Eisenstein's project? The weaving of historical periods of Mexican history into one unity, threads to be laid, side by side, in the true *montagiste* tradition. Or, in his words,

Striped and violently contrasting are the cultures in Mexico running next to each other and at the same time being centuries away. . . . No plot, no whole story could run through this Serape without being false or artificial. And we took the contrasting independence of its violent colours as the motif for construction of our film: six episodes following each other—different in character, different in people, different in animals, trees and flowers. And still held together by the unity of the weave—a rhythmic and musical construction and an unrolling of the Mexican spirit and character.<sup>10</sup>

10. This description of Eisenstein's Mexican project, extracted from correspondence with Upton Sinclair, is reprinted in S. M. Eisenstein, *Que Viva Mexico*, London, Vision Press, 1951, p. 10. For the fullest account of this entire episode, see Sergei Eisenstein and Upton Sinclair, *The Making and Unmaking of "Que Viva Mexico!"* Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1970.

However striking the similarities of intent (and they do, indeed, contribute to the basis of my claims), there is, within the similarity, an equally striking difference. Deren's project, elaborated in postwar America, is one from which the historical dimension has been abstracted, and it is with special interest that we realize that it is precisely with the reinsertion of history within her project that collapse begins. Scrupulous observer that she is, she begins to realize, as she penetrates the Haitian culture, that she is dealing with a form that defies the aesthetic boundaries that are hers. It is with the realization that Haitian dance was not, in itself, a dance form, but part of something larger, a "mythological ritual," that she begins to perceive "the total integrity of cultural form," and its distinctive elements, "which eventually led me to look for the possible interpolation of another culture, to investigate the history of the Spanish and Indian period of the islands, and finally, the determination of the Indian influences."<sup>11</sup> This leads to an assessment of the complex dialectic of power relations amongst white men, Indians, and blacks which subtends the rituals of Vodoun. And it was the full recognition of both the culture's integrity and of the complex historical processes inscribed within the culture that seems to have precipitated her acknowledgment of defeat, the eventual abandonment of the project. The humility of this acknowledgment can be read as the supreme testimony to her rapture of discovery and intensity of involvement in the experience of community in myth.

From Mexico and Haiti, each returned to the tasks of theory and the difficulties of practice. Deren's struggles with poverty and professional alienation compose a mirror reflection of Eisenstein's difficulties within the hardening structure of the state-supported industry under Stalinism. For both, the rediscovery of the deepening division between their own work and that of dominant practice intensified the pace of theoretical intervention. *Divine Horsemen* is the impressive product of Deren's Haitian investigations. We may now begin also to consider whether her theoretical proposals on the nature of poetic cinema, which elicited the unanimous hostility of her male interlocutors in the symposium of 1953,<sup>12</sup> do not demand a comparative reading with Eisenstein's paper, "Film Form: New Problems," which elicited, upon its delivery at the All-Soviet Conference of Filmmakers of 1945, a collective lynching by his peers. And I would tend to favor a reading of *Anagram* as an attempt to define a method and range of issues within film theory that might benefit from a parallel consideration of Eisenstein's major late theoretical text, "On Non-Indifferent Nature."

From Mexico and Haiti, each returned, as well, with the memory of a determinant experience, one which was to permeate all subsequent theory and practice, further accentuating their problematic status as filmmakers. This was the memory of their encounters with the *ecstatic*.

11. For a fuller account of this development, see *Divine Horsemen*.

12. This is discussed in "Film and the Radical Aspiration."

It has become evident, as the publication of Eisenstein's late manuscripts proceeds both in Moscow and in the West, that we must begin to consider the period of his development from his return to Moscow until his death in 1948 in terms that require a thorough and careful account of this major event in his career. It is evident as well that the complex of futurist and constructivist allegiances, of ideological commitments of the immediately postrevolutionary period—those which marked both theater and film work from 1923 through 1929—do not suffice to give us a whole and coherent view of the later work. It is clear, furthermore, that neither the tightening constraints of production conditions on the one hand, nor shifts of interest within current Soviet psychological theory on the other, account for the radical and dramatic transformation of the work of the later years. What is needed is an understanding of the ways in which the Mexican experience and the encounter with the mythic precipitated a major renewal of both theory and practice.

This experience was, like everything else in Eisenstein's development, subject to the transformational process of assimilation on the terms available to him within the growing constrictions of his situation. The language of the later essays, their syntax, imagery, repertory of simile and metaphor, confirms one's sense of these developments and of these constraints. Thus for Eisenstein both Piranesi and El Greco, subjects of extended meditation, are seen as "bursting limits, exploding, like rounds of canon fire, the notions of school and movement, escaping the limits of realism as it is currently understood."<sup>13</sup> And when he finally allows himself to recall Mexico, he evokes the "vertigo" induced by the sight of the carvings at Uxmal: "a human profile decomposed, or the sight of serpents' heads fragmented in an indescribable dissolution in the galleries behind the pyramid. . .," or the manner in which the "battlements of the building's decorative lower section suddenly reveal themselves as a system of monstrously deformed jaws." The process which has engendered these images of formal decomposition he then describes as one which is "inaccessible to a normal state of consciousness." And this state of consciousness to which he returns, obsessively, is termed *ecstatic*. But the category of the ecstatic in the later writings is never precisely localized or contained. Writing in 1937 of El Greco, he describes the artist's passage from "the representation of ecstatic characters to the ecstatic representation of characters."<sup>14</sup> (One recognizes in this remark the kind of demand defined in the celebrated essay on Griffith in which he claims that it is not the cradle's rocking movement that *Intolerance* required, but rather the pervasive rhythm which might have rocked the film.)<sup>15</sup> This proliferating and intensifying concern with the ecstatic, Eisen-

13. See S. M. Eisenstein, "El Greco y el Cine," in *Cinématisme: peinture et cinéma*.

14. *Ibid.*

15. Sergei Eisenstein, "Griffith, Dickens and the Film Today," in *Film Form*, New York, Harcourt Brace, 1949, pp. 195-255.

stein's obsessive and constant insertion of this category within all the parameters of his later theoretical discourse, seems to demand, in addition to a psychoanalytically informed study, an attempt at retrieval of the role of a tradition other than that of constructivism, that of symbolism in all its troubling ideological ambiguity. But if we are to arrive at a more accurate understanding of the graphic exacerbation, the particular temporality, the textual paradoxes of *Ivan the Terrible*, we must come to understand the way in which for Eisenstein, as for Deren, the condition of the ecstatic was "the incandescence of obsession."



Letters from Mexico  
to Maxim Strauch and Ilya Trauberg

SERGEI EISENSTEIN

translated by TANAQUIL TAUBES

[8-10 May 1931]

Julio D. Saldivar  
Hacienda Tetlapayac  
F.C.M. EDO. HGO

Dear Makkushka!<sup>1</sup>

I was very pleased to receive your letter. It was really marvelous to read that someone takes some interest in me, aside from their interest in Mexico. I am not at all accustomed to that. If my "doppelgänger" is, deep within his "soul," an old, sentimental Jew, then he's in for even harsher treatment than a "second" V. V. [Mayakovsky]. You see, I don't even have anyone to cry to on the telephone. Not only here where the country doesn't run on telephones . . . You and Pera<sup>2</sup> are perhaps the only ones who know that I'm quite without "armor"—I don't mean in the sense of a battleship. There is a kind of lizard here [the armadillo], a cross between a common lizard and a turtle, out of which they make elegant little baskets by sticking the tail into the neck, degutting it, and lining the inside with scarlet or sky-blue silk. Sometimes they use them to make mandolins, which moan piteously. My very tender "doppelgänger" bleeds continually and his armor has to be constantly mended and tightened to keep it from completely . . . falling apart. Not as Pudovkin would tighten his—I don't discipline mine. And not in V. V.'s style either—I don't keep mine in check. The vigor of our so-called creativity lies in the dialectical fusion of "blood" and "iron"!!! This becomes monstrous only when there is a break in the creative process, and during moments of rest. "Oh, if one could only produce *without* rest!" But I also have a third self. Actually, I

1. Of the letters written to Maxim Strauch from Mexico, Strauch reproduces two in his contribution to *Eisenstein in the Reminiscences of His Contemporaries* (Moscow, 1974). "Makkushka" derives from Strauch's childhood nickname, Mak.

2. Eisenstein married Pera Atasheva in October 1934.

think he's the main one: a cross between the "flying Dutchman," a conquistador of the Americas, and a "victim of the evening" soaked in blood and tears. He is a quiet, closet scientist with a microscope, searching out the mysteries of creative processes and phenomena, which submit to analysis only with difficulty. Now, of course, this respectable fellow is in a situation of high comedy: between earthquakes, drought-ridden tropics, tropical downpours, and other such elements—on carriages, airplanes, trucks, horseback, steamers, and from time to time, on trains, he carries himself as if he were in Voltaire's armchair. To put it more simply, the theoretical work continues without interruption. Analytic methods of great refinement and endless synthetic amplifications present themselves on the most curious occasions (crocodile hunting or at Indian dances involving turkeys, during which each dancer has to strangle a live turkey—there are twelve dancers, the one who doesn't succeed in wringing his turkey's neck is beaten up by the other eleven! we could *not* film it!! and other similar attractions). If only I had time to explore Quetzalcoatl, Kukulcan, and other Mexican gods, to be able to set it all down in a book . . . and one more monument to "vulgar materialism" would go down in the history of the "mechanists." My position, let's say, is not one of belief in Deborin's spiritualism.<sup>3</sup> I will start believing in God (with a capital G!!!) the moment I discover a mechanically insoluble obstacle in my work—I am happy to confess that so far this hasn't happened. My theoretical work has come a long way from its position prior to my departure. Fortunately, it's headed in the direction of ever-greater simplification, clarity, and scale. I'm even managing to get a great deal of reading done. Such serious things as Lévy-Brühl—*Reasoning Among Primitive Peoples (en français)*.<sup>4</sup> Besides providing vast *corroborative* material, it is, of course, the indispensable key to future battles with . . . Sutyryn!<sup>5</sup> I haven't learned to speak Spanish yet. No time. I can't afford to spend one percent of my attention on it. I want to learn the language automatically. So far, I can read Ibáñez's *Blood and Sand* in Spanish without much difficulty (and understand more than when I first read Zola in the original!). Although I have deftly adjusted to "armchair" work in a Pushkin-like "kibitka"<sup>6</sup>—my own kind of thinking gyroscope!—I still feel a terrible need to settle down and finally consolidate the theoretical organism. Yes, and what's more, I'm doing a great deal of drawing!

Actually, the filming, theory, and drawing are done in "relays" so as to keep going at all costs. Yesterday I rode horseback at a gallop for five miles—the horses here are devils (they belong to *Mexican* cowboys!)—through maguey fields (a thorny cactus). Not only did I keep my seat like a thoroughbred "charro"

3. Possibly a reference to Abram Deborin's attitude toward Marxism.

4. Lucien Lévy-Brühl, *Les fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures*.

5. V. Sutyryn was an activist in RAPP, the Writers' Association that had assumed control of published work (1925-32).

6. A covered cart or sledge.

(cowboy), but I even felt that the constant exertion and gallop with these horses matched my normal state of being! Whither are we bound and do we not rush in vain!!!

As merchandise, the film is wonderful.

But now I'm "spoiled." Once I embodied the "ideal spectator." Then everything turned out well. Now I seem to have become too refined; I feast my eyes on . . . reality, regardless of any need to select and put in order. Of course, the visual is on a higher level, but I'm afraid that the standard visual "thermometer" is gone. Perhaps it's simply a "trauma" from the sad fate of *The General Line*;<sup>7</sup> in any case, reality now seems unrepresentable. We'll see. I'm working with a great push. Almost alone, because Grishka<sup>8</sup> is having stomach trouble. Influence of the tropics on northern intestines! So, it seems I have given you a complete account of myself. Don't judge me too severely—"Tu l'as voulu, Georges Dandin"—you asked for it! I have to finish up now—we have to ride twenty-five miles to a ball organized for the regional Indians. We're to recruit "typage" for the episodes of savage passion in the maguey fields. We're getting ready "to drive ahead" so there will be little time to write. You, however, should write more often and just as thoroughly as you've been doing.

I am very dissatisfied with what you and Ida are doing.<sup>9</sup> One must apply pressure, pull strings, debase oneself, *be diplomatic, crafty, cunning, and again press*. The main thing is to *do*. To really get down to it. You have what it takes: real force. You have to drop the Oblomov act.<sup>10</sup> What do you mean by "I asked for a leave but didn't go to Leningrad"?<sup>11</sup> Maybe what you both need is to work in Leningrad? I don't know what is being done there now, but you should be on the lookout. You are at the point where your actual age begins to merge with the gallery of "characters" in your range. You remember, I often spoke to you about that, and you shouldn't waste this time for any reason. The same goes for Idka! What idiocy!

Thanks for "The Old Man in Felt Boots"<sup>12</sup>—it's very good, but it is only a *small, a very small* fraction of what it should be. Don't forget that all "prominent figures" are first and foremost great *businessmen*. Without enormous "organizational" preparation nothing ever gets anywhere or comes to anything: what Victor Hugo and Diego Rivera have in common is that both are great

7. After the departure from Moscow of the Eisenstein group, their revised film was released publicly under the title *Old and New* (November 7, 1929).

8. Grigori Alexandrov, collaborator on the Mexican film.

9. Strauch's actress wife, Judith Glizer. They lived in rooms adjoining Eisenstein's on Chisty Prudy Street.

10. The central character of Ivan Goncharov's novel, *Oblomov*, became a catchword for laziness, evasion, and lack of initiative.

11. In Leningrad, N. Loiter organized a new theater and invited Strauch and Glizer to join it.

12. Glizer had written and acted in a sketch performed at the Writers' Club—a monologue of a bearded old peasant.

fighters! That fact is at the *base* of all "genius." It's only in fairy tales that roast geese fly magically into your mouth . . . I can "see" you from here—there you are, gazing at the remarkable things Meyerhold is doing and . . . delighting in it all. You are gazing and thinking, this is quite sufficient! I think it's foolish of you not to have taken GIK's offer.<sup>13</sup> As for theory, of course nothing comes easy—the "mechanists" are going to make it very hard for us. We will have to be in total control of the method to be able to put it at the service of *practice*, our own practice—practical work is of the utmost consequence. Fifty percent of my reason for going to GIK was to be able to have it all down cold, "to show it." You seem to have plenty of leisure.

Well, it seems the whole thing is turning into a total checkmate. And the car is ready to go.

One more thing. *Learn to find a place where you can apply what it is you want to do.* Go to the club. Organize something for yourself and Idka. Find materials. Playing small roles, even with Meyerhold,<sup>14</sup> is *not* work.

Later in the day.

Having returned, I'll continue. We still didn't find the girl. We have the young man. The enclosed supplement No. 2 gives you an idea of the "fortress" we live in. Haciendas have their own style, more like fortified castles than estates. All around, as far as the eye can see—maguey. You'll get a photo of them.

In the center of the hacienda's ground plan you will notice a familiar word—a golden word . . . *Titina*.<sup>15</sup> One would like to have, inside these insurmountable walls, a "Pianola" with "Titina" sitting on top. We will protect her—preeminently from Eduard Kazimirovich [Tisse] in every spare moment from filming. Valeska. Valeska. Valeska . . .<sup>16</sup>

In any case, combining her with Mexico is amusing! I recently got a letter from her: ". . . Pudovkin was here, he took down your address and is planning to write . . ." (Evidently taking down my address is one of Lodik's [Pudovkin's] favorite pastimes!)

Now I'll wind up this excessively long letter.

(NB. A strict word-count has been kept, and I suggest that you respond with no fewer!)

I embrace you warmly.

Write.

Your Starik [Old Man].

13. Strauch was invited to teach at the State Cinema Institute.

14. In 1931 Strauch played small roles in two Meyerhold productions: Ilya Ehrenburg's *Trust D. E.* and Yuri Olesha's *List of Benefits*.

15. The heroine of Chaplin's song, sung to the Russian group in Hollywood, and later used in *Modern Times* (1936).

16. Valeska Gert, the German dancer and actress.

Give Judith my sincere blessings, my best wishes and greetings. The work here needs a few more months, after which I'll make my way back across Japan.

One way or another, till we meet again soon.

Hacienda Tetlapayac, Hidalgo, Mexico.

8-10 May 1931

Write to "Hotel Imperial," only *don't* send letters registered—they forward all ordinary mail.

[Strauch also quotes fragments of other letters from Mexico:]

. . . Very sorry that you're both enduring nonsense about the repertoire [at the Theater of Revolution?].

Apparently you'll have to wait for my return, as I am bringing a wonderful play about Hollywood<sup>17</sup> . . . There's a role for you—"a bullet"—as if it had been written especially for you . . . And for Idka two roles—for her choice.

. . . I want to stage the Hollywood play myself. Somewhere, where we can all work. Will this work out—I don't know. I want it for "old times' sake."

[this was signed]

With fatherly blessings

Sergo.

[17 September 1931]

Dear Makkushka!

I must say there isn't much point in proving to you that you are an intolerable creature. But you've already endured the punishment for silence. I am over my head in difficulties but at such times my writing becomes volcanic, and in the last two or three weeks you might have received a goodly share of model pastoral epistles and exhortations. Didn't I deliberately write you that I took for granted and deserved answers to the letters I had written you! Our difficulties are not altogether over, so you've managed to get the tail of the writing period. Now, point by point.

Of course the main thing is your work.

17. Eisenstein bought the Soviet rights to *Once in a Lifetime*, by George Kaufman and Moss Hart.

Your comment about Ilyusha<sup>18</sup> rather surprised me. It's true I've seen hardly anything—except for two reels of *Express*<sup>19</sup> (in Leningrad, rough cut), but it seemed to me that in the compositions, at least, he does satisfactory work. Moreover, everyone who has seen *Express* praised him highly. You'll see this more clearly, and I enclose a letter to him, which I hope will help you in what you should say to him. This is what should be done: you were an eyewitness to the way in which I "drove" the directors in the necessary direction in the case of *The Mexican* or *Tsar Hunger*.<sup>20</sup> You are now far more experienced than I was at that time. Again, it's a question of prestige. If you *take* Ilyusha in the right direction, you'll naturally be able to steer him as you should. He is painfully touchy. I forcefully knocked the last vestiges of his image of himself as a "leading" journalist out of him. I don't know what he's like now. But if you could, *without offending* him, prevail upon him, using "my example," that is, using my way of speaking, intonation, and so on (but for you, taking on my image would be easy!), you could shape him into obedience and submission, exploiting his conventional reflex to my "authority." Don't laugh, but take this *very* seriously and please "don't feel ashamed." Otherwise you're a fool and the work with the old man [Meyerhold] and me didn't teach you anything (besides a superficially critical attitude). Or else—as *I would like to believe*—you must now be very skilled as *few others are*. After all, you've also had a taste of bad directors, which, if one already has a foundation, is even more useful for self-development. (It's very likely that the business with Valkii [Smyshlayev] and Tikhonovich<sup>21</sup> gave me more than did the winter with the old man!) Again, there's your impudence, enough for anything—from getting into a theater without a ticket to smacking a fellow straight in the mug, even if that mug has "a museum significance"!

Therefore, of course, you have to take Ilyusha and his film secretly into your hands. One always has to go through this. As he doesn't have a little pointed beard, you will have to wear one for him. If you can't do it directly, or if Ilyusha has some sort of pathological fixation on some piece of junk (actor, situation, a section of the scenario) and it's impossible to *talk* him out of it—use irony. Your nature makes it very easy for you to produce the effect of a "frightening and mysterious man behind glasses." An unrelenting ironic stance is a powerful weapon, and it should work on Ilyusha whose self-confidence *I hope* isn't inborn

18. Ilya Trauberg, younger brother of Leonid Trauberg, completed his first film, *Blue Express* (December 1929), based on an idea by Sergei Tretyakov. The younger Trauberg had worked on the Leningrad scenes of *October*. Strauch was at the time playing the chief role of Franz in Trauberg's *Dlya vas naidyotsya rabota* (*Work Will be Found for You*). This film, completed in 1932, is the subject of Eisenstein's September letters to Strauch and Trauberg.

19. The American title of *Blue Express* was *China Express*.

20. Two plays designed by Eisenstein, Jack London's *The Mexican* at Proletcult, and Andreyev's *Tsar Hunger* at the Foregger Workshop.

21. V. Smyshlayev and V. Tikhonovich were directors at Proletcult. Eisenstein studied and worked with Meyerhold through the winter of 1921-22.

(or he would be "a bride in whom one can already see a sad widow"—that is, a goner). Generally, this "mask" is one that requires the least fuss and works very successfully. Only *please*, open up and get out of this thick apathy of loose, vacillating bodies of people who understand *so little!* *You must.* Seriously, I am strongly hindered, but because of all the difficulties, the work drags on. I think it's good merchandise. The photography, shot by shot, is great. What it will be as a whole—we'll see. It is well planned and conceived. I hope I have the guts to finish it.

All that you write pro the old man surprises me a bit. I wouldn't expect it of you. I warned you about the "theater of the actor," a position directly opposed to mine when we were still in Proletcult. Meyerhold *never* put together a "whole" production, remember how his "Cuckold"<sup>22</sup> was totally unbearable from the audience's viewpoint—a series of tricks, acted set pieces. I explained the illusions to you—that for him it is enough *to follow* the actor in performance and that it is totally irrelevant whether or not the performer does what should be done. I was *attracted* to that because it is the only way to master the actor's working method, not applying it empirically as the old man does, but systematically, and in an informed way, as method of expression, as I tried and am still trying to do. The moment I realized these principles I characteristically grew fed up with "acting" and transferred to the nonacted cinema. (In "weak" moments I feel a regressive tendency toward actor, theater, and so on, sometimes even now!)

The issue of "unity and wholeness" is not a question of the Moscow Art Theater, but one of dialectics. Funnily enough, there was a rumor here that the old man had died (later we learned that the rumor was Ehrenburg's!) and I drafted an obituary (don't tell him—he would die of suspicion alone!!). Putting together sensibly what I know of Meyerhold, I came to the conviction that he is a very curious "nondialectic" type and the epitome of "dualism" (for theater, there is a domain of psychology). That being so, the dualist, going to the extreme, slides into a monistic dialectic . . . but does not take the leap. Between Meyerhold (in his development, concepts, interpretations, and even in his personal relations) and the dialectical process there is that perceptible difference which exists between "a unity of opposites" and "contrast"; in practice this means a gulf. Contrast is a surrogate "unity of opposites" for "the poor." Just as there is dualism, there is also a simple mechanical understanding of the monism of dual polarities. (It's characteristic that Greek philosophers, though idealists, were still dialecticians, and it was the Romans, the Yankees of antiquity, who "simplified" the dialectic concept into a static one, from which pairs of opposites evolved *outside* a unity!) This analysis of the old man will probably go into my book (if such a book is to be!) as an example of dialectics remaining "on the very periphery," cringing from a real dialectic principle. It is curious in every way: from Meyerhold as a whole to

22. Meyerhold's production of Crommelynck's *Le Cocu Magnifique* was staged in 1922.

the most trivial detail of his work—we find one single principle: the absence of a conceptual “unity,” an absolutely inevitable symptom of everything he does.

What do you think of this? Perhaps it hasn't been put clearly or strongly enough (that is, beyond demonstration). Although you know him well enough to be able to smell the truth of what I write about him . . .

[Strauch here deletes a passage critical of Meyerhold, and quotes from an undated “next letter”: “Go and see the ‘old man’s’ work more often. He’ll die and you won’t find anything like it anywhere. Give him my greetings and tell him that I love him.”]

I am sending you a group photo with the Spanish ambassador and the Foreign Minister, Senor Xenaro Estrada, because he absolutely duplicates your make-up in “Lena”<sup>23</sup> (the picture on the postcard is of the annual Spanish fiesta “Covedonga” here). The Spanish Republic hasn't reached the point of “red carnations”; little berries and apples arrive from time to time. But the ambassador<sup>24</sup> is an old acquaintance—he once interviewed me on Chisty Prudy for his book and for the Spanish-American newspaper! From the moment of our mutual recognition he will be an ambassador for us!

Well, I should finish this and write Ilyusha [Trauberg] a letter to place in your envelope. You can give it to him sealed or unsealed, but you *must* read it (the way in which it's forwarded to him depends on the degree, temporary or continuous, of warmth and intimacy in your relations with him). In general he is not Room;<sup>25</sup> one really has to influence him (in moderation) and with a maximum of real collaboration. Don't misunderstand me; he is not only good, but I think he will be worthwhile. And it is worth being persistent.

Give my heartfelt greeting to “the old man” and to Zizi.<sup>26</sup> Also my regrets that we will be in different cities this winter (which applies to you too! . . .).

When you write, give my regards to the household and pray for me, just to make sure we didn't “pray badly!” Sometimes I am truly reminded of the Mugan steppe<sup>27</sup> (it's true that the proletariat there doesn't feed on bananas, which, served with cream, sounds like a delicacy!).

I embrace you.

Your Old Man.

23. *Lena* [Goldfields], a play by Valerian Pletnyov, was produced by Eisenstein for Proletcult in 1921.

24. Julio Alvarez del Vavo, author of *La Nueva Rusia* (1926).

25. Abram Room, for whom Strauch played in Barbusse's *Ghost that Will not Return* (1930).

26. Zinaida Reich, Meyerhold's wife and actress in his theater.

27. Location for part of the filming of *Old and New*.

[Enclosure to Ilya Trauberg]

Dear Ilyusha!

This letter will fall short of the usual outpourings of tenderness, not for want of them (that's quite unthinkable!), but because this is a business letter, to be sent through Maxim Maximovich, who is indiscreet and capable of examining it. This letter attempts to address in full another of his indiscretions, namely, that he has talked against you, as does not befit the relation of a disciplined actor to his director. But that is very superfluous evidence of the actual reason for the slander, namely, that the director is not *on the highest level*. Without giving concrete instances, M. M. expresses his imperfect satisfaction with what you are doing. No factual evidence is available to me, but my work with M. M. over a period of many years convinces me that his purpose is reasonable, and that I would probably agree. He is a very thoughtful man, who has passed through the hands of good, capable directors and wallowed a little with bad ones, which can, I think, be useful for self-development. For it forces one not only to develop a critical resistance, but to work out as well (from inside) "one's own variant"—in reply to the director's mistaken ideas. I began my work as a designer with directors of just this sort, and it brought me considerably more than my winter with Meyerhold, where I found myself in conditions (apart from the obligations of discipline) of sincere prostration before perfect mastery. I was very glad to hear from Pera [Atasheva] (and why not from you!) that M. M. was going to work with you. He can be of enormous use to you. It is true that he is very modest and has a rather contemplative disposition. To be able to use him you have to tug him completely in your direction. While he was my assistant,<sup>28</sup> I was indebted to him for many valuable suggestions, much advice, and personal initiative. It is my belief that advice (highly qualified advice) can't harm anyone, and if you still have my senile, decrepit admonitions in mind, then you will recall how I always listen attentively, and if the analysis does not reveal too much of a personal bias, then I can really exploit it. There should be no question of "personal conflict" in your work together; it's a family affair. After all, you are both from my own spacious nest. My only concern is that you should both enjoy a maximum of fruitfulness and success in your work. In all work there is a moment of "check"; you've let yourself slip, and then suddenly something stops and one's forced to put *oneself* "under suspicion" (as Meyerhold said: true in relation to . . . others!). To sniff out falseness, the possibility of evasion, an insufficient rigor in one's own work, a break in the idea, and so on. It often takes place at the screening of a large quantity of rushes, unseen for a long while. And this happens to be of quite vital usefulness (after, perhaps, two-three days of hysterics, and that, too, is hygienic, not

28. Strauch worked as assistant director on *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), *October* (1927), and *Old and New* (1929).

dangerous!). I don't know how it is with you, but it happens to me regularly, always. No matter if this letter appears to be a "check" on self-analysis. Without recalling this to Fridke,<sup>29</sup> you may remember how useful my "check" turned out to be for *Oblomok*<sup>30</sup>—after it, [Ermler] discarded everything he had shot for the beginning and reshot the whole beginning, finding in himself everything that was needed. I am quite sure that your case is not so serious—the success of "Express," which I haven't seen, confirms it. But after every regular period of work, it is not a bad thing to turn and take a look at "what you were, and what you have become, and what you now have." (I know this for myself and from experience.) Maxim will certainly be very useful to you in this because he has a wonderfully true eye and an interest in directing (that means an interest wider than the limits of his role). He has always had it, as long as we've worked together in theater and cinema.

Naturally, it would be nice if you wrote me about what you are doing. Though I'm old, decrepit, and worn out by life, I might still be of some use to you. Of course it may be that you are now such a fire chief on the film front that the senile voice of "bygone falcons" is not for you . . .

Anyway—why the devil don't you ever write?

If this is your silent little answer to the last letter I sent you from Hollywood, then it's no use: your letter arrived there with its materialized *fantastika* right in the midst of thunderclaps of an approaching break-up, and the storm in the Paramount swamp washed over the letter's suppositions—and I made straight for the Mexican shore.<sup>31</sup> I hope that you will never—either now or in the future—have to go through the peripeteia we've experienced these last years, be it in Europe, the States, or Mexico. Though it's all marvelous and fascinating, looking back on what has happened, I sometimes ask myself: where did I get the nerves to endure all this!? It has not been without roses (there were quite a few!), but there also have been enough fangs!

Right now I feel a wild impulse to return, but all sorts of difficulties are prolonging our stay. There seems to be no single article or situation in international film affairs that I haven't taken on—you know that for me knowledge is the sweetest fruit!

Answer this—let's set up an epistolary exchange in anticipation of those happy days when I shall once again be able to embrace you.

Your Old Man

Mexico DF, 17 September 1931

Address: c/o American Embassy.

S. M. Eisenstein, Mexico, DF.

29. Friedrich Ermler.

30. *Oblomok imperii*, Ermler's film of 1929, shown in the U.S. as *Fragment of an Empire*.

31. Ilya Trauberg's letter to Eisenstein reached him in Hollywood in the midst of the Paramount crisis and his departure for Mexico.

## Bayreuth: The Centennial *Ring*

ANNETTE MICHELSON

In August 1876, Marx, together with his daughter Eleanor, set out from London for Carlsbad, where he planned, as in his visit of the year before, to take the waters. He found, to his discomfort and annoyance, the region from Nuremberg through Weiden, Neukirchen, Irrelöhe, and all the way to Carlsbad, overrun by tourists. The ruling class of Europe and the East were converging upon Bayreuth for the first complete performance of the *Ring* cycle, which was to inaugurate the Festspielhaus and the "Fool's Festival."<sup>1</sup> Marx, in correspondence, declared his scorn for the enterprise, complaining, moreover, that the single focus of attention and conversation in Carlsbad that season was Wagner and his domestic affairs.

With the passing of a century and the momentous production of the *Ring* commissioned from Boulez and Chéreau in celebration of Bayreuth's centenary, a wheel has come full circle. It is the completion of this centennial project upon five years of presentation (1976-1980) that we wish to mark by publication of two texts: Jean-Jacques Nattiez's analysis of that production and a conversation between Boulez and Michel Fano held during the third season of presentation. It is our view that this production of the *Ring* will stand as more than a chapter in the history of Bayreuth or, more generally, of performance; it is our conviction that it

1. This account is drawn from Yvonne Kapp, *Eleanor Marx*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1976, vol. 1, pp. 173-74. It is confirmed by the account of Eleanor Marx's young acquaintance, George Bernard Shaw: "When the Bayreuth Festival Playhouse was at last completed, and opened in 1876 with the first performance of *The Ring*, European society was compelled to admit that Wagner was 'a success.' Royal personages, detesting his music, sat out the performances in the row of boxes set apart for princes. . . . His own account of it contrasts the reality with his intentions in a view which would be bitter if it were not so humorous. The precautions taken to keep the seats out of the hands of the frivolous public and in the hands of earnest disciples, banded together in little Wagner Societies throughout Europe, had ended in their forestalling by ticket speculators and their sale to just the sort of idle globe-trotting tourists against whom the temple was to have been strictly closed. The money, supposed to be contributed by the faithful, was begged by energetic subscription-hunting ladies from people who must have had the most grotesque misconceptions of the composer's aims; among others, the Khedive of Egypt and the Sultan of Turkey!" (*The Perfect Wagnerite: A Commentary on the Nibelung's Ring*, New York, Dover Publications, 1967, p. 127).

constitutes a major stage in the renewal of performance as textual production within our culture.

If we are to understand the meaning of this intervention, we must nevertheless begin by situating it within the evolution of Bayreuth performance as a whole, and most particularly in relation to the revision of Wagnerian scenography proposed in the postwar period by Wieland Wagner. That work appears in retrospect as one of closure, marking the definitive implementation of the nineteenth century's most ardent and compelling view of the Wagnerian project, that of Baudelaire. Consider the following fragment from the celebrated account of his experience of *Tannhäuser*:

I recall that from the first measures on I was subject to one of those felicitous impressions, known to almost anyone of an imaginative bent, in dreams, while asleep. I felt released from *the constraints of gravity*, and I recaptured in memory *the rare delight* which circulates in high places. . . .

I then spontaneously began to evoke the delectable state of one deep in reverie, in total solitude, but a solitude of *vast horizons* and *bathed in a diffused light*. I soon became aware of *a keener gleam, a luminous intensity so rapid in its growth* that the dictionary's shades of meaning would not suffice to express this *steady intensification of burning brilliance*. It was then that I fully apprehended the idea of a soul afloat within a luminous field, of an ecstasy *compounded of insight and delight*, hovering above and far removed from the natural world.

One might easily discern the differences amongst these three interpretations. Wagner speaks of *a choir of angels bearing a sacred chalice*; Liszt sees *an edifice of miraculous beauty*, mirrored in a shimmering haze. My own dream boasts few material objects; it is vaguer and more abstract, but the main thing in this question is to concentrate on the similarities. . . . We find in all three versions the sense of spiritual and physical bliss, of isolation; of the contemplation of something infinitely great and infinitely beautiful; of a light whose intensity rejoices the eye and soul to the point of swooning; and, finally, the sensation of space stretched to the furthest conceivable limits.<sup>2</sup>

Wieland Wagner, literally sweeping the stage of the debris of nineteenth-century scenography, shaped the Wagnerian performance as a deliberate, ritualized progress across the naked "disc of the world," enveloping the still, sparse, symbolic groupings of his design with perpetually shifting modulations of light.

2. Charles Baudelaire, "Richard Wagner et Tannhäuser," *Oeuvres Complètes*, Paris, Editions Gallimard, Pléiade, 1961, pp. 1213-14.

In so doing, he installed the spatiality of abstraction, its horizon of immensity, its infinite extension of optical depth, thereby confirming and intensifying Wagner's spectacle as apparitional in character.<sup>3</sup>

Baudelaire, pursuing the account of his experience, had said,

No musician excels, as Wagner does, in the depiction of space and depth, material and spiritual. . . . He has the art of rendering through subtle gradations all that is excessive, immense, ambitious in the natural and spiritual man. The sound of this ardent and despotic music sometimes seems to recapture for the listener, against the ground of shadow torn assunder by revery, the dizzying imaginings of opium.<sup>4</sup>

And it was, in fact, the radical simplification of Wieland Wagner, with its amplification of scale, which redefined the depth of theatrical and acoustical space and the span and spectrum of diffused light as the axes of Wagnerian scenography. To this revision he also brought the inclination to symmetry, its consequent formalization of composition, and a direction of actors such that "the actor does not play the action (designated by the libretto), but in the action."<sup>5</sup> One example among many (and it is taken from his staging of *Tannhäuser*) is Wolfram's delivery of "*Blick ich umher*," with his hands resting immobile on the strings of his harp, so that

the spectator-listener cannot associate the actor's position with the performance of a gesture whose material result he would perceive in listening to the orchestra and which would be dictated only by the context of the anecdote, the result being that he automatically attributes to this position of the body an expressive value which reveals not the external behavior of the character in this scene, but his inner feeling within the dramatic situation.<sup>6</sup>

The consequence, both immediate and far-reaching, of this essentializing process and its abstractive techniques was, quite naturally, the de-temporalization of the spectacle, or rather the reenforcement of the apparitional as atemporal. This is the ground of that quality which Adorno defines as the Wagnerian "phantasmagoria," through which time, as "the decisive factor of production," is nullified in a transparency of acoustical theatrical representation which generates the "illusion of eternity."<sup>7</sup> And it is the texture, dynamics, timbre, *depth* of Wagner's orchestra-

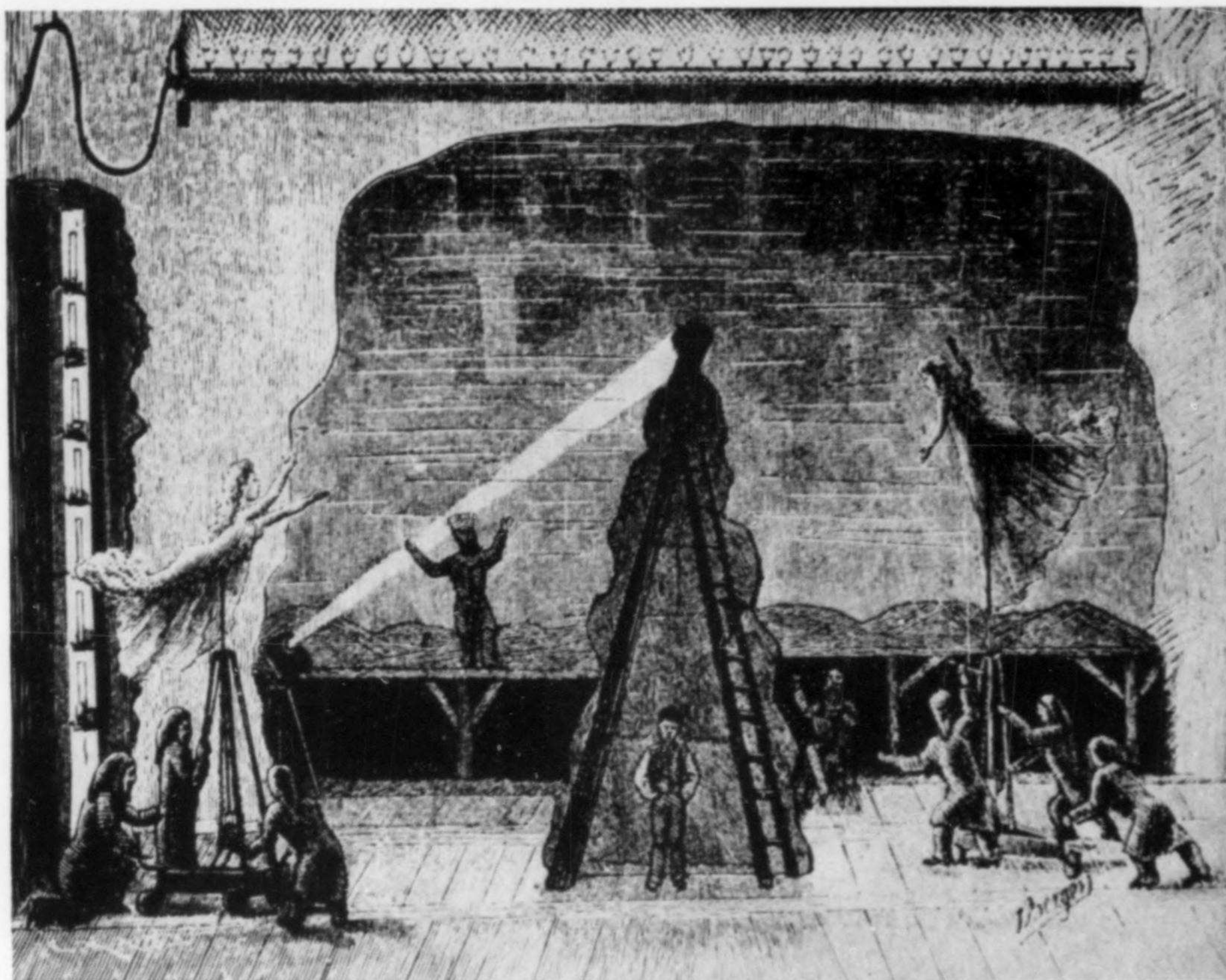
3. My sense of Wieland Wagner's work, unlike that of Chéreau's, derives not from personal experience, but from the abundant literature and photographic documentation available, among which I would cite Claude Lust, *Wieland Wagner et la survie du théâtre lyrique*, Lausanne, Editions de l'Age d'Homme, 1969.

4. Baudelaire, p. 1214.

5. Lust, p. 88.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 87-88.

7. Theodor W. Adorno, *Essai sur Wagner*, trans. Hans Hildenbrand and Alex Lindenberg, Paris, Editions Gallimard, 1976, p. 117.

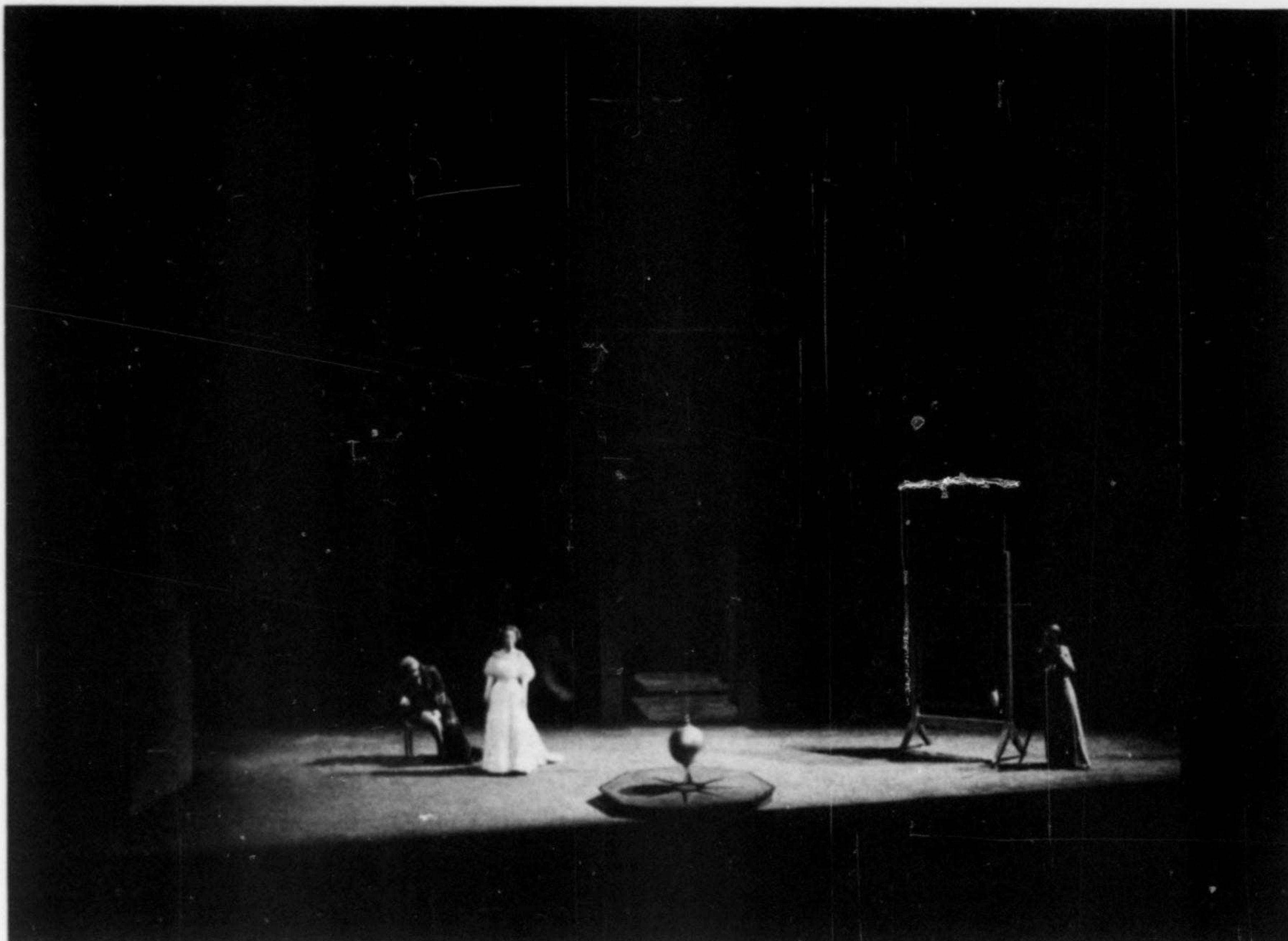


*Nineteenth-century stage machinery for the Rhine maidens in Das Rheingold, Scene I.*

tion which Adorno, in an especially interesting passage, analyzes as the medium of the phantasmagorical effect, first celebrated by Baudelaire, later to be realized by Wieland Wagner. Most succinctly expressed by Adorno, quoting Paul Bekker, this is "the illusion of the absolute reality of the unreal."<sup>8</sup>

The history of Bayreuth's scenography, then, may be schematically described or plotted as follows: the long struggles to implement phantasmagoria through the unwieldy theatrical mechanics of nineteenth-century realism; a decade's consummation of the phantasmagorical mode of representation in the work of Wieland Wagner; and the restitution, through the free play of concrete and contradictory, articulate detail, of temporality and history in a reading that is allegorical. The machinery which transported the Rhine maidens in their fearsome "maiden" plunge of 1876 has been left in the cellar where it has laid for over forty years; but Chéreau's dragon (the work of Richard Peduzzi, his exceptionally fine designer), mounted on wheels and whipped about the stage by black-robed attendants, marked the unmasking and acknowledgment of the means of production of a stage spectacle in time, a spectacle of production in history.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 120.



Patrice Chéreau (director), Richard Peduzzi (set designer), Jacques Schmidt (costume designer). *Die Walküre*, Act II. Bayreuth, 1978. (Photo: Siegfried Lauterwasser.)

It was Chéreau's constant insistence on both the concrete materiality of the dramatic action and its means of production which, joined with Boulez's characteristically admirable clarity of reading, set this production apart. Restoring the *Ring's* temporality, Chéreau went even further; in the second act of *Die Walküre* he installed at the center of the action the incessant revolution of the pendulum which marks a time, an order, over and against the temporal structure of the score itself. It is here, in the tension between the two temporalities, that we find the locus of the deep and seminal complicity of Boulez and Chéreau in the textual production of this *Ring*.

It is that tension, consistently maintained throughout the work's four sections, extended in the succession of disjunctions, gaps, breaks, clashes, encroachments, overlaps, enjambments, dissonances, paradoxes through which the relation of musical to dramatic structure, of drama to myth, is articulated—all of this composing a text that is at every point polysemantic. It is through that succession that the Wagnerian project is presented as issuing from a framework of contradiction whose organic form is that of allegory, rigorous in its abundance of concrete narrative detail and purposeful anachronism.

It is known that Chéreau dismisses any view of this work as implementing the Shavian reading of the *Ring*. His rejection of the notion of Siegfried as Bakounin is, however, quite beside the point, for Shaw's argument is other, elsewhere. Like Chéreau, Shaw, writing a quarter century after Baudelaire, spoke for the Wagnerian project as allegory, and proposed nowhere more sharply and powerfully than in his description of the third scene of *Das Rheingold* the juncture of myth and social process as its site:

This gloomy place need not be a mine: it might just as well be a match-factory, with yellow phosphorous, phossy jaw, a large dividend, and plenty of clergymen shareholders. . . . In the mine, which resounds with the clinking anvils of the dwarfs toiling miserably to heap up treasure for the master, Alberic has set his brother Mime . . . to make him a helmet. Mimmy dimly sees that there is some magic in this helmet, and tries to keep it; but Alberic wrests it from him, and shows him, to his cost, that it is the veil of the invisible whip, and that he who wears it can appear in what shape he will, or disappear from view altogether. This helmet is a very common article in our streets, where it generally takes the form of a tall hat. It makes a man invisible as a shareholder, and changes him into various shapes, such as a pious Christian, a subscriber to hospitals, a benefactor of the poor, a model husband and father, a shrewd, practical, independent Englishman, and what not, when he is really a pitiful parasite on the commonwealth, consuming a great deal, and producing nothing, feeling nothing, knowing nothing, believing nothing, and doing nothing except what all the rest do, and that only because he is afraid not to do it, or at least pretend to do it.<sup>9</sup>

It is this sighting of the present within the mythic, this identification of the "picture of Niblunghome under the reign of Alberic [as] a poetic vision of unregulated industrial capitalism as it was made known in Germany in the middle of the nineteenth century by Engels' *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*," which is neither trivial nor irrelevant to the critique of the spectacle of phantasmagoria. Like Shaw, Chéreau, together with Boulez, might say, "They frantically deny these facts, and then declare that I have connected them with Wagner in a paroxysm of senseless perversity."<sup>10</sup>

9. Shaw, pp. 17-18.

10. *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

## Chéreau's Treachery

JEAN-JACQUES NATTIEZ

translated by THOMAS REPENSEK

*Wagner is not only a musician; and he certainly didn't want only to be a musician. He was born into the theater. He was perhaps inspired more by the spirit of the stage than the spirit of music.*

—André Suarès

### *Permanent Disgrace*

In the program for the 1977 Bayreuth Festival superb photographs of the '76 *Ring* were published alongside quotations which testified to the hostility that Bayreuth productions have provoked over the last 100 years: "... the German people have nothing in common with this disgraceful incompetence ..." (1876); "Another kind of centenary—100 years of Bayreuth under attack" (1976). In his brief introductory text, Wolfgang Wagner wrote, "The arguments have scarcely changed over the years, except perhaps for an increase in threats of violence (murder, arson)—which a contemporary German sociologist would undoubtedly be able to explain."

Three recurrent themes emerge from this narrative:

a) *Nationalism* (including xenophobia and racism): "the internationalization of Bayreuth—for which Cosima is responsible, for she is 100 percent French— involves great risk. . . . Since 1888 foreigners have had the upper hand at Bayreuth, while Germans are treated as if they were foreign" (1896). "Responsibility rests with the German people to safeguard their most precious assets" (1925). (Concerning Grace Bumbry in the role of Venus): "Of course it's not racial prejudice! Yet may I say that you have been extremely careless of those who love Wagner and, moreover, shown extraordinary bad taste by allowing a black singer to appear beneath 'these sacred vaults' and, what's more, on a German opera stage" (1961).

"After seeing the Tetralogy at Bayreuth in 1976, I began to feel once more my old hatred for France and the French in general" (1976).

b) *Essentialism* (the spiritual nature of the *Ring* cannot be changed): (regarding Wieland's 1952 production of the *Ring*): "How can this incoherent 'modernism' ever harmonize with the universality, the eternally human inspiration of Wagner's dramatic conception?" (1953). "We need a new Wieland to clear away all this confusion and lead us back to the enduring values of the Tetralogy" (1976).

c) *Respect for the composer's intentions* (here there are many examples to choose among): (concerning the use of projections in *Parsifal*): "If the inheritors of the Bayreuth legacy did not respect their master's memory enough to respect his will, then they should at least have had the common sense to recall that Wagner's musical drama, being essentially romantic, can only be staged as a romantic vision" (1925). "The scenic directions at the beginning of the first act of *Die Walküre* are, like the notes of the score and the words of the libretto, eternally valid" (1928). "This production of the Tetralogy is a milestone of shame in festival history. . . . Wagner clearly intended his works to be performed in realistic settings . . ." (1933). "Shouldn't Bayreuth's highest law be faithful conformity to Wagner's will?" (1935). "Should we maintain tradition, that is, Wagner's intentions, the detailed exposition of his scores and theoretical writings, or should we adopt new methods perhaps more in harmony with contemporary thought?" (1925).

The nationalist reactions reflect how deeply the Boulez-Chéreau combination disturbed some people. But we are more interested in the other two questions: Does the *Ring* have an essence? Should the director respect the composer's intentions? They raise aesthetic, scenographic, and hermeneutic issues which, when stripped of all emotion, merit serious consideration.

First, we should ask why it is always *fidelity* to Wagner's intentions that is at issue. What is the status of opera?<sup>1</sup> Obviously, an opera is the combination of a verbal text, a musical text, and dramatic action, but it can truly be said to exist only in performance. The only evidence we have of Wagner's intentions is the score (a book), in which his stage directions function less as categorical imperatives than descriptive supplements to the libretto's lack of visual illustrations.<sup>2</sup> On

1. What follows is the application of semiological analysis to the problem of opera. The reader who shares our intellectual orientation will easily discern, even as with Wagner, Chéreau, the observer at Bayreuth, the author of this article, and his reader, the three dimensions of the semiological model: the poetic, the neutral (or the material), and the aesthetic.

2. Wieland Wagner: "Wagner's stage directions are nothing more than amplifications of his scenic visions intended for those unable to read the score" (Wieland Wagner, "Richard Wagner: un éternel scandale," interview with W. Panofsky, *Musique en Jeu*, 22, p. 95). Claude Lust: "Who does not think that the stage directions found in the score are clarifications intended for the *reader*, that they have only referential value for the stage director, and that, consequently, they should be freely interpreted?" (Claude Lust, *Wieland Wagner*, Lausanne, La Cité, p. 82).

the basis of this evidence, how is the stage director to proceed? He must literally *bring the work into being*, but with a dual constraint: the impossibility of recapturing the aesthetic of an era twenty, thirty, or a hundred years past,<sup>3</sup> and the necessity of *assigning* to the work *a meaning* that the spectator will understand. Scenic interpretation is always exegetical.<sup>4</sup> The stage director can choose decor, costume, movement, pose, and gesture for the principals and chorus; but where is meaning to be found?

This is the problem. Wagner's evidence—the poem and the score—is not in itself proof of his intentions. A symbolic object—a sentence, a work—acquires meaning only through the situation of its creation and its reception, which, especially for works of art, are not necessarily the same.<sup>5</sup> This explains why the meaning Wagner intended for the *Ring* is not immediately apparent from his text, but must be reconstituted through documents external to it: a theoretical article, a letter, hearsay, not to mention the intellectual climate of the age. Fixed in the flatness of a sheet of paper, and accessible in a brief period of time, the score is the result of a complex *creative history* which, in the case before us, extends over many years (1848–1874).

For today's reader and particularly the stage director, the story of the *Ring* is the one he reads in the libretto score, introducing into his interpretation (exegesis) what he knows of the political, social, aesthetic, ideological, and theoretical context in which Wagner created his work. Moreover, the realization of the work, the life it takes on when it is brought to the stage, is not the work of an individual existing outside of time, but a man with his own history, idiosyncrasies, and imagination. The result—the performance—is in turn interpreted by the audience—including the author of this article—who have (or do not have) their own view of the work, their own understanding of Wagner, their own previous exposure to Chéreau and Boulez. Is it necessary to add that the reader of this article also draws upon a similar reserve of knowledge and experience which causes him to interpret and evaluate our commentary in a particular way?

In short, the perception of the staging of an opera, and necessarily of a work as complex as the *Ring*, releases a continuous *hermeneutic shock*, an *interpretive blow*. The work interpreted on stage today is the result of a *tension* between the

3. "The argument which proposes that Wagner as stage director was a 'prisoner of the style of his time' is obviously justified and is not meant to slight Wagner's theatrical sense. It is taken for granted, however, that for theater to be of its time its style must be contemporary" (Wieland Wagner, p. 95).

4. Musical interpretation also evolves but is less clearly documented: we have no recordings of Wagner before 1904, and the condition of those we have leaves much to be desired. When we listen to an interpretation by Boulez we cannot recall all past performances of the *Ring*. But decor is another matter. We have only to leaf through one of the festival's commemorative catalogues or visit the basement of the two-year-old Wagner museum in Wahnfried, where maquettes of productions from the very beginning are on display, to grasp in a few minutes the plastic evolution of Wagner's stage.

5. Concerning this question and related issues, see J.-J. Nattiez, *Fondements d'une sémiologie de la musique*, Paris, UGE., 1975, p. 191.

imagination of the *reconstituted* creator, the deceptive evidence of a literary/musical text bearing within itself a range of possible scenic forms, and the exegesis of a director and conductor. "It is," writes Boulez, "a continuous past-future exchange which floods the work and ourselves as well."<sup>6</sup>

In the pages that follow I will attempt to clarify—with all the subjectivity inherent in an all-inclusive interpretive enterprise—these different *superimposed*, often *combined*, and *discontinuous* levels of meaning.<sup>7</sup>

### *Chéreau's Interpretation*

For Chéreau, the central figure of the Tetralogy is not Siegfried but Wotan. Siegfried is free, but his is the useless freedom of unconsciousness.<sup>8</sup> Wotan needs the blind liberty of "an ignorant *man of action*, in order to retain power."<sup>9</sup> "The 'Schmiedelied' is a crucial moment: Siegfried himself fails to understand why he forges the sword. . . . It must be forged to accomplish Wotan's plan. It is liberty in constraint, the unforeseeable foreseen, an instructive act that is sidetracked, made part of a plan."<sup>10</sup> To clarify his interpretation, Chéreau doesn't hesitate to interpolate an appearance by Wotan: he draws a curtain to reveal the forge that will enable the hero to fashion Nothung. Siegfried only vaguely understands what it is: "He knows *intuitively* there is something he does not have: if he never doubts (fears), he will never be truly human."<sup>11</sup> Wotan is, therefore, the motive of the action. Unlike Siegfried, Siegmund is consciously free, and this is why Wotan must destroy him.<sup>12</sup> "This 'conception' of Siegfried generates a 'conception' of the entire *Ring* for me."<sup>13</sup> Chéreau's Tetralogy is a play on power. "The primary discourse of the *Ring*, its obvious message, is not the birth of this free man . . . but Wagner's astonishing vision of power, political power, society, and the modern

6. Pierre Boulez, Patrice Chéreau, "Commentaires sur 'Mythologie et idéologie,'" *Bayreuther Programmhefte 1977, VI-Siegfried*, p. 14. These commentaries were published in relation to the following interview: Pierre Boulez, Patrice Chéreau, "Mythologie et idéologie," échange de vues sur la mise en scène de la *Tétralogie* en 1976 avec Carlo Schmid, *Bayreuther Programmhefte 1977, IV-Das Rheingold*, p. 1-23 and 104-110. I will quote extensively throughout this article from both, and will henceforth refer to them as Commentary and Interview, respectively.

7. Recognition is due to Patrick Beck, Jean-Pierre Dauphin, and Jacques Pecheur, who, in the course of a friendship formed during theater intermissions and dinners afterward, helped the author to clarify his initial ideas.

8. Interview, p. 3.

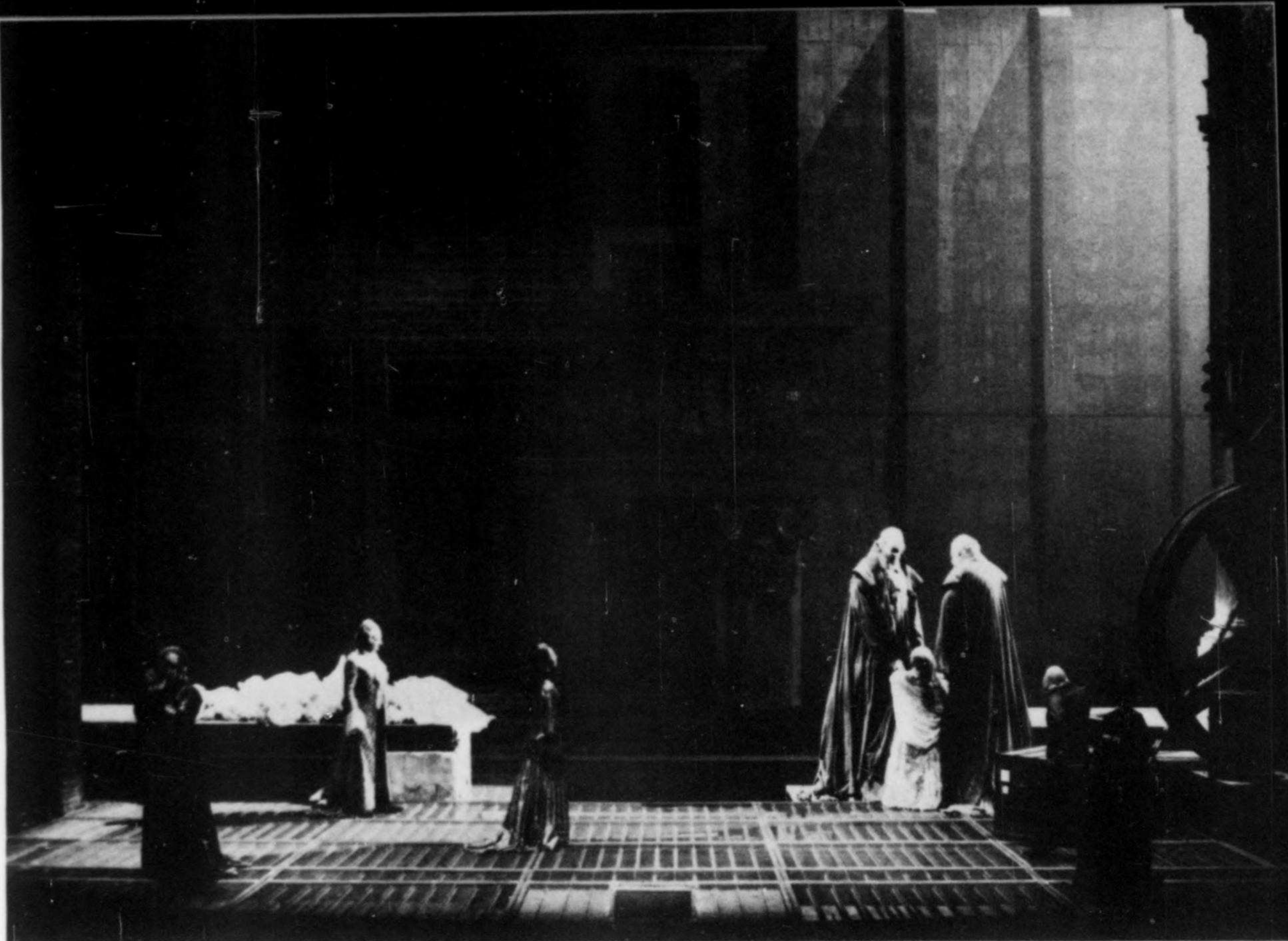
9. Commentary, p. 18.

10. Interview, p. 21.

11. Commentary, p. 19.

12. Interview, p. 4. In another interview Chéreau indicated that he was impressed by the following statement by Ernest Bloch: "There was a hero who was free, and that was Siegmund, but Wotan could not tolerate it." (Numa Sadoul, *Bayreuth, Richard Wagner, Centenaire du Ring*, notes and interviews with P. Chéreau, R. Peduzzi, J. Schmidt, P. Boulez, Paris, revue Opéra, 1977, p. 94).

13. Commentary, p. 19.



*Das Rheingold, Scene IV. (All photos illustrating this essay, unless otherwise noted, are from the 1978 presentation of the centenary Ring at Bayreuth, Patrice Chéreau, director; Richard Peduzzi, set designer; Jacques Schmidt, costume designer. Photographs by Siegfried Lauterwasser, courtesy Festspielleitung Bayreuth.)*

State. The *Ring* is perhaps like a premonition, a description of the mechanisms of power—how it is seized, how it is lost—of the terrible perversion of societies based upon the preservation of power, of the mechanisms of the powerful State and its oppositions, of ‘that State born always in half-light’ (A. Glucksmann), which orders from the beginning its own apocalypse, since its exclusive concern quickly becomes the maintenance of its power.”<sup>14</sup> This quote from Glucksmann, who used a photograph of Chéreau’s staging of *Götterdämmerung* for the cover of his *Master Thinkers*, situates Chéreau’s thought within the context of a certain contemporary philosophical debate. . . . Chéreau fills his stage with symbols of degraded power. First, magnificent Valhalla: in the ’77 version it is an immense tower whose base and summit cannot be seen: “Valhalla should be represented so that its form remains undefined, while conveying the idea of the materialization of power, of its ideology. . . . It is important that the spectator never be far enough away to see it entirely. It should be, in a sense, limitlessly large; larger than the eye can see.”<sup>15</sup> Chéreau begins the twilight of the gods in *Das Rheingold*: his Valhalla

14. Commentary, p. 94.

15. Interview, pp. 14-15.



Das Rheingold, Scene I. (Photo: Wilhelm Rauh, 1980.)

is already *vanquished*; to conceal Freia the giants pile gold between poles like those used by Venetian gondoliers, suggesting the sudden disappearance to come. The gods no longer ascend but descend to reach this Valhalla; and Wotan, in a scene Chéreau compares to the medieval dance of death, leads the other gods to a place they already no longer believe in. Throughout, Wotan faces the gradual collapse of his illusions.

Yet as the gods are destroyed—every production of the *Ring* has always more or less represented this—humanity slowly emerges. Never has this been better realized; it has often been entirely ignored by directors who conceive of *Götterdämmerung* as the end of the world.<sup>16</sup> For Chéreau, humanity begins to live when Siegmund meets Sieglinde. And what a meeting it is! We *feel* the jubilant presence of their bodies, the attraction of two beings able to release their sensuality. The conclusion of the first act of this *Die Walküre* is unforgettable. The looming forest literally shatters Hunding's house and moves five meters across the stage. Siegmund throws himself on Sieglinde, consummating the act of love, and a splendid velvet curtain falls over them.

Siegfried, however, becomes the failed attempt of a new race: after his death, he is abandoned like a useless scrap. And at the very end, when Brünnhilde has thrown herself onto the funeral pyre, the chorus turns to the audience: we are there, the future is in our hands without our knowing what it holds. This *hominization*<sup>17</sup> parallels the disintegration of Nature: from the first scene of *Rheingold* the river is blocked by a dam. And when Siegfried forges his sword, two wheels, one of which is toothed, emerged from the wings, suggesting the advent of the industrial age. In the first scene of *Götterdämmerung*, the Rhine, utterly destroyed, disappears, and the water wheel no longer turns. Humanity is heir to an uncertain future in a world it has transformed.

#### *Staging Versus Music*

The '76 *Ring* gave rise to a number of satires, often published at the author's expense, including one by Professor Faerber of Berlin, spokesman for an Association to Safeguard the Work of Richard Wagner.<sup>18</sup> "An excellent, or rather

16. It has been said that Wieland Wagner's conception of the *Ring* was influenced by the dropping of the bomb on Hiroshima.

17. The anthropological term is borrowed from Jacques Gomila, "Richard Wagner: grand intellectuel on intellectuel organique de la bourgeoisie pangermanique?" *Musique en Jeu*, 31 (May 1978), 58-64.

18. There are precedents for this. In 1953, Wieland's staging precipitated the formation of a Society for Wagnerian Studies to "determine authenticity on the basis of the theoretical writings and stage directions of the Master." The society's manifesto states that "*competent* Wagnerians everywhere are alarmed at how the works of Richard Wagner are being presented to misrepresent completely his intentions by interpreters whose pleasure is contradiction" (*italics added*).

'adequate,' staging avoids the 'tradition/innovation' dilemma; the only reliable criterion is accuracy of interpretation."<sup>19</sup> His argument is based primarily on the idea that staging should be subordinated to musical text, and that consequently the director should have a technical knowledge of the Wagnerian musical idiom.

For Faerber the leitmotif has a precise denotative meaning: "Wagner's music never falters: it cannot mislead us because it is the vehicle of primary meaning; it alone translates the content and the very form of dramatic action." Interpreted in this way, measures 49 to 81 of the prelude of *Das Rheingold* evoke waves; measures 90 to 106, the formation of the solid elements; and a chord in A flat major further on, "the birth of life from the liquid elements" (Kurt Overhoff).<sup>20</sup>

If the music conveys precise meaning, then it can be used to interpret the action and the characters' psychology. Accordingly, Wotan can be described as follows: "In his quest for power, he is less self-assertive than self-protective in the face of danger . . . [his only error] the imprudence of a moment rather than premeditated evil."<sup>21</sup> Faerber supports this interpretation—which is totally different from Chéreau's conception—with the "melodic expression [which] translates above all uprightness, truth of character."<sup>22</sup> The discordancies he finds between motif and action can only begin to be enumerated here: Wotan runs ahead of the "Wanderer chords," the stage should remain empty until Brünnhilde's arrival,<sup>23</sup> the forging of the sword is not synchronized with the hammer's blows,<sup>24</sup> Wotan's movements contradict the music,<sup>25</sup> etc. There is a science, then, of the leitmotif that enables us to determine its meaning with accuracy: "Can a young director, working alone, resolve in one year a problem to which he could devote himself for the rest of his life?"<sup>26</sup>

I have paraphrased this argument here because it reflects the opinion of many *musicians* who have seen, heard, and been infuriated by the Chéreau-Boulez interpretation. The Valhalla theme in particular has been used to condemn Chéreau's conception of Wotan. "The castle of Valhalla was built as a symbol and affirmation of Wotan's power. The tonality of the Valhalla theme asserts the nature of this power. Whoever is pierced by the resonance of the tubas at the beginning of scene two will remember it for the rest of his life (unless the conductor is Pierre Boulez)."<sup>27</sup> Boulez explains his interpretation: "The first view of Valhalla is hardly triumphant, but uncertain, dreamlike, a fantasy, a mirage.

19. U. Faerber, *The Bayreuth Festival's Centenary Ring*, Berlin, 1977, p. 5.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 66.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 72. We can be thankful Wieland Wagner did not wait until he became Herr Doktor Professor to stage his grandfather's works.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

The tonality, the quality, the dynamic value of the sound, the explicit notation 'sehr weich,' all combine to color this dream with a highly vaporous musicality. . . . The Valhalla theme becomes confident and assured, employs a more triumphant idiom when it is sustained by the theme of the sword which, however, concludes it, marking its disappearance from *Rheingold*." 28

Faerber and Boulez arrive at diametrically opposed conclusions on the basis of the same text, the same musical data (tonality and orchestration). Faerber's argument, however, rests on a semiological conception of the leitmotif that has been superseded. He claims to be able to extract from the music a meaning whose precision allows it to dominate the action. It has been recognized for a long time now, even in the Michelin guides of music, that the meaning of the leitmotif is derived not only from its inherent musical sense but also from its context—stage action, narrative, poetry. Yet the poem itself does not possess a single, clear, definitive meaning—we will return to this later. The meaning attributed to the leitmotif is the result of a dialectic between that attributed to the music and that attributed to the book.

It is unnecessary to construct a more complex theory of the leitmotif than already exists, but the following points should be emphasized:

a) Of course, purely denotative leitmotifs like that of the dragon or the ring exist, but does their meaning remain the same throughout? Why do we hear the dragon motif when Brünnhilde asks Siegfried, "When I consume you with my eyes, don't you go blind? When I touch you, don't you catch fire?" According to Wieland Wagner, this means that Brünnhilde "wants to possess Siegfried ecstatically, barbarously, as savagely as Fafner maneuvers to win the treasure." 29

b) And what of two successive motifs? According to Jean Molino's narrative theory (1975), the juxtaposition of two words is sufficient to produce a story, for example, TIGER-NIGHT. The mind immediately invents a network of relationships between the two terms, investing them with meaning. But this meaning is not necessarily that which their author intended, nor is it the same for different readers.<sup>30</sup> It seems to me that leitmotifs occurring in succession are related to this elementary narrative form, for *beginning* with the interpretation given to each *theme*, a narrative is constructed that gives meaning to their juxtaposition. Take, for example, the very end of *Götterdämmerung*: "Curse of the ring—Rhine Maidens—Valhalla—redemption through love (*Liebeserlöschungsmotiv*)—divine power—Siegfried—twilight of the gods." What can this mean? Verbal logic provides what's missing: "This is a summary of the work: first there was the curse of the ring, stolen from the Rhine Maidens, who spoke too freely. Valhalla had to be paid for with gold. Humanity is redeemed through love, for divine power,

28. Commentary, pp. 4-5.

29. Wieland Wagner, p. 115.

30. Two initialed entwined hearts on the trunk of a tree—this is a *story* of love—but what do we know about what it meant for those who inscribed them into the bark.

defeated by its own creation, Siegfried, is terminated in the twilight of the gods." It immediately becomes clear that this is and is not the hypothetical narrative, for what does the theme of redemption mean? For Wagner, did it mean man saved by a woman's sacrifice (Senta, Elisabeth, Elsa, Isolde, Kundry, Cosima)? Siegfried saved by Brünnhilde? The gods saved by the death of the redeemer Siegfried? Humanity saved by the death of them both? "It is a message for everyone, everywhere," writes Chéreau, "but like all soothsayers the orchestra is never clear; its message can be interpreted in different ways. Once we have heard this theme announce the character of Siegfried and heard its progress to the end, can we ever hear it innocently again, can it ever have the value it had? Don't we hear, don't we *have* to hear it with misgiving, irresolution? The gods no longer live, and human values must be rebuilt and reinvented: before the abyss, man listens with difficulty to this oracle which rises from the center of the earth."<sup>31</sup> At this crucial moment Chéreau has chosen to pose the question of man.

Since fidelity to Wagner's intention has such apparent importance, consider what he has written. The term *leitmotiv* was not used by Wagner himself but by Heinrich von Wolzogen who, in publishing the first commentary on the *Ring*, inaugurated that tradition which reduces the Tetralogy to a catalogue of descriptive themes. Wagner was irritated by this: "The edition [piano duet transcription] of *Götterdämmerung* contains explicit readings like 'motif of Wanderer's joy,' 'motif of misfortune,' etc. People will think such nonsense is my doing."<sup>32</sup>

Such imitative interpretations are not surprising if we consult one of the *rare* texts Wagner devoted to the leitmotif: "To become a work of art, the new musical dramatic form must have the unity of a symphonic movement; to accomplish this it must develop an intimate relationship not only with a few scattered fragments of arbitrary value but with the entire drama. This unity is expressed in a fabric of *fundamental themes* [*Grundthemen*] that extend throughout the entire work, that oppose, complete, and transform one another, exist apart and together as in a symphonic movement; it is, however, the dramatic action, as performance and representation, that determines the modalities of separation and reunion, which [in symphonic form] were always borrowed from the vocabulary of dance. . . . A young friend of mine, I remember, considered the question of the leitmotif—he was the first to use it in this sense—more from the point of view of its dramatic effect than its structural importance in the musical composition (unversed as he was in the technical aspects of music)."<sup>33</sup>

This text is important for two reasons: Wagner states that the term *leitmotif* was not his own; and he insists that, although the leitmotif may be controlled by the action—story, plot, narrative—it is not only a semantic unit but also a

31. Commentary, p. 87.

32. Cosima Wagner, *Die Tagebücher*, II, Munich, Zurich, Piper, 1977, p. 772.

33. Richard Wagner, *Oeuvres en prose*, Paris, Delagrave, 1924, Vol. XII, pp. 284-285.

morphological phenomenon whose purely musical dimension (formal and syntactical) is at least as important as its semantic function.

The recent Bayreuth *Ring* has created an uproar not only because of Chéreau's reintroduction of a narrative dimension to the operatic stage, but also because of Boulez's transformation of the Tetralogy from a catalogue of musical themes into a dynamic musical work. In this sense, Boulez's interpretation of the leitmotif seems to correspond perfectly with Wagner's own understanding of it: "The progressively subtle transformation of the motifs is determined by neither the imperatives of dramaturgy nor the sheer pleasure inherent in a virtuoso manipulation of the music. Rather, it is the result of having to integrate the most rigorous functions and essential characteristics of music into a theatrical context, without sacrificing the drama to a formal structure that is alien to it." Inspired by Beethoven's late period, particularly the idea of variation, Wagner continued his inquiry "without arriving at the same formal conclusions, and without adopting Beethoven's formal system, which would have negated his dramatic structure."<sup>34</sup>

Thus the allegation that Chéreau's staging is misconceived because it contradicts the "semantic evidence" of the orchestral argument is based on an erroneous understanding of the leitmotif.

#### *Chéreau Versus Wieland*

But there is more than one way in which staging may be set in opposition to music. Is it irresponsible to agree with Carlo Schmid's estimation that Chéreau's *Ring* supersedes all others, particularly Wieland Wagner's?<sup>35</sup> Wieland's conception of operatic production, as Lust has convincingly argued, is based on the *ensemble*, that is, the union of poetry and music. In a certain sense Chéreau is in opposition to Wieland: Wieland lights his stage with subtle variations of color, Chéreau with glaring white light; Wieland's stage is empty, Chéreau's thronged; Wieland's Windgassen immobile, Chéreau's Kollo active. These are not accidental differences: "Wieland Wagner doesn't focus light on a stage setting, he creates a setting with colored light. Rather than lighting the stage he projects a dimension of floating color in space. White light is never used."<sup>36</sup> "The genius of Wieland Wagner's staging is above all his knowledge of the expressive possibilities of immobility. We find it hard to believe that directors . . . are unaware that if a singer continuously moves his arms he hides his body."<sup>37</sup> Wieland directs a theater

34. Commentary, pp. 4-5.

35. I am in no position to speak about Wieland's *Ring*, which I have not seen. But I can compare two styles, Chéreau's and Wieland's, of which I have seen *Lohengrin* (1958), *Tannhäuser* (1961), *Tristan* (1962), *Parsifal* (1962), and *Die Meistersinger* (1963).

36. Lust, p. 115.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 104.

of music, not a theater of words. According to Lust, this is accomplished by projecting a musical score into space: "By reading text and music separately we arrive at an understanding of the real drama, for the music of the drama creates a form that is equivalent to its 'dramatic restatement.' The book serves only to designate the object of the interior drama, on which the composer builds."<sup>38</sup> Wieland is particularly interested in translating the psychological drama of his characters through gesture and movement, within the limits of musical time, rather than the "real" time of spoken theater: "The musical drama does not unfold in the space of the action, in its universe of circumstances, but in the affective time of the musical story, in that one-dimensional universe which becomes a new objective universe. . . . The musical performance of an opera is enough to bring it to life; the drama is already performed in its staging."<sup>39</sup> All that is necessary to produce a work is the tension that gives birth to the dramatic idea. Wieland "attempts to recreate this tension on stage by means of a pure visual narrative, unencumbered by detail, that reveals to the audience at once the truth experienced as life in a dramatic situation."<sup>40</sup> In a word, the stage production expresses *interiority* through a historical framework. "Wieland Wagner transforms a character's passion into a unique visible objective truth . . . all *purely narrative* description, all intellectual explanation is out of place and futile."<sup>41</sup>

Here Chéreau stands in absolute opposition to Wieland.

I do not want to discredit what once inspired my admiration: the memory of *Lohengrin*, *Parsifal*, and *Tristan* lives on. Lust's mistake was simply to have postulated for musical theater an immutable *essence* whose principles Wieland had supposedly discovered: "[The new principles of stage production that were developed] reflect only Wieland Wagner's state of mind at the time he conceived his interpretation, his general understanding of the work and his role as stage director. *Only this general understanding should be imitated*, to enable young directors to discover analogous principles on their own."<sup>42</sup> Chéreau is a great director precisely because *he forces us to recognize that, as gifted an artist as Wieland was, he did not necessarily have the last word*. He utilized dramatic tension, of course, but to sustain a story that wasn't told. In the end we lost interest; we might as well have listened to oratorios conducted by Böhm.

For Wieland, the time of musical theater is the time of the music. For Chéreau, the time of Wagnerian music is theatrical time. Chéreau does not reject or disparage Wieland's interpretation but presents instead a narrative vision of operatic art, which, although it appeared ridiculous in its traditional context, becomes valid when seen with eyes that take seriously what appears to be fantasy.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 177.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 181. Italics added.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 178. Italics added.

## Chéreau's Style

"Wagner subordinates everything to narrative demands."<sup>43</sup> "Text, music, stage action, orchestra, they are all governed by the *laws of theater*. The first important thing I discovered about the *Ring* in rehearsal was to what extent Wagner struggled with the problem of what to put on stage, what story to develop with music . . . what kind of narrative was appropriate to 'operatic theater.' His solution was to tell a mythical story, this recourse to mythology being Wagner's great 'musical,' hence theatrical, intuition."<sup>44</sup> Chéreau does not maintain the validity of this conception for all opera: Verdi, Offenbach, and Mozart pose different problems.<sup>45</sup> Here, however, the singer is an instrument of action: never before have opera singers moved so much, as if suddenly freed from the necessity of watching the conductor. Valkyrie that drag bloody corpses on stage; a Hagen accompanied by altar boys; a Sieglinde who runs aimlessly around the stage, terrified by the storm; a Siegfried who, in his second act, crackling with spirit, climbs a tree: this is directorial house-cleaning! "[The singers'] movements should be paced by the movement of their own and the orchestra's music."<sup>46</sup> "A certain rhythmic corporeal expression is necessary," according to Boulez, "to enable the singers to act and move correctly."<sup>47</sup> It has been all but forgotten that an opera singer can use his entire body to express dramatic intensity. "My conception of the *Ring* depends primarily on the actors. I have believed for a long time that they are the primary source of the emotion elicited by a theatrical production."<sup>48</sup>

Chéreau's animated stage appears excessive only because opera companies have for so long embalmed their singers with boredom. This is why his staging always seems to be *hyperbolic*: Wagner opened the door to admit Spring; Chéreau tears down the walls and lets the forest invade the stage. Siegfried hears the forest murmur as trees move and clearings take shape. Does Hagen kill Siegfried? Three spear thrusts provoke somersaults; Alberich's spear drips blood. Cinema is also invoked: the cog wheels are direct reference to the poster for *Modern Times*, and Wotan's globe recalls Chaplin's in the *Dictator*. Freia carried in the arms of giants: *King Kong*. Nibelheim: Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*.

Chéreau and Peduzzi construct an "image of the present." Theirs is no longer the chaste romanticism of literary anthologies, but romanticism dominated by "confusion, appearances, ambiguities, that disorient us and threaten to destroy our balance."<sup>49</sup> A *realist romanticism*, so to speak, in which today's sullen disillusion is in proportion to yesterday's optimism. "The world of *Götterdäm-*

43. Commentary, p. 39.

44. Interview, p. 16.

45. Sadoul, p. 93.

46. Interview, p. 14.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

48. Commentary, p. 96.

49. Interview, p. 13.

*merung* is a world where it is difficult to believe any longer in anything."<sup>50</sup> This *Ring's* "color" is borrowed from cinema: its decor ranges through all shades of black, white, and gray. "In the universe of the *Ring*," Carlo Schmid has said, "mold grows on everything and everything is in a state of decay."<sup>51</sup>

In order to interpret this story which concerns everyone, Chéreau, in perfect accord with Boulez, restores the full value of the *text*. "In Wagner, the song is essential to the comprehension of the text, whereas Verdi can be sung without listening to the words."<sup>52</sup> Boulez has specified a sort of declamatory rhythm "by giving special emphasis to expressive pronunciation. Moreover, I have softened the orchestra's sound in accompaniment: the singers no longer have to strain to be heard; they can allow their natural speech to flow freely."<sup>53</sup>

Chéreau thus joins forces with *narrativity*. But what story is he telling? Perhaps his greatest innovation, and at the same time the one least recognized, is his frontal attack on the illusion of the dramatic work by telling several stories at once: the Germanic and Scandinavian mythology of Wagner's inspiration, Wagner's relationship to his own time, his personal life.<sup>54</sup> To this Chéreau has added what the Tetralogy can mean to us today. His greatest success is to have risked telling us simultaneously all the different tales that can be read in the work.

This explains why Chéreau deliberately combines different styles of costume, decor, even acting: commedia dell'arte between Mime and Siegfried, bourgeois drama between Fricka and Wotan, childish enchantment in *Siegfried*. This is undoubtedly the first time that a director has chosen to inscribe within the visible options of a stage production, rather than within the spectator's cultural background and imagination, all possible interpretations of a plot as complex as this. The one-dimensional dramatic narrative is dead.

#### *Chéreau's Four Stories*

Chéreau tells four stories at the same time.

a) First there is the myth. Nothing has been omitted or modified: the Rhine gold; the giants—real giants for once—singers held aloft so that, beside these monsters, the gods are reduced to insects;<sup>55</sup> characters with spears; a dragon on

50. Commentary, p. 99.

51. Interview, p. 107.

52. Chéreau, in Sadoul, p. 95.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 104.

54. There is no reason to exclude this: it should not disturb us to see in Fricka and Wotan an echo of the conflict between Minna and Richard. And what of his obsession with the concept of redemption through woman in all his work? Liszt was able to see it: "Do you not feel that the dagger and the wound which you have in your heart will follow you everywhere, and that the wound will never heal?" (letter, April 8, 1853, Richard Wagner, Franz Liszt, *Correspondance*, Paris, Gallimard, 1975, p. 204).

55. Not to mention the Nibelungen whose leader was a real dwarf. Chéreau hoped to find fifty of them in the vicinity of Bayreuth.

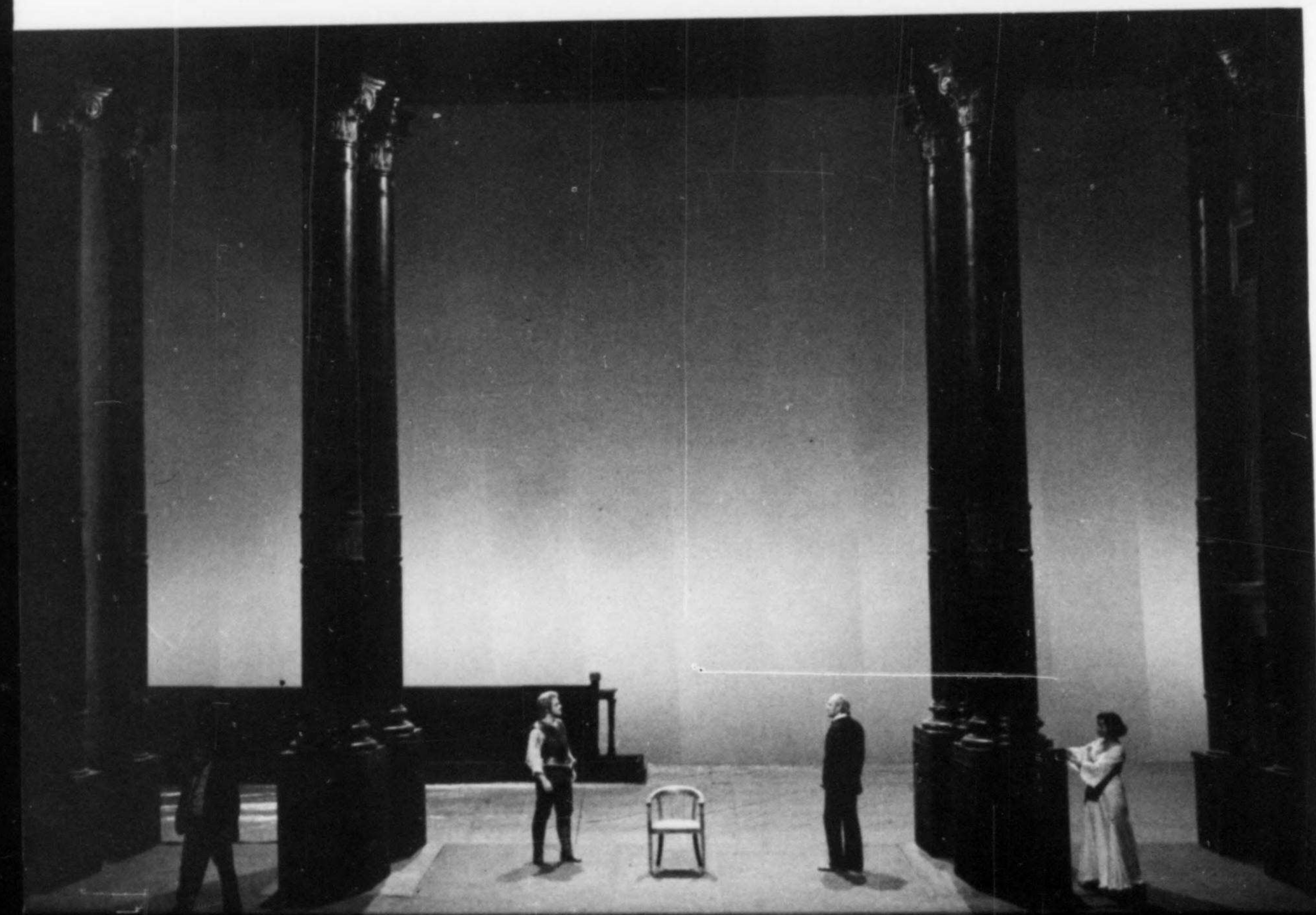


wheels which, manipulated by Kabuki-like figures in black, springs straight out of the forest of Macbeth or the fairy tales of our childhood: "In Siegfried, I have attempted to express theatrically the magic of fairy tales. . . . Playfulness should be the dominant spirit of the first two acts: it's a child who's on stage . . . ; it should become serious only after the hero discovers fear."<sup>56</sup> Unlike his recent predecessors, Chéreau has kept all the literal mythological apparatus: the bear of Act One of *Siegfried*, the dragon. (Live horses on stage had to be discontinued . . . for technical reasons!)

b) The second story is the myth as conceived by Wagner in the nineteenth century: "I've always claimed not to understand the *Zeitlosigkeit*. Every mythology belongs to a specific time."<sup>57</sup> "What is a theatrical director for if not to construct magnificent images in which the audience can recognize its anguish, its

56. Interview, p. 104.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 18.



future, and its fears? This is what Wagner accomplished in the *Ring* through the use of Germanic myths."<sup>58</sup> "Wotan is no less mythological for wearing a frockcoat. A mythology of the nineteenth century, of our industrial past, exists today. . . . There is a saga of the industrial world (the *Schmiedelied* certainly seems to be a part of that)."<sup>59</sup> Chéreau explains Wagner's recourse to Germanic mythology as an attempt to provide a history for a new German society confronted with *Frünpitalismus*, seeking to unify itself. "What director wouldn't wonder about the gods behaving like a typical bourgeois family?"<sup>60</sup> This explains the cog wheels of the nascent industrial age at the edge of the stage in *Rheingold*, scenes two and four, and *Siegfried*, Act One.

c) But Chéreau and Peduzzi do not stop here. They prolong the history of the destruction of nature to include the onslaught of the industrial age: Siegfried's forge is a power press; and although Hunding's house is in the classical style, the fire escapes attached to the facades in the final scene of *Götterdämmerung* evoke the streets of New York. What Wagner's myth means to us today constitutes Chéreau's third story. "If we are returning to Wagner's *Ring*, if we are staging it once again, it is because we feel Wagner's message bears repeating, and that ancient myth, this structure incorporating ideas from the *Edda*, the nineteenth century, and Schopenhauer, still has practical value; that recourse to mythology, fairy tales, German philosophy, and the common stock of Indo-European folk legend helps us to speak about our condition in 1977."<sup>61</sup> "What is fidelity?" Boulez wonders. "Is it respect for what lacks permanence? Or belief in the work as a regenerative vehicle of new truths that will be deciphered according to their time, place, and circumstance? . . . Myth forces us to reflect on our present condition, it provokes a response, it forces us to concentrate our attention on the eternal problems it contains,"<sup>62</sup>

Tradition has always dictated that the singers wear conventional medieval costumes. By abstracting costumes and decors, Wieland Wagner set his productions in a mythological, archetypal dimension, outside of time. Chéreau, however, maintains in 1976 the nineteenth-century character of the *Ring*, making the transition from 1850 to the present by employing a variety of modern styles: Siegfried wears a dinner jacket; Mime carries a suitcase; Brünnhilde is dressed in an imposing white albatross robe. Within Valhalla's concrete fortress stand Corinthian columns like those in the final scene of *Götterdämmerung*: Peduzzi is like the utopian architect who considered North America an appropriate setting for the Parthenon.

d) Chéreau also proposes a fourth story, which is the most difficult one for

58. Commentary, p. 93.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

60. *Ibid.*

61. *Ibid.*, p. 93.

62. *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

Bayreuth traditionalists to accept because it questions the Wagnerian myth itself. At the end of *Rheingold*, Loge, looking like a Daumier caricature, draws the curtain on the lively dance of the gods. The dam is seen for what it is, a *stage effect*. Some of the actors wear black tie in imitation of the audience in the orchestra seats (who is actually in costume at Bayreuth?). In 1976, Valhalla was made to look like a little *Festspielhaus*; in 1977, it included the doorway to Wahnfried, and the Corinthian columns referred to above were identical to those that decorate the interior of the concert hall.<sup>63</sup>

Why should we still be duped by the mystique that Wagner promoted for his entire life and in which he wanted us to participate? The *pilgrimage* to Bayreuth, the *sacred* mount, the *mystical* abyss? Enough! Without destroying illusion that is the source of theatrical pleasure, "the public is called upon to witness and reflect upon the illusion of theater, of myth; at the end of the performance, reality reclaims the universe of our dream."<sup>64</sup> This is why, at the end of Chéreau's *Götterdämmerung*, we are not only disoriented but uncomfortable, facing actors who look at us and say, "Now it's up to you." Chéreau therefore tackles the *narrative heterogeneity* of the *Ring*: The gods may in fact represent us both as primitive tribe and bourgeois family; *Rheingold* is therefore both a comedy and a tragedy.<sup>65</sup> Heterogeneity, but also *discontinuity*: "What troubles me is knowing that it's not exactly the *Edda*, not exactly *Buddenbrooks*, but a combination of the two in every possible way, and more. And that the meaning finally resides in the combination."<sup>66</sup> "The problem of staging is precisely that of orchestrating these different elements, keeping in mind that a purely mythological reading may defuse the work . . . and that a purely political reading may diminish it to the same extent, reducing it to its circumstances."<sup>67</sup> Chéreau's greatest accomplishment seems to have been to preserve, through stylistic variation, the unity of each of these "multiple levels of signification" (Boulez), to make them readily available to us.

#### *Chéreau contra Wagner*

The same notion of fidelity which lies behind the violent criticism of the centenary *Ring* has also been used by Chéreau, Boulez, and their supporters in its defense. Carlo Schmid: "Monsieur Chéreau, you have been more than a director; you have accurately interpreted the philosophy that Wagner transformed into

63. This was the same for the 1882 production of *Parsifal*, but the same device, one hundred years later, achieves a significance of the second power.

64. Boulez, in *Commentary*, p. 3.

65. *Commentary*, p. 91.

66. Interview, p. 20.

67. *Commentary*, p. 95.

music and elevated to the level of myth."<sup>68</sup> Numa Sadoul: "Seldom has Wagner been as present in his work, seldom has a *Ring* as accurately, faithfully, and lovingly represented him. Throughout, the author's intention has been faithfully preserved."<sup>69</sup> Chéreau: "I am guided by Wagner's intentions; I follow his directions or rather I always take my cue from Wagner the stage director. . . . I follow even the smallest detail of the text nourishing myself with what's there, including its contradictions";<sup>70</sup> and, concerning the final scene of *Rheingold*: "[The gods] know now that the apple has a worm in it; this information is given in the text, written in the words and the music. . . . This is precisely what Loge says."<sup>71</sup> Boulez: "This declamatory style was intended by Wagner, especially for the dialogue."<sup>72</sup> "The Wagnerian orchestra exists to accompany the singers; Wagner said this in 1876!"<sup>73</sup> Textual evidence, the author's intention: is this so evident? The question of Wagner's intention cannot be settled so easily.

The centenary production coincided with the appearance of certain documents which should give a fresh impetus to Wagnerian studies, even modify the traditional conception of certain works. We certainly possess a great deal of information about Wagner's creative strategies: almost all the drafts for the *Ring* libretto have been published (Strobel 1930, 1933); Curt von Westernhagen's study (1973) is a detailed examination of the genesis of the score. And if only three volumes of the complete correspondence have appeared (G. Strobel, editor, 1967, 1970, 1976), the recently published complete edition of Wagner's music assembles from his letters, articles, and essays almost everything he ever said or wrote on the *Ring* (Breig and Fladt, 1976), not to mention such peripheral sources as the unexpurgated edition of *My Life* (1963) and, of course, Cosima's *Journal*.

The definitive study of the creation of the *Ring* based on this new documentary evidence remains to be written. I do not intend to judge Chéreau's strategies in light of this body of information, but will draw on certain specific information to consider several questions raised by the debate over fidelity.

First of all, what are we to think of the priority accorded to theater by both Boulez and Chéreau? This is perhaps the easiest question to answer. We may wonder how someone like Faerber, who values the precision of his philological conclusions, can claim that "Wagnerian drama is never the expression of a total art form" and that "Wagner always granted a certain priority, even a decided preeminence, to the music."<sup>74</sup> Even a cursory reading of Wagner's complete prose works reveals that he thought of himself less (that is, not at all) as a reformer of the

68. Interview, p. 1.

69. Sadoul, p. 87.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 92.

71. Interview, p. 9.

72. Sadoul, p. 104.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 105.

74. Faerber, p. 6.

musical idiom—which he nevertheless was (without being clearly aware that he was, nor particularly wanting to be)—than as a reformer of opera as an institution. Consider the following quotation from *A Communication to My Friends*, that impressive leap into the future in which Wagner literally programs the rest of his life: “[With my *Tannhäuser*] I understood clearly for the first time that the habitual way we had of presenting our operas absolutely contradicted what I required. The simple material effect of vocal sound has always assured the primacy of the singer; the actor was secondary, even incidental; corresponding to this quite naturally was an audience that cultivated its ear at the expense of its eye. Now, I was going in exactly the opposite direction: I wanted the actor in first place, *and only then* the singer, who would *reinforce* the actor.”<sup>75</sup>

Secondly, is the *Ring* a myth about society in 1850? According to Carlo Schmid, “Wagner borrowed certain elements from Germanic myths, and we borrow decors and costumes that appear designed to distance us from ourselves and from reality, but which in fact lend reality an appearance of substantial truth.” This strategy of distancing was intended to bring out “an essential aspect of the nineteenth century, of the industrial revolution: incipient capitalism.”<sup>76</sup> To judge this interpretation, we should read what else Wagner was writing between 1848 and 1851 while he was working on the libretto: *Art and Revolution*, *The Art Work of the Future*, *Art and Climate*, and *Opera and Drama*. These texts, which Wagner clearly identifies as coinciding with the genesis of the *Ring*,<sup>77</sup> tell—with variations unnecessary to include here—the same story: In the beginning, people, priests, actors, poets, music, poetry, and dance all existed together in perfect union. Man lived in harmony with nature. Then the wicked Romans appeared and civilization began to decline. Christ tried to save what was left but failed. Things deteriorated further with the birth of industrial society. The novel was here, music there, and theater somewhere else. But a new age is coming; social revolution will sweep away the old order, reestablish harmony between man and nature. The total work of art, in which music, poetry, and theater become a harmonious whole, will be possible thanks to me, Richard Wagner, poet *and* musician, and humanity will be saved.

This is only a slight exaggeration. The reader need only turn to those theoretical essays which, like Hugo's *Preface to Cromwell*, offer an extraordinary *myth of the origin of music and opera*. Only after reading it can we honestly say whether or not Chéreau has rediscovered in this picture of nature and civilization, *one* of the essential aspects of Wagner's thought and *one* of the possible meanings of the Tetralogy.

75. Richard Wagner, *Une communication à mes amis*, followed by *Lettre sur la musique*, trans. Jean Launay, Paris. Mercure de France, 1976, p. 99. Italics added.

76. Interview, p. 1.

77. In the letter to M. Villot, R. Wagner, *Une communication à mes amis*, p. 208.

There remains finally the general conception of the *Ring*, and particularly the function accorded to Wotan. It is well known that Wagner wrote the libretto beginning at the end, with the *Death of Siegfried* (November 1848). Then, when he decided to go back to Alberich's theft of the gold, about which he had been thinking since October 1848,<sup>78</sup> he wrote *Young Siegfried* (between May 3 and June 24, 1851). In November 1851, he began *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre*, which he finished between June 1 and November 3, 1852. In December of the same year he revised several minor but significant details of these last two projects, giving them the form in which we know them today. *Götterdämmerung* is rather far removed from the *Death of Siegfried* in several ways. Siegfried is certainly the center of both, but with *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre* Wotan appears. With his introduction, *Wagner never stops asking himself what his own work means*. Thus the paradox of charges of infidelity: what we read today is the result of so complex a gestation that even its author was uncertain about its meaning. The meaning of the *totality* of the work is different from that intended by the poet at each *particular* moment in the creation of the work.

But is Siegfried, as Bérénice Reynaud claims, the central character of the *Ring* simply because "he was the initial source of Wagner's fascination, from which he returned to the original transgression in order to explain the fate of the gods"?<sup>79</sup> What in fact occurs is a decentering. Houston Chamberlain, Wagner's son-in-law, recognized this in the last chapter of his book, *Das Drama Richard Wagners*, where Wotan is proven to be the central character of the *Ring*. In a letter dated September 22, 1892, Cosima thanked him for a copy of the book and particularly for this interpretation. She makes the following valuable statement: "The suggestion to christen the Trilogy *Wotan*, made by a clever friend of ours, was seriously considered."

This establishes Wotan's original *position* in the drama. But how should his character be *interpreted*? In the "Myth of the Nibelungen, a sketch for a drama" (1848), Wagner describes the gods: "With sublime action, the gods imposed order on the world, harnessed the elements with wise laws, and consecrated themselves to the tender care of the human race. Their power was supreme. But the truce that brought them to power was not founded on reconciliation but force and trickery. The goal of their dominion over the world was moral conscience, but the *evil* they pursued *remained a part of them*."

Wotan can therefore only be tormented, for he knows that he must make use of "free will" in his attempt to redeem mankind: "The Gods prepare man for the sublime task of redeeming their own transgression."<sup>80</sup> The conclusion of this draft

78. Cf. "Le mythe des Nibelungen considéré comme esquisse d'un drame" (Wagner 1929, II: 109-125).

79. Bérénice Reynaud, "L'Anneau du Nibelung: du mythe à l'intention musicale," *Musique en Jeu*, 22, p. 43.

80. *Ibid.*, p. 112.

of the poem is apparently optimistic: "Listen then, Great Gods, your crime is paid for: thank the hero who takes responsibility for your mistake." He concludes with a eulogy to Wotan: "Let but one reign, you, Father of all; so that your power be eternal, I lead him to you: receive him well, he is worthy."<sup>81</sup> This is the source of the first prose draft of Brünnhilde's last words in the first version of the *Death of Siegfried* (from which Wagner gave public readings beginning in 1849):

Nur einer herrsche:  
Allvaters! Herrlicher du!  
Freue dich des freiesten Hulden!  
Siegfried lühr'ich zu:  
biet ihm mindlichen Gruss,  
dem Bürgen ewiger Macht!

Only one master:  
Magnificent! Father of all!  
Rejoice in your hero, freest of all!  
I bring to you Siegfried:  
greet him with tokens of love,  
the promise of power forever?<sup>82</sup>

We aren't yet at the point where Valhalla is engulfed in flames. On the contrary, love is a positive factor in the exercise of power, whereas, in the Tetralogy it must be renounced if power is to be conquered.

But as Wagner began the task of editing the three works that preceded the *Death of Siegfried*, he began to feel less sure of himself. He crossed out the stanza quoted above,<sup>83</sup> probably before May 1849, and wrote in the margin to the right:

Selige Sühnung  
ersah ich den hehren  
heilig awigen  
einigen Göttern!  
Freuet euch  
des freiesten Helden!  
Göttlichem Brudergruss  
führt seine Braut ihn zu!

Expiation divine  
I learned from the gods,  
sublime and sacred,  
eternal, unique!  
Rejoice then  
freest of heroes!  
To godlike brotherhood  
he is led by his bride!

But in the left margin there is the following stanza, which, according to Strobel, was written before the one on the right:

Machtlos scheidet  
die die Schuld nun meidet  
Eurer Schuld entspross der  
froheste Held

Powerless leaves he  
who of guilt now is free.  
From your own guilt a joyous  
hero is born,

81. *Ibid.*, p. 124.

82. Richard Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen*, Leipzig, Fritsch, 1887, new edition, Hildesheim, Olms Verlag, 1976, II. p. 227.

83. Cf. O. Strobel, "Zur Entstehungsgeschichte der *Götterdämmerung*," *Die Musik*, 1933, pp. 336-341.

dessen freie that sie getilgt:  
 erspart ist euch der bange Kampf  
 um eure endende Macht:  
 Erbleichet in Wonne vor des  
 Menschen  
 That,  
 Vor dem Helden, den ihr gezeught!  
 Aus eurer bangen Furcht  
 verkünd' ich euch selige  
 Todeserlösung

expiation in his free will:  
 spared you are the fearful fight,  
 the twilight of your power:  
 with rejoicing turn pale at the  
 action of  
 Man,  
 of the hero to whom you gave life!  
 From fearful dread released  
 through blessed death redemption.

Even if Wagner eventually abandoned these two drafts, they are particularly significant, especially the second, for in them the poet, in the company of the "eternal, unique" deities, introduces the idea of responsibility, of divine transgression which requires the death of a free hero. It is this aspect of Wotan's personality that accounts for the tragic dimension of the Tetralogy.

Wotan's character thus undergoes a radical transformation: he renounces the will to live in order to be saved. Wagner had this pessimistic conception of the *Ring* even before reading *The World as Will and Idea* in September-October 1854. Previously, in a long discussion of the *Ring* addressed to Roeckel (January 25), he had developed a thoroughly Schopenhauerian view of Wotan: "He is carried to the summit of tragedy: to will what is necessary and to accomplish it alone." Wagner himself admits that he hadn't yet read Schopenhauer.<sup>84</sup> And in *My Life* he admits that Wotan's character was revealed to him only after reading Schopenhauer: "Tragedy, [Herwegh] said to me, is expressed precisely in Schopenhauer's awareness of the nonexistence of the visible world; every great poet, every great man, has had the intuition of this void. This made me think of my *Nibelungen* poem and I realized with surprise that on the unconscious level of poetic conception I had been aware of what had so often confused me in theory. It was at that moment that I first realized who my Wotan really was."<sup>85</sup>

This last sentence, written in 1854, is crucial. Fifty copies of the *Ring*, containing the new version of the *Death of Siegfried* completed in December 1852, were published in 1853; as soon as the work was finished, Wagner began to question its meaning, even to modify his interpretation of it.<sup>86</sup> How then can we resist the temptation to modify it now?

Reworking the *Death of Siegfried* during the fall of 1852, Wagner wrote a

84. Cosima Wagner, *Die Tagebücher*, II, March 29, 1878, p. 73.

85. Richard Wagner, *Ma Vie*, Paris, Plon, 1927, III, p. 101.

86. This was not the first time this had occurred. In *Une communication à mes amis*, Wagner states that he did not really understand Elsa's character until after the fact (p. 111). Cosima stated that Wagner himself had absolutely no idea (*kein unverständlich*) what the scene between Waltraute and Brünnhilde was about (Cosima Wagner, *Die Tagebücher*, I, p. 402).

long passage that contains the 1853 *Privatdruck* in which Brünnhilde addresses the people. It is inserted immediately after the "So-werf-ich den Brand/in Walhalls prangende Burg" of the definitive version:<sup>87</sup>

Ihr, blühenden Lebens  
bleibend Geschlecht:  
was ich nun euch melde,  
merket es wohl!  
Sah't ihr vom zündenden Brand  
Siegfried und Brünnhild' verzehrt;  
sah't ihr des Rheines Töchter  
zur Tiefe entführen den Ring:  
nach Norden dann  
blickt durch die Nacht:  
erglänzt dort am Himmel  
ein heiliges Glühen;  
so wisset all'—  
dass ihr Walhall's Ende gewahrt!—

You who prosper in life,  
the race that endures:  
what I am about to say,  
mark well!  
You have seen Siegfried and Brünnhilde  
consumed in the raging pyre;  
you have seen the Rhine Daughters  
return the ring to the waves:  
look northward then  
across the night:  
shining in the heavens  
a sacred light;  
realize—  
it is Valhalla's destruction you see!—

Verging Wie Hauch  
der Götter Geschlecht;  
lass' ohne Walter  
die Welt ich zurück:  
meines heiligsten Wissens Hort  
weis' ich der Welt nun zu.—  
Nicht Gut, nicht Gold,  
noch göttliche Pracht;  
nicht Haus, nicht Hof,  
noch herrlicher Prunk;  
nicht trüber Verträge  
trüglicher Bund,  
nicht heuchelnder Sitte  
hartes Gesetz:  
selig in Lust und Leid  
lässt—die Liebe nur sein.

Eclipsed in a breeze  
the race of the gods;  
I leave behind  
a rudderless world:  
my sacred hoard of knowledge  
I give to know.—  
Not gold, estate  
nor the splendor of gods;  
neither house nor home  
nor glorious display  
false unions  
ambiguous pacts  
customs' pretense  
stringent laws:  
only love blesses  
pleasure and pain.<sup>88</sup>

Called to witness the death of the Gods, humanity survives. Only love (nature) triumphs over power, conventions, and false laws.

87. Richard Wagner, *Götterdämmerung*, ed. bilingue, Paris, Aubier-Flammarion, 1972, pp. 292-3.

88. Richard Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen*, II, p. 228. Louis II bitterly regretted the loss of this last stanza. He was so insistent about it that Wagner finally set it to music for him.

The presence of man is so central an issue here that in May 1856, Wagner revised the final scene to include a *chorus*: "End for the *Death of Siegfried*: after setting fire to the funeral pyre, Brünnhilde turns toward those who remain. She doesn't call for the resurrection of the fallen, but prophesies to Hagen a long period of reincarnation, followed by the redemption for which she is destined, for she knows that she will not be reborn. To those who remain, she offers the choice between Hagen's destiny and her own: if you love life, turn away from me and look at him! She goes to her horse and speaks silently to it for a long time. The chorus expresses its growing resolve to decide in her favor, until, at last, it turns with resolution to face her; she mounts her horse and jumps triumphantly into the fire."

Schopenhauer has tread this ground. It is an obvious allusion to the Brahminical cycle of reincarnation concluding in final redemption. In fact, in the notebooks this sketch occurs next to a brief outline for a Buddhist opera, *The Conquerors*. In a letter to Franz Müller, June 22, 1856, Wagner wrote that "for the first time in the entire work, at the very end, men and women are going to have to reveal themselves and play a larger role." He also wrote that he would have to rewrite once more Brünnhilde's last words, which he did:

Führ' ich nun nicht mehr  
nach Walhall's Feste,  
wiss't ihr, wohin ich fahre?  
Aus Wunschheim zieh' ich fort,  
Wahnheim flieh' ich auf immer;  
des ew'gen Werdens  
off'ne Thore  
Schliess' ich hinter mir zu:  
nach dem wunsch—und wahnlos  
heiligstem Wahnland  
der Welt-Wanderung Ziel,  
von Wiedergeburt erlös't,  
zieht nun die Wissende hin.  
Alles Ew'gen  
Sel'ges Ende,  
wiss't ihr, wie ich's gewann?  
Trauernder Liebe  
tiefstes Leiden  
schloss due Augen mir auf:  
enden sah ich die Welt.—

Since I take him no more  
to Valhalla's feast,  
do you know where I go?  
I flee from desire,  
eternal flight from dreams;  
I close behind me  
the open doors  
of the eternal future:  
to the absence of desire,  
holiest task  
of world transformation,  
from reincarnation freed  
she sets out now who knows.  
Do you know  
how I found  
this blessed end of eternity?  
The deep sadness  
of love in mourning  
it was that opened my eyes:  
I saw the world end.<sup>89</sup>

89. *Ibid.* VI, pp. 255-6.

In a letter to Roeckel dated August 23, 1856, Wagner explained that the other version, "only love blesses pleasure and pain," was a bit pompous, and, moreover, that Brünnhilde didn't know what to do with that sort of love. By relocating it in a Schopenhauerian context, Wagner believed that he had found "the true fundamental order of things."

This fails, however, to take Cosima's influence into account; for her, the terms *Wunschheim* and *Wahnheim* sound artificial.<sup>90</sup> In the end, the first and second versions disappeared completely, *alles Cosel'n zu gefallen* (July 22, 1872), "just to please Cosima."<sup>91</sup> But the reasons that Wagner himself provides are more interesting: "Since the meaning of these verses translated perfectly in the effect produced by the drama set to music, it should be clear that they must be deleted." Wagner wanted to avoid redundancy: it is already clear that happiness is achieved only by renouncing desire and illusion, meaning, finally, the will to live. The chorus is deleted then for primarily aesthetic reasons: "He thought, and rightly so," writes Cosima in her journal for December 20, 1869, "that it disrupted the stylistic unity of the whole. 'And something like a final chorus is completely out of place in a work like this,' he said."<sup>92</sup> But there is undoubtedly more to it than that. With the prospect of such a bleak future, burdened with a heritage of lost illusions (*Wähnen*), mankind should say nothing and consider this immense question in silence.

Chéreau has understood and translated the emerging condition of suffering humanity. "There is a theatrical aspect of *Götterdämmerung*" he writes, "that should not be overlooked: the abrupt intrusion of the chorus, of all humanity onto the stage. . . . I asked these men and women to express the depth of their questions and their doubt. . . . This is my way of understanding the impasse in which Wagner found himself twenty-five years after beginning to write the *Ring*: what conclusion, how to conclude?"<sup>93</sup>

Humanity listens to the orchestral oracle twice: in the last scene and during the *Funeral March*, which has been omitted. This departure from tradition elicited strong reactions: "Far from expressing immobility, this music embodies a movement measured by more than rhythm alone. . . . Chéreau has falsified these expressive elements of the music by giving priority to a static stage tableau."<sup>94</sup> But what was Wagner's view of this?

In September 1871, according to Cosima, he said, "I have written a great chorus, but a chorus that will be 'sung' by the orchestra after Siegfried's death

90. Cosima's biographer, Du Moulin Eckart (1929) claims this statement occurs in her private journal in March 1872, but it does not appear in the 1976 edition.

91. Cf. the preceding note; Du Moulin Eckart notes September 28, 1871, but the journal indicates nothing on that date.

92. Cosima Wagner, *Die Tagebücher*, I, 1876, p. 180.

93. Commentary, p. 87.

94. Faerber, p. 69.



during the orchestral interlude. The Siegmund theme will be heard, as if the chorus were explaining that this was his father, then the sword motif, and then his own theme. The curtain will rise, Guttrune will enter, thinking she's heard the sound of his horn. How could words create the same impression as each theme reintroduced in this way? Musical expression is uniquely suited for this." Hasn't Chéreau intuitively rediscovered one of Wagner's deepest ideas?

As for the final scene, we only have to recall the directions in the definitive score: "The men and women consider with deep emotion (*Ergriffenheit*) the flames that rise into the sky." In the libretto, published by the author in 1872, he speaks of a "silent seizure (*Erschütterung*)."<sup>95</sup>

Why give such a detailed account of the genesis of this part of the *Ring*? Undoubtedly because the meaning chosen for its conclusion retrospectively defines the meaning of the entire work. But especially to illustrate an attempt to assign a narrative logic to an ensemble whose visible elements are, like the tips of an iceberg, complex, mobile, and hidden from view. That logical inconsistencies of action *inhere in Wagner's text* is hardly surprising.<sup>96</sup> To these actual discontinuities (the work that results) should be added those expressly intended by Wagner: "I intend to use three different dramas, *each with its own unity*, to represent my myth."<sup>97</sup> After finishing the love duet between Siegmund and Sieglinde, Wagner wrote to Liszt on July 3, 1854, expressing his surprise at how it contrasted with *Rheingold*.<sup>98</sup> And the fairy tale exists in the myth, for Wagner explicitly identified the source of *Siegfried* in the Grimm tale: *Märchen von einem, der auszog, das Fürchten zu lernen*.<sup>99</sup>

The amount of interpretative data available to the stage director is so great that no single *Ring* production, on one level or another, can possibly escape self-contradiction. The Bayreuth stage is not a classroom, but musicological research does show that the text and score of the *Ring* are susceptible to various levels of interpretation. Chéreau's conceptual bias is based on a tension between a historic creation, a text, and a contemporary reading that brings to the stage several of the possible narratives contained within the *Ring*.

95. Richard Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen*, VI, p. 256.

96. Cf. the biography by Ernest Newman (1933), vol. II, chap. XVII.

97. Cosima Wagner, *Die Tagebücher*, II, p. 161.

98. R. Wagner, F. Liszt, *Correspondance*, p. 287.

99. Conversation with Kietz, 1849, and letter to Uhlig, May 10, 1851. In 1849, when the project of the entire *Ring* had not yet absorbed him, and just after completing the *Death of Siegfried*, Wagner considered writing a comic opera inspired by a tale by Grimm. In a letter to Uhlig he wrote, "What a surprise it was for me to realize that this boy (who learned fear) was none other than the young Siegfried who would win the treasure and awaken Brünnhilde. It is decided. I will begin writing *Young Siegfried* next month."

*In Praise of Treachery*

Are we any closer to answering the question posed earlier: how can both partisans and critics of the '76 *Ring* invoke the principle of fidelity to intention?

First of all—and here we disagree in principle with both Boulez and Chéreau—the text in itself cannot constitute conclusive evidence. Certainly the *sehr weich* of the Valhalla theme is part of the music, but this “content” has meaning only as Boulez interprets it; by translating this notation into dramatic action, he finally gives it meaning. The same applies to the libretto. Chéreau frequently deliberately goes against the letter of the text. For example, when he puts the woodbird in a cage, his ideological, theatrical intentions are clear. Ideologically, the bird, who accomplishes what Wotan himself does not dare admit (to lead Siegfried to Brünnhilde), belongs to a nature which is itself already captive. Theatrically, the cage represents on stage an off-stage character; nevertheless Siegfried “sees it perching peacefully on the branch.”

What's going on? “Actually, I was trying to tell the story,”<sup>100</sup> Chéreau remarked concerning the text and his intentions. But Chéreau isn't the only one who has *recreated* a story. The musicologist who retraces the genesis of the text (Strobel) or the score (von Westernhagen) must first assemble his evidence. Then he interprets it. This is the procedure of any historical investigation. Paul Veyne calls it the construction of a *plot*, a literary term quite appropriate to this context.<sup>101</sup> The musicologist reconstitutes from dispersed sources one possible story of a text whose final form we possess, choosing one *thread* from among several and developing it. Strictly speaking, the musical historian, like any other historian, constructs a *tale*. The stage director, the audience, the critic also construct *their own* plot: the story Wagner wanted to tell, the story of the libretto, the story told by the structure of the motifs. A different *standard of selection* determines which elements will be used to fabricate the plot of each story, assigning to each a value subject to variation. If diverse theoretical positions can all speak of “fidelity to intention,” it is because the intention of one is not the intention of another.

Several things follow from this position. First of all—something that has been said a hundred times before—this Tetralogy is uneven. I sometimes would

100. Sadoul, p. 92.

101. “Facts do not exist in isolation, inasmuch as we call the framework of history a plot, a very human, hardly ‘scientific’ combination of material cause, purpose, and chance; in a phrase, it is a slice of life, which the historian cuts as he chooses, and in which facts have an objective and relative relation to one another. . . . The word *plot* reminds us that the object of the historian's study is as human as the play or the novel, *War and Peace* or *Antony and Cleopatra*. . . . What facts, then, are worthy of the historian's interest? It all depends on the chosen plot; in it a fact is neither interesting nor uninteresting. . . . In history as in the theater, it is impossible to express everything, not because it would require too many pages, but because there do not exist elemental historical facts, factual atoms. If we cease to see events in the context of their plot, we are drawn down into the abyss of the infinitesimal.” (Paul Veyne, *Comment on écrit l'histoire*, Paris, Seuil, 1971, pp. 46-47).

have liked (my plot . . .) Chéreau to emphasize a particular detail. After the astonishing third act of *Die Walküre*, the same decor in the third act of *Siegfried* is somewhat disappointing; something new should have appeared. I would have liked to have seen an expansiveness in the decor to equal the two lovers' joy and the danger that threatens them. Why not improve the dragon motif I spoke of earlier? With his genius for clarifying different layers of sound, Boulez could certainly have made this easier to identify. This statement, attributed to Wagner by Cosima, should also be taken into account: "This kiss of love is the first touch of death, the end of individuality. This is the source of Siegfried's fear."<sup>102</sup> A morbid anxiety infects the rapture of first love in this scene, enshrouding the characters' actions: "So will I drink life from these sweet lips, even if I die from it" (Siegfried); "The light is extinguished: everything grows dark around me . . . the terror that overcomes me runs wild"; "Let us die laughing, laughing we die" (Brünnhilde).<sup>103</sup>

Here then is my plot for the genesis of the *Ring*: Once he had settled on a meaning for Wotan, the composer really didn't know what to do with Siegfried. In a letter to Roeckel dated August 23, 1856, he made it clear that although he no longer believed in the Hellenistic optimism on which the book was based, Siegfried would nevertheless preserve his individuality in order to be happy. Chéreau's pessimistic interpretation is somewhat removed from the character's proper psychological state. Was the Siegfried of 1876 still for Wagner the "purely human" hero of 1848, the precursor of a new age? Can this ever be positively stated?

It becomes apparent that acceptance or rejection of Chéreau's position depends in the final analysis on the importance, the *weight* accorded to certain *elements* of the plot. Why not admit that what finally elicits acceptance of this production, with its weaknesses and what may be called its errors, is the brilliant effect of its entirety. I still feel the effect of certain powerful images: Brünnhilde and Wotan's farewell; Erda's veil left behind in Wotan's hands; Wotan's attempt to steady the great balance of time, crying, "Das Ende! das Ende!"; the Norns, spiders of fate caught in their own web. None of this, of course, occurs in the text. "Opera means theater," Butor has said. A contradiction perhaps. But given the searching pessimism and the symphonic narrativity of this *Ring*, so much beauty is happily received; and if Boulez and Chéreau have betrayed Wagner, then we side with the traitors.

102. R. Du Moulin Eckart, *Cosima Wagner*, Munich and Berlin, Frei Masken, 1929, I, p. 460.

103. Richard Wagner, *Siegfried*, Paris, Aubier-Flammarion, p. 265.

## A Conversation

PIERRE BOULEZ and MICHEL FANO

translated by THOMAS REPENSEK

*Fano:* I would like to begin by asking how we can define modernity in music today, in terms of both its creation and its reception. After a beginning that we can designate very generally as Stravinsky, the Vienna School, and so on, how are we to situate musical thinking today, including its violent and even terrorist currents? Before you answer I will just add—because Bayreuth is always a little in the back of our minds—that it seems clear to me that the productions I have seen are certainly examples of modernity (and not modernism), inasmuch as its thought is modern because enlightening.

*Boulez:* Modernity really begins, I think, with the rejection of the preconceived frame of reference. It's a definitive and, I would say, a priori rejection. This is of primary importance, because the preceding generation—excepting, of course, Stravinsky and Schönberg—developed a sense of remorse. They had been, in fact, ultramodern, but a time came when they needed security, when they began to lose their balance and panicked, or whatever. In any case, they fell back on a model in order to rethink the problems in safety. And, for me, the concept of modernity involves first that state of circumstances in which thinking cannot be physically adapted to things as they exist, in which thought must invent, for expressive reasons, the formal structure of invention itself. I think that this modernity has had its precursors—for example, Beethoven in his late works and Wagner in the theater were truly innovative—when what follows totally disregards what has preceded it. A moment arrives when things must change. And I believe that this occurs somewhat in spite of itself, in former times that is, when the preconception of the existing form, the existing frame, was firmly established, in which creative thinking was completely framed. There was to begin with a struggle between this formal frame, in which everyone had his place, and individualism, which broke the frame apart. At the beginning of this century the frame was suddenly shattered, in spite of itself, and the consequences were works which generally speaking had no need of formal musical concepts. The most advanced works of the time were ballets or theater works, whose formal concept conflicts with theatrical form,

which is completely different from that of music. "Le Sacre du Printemps," therefore, is an example, and "Erwartung" a typical one, in which the theatrical concept—the extramusical concept I would say—really forced people to think of the music in a different way. In any case, they took advantage of the opportunity to escape from the formal musical framework. The same applies to Webern, whose most advanced work is always involved with a text. It was the text that finally led to a formal framework different from that of music.

*Fano:* You mention "Erwartung"; why "Erwartung" and not "Pierrot Lunaire"?

*Boulez:* Because, from a certain point of view, "Erwartung" is more daring. "Pierrot Lunaire" employs small closed forms, a succession of twenty-one closed forms, which are easier to organize because they are intense, separated moments on their own. Naturally, there is continuity from moment to moment, but the work is nevertheless easier to organize, and in my opinion depends much more on the traditional romantic lieder cycle. Compare it, for example, with Schumann, who composed cycles that were obviously structured with repeated themes, etc., and you clearly see "Pierrot Lunaire" as extremely derivative. Just as "Erwartung" is not without precedent, if you like, in Wagner and even Strauss. But "Erwartung" really went further in combining all the formal elements in a continuous line that is remarkably long for something as chaotic as this twenty-five minute work. It is very long, practically continuous, and when you examine it closely, you see that it is very difficult to make cuts in it. There is no point, or hardly any, of stabilization.

*Fano:* The idea of parts . . .

*Boulez:* Yes, the idea of parts almost doesn't exist. Which is not the case, for example, in Berg, where of course whole elements closed in on themselves do exist, linked together, but completely closed. "Erwartung," on the other hand, is for me the prototype of a kind of open form, whose development is unknown, and the only point of reference, especially at the beginning, is the dramatic impulse. Only the unfolding of the story itself is unclear. It's not a story where you go from one point to another. It's a story where there is nothing to understand in the logical sense of the term. There is no conclusion and it's not clear what actually has taken place. It could continue, it could already have begun, it's a sort of temporal rift, a scrap of time torn off that ends. Moreover, the end of "Erwartung" always leaves people up in the air, because in effect it is an end without conclusion, a little like the "Drowning" in *Wozzek*, but the "Drowning" has an end, and suddenly an equilibrium is established. The end of "Erwartung," however, is the fragment of a veil that has been completely torn away. And like the beginning, it hesitates; we don't really know where it's going; it's like a photograph or a film not quite in focus. Something is visible but it could as easily be a lamp as the edge of a wall—who knows?—until gradually the focus is adjusted and the objects come into view.

And then, at the end, a sharp rift occurs, like a fragment of an identifying feature suspended in air. I find that absolutely remarkable. In Stravinsky, of course, in the "Sacre du Printemps," you still have the organization by dances, that is, the use of parts, but parts that refer to one another; these are easily retained in transitions, but the organic continuity of this work cannot be explained in terms of musical continuity. Not at all. Naturally, very general laws, laws of contrast, do apply; after something lively, something slow; after something strong, something soft, etc., but . . .

*Fano:* The large musical rhythms . . .

*Boulez:* Yes, but that's not where we find the meaning of form; it's too elementary. That is form's negative aspect, its nondescriptive, restrictive side; that is, you have something that is strong, something that is not soft. It is perhaps a massive structure, for example, and then another structure cut away from it. Very well, but these are what I call envelopes. What's inside is more complicated than that.

*Fano:* I am thinking again about modernity. I don't remember if it's an article by Nattiez or some program notes where he refers constantly to a text of yours which I would like very much to see.

*Boulez:* Yes, an interview with Carlo Schmid. The interview itself wasn't very interesting, so a lot of commentary was added to fill in the gaps.

*Fano:* In that interview you say, "The future is flooded by the past"; well then, can't modernity be thought of precisely as this transitional flooding, which would distinguish it from modernism? This ebb and flow between what has always been important in the past and what should be important in the future occurs in today's present; this is what constitutes modernity.

*Boulez:* Modernity is that and more. What is at stake between modernity and modernism? I think it involves the assimilation of the past in such a way that memory is no longer a factor, so that memory can dispense with this assimilated past completely. The trouble with what I call random autodidactism, however, is that people don't know. There may be rejections, predispositions, or even affinities. Affinities or rejections that are limiting because, basically, they have not been absorbed. And when they have been absorbed, the memory can reject them because it has taken what it needs and couldn't care less about the rest. And, interestingly enough, the work absorbed is very important, much more important because it's been closely examined, but at the same time it is no longer important because it has been disposed of, voided. In this way the past becomes important and is, at the same time, disposed of. If this step is bypassed, there's a deficiency. Those who want to begin without bother about the past, or who reject the past as

such, are involved with reactions that are quite infantile, because they don't advance by way of rejection; they skip the assimilative step. It is a preventive rejection, which has never helped or immunized anyone.

*Fano:* I'd like to discuss the questions of necessity and chance, and, in doing so, to think of Bayreuth and of the character of Siegfried as defined so well by Nattiez—spirited, manipulated, and so forth. The problem of necessity and chance has preoccupied composers for the last fifteen years, and your "Third Sonata" is very significant in this regard. "Eclat," another work I am well acquainted with, defines the composer's strategy toward the interpreter in a different way. How do you experience these two relationships, and how especially do you think the audience perceives them? This is a crucial problem, since there is generally only one version, one itinerary. How, therefore, does the audience confront the work from the very beginning?

*Boulez:* Now that is a question, like many others of course, with which I've always been concerned. "Are we or are we not aware of what is going on?" Naturally, it is very easy on the printed page. Take a poem, for example; if you're looking at the page, of course you see its structure, a structure that may change. But imagine that you deliver it orally. You commit yourself to a particular presentation. You have no choice but to say one sentence after another. Take Mallarmé: I recently reread his celebrated projected book, and about the readings he wanted to give; precisely that, but with variations: to reveal to a certain number of people, through different readings, a complete understanding of the circuits. I remember when there were works of that sort (aleatoric they were called) with structures that repeatedly changed. There was a time when it was considered interesting to perform the same work twice in the same concert, so that, it was claimed, we would understand the difference. That sort of thing never interested me, because I don't think that is what a multiple work sets out to accomplish. A multiple work should be encountered differently at different times. We do not necessarily see—I am referring especially to a solo work where the immediate gesture is everything—we do not see the code in operation. A multiple work is paradoxical because when we hear it, we hear it as one. We really hear one unique version without being able to determine what constitutes its multiplicity. Therefore, a work is made because it is not determined and yet, what is finally heard—a version—is determined. Now, that made me think about composing a similar work, because I think that the work must necessarily have a formal curve in whatever way it develops. Although the form must be conceived at a higher level, it should be conceived so as to be perceived as a fixed form in a specific rendering. I think all too few have looked into this sort of thing. What really interests them is the explosion of the moment. I call it the rehearsing of clichés.

The expression of the moment, improvised expression, doesn't interest me very much because it emerges from habits of thinking and of action—reflexes. It

may be interesting as psychodrama, but generally speaking, it is not interesting from the point of view of musical structure, because the expression is, frankly, banal. Therefore, what I find interesting about a multiple-circuit work is that, if it is listened to as a work, it has a definitive form. But this definitive form will not be the definitive form heard at another time. Yet, if you listen to the work several times, exactly the same things will register, but at different locations or in different contexts, with a different gesture even; in any case, the work will have a completed form, set for one time. It is completion at a specific time that interests me. Not mobility as such.

*Fano:* Yes, I understand, yet you still want the work to be heard several times.

*Boulez:* Yes, of course. When you listen to a work, for example "Opus 106," which is a complex work, you listen to it again; you don't listen to it only once in your life.

*Fano:* Of course.

*Boulez:* You listen to it many times. In order to understand its complex relationships, you have to listen to it a number of times to really understand its tonality. It's the same thing, yet when you listen a second time, you don't listen to exactly the same thing again. You listen to the same elements, only they are disposed not in a different way but—how should I say it?—the form remains almost the same.

*Fano:* When we made a film together fifteen years ago you evoked different views of the same landscape in order to understand why we take one road rather than another. Were you thinking of a city?

*Boulez:* Yes, absolutely—Venice in fact.

*Fano:* Why Venice?

*Boulez:* Because Venice seems to me to be the most anxiety-ridden city and this is what constitutes a city for me. Because a city is a labyrinth. And I believe that a work should be fundamentally a labyrinth. A labyrinth that occurs only once, or that is reexperienced always in the same way, so there are always several interpretations of the same labyrinth. But a labyrinth where you are probably not always in the same circumstances, in the same situation. And this labyrinthine work is for me one of the keys to what I want to do, to what I think I must do.

*Fano:* The "Third Sonata" just now?

*Boulez:* No, but I am going to begin work on it again.

*Fano:* But "Eclat" involves a completely different set of circumstances.

*Boulez:* Yes.

*Fano:* And I think it might be interesting if you would clarify this because in "Eclat" one gets the impression really that the harp—or whatever instrument it is, I forget which one—is really Siegfried.

*Boulez:* Oh yes, absolutely.

*Fano:* And that I find rather curious.

*Boulez:* Of course you understand, I spoke about . . .

*Fano:* Monitored liberty.

*Boulez:* Yes, that's it. A string, a puppet's string. But a puppet that can answer back. As I've already explained, there is the excitement of not knowing exactly when. There is stimulation and anxiety which certainly changes the game. I am considering the issue of interpretation from this point of view: there is very little difference between interpretations by one or by two persons. The codes can be completely assimilated by both, by the soloist or the two together. There is freedom that cannot be seen. In a small group, freedom is visible. For freedom cannot be grasped by everybody, only a single individual can take it. And the others react, or don't react, or even go to pieces. I've experimented quite a bit with this and written about it. There are passages in which everything is in very definite measure, everyone is together; then I stop marking time, and because it is a very difficult tempo, it goes completely out of synchronization. After a certain time, I resume a certain measure, and everyone takes it up again. It's a way of signaling to players to let go, of losing them and retrieving them again.

I have seen what happens, for example, when the classical repertory is performed. There is an accident. Obviously accident is the state of circumstances in which the code no longer functions. Something is lost, optically, as a result of the code's no longer functioning. It would be interesting to use that very loss of code to understand how the music falls off.

*Fano:* Theatrical experience.

*Boulez:* It's theatrical experience, and a musical experience when somewhat more complicated things are at issue, when we realize that someone has not been following. Then I know I have lost them. Like Tom Thumb in the forest, I really lose them. Then I leave a trail of pebbles to bring them back. This is where you see the code, a collective code, that is, which is addressed to the individual or group as

such. Then the group becomes fragmented. I did this to a certain extent in "Le Domaine," which I divided into three sections. It is a continuation of "Eclat," whose chord structure is similar. I let people go, I began to conduct, and then I stopped. That's all. And since the rhythms were too complicated to really be together, it broke apart. What's interesting about groups is their coincidence/non-coincidence. Our music has always developed essentially by coincidence. Improvised music, let's call it random music, is total noncoincidence. The two extremes are all very well, but there is all that space in between which makes it possible to go invisibly from one to the other. That is, there is a transition from chaos to absolute order. Extreme situations interest me for only very short periods of time, on the whole. They very quickly become monotonous, unambiguous. Without ambiguity we quickly understand. And in "Eclat," there will be a great expansion. The first part is, therefore, this totally free thing, then there is a part that is completely unified, and then, after a certain amount of time, I go back and forth; that is, instead of giving signals that simply correspond to someone's event, I supply signals that correspond, for example, to the event of several persons, and then I let it go and the event disappears. It's an event that begins in order and then ends because I am occupied with something else.

*Fano:* But, and I ask this for precision's sake, is the solitary event completely written?

*Boulez:* Completely written, yes.

*Fano:* Except that it's no longer maintained.

*Boulez:* No. You are aware of what is going on and when you conduct, you can direct with one hand, two hands, etc., and finally when things become very complicated, you no longer notice the tempo. You're therefore no longer interested in producing very complicated superpositions of three and four, with tempi that follow in the order three and four or five and seven. It serves no purpose. Especially if the writing is complicated. If a beat is perceived, the relationship can exist. If the writing is complicated, the internal beat is so fleeting you can bring together events with different beats, but that doesn't count. What I find interesting, therefore, is to start something, and then something else. This superimposition becomes clouded, because (since we're speaking of complexity) it is precisely because you want it to disappear.

*Fano:* It's a historic question then! Don't you think that this development has been largely determined by the sort of "over-stipulation" of a certain period, ending, in '28 or '29, in the "Klavierstücke"?

*Boulez:* Yes.

*Fano:* Is there a connection?

*Boulez:* A territory was invaded and one saw that the limits of absurdity had been reached. They began to realize that much more subtle results could be achieved by a specificity of gesture. The musical gesture had been completely lost sight of. The musical gesture enables you to do things that the "measuring" of things no longer allows. At certain times this liberty, this monitored liberty as you call it, is much more productive than the yoke of calculation, which has its limits. What's more, there is an enormous loss of execution in performance, because it can be so complicated that you only pay attention to the execution, and even fifty percent of that is lost. So I always avoid it. Sometimes, however, it's intentional. I have done that in certain parts for the harp where I wanted harp echoes, and I wanted it to continue but more or less by chance, and I wanted it precisely noted. So I determined very small values, minims, so that at least they would never overlap; I don't remember which harp, the first or the third, anyway I really don't give a damn because they are the same chords that cut across the different chords of the harp. There is a quarter-tone harp, another kind of harp, and a half-tone harp. You have the same chords on all three. It's impossible for them to do it together because they attempt to be rhythmical in the correct way, and it's really impossible to do in a very simple succession, but I know that; I do it intentionally and when I work I say, "not so slowly, like this, ta, ta, ta . . ." Then when you get to a normal tempo, it goes "blll," but that is what seems right to me.

*Fano:* This brings us to my third point: repetition and difference. How much of a complex phenomenon is perceived? And finally, where is pleasure located? And understanding? How does the mind perceive the difference between repetition and difference?

*Boulez:* I'm interested in the notion of envelopment. When you have a complex phenomenon, you always have to compensate for it with some kind of simplicity. There can only be brief moments in a work when all the components are complex. When this occurs, what is heard is dispersed; it is rendered chaotic, because the constituent parts cannot be separated. The amount of information is too overwhelming to be differentiated; each component is apprehended rather by chance; you grasp what strikes you suddenly. So what I do is work with a negative aspect of this. For example, if I accentuate rhythmic sequences, I sometimes practically annihilate the entire harmonic content; that is, the harmonic context doesn't shift, or it shifts very little. You can only hang onto a more specific auditory phenomenon. Or if the instrumentation is highly inflected, overcharged, finely wrought from an acoustic point of view, there is an aspect of it that I usually never approach. Or I use large envelopes—you referred to the "Third Sonata"—which make the registers, for example, so clear that they cannot be mistaken. Thus, all the green structures in the "Third Sonata" are in the center. They are

only slightly inflected on purpose, and all the other structures are, well, here and there. They begin in a distant register, and approach the central register as the curve is being defined; you have the green structure which is stable, and the red structure which is a zigzag and which gradually approaches the green structure through the register. It is, therefore, impossible not to hear this contrast. The second contrast that one cannot fail to hear is the relationship between sound blocks and sound points. You sense very clearly when a structure is approaching; that's a point and these are blocks. I make use of categories in this way—not rudimentary, but well-determined, clearly visible envelopes—in order to really work at a deeper level. For example, in "Eclat," when the instruments of the small accompanying group come in, the instrumentation is such that we are not aware that there is a complete change in instrumentation, form, and the way the sonic material is used, that creates a completely different universe. I think this is very important.

There are always large envelopes. The most difficult thing I've done was in "Explosante fixe" where I attempted an exclusively permutational form, that is, where the form undergoes no evolution whatsoever. There is, for example, an element A, which will recur fifteen times; an element B, which will recur let's say twelve times; an element C, which will recur seven times, etc.; and then a central element that occurs only once. There will be a lot of permutations among the elements. And each time, these elements regain exactly the same form of expression, that is, the same register. Element A, for example, will always be in the same register; element B, always in the same deep register; and element C, always in the middle register. Element A will always be highly ornamented while the notes in B will be quite severe, and so on. It's very difficult, especially when the work is complex, but I think these permutations can be located since they move always in the same directions. The things that are much more difficult to locate are located, but only because they are associated with a clearly identifiable characteristic. Working with Wagner and Berg pointed me in this direction. I noticed that especially for something complex they use a lot of mnemonic devices. For example, in *Wozzek* or *Lulu*, when there is a reprise, it is always in the same register so that it functions mnemonically. It is almost always the same sounds which are heard, and even people who do not have absolute pitch still receive some kind of descriptive return. They don't know how it happens, but there can be no doubt that the descriptive effect is there. When things must evolve and transgress the mnemonic, there are changes.

*Fano:* In *Wozzek*, for example, a scene is improvised from a chord, and for someone who doesn't expect it, the development goes in a completely different direction, while structurally, it's similar. In *Lulu*, the F major at the beginning reappears precisely . . .

*Boulez:* Precisely. Some things have to be signaled while others, on the contrary,

transgress the signal—moments when you get lost. Wagner also used semaphors like this in a way.

*Fano:* Listening to the work is progressively instructive: the work's code is revealed as it unfolds, and then it becomes amazingly clear. Which is to be expected since it's meant to be recognizable.

*Boulez:* There are themes I call developmental and themes that, while not regressive, involve "a return to." Mnemonic themes to give the memory something to hold on to. We are certainly aware, in complex works like those of Wagner and Berg, that the memory needs to cling to the markers that are there, that are immediately recognizable, and function descriptively. Yes, it's been called the "Who's Who of the Gods," but without it the opera wouldn't work.

Also, it's a subtle technique. For example, the leitmotiv in *Pelléas*. The music is wonderful, and in this sense it has its subtleties. And you'll notice in *Götterdämmerung* that sort of constant interweaving is magnificent. What I've noticed in the evolution of Wagner's Tetralogy from its very beginning is that there is a basically neutral musical text into which references are inserted, and from time to time something of that neutrality suddenly appears, a little recitative. Proportion is completely overthrown. It's amazing, because you sense this vast information project that constructed itself.

When he composed *Rheingold* he certainly didn't know how he would use those themes twenty-five years later. We hear it, therefore, in a way that is different from the way in which he composed it, without intending to. You hear, for example, a given motif, and when you know the evolution it will undergo in *Götterdämmerung* you say, my God, it's really very slight, but what potential! What's interesting is that there are themes that are pliable, that lend themselves to that sort of thing, which he developed, and others that he abandoned. There are themes like those of the deaths of Siegmund and Sieglinde that you could imagine his using again. But no. He uses them once or twice and then stops. As themes, he never manages to entirely remove them. Even as motifs, they only recur as references to a particular situation.

What you said has made me think of the structural system in which Wagner sometimes uses quotations, quoting himself; he quotes a completely formed structure, replaces it, or recaptures elements of it. He rebuilds a structure. This is what I tend to do more and more, to construct the music's form, to displace or relocate completed structures, to have the elements interact in a different way, and to introduce other elements along the way. There is always this mnemonic ambiguity, what we think we know, what in the final analysis we don't know and are not sure of recognizing and recognize nevertheless. This is what constitutes its interest, since we are speaking about different repetitions, about a repetition we recognize as different, a difference that has had the sense of repetition. So, if you consider the beginning of *Rheingold*, really, I think the

American Minimalists . . . (laughter). Their use of repetition is only fortuitous, that of autodidacts.

*Fano:* It's really extraordinary, because that finishes it; it's a joke.

*Boulez:* And it involves a kind of "nerve." I think of people listening to it then, to that material which moves without moving. It's a stroke of utter genius. And it's one of the things that is most impressive to direct—when you have this thing that moves without moving, the two or three times it recurs in *Götterdämmerung*, when Hagen keeps night watch and sees the sun rise. Also there are those eight horns that come in one after the other. It's astounding that sort of ascent, rather short as a prelude, but really amazing. The primitive quality of the American movement is (laughs) . . . but I think they haven't thought things out. They haven't considered anything seriously.

*Fano:* Would you say something about the problems associated with material and instrument? There has been an extraordinary development of instruments; the composer's relationship to the instrument is now completely changed; he can elicit from it some extremely interesting effects which may also influence the creation and writing of the work.

*Boulez:* It seems to me that today, whether by rather conventional means—which also act to shatter convention—or by unconventional ones, or by means outside of convention, both in the domain of instruments and in electronics, there is a fundamental preoccupation with material. Where does it come from? Primarily, I think, from the fact that instruments are conceived of in terms of a certain capacity and from the fact that this capacity has been more or less fulfilled. An object invented for a given purpose certainly has resources of which even the inventor is unaware. But these resources are not infinite. There comes a time when they are exhausted unless you begin resorting to extreme situations—for example, using an electric razor to clean a street. It is obviously possible, but proves nothing. And there is a fair amount of that sort of use of instruments. It's an attempt to entirely avoid the sonority produced by an instrument in its intended function, to utterly subvert that function. This is no solution to the problem, but an evasion. You can tap on a violin, but you produce an extremely primitive sound compared to the one that a violin could produce. It's not shocking but irritating, this reduction of the efficiency of an extremely specialized object, to use a violin to produce a sound that could as easily be made with a cigar box.

If this material is instrumental, then it is really related to function. One shouldn't ignore the limits of function; that is naive, and even silly. There is a moment when the function of the instrument must change, and these functions, having undergone change, will then provide the material with a new dimension. Of course, by evading this problem we will not find a solution. On the other hand,

I also believe that electronic technique as panacea is quickly exhausted if it is used only as such. Wouldn't you agree that in today's electronic world there are many who have taken refuge in order to camouflage basic weaknesses in training or invention or in both? The problem, then, clearly seems to me that electronic material exists only as a function of composition. If it is like a display of exceptionally fine merchandise, exotic fruits for example, it is also completely spoiled, because there is no connection whatsoever between the function of the material and the inventive purpose for which this material is intended. A kind of total conditioning of the one by the other is needed. Material existing independent of thought is inconceivable to me.

*Fano:* Of course.

*Boulez:* And this is where Cage and others fail completely. They speak with a kind of imperial voice: "The material has no importance whatsoever; I make music with whatever is available." This isn't true. It's only a decision. But a decision isn't enough. It should have actual consequences. But, when we are dealing with facts, material does not adapt itself to the organization of time simply because we have decided it will.

*Fano:* Certainly.

*Boulez:* That is complete free will, and it yields no return at all, absolutely no advantage. It is something I have repeatedly discussed in my lectures at the Collège de France, the idea of a structure of responsibility in relation to this material. There is a specific moment when responsibility is established, and if you decide that this responsibility does not exist, then you are pretending, for, in fact, it does exist. This is why we cannot even talk about order or validity, or anything else, since there is absolutely no really responsible relation between material and invention. For me, this is an extremely important point, and it's understandable that many composers are bothered by the fact that instruments, the instrumental corpus that we still use, are strongly limited by the past. But this realization is not sufficient. Transformation is necessary, and at a given moment a transformation is made in either of two ways: by using conventional material in a different way, that is, by an accumulation such that in the resulting ambiguity the character of the instrument disappears. Orchestration makes it possible to have sounds that are so complex in themselves and so complex in their rapid succession that their origin cannot be determined. In "Eclat," for example, when I produce very short sounds, mixing two or three notes, it's not clear which instrument produced them and you would have difficulty in deciding, "There's a mandolin-guitar," or whatever. Or, in the other works I am orchestrating I make transitions so fleeting, so rapid that you can't analyze them. The effect of conventional instruments can be mitigated in the richness that results from extensive superimposition, such that analysis is practically impossible.

*Fano:* We already see that in Wagner. There are instrumental combinations that defy analysis when heard for the first time.

*Boulez:* He was the first to orchestrate in this way. For lack of a better term, I call it acoustical instrumentation.

*Fano:* Yes, it expresses the sense of something closely controlled. Since IRCAM concentrates on this sort of research, we might ask how your work as a composer is concerned with this problem. IRCAM has initiated an extremely interesting kind of research; do you intend to make use of it yourself?

*Boulez:* Yes, from now on. That is, what interests me, to begin with, is the transition from instrument to electronics. I conducted some misleading experiments at first, about twenty years ago, when our studio was still rather primitive and we couldn't really do much, at least nothing more refined than instruments themselves. I was never really convinced by the electronic experiments, apart from a very few, because, quite frankly, the thinking behind this material was really rather unsound in terms of what we know about musical composition. And as I see it, this was the result of the material—the electronic equipment—having a sort of unlimited efficiency and, at the same time, an extremely limited output because it was not conceived basically as a function of a certain order of musical thinking and because it did not go beyond a physical, mechanical proliferation of events, over which no control could be maintained. I do not mean that control shouldn't sometimes be lost, or that things cannot be invented without being written. That's not what I mean. But control of function and control of creation should be there. You don't just turn one machine on while another works at the same time—a kind of gadget, an inkblot method, which doesn't go very far. Then it's reduced to a psychological test.

What really interests me is the two extremes. On one hand, sound transformed by the instruments; on the other, not only the transformation of sound but its being made anonymous. This is what I tried to do and will attempt to improve on and actually accomplish in "Explosante fixe." You begin with an instrument that has a very distinctive sound and transform it so that the resulting sound could be from a flute, a violin, a cello. You don't know how to recognize it and you might say, "Well, it's the sound of a flute and not a cello." What interests me is this total pulverization, pulverization that is further increased by that of the loudspeaker, because I find, due to the resistance involved, a greater affinity between the amplified sound of a flute and the amplified sound of a cello than between the amplified and unamplified sounds of a flute. Amplification has already pulverized the material; we sense that the sound comes from a loudspeaker. But I noticed once—it wasn't a musical experiment, but a Peter Brook play in which there was a part at the beginning in which the voices were normal and very few were amplified, and a second part in which the voices were amplified for almost the entire time, with very few natural voices—finally I noticed that, of all the actors

who were on stage whose voices were electronically transmitted, it was impossible to distinguish who was saying what and where the voice was coming from. The source and location of the sound in the confusion of men's and women's voices were impossible to determine. But the great unifier, if I may call it that, was the loudspeaker. What seemed interesting to me was having instrumental music rendered anonymous and completely pulverized by the transforming, strangulating passage through the loudspeaker system. This relationship between personality and anonymity is both interesting and productive; with a flute we can make a bell—to make a foolish comparison—and at the same time this bell is anonymous. It no longer has any power. You still sense personality if you have very personal things for instruments, for example, double repetitions for the flute; you know very well that that could only come from a flute.

You have to give the instruments extremely specific characteristics for those characteristics to stand out or remain recognizable. But they are recognizable as an envelope, although no longer as the central event. It's very interesting to do that and it's what I want to do in "Explosante fixe." Many of my ideas come from different areas by means of which a musical phenomenon seems suddenly to be, of necessity, something else. You must have seen the Japanese Bunraku theater where the puppet is manipulated by three people, the musician, and the narrator along side them. I would like to have a flute, for example, played by three or four people who really make a puppet out of it, that completely change it. One will be completely manipulated by the other and create a sort of vast personal dimension to the game, that will be completely subsumed in something much larger.

Personally, I have little sympathy for electronic instruments that people directly control, because they can't do much. They can step on a pedal once in a while, press a key, but really . . .

*Fano:* The synthesizer has become an electric organ, which is uninteresting.

*Boulez:* What's interesting is to use the synthesizer only as a transmitter. For example, determine a modulation limit to make it possible to play at the same time, at the same rhythm as the others, so that the modulation limit becomes unrecognizable. Or perhaps make a recording of the time. It's a very complicated notion (laughs); I have someone record—he presses a key that records only those notes by altering the characteristic or not altering it; and then, when that sequence, let's say structure A, recurs, I restate beneath it the first A structure, but reduced to its general outline; and as I restate the B sequences, I add only the essential points of the outline, so that the last sequence will be cut to the bone, a combination of all the others, progressively reduced, a piling up of reductions, and on top of this charnel house we will have the last structure.

I am interested in reinforcing the function of written music with mechanical characteristics that function as extensions of them, but differently. There is a sequence, for example, with a series of intervals. This series of intervals is recorded,

then you put them in random sequence. Every time you restate a sequence, you have the same sequence but in a completely different form, with octaves all through, that is, randomly occurring changes in octave. Finally, you have all these changes combined, in summary form, like the first structures, only then they are in a series that we could call completely random and superimposed. Or sequences that are rhythmically very complicated, that clash with a transformation sequence that is rhythmically quite fixed. You have a rhythmic transformation sequence, for example; you superimpose on it a sequence that is absolutely rigid, that has no organic similarity with what it transforms; the superimposition of the nonorganic transformation mechanism over an organic structure makes things happen.

*Fano:* Certainly, but you're talking about the electronic system used in terms of its actual nature.

*Boulez:* That's it. Not just a small transformation, but the use of the electronic function as such.

*Fano:* I've discussed this at length with Jean-Claude Risset. It is interesting to use the computer as backup to the composer.

*Boulez:* I am pleased to hear you say that. Jean-Claude and I have had long discussions about it, to mesh the mental circuits of composition with such a machine, to organize a virtual work in which the composition circuit is organized but in which there's nothing more, in which the material is infiltrated, so that the composition circuit organizes the material.

*Fano:* It's a marvelous idea.

*Boulez:* Analysis of the mental process of composition is phenomenally important. I think our goal should be to create a work where only process exists, which could be applied to different material categories that anyone could set in motion at the very moment they were heard. The work as potential coming into existence only when the listener decides to allow it to exist.

*Fano:* As in Mallarmé.

*Boulez:* Yes. And with today's equipment. The overlapping of the completely random organization can be played with. If it doesn't work, there will be an opening. If, for example, the structure rejects a certain type of material, the structure will not function and the results will be paradoxical, and I see that as . . .

*Fano:* I would like now to raise the question of what we might call music outside of itself, the relations—and these are at the very center of the issue—of . . .

*Boulez:* Of music and the theater.

*Fano:* Of music with what is not music. I've felt this as I've been watching and hearing the *Ring*. An important question must be asked. How is it that something so contemporary has no current extension? And why is it that creative people refuse to deal with this problem, the form of opera? I am not referring to certain operatic composers, but let's say the few really important composers. Are the instruments lacking? What's the problem?

*Boulez:* There are many factors. One main problem is the immobility of all that enormous machinery. It's a direct product of the nineteenth century and has evolved very little since then, not only in its deployment of energy and people, but in its architecture as well. The design of the opera theater is extremely confining today and practically impossible to change. Replacing the traditional operatic stage would entail enormous financial risk. Other productions would have to be suspended while the new system was being set up; reconstructing the relationship between orchestra and stage could force the theater to close. Dismantling and rebuilding would be astronomically expensive. As for the theater at Bayreuth, what is extraordinary is that we've seen nothing like it in a century! The theaters have still not adopted that kind of plan. And we still have the Italian style theater of the eighteenth century, but on a very much larger scale. Instead of fifty musicians, we have one hundred and twenty. There's absolutely no acoustical justification for that immense "pool" of musicians in front of the stage. And then visually, you know, it's really awful; that barrier, that curtain of sound between the singers and the audience that makes it impossible to see; even if you're upstairs, you've got that pool underneath you, a lot of people simultaneously bobbing about.

There's another problem to be considered. To a certain extent, the theatrical revival of the postwar period took place in very small theaters. The only author whose work was on a large scale, and that rather late, was Genet. All the others, Beckett in England, for example, always produced on a small scale, a small number of actors, plays in condensed form.

In any case, the great innovative directors, Chéreau in France and Stein in Germany, were the ones who created theatrical spaces completely unlike those to which we had become accustomed. This renewal of the theater, even if it often used conventional means, took place in the large, warehouse-like spaces that were created for them. The example of Peter Stein in Berlin, who really created his own theatrical space, is extremely significant. Ronconi's *Orlando Furioso* could not have been presented in a traditional theater.

It therefore seems to me that the renewal of musical theater must have been influenced by what I call the warehouse. I intend to do something at IRCAM on "Theater and Music," inviting composers, and especially directors, people like Chéreau certainly; Stein, who is an extremely important exponent of contempo-

rary theater; the heirs of the Living Theater; and others in that direction. Take Peter Brook for example. His life in the theatrical establishment ended at a certain point. He wanted to structure a theater of his own, in its own context, whose representational forms could no longer be accommodated within a conventional framework.

What is true for theater is even truer for musical theater. The formal apparatus of an opera house is much more imposing, from a social as well as technical point of view, than that of the dramatic stage. This is part of the problem. To accept this situation means painting over the old form—a rainbow in acrylics let's call it—to make it more contemporary, but the framework remains the same. That's why I want to experiment theatrically at IRCAM—to liberate it completely. Because there we can do anything, really. In the context of the city . . .

*Fano:* Don't you think the cinema has something to offer here?

*Boulez:* I'm sure it does.

*Fano:* How do you think the cinema can be used?

*Boulez:* Although I'm not really sure, I would say a cinema of excess. What I mean is the restraints are of a different kind. All the theatrical arts are rigorously held in check, in one way or another. Cinema is controlled commercially. If there's no one to underwrite the enormous expense, without guarantee of return, nothing will happen. Or you are faced with the alternative of things like the State, perhaps, assuming responsibility, creating certain special circuits, or using television—but a channel that would be almost completely free of control. Personally I see little chance of this solution. You know as well as I do (and you're better informed), first, how few interesting films there are, and second, that there are almost no interesting films with interesting sound tracks in distribution.

*Fano:* This is where commercial factors exert their control. You don't have enough time to do the work, and the incompetent are employed. If all these conditions were to occur simultaneously, do you think that a presentation whose image and sound are thereby completely "frozen" could produce effects as astonishing as those that we experience living today? But this isn't an aesthetic constraint we are dealing with here.

*Boulez:* No. Well, I think that film should play a part in performance today. Have you seen what Svoboda did with direct projection of television images on a screen?

*Fano:* In Czechoslovakia?

*Boulez:* Yes.

*Fano:* It wasn't a story about a dancer who arrives in an airplane, walks down the stairway, and finds herself in the middle of a stage, was it?

*Boulez:* No. What I saw was mostly faces. For example, there was someone very important who was being photographed by a camera and you could see his face on ten television screens at the same time, with only slightly different framings to distinguish them. When you saw him speak, you saw a proliferation of faces in different sizes. It's a very interesting technique.

*Fano:* Of enlargement?

*Boulez:* Yes. Today film conditions our eyes to vast spaces. That scale doesn't exist on stage, of course. The self becomes isolated, yet the space does not increase in size. When I recently saw Beckett's *Not I*, there was that mouth; it would be extraordinary to see a mouth speaking like that projected intermittently, enlarged forty times, filling the entire stage. Such a multiplication would be amazing. The dimensions have to be expanded, but not all to the same extent. There is a danger with film because it is completely self-contained and very difficult to integrate. I could imagine much more easily, for example, a cameraman taking the pictures as they were being simultaneously projected on screen.

*Fano:* Yes, I see. Would you say, then, that in this audiovisual age, as it's called, Wagner alone remains—a remarkable figure?

*Boulez:* He succeeded perfectly in realizing the necessary conditions of his vision, but since then advances have been minimal. We've even regressed with the Italianate theater, which is so much less interesting from a theatrical point of view. Wagner really wanted a theater of illusion.

*Fano:* And even the organization of the performance—it's amusing to hear people say, "Bayreuth's impossible, with all that ceremony." But once you organize a production in such a functional way so that there's no more jostling, when the theater is designed so that a row can be emptied in thirty seconds and the theater filled or emptied in a minute, now that's something you no longer find in theaters. None of the pushing and shoving, everyone satisfied, and it begins exactly at the right time to listen to music, four o'clock in the afternoon.

*Boulez:* Yes, it's an amazing feat of organization. The man was extremely astute. And then, especially in a town like Bayreuth, where everyone comes only for the performance and is completely cut off from everything else.

*Fano:* I would like to put a question about the gap that seems to exist between, on the one hand, the laboratory, where serious research is conducted, as represented

by IRCAM, where a certain way of rethinking the concert form goes on, one which you have imposed on your audience in France, and which seems to modify the audience's desire to hear; and, on the other hand, the people who will perform the music and who are completely ignored. It's a question of pedagogy. You have acted at the source, on what can be done in terms of composition, and the options within the composer's reach. You have questioned the possibilities of reception; but there remains that large middle ground of the performer.

*Boulez:* That is a real problem. One human life unfortunately is not enough to deal with it all. In France I have suggested setting up at La Rochelle, no, at Royan—since a festival already exists there—not a festival this time, but conferences where performers and composers could study. Although no institution exists, perhaps one could be established, starting with the Ensemble Inter-Contemporain, consolidating it with IRCAM. It might work, although its range would be limited, since it would fail to address music in all its aspects. To my way of thinking, one organization should embrace a working knowledge of performance, composition, and diffusion, all at the same time. But how can it be done by an institution such as the Conservatory? Under an imaginative individual it could be done. But you can't do it two weeks out of the year. It requires some permanence. I am ready to provide some sort of fleeting input from time to time, something; otherwise, I don't see how it's possible.

It's a problem on all levels; it's a problem of elementary education: teaching six-year-old children not music, but how to listen—music hearing. I realize very well that education has to precede theory with doing. Because doing is more important than receiving. At the same time, doing is not enough, because the gift of spontaneity, which is a child's gift, does not last. I assume this from their graphic education. Children's drawings are really lovely, sometimes quite funny, and full of imagination. But when they reach the age of ten or twelve, it's over.

*Fano:* There is no connection between that and their future adult experience?

*Boulez:* No, but I think it's also physiological; at a certain age this ability, this spontaneity disappears; culture isn't the only determining factor. A child's spontaneity simply disappears, and his relationship to the world changes. I remember as a child I would examine a fly or a spider to see how it was put together. And now I admit I'd have to be forced to look at a spider the way I used to, when I would move one of its legs to see how it reacted. There is a kind of naiveté of the imagination, an artlessness that disappears. Certainly from this point of view, the simplicity of this relationship with the world disappears. This is what we call growing up, developing. You can't always be a child. Moreover, I have often said that I am extremely skeptical about education. The great masters have shaped very few great students, and great students have sometimes come from among completely unknown people. Why was the relationship established, and

how is it established? I would say that education is as mysterious as genetics. There is something, finally, about its consequences that is impossible to grasp.

*Fano:* There is perhaps, at the limit of absurdity, no need for musical education. I will explain. In terms of instrumentation, in this sense, the Ensemble Inter-Contemporain, which of course is the best organization of its kind in Paris, is made up of first-prize winners from the Conservatory and students whose tastes have matured since the completion of their degrees. And then, the creative individuals usually stayed something like six months at the Conservatory. Perhaps it's not important. What's important is the question.

*Boulez:* Certainly, unless you're dealing with an exceptional person, like Messiaen, for example. But how many of those who came to him failed to find anything? It's like a detonator. Contact with someone interesting can have that effect. But the person able to set off the detonation is not necessarily interesting in himself.

*Fano:* Absolutely. Nevertheless, in terms of education, Messiaen was that sort of person. Something made him a detonator. I remember the first thing we studied in his class, the "Suite Lyrique." His analysis was utterly amazing. It was the detonator for me.

*Boulez:* Yes, I think that's it. When you grasp what you've been looking for. Of course, you don't find it in some ordinary person, but in someone who may have something interesting, and you take it. But it's the same thing for instrumentalists. How many really great pianists have been formed by other great pianists? None at all. And the more I think about this, the less I believe in education. I don't believe in heredity. A brilliant father can produce an imbecile, and an imbecile can have a bright child. That goes without saying. Genetics has not solved this problem yet either. It's something we don't understand. Anyway, it's fortunate for us because if you could be sure that by attending someone's class or having a brilliant father you could be a bright student or child, as on a sort of stud farm, there would be something about such a mechanistic operation that would be a little horrifying. The more I think about it, the more I favor this random nature of the individual. If there's a sort of chance in which I do believe, it is that sort. Take my own case, as a simple example. I was born into a milieu where there was little music, in a small town where nothing of musical interest existed, but I survived.

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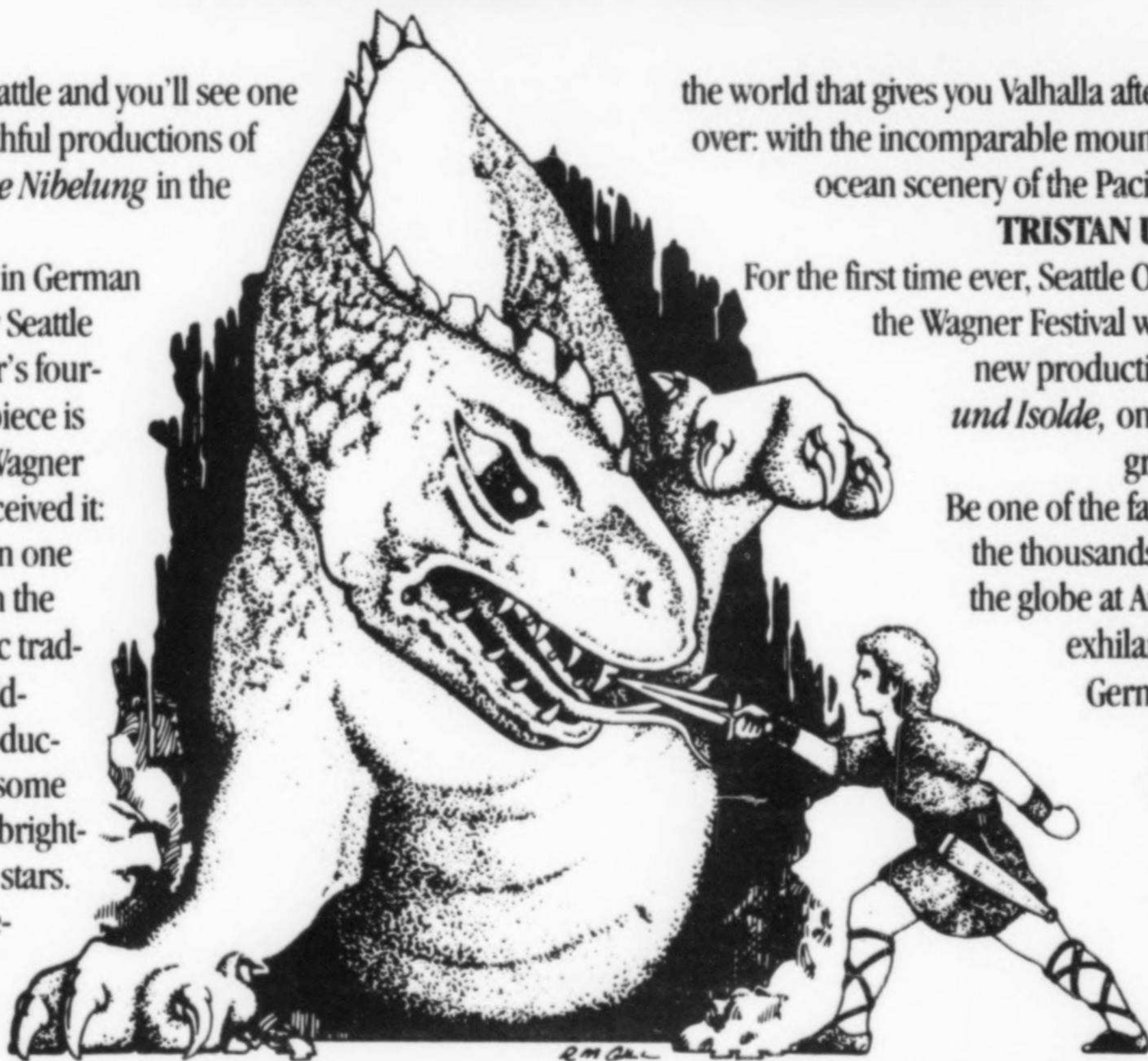
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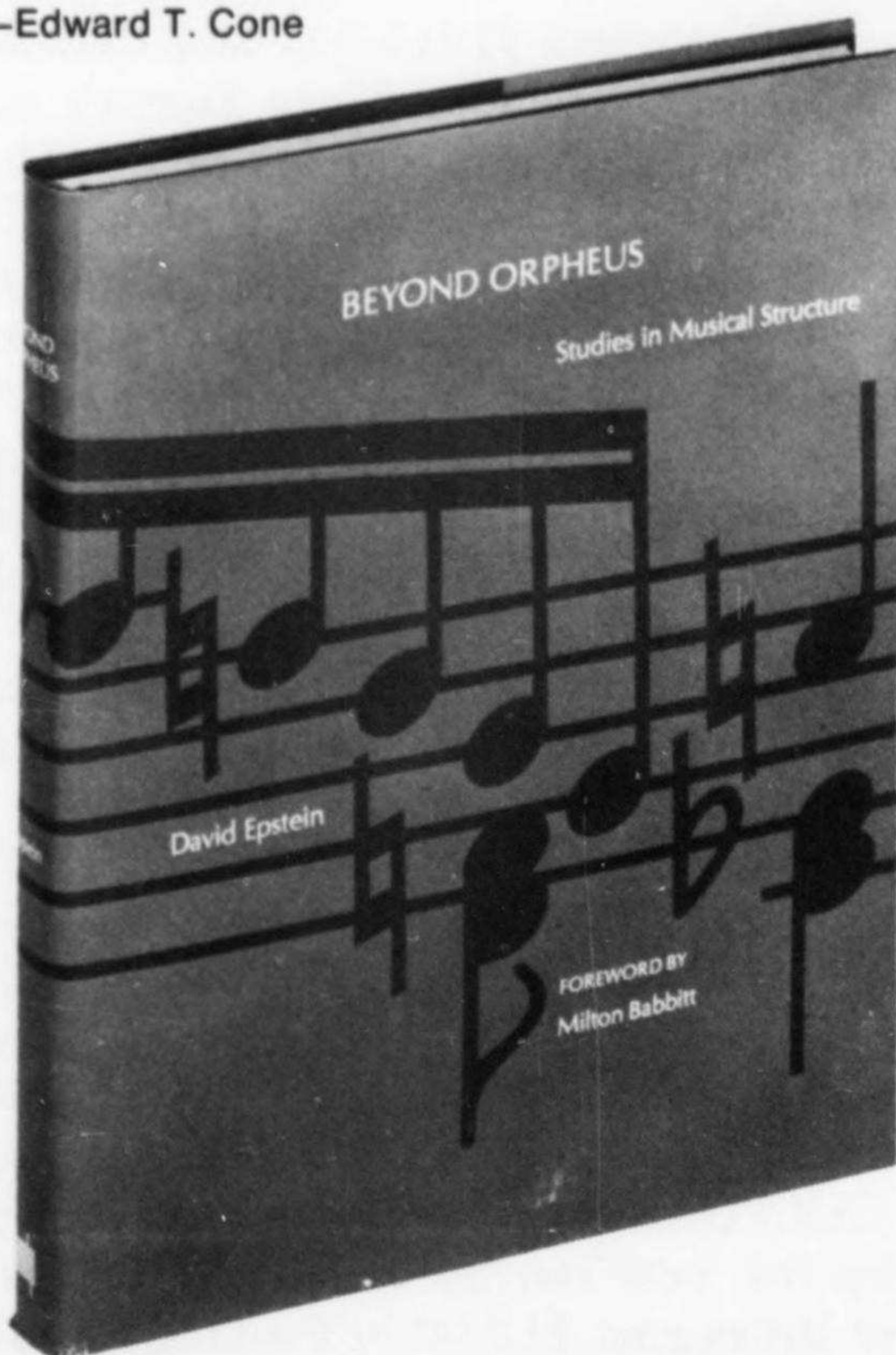
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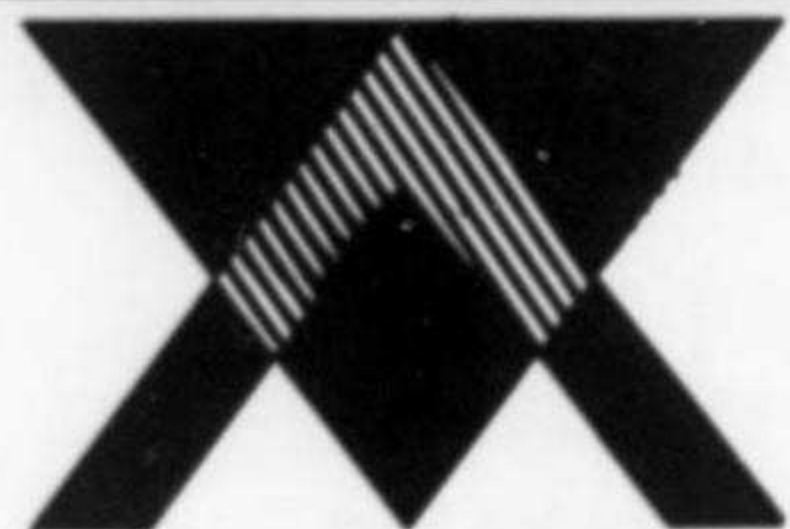
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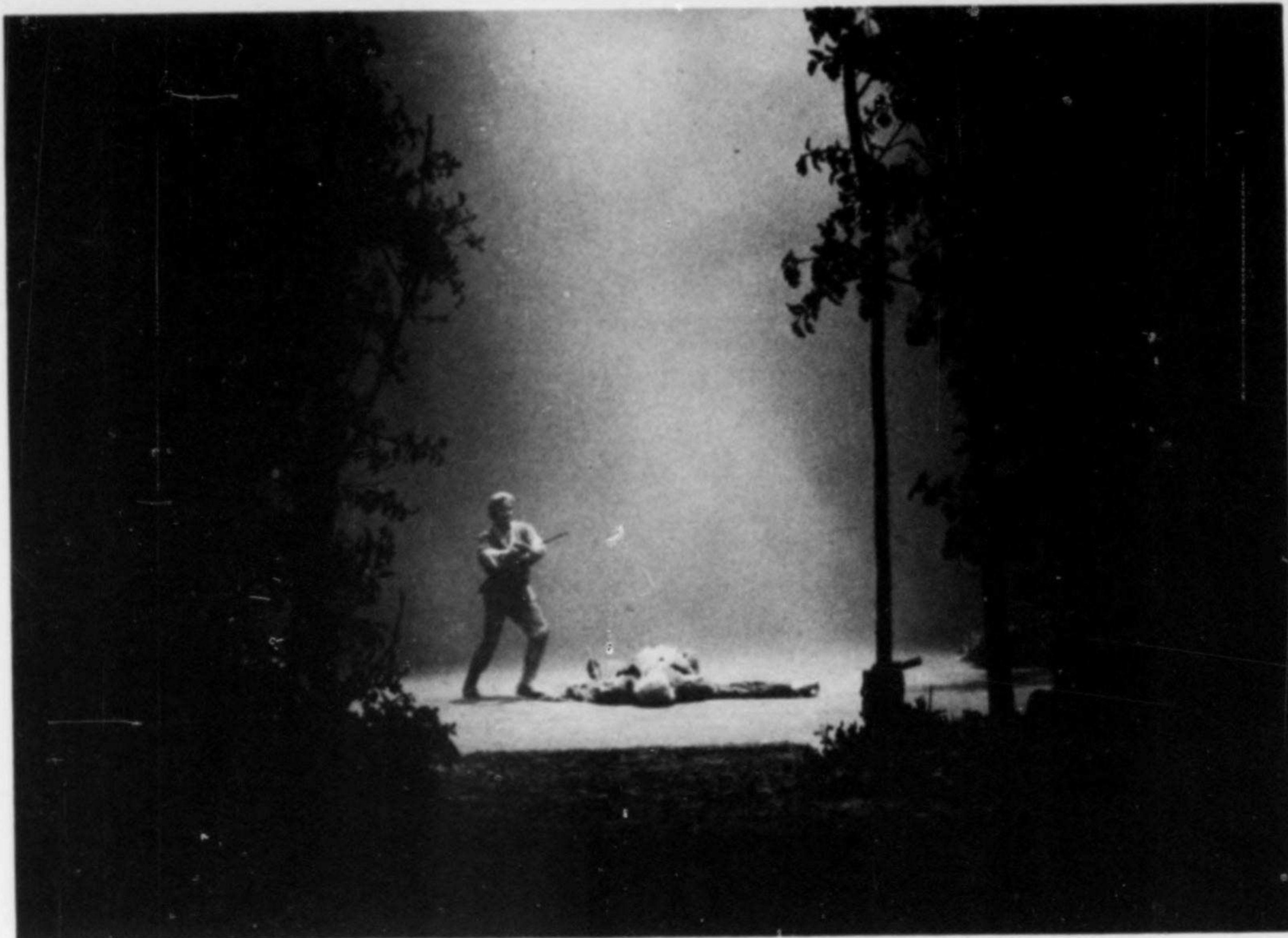
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