

IMPOSSIBLE STAGE DIRECTIONS

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the School

of Theatre and Dance

University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment

of the requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

By

Chelsea M. Taylor

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ABSTRACT

Stage directions that defy singular interpretation and do not, in fact, direct staging have been underexplored by simplistic theories which describe didascalia as fundamentally instructional. This thesis aims to develop methods of defining, interpreting, and staging impossible stage directions in modern and post-modern plays. I use textual analysis in tandem with the historical context of selected plays to elucidate the purpose of the stage direction within the text. Then, I use the purpose of the stage direction within the text to discover a responsible way of presenting the playwright's work onstage. Three case studies reconstruct an impossible stage direction from a different genre, movement, or style of theatre. The first study discusses how Anton Chekhov's breaking string in *The Cherry Orchard* breaks the traditional semiotic model of interpretation by combining realism and symbolism. The second study explores affect theory, as opposed to semiotics, as a means of interpreting Antonin Artaud's nauseating apocalypse in *Spurt of Blood*. Lastly, I use concepts from trauma studies to hypothetically stage Heiner Müller's radiating breast cancer in *Hamletmachine* as a traumatic memory. While this study does not argue for a single theory which accounts for all didascalia, the methodologies used in each section can be applied to a myriad of impossible stage directions hiding in scripts throughout theatre history.

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Introduction: Impossible Stage Directions

A mysterious breaking string ominously sounds twice disrupting an otherwise ideal example of Russian realism. A hurricane consisting of dismembered limbs, ruins of buildings, and scorpions intended to cause nausea defies the law of gravity as an act of staging cruelty. The Madonna sits on a swing while her breast cancer, both invisible and blinding, radiates into the audience as part of a postmodern expression of *Hamlet*. While these impossible stage directions may only take up only a line or two of their great scripts, they desperately call out for attention. Why are they included? How could they possibly be staged? What effects do they have on the meaning of the larger play and on the artistic movements that created them?

Despite the vast amount of information covered by literary scholars and semioticians in the last several decades, their theorizing of stage directions has overlooked the impossible stage direction. While the majority of stage directions do, in fact, direct staging and can be decoded into a singular meaning, some didascalia can neither be simplified into a sole denotation, nor represented literally onstage. Instead, the impossible stage direction resists literal staging and obscures concrete description for the imaginative reader, presenting unique problems for theatre practitioners, live audiences, and readers alike. The goal of this study is to develop methods of defining, interpreting, and staging impossible stage directions that have previously gone ignored. This project will also explore the possible functions and purposes of impossible stage directions in both modern and postmodern plays. The aim is not to provide a broad universal theory accounting for the meaning of all impossible stage directions; instead, I propose that

theatre practitioners can use close textual analysis in tandem with the historical context of the play to elucidate the purpose of the stage direction within the text and discover a responsible way of presenting the playwright's work onstage. This study defines "responsible staging" as interpretations of impossible stage directions that are rooted in the text, rather than interpretations created by practitioners outside of the text. In the following three case studies, I use semiotics, affect theory, and trauma studies as essential tools to define, interpret, and stage these tricky didascalia.

But first, what is an impossible stage direction? This study defines an impossible stage direction as one that cannot be translated into a staged icon. Most stage directions easily convert into a recognizable icon in performance, so the audiences of various productions as well as readers may understand the intended image or meaning within the script. An impossible stage direction, however, does not resemble an icon closely enough to be easily recognizable onstage. Instead, a theatre practitioner translates the direction into a staged symbol different than that within the text, permanently separating the iteration onstage from its textual blueprint. As the play is produced multiple times, each new interpretation of the impossible stage direction stands as a unique version in conversation with all other constructions. Each production, therefore, represents a single section of the fractured whole—which can never be completely presented onstage or in the text—making the stage direction impossible to entirely fulfill.

So how can a study rooted in textual analysis fully explore the staging of the impossible? After all, most stage directions call for the action, physical presence, and even embodiment that the text lacks. The impossible stage direction, however, can never be completely represented or fulfilled, so a study of specific productions or

interpretations could never capture the total, ephemeral essence of these complicated words. Instead of limiting these poetic moments to their original incarnation, this study will pursue what Andrew Sofer calls a “contextual reanimation” within the following three case studies. Contextual reanimation is the “thick description of the stage event as best we can reconstruct it.”¹ Rather than solely focusing on the choices of the director of the premiere or a seminal production, this study will incorporate the opinions about theatre of each playwright, including personal letters, interviews, journals, and manifestos. In the pursuit of the ideal, these thoughts on what the theatre should be are crucial. While no scholar can absolutely prove authorial intent, this study searches for clues indicating the purpose, or role, of these impossible moments in relation to the larger play. Some of the educated guesses are, of course, in vain. Sofer aptly describes this process of reanimation by stating, “[sometimes] an ingenious interpretation is incommunicable to an audience.”²

This study will also use the critical approach of “production analysis.” In their book *Producible Interpretation: Eight English Plays*, Robert D. Hume and Judith Milhous define “production analysis” as “[the] interpretation of the text specifically aimed at understanding it as a performance vehicle—‘reading with a directorial eye,’ if you like. While heavily grounded in textual analysis, such criticism will be undertaken on the principle that what should emerge is a sense of multiple possibilities in actual performance.”³ According to Hume and Milhous, production analysis should use both theatre history and drama history to clarify a range of possible meanings in the text and

¹ Sofer, Andrew. 2003. *The Stage Life of Props*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press. 4.

² Ibid.

³ Hume, Robert D. and Judith Milhous. 1985. *Producible Interpretation: Eight English Plays, 1675-1707*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

present “performance potentialities.”⁴ The study of impossible stage directions calls specifically for production analysis, considering individual interpretations may not even be based in the script. While impossibility may deter theatre artists from producing the work all together—as in the case of the world premiere of *Spurt of Blood* following almost forty years after Antonin Artaud wrote the script—occasionally a script asking for the impossible invites the director to disregard the written direction all together. For example, Keith Fowler set his 1992 production of Heiner Müller’s *Hamletmachine* in a “slime-green, tiled laboratory complete with hydraulic lifts which suggest implements of torture” and added “three Nazi-like scientists tak[ing] notes.”⁵ While Fowler’s production was lauded as a success, its premise was devised outside of the script; therefore, a study of such production would speak more to the work of Fowler than Müller. In short, what Humes and Milhous label “performance analysis” simply does not serve the impossible stage direction. Performance analysis, or the study of an actual, historical production, limits the scholar to what the director, designers, and actors create and excludes all potentialities within the text. These possibilities are the lifeblood of the impossible within theatre.

While the benefits of employing production analysis far outweigh the disadvantages, pitfalls of this approach certainly exist. As Sofer openly admits, “it is sometimes hard to draw the line between reasonable supposition and armchair fantasy.”⁶ This is especially true in the case of the impossible: as previously mentioned, proving authorial intent is not only its own impossible task, but also tangential to the progress of

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Warren, M.E. “STAGE REVIEW: Designers are Real Stars of Muller Plays at UCI.” *Los Angeles Times*. Jan. 23, 1992.

⁶ Sofer, Andrew. 2003. *Stage Life of Props*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press. 5.

theatre. Instead, each of the following case studies uses direct quotations from the playwrights' letters, interviews, and journals as clues gesturing toward the goals of the stage directions within the texts, not the imagined visions of a performance in the playwrights' minds. By intuiting the possible purposes of the moment, scholars and practitioners alike can responsibly fulfil the needs of the text without assuming authorial intent.

Additionally, this study wishes to use production analysis instead of performance analysis as a means to open up a discussion on not only impossible stage directions, but on didascalia in general. Literary scholars and semioticians have theorized and studied stage directions for the last several decades; however, theatre scholars—with the notable exception of Marvin Carlson and his essay “On the Status of Stage Directions”—have remained nearly silent on the issue, due in large part to the understanding that stage directions may not be the words of the playwright.⁷ This study proposes that directors can both insert a unique interpretation in performance as well as honor the written stage direction: they can display their own artistic aesthetic while upholding the original spirit of the play.

The aim of the study takes into account the role of theatre practitioners attempting to produce these scripts. Sofer states:

In bringing dead words to life, the director's task is necessarily selective. She must pick particular moments and 'beats' for emphasis and move swiftly past many potentially fruitful diversions in pursuit of the spine of her particular interpretation. The director's job is not to realize all possibilities latent in the script, but to sculpt stage time so that it moves meaningfully for an audience.⁸

⁷ Carlson, Marvin. "The Status of Stage Directions." *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 24, no. 2 (Fall, 1991): 37-48.

⁸ Sofer, Andrew. 2003. *Stage Life of Props*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Similarly, this study suggests interpretations and choices at many points that are no means are considered definitive; instead, they simply provide examples of the new method of interpretation. This study aims to settle the struggle for interpretative control by presenting means through which a director can both insert her own take while satisfying the written instructions. Additionally, this study intends to encourage both new scholarly attention on impossible stage directions and new productions of plays traditionally avoided due to their impossibility.

The following three case studies delve into the complicated worlds of three disparate instances of impossible stage directions. Just as studying particular productions' interpretations of an impossible stage direction would not address the totality of that moment within the script, creating a blanket theory for all impossible stage directions would fail to provide the much needed and nuanced approach for which each script calls. The following chapters will reconstruct the breaking string in Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, the hurricane of violent debris from Antonin Artaud's *Spurt of Blood*, and the Madonna's radiating breast cancer in Heiner Müller's *Hamletmaschine*. These three examples employ different genres, hail from various countries, and represent distinct moments throughout modern theatre history, showing that impossible stage directions are not owned by a particular movement or school of dramatic thought. These complex didascalia, instead, pop up in scripts, regardless of style, plot structure, and time period. The following case studies use unique tools—namely semiotics, affect theory, and trauma studies—to accurately meet the needs of their radically different texts.

These three case studies simultaneously stand alone and take on new meaning together. While each chapter deals with its own historical moment, they also function as

steps in the process of identifying, interpreting, and staging impossible stage directions. The aim of this study is not to tell the story of the evolution of impossible stage directions, even though the case studies are presented chronologically and increase in symbolic difficulty. If so, these examples would not show enough of complex, rich history of the impossible in the theatre: such a study—if even possible—would have to start with conjecture about ancient scripts and end only with contemporary projects being devised today. More importantly, this study does not mean to suggest that such an evolution exists. Instead, impossible stage directions stand independent of one another as well as in contrast to their genres and dramatic movements: no single, universal theory could incorporate all impossible stage directions. As seen in the following three chapters, each script requires its own unique set of tools to uncover a responsible interpretation. The only tool transcending these examples is the definition of impossible stage directions couched in terminology from semiotics. Even after semiotics helps identify the impossible, it may not aid in the interpretation or determination of potential stagings. These examples show the individual attention that each impossible—and arguably possible—moment requires before responsible staging.

A paradox exists in the contemporary theatre. When producing a play, dialog is regularly favored as the essence of a script, the vehicle for the play's overall meaning and ideas, and even the embodiment of the voice of the playwright. Stage directions, on the other hand, are often purposefully omitted, completely changed during rehearsals, or even ignored throughout the entire process. Why do some directors and theatre practitioners commonly revere dialog but disregard stage directions? While many literary scholars, such as Linda Micheli, have shifted their focus onto stage directions as a means to

understand the text, theatre artists still view the incorporation of stage directions into a production as optional at best.⁹ As Gordon Craig, an English director at the turn of the twentieth century, argues, “As for the stage directions, descriptions of the scenes, etc. with which the author may interlard his copy, these are not to be considered by [the director], for if he is the master of his craft he can learn nothing from them.”¹⁰ It is worth mentioning that didascalia dictating the structure of the play (act breaks, scene changes etc.) as well as those of attribution, delegating which character speaks which lines, are rarely manipulated, or even recognized as stage directions. Instead, stage directions describing settings, characters, technical elements, and instructions for action imbedded in the dialog are viewed most frequently as flexible. So why do theatre artists so often disregard what could be considered the most theatrical aspect of the text?

This debate over the importance of stage directions seems polarizing, but both opinions are correct when considering the various historical contexts of different stage directions. Theatre artists understand that stage directions—those instructing performance—did not exist in the ancient world. Instead, action is implicit, or embedded in the dialog and rarely expressly written by the playwright. Any explicit stage directions were added by editors into later publications and translations of the script. Senecan tragedies serve as the most extreme example of debated implicit stage directions. Scholars, such as John Fitch and Hanna M. Roisman, question whether the plays were produced at all during Seneca’s lifetime.¹¹ Thomas Kohn, similarly, focuses an entire

⁹ Micheli, Linda M. “‘Sit By Us’: Visual Imagery and the Two Queens in *Henry VIII*.” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (1987): 452-66.

¹⁰ Craig, Edward Gordon. 1911. *On The Art of the Theatre*. Chicago: Browne’s Bookstore. 149.

¹¹ Harrison, George William Mallor, and Federick Ahl. 2000. *Seneca in Performance*. London: Duckworth with the Classic Press of Wales.

book on the nuanced detailing of the implicit directions.¹² Stage directions from the plays of the early modern period to those in contemporary works are not necessarily the work of the playwright, either. Instead, directors, designers, or producers of the premiere or early productions include their own instructions or blocking as stage directions in the published script. John Dryden, for example, openly credits actor and theatre manager Thomas Betterton with the “description of the Scenes, and other decorations of the Stage.”¹³ Major publishers, such as Samuel French, often include notes about the premiere productions in their scripts, regardless of period. With these origins of stage directions in mind, it seems less surprising that theatre practitioners would ignore stage directions in favor of their own artistic interpretation of the play, while still observing the dialog with reverence.

Stage directions have a long history as the products of collaboration between playwrights and practitioners; however, several dramatists claim sole authorship of the entirety of their work, stage directions included. The reason to include elaborate didascalia as part of the published script becomes twofold. First, playwrights may use stage directions as a tool to unify all future productions with the script, making the dramatic text, the virtual performance (that which is imagined in the mind of the reader of the script), and various productions cohesive with their original vision. The advent of the printing press in 1440 made the inclusion of stage directions more important as playwrights were no longer guaranteed a place in the rehearsal room. Being separated from their work both temporally and geographically, playwrights could write stage

¹² Kohn, Thomas D. 2012. *The Dramaturgy of Senecan Tragedy*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.

¹³ Dryden, John. 1976. “Preface to *Albion and Albanus*.” Vol. 15 of *Complete Works*. 20 Vols. Berkeley: University of California Press. 11.

directions as a failsafe, a lasting attempt for control. French tragedian Pierre Corneille argued actors who worked on his plays as part of a touring company “would do some very odd things” if not for his “notes.”¹⁴ Second, dramatists may include detailed descriptions or directions for the enjoyment of the reader. Playwrights writing before the invention of the printing press certainly did not consider their work on the page final; after all, what audience would such a work have? Instead, these writers depended on performance to circulate their plays. Dramatists working during the late fifteenth century and onward could enjoy the options brought on by publishing. While performance still remained the main goal for their plays, playwrights expanded their readership beyond that of just theatre practitioners to which they could cater and amongst whom they could gain popularity. Stage directions, as a result, could take on an artistic flair to help audiences imagine the setting, characters, and actions of a play while reading. An example of this style of stage direction can be seen in the long opening descriptions of plays by artists like Eugene O’Neill and George Bernard Shaw. Both men contributed to bringing realism to US and British stages, respectively; additionally, the style of the long character descriptions present in texts, such as *Candida*, resemble those written in realistic novels. Realism, however, was not the only movement to encourage stage directions for the sole purpose of reading. Some early French Symbolists, Theodore de Banville especially, preferred their written symbols to be experienced in the theatre of the mind. Maurice Maeterlinck went so far as to argue against actors performing, writing “No symbol can bear the active presence of the human being.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Corneille, Pierre. “Of the Three Unities of Action, Time, and Place.” Trans. Donald Schier. *Critical Theory since Plato*. Ed. Hazard Adams. Chicago: Harcourt, 1981. 235.

¹⁵ Maeterlinck, Maurice, Alfred Sutro, and Arthur Bingham Walkley. 1911. *The Treasure of the Humble*. New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co. 97.

After encountering such a wide range of stage directions with such varied and questionable origins, it is no wonder that theatre artists traditionally regard written didascalia as optional. Literary scholars and semioticians, on the other hand, started analyzing stage directions as a means to understand the larger text, under the assumption that the dialog and stage directions come from the same author. Traditionally, theatre artists and scholars alike view stage directions simply as that—directions for staging. John Searle compares stage directions to “a set of instructions for how to do something, namely how to perform the play.”¹⁶ Several playwrights—Samuel Beckett serving as the most extreme example—include instructional stage directions, like those Searle describes, to counteract the multiple interpretations of theatre practitioners as the dramatists are distanced by both time and space from their texts. Beckett went so far as to prepare an injunction to stop the 1984 performances of *Endgame* at the American Repertory Theatre due to the production’s disregard of the published stage directions.¹⁷ Michael Issacharoff conflates stage directions with “a real voice, that of the author” which speaks directly to “other real people, actors and directors.”¹⁸ While Issacharoff’s theory may hold true for some realistic plays, it does not account for some stage directions from modern or post-modern plays. Suzan-Lori Parks play *Venus*, for example, features complicated headings for each scene, such as “A Scene of Love (?)” or “Footnote #9.”¹⁹ These headings are not simple instructions nor the written will of the playwright; instead, as Patrice Pavis argues, directions like these headings could function

¹⁶ Searle, John. “The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse.” *New Literary History* 6 (1975): 329.

¹⁷ Freedman, Samuel G. “Associates of Beckett Seek to Halt Production.” *NYT*, 14 Dec. 1984.

¹⁸ Issacharoff, Michael. “Inscribed Performance.” *Rivista di Letterature modern e comparate (Pisa)* 39 (1986): 95-6.

¹⁹ Parks, Suzan-Lori. 1997. *Venus: A Play*. New York: Theatre Communications Group.

as a disembodied narrator, guiding the audience.²⁰ While all these studies accurately describe some stage directions, no single theory can account for the functions of all didascalias across various genres and periods of theatre history.

It is important to note, for example, that there is a key difference between the impossible and the technically difficult stage direction. While they both occasionally dissuade producers and baffle audiences, a technically difficult stage direction still has a stageable icon, while the impossible does not. Take for example, the hyperreal violence in Sarah Kane's *Phaedra's Love*. Kane ends her tragedy with vultures swooping down to disembowel a still speaking Hippolytus after he was sliced from neck to groin and attacked by an angry mob.²¹ Certainly, it would take a brave director with a talented team of designers and actors to fulfill this stage direction to the degree Kane has detailed in the script; however, the written description can be imagined and staged to signify the same meaning. In short, audiences reading and audiences watching *Phaedra's Love* could recount similar (if not identical) stories of how Hippolytus died. While this seems obvious for a play staged realistically, non-realistic and technically difficult stage directions still do not breach the realm of the impossible. Sarah Ruhl's *Eurydice*, for example, prominently features a raining elevator, a room constructed out of string, and even the devil riding a tricycle.²² These images—nonsensical, whimsical, or otherwise—still remain concrete images that designers, directors, and audiences can recreate with little to no variation. Their meaning may be up for debate, and they are a far cry from realism; yet the icons ultimately survive.

²⁰ Pavis, Patrice. 1988. "From Text to Performance." *Performing Texts*. Eds. Michael Issacharoff and Robin F. Jones. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 86-100.

²¹ Kane, Sarah. 1996. *Blasted & Phaedra's Love*. London: Methuen Drama. 95-6.

²² Ruhl, Sarah. 2006. *The Clean House and Other Plays*. New York: Theatre Communications Group.

The three following case studies were chosen, then, due to their clear lack of icon. Each reconstructs an impossible stage direction from a different genre, movement, or style of theatre. Chapter One, entitled “The Impossibility of Symbol: Anton Chekhov’s Breaking String and the Struggle for Interpretative Control,” gives a more detailed definition of impossible stage directions. It also lays out the basic semiotic system for staging didascalía and explores how impossible stage directions break the traditional semiotic model of interpretation. Using Chekhov’s breaking string as an example, chapter one also discusses Chekhov’s interest in combining aspects of French Symbolism and Russian Realism to create a hybrid genre which captures everyday life as it is truly lived, as opposed to the outlandish characters and plots of nineteenth century melodrama and farce. By employing Chekhov’s personal letters and Konstantin Stanislavsky’s retellings of working with Chekhov, chapter one reconstructs the problems of creating the breaking string for the premiere 1904 production of the *The Cherry Orchard* at the Moscow Art Theatre. Chekhov and Stanislavsky never agreed on what the twice heard breaking string effect should sound like before Chekhov died, losing the icon of the breaking string forever. This contentious debate embodies the struggle of interpretative control experienced so often by directors and playwrights when attempting to stage a production. Due to the impossible depending on interpretation, the breaking string becomes a battleground for artistic control over productions of *The Cherry Orchard*.

Chapter Two, entitled “The Impossibility of Synesthesia: Antonin Artaud’s Disregard of Gravity and Affective Fidelity,” builds upon the semiotic definition laid out in Chapter One by exploring how to interpret an impossible stage direction once it is identified. Chapter Two discusses how affect theory can provide a responsible means of

translating the written symbol's meaning into a new, unique symbol for the stage through exploring a possible method reconstructing Artaud's nauseating hurricane. By using affect theory, a theatre practitioner can aim to match the newly interpreted impossible stage direction with the aesthetic of the possible, icon-based directions. While Artaud's inclusion of synesthesia makes his stage direction impossible, it also provides a common goal for both the very different written and staged symbols. Although synesthesia makes the icon unattainable, it also provides the ideal audience response. In the case of Artaud's hurricane, a producer may not be able to create a visual image of hurricane which induces nausea, but the goal of nausea remains. A production may aim for the audience to have an affectively consistent experience—a similar affective experience to that of audiences reading the script—while watching the show. While the performance cannot be a literal interpretation of the script, it can evoke the same sensorial or emotional response as the script describes. Additionally, chapter two explores Artaud's break from the Surrealist movement and his creation of the Theatre of Cruelty. By examining Artaud's manifestos and writings on the theatre, chapter two observes the importance of impossibility in Artaud's work as well as clues to interpret such radical instructions.

Chapter Three, entitled "The Impossibility of Trauma: Heiner Müller's Radiating Breast Cancer and the Bifurcation of Germany," continues to build on the ideas posited in Chapters One and Two and explores the possibility of *Hamletmachine* functioning as Müller's memoirs of trauma. The chapter builds upon the semiotic definition presented in chapter one to classify Müller's Madonna with breast cancer as an impossible stage, while also establishing the means of interpretation laid out through affect theory in

Chapter Two. Chapter Three, however, goes past definition and interpretation to suggest potential methods of staging the impossible stage direction. Chapter Three uses Müller's personal writings on theatre and interviews to explore the political conditions leading up to the hopelessness of *Hamletmachine* and theories from trauma studies on memory as a means to embody and perform suffering onstage. By reconstructing an ideal affective response, producers of the play can share a common goal with the script, even though they cannot literally create breast cancer that is described as both invisible and blinding. Practitioners can, instead, aim to reconstruct the dream-like aesthetic of the blurry, confusing nature of memories associated with trauma. Chapter Three serves as the culmination of the larger study, showing how a complete understanding of the written symbol can lead to the discovery of a common, affective goal that produces a responsible, yet unique version of the impossible stage direction.

Though impossible stage directions have been overlooked by scholars, they have been hiding in famous plays throughout theatre history. They have a key role in keeping plays alive by demanding new interpretations and unique productions. They often spark debate and controversy, because they simultaneously are themselves and something other than themselves. As discussed by Marvin Carlson in *The Haunted Stage*, these stage directions carry with them not only the ghosts associated with reading the scripts, but also the specters of all past productions.²³ Because they can never be fully represented, these impossible moments depend on the conversation created by multiple interpretations to embody their ephemeral essence and keep the play evolving for decades to come.

²³ Carlson, Marvin. 2002. *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Chapter One

The Impossibility of Symbol: Anton Chekhov's Breaking String and the Struggle for Interpretative Control

At a table littered with strange objects, Beethoven and Quasimodo host a comically depressing postmortem on their attempts to create the impossible sound cue necessary for Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*—the breaking string. Both quite deaf and dead, the two men struggle against their inevitable failure in Mickle Maher's play *The Hunchback Variations*. Beethoven begins by greeting the audience, "Good evening and welcome to this evening's panel discussion on *Sound, Mysterious Sound, Impossible Sound, Creating the Impossible, Mysterious Sound and the Effects on Love and Friendship of Rehearsing the Creation of the Impossible and Mysterious Sound* [sic]."²⁴ As the series of panel discussions progresses, Beethoven and Quasimodo explore what it means to make "the impossible," or as Beethoven describes, "the pleasure associated with the making of an impossible thing."²⁵ Even though the two ultimately fail, they embody the ever-present creative impulse of the artist as well as ephemeral fate of art, particularly theatre. Beethoven concludes, "The true sadness of this sound, of course, is that it has not yet been born."²⁶ This quirky, fast-paced play points out a sad truth: the sound Chekhov intended may not be recoverable. Even if the sound was achieved, what proof would there be to confirm it? Instead, artists ranging from the fictional depictions of Beethoven and Quasimodo to the very real Konstantin Stanislavsky, director of the world premiere in 1904, endeavor to find their own way of

²⁴ Mickle Maher. *The Hunchback Variations*. 1.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 12.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

satisfying this oddly demanding, yet simple stage direction, “The distant sound is heard, as if from the sky, of a breaking string, dying away sadly.”²⁷

Marvin Carlson describes “an ancient struggle in the theatre:” the struggle of interpretative control between a playwright and those producing the play.²⁸ Stanislavsky joined the “ancient struggle” for interpretative control, willing or otherwise, in regards to Chekhov’s breaking string, which is heard twice in *The Cherry Orchard*. Chekhov’s breaking string snapping on Stanislavsky’s realistic stage provoked a never-resolved debate between two of Russia’s most influential theatre artists as well as, unbeknownst to either artist, became an exemplary impossible stage direction. So what constitutes an impossible stage direction? The impossible stage direction is one that cannot be translated into a stage-able icon, because it cannot be stage literally, it demands interpretation. The impossible stage direction becomes transient: partially present in the text, partially present onstage in an endless multitude of interpretations throughout the years, but never wholly represented. In this way, the stage direction is then similar to Plato’s notion of the Forms—the non-physical, yet substantial idea of an object which more accurately describes the reality of what that object is than the tangible object itself—insomuch that they become unrepresentable.²⁹ Theatre artists are, therefore, left with various, imperfect, and incomplete copies of the unrealizable ideal. Because a singular interpretation of these stage directions can never embody the totality of their essences, the stage directions themselves become impossible to fulfill.

²⁷ Chekhov, Anton Pavlovich. 2009. *Cherry Orchard, and other plays*. Auckland, NZL: The Floating Press.

²⁸ Carlson, Marvin. "The Status of Stage Directions." *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 24, no. 2 (Fall, 1991): 46.

²⁹ Plato, and Jowett. 1901. *Cratylus*. Charles Scribner’s Sons.

Of course, all stage directions, and dialog as well, need to be interpreted on some level simply because they begin in the script as symbols—as words. Ferdinand de Saussure’s *Writings in General Linguistics* lays out a basic semiotic system for language in which he argues that any word is only arbitrarily connected to its meaning. Words, therefore, gain their meaning in relation to larger, socially agreed upon semiotic system, such as a language.³⁰ The traditional method of interpreting a stage direction is as follows. An author has an idea which he or she communicates through language in a script. A theatre artist will read the author’s symbols (the stage directions) and interpret them into a signified meaning. The artist will then turn this signified meaning into a new signifier, usually an icon, onstage. According to semiotician Charles S. Peirce, an icon differs from a symbol due to how it relates to its object. While a symbol is arbitrarily related to its object—like a word is related to its meaning—an icon signifies its object through resemblance and recognition, such as a baby doll representing an infant.

Most stage directions can be translated into an icon; therefore, the chain of interpretation does not disrupt the author’s intended meaning, inasmuch as meaning of the scripted words matches the meaning of the staged icon. For example, Chekhov’s opening stage direction in *The Cherry Orchard*, “Enter Dunyasha with a lamp, and Lopakhin with a book in his hand,” becomes two human beings walking onstage holding two distinct physical items.³¹ Both the actors and the props are icons which resemble—but are not actually—the characters and their belongings. These icons are recognizable as the signified, just as the stage direction is recognizable as the signified. Audiences watching *The Cherry Orchard* would see two humans walk onstage holding two

³⁰ Saussure, Ferdinand de. 2006. *Writings in general linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

³¹ Chekhov, Anton Pavlovich. 2009. *Cherry Orchard, and other plays*. Auckland, NZL: The Floating Press.

recognizable objects just as audiences reading the script would imagine. These icons need no interpretation, because they resemble the signified so closely. Most realistic stage directions, such as this example of Chekhov's, demand a singular interpretation, with little room for variation. While the specific props, actors, costumes, etc. will change, the icons, containing the action and image, will not. Similarly, different spectators can independently read these icons as various symbols, but the icons themselves remain.

The audience is free to interpret the icon as a symbol of something larger, such as a book symbolizing literacy; however, this interpretation is not necessary to understand the stage direction itself or the play. As Richard Schechner explains, there is a difference between an action that "is" performance and an action that can be read "as" performance. According to Schechner, what "is" performance can be defined by historical and social context, tradition, usage, etc. while almost any action can be read "as" performance by an audience.³² The same "is/as" dichotomy can be applied to symbols. Peirce gives a definition of what "is" a symbol: the symbol "is" is limited to a sign that is arbitrarily connected to its object, gaining meaning only when in the context of a larger semiotic system.³³ An audience, however, is free to interpret almost anything—icons included—"as" symbols, even if they are connected to their objects inherently through physical attributes or resemblance. With the example of Chekhov's opening stage direction, the word "lamp" "is" a symbol of a portable lighting device, while the prop, or the icon of the lamp, can be read by an audience "as" a symbol of light, knowledge, or intellect. In the case of a completely realistic production, the prop may actually be a working lamp which then serves the dual purpose of representing a lamp and lighting the stage. Most

³² Schechner, Richard. 2006. *Performance Studies: An Introduction*. New York: Routledge. 38-9.

³³ Peirce, Charles S. 1991. *Peirce on Signs*. ed. J. Hoopes. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

stage directions only require the audience to understand what the symbol “is” to understand the play; therefore, the burden of clarity relies on the director or producer’s ability to successfully translate the symbol into the signified, then the signified into an icon. The audience only need recognize the icon as what it signifies to follow the arc of the play. If they interpret that icon “as” a symbol, they may gain a deeper understanding of the stage direction or even the play as a whole, but that understanding is in addition to recognizing the icon of their own making.

The impossible stage direction, however, defies this basic model of understanding and demands a more sophisticated method of explanation. As previously mentioned, the impossible stage direction is one that cannot be translated into a stage-able icon; therefore, it disrupts traditional modes of interpretation that rely on immediate recognition. In the case of the breaking string in *The Cherry Orchard*, Chekhov takes a sound and translates it into a language-based stage direction, writing: “the distant sound is heard, as if from the sky, of a breaking string, dying away sadly.”³⁴ A director or sound designer then reads the stage direction—the symbol—and interprets its meaning. This meaning, however, departs from the classic formula and cannot be converted into an icon. The literal symbol (the words written in the script) do not signify an identifiable object; therefore, the object has no icon. While a notation system for sound and music exists, Chekhov chooses to not use this language: he does not include a bar of music or even write “a violin string breaking—C sharp.” Instead, he expresses this sound poetically; therefore, no sound effect can closely enough resemble the sound described in the script to be recognizable without interpretation. The break in formula requires the

³⁴ Chekhov, Anton Pavlovich. 2009. *Cherry Orchard, and other plays*. Auckland, NZL: The Floating Press.

director and sound designer to then create their own symbol from the meaning they interpreted from Chekhov's original symbol. Now, the audience hears the director or designer's symbol and must interpret it for their own understanding. Unlike the icon, the audience can no longer rely on simply recognizing the meaning. The choice to interpret that sound "as" a symbol is gone, and the audience is left with a sound that "is" a symbol and demands interpretation for understanding.

While Chekhov's choice to express the breaking string with poetic description rather than musical notation may seem odd, it is not unprecedented. As A.G Cross argues in his article "The Breaking Strings of Chekhov and Turgenev," the mysterious sound in *The Cherry Orchard* has history of use in Russian literature.³⁵ Cross points out that Ivan Turgenev uses the sound of vibrating or breaking strings in both the short story "Bezhin Meadow"—first published in the journal *Sovremennik* in 1851 and later included in *Sketches from a Hunter's Album*—and a poem "The Nymphs"—first printed in *Vestnik Yevorpy* in 1882—which both predate *The Cherry Orchard*.³⁶ Additionally, Cross details how Chekhov was deeply influenced by Turgenev's major works, namely *Fathers and Sons*. In "Bezhin Meadow," Turgenev writes of a hunter who, after losing his way, finds himself with a group of herders telling mysterious stories of Russian folklore at night. Turgenev writes, "They all fell silent. Suddenly, somewhere in the distance, there rang out a protracted, ringing, almost moaning sound, one of those incomprehensible night sounds, which arise sometimes in the midst of deep silence, well up, hang in the air and slowly spread out, finally, as if dying away."³⁷ While the sound in "Bezhin Meadow"

³⁵ Cross, A. G. (1969). "The Breaking Strings of Chekhov and Turgenev." *Slavonic and East European Review*, 47(109).

³⁶ *Ibid.* 512.

³⁷ Turgenev, Ivan. 1953. *Sobraniye Sochineniy*. 12 vols. trans. A.G. Cross. Moscow. p. 169.

does not explicitly describe a breaking string, it most likely provided the inspiration for the slowly dying pace and the placement of Chekhov's sound in the sky. In "The Nymphs," Turgenev describes "an uneven, long sigh, like the vibrating of a breaking string."³⁸ These two pieces of literature, written thirty-one years apart from each other and more than twenty-two years before *The Cherry Orchard*, clearly influenced Chekhov: the breaking string is almost a literal combination of Turgenev's poetic language. Because Chekhov only encountered these sounds as symbols in literature, he can only express them in the same way. His mental imagining of the noise does not, in fact, correspond to a realistic icon, because that icon may not exist. Instead, Chekhov attempts to communicate the sound he imagined while reading Turgenev's works in hopes that Stanislavsky could actually create it.

The characters' dialog in *The Cherry Orchard* demonstrates that the breaking string cannot be simplified into an icon as well. Chekhov allows his characters to struggle with the sound, subtly admitting that this noise is not recognizable and needs interpretation. Lopakhin suggests it is a mining cable breaking, Gayev thinks it is a heron, Trofimov ponders an owl, and finally Ranevskaya observes there is "something disagreeable about it."³⁹ The characters briefly represent a potential audience with their failure to understand the sound as icon. The sounds Chekhov's characters posit do not even resemble one another: after all, an owl and a mining cable break sound nothing alike. Eventually, Ranevskaya begins to interpret the breaking string as a symbol and concludes that its meaning is ultimately more important than the noise itself. By identifying the sound as "disagreeable," Ranevskaya breaks through the realm of realism

³⁸ Ibid. 493.

³⁹ Chekhov, Anton Pavlovich. 2009. *Cherry Orchard, and other plays*. Auckland, NZL: The Floating Press.

and introduces the metaphysical, symbolic world of the play. In short, the sound no longer needs an icon tying it to an earthly cause: it can represent a feeling or a theme. As Maurice Valency describes in *The Breaking String*, “Whatever of sadness remains unexpressed in *The Cherry Orchard*, this sound expresses.”⁴⁰ By Chekhov making the meaning paramount, he not only rejects a single icon—the sound—but also a completely realistic universe of the play.

Chekhov’s breaking string, heard twice in *The Cherry Orchard*, becomes the ultimate point of intersection for realism and symbolism. Chekhov, often considered a playwright of strictly realism, uses the stage to portray life as it is, without moral judgement or excessive drama. His four major plays, *The Seagull*, *Uncle Vanya*, *Three Sisters*, and *The Cherry Orchard*, were all produced at the Moscow Art Theatre under the direction of Konstantin Stanislavsky. The Moscow Art Theatre, Stanislavsky, and Chekhov further developed the already popular genre of realism on Russia’s stage; however, Chekhov’s view of the world was more complicated than the obvious surface life that the eye could observe. Instead, Chekhov tended to agree with Maurice Maeterlinck and other French Symbolists that a large part of life was invisible and could only be explored in the mind. For Chekhov, a true picture of the world could not be limited to either the physical or the metaphysical as pure realists and symbolists would have it; instead, art needed to reflect the combination of the two to truly capture life as it is. Chekhov used his four major plays to experiment with different types of emerging modern theatre, such as symbolism, to achieve an accurate picture of life. While Chekhov explores symbolism in his earlier play *The Seagull* through the artistic experiments of the

⁴⁰ Valency, Maurice. 1966. *The Breaking String; The Plays of Anton Chekhov*. New York: Oxford University Press. 287.

character Konstantin, *The Cherry Orchard* seamlessly intertwines realism and symbolism by separating, or freeing the symbol from the physical, realistic constraints, such as props and actors. Chekhov's final play realistically portrays both the natural and metaphysical worlds together by allowing realistic characters to interact with the symbols, rather than wrestle with the concepts of symbolism in dialog.

Chekhov's plays are often criticized for their lack of plot. These pictures of rural Russia show the monotonous, frustrating, and failing lives of several generations of the gentry class. He often minimizes or even eliminates climatic moments, protagonists and antagonists, and stock characters in favor of nuanced action and emotion beneath the text. Chekhov wrote:

The demand is made that the hero and heroine should be dramatically effective. But in life people do not shoot themselves, or hang themselves, or fall in love, or deliver themselves of clever saying every minute. They spend most of their time eating, drinking, running after women or men, talking nonsense. It is therefore necessary that this should be shown on the stage... that is what happens in real life. Life on stage should be as it really is.⁴¹

Chekhov's plays become the "drama of the undramatic."⁴² Instead of following the path of the Russian melodramas and farces of the late nineteenth-century, Chekhov's dramas very much belong in the world of realism, because they hinge on what is absent. In *The Cherry Orchard*, the climatic auction takes place off stage, while the ball in Act III preoccupies the characters. Though always in conversation, the characters often do not truly listen to one another and rarely express their true emotions. Instead, the play happens in the undercurrent of things left unsaid during small talk. While the subtext is tragic, the surface realism is comedic. Chekhov highlighted slapstick or frivolous

⁴¹ Gainer, J. Ellen, Stanton B. Garner Jr., and Martin Puchner. 2009. Anton Chekhov. In *The Norton Anthology of Drama*. Vol. 2, 341-345. New York: W. W. Norton & Company. 343.

⁴² Ibid.

moments as an ironic counterpoint to failure to make life changing decisions. The most notable example of this irony is, of course, the characters' willful ignorance during the offstage auction of the cherry orchard.

Chekhov complained about Stanislavsky's tragic production during rehearsals of *The Cherry Orchard*, because Stanislavsky revealed the play's emotion through overt gesture instead of focusing on the comedy, which ruined the irony of the play. In short, the characters were too aware of their dire situation, making them sympathetic rather than laughable. Chekhov complained:

Anya, I fear, should not have any sort of tearful tone... Not once does my Anya cry, nowhere do I speak of a tearful tone, in the second act there are tears in their eyes, but the tone is happy, lively. Why did you speak in your telegram about so many tears in my play? Where are they?... Often you will find the words 'through tears,' but I am describing only the expression on their faces, not tears. And in the second act there is no graveyard.⁴³

Stanislavsky interpreted the play solely as realism, and, therefore, focused on the characters primarily as the true source of meaning in the play, turning "through tears" into "tearful."⁴⁴ While that distinction seems slight, it mattered a great deal to Chekhov who claimed Stanislavsky ruined his play by misinterpreting it. Chekhov imagined comedy in his realism and included symbolism to carry the tragedy of the piece. If the characters remain ironically clueless, the breaking string—like the offstage auction—can embody the play's true heartbreak, allowing the elements realism and symbolism to balance each other out.

⁴³ Stroud, Gregory. *Retrospective Revolution: A History of Time and Memory in Urban Russia, 1903-1923* (Urbana- Champaign, 2006). 63-4.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Even though Chekhov's scripts and Stanislavsky's productions could be considered realism at its finest, Chekhov could also be hailed as a "pedestal for Russian Symbolism."⁴⁵ Even though he never considered himself a symbolist, Chekhov appreciated the movement wanted to incorporate symbolism into Russia's stage. Chekhov often suggested that Stanislavsky direct Maeterlinck's one-act pieces for the Moscow Art Theatre. In his own art, he most famously made *The Seagull's* Konstantin an "avant-garde" playwright with symbolist rhetoric, such as, "Life must be represented not as it is, but as it ought to be: as it appears in dreams."⁴⁶ Clearly, Chekhov disagrees by saying, "life on stage should be as it really is."⁴⁷ The character Konstantin, while a symbolist thinker, ultimately remains a realistic character and provides some comedy with his outlandish thoughts. Konstantin's mother Irina even says, "[He] forced his decadent trash on us... let him write as he feels and can, but let him spare me the nonsense."⁴⁸ Chekhov, therefore, points out the ridiculousness of bad symbolism as well as incorporates the beauty of good symbolism in his early attempts at a hybrid play. Chekhov, unwilling to sacrifice the "living characters" Konstantin despises, creates a character that would hate *The Seagull* if he were aware of it. Plays consisting of a "three-walled room" filled with "people in the act of eating, drinking, loving, walking, and wearing coats" revolt Konstantin, while he is simultaneously contributing to the play by eating, drinking, talking, etc.⁴⁹ Unlike other contemporaneous playwrights bound to pure genre codes of either symbolism or realism, Chekhov uses his earlier play *The Seagull* to

⁴⁵ Corrigan, Yuri. 2009. Čechov and the Foundations of Symbolism. *Russian Literature* 66 (2) (8/15): 165.

⁴⁶ Chekhov, Anton Pavlovich. 2006. *The Seagull*, ed. David Widger. Project Gutenberg.

⁴⁷ Gainor, J. Ellen, Stanton B. Garner Jr., and Martin Puchner. 2009. Anton Chekhov. In *The Norton Anthology of Drama*. Vol. 2, 341-345. New York: W. W. Norton & Company. 343.

⁴⁸ Chekhov, Anton Pavlovich. 2006. *The Seagull*, ed. David Widger. Project Gutenberg.

⁴⁹ Chekhov, Anton Pavlovich. 2006. *The Seagull*, ed. David Widger. Project Gutenberg.

create a dialog between realism and symbolism. By adding symbols—such as the dead seagull, Chekhov attempts to make the absent metaphysical world present to his realistic characters and allow those symbols to carry the tragedy of the piece.

In addition to admiring symbolism, Chekhov recognized the similarities between symbolism and realism. Maeterlinck's opening statement in *The Tragical in Daily Life* reads, "There is a tragic in everyday life that is far more real, far deeper and far more true to our genuine selves than the tragic of great adventures."⁵⁰ Just as Maeterlinck rebels against the "tragic of great adventures," Chekhov writes against the traditions of overly dramatic melodrama, farce, and stock characters of the late nineteenth-century. Chekhov aligned himself with both realism and symbolism in that he focuses on the "daily life" of his characters. Chekhov pointed out, "People are having a meal, but at the same time their happiness is being created, or their lives are being destroyed."⁵¹ Chekhov eventually learned to use this stage of daily life to support both his tragic symbols and his realistic characters.

Even though Chekhov was not part of the French Symbolist theatre, these methods and aims resemble those of the subgroup the *idéoréalistes*.⁵² Led by Saint-Pol-Roux, the *idéoréalistes*, contemporaries of Chekhov, hoped to create work that highlighted both the struggle of human passions as well as the intellectual symbol. François Coulon wrote, "If spectators, even hostile, experience a formidable struggle of human passions in an *idéoréaliste* drama, they will perhaps give us their attention even

⁵⁰ Maeterlinck, Maurice, Alfred Sutro, and Arthur Bingham Walkley. 1911. *The Treasure of the Humble*. New York: Dodd, Mead and Co. 97.

⁵¹ Gainor, J. Ellen, Stanton B. Garner Jr., and Martin Puchner. 2009. Anton Chekhov. In *The Norton Anthology of Drama*. Vol. 2, 341-345. New York: W. W. Norton & Company. 343.

⁵² François Coulon, "Essai de rénovation théâtrale," trans. Marvin Carlson. *Mercure de France* 6 (Oct, 1892): 158.

when they do not understand the symbol of the piece, a symbol accessible only to the elite.”⁵³ Chekhov, unlike the *idéoréalistes*, did not believe symbols were accessible only to the elite; instead, he believed them to be both understandable and necessary. Ultimately, he aimed to achieve what the *idéoréalistes* only dreamed of creating: symbolism for the common man. As the grandson of a serf who purchased his own freedom, Chekhov and his plays were very aware of the political and economic forces in Russia. While Chekhov did not live to see the Russian revolution, he still sensed a changing world and, therefore, a changing audience. Often *The Cherry Orchard’s* Trofimov is heralded as a revolutionary—comparing the cherry orchard to the entire country of Russia—while Firs represents the poverty and dislocation of the serfs over the late nineteenth-century. The two characters mirror the “new” and “old” Russia at the moment before political change. His diverse cast of characters seems appropriate for an audience experiencing a newly available social mobility. Just as he became a doctor and successful writer within two generations of his grandfather freeing himself from serfdom, Chekhov acknowledges that his audience may not come from an elite background.

Symbolism, developed by antirealist theorists in the 1880s, seems to be the antithesis of realism. After all, realism depends on the aspects of life made absent by the playwright, so in that absence, subtext and dramatic irony will thrive. Realism, therefore, demands performance give life to the subtext, or true play: actors can imbue the words in the script with a deeper meaning. Symbolism, on the other hand, makes things absent in physical life present in the text, “expressing the inexpressible.”⁵⁴ Plays, such as Maeterlinck’s *The Intruder* or *The Blind*, require the eerie, invisible presence of another

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Mickle Maher. *The Hunchback Variations*. 7.

force to reach and explore the metaphysical world. Pure symbolism needs no stage; instead, plays like Banville's *Le forgeron* were conceived as a "spectacle in an armchair" meant only for the theatre of the mind.⁵⁵ So how could a play aim to both make present human struggles absent and absent metaphysical truths present?

Andrey Bely states that, over the course of four essays, Chekhov offers literature's most successful intersection of these two artistic movements by finding what Bely deems their only point of connection: "the reality of Chekhov's symbols."⁵⁶ Unlike symbolist playwrights, Chekhov does not attempt to dehumanize his characters in favor of the symbol; instead, he allows his realistic characters to interact with the symbol, as seen when Lopakhin, Gayev, and Trofimov all suggest radically different icons for the breaking string. Through the interaction of realist characters with symbolic stage directions, Chekhov creates multiple worlds in which the symbols can function, creating the dramatic irony that supports the realism. Chekhov's realism lives in one world: the world of the play. The characters, the setting, and the action of *The Cherry Orchard* are all realistic. The characters are unaware of a world beyond their own: they are bound to the realm of realism. Symbolism, however, lives simultaneously in two worlds: the physical world of the play which holds the symbol and the spiritual world from which the symbol came. Simply put, the existence of the symbol depends on the existence of a "beyond" which sent the symbol. In the case of the breaking string, Chekhov's "distant sound" specifically comes "from the sky" suggesting an otherworldliness of the symbol. Ranevskaya can only observe that there is "something disagreeable about it."⁵⁷ The

⁵⁵Carlson, Marvin A. *Theories of the Theatre: A Historical and Critical Survey from the Greeks to the Present*. Cornell University Press, 1993. 289.

⁵⁶ Corrigan, Yuri. 2009. Čechov and the Foundations of Symbolism. *Russian Literature* 66 (2) (8/15): 165.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

audience, however, interacts with the symbol in both the realistic and symbolic realms. In addition to an audience watching a production, an audience reading the script can interpret *The Cherry Orchard* as a textual blueprint meant for a realistic staging as well as a “spectacle in an armchair.” Chekhov’s breaking string, from the perspectives of both semiotics and symbolism, “is” a symbol which demands interpretation beyond what is presented onstage.

Due to the multiple layers of interpretation necessary, the audience becomes part of the other world—the beyond. Because the audience is presented with a sound that the characters do not understand, Chekhov’s string functions as a symbol which carries the tragedy of the play: the characters, once again, are willfully ignorant of both the changing world they live in and the metaphysical world. Like the offstage auction, the sound is both simultaneously present and absent. While it is definitely heard by the characters in Act II, it is willingly misunderstood and excused away. By Act IV, only Firs and the audience is left to possibly hear it along with the destruction of the cherry orchard. Because the breaking string straddles both the world of the play and the beyond of the audience, *The Cherry Orchard* and its demanding stage direction subtly and successfully blend realism and symbolism.

As mentioned before, Chekhov previously experimented with symbolism most prominently in *The Seagull*. While he included titular symbol of the dead seagull, his attempt at making the absent metaphysical world present was too overt: the symbol of the dead seagull grounds itself too heavily in the world of realism by becoming a stage-able icon. First, Trigorin easily explains the symbol in Act II by musing about a short story in which the seagull is a girl. In Act IV, Nina follows Trigorin and compares herself to the

seagull.⁵⁸ These two moments show that the symbol does not “express the inexpressible.”⁵⁹ Instead, it can be easily expressed several ways while being understood in only one. The singular interpretation of the dead seagull is rooted not only in the dialog of the script, but also the stage directions. After all, theatre practitioners can easily translate the seagull into an icon: the audience only need to recognize the icon and listen to the dialog to understand its purpose. In addition to the clear and communicable meaning, the seagull is physically present on stage. Maeterlinck argues, “No symbol can bear the active presence of the human being... the Greeks were not unaware of this, and their masks, which we no longer understand, were designed to attenuate the human presence and to free up the symbol.”⁶⁰ Chekhov’s seagull is crowded with human presence. As a tangible object, the bird only has meaning in relation to the character controlling or analyzing it: it has no freedom to stand alone. Without the characters and their relationships, the bird would be devoid of meaning. Instead of representing a universal truth, the seagull simply reinforces the realistic plot of the play; therefore, both the physical prop and the singular meaning of the symbol are rooted in the world of realism, not the metaphysical world of symbolism. In contrast, the breaking string in *The Cherry Orchard* resists becoming a recognizable icon; therefore, its impossibility frees up the symbol for both artistic and audience interpretation.

In *The Cherry Orchard*, Chekhov clarifies the realms of realism and symbolism and provides the breaking string as a bridge between the two. Unlike those in the *The*

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Mickle Maher. *The Hunchback Variations*. 7.

⁶⁰ Maeterlinck, Maurice, Alfred Sutro, and Arthur Bingham Walkley. 1911. *The Treasure of the Humble*. New York: Dodd, Mead and Co. 97.

Seagull, the characters in *The Cherry Orchard* are unconcerned with symbolism as an art form; they exist in the realistic world created by the playwright. The symbol, however, clearly comes from elsewhere—the metaphysical world. As discussed before, the characters cannot accurately attribute the sound to any realistic origin or meaning. While they mention maybe an owl or heron, Ranevskaya’s uneasiness about the sound exemplifies Chekhov’s new ability to distance his characters and “free” his symbols. The breaking string, unlike the seagull, does not depend on the characters’ relationships or plot; instead, it retains the ability to stand alone and be interpreted by the audience freely.

Chekhov fulfills some of Maeterlinck’s ideals in his impossible stage directions. In *The Tragical in Daily Life*, Maeterlinck posits, “[The essential tragic’s] province is rather to reveal to us how truly wonderful is the mere act of living, and to throw light upon the existence of the soul, self-contained in the midst of ever-restless immensities; to hush the discourse of reason and sentiment, so that above the tumult may be heard the solemn, uninterrupted whisperings of man and his destiny.”⁶¹ Chekhov literally fulfills Maeterlinck’s scenario with his breaking string. First, he provides silence before the sound cue in both Act II and Act IV “to hush the discourse of reason and sentiment,” so the breaking string is literally heard “above the tumult” and functions as the “uninterrupted whisperings of man and his destiny.” As Valency argues:

The abyss that divided the older generation from the younger...is no doubt a universal complaint in all periods, but the social and economic situation of Russia in the latter half of the nineteenth century made the break particularly sharp and deep. The golden string that connected man with his father on earth and father in heaven, the age-old bond that tied present to past, was not to be broken lightly. When at last it snapped, the result, we have discovered, was both world-shaking and soul-shaking.⁶²

⁶¹ Ibid. 97-8.

⁶² Valency, Maurice. 1966. *The Breaking String; The Plays of Anton Chekhov*. New York: Oxford University Press. 289-90.

Chekhov's string, in addition to embodying all the tragedy left unfelt in *The Cherry Orchard*, represents yet another distinction in worlds—not between physical and metaphysical realms—but the difference between a Russia with a spiritual connection to both the physical and spiritual father and a new Russia. Ultimately for Chekhov, the world does not end with a bang, but with a snap. When the string breaks, the audience sees the characters struggle with the realistic “world-shaking.” Before the string breaks in Act II, Varya, Anya, and Trofimov, all part of younger generation, silence their uncle Gayev's poetic musings on nature. In Act IV, the string breaks again as the elderly Firs realizes that everyone has forgotten and abandoned him. While the string relates to the plot and character relationships of the play, it also rises above the play. The seagull only represents the ruin of Nina and the despair of Konstantin: it remains realistic and personal, not world-shaking. The breaking string, however, symbolizes “a universal complaint in all periods.”⁶³ Ranevskaya's uneasiness in Act II shows the “soul-shaking” power the symbol has in the world of realism. By Act IV, the sound's “soul-shaking” power is meant for the audience alone, proving that Chekhov's final symbol acts as a bridge connecting the onstage world of realism and the symbolist realm of beyond the audience shares.

Even though Chekhov successfully connected these two distinct genres, his unique solution was never fully realized. As previously discussed, Chekhov believed Stanislavsky ruined his play by taking the tragedy out of the symbol and burdening the characters with it. While Stanislavsky, much like the fictional Beethoven and

⁶³ Ibid.

Quasimodo, found Chekhov's hybrid form impossible to achieve, Chekhov thought his stage direction was self-explanatory. He complained to his wife Olga Knipper, "Tell Nemirovich that the sound in the second and fourth acts of *The Cherry Orchard* must be shorter, much shorter, and be felt as coming from afar. How petty it all is. They cannot cope with a trifle, a sound, although it is described so clearly in the play."⁶⁴ As Cross observes, Chekhov was less concerned about Stanislavsky understanding the symbol and more focused on him recreating it.⁶⁵ In Chekhov's mind, a singular sound existed to create his perfected symbol, and it needed to be duplicated, not explained. Stanislavsky recounted his discussion with Chekhov concerning the sound, "In one act there must be heard off-stage a sound which is complex and not easily describable in a few words, but it is important that it is exactly as I want it... Surely this sound is not that important? I asked. Anton Pavlovich looked sternly at me and answered curtly: It's necessary."⁶⁶

Chekhov died shortly after the Stanislavsky's first production of *The Cherry Orchard*, leaving his mysterious sound unheard. In this regard, *The Cherry Orchard*'s breaking string stage direction is impossible because the sound may or may not exist: instead, the icon of the sound, trapped in Chekhov's imagination and never accurately communicated to Stanislavsky, was lost with Chekhov's death. Chekhov, through *The Seagull* and *The Cherry Orchard*, managed to create his own hybrid of form, balancing the worlds of both realism and symbolism; however, his solution remains on solely on the

⁶⁴ A.P. Chekhov, *Polnoye sobraniye sochineniy I pisem*, 20 vols. trans. A.G. Cross. Moscow, 1944-1951, XX (1951) p. 251.

⁶⁵ Cross, A. G. (1969). The Breaking Strings of Chekhov and Turgenev. *Slavonic and East European Review*, 47(109). 510.

⁶⁶ *Chekhov teatr*. ed. By Ye. D. Surkov. trans. A.G. Cross. Moscow, 1961., p. 369.

page. His unique amalgam depends on the “necessary” stage direction describing the sound of the breaking string, or the bridge between worlds, which remains silent.

Ultimately, with or without a specific meaning, the breaking string is destined to go through a myriad of interpretations before it even reaches the audience. Due to multiple layers of interpretation, the meaning created by the audience no longer necessarily directly relates to the author’s intended meaning. Without an icon to rely on, each theatre practitioner working on an impossible stage direction creates a unique symbol to fulfill the stage direction, permanently separating the possible meaning of the text from the possible meaning of the performance. Neither the playwright nor the director have full control over meaning the audience makes: interpretative control has shifted from the playwright to the artists and finally to the audience.

The impossible stage direction defies a singular meaning, because it refuses to become an icon. Any sound cue used in a production *The Cherry Orchard* will never completely fulfill Chekhov’s words; instead, each new cue, new interpretation will add to the infinite possibilities that make up the conversation between these literary and auditory symbols. The goal of capturing the authorial intent behind these symbols is a Sisyphean task. While an artist’s singular interpretation cannot embody the entire stage direction nor guarantee the audience’s complete understanding, the new, staged symbol can keep the play itself alive and the debate of meaning ongoing. In the case of *The Cherry Orchard*, perhaps theatre practitioners cannot recover the specific sound Chekhov intended; however, they can create a new effect to serve the same function as the stage direction in the text. After all, the goal to incorporate symbolism into a realistic play and the challenge for a symbol to be both absence and present onstage simultaneously did not

disappear with Chekhov's death. With these objectives in mind, artists today can avoid Stanislavsky's frustrating guessing game, and instead experience—to steal a line from Beethoven—“the pleasure associated with the making of an impossible thing.”⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Maher, Mickle. *The Hunchback Variations*. 1.

Chapter Two
The Impossibility of Synesthesia:
Antonin Artaud's Disregard of Gravity and Affective Fidelity

After condemning the Deadly Theatre as a “deadly bore” and “a travesty of the word [theatre]” in *The Empty Space*, Peter Brook introduces his Holy Theatre, or “Theatre of the Invisible – Made – Visible,” as the first example of a worthwhile version of theatre.⁶⁸ He describes the Holy Theatre as “the true dream behind the debased ideals of the Deadly Theatre” and as “what is meant and remembered by those who with feeling and seriousness use big hazy words like nobility, beauty, poetry.”⁶⁹ What possible theatre could live up to such lofty goals? What performance prioritizes the invisible, the ritualistic, and the sacred in opposition to the contemporary “theatre of doubting, of unease, of trouble, of alarm?”⁷⁰ Brook argues that the “illuminated genius” of Antonin Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty exemplifies the Holy Theatre and its noble aims.⁷¹

Artaud’s writings so deeply affected Brook that he and Charles Marowitz named their experimental group, meant to investigate the essence of the Holy Theatre at the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1964, “The Theatre of Cruelty.” Even though Brook and Marowitz deviated from Artaud’s proposed methodology, they discovered the key to staging examples of both the Theatre of Cruelty and the Holy Theatre. Brook writes, “A holy theatre not only presents the invisible but also offers conditions that make its perception possible.”⁷² By definition, perception of the invisible cannot be achieved through spectacle alone; therefore, an attempt to literally recreate one of Artaud’s images

⁶⁸ Brook, Peter. 1968. *The Empty Space*. New York: Atheneum. 40-42.

⁶⁹ Ibid. 42.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid. 48.

⁷² Ibid. 56.

would be made in vain. Instead, theatre artist should aspire to create the conditions needed for spectators to perceive the invisible, the sacred, and—especially for our purposes—the impossible. This chapter aims to explore a potential way of interpreting one of the western canon’s most famous impossible stage directions through affect theory.

It is important to note not only the evolving history of thought on affect, but also how this study defines and uses affect theory. In their introduction to the *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*’s special section “Affect/Performance/Politics,” Erin Hurely and Sara Warner place the word “affect” among “other contemporary keywords vexed and invigorated by rival interpretations, such as identity, subjectivity, and performance.”⁷³ The introduction aptly describes the transition of affect’s definition from “an inner disposition or feeling” used as early as the fourteenth century to the late nineteenth century’s use “the outward display of emotion or mood.”⁷⁴ By redefining affect as something inherently observable, psychoanalysis unknowingly deeply influenced the humanities, especially literary criticism. This “affective turn,” coined by sociologist Patrician Ticineto Clough, explores “that dimension of culture that cannot be grasped through semiotic analysis or constructivist perspective.”⁷⁵ Affect theory’s rise in popularity comes as no surprise to any scholar interested in audience members, subjectivity, or sensorial experience; however, those in the fields of theatre and performance studies may have a unique interest in affect transcending audience reception. After all, performance regularly deals in “human motivation and behavior that are not

⁷³ Hurley, Erin and Sara Warner. “Special Section: Affect/ Performance/ Politics.” *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*. 26, no. 2 (2012): 99-107.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

tethered to consciousness, cognitive processes, and rationality.”⁷⁶ For example, Brook used impulse-based, non-verbal experiments to capture the “Theatre of Invisible—Made—Visible.” Artaud describes a theatre centered on affect by saying, “We must believe in a sense of life renewed by the theatre... Furthermore, when we speak the word ‘life’ it must be understood we are not referring to life as we know it from its surface of fact, but to that fragile fluctuating center which forms never reach.”⁷⁷ Affect theory, then, is not a first attempt to peel back life’s “surface of fact.” Instead, it provides the vocabulary and tools needed to examine art’s long tradition of showing, communicating, and inspiring life’s “fragile fluctuating center” which other theories, such as semiotics, can never grasp.

Just as artists have different methods of provoking different emotional and sensorial responses, theories have different definitions and uses for affect theory. For the purposes of this study, affect theory will be defined using theories posited by Brian Massumi and Sarah Ahmed, who were both heavily influenced by French philosopher Gilles Deleuze. As Massumi explains in his book *Parable of the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, affect is trans-personal, meaning that affects are not solely owned by or experienced within one individual. Instead, affect circulates within the public sphere and connects multiple individuals.⁷⁸ Sarah Ahmed maintains a similar position that affects “do not positively inhabit anybody or anything,” but rather circulate “between objects and signs.”⁷⁹ In Ahmed’s case, the individual is significant not as the origin of affect, but

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Artaud, Antonin. 1958. *The Theatre and Its Double*. trans. Mary Caroline Richards. New York: Grove Press Inc. 13.

⁷⁸ Massumi, Brian. 2002. *Parables of the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Durham: Duke University Press.

⁷⁹ Ahmed, Sara. 2004. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. New York: Routledge. 46.

as a point of impact. For Massumi and Ahmed, affect theory cannot be boiled down into a linear progression or chronological process; instead, affects live between subjects and signs and can be perceived as an atmosphere. Individuals simultaneously affecting and being affected by others and objects around them not only create this atmosphere, but also constantly contribute to its development.

While Brook frequently references Artaud as one of his major artistic influences and uses the Theatre of Cruelty as the namesake for his experiments, he also openly admits that his exercises—although stimulated by Artaud—were “very far from what he had proposed.”⁸⁰ Instead of attempting to literally recreate the images and theoretical methods posited in Artaud’s plays and manifestos, Brook recognizes their inherent impossibility. His experimentations which used Artaud’s ideas to access the Holy Theatre, therefore, were exercises in affect. Brook developed his investigations to discover what an actor needed to communicate in the absence of language. Could a whistle convey a demand? Would tapping finger-nails express a need? How can actors make contact or, like Artaud’s metaphor of victims being burnt at the stake, send “signal through the flames?”⁸¹ Through these exercises, Brook determined, “It was not enough to feel passionately—a creative leap was required to mint a new form which could be a container and reflector for his impulses.”⁸² In short, an actor needed this new form, or what Brook calls actions, to relay both the invisible and the non-verbal to another actor or audience member.

⁸⁰ Brook, Peter. 1968. *The Empty Space*. New York: Atheneum. 56.

⁸¹ Artaud, Antonin. 1958. *The Theatre and Its Double*. trans. Mary Caroline Richards. New York: Grove Press Inc. 13.

⁸² Brook, Peter. 1968. *The Empty Space*. New York: Atheneum. 51.

Artaud wrote his first dramatic text *Spurt of Blood* in 1925. Previously, he only wrote poetry and scenarios, which resembled nonsensical short stories. *Spurt of Blood* marked not only Artaud's first use of dialog attributed to specific characters, but also his use of stage directions. Artaud wrote:

There is a noise as if an immense wheel were turning and moving in the air. A hurricane separates them. At the same time, two stars are seen colliding and from the fall a series of legs of living flesh with feet, hands, scalps, masks, colonnades, porticos, temples, alembics, falling more and more slowly, as if falling in a vacuum: then three scorpions one after another and finally a frog and a beetle which come to rest with desperate slowness, nauseating slowness.⁸³

Artaud's gravity defying cosmic event lacks a stage-able icon due to the incorporation of synesthesia, or the stimulation of one sense provoked by the sensation within another; therefore, theatre practitioners—like Brook and Marowitz—cannot rely on semiotic interpretation to simply translate words into recognizable spectacle. Instead, artists can use affect theory to reconstruct an ideal affective response that their production can share with the script. While audiences attending a performance will not see the vivid images audiences reading the text could imagine, they can share an affectively faithful, or consistent experience by feeling the same emotions or provoking the same sensorial response. It is important to note that “affective fidelity,” for the purposes of this study, means that the affective atmosphere created during a production matches the affective atmosphere produced by the script. After identifying a common affect both the script and a performance aim to achieve, a director or designer can insert their own unique action, or reflector of impulses, in place of the written symbol (the stage direction) to create the conditions necessary for the spectator to perceive the intended affect.

⁸³ Artaud, Antonin. 2001. “Spurt of Blood.” *Artaud on Theatre*. eds. Claude Schumacher and Brian Singleton. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee. 19-22.

Artaud's nauseating disaster is an exemplary impossible stage direction, because it eventually breaks the traditional method of semiotic interpretation. Consistent with the definition provided in Chapter One, the cataclysmic event cannot be translated into a staged icon and demands interpretation on the part of the producing artists. Much of the written symbol, however, can be translated into a recognizable staged icon. After all, Artaud's vivid writing provides the necessary details to literally recreate the script's image, going as far as to list the exact objects required (feet, scalps, a frog, etc.). While the icon is not realistic—stars do not regularly collide, nor do their collisions produce living flesh, it remains recognizable nonetheless. As Elinor Fuchs argues in her essay "EF's Visit to a Small Planet: Some Questions to Ask a Play," a play is an entirely different world which follows its own rules; therefore, even Artaud's disregard of the basic laws of physics does not qualify this stage direction as impossible.⁸⁴ After all, there is an incredibly long history of defying gravity in the theatre, evolving from the ancient Greek *mechane* used for the flying entrances and exits of gods to the contemporary rigging systems essential for popular musicals like *Wicked* and *Peter Pan*. Even though they remain incredibly difficult to achieve, most of the stage directions in *Spurt of Blood* are possible with talented designers, especially considering the increasingly popular trend of incorporating projections into productions.

The last description, however, calls for "desperate slowness, nauseating slowness"⁸⁵ making the technically difficult instruction impossible. No singular image depicting "slowness" inherently and simultaneously connotes both desperation and

⁸⁴ Fuchs, Elinor. "EF's Visit to a Small Planet: Some Questions to Ask a Play." *Theatre* 14.2 (2004): 4-9.

⁸⁵ Artaud, Antonin. 2001. "Spurt of Blood." *Artaud on Theatre*. eds. Claude Schumacher and Brain Singleton. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee. 19-22.

nausea. While the sight of severed limbs could easily make a spectator ill, Artaud's explicitly names the "slowness" of the falling as the cause or catalyst of the emotional and sensorial response. A producer might be tempted to ignore these few words that confuse the translatable direction. After all, would reproducing the image literally more accurately fulfill the needs of the script than producing a seemingly unrelated feeling of physical discomfort? For Artaud and his Theatre of Cruelty just as for Brook and his Holy Theatre, the answer would be a resounding, "no." Instead, the conditions to perceive the invisible, in this case the nausea and desperation, are just as crucial as the stimulating spectacle. Together, they make up a language of the senses on which The Theatre of Cruelty depends. As Artaud explains in *The Theatre and Its Double*:

I say that the stage is a concrete physical place which asks to be filled, and to be given its own concrete language of speak. I say that this concrete language, intended for the senses and independent of speech, has first to satisfy the senses, that there is poetry of the senses as there is a poetry of language, and that this concrete physical language to which I refer is truly theatrical only to the degree that the thoughts it expresses are beyond the reach of the spoken language.⁸⁶

This "poetry of the senses" not only indirectly favors the stage directions over the verbal dialog of the short play, but also encourages the stimulation of multiple sense simultaneously to create thoughts "beyond the reach of the spoken language." Artaud is, of course, limited to the poetry of language within the script; however, he regularly speaks out of against the supremacy of verbal communication within his writings: he wrote, "to cause spoken language or expression by words to dominate onstage the objective expression of gestures and of everything which affects the mind by sensuous and spatial means is to turn one's back on the physical necessities of the stage and rebel

⁸⁶ Artaud, Antonin. 1958. *The Theatre and Its Double*. trans. Mary Caroline Richards. New York: Grove Press Inc. 37.

against its possibilities.”⁸⁷ This statement and several similar claims made by Artaud were meant as critiques of the realistic theatre’s obsession with dialog; however, it can also be read as an invitation for interpretation. After all, an impossible stage direction is defined by its multitude of possibilities. Artaud, a theatre director himself, recognized how words fail to express not only meaning, but more importantly feelings and sensations. He went so far as to say, “What a mournful ship is servitude to the author, submissiveness to the text! Every text has infinite possibilities. The spirit and not the letter of the text! But a text demands much more than analysis and understanding.”⁸⁸ In light of these sentiments, translating Artaud’s impossible stage directions into icons—if it were even possible—would betray the goals of the script and the nature of the Theatre of Cruelty. *Spurt of Blood*, therefore, presents the impossible not as a deterrent or obstacle for artists, but as an invitation to explore the “poetry of the senses” through various interpretations.

The “poetry of the senses” that both embodies the essence of the Theatre of Cruelty and makes the stage direction impossible is now better known as synesthesia. As stated before, synesthesia is the stimulation of one sense provoked by a sensation within another sense, such as a sound producing a visualization of color or a smell perceived through taste. Synesthesia is technically a neurobiological term that describes a rare, involuntary phenomenon within the brain affecting the cognitive pathways or senses. Synesthetes are those diagnosed with synesthesia. Though synesthetes are rare, many types of art, including theatrical movements, have attempted to simulate synesthesia

⁸⁷ Ibid. 71.

⁸⁸ Artaud, Antonin, and Ruby Cohn. “States of Mind: 1921-1945.” *The Tulane Drama Review* 8, no. 2 (1963): 30-73.

within audiences. The most widely recognized example of this art would be Walt Disney's 1940 animated film *Fantasia*, which associates images, especially color, with music. Even though Artaud never uses the term "synesthesia," he advocates for a theatre which stimulates multiple sensations through unconventional means. He proposes inverting arena staging to overwhelm the audience's sense on multiple fronts: he writes, "In the theatre of cruelty the spectator is in the center and the spectacle surrounds him. In this spectacle the sonorisation is constant: sounds, noises, cries are chosen first for their vibratory quality, then for what they represent."⁸⁹ Just as Artaud blurs spectacle with sound and sound with vibratory feeling, he also mixes image and physical discomfort in his cataclysmic, nausea-inducing slowness.

The goal to create synesthesia makes the icon unattainable, because an icon is, by definition, something that is immediately recognizable: the blending of sensorial responses in unconventional ways clouds the icon beyond recognition. Despite complicating Artaud's stage directions, synesthesia also provides a map, or guide to interpret Artaud's "poetry of the senses." The opportunity to experience the spirit of *Spurt of Blood* is not lost simply because the icon is. As Artaud states, "All true feeling is in reality untranslatable. To express it is to betray it. But to translate it is to dissimulate it."⁹⁰ According to Artaud, all artists must paradoxically betray their feelings to convey them. While this unavoidable betrayal is, in fact, what makes Artaud's theatre cruel, the artist can avoid disguising the feeling in translation, which reorients the audience to think logically about the staged images rather than experience them through the senses. The

⁸⁹ Artaud, Antonin. 1958. *The Theatre and Its Double*. trans. Mary Caroline Richards. New York: Grove Press Inc. 81.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 71.

semiotic translation of Artaud's cosmic event would ultimately suppress the lifeblood of his sensorial poetry.

Spurt of Blood was Artaud's first dramatic text and marks the beginning of Artaud's departure from the Surrealist movement. Written in 1925, Artaud's short and violent script is arguably the earliest work of his Theatre of Cruelty. Artaud began his career in theatre as early as 1920 by taking walk-on roles at the Théâtre de l'œuvre. The Théâtre de l'œuvre, known for its long history of supporting non-realistic movements, was home to seminal French symbolists Lugné-Poe and Maurice Maeterlinck and hosted the infamous premiere of Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi*. By the early 1920s, however, the Théâtre de l'œuvre had seen two closures—the first as a result of Lugné-Poe's personal choice to explore other artistic pursuits and the second as a result of World War I beginning in 1914—and reopened in 1919 to the newly forming movements of Dada and Surrealism. Artaud joined the Surrealists in 1924, the same year as the publication of André Breton's first Surrealist manifesto; yet, despite Artaud's placement in the forefront of and his active involvement in the movement, his time as a Surrealist was short-lived. By 1925, Artaud was simultaneously editing the Surrealist journal *La Révolution Surréaliste* and exploring his own theatrical project, such as *Spurt of Blood*. Artaud's formation of the Alfred Jarry Theatre in 1926 revealed the differences between his own dramatic pursuits and Breton's idealistic restrictions which led Breton to exile him from the Surrealism group that same year.⁹¹ Breton led the Surrealists towards communism and complained the theatre was a too bourgeois art form. Artaud, on the other hand, ventured farther away from editing Surrealist journals, favoring the theatre. While Artaud

⁹¹ Artaud, Antonin. 2001. *Artaud on Theatre*. eds. Claude Schumacher and Brain Singleton. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee.

continued to collaborate and socialize with several artists still under Breton's leadership, his artwork left the realm of dreams and entered into the world of nightmares.

Artaud's deep involvement with and severe break from the Surrealists can be seen in the style of *Spurt of Blood*. While imagery such as Artaud's colliding stars and slowly falling limbs definitely resemble a dream-like fantasia while rejecting everyday logic, the play also assaults the senses in a drastically different way than the plays of contemporary surrealists, such as Jean Cocteau. *Spurt of Blood*, while heavily influenced by Surrealism, serves as the early experiment off which Artaud bases his 1932 Theatre of Cruelty manifestos and *The Theatre and Its Double*. Artaud's obsession with religion, especially Christianity, starts with *Spurt of Blood* and is seen frequently throughout the rest of his writing, most prominently in *The Death of Satan and Other Mystical Writings*.⁹² This turn toward the sacred and the ritual departs even further from Breton's Surrealism which, after a brief conversion to communism, avoided moralistic and religious entanglements.

Spurt of Blood almost serves as the bridge connecting Surrealism to Artaud's never-fully-realized Theatre of Cruelty. Writing his play and opening a theatre while still in the tranches of Breton's Surrealism, then, became two distinct acts of rebellion, making *Spurt of Blood* an early declaration of independence of the Theatre of Cruelty from Surrealism. *Spurt of Blood* was published amongst Artaud's Surrealist poetry, fragmented letters, and early theatrical manifestos in *The Umbilico Limbo* in July of 1925.⁹³ Just as his poetry mixed violent imagery and sensation while abandoning

⁹² Artaud, Antonin. 1974. *The Death of Satan and Other Mystical Writings*. trans. Victor Corti and Alastair Hamilton. London: Calder & Boyars.

⁹³ Barber, Stephen. 1993. *Antonin Artaud*. London: Faber and Faber Limited. 26.

narrative, *Spurt of Blood* also juggles overwhelming description with the incapacity of language. Artaud writes, “I made my debut in literature by writing books to say that I could write nothing at all...I never had ideas, and two very short books, each of 70 pages, are concerned with this profound, deep-rooted, endemic absence of all ideas. These are *The Umbilicus of Limbo* and *The Nerve-Scales*.”⁹⁴ Even though *Spurt of Blood* was written and published before the founding of the Alfred Jarry Theatre, the play was never produced during Artaud’s lifetime. This inclination toward writing can be seen in Artaud’s frequently published work, including *La Révolution Surréaliste*, *The Umbilicus of Limbo*, and *The Nerve-Scales* coming out within several months of each other over the course of 1925. Artaud, unlike Breton, could not just visit the theatre to heckle: instead, he still craved the experimentation seen in the early years of Dada and Surrealism.⁹⁵ Writing *Spurt of Blood* as a play—rather than a poem or scenario—marks Artaud’s first steps into exploring his later belief that the theatre held salvation for humanity more so than any other art form.

Even though Artaud rarely wrote scripts, he dedicated his life to writing about his theoretical theatre. His plays are not often produced, perhaps, because they call for drastic degrees of feeling and sensation in addition to technical marvels. In *Theatre and Its*

Double, Artaud writes:

The images of poetry in the theatre are a spiritual force that begins its trajectory in the senses and does without reality altogether. Once launched upon the fury of his task an actor requires infinitely more power to keep from committing a crime than a murdered needs courage to complete his act, and it is here, in its very gratuitousness, that the action and effect of a feeling in the theatre appears infinitely more valid than that of a feeling fulfilled in life.⁹⁶

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid. 38

⁹⁶ Artaud, Antonin. 1958. *The Theatre and Its Double*. trans. Mary Caroline Richards. New York: Grove Press Inc. 25.

In light of these statements, Artaud's theatre depends more on the "spiritual force" created by actors than on grandiose spectacle. Brook and Marowitz's experiments which were described by Brook as "very far from what [Artaud] had proposed" seem like a brilliant methodology to achieve Artaud's theories: maybe the exercises themselves were not of Artaud's making, yet the results seems closely related.⁹⁷ Just as Artaud's "spiritual force" begins in the senses and aims to create an "infinitely more valid" feeling than reality could provide, Brook's nonverbal impulses attempt to reach the invisible, deeply felt Holy aspects of theatre. Artaud's writings and Brook's actions, therefore, share a common goal: to stimulate an affective response within their audiences, or communication feels without dissimulating them in translation.

When affect is viewed as a circulation or constantly evolving atmosphere, affect can also be understood as curated and subjective, contagious and faithful. Massumi, using the Deleuzian definition of trans-personal, frequently uses affect to describe politics and the public sphere; however, his thoughts are useful for discussing theatrical performances and audience experiences. Massumi concludes that affect has the power to "produce ideological effects by non-ideological means," seen in his example of citizens voting for candidates they like despite disagreeing with the candidate's policies.⁹⁸ Massumi states that eventually—even concerning something as important as government—affect can win out over rationality. Affect allows politicians to be "many things to many people, but within a general framework of affective jingoism."⁹⁹ This

⁹⁷ Brook, Peter. 1968. *The Empty Space*. New York: Atheneum. 56.

⁹⁸ Ibid. 103

⁹⁹ Ibid. 103

flexibility in rational meaning with a general framework, or affective atmosphere is crucial to impossible stage directions: it allows producing artists the flexibility of interpretation while providing a common, affective goal the production and script can share. While individual subjects encounter affect in unique ways, all of these encounters occur within the atmosphere or “general framework” of a larger affect. The circulation, or trans-personal nature of affect means that affect is not entirely subjective. Even though one may experience a personal variation, the overall affective environment heavily influences those encounters. While artists cannot control individual audience responses, they can use the play as a vehicle to project certain affects; therefore, the impact of the play is not the content, but the delivery. Massumi observes the contagious nature of meaning making revolving around and promoting affective frameworks. Massumi’s “reactive body politic,” or—for the purpose of the theatre—the audience is just as influential as the producing artists, because affect can be contagious.¹⁰⁰ Even though the affect itself does not begin nor end with these individuals just as the affect is not owned by the artist, each subject is not affected in a vacuum; therefore, while one cannot guarantee a specific affective response from an individual, one can curate and influence the overall affective framework which dictates individual encounters.

Theatre practitioners, therefore, can use affect theory to responsibly interpret impossible stage directions and create an affective atmosphere rooted in the script in which the audience can encounter the work. Returning to Artaud’s apocalyptic, nauseating stage direction, the content matters less than the delivery: the icon of the stage direction matters less than the affective atmosphere of the play. From Artaud’s clearly

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

articulated manifestos, theatre practitioners understand that the goals of the Theatre of Cruelty are to activate the senses and express life beyond the rational. In the case of *Spurt of Blood*, this goal can be achieved through synesthesia, triggering physical discomfort with spectacle. Both audiences reading the script and those watching a production can experience the affective atmosphere, even if they imagine and see radically different images. Ideally, productions can convey both the icon and affect contained within the script, connecting with the audience on a rational, emotional, and sensorial level; however, the impossible stage direction demands artists sacrifice concrete meaning in favor of the affect. Of course, a director could never control the meanings made or the feelings sensed by the audience; however, the artist can curate the affective atmosphere and guide individuals towards certain affective encounters. *Spurt of Blood's* umbrella affect can be “discomfort” while individual audience members experience personally experience “anxiety,” “irritation,” or even “nausea.”

Additionally, the production has two advantages in creating the ideal affect dictated by the script: the audience and the actors. As seen in Brook’s exercises, non-verbal impulses have incredible communicative power, and they contribute to the uncomfortable framework in which all other audience members continually encounter the play. As more and more audience members produce signs of discomfort, the circulating affect strengthens. Specific subjects are affected by both the action on stage and the nervous shifting of the person sitting next to them just as they affect others with a slight moan or sharp intake of breath. Also, artists curating the affective atmosphere have an additional opportunity to influence sensorial and emotional responses. Unlike literary and visual art forms, theatre and performing arts have the advantage of actors actively

participating in the circulation. From the perspective of semiotics, actors simply represent characters; however, within the frame affect theory, actors are individuals contributing and reacting to the same in environment as the audience. Whether the actors' responses are the carefully rehearsed, imagined embodiment of their characters or they are the genuine impulses of actor (most likely some combination of the two), the responses still affect and are affected by the audience.

The goal of maintaining the affective atmosphere of the script throughout the production still allows directors to have creative and interpretative control of the impossible stage directions. But what of the technically difficult stage directions that have a stage-able icon? Should theatre practitioners favor the semiotic interpretation over the affective atmosphere? Does the goal of affective fidelity mean everything in the script is open to interpretation? Ideally, any icon of a stage direction should feed into affective atmosphere the script provides. Each stage direction, each character, each beat of dialog can trigger different sensations or influence various encounters while still circulating under the umbrella affect. Take another stage direction from *Spurt of Blood* for example. Artaud writes: "A multitude of scorpions crawl out from beneath the Wet-Nurse's dress and swarm between her legs. Her vagina swells up, splits."¹⁰¹ After all, this stage direction can be literally recreated, yet hold possibly radically different semiotic meanings. The specific semiotic readings, different as they may be, still need to feed into the overall affect of discomfort. Some audience members may gasp at the irreverence, others may find a mutilated, exposed female body disturbing, and a few may even recoil at the sight scorpions: all these emotional and sensorial responses, however different,

¹⁰¹Artaud, Antonin. 2001. "Spurt of Blood." *Artaud on Theatre*. eds. Claude Schumacher and Brian Singleton. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee. 22.

circulate and feed the affective environment of discomfort. Whether or not the artists and audience members interpret the images as symbols, the curated and contagious affect remains: it blends the icon of the possible with the aesthetics of the impossible, the directorial choices with the playwright's words, and—most importantly—the audience reactions with the actors' impulses.

In this regard, affect theory and the realm of the senses are not the enemies of semiotics and rationality as the Surrealists or Artaud argued. Instead, the rationally interpreted symbol acts as a subject within the circulating conversation of affect, or, to quote Ahmed, a “nodal point” within the “affective economy.”¹⁰² While the Wet-Nurse violently birthing a swarm of scorpions is extremely challenging to stage, an icon exists which resembles these words closely enough to be identifiable. Of course, it would take a technical wizard to achieve the icon imagined by most readers, but the icon remains and can be interpreted freely as a symbol by the audience without an additional layer of interpretation from the director. In her book *Artaud and His Doubles*, Kimberly Jannarone argues,

The scorpion swarm of [*SPURT*] *OF BLOOD* resembles nothing so much as the plague raging through Europe in Artaud's imagination, spawning a dangerous new universe as it annihilates the old. Artaud's images of comprehensive devastation, of new life equated with torment, come hard on the heels of World War I, whose aftermath left much of Western Europe feeling that the new world just arrived had originated in horror was very clearly heading back into it.¹⁰³

Even though this rational interpretation of the scorpion swarm symbolizing the horrors of World War I and spawning of World War II is by no means definitive, it has the ability serve as a “nodal point” for some audience members with historical chops in *Spurt of*

¹⁰² Ahmed, Sara. 2004. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. New York: Routledge. 120

¹⁰³ Jannarone, Kimberly. 2012. *Artaud and His Doubles*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 32.

Blood's "affective economy." Symbolic meanings can feed into an affective environment without representing that environment literally. While one audience member may be nauseated by the sight of blood or embarrassed in the presence of nudity, another may associate a stage scattered with dead bodies with trench warfare. The association of war, still under the umbrella of discomfort, now becomes part of the circulating affect and adds to environment. Conversely, the affective atmosphere influences any symbolic meaning derived by the audience. While it would be impossible to prove, it seems unlikely that an audience member would associate the swarm of scorpions with rebirth or hope. Additionally, the bookending world wars may serve as "nodal points" affecting rational, sensorial, and emotional responses to the play; however, it seems highly improbable that romantic images—such as those inspired by art like *Casablanca*—would circulate in this environment. This lack of Romanticism is purely due the affective atmosphere of the play. After all, the characters YOUNG MAN and YOUNG GIRL proclaiming their love while surrounded by images denoting war could easily be associated with several Romantic narratives; however, Romanticism has no worth in the affective economy of discomfort. No matter what logical meaning the audience makes while watching *Spurt of Blood*, it will be made within the confines of discomfort.

Even though technical miracles onstage bringing the script's icons to life can contribute to the air of discomfort, large budgets and elaborate accoutrements are not the keys to creating a faithful affective experience: in fact, the opposite may be true. Brook claims that "[Jerzy] Grotowski's theatre is as close as anyone has got to Artaud's ideal."¹⁰⁴ Grotowski, author of *Towards a Poor Theatre*, approaches the theatre as a

¹⁰⁴Brook, Peter. 1968. *The Empty Space*. New York: Atheneum. 60.

vehicle of self-discovery and salvation. In the pursuit of the sacred, Grotowski's actors expose the self to the point that any performance actually becomes a sacrifice of personal secrets and privacy. To achieve this goal, "Grotowski makes poverty an ideal; his actors have given up everything except their own bodies; they have the human instrument and limitless time—no wonder they are the richest theatre in the world."¹⁰⁵ As Brook points out, the goals of both Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty and the Holy Theatre can be achieved by dedicated artists with or without extraordinary means. Human connection beyond that of the rational and the verbal become paramount, not intense spectacle or mind tricking illusions. The circulation of affect, of impulse amongst artists and their audience makes the encounter more consistent than any reverent semiotic translation could.

Brook concludes his thoughts on the Holy Theatre by saying, "we are rediscovering that a holy theatre is still what we need. So where should we look for it? In the clouds or on the ground?"¹⁰⁶ The ability to fly performers in and off stage may create a beautiful stage picture, but should theatre artists sacrifice the deep connections made by bodily proximity because they are scared the audience might see the rigging line? These lingering questions hint at the need to bring the actors and audience closer to create the needed affective atmosphere, especially when it comes to the Theatre of Cruelty and its myriad of impossible stage directions. The impossibility of *Spurt of Blood* is certainly daunting: after all, Artaud himself did not even direct a production. This challenge, however, should be met frequently not as an attempt to prove technical prowess, but as an effort to reach the spiritual, the invisible, the nonverbal, or even the impossible that dictates human experience. By forgoing a literal, semiotic interpretation of the play,

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 64.

directors can instead create faithful affective environments in which audiences can encounter and contribute to the play. The Theatre of Cruelty demands to be lived, not just simply read or seen, and a living theatre, as defined by Artaud, needs to transcend the “surface of fact” and communicate with “that fragile, fluctuating center” of humanity. When theatre’s primary goal is to affect and be affected by its audience, the impossible becomes essential.

Chapter 3
The Impossibility of Trauma:
Heiner Müller's Radiating Breast Cancer and the Bifurcation of Germany

Post-modern German playwright Heiner Müller arguably became one of Germany's most prominent dramatists. A playwright for the postdramatic theatre, Müller abandons the narrative in favor of problems. Müller writes,

In every institution people are in pursuit of solutions, solutions to problems. But that is a completely unrealistic approach, because the problem really is that there are many available solutions but not enough problems. The issue is rather to create problems, to find problems and then enlarge them out of proportion; then you'll find the solutions automatically... This means, of course, that one would also need an awareness of problems. I believe this is quite correct, especially for the theatre.¹⁰⁷

In short, problems are the key to progression. Müller does not answer a specific call to promote intellectualism or political activism like his German predecessors and contemporaries—mostly notably his mentor Bertolt Brecht and close friend Carl Weber. He, instead, amplifies and transmits these needs for other theatre artists to fill. His plays, in this regard, are not meant to convey a singular lesson or meaning directly to an audience: instead, they can adapt to new situations, new crises while still reflecting the historical moment of their own conception. As Tony Kushner reflects, “Eventually any theatre artist intent on doing Müller's work will find themselves faced with a heady and alarming freedom, for the key to staging must be invented upon the occasion—by the historically informed, politically engaged imaginations of those doing the staging.”¹⁰⁸

No play presents as many problems or demands this “heady and alarming freedom” as much as Müller's *Hamletmachine*. Riddled with impossible stage directions

¹⁰⁷ Müller, Heiner. 2001. *A Heiner Müller Reader: Plays, Poetry, Prose*. ed. Carl Weber. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press. 231.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* xvi.

and rooted in a dark history of national trauma, *Hamletmachine* adapts Shakespeare's masterpiece for a German audience in only nine short pages consisting of four monologues and one scene. The majority of the play revolves around Hamlet and Ophelia, the only two speaking characters; however, several other characters appear momentarily in strange images accompanying the four monologues throughout the text. For example, three women stand naked and speak as Lenin, Marx, and Mao.¹⁰⁹ While this disarming stage picture has a realizable icon, Müller also includes characters in impossible stage directions. In the scene titled "Scherzo," Müller writes "On a swing, the Madonna with breast cancer. Horatio opens an umbrella, embraces Hamlet. They freeze under the umbrella, embracing. The breast cancer radiates like a sun."¹¹⁰ The Madonna's breast cancer calls for both the microscopic invisibility of cancer as well as the blinding power of the sun, meaning the poetic instruction has no stage-able icon an audience can recognize. Due to this break in semiotic interpretation, theatre practitioners must rely on affect theory to reconstruct an ideal affective response the production of the play can share with the script. Additionally, theatre practitioners can use theories about memory from trauma studies to embody and perform suffering onstage. When the play's conception is put in the historical context of the post-World War II bifurcation of Germany, *Hamletmachine* can be recognized as Müller's post-modern expression of Germany's national trauma. Using the methods laid out in E. Ann Kaplan's *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature*, one can read *Hamletmachine* as Müller's personal memoir. His writings and interviews can then be

¹⁰⁹ Müller, Heiner. 1984. *Hamletmachine and Other Texts for the Stage*. ed. Carl Weber. New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* 55.

used as a road map to responsibly recreate his distorted memories of trauma that are too painful to describe literally.

Müller's radiating breast cancer typifies an impossible stage direction, because it cannot be translated into a staged icon. Similar to Artaud's colliding stars in *Spurt of Blood*, however, the invisible and blinding nature of the Madonna also includes possible elements. The Madonna sitting on a swing as well as Horatio embracing Hamlet under an umbrella are not only recognizable stage pictures, but are also quite easily achieved. The impossibility comes with Müller's description, "The breast cancer radiates like a sun." One can easily imagine the Madonna dressed as a cancer patient or a cancer patient positioned like the Madonna would indicate "the Madonna with breast cancer." Semiotic interpretation, however, fails on two accounts. First, various interpretations of "radiates like a sun" produce drastically different stage icons, meaning any staging is a symbol crafted by the director, not an icon. "Radiates like a sun" can, of course, indicate something that produces bright light or intense heat. Sunlight is electromagnetic radiation given off in infrared, visible, and ultraviolet wavelengths. While only the visible wavelengths can be seen by the human eye as sunlight, infrared and ultraviolet rays can be felt. For example, overexposure to ultraviolet light results in a radiation burn, or a sunburn. Depending on the director, "radiates like a sun" can easily be interpreted as any mixture of bright light and/or intense heat: simultaneously visible and invisible. Second, the breast cancer is the active subject, while the Madonna remains passive. Breast cancer, invisible to the naked eye and contained within the body, is the subject radiating—meaning this radiation should be either invisible or contained. Complicating this matter more, breast cancer can be treated with the invisible radiation of x-rays,

gamma rays, or charged particles. While it may be natural to associate breast cancer with this type of radiation, Müller inverts the relationship between breast cancer and radiation by turning a cure into an attack on the audience. Even though the majority of the stage direction can be translated into an icon, the active breast cancer and the various interpretations of radiation make this stage direction impossible. No single image could be recognized as the words in the script: instead, the literary symbol must be filtered through a director's interpretation.

It should come as no surprise that a playwright focused on creating problems includes impossible stage directions that open the play up to endless interpretations.

After all, Müller wrote:

When I'm writing a play and in doubt which stage direction I should add, if this guy should walk on his hands or stand on his head or crawl on all fours, I know—when that becomes a decisive question—that something is wrong with the text. As long as the text is right, it is of no interest to me, it is a problem of the theatre or of the director, if the character stands on his head or his hands. Whenever that becomes a problem for me, I haven't written something in the right way. I firmly believe that literature has the task of offering resistance to the theatre. Only when a text cannot be done the way the theatre is conditioned to do it, is the text productive for the theatre, of any interest.¹¹¹

Müller, unlike playwrights such as Samuel Beckett, treats stage directions not as instructions, but rather as opportunities for resistance. Instead of writing to fulfill the needs of a particular style of theatre like Brecht or accomplish the goals laid out in a manifesto like Artaud, Müller uses the impossible as a catalyst to spark change within the theatre. By designating the role of the director as that of interpretative control, Müller does not guard his texts against new forms of staging: he demands them. As Tony Kushner says, “[Müller] reminded theatre practitioners and their audience of the

¹¹¹ Müller, Heiner. 1989. *The Battle: Plays, Prose, Poems by Heiner Müller*. ed. Carl Weber. New York: PAJ Publications. 160.

productive tensions between the text and the staged event...He urges us to ‘do what we cannot do’ to transcend—there is more of utopia in Müller’s discussion of theatre practice than there is in the inferno of his plays.”¹¹² *Hamletmachine*, therefore, was not written as a foundational blueprint off which nearly identical productions could be constructed. Müller not only embraces the natural tension between a text and its performance, but magnifies the problem areas in an effort to inspire transcendence. This “utopia” Kushner describes reflects both Müller’s belief in and disenchantment with communist principles. While his theatre is one in which all artists are viewed as equal collaborators, it also is a theatre without concrete solutions. Each production presents only temporary answers to the eternal problems of humanity: his theatre is both transcendent and doomed, hopeful and bleak, utopian and hellish.

As seen in the case of Artaud’s cataclysmic event being associated with either World War, any associations theatre practitioners or audience members draw between the Madonna’s radiating breast cancer and religion, sexuality, or disease become “nodal points” in the “affective economy.”¹¹³ These rational associations join the affective conversation rather than dominate as a singular meaning: the play, despite multiple interpretations, remains an expression of despair and refuses to transform into a lesson concerning morality or history. A thin line exists between the “alarming freedom” that comes with staging *Hamletmachine* and artistic anarchy which results in a total departure from the text. While Müller’s plays can be liberally interpreted for a semiotic perspective, they—much like the example of Artaud’s *Spurt of Blood*—require affective

¹¹² Müller, Heiner. 2001. *A Heiner Müller Reader: Plays, Poetry, Prose*. ed. Carl Weber. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press. Xvii.

¹¹³ Ahmed, Sara. 2004. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. New York: Routledge. 120

fidelity. As Case argues, “It is not an economic revolution, a class revolution, or a historical revolution that *Hamletmachine* acts out. It is what Jean Baudrillard called ‘the revolution of signs’—it taps the surrealist roots of the drama for their semiotic revolution.”¹¹⁴ This semiotic revolution demands an affective goal. Theatre practitioners can interpret stage directions with the aim of adding to a curated atmosphere in which the audience can encounter the plays. In the case of *Hamletmachine*, any given production and the script can share an environment of hopelessness. As Müller explained, “[Hamletmachine] is the description of a petrified hope, an effort to articulate a despair so it can be left behind.”¹¹⁵ Productions, therefore, can interpret the Madonna’s radiating breast cancer into radically different staged symbols while still maintaining affective fidelity between the audience and the actors.

Even with the affective goal of hopelessness aiding interpretation, theatre practitioners have a new problem: how to responsibly stage their interpretations. For the purpose of this study, responsible staging refers to being faithful to the spirit of both the text and context of the play, without literally interpreting stage directions. Müller complicates his scripted moments of impossibility by describing his play as “an effort to articulate a despair so it can be left behind.” He goes on to say, “It is certainly a terminal point. I can’t continue in this way.”¹¹⁶ Even though Müller does not specifically use the words, he is describing a method, to borrow a term from Sigmund Freud, of “working through” his personal and Germany’s national trauma by writing.¹¹⁷ Freud’s “acting out”

¹¹⁴ Case, Sue-Ellen. “From Bertolt Brecht to Heiner Müller.” *Performing Arts Journal* 7, no. 1(1983): 101.

¹¹⁵ Müller, Heiner. 1984. *Hamletmachine and Other Texts for the Stage*. ed. Carl Weber. New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications. 50.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ LaCapra, Dominick. 2001. “Writing History, Writing Trauma.” *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. 1-42.

refers to what Müller would deem a theatrical solution, or a didactic narrative: a piece of artwork that responds to the previously experienced trauma with a rational solution. In contrast, a piece of art that is “working through” trauma lacks concrete answers and relies on various forms of expression. If artists view *Hamletmaschine* as Müller’s attempt to work through both his own personal experiences as well as the national trauma Germany experienced post World War II, then these impossible stage directions should be treated like delicate memories. Staging *Hamletmaschine* is no longer a simple matter of liberal semiotic interpretation in front of the correct affective backdrop: instead, it can be a process of retelling or “working through” trauma.

Müller might not appear like an obviously traumatized playwright. After all, the wake of World War II was filled with dramatists like George Tabori, Max Frisch, and Peter Weiss who were both “working through” and “acting out” various traumas—the Holocaust most notably—through playwriting, creating scripts ranging from Weiss’s docudrama to Tabori’s black comedy. Despite producing radically different plays like *Mein Kampf* and *The Investigation*, each writer was clearly wrestling with fallout of World War II across Europe through narratives directly exploring the Holocaust. Müller’s work, on the other hand, is not clearly “about” any of these atrocities, due in large part to his rejection of didacticism and narrative. Instead, his hopeless post-modern pieces embody and conflate three types of the trauma: his own personal trauma, the national trauma felt in post-World War II Germany, and E. Ann Kaplan’s concept of “future-tense trauma.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ Kaplan, E. Ann. “Trauma Studies Moving Forward: Interdisciplinary Perspectives.” *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*. Vol. 27. No. 2. (2013): 53-65.

Müller was deeply impacted by Germany's role in World War II and the political division bifurcating his country. Born in 1929, he vividly describes the effect that Hitler's rise to power had on his father, a functionary in the Social Democrat Party during the Weimar Republic. In his story "The Father," Müller describes pretending to be asleep at 4:00 a.m. while uniformed men from the new fascist regime beat and arrested his father.¹¹⁹ He and his mother were allowed to visit his father at a concentration camp one year after his arrest. He describes the wired fence that you could not shake hands through as an image of his trauma. Müller goes on to detail his "second experience of treason" when his father could not find work after being released from the camp where he was held for over a year.¹²⁰ After the war, his father was exiled from the Socialist Unity Party for being a "Titoist," or a supporter of Josip Broz Tito in opposition to Stalin and the Soviet Union following World War II, and defected to West Germany. Müller, betrayed by his father and still a deep believer in communism, stayed in East Germany and only visited his father when he was hospitalized and quarantined in 1951. Carl Weber details this visit by saying, "the [hospital's] glass door was another traumatic imprint in his memory, like the fence of the concentration camp and the door in which his arrested father stood. These images were to become important for his theatre."¹²¹ Müller's complicated feelings towards his father, ranging from abandonment to betrayal, left a lasting "traumatic imprint" in his memory marked by visions of the barriers seemingly permanently separating them. Concentration camps, like disease, became reminders of

¹¹⁹ Müller, Heiner. 2001. *A Heiner Müller Reader: Plays, Poetry, Prose*. ed. Carl Weber. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press. 14-18.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ Müller, Heiner. 1984. *Hamletmachine and Other Texts for the Stage*. ed. Carl Weber. New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications. 22.

separation for Müller. Similarly, his father's inability to get employment or adapt to the Socialist Unity Party symbolized an emasculation in Müller's eyes. Both his familial patriarch as well as his fatherland suffered greatly during the war.

Müller did not simply observe the sufferings of others during the war. At sixteen, he was drafted into the Reichsarbeitsdienst, or the Labor Force, and he was sent to the front lines in 1945. The Reichsarbeitsdienst was formed by the Nazis as both a way to mitigate the effects of unemployment in Germany during the war as well as indoctrinate the youth of Germany into the Nazi party. Müller, despite his dislike of the Nazi party, avoided his father's crippling unemployment by being drafted into the Nazi party. He either needed to face poverty and treason charges, or don a Nazi uniform. He was briefly taken as a prison of war and managed to escape on foot.¹²² Experiencing imminent danger while serving a cause he did not believe in, Müller was left with violent memories and images witnessing the fighting in Mecklenburg, Germany: he watched the fall of his beloved homeland in person.

Even though Müller's childhood and his experiences during the war years contained enough suffering for a lifetime, he experienced another traumatic blow in 1956. Weber writes,

1956 was a crucial year for the further course of European history, and has become a kind of watershed in the history of Marxism. In February, Khrushchev revealed the full scope of Stalin's reign of terror during the XXth Soviet Party Congress. The debate on the abuses of the cult of Stalin began. Müller's mentor Brecht died in August. And in October, efforts to reform the Communist system in Hungary rapidly escalated into a full-scale revolution that was immediately exploited by the Cold War strategists and then crushed by invading Soviet forces after a week-long civil war. Many illusions on the left were shattered forever that year, many hopes brutally dashed. It was, of course, traumatic for Müller's

¹²² Ibid.

development, as evident in *Hamletmachine*, a text he published twenty years later though the first scene were written under the immediate impact of the events.¹²³

The year 1956 left Müller completely disenchanted both with political bifurcation of Germany—enforced since 1949—and state of the Communist party internationally. While he began writing *Hamletmachine* that year, Müller spent the following twenty years wrestling with the events of 1956. Of course, brutal images of Germany’s concentration camps would be forever associated with similar atrocities under the reign of Stalin, and Müller was forced to confront the fact that his communist solution to fascism produced the same horrifying results. Arguably, 1956 marked Müller’s abandonment of theatrical solutions. With the death of his mentor, Bertolt Brecht, the defection of his father, and the disillusionment he felt toward any political solution to human suffering, Müller was left to write his hopeless semiotic revolution by translating his “traumatic imprints” into art. He knew, however, that this translation did not come easy. Müller said, “When you translate an idea into a picture, either the picture become crooked, or the idea explodes. I’m more for the explosion.”¹²⁴

In addition to experiencing the trauma of Hitler’s rise to power and World War II first hand, Müller speaks as representative of Germany’s national suffering. Weber describes:

Heiner Müller is very much a son of his nation, and the obsessions and trauma inflicted on the German people—and inflicted by them on others—have become his own. The German ‘split,’ the ‘two souls dwelling in my breast’ the archetypal German, Dr. Faustus, agonizes over; Hamlet—this ‘very German’ character, as Müller once said—torn apart by the contradictions of existence.¹²⁵

¹²³ Müller, Heiner. 1984. *Hamletmachine and Other Texts for the Stage*. ed. Carl Weber. New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications. 23-4.

¹²⁴ Müller, Heiner. 1995. *Theatremachine*. ed. Marc von Henning. London: Fager and Faber. Xx.

¹²⁵ Müller, Heiner. 1984. *Hamletmachine and Other Texts for the Stage*. ed. Carl Weber. New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications. 15.

Germany was both physically and spiritually torn apart by the war. For Müller, the trauma was located in the understanding that he and his countrymen were not only at fault for the innumerable horrors of the mid-twentieth century, but also irrevocably damaged by them: the German people were both perpetrators and victims, murderers and the murdered. A trauma of this kind transcended personal, ruined lives. As Jeffery Alexander describes in *Trauma: A Social Theory*, “Trauma is not the result of a group experiencing pain. It is the result of this acute discomfort entering into the core of the collectivity’s sense of its own identity. Collective actors ‘decide’ to represent social pain as a fundamental threat to their sense of who they are, where they came from, and where they want to go.”¹²⁶ The collective German trauma, therefore, is not the Holocaust itself, but the permanent change of the German identity as architects of the Holocaust. As seen with Müller being drafted into the Reichsarbeitsdienst, all Germans—willing or otherwise—now were burdened with the identity of “Nazi.” Additionally, Germany was once again stripped of the identity “world superpower.” After the war, the sense of “who they were” was irreversibly damaged while their future as a people was threatened.

Alexander’s idea of collective trauma is complicated with the idea of national trauma. While collective trauma can apply to any group—such as Jewish people from many nations affected by the Holocaust—national trauma affects a paradoxically strong, yet fragile identity: the imagined community. Benedict Anderson explains his concept in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*: he writes, “I propose the following definition of nation: it is an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is *imagined* because the members

¹²⁶ Alexander, Jeffery. 2012. *Trauma: A Social Theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press. 15.

of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”¹²⁷

Germany, just like all the countries involved in World War II, held its imagined identity together by its limited, yet expanding borders and the sovereignty of Hitler and the Nazi Party. The 1949 bifurcation of Germany brought both Germany’s borders and political sovereignty into question, throwing the country as a whole into a national identity crisis. The bifurcation of Germany was solidified with the rise of the Berlin Wall, separating the Federal Republic of Germany in the west and the German Democratic Republic in the east. This new border in addition to two new politically sovereign entities made Germany a paradox: divided but one. Fellow citizens, friends, and even families like Müller’s found themselves on separate sides of the wall. The previous imagined community of Germany relied, like all nations, on a strong connection between citizens, a belief that Germans make up the “us,” not the other; however, the Holocaust as well as the resulting bifurcation fractured not only the German identity, but the entire imagined community, complicating a collective trauma to the point of a national crisis.

Müller and his art became a unique bridge connecting a fractured Germany.

While Müller lived in the East, the majority of this art could only be produced without censorship in the West. Case observes,

Because of his professional association with the state and because his early plays chronicled its history, Müller is often regarded as a political ‘guru’ by young people in both the East and the West. In West Germany, young theatre people think of him as a kind of political conscience, reminding them of the other of German cultural involved in a collective, communist experiment. In the GDR, young theatre people see him as a writer capable of criticizing the history of the country and remaining in a position of power.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Anderson, Benedict. 1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso. 6.

¹²⁸Case, Sue-Ellen. “From Bertolt Brecht to Heiner Müller.” *Performing Arts Journal* 7, no. 1(1983): 95-6.

This honorary dual-citizenship allowed Müller a perspective from both sides of the wall, a luxury few artists achieved. More than any other dramatist of his time, he could see the ideological differences as well as similarities left in imagined identity of the German people. Müller's play, therefore, had the opportunity to properly mourn the hopeless situation of a people divided, yet burdened with the same incredible guilt.

Müller's plays are entangled with a third type of trauma, or what Kaplan has coined "future-tense trauma." Future-tense trauma relates to a specific witnessing of "probable futurist dystopian worlds, as they are imagined on film, *before* they happen."¹²⁹ While Kaplan's article discusses films in which humanity has destroyed the planet, future-tense trauma can just as easily appear in the theatre. *Hamletmachine*, one of Müller's shortest and most dense plays, not only tackles sins of the past, but also apocalypses of the future: the play describes violent revolutions, chemical warfare, and ecological disasters. Hamlet's first monologue declares, "THERE IS SOMETHING ROTTEN IN THIS AGE OF HOPE" after he describes the world turning in its "putrefaction."¹³⁰ In the case of *Hamletmachine*, the disorder and chaos of Denmark has spread like a disease through the entire world: Hamlet has no escape, not even death. Instead, both he and Ophelia are trapped in the ruined world made for them by various failed experiments of humanity—communism, capitalism, and fascism included. As Weber explains, "Müller is one of the few dramatists today who could be called a 'universal playwright,' a playwright asking questions and expressing traumas that

¹²⁹ Kaplan, E. Ann. "Trauma Studies Moving Forward: Interdisciplinary Perspectives." *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*. Vol. 27. No. 2. (2013): 53.

¹³⁰Müller, Heiner. 1984. *Hamletmachine and Other Texts for the Stage*. ed. Carl Weber. New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications.

concern all of contemporary mankind, not only one group, nation, class, or culture.”¹³¹

Müller “works through” while Kaplan recognizes that future-tense trauma relies both dystopian and utopian thought; however, Kaplan’s utopia hides in the dystopian narrative while Müller hopes for a utopia in theatre practice and process.

These three different types of trauma—personal, national, and future-tense—coalesce in *Hamletmachine* to an almost overwhelming degree. According to LaCapra, this confusing hopelessness is a mark of close proximity to trauma. He writes:

Some of the most powerful forms of modern art and writing, as well as some of the most compelling forms of criticism (including forms of deconstruction), often seem to be traumatic writing or post-traumatic writing in closest proximity to trauma. They may also involve the feeling of keeping faith with trauma in a manner that leads to a compulsive preoccupation with aporia, an endless melancholic, impossible mourning, and a resistance to working through.¹³²

Considering his obsession with problems, it comes as no surprise that Müller uses his artwork to resist “working through” trauma; however, *Hamletmachine* still serves as an example of Freud’s “working through,” rather than “acting out.” As LaCapra concludes:

Trauma brings about a dissociation of affect and representation: one disorientingly feel what one cannot represent: one numbingly represents what one cannot feel. Working through trauma involves the effort to articulate or rearticulate affect and representation in a manner that may never transcend, but may to some viable extent counteract, a reenactment, or acting out, of that disabling dissociation.¹³³

Müller’s work is the embodiment of this dissociation between semiotic representation and affect. His impossible stage directions depend on the affect of hopelessness while they can symbolize a myriad of meanings. Returning to the example of the Madonna’s

¹³¹ Ibid. 13

¹³² LaCapra, Dominick. 2001. “Writing History, Writing Trauma.” *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. 23.

¹³³ Ibid. 42.

radiating breast cancer, the sun's radiation usually signifies warmth, light, and life; however, breast cancer is a disease which can be associated with coldness, darkness, and death. Similarly, the Madonna is a symbol of holiness—the single human born without sin and absorbed into heaven without dying—placed on a swing above the mortal characters; yet she is burdened with the deadly disease corrupting the only body—specifically the breasts—pure enough to carry and feed the savior of the world. This confusion of signs, the numbingly cold representation can be a symptom of Müller working through trauma. The semiotic interpretation of the Madonna's radiating breast cancer does not have to perfectly align with affective atmosphere of hopelessness: after all, Müller's expression of "impossible mourning" remains impossible in the script.

Because Müller uses his plays to work through his various types of trauma, *Hamletmachine* can be read as a memoir. It would be easy to discredit *Hamletmachine* as a memoir considering it is often labeled as a postmodern adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, meaning it is categorized as a work of fiction. Janet Walker, however, points out that, in terms of trauma, fiction and truth are not mutually exclusive. She reminds her audience of the "traumatic paradox," meaning it is not uncommon for victims of real trauma to respond with "fantasy."¹³⁴ Kaplan uses Walker's idea of "traumatic paradox" in her book *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* to argue that memoirs occupy a liminal space: they neither fall into the category of strict fiction, nor do they render the literal truth. Kaplan writes, "In a memoir, then, 'truth' in regard to events is not, per se, at issue. The main thing about a memoir is the emotions

¹³⁴ Walker, Janet. "The Traumatic Paradox: Documentary Films, Historical Fictions, and Cataclysmic Past Events." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture & Society*. 1997. 809.

that are remembered and the ways in which the writer expresses them.”¹³⁵ What makes *Hamletmachine* a memoir, then, is the incorporation of those “traumatic imprints” into his stage directions. Müller layers his own memories on top of the characters of Hamlet and Ophelia while disregarding the plot of *Hamlet* almost entirely. He even includes a moment in the script during which the actor playing Hamlet refuses the part of Hamlet and tears up a picture of playwright (meaning Müller): by shedding this role, the actor reveals that the core of the play has little to do with Shakespeare’s masterpiece and more to do with the life and will of Müller. In *Trauma Culture*, Kaplan argues that Freud’s *Moses and Monotheism* is actually a memoir of being traumatized during this exile during the Holocaust. Similar to *Hamletmachine* adapting Shakespeare, *Moses and Monotheism*, without any historical evidence, drastically rewrites the Old Testament’s story of Moses bringing the Jewish people out of Egypt and to the Promised Land. While *Moses and Monotheism* is often discredited for its lack of historical truth, Kaplan argues that Freud inserts his own personal trauma as well as the collective trauma of the Jewish people leading up to the Holocaust into the story of Moses which makes his *Moses and Monotheism* less of a psychiatric case study and more of a memoir. In both the case of *Moses and Monotheism* and *Hamletmachine*, the adaptation of fiction acts as a vehicle to carry the affective truth of traumatic experience.

If theatre practitioners view *Hamletmachine* as Müller’s memoir, how should they stage the impossible moments that serve as his memories in the script? Of course, the presence of trauma does not change Müller’s creation of theatrical problems nor does it remove the “alarming freedom” needed to direct his plays in a new historical context.

¹³⁵Kaplan, E. Ann. 2005. *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press. 43.

This problematic freedom is complicated by the traumatic concepts embedded in the play. Theatre practitioners, as Kushner suggests, can layer their own “historically informed, politically engaged imaginations” on top of Müller’s work.¹³⁶ In short, they can complicate his problems further, rather than try to solve them through oversimplification. As previously mentioned, staging new semiotic interpretations within the affective environment of hopelessness is only part of the process of responsibly staging *Hamletmachine*. Additionally, theatre practitioners need to apply their own political context as a means of honoring the weight of Müller’s trauma. *Hamletmachine*, despite being a postdramatic script, cannot thrive in a vacuum: its universality demands to be constantly adapted to new political disenchantments, new failed experiments of humanity, new moments of hopelessness. In this light, productions with liberal semiotic interpretation encouraging an atmosphere of despair within a new political context are not erasing Müller’s memories of trauma; instead, they are adding another layer, another chapter to the ongoing experience of “impossible mourning.”

Of course, these new chapters detailing the never-ending struggle of humanity can and will look radically different; however, that thin line between “alarming freedom” and artistic anarchy still exists. One example of a responsible staging of *Hamletmachine* comes from the auteur Robert Wilson. Wilson first met Müller while he was working in West Germany in 1979, and the two first worked together on *the CIVIL warS* in 1988, and the two extensively collaborated on Wilson’s 1986 production of *Hamletmachine* at New York University. Despite the use of undergraduate actors and student technicians, the production was lauded as a great success by both men. Wilson even claimed the

¹³⁶ Müller, Heiner. 2001. *A Heiner Müller Reader: Plays, Poetry, Prose*. ed. Carl Weber. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press. xvi.

show was “one of the best things [he’s] done in years.”¹³⁷ Critics widely applauded Wilson and Müller’s blend of style. John Rockwell from *The New York Times* wrote, “A more telling synthesis of German Expressionism and American Minimalism could hardly be imagined.”¹³⁸ Gordon Rogoff’s review in *Performing Arts Journal* agreed by saying, “In Wilson, Müller has found the perfect director for unearthing the form behind the scribble, and in Müller, Wilson has at last found the dramatist who can give textual weight to his stunning, impalpable visions. Once seen, nothing could be simpler than Wilson’s ingenious, rational, Cubist solution, but it isn’t likely that anyone else could have thought of it.”¹³⁹ Whether Cubist, Minimalist, Expressionist, or some combination of the three, Wilson’s stylized simplicity takes advantage of the “alarming freedom” needed to stage *Hamletmachine*; however, the production did not crowd, or overshadow the text. Rogoff writes, “Wilson’s images are affinities rather than equivalencies of Müller’s politically charged landscape. We are free to make our own associations. Müller wants the public to make up its own mind, Wilson lets the public think.”¹⁴⁰ This strategy was seen most clearly in Wilson’s handling of the stage directions. Instead of attempting to literally recreate the icon or stage a new symbol, Wilson turned certain stage directions into dialog. Rockwell observes, “Mr. Wilson juxtaposes this heat with his most coolly controlled yet ornately stylized productions, further fragmenting Hamlet and Ophelia among his 14 young actors and having them simply recite the fantastical stage directions.”¹⁴¹ Wilson layered his own affinities on top of Müller’s now verbalized

¹³⁷ Rockwell, John. 1986. “Wilson and Müller at NYU.” *The New York Times*.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Rogoff, Gordon. “Review: Hamletmachine by Heiner Müller; Robert Wilson.” *Performing Arts Journal*. 10, no. 1 (1986): 55.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. 56.

¹⁴¹ Rockwell, John. 1986. “Wilson and Müller at NYU.” *The New York Times*.

directions complicating the play instead of simplifying it. By turning the stage directions into dialog, Wilson both radically interpreted as well as responsibly staged Müller's words with his own shocking images.

While Wilson's production of *Hamletmachine* is often lauded as a success, it is by no means a definitive production: after all, no such production could ever exist in Müller's theatre. Instead, Müller admires Wilson for adding to, but not changing his text. He said, "[Wilson] leaves the text alone... I am disappointed by productions of my plays in which the actors give their versions of the text."¹⁴² Even though *Hamletmachine* posits many problems, Müller is not asking theatre practitioners to solve them for the audience. He, instead, wants the theatre to progress by adding more complications, more layers to his work. In short, his impossible stage directions are not meant to be "fixed" but instead displayed with respect amongst other artists' work. Similarly, traumatic experiences cannot be "cured" but instead must be worked through by remembering.

¹⁴² Ibid.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined methods of defining, interpreting, and staging impossible stage directions. While both scholars and theatre practitioners have had a long and varied history analyzing various types of didascalia, impossible stage directions have been consistently overlooked for centuries despite playing a key role in a myriad of frequently read and produced plays. This study aims to inspire both future scholarship on impossible stage directions and new productions of plays containing these difficult moments. Even though impossible stage directions cannot be wholly expressed in a single interpretation, this thesis details procedures to responsibly reconstruct a selected stage direction. While these reconstructions do not rely on literal, semiotic interpretations, they remain faithful to the script by creating a consistent affective experience for the audience. These interpretations may vary drastically from the images listed in the play; however, they continue to embody the spirit of the work by drawing on textual analysis and historical context of the script, rather than outside influences.

The previous three case studies each explore an impossible stage direction from a different theatrical style or movement. In Chapter One, Anton Chekhov's breaking string in *The Cherry Orchard*, possibly the most famous impossible stage direction, provides the key example used to define impossible stage direction. The second chapter uses Antonin Artaud's nauseating apocalypse from *Spurt of Blood* to explore methods of interpreting impossible stage directions through the lens of affect theory, rather than semiotics. Finally, Chapter Three discussing how to stage traumatic memories by looking at Heiner Müller's Madonna with radiating breast cancer in *Hamletmachine*.

A practical mind might argue that impossible stage directions are meant only for the imagination of the reader and that they cannot be accurately produced due to the physical limitations of the stage; however, several dramatists—most notably Chekhov, Artaud, and Müller—wrote difficult plays specifically for the stage to create or solidify a new style theatre. These moments of impossibility, then, can be viewed as challenges meant to propel theatrical practices forward and inspire new staging techniques, not as literary experimentations. While the three stage directions presented in this study cannot be produced employing the traditional modes of semiotic interpretation the theatre is accustomed to using, they are far from unproduceable. Theatre practitioners, instead, can create unique interpretations of these didascalia while remaining faithful to the script, so audiences can experience various live performances without sacrificing the spirit the play.

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