

# *A Performance Cosmology*

Testimony from the Future, Evidence of the Past



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## The Effect Produced



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The notion of the produced effect (in German: *Wirkung*) has been little used by theories on theatre and yet it is very useful in examining how theatre acts on society, on the audience or on the individual spectator. Normally associated with it, in opposition, is the notion of reception, namely the manner in which society, audience or spectator responds to the dramatic text or the performance. These two notions of produced effect and reception, which in ordinary use aren't always distinguished from one another, make us grasp how theatre influences us and how we influence it.

In the sixties and seventies of the last century, German aesthetic theory was opposing a *Wirkungsästhetik* (an aesthetic of the produced effect) to a *Rezeptionsästhetik* (an aesthetic of reception) and the question was to know whether we had to - for an analysis of the text - take into account the production's mechanisms or rather deal with the act of reading and reception. The aesthetic of reception (Jauss 1977, Warning 1975, Grimm 1977) came to fill in a gap that the study of authors and their writing techniques had often concealed: a lack of knowledge of the audience and their horizon of expectation. Nowadays we recognize that one must approach the production and the reception of the work, literary or theatrical, together and that one shouldn't separate the production of the effects from the manner in which they are received by the reader or the spectator.

The notion of effect has a long classical tradition behind it. The produced effect can be easily observed on the spectator (rather than on the reader), and it is in this field that classical theatre engages with this notion (as though to confirm theatre's efficacy). For instance, Molière advises: 'let us only consider, in a comedy, the effect it has on us' (*La Critique de l'École des Femmes*, scene 6). And Racine, for his part, stresses that the effect of his theatre is universal and lasting: 'I have recognized with pleasure, in the effect produced on your theatre by everything of Homer and Euripides that I have imitated, that common sense and reason were the same in every century' (Preface of *Iphigénie*).

Whether it concerns comedy or tragedy of the French or

the Greek, of the seventeenth-century audience or that of the twenty-first century, theatre produces an effect on the audience distinct from the other arts. The performance is necessarily 'live'. It makes the whole of the scene (actor, spoken text, 'stage effects') and the spectator coincide, if only for a brief moment, in a unique and non-repeatable event. During this event, there is even a communication and a movement back and forth between stage and auditorium, and the produced effect is perceptible from the feedback on the actors' performance.

The 'good' or the 'bad' reception-reaction rebounds onto the performance, either facilitating it or slowing it down. A history of audiences and societies and their influence on dramatic texts, performances or productions remains to be written. And what is the *mise-en-scène* if not a mechanism, become indispensable by the end of the nineteenth century, to adapt the performance to the specific intended audience, and thus a taking into account of the receiver for the creation of the stage performance?

In order to imagine this history of the produced effects (of the theatre on the audience as well as of the audience on the theatre), one should start to specify what exactly generates this effect on the spectator: theatre in general? Reading the play? The performance? The style of the *mise-en-scène*? One should distinguish the effect produced according to the type of receiver as well as the mode of reception and in particular its duration.

1) *From the individual points of view of the spectators*, who are moved by the story most of the time, identifying themselves with a character or a conflict. We know that - since Aristotle - the pleasure of the spectator of tragedy is linked with a feeling of pity and terror: pity and compassion *vis-à-vis* the unfortunate hero, terror and masochism toward oneself. This mixed feeling gives rise to a catharsis, or 'purification of the passions'. But this cathartic effect can only be produced if the spectator knows that the theatrical action is not real, which produces in them a denial: 'It is necessary that it is not true, that we know it is not true, so that the images of the unconscious may be truly free' (Mannoni 1969). It is therefore very difficult to evaluate the impact of the performance on the spectator: it is more or less direct, immediate, invisible or deferred.

2) *From the collective point of view of the audience*, the produced effect is equally difficult to grasp, for theatre



is 'a rooted art, the most committed of all the arts in the living web of the collective experience' (Duvignaud 1965: 11). The audience's reactions differ from the totality of individual responses, for if 'the theatre performance is organized so as to have an effect in the moment' (15), the audience is often undecided or even divided. How far can we push the audience? Everything has been tried to shock them, to get the audience out of their torpor by all kinds of performances. Nowadays, in certain limit experiences, one simulates the violence perpetrated against the actors in order to disturb the audience, to almost force them to intervene in a physical fashion (Fura dels Baus). And, if theatre audiences have historically been relatively homogeneous, for the last twenty years audiences have been extremely varied, by genres, and its consequent reception will be equally heterogeneous: so what exactly has the theatre had an impact on? A community of theatre lovers? An audience made up of regular customers? Isolated individuals? Tourists?

3) *From the point of view of society as a whole*, the effect of a play or a performance will be equally powerful and significant, whether the impact is immediate and visible or postponed and hidden. It remains for historians to tell us how great plays or unforgettable stage events have influenced the course of history (as with the Greek tragedies or romantic theatre in Poland). As to the success of the plays, depending on historical circumstance, they are sometimes immediate (Racine, Rostand), at other times deferred and unimaginable (Kleist, Büchner, Musset).

### Factors and Markers of the Produced Effect

The produced effects are as countless as they are unpredictable. At best, we can predict at which levels they are identifiable. By distinguishing the different levels of the text during the reader-spectator 'textual co-operation' (Pavis 2002), the following components and factors of the produced effect become apparent:

- *The place of enunciation*. The space of the event determines the overall impression: is it an Italianate theatre or a 'site-specific performance', a found place that determines the *mise-en-scène*?

- *The plot*. Is what we are being told credible enough to make the reader/spectator uneasy or must we 'invent our own story'?

- *The dramaturgy*. Does the creation of an action by characters result in a fable that will be understood by all (once and for all) or, on the contrary, that will be extremely changeable? Each new reading or production constitutes what was in the past called a 'concretization'.

It is a useful notion if it suggests that every reading is necessarily new, evolves in the course of time and only concretizes in history, that is to say, if it suggests that every reading specifies and constructs what before was only general and abstract and had not been made concrete by a situation of relative and new reading. A problematic notion indeed, if the concretization suggests that the work is unique, stable, essential, but that it is manifested in different times according to various modalities. Indeed, the different realizations are not variants of a same work, but original productions each time, derived from a work, due to the changes of context and of our modes of reading, and of the construction-deconstruction that we make of it.

- *The level of the unconscious and ideology*. The effect of the same play or performance will be different according to each receiver, for the effect depends as much on their unconscious as their relation to ideology. Which finds expression, for instance, in:

a) *An identification* with the character, to the triggering of a fantasy or of daydreaming.

b) *An interpellation*, in the meaning of Althusser (1965), is a manner of forcing the spectator to 'respond' to the portrait that is made of them and of their situation through the characters.

c) *A legitimation*, which is the stage following the 'interpellation', when the involved subject confirms and legitimates the order given by fiction depending on their own situation.

d) *A disorientation of the spectator* is always possible, frequently as the first reaction; when prolonged, it prevents recognition or identification of a known situation. This is especially possible with shows from cultures that are foreign to us.

At whatever level we approach text or performance, we can see that the effect they have on the reader or the spectator depends as much on the object itself (its configuration) as on the receiver (their identity). The notion of produced effect functions as a mediation between production and reception. To determine the effect produced by a performance, we must establish the manner in which it has been produced whilst imagining the expectations with which it was received and understood. Taking only one example, the *mise-en-scène*, there are two ways to approach it: through describing the tasks and the working process of the director, or through reconstructing the role of the spectator according to their expectations and their real situation. Production and reception are intimately linked and interdependent. Production anticipates its effects on the spectator and imagines what the spectator is going to understand of the received object; it reconstructs the

project or even the intentions of the *mise-en-scène*. Thus, shaping a production is as much about fashioning a subject matter and its elaboration by actors and all the other artists as it is taking into account the changing viewpoint of the spectator according to their habits, their expectations, their new situation. Thus giving attention to the produced effect keeps us from privileging only one of the two sides of the theatrical event - production or reception - by reintroducing a dual model in applying the model of communication (sender/receiver) onto the theatre work.

Therefore we can clearly see that directing fosters and maintains the spectator's interest, bringing about in them the desire to see and understand, without ever being able to achieve this. There is however no universal theory of the effects or failsafe method to touch the spectator (Pavis 2000). For what is important is not the intrinsic value of the signs and effects of each 'scenographic language' (music, space, aesthetic, language etc.) but the combination of all materials proper to each staging (and even to each 'scene' of the show). Only a 'militant' and political aesthetics, such as that of Brecht, will attempt to quantify the respective effects of each language. Thus Brecht recommends that the worker assigned to set-building draw up a 'table of the possible effects', and he suggests the worker indicate for each scene of each play the quanta of effects (*Wirkungsquanten*), for example: 'the social marks, the historical marks, the alienation effects, the aesthetic effects, the poetic effects, the technical innovations, the effects of tradition, the destruction of illusion, the values of exposition' (1967: vol. 16: 467). This set-builder's checklist seems somewhat mechanical and hard to corroborate, but it has the merit of quantifying the force of the effects and making tangible their variety.

Theatre effects are thus innumerable. But measuring the effects produced on the spectator is not obvious, for there is no clear, final typology of effects. It would be better - albeit metaphorically - to imagine what 'inner *mise-en-scène*' the spectator performs as soon as they are affected by the *mise-en-scène*: how does the *mise-en-scène* embed itself, carve itself, sculpt itself, in them. Cognitive psychology might help us to see how the stage configuration stamps itself in the imagination and the body of the spectator, as a 'negative' of the perceived or hallucinated figure coming from the stage. The spectator perceives and experiences it as a re-play, as an inner mime, especially through the actors' moves on the stage. The spectator possesses the faculty to comprehend an imaginary network that the *mise-en-scène* endeavoured to establish. The spectator has the awareness, an embodied awareness, that the performance in the process of the *mise-en-scène*, always leaves traces in them, be it a sensation,

an aesthetic pleasure, a figure, or an overall score. This effect produced on the spectator gives them the certainty that everything has been organized around them, but without being totally explainable or communicable.

The director always asks herself or himself: what should I do so that something emerges for them, the spectator, '*mon semblable, mon frère* [my fellow-creature, my brother]' (Baudelaire), so that my art has an effect on them.

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#### Woyzeck effet produit

The pleasure of looking freely is one of the greatest pleasures imaginable. It blossoms most fully in the theatre. The spectator looks at what he wants without guilt, without any obligation to have results or to buy anything. He is protected by a contract. However his taboos, his habits, his unspoken laws restrict this complete freedom, for can one look into somebody's soul for a long time? And look into that which does not concern us? It certainly takes some strength, some courage too.

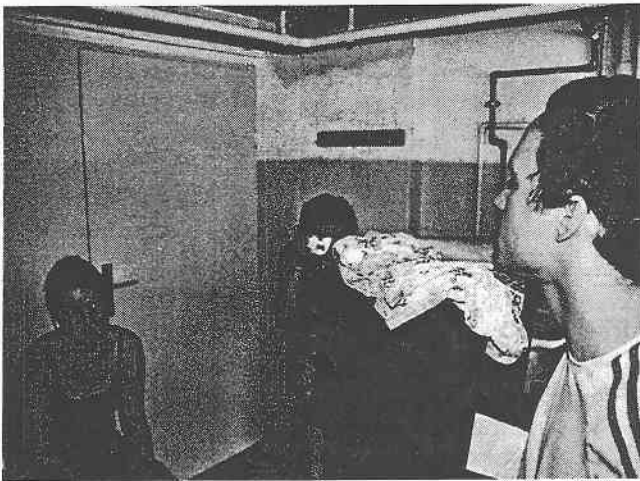
In those performances that I do not understand or that bore me stiff because I do not see what they are getting at, I can at least look in my own way, against the tide, far away from any semiological tyranny and mapped-out meaning. I love looking at women speaking a foreign language or with a look that is foreign to me. The same thing happens with foreign performances. One can look at the stage as a field of experimentation in looking. Let's not deprive ourselves of this!

Often, stagings of the last thirty years, stagings of avant-(re)garde, are so arranged that the spectator's gaze can wander back and forth, from surface to depth, from moment to moment.

Can one, should one, theorize this wandering of the gaze? No doubt psychologists would do so successfully. But theatre exists precisely *not* to reduce everything

to a theory, i.e., etymologically to a contemplation, a consideration and ultimately an abstract speculation. Theatre, the *teatron* of Greek tradition, is the place from which one watches a show. As important as the object being looked at is the place from which and the attitude with which one looks at it.

In July 2004 in Mainz, directing Büchner's *Woyzeck*, I decided directly to use the dirty and various locations put at my disposal: a class-room, a cellar, an interior space, a garden where I could accommodate about thirty people, who were ready to follow the character moving around. I chose not to change anything in these 'found places' and to take into account the symbolic location we were in: the university photo lab, in which, because of the digital simplifications, there is nothing left to develop. I tried to put myself in the spectators' place, that is to see things from their perspective, to imagine what they would see from the interaction between these dirty walls and the story about the soldier Woyzeck. So I went back and forth between these different ways in which everyone looked at each other. Every spectator was encouraged to take pictures during the performance, to contribute to the symbolic murder of the killing gaze, Woyzeck's gaze on Marie, through the camera rather than the usual knife, the remnants of a primeval technology and scene.



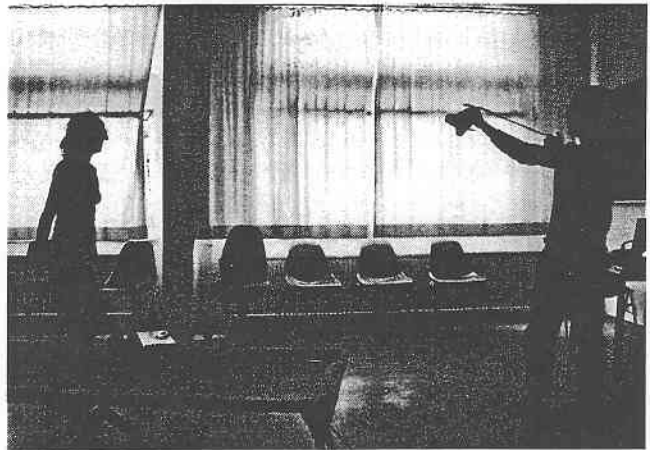
Pursued by everyone with these surveillance and registration machines, Woyzeck himself becomes the camera that kills. He takes his revenge on the world which observed him and which has given him proof of Marie's unfaithfulness.

We are all Woyzecks: spectators ready to kill, to look and to see and get proof of the other's guilt.

But how to avoid the gaze as a revolver, a knife or a camera, to let our gaze be cast gently over the body of the performance? *Mise-en-scène*, this pitting against each other all the elements of the performance in relation

to the spectator, has accustomed us to follow the spatio-temporal unfolding of the performance. But it sometimes happens that it frees our gaze and that we get lost in the image without being able to leave it. *Mise-en-scène* then has nothing left of a privileged vector; we are thus encouraged to reconstruct ourselves and to refind ourselves again through it.

I wrote a foreword to the play: Woyzeck and Marie welcomed every spectator of the opposite sex into a sinister cellar in front of an old fashioned camera masking as a Polaroid. He or she started the monologue with 'tell me that you love me!' The future spectator, and current victim, did not know where to put themselves, were made to feel very uncomfortable, he or she was seized upon as a desiring subject and rejected as a spectator equipped with heavy semiotic know-how. What Marie or Woyzeck said to each other is what the actor always says to his or her mute and unfeeling spectator: 'Tell me that you love me!' Which is also what everybody says to everybody else.



So this is what I understood of the scopophilia and aprosexia of Field Station 7. Not to mention aporia, existensia, amnesia, parapraxia, aphasia, cryptaesthesia, idioglosia euphoria, eleuctheria, peripheria, synesthesia, utopia and, of course, hysteria.

I ask you all to witness the fact that I respected the terms of our contract, that I have been a good voyeur, keen to look like a reliable witness, regardless of the cost, thereby testing the ways of dispersing my attention, and yours.

**The ACTOR playing Woyzeck, to a female spectator on her own.**

Tell me you love me.  
wait, not straightaway.  
let me first make the camera ready  
to record your voice  
to draw your outline  
to freeze forever the features of your face  
here in the darkness of the cellar.  
Let me tell you  
why I want to take your portrait  
before it is too late.

Tell me you love me:  
Marie, she never told me  
that she loved me.  
Had she told me,  
it might have calmed me down  
calmed me forever.  
Because deep down  
Deep down in the cellar  
I, Woyzeck, born with photography  
Pursued by the photographs  
Tormented by the photocrats,  
I am not a bad guy.  
It's just that they never tell me anything  
they never tell me they love me  
I never told it either  
not to Marie, not to you, not to anybody.  
And yet it was so simple:  
'Marie, I love you' or 'Hello, Madam, I love you'  
Yes, I know, it seems simple, but it is comical.  
Never ever did I speak that fateful phrase: 'I love you'.  
Never did I have the time to think about  
what would give her great pleasure  
or what would do her good  
too observed, too pressed, too oppressed  
never a kind word  
neither for her nor for me.  
Had she stopped at least for a while  
stopped running after her image  
chased by those blokes with their dirty and hairy hands,  
by this trendy photocrat  
half drum half major  
half photo half labo  
half photomate half photopimp

Maybe I would not have bought my camera  
if only I had told her 'I love you'  
like I am telling you right now  
and if she had told me as you do right now: 'I love you'  
we would have avoided a lot of trouble.

So here we are face to face, silent  
You are saying nothing to me because I am saying  
nothing to you  
I am saying nothing to you because you are saying  
nothing to me  
Subject? Object?  
The camera is loaded  
The words too are loaded  
Loaded with meaning.  
Careful that everything does not blow up  
'Tell me you love me'

**The FEMALE SPECTATOR, understanding that in order to be admitted she has to say 'I love you!'**

Here is your ID picture.  
Stick it into your passport.  
You will need it when entering and leaving the photo  
lab.  
That's all. Thank you. Farewell.

**ACTRESS, playing Marie to a male spectator on his own.**

Tell me you love me  
I know: one does not say those things  
That's not a thing you can ask the other  
Certainly not to a man like you  
Who looks so well-bred.  
This should come from you.  
But wait, don't be so hasty.  
Anyway nothing is ready  
I must set up the camera  
To freeze your face forever  
and your surprise, and your fear, and your desire.

You can still go home  
You run the risk of having your photo taken  
Like that, by anybody  
Your image will take a blow  
A blow beneath the belt  
A blow you might never recover from  
Because the gaze of the objective is without mercy  
Just as the gaze has no mercy  
That men cast on me  
No mercy and no love.

The photocrats devour me with their eyes  
It seems I am photogenic  
But they don't say a word  
Or only empty words, obscenely empty  
Therefore please: tell me you love me  
Woyzeck, he never said it to me  
But he always rushes in

And me, too, I never said it to Woyzeck  
that I love him:  
hey, you, Woyzeck, I see you and I am telling you:  
I love you.  
But I never could tell him anything  
Too late  
You can still get out of it  
By closing your eyes  
By leaving the place  
On tiptoes  
Not seen not caught  
'I could not find the right building'  
A developer revealing the world's bruises  
You, you may leave when you want  
I have to stay and be finished on the spot  
Because I am the Woyzeck of the Woyzeck  
The photocrat's gaze pins me down  
Pierces me  
In spite of my seven buckskins  
'Bin ich ein Mensch'  
I would not go that far

I never dared to tell you  
Something really simple  
I love you, you, Woyzeck  
Because you only wanted to see me  
Because you talked to me in your delirium

But if you had only told me  
You Marie, I love you,  
You and your body on edge  
I love you  
With your eyes, with your hands, with your words  
If you had told me that  
Things would have come to pass  
You and me

But never mind  
Since everything goes to hell, man and woman  
Well, well, it's ready  
Come on: tell me that you love me

**The MALE SPECTATOR, understanding that in order to be admitted he has to say 'I love you'.**

Here is your ID picture  
Stick it into your passport  
You will need it when entering and leaving the photo lab.  
That's all. Thank you. Farewell.

*Woyzeck* cast: Jana Chiellino, Johanna Gerhards, Jens P. Gust, Doris Mucha, Christiane Kirchner, Hoger Tapp, Robert Teufel, Simone Horn.