

MEDITATIONS ON POLITICS AND ART:
TOWARDS AESTHETIC AND CRITICAL DRAMATURGY

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Abstract

Beginning with the philosophical underpinnings of politics and aesthetics, I proceed to centrally locate dramaturgy as a political practice/process that unites artistic production and consumption. By discussing some of the major tenets of narrative-based, or poetic dramaturgy, through this lens, I attempt to unearth its more fundamental constitutive relationships and redirect current discourse and pedagogy. Distinct from its particular expressions within specific regimes of the arts, it can be inclusively defined as the act of uniting contradictory elements in the processes of creation and spectatorship: unconscious/conscious, and active/passive. I then address alternative dramaturgical presences of composition in Martha Clarke's *Threepenny Opera* at the Atlantic Theater Company, and her dance theater piece *Chéri* at the Signature Theater, allowing for a more complete read of the pieces. Ultimately, I hope to begin a discussion of Aesthetic and Critical Dramaturgy that does not reject Poetic Dramaturgy, but expands upon it, inviting new forms of exchange and collaboration among artists.

Appendix A

Aesthetics in Performance: the dramaturgy behind *nakhtik: a danced political lecture*

Appendix B

Working performance script of *nakhtik: a danced political lecture*

Appendix C

Original Yiddish text of Yankev Glatshteyn's poem *שאָפּען נאַקטורן*

Appendix D

My English translation of Yankev Glatshteyn's poem *Chopin-Nocturne*

In a paper entitled “Why Rancière Now,” Tanke states that we are at a critical point when art and politics are discovering their global identities (12). While there is a ringing cry to action and contemplation in this that spurs me, I was also struck by the thought that art and politics are always at a “critical point,”¹ and that a conception of “critical” emerges for me as a central proposition. Art and politics operate in primary relation to the shifting terrain of experience, shaping it and being shaped by it. They are always on the verge of change, always at a crucial stage of development. Rather than discovering a global identity, they are being redefined through ever new perceptions which respond to, move with and are moved by our globalized predicament. But globalization is only one aspect of this identity forming distribution that constitutes the current critical point of art and politics. It is precisely the relationship between art and politics and the immediate relevance they bear to our experiences, personal and communal, that incite me to write this. It is the continual possibility of a critical point, rife with radical potential, and an equally critical art that fuel my thinking.

In order to better understand the nature of our current critical point, I first explore the theoretical foundations of aesthetics and politics and reconsider the role of art. Deriving political and aesthetic experience both from sensory perception relocates the radical potential of art; rather than being limited to the didactic or expository, a critical art is also an intercession and reformulation of our everyday aestheto-political experience. I then apply this foundation to the formative literature of dramaturgy. Analyzing Aristotle, Lessing, and Brecht through this lens develops a new conception of “dramaturgy,” one that is not simply “narrative structure,” but that more precisely unites artistic production and consumption. In this sense, dramaturgy relates to how we create art as practitioners, and identify it as

1 Benjamin, in his *Eighth Thesis on the Concept of History*, writes “The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the “emergency situation” in which we live is the rule. We must arrive at a concept of history which corresponds to this. Then it will become clear that the task before us is the introduction of a real state of emergency.” I believe the same is true of a concept of art.

spectators. It is the web of relationships connecting the aesthetic and political manifestations of sensory experience through the artist and to the spectator. While traditionally confined to narrative and narrative structure, I demonstrate that this is but one means of creating and identifying art, and call for a dramaturgy that reflects a more complete picture of these processes. More fundamentally, the artistic impulses and relationships that find expression in Aristotle and Lessing as narrative, are evident in other machinations. I contend that Brecht's foundational concepts of epic theater and *verfremdungseffect* already indicate a reevaluation of underlying relationships between production and spectatorship.

While the connection between art and politics has been long a topic of discussion (or vituperative dismissal)² and spans nearly all the traditions engaged here, dramaturgy and dance are relatively recent arrivals to this discussion, and the terrain is often uneven. The politics of dance and movement, for example, are not often discussed in a dramaturgical context, and there are certain discomfitures between their literatures. Also, in all the arts, but especially in dance, there are many degrees of separation between practitioners, teachers, and scholars, and this is reflected in the vocabulary and lines of discourse these writers engage. Both on practical and discursive levels, the coalescence of these seemingly disparate traditions reveals new approaches to artistic practice, production, and contemplation.

To begin, in all forthcoming arguments I assume the historical quality of human perception. Our experiences being of a historical nature are dialogic with other contemporaneous events and regimes of thought. Our conceptions of all facets of society and categories of knowledge, be they of education, rehabilitation, art, or science, are inextricable from the politicities of their moment of realization.³ This is fundamental to my discussion for two reasons. First, because human perception,

2 I am here thinking of Rancière's response to the numerous writers who either proclaim art's autonomy or dismiss aesthetics as a useful term and field of study.

3 I am attempting to invoke a roughly Foucauldian conception of how categories of knowledge, and knowledge itself, interact

the formulation of a sensible world and how it is conceived by a body politic, becomes the framework for social identity and social reality. Sensuous experience, then, the realm of perception, is privileged as a significant approach to comprehending conscious and unconscious mobilization on various fronts that would be seemingly disconnected. As will be explored, dramaturgy is precisely the artistic conjoiner of identity to reality, and conscious to unconscious, and so must be researched and discussed in relation to the historical and political grounding of perception. Second, the historical quality of perception implies that the ideas yielded by it are equally historical. The term “art,” for example, does not denote the same concept now as in earlier periods, and our ideas and recognition of art have changed as well. This point is really an elaboration of Marx's argument that all social relations are products of man (*Poverty of Philosophy*), in which the basis for these social relations themselves are a question of perception and of historical character.

The centrality of perception and historical relations is developed by Rancière into a theory of *le partage du sensible*, or “the distribution of the sensible.” He argues that acts of perception rely upon a configuration of phenomena and circumstance, based on temporalities and spacings, and a worthiness of its object. These conditions are either the possibility of sharing, of a collective perception, or the possibility of exclusion. As such, the distribution of the sensible, which includes both of these possibilities, is at once a political and aesthetic matter. The aesthetic conditions of society come to bear directly on political participation. The distribution of the sensible “is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience. Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time” (*The Politics of Aesthetics* 8). By viewing politics as what is seen

with power and specific social structures of power (5). Rather than viewing these various discourses as unfolding expression, they are systems of positioning subjects and objects, an example is in *The Formation of Enunciative Modalities (The Archaeology of Knowledge)*.

and what can be said about it, Rancière relies on the sensible to gain access to the political. The material world, including its institutional constructs and state apparatuses, form part of the distribution of the sensible, limiting the range of perception, eligibility of perceptibility, and even the construction of space and time.

On an individual, personal level, the question of “who has the ability to see and the talent to speak” is especially operative. Each member of a community has a relational experience of being visible or invisible, heard or unheard that is at once aesthetic and political. The inequality suggested here is the formation of non-democratic politics, but also of common experience where certain voices are granted varying degrees of importance. The duality of Rancière's “partage,” the dialectic between formation and division, is thereby reflected on the level of consciousness and knowledge. I suggest that the naturalization of common experience is assimilated as a false consciousness⁴, one that is based on the common, aesthetic experience of an undemocratic politics. Similarly, the categorization and dissemination of knowledge is based on the primacy of this inequality. There are direct and indirect correlations between the sources of knowledge and their deemed legitimacy as knowledge. There are those who know and those who do not know, legitimate sources of knowledge and illegitimate, accommodated and enforced by commodification and systemic societal structures⁵. Knowledge and consciousness themselves interact on the personal level; the individual's sense of his own knowledge contends with the “heard” voices of a social politic, and thusly the acquisition of knowledge may become an imputed consciousness that does not necessarily correspond to its verity. For example, each member of a body politic must contend with how one's own knowledge is appraised and valued. If

4 Despite the unpopularity of the term, I use it here for two reasons: 1) as aesthetics and politics derive significance from the same realm of perception, so art reifies ideology. 2) “consciousness” must be addressed both as an artistic and political reality, with agency in the production and identification of art and politics.

5 By this I simply mean that commodification and social structures reinforce a particular hierarchy of knowledge and sources of knowledge. This is important because form and structure in art perform a similar operation on the material of a work, privileging particular modes of identification and construction.

there is a disagreement of source or application, if one's own knowledge is not valued it may be displaced by a more esteemed knowledge, despite its inaccuracy or fallacious nature. In short, I am suggesting that consciousness is informed by both its efficacy and its inefficacy⁶. The knowledge appraised as ineffectual in certain arenas of discourse and the internalization of “proper” knowledge that belongs to a more common distribution create the conflictual nature of consciousness.

This conflict is crucial for our discussion because it suggests that sensory experience affects both conscious and unconscious thought, as well as our formation of identity in relation to a larger social experience. Political struggle, the struggle for one's own voice to be heard and recognized, granted legitimacy, is also the artistic struggle. Detached from the discursive, these sensible voices of the *demos*⁷, are a sensible phenomena that defy a continuous view of the sensorium. Rancière's distribution of the sensible is operative not only on the conscious mind, but also on an unconscious plane. In artistic production, as with critical politics which attempt to reinterpret or even change the current state of social interaction, the engagement of unconscious reality is paramount.

We have then, two spheres of interaction with the distribution of the sensible that are in constant dialogue: the internal and the external, realms of consciousness and fields of perception. As already implied, this distinction does not mandate an “individual” versus “collective.” In fact, I argue that the sharing/dividing contradiction present in perception is also at play on the level of consciousness. The continuity of shared aesthetic experience that normalize ways of seeing and being seen, operates synchronously with the discontinuity of experience and forms distinct ways of conceiving and being conceived. Consciousness, as presented here, is not reflective of “awareness,” per se, but rather the internalization of the aestheto-political paradigm established by the distribution of the sensible.

6 Not to belabor a tangential point, but there is grounding for this line of thought in Foucault's The Archaeology of Knowledge, where “discourses,” ways of speaking, are constructed by both continuities and discontinuities. Inefficacy, the unactualized accounts of consciousness, suggests Foucault's discontinuity; the unconscious as the dispersal of a subject

7 *Demos* is the Greek term used for “the people,” but I use it here after Rancière to immediately reference the duality of community formation and division based on the sharing/exclusion of fields of perception.

Consciousness is the contradiction of activity and receptivity whether it is voiced or heard or not. It is the state ontologically prior to manifestation that may or not materialize, and when it does, it may not materialize in the same configuration. That is to say, the conditions that form an individual's consciousness, or potentially a class consciousness, may not be exercised in a predictable way.

This aesthetic reality of politics almost immediately raises the political reality of aesthetics. If politics “operates upon the transcendental conditions that structure the distribution of the sensible and thus the subjects that inhabit it,” what relation, then, does art have to it? (Tanke 12) According to Rancière, artistic practices are ways of doing and making that intervene in the general distribution of ways of doing and making as well as in the relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility (*The Politics of Aesthetics*, 8). In other words, just as politics intervenes in the aesthetic, so do aesthetics in the political. The reconstruction of a sensible world based on aesthetic experience is also a reconstruction of a political world. As such, the tendency towards new modes of creation and perception within artistic practice inveighs against the formative, established political reality. However, the contrast between artistic practice and the general distribution of practices is indeed not always discrete, but it is important to recognize the difference in social function. Art, which conjures play and experimentation, occurrences of which are dependent upon a particular gaze, is an end in itself. As there is no other intended purpose for the practice or the product, the fulfillment of an artistic endeavor need not meet any criteria other than its own fulfillment. “Play is any activity that has no end other than itself, that does not intend to gain any effective power over things or persons” (*Aesthetics and its Discontents* 30). This does not imply that art exists in a separate sphere from other modes of production and forms of life, indeed the very interconnection between them is fundamental to the discussion.

I would like to make two observations based on “art as play”. First, play's freedom is contrasted

to the servitude of work (31). Since art is not encumbered with the more purposive or socially utile practices of commodity production, it has greater freedom to experiment with the constructions and imaginings derived from the common base of the perceptible world. Like theory, art can explore modes of being and creating in such ways that we do not experience them. The reordering, reconstructing of this material life that constitutes the perceptible reality leads to new modes of its apprehension and new forms of its sharing. It does not directly take effect on social life, but on the conditions of life's perception. The effect of art is its reception and mediation by the conscious and unconscious minds of the spectators. Because art has no end beyond itself, because its use does not perform a specific societal function, it bears a different relation to function. This distinction, the relationship between art and the formative substance of perception, is pivotal in conceiving and discussing the political unconscious. Second, while our first view of 'art as play' rejects its encumbrance of social function, it still retains social relevance and connection to labor practices. Schiller, in his *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, does not separate contradictory impulses of space, time, and energy, but unites them with the play instinct. "Man is neither exclusively matter nor exclusively spirit. Accordingly, beauty, as the consummation of humanity, can neither be exclusively mere life...nor can beauty be merely form...it is rather the common object of both impulses, that is of the play instinct" (Letter XV). The unity described here, between rational and sensuous, matter and spirit, marks the full definition of a human being. Humans are fully human when they play. The play instinct as it materializes in art production is an expression of an impulse, or abstraction that thus both material and immaterial. It is both consciousness and unconsciousness. Considering this second point in light of the first, it can be said that the notion of art as play, while at once designating an individual character of production, also links it to modes of production in general. The reframing of the distribution of the sensible is pertinent specifically because of this contradiction: it is both a labor practice and it is not. Insofar as it unifies a

conscious and unconscious mind, that it has and does not have social function, it bears a unique place illuminating contradictions between individual and social lives.

While until now we have focused on artistic production and how art relates to the distribution of the sensible, of equal importance to our discussion is how a spectator recognizes art. Just as art and politics arise from the same conditions of perception, so they are both subject to perception in their identification. While differentiations can be made concerning artistic practices, it is also necessary to discuss how and on what terms a spectator of a given society identifies art. Rancière lays the groundworks for three regimes of the arts which are particularly useful in drawing new conclusions. Especially for the purposes here, in which the processes of artistic creation and consumption of performance events are never fully divided, Rancière's logic and terminology are helpful. It is also imperative that both production and consumption be viewed historically; a regime may materialize in a particular moment, and in that sense is historically based, but does not nullify the prior regime which would still exist as a method of aesthetic intelligibility and discourse. Also of importance is that each regime is produced by contradictions within the prior regime.

Rancière's three regimes are the ethical, the poetic, and the aesthetic. The ethical predominantly follows Platonic logic based on two metrics: the veracity of a work to its idea, and its effect on the community. A work of art is judged by how well it adheres to the truth as understood by an ideal or divine model. As in Book X of the *Republic*, a bed first originates as an idea by God, an expression of the divine, or godly, and then is imitated by an artisan. In this way may we judge all art by their ontological accuracy, by their proximity to the ideal model that is made by God. By this method we may firstly judge everything as an imitation, but also the effects of imitations on the public. Poetry, which would be an imitation of an imitation, is thus doubly removed from the original idea and therefore false. It is also, because of this distance, noxious to the people. It would manipulate them

and disturb the proper morals, or ethics of society. “As in a city when the evil are permitted to wield power and the finer men are put out of the way, so in the soul of each man, as we shall maintain, the imitative poet implants an evil constitution, for he indulges the irrational nature which has no discernment of greater and less, but thinks the same thing at one time great and at another small – he is an imitator of images and is very far removed from the truth” (Book X). The closer production adheres to truth the more just society becomes. As further observed in Book X, the poet “will make a likeness of a cobbler though he understand nothing of cobbling.” This division of labor, the lack of relevance of artistic production to the utile production of goods and services is also indicative of the poet's deviation from truth. The insistence of a developing ethos of society that may be disturbed by production that is not immediately utile in and of itself, speaks both to a definitional grounds of what later becomes “art,” and the interconnectedness of forces of production and art's identification and discourse.

The emergent poetic regime⁸ is essentially laid out in Aristotle's *Poetics*. As a way of maintaining Plato's ideal society but still allowing for imitation, Aristotle extends artistic practice to the imitation of action and founds an ideal structure to maintain an accordance of imitation and social hierarchy. Thusly, and following a set of rules to regulate the ethical effects of representation, the arts are all bound together under the same banner: narrative. The rules that form the aesthetic structure of the work simultaneously make it distinct from and support the dominant ideologies of social narrative and power found in the real world. By delegating specific correlation of subject matter and artistic genres, and indeed many precise divisions therein, the political unity of the state is preserved in mimetic action.

Likewise, the artistic practices of mimesis are also separated and individual, bound by rules that

8 I use “poetic regime” instead of the more common “representative regime” to suggest a larger scope of the regime and the related practices of dramaturgy. Beyond referring to mimetic action and narrative structure, as Ranciere discusses in *Mute Speech*, the poetic regime fundamentally privileges the meaning of words and the articulation of meaning attained by the written word. I argue that poetic dramaturgy has this same effect, and contrasts with aesthetic dramaturgy.

make their occupations and subject matters appropriate. Rancière uses the *Juno Ludovisi* as an example. While in the ethical regime it is viewed as an image of divinity, and thereby judged by its intrinsic truth and impact on the ways of being of the citizenry, individual and collective, in the poetic regime it becomes the product of an art. A sculpture, for example, can be named as such because “it imposes a certain form on a specific matter...and second because it is the realization of a representation – the constitution of a plausible appearance that combines the imaginary traits of divinity with the archetypes of femininity, and the monumentality of the statue with the expressiveness of a particular goddess endowed with the traits of a specific character” (29, *Aesthetics and its Discontents*). The first point, the imposition of a certain form on a specific matter, effects both the production and recognition of the work. There is a specific craft of sculpting based on techniques, thus deriving a unique relationship between the artist and the artisan. While the work itself may not have social function, the techniques involved in its creation, and subsequent criteria of judgment, stem from a specific mode of making that has social resonance. A sculptor, in this instance, may not create something “useful,” but will employ methods that are rooted in skills of labor and knowledge. The appraisal of art in the poetic regime includes a specific application and evaluation of labor in its very constitution. The second point is two fold. First, the imitation must be plausible: a combination of an imaginary and a recognizable, the full weight of which will be further evaluated later. Second, the monumentality of the statue correlates to the divine subject matter. The adequation of form and subject emerges as a fundamental division between arts and their access to human experience.

Finally, within the aesthetic regime, the rules concerning what makes art and what art makes are democratized. Art becomes art because it is viewed as such, and so is more a mode of being than a mode of doing. The same *Juno Ludovisi* does not draw its property of being an artwork from the conformity of the sculptor's work to an

adequate idea or to the canons of representation. It draws it from its belonging to a specific sensorium. The property of being art refers back not to a distinction between modes of doing, but to a distinction between modes of being. This is what 'aesthetics' means: in the aesthetic regime of art, the property of being art is no longer given by the criteria of technical perfection but is ascribed to a specific form of sensory apprehension (29).

The implications of such a regime are tremendous. The techniques of imposing specific forms on specific matter, the adequation of form to content, the distillation of binary oppositions, active/passive being perhaps the most menacing, are no longer necessary. This should not suggest, however, that art in the aesthetic regime is further separated from social experience; to the contrary, there is a far more democratic appeal that allows for the image, the non-narrative, even the commodity, to give the specific experience which suspends the ordinary connections of appearance and reality. Privileging the experience over the forces of doing, art in the aesthetic regime has a quite different relation to everyday life. Rancière locates in this new found equality of subject matter a disruption of the prior regime's distribution of the sensible. It is neither the "death of art" implied by the Romantic notion of subsuming all of life into art, nor the opposite, the effacement of boundaries between art and life. Rather, in continuation of Schiller's dialectic discourse, aesthetic experience is effective inasmuch as it is the experience of...the art of the beautiful *and* the art of living (Schiller, Letter XV). It is precisely the copresence of art and non-art that guides our aesthetic view and suspends the opposition of the activity of reason and the passivity of sensibility. Accordingly, the rupture of everyday experience provides the opportunity to discover new ways of being.

We should not underestimate the power of upsetting the binary of activity and passivity, or of breaking the normative ways of being and making. Artistic practice can be both an expression of the conscious and unconscious inclinations towards such a break. What such an expression demands, however, is a correspondent dramaturgy. Without one, we are not adequately developing the tools of reflection and discourse to understand this shifting terrain, or the practical methods to support the

endeavor. As creative practice and spectatorship moves beyond traditional forms, discourses, and vocabularies, so too must we understand the dramaturgy of these practices. This does not mean, however, to reject the practical or theoretical history of performance and dramaturgy. Instead, let us reexamine these practices and find the discontinuities within them. Despite its traditional reliance on the literature of representation, dramaturgy as a functional presence and process must not be limited the web of hierarchical structures based on representation that we are working to demystify and cast off. As the analysis and understanding of performance practices has developed, particularly in relation to theoretical advancements, so has the need for aesthetic and critical dramaturgy emerged.

While the aesthetic regime reigns in new forms of art's recognition that are independent of specific practices, we should not ignore the role of spectatorship in prior regimes. Let us not forget that the effect of performance and dramatic art on the community at large is definitional in the poetic regime. Even in discussions of Brecht, who did discuss these fundamentals, it is almost completely overlooked. Instead of further incorporation of form and effect, we have seen the separation of formal elements from the political demands that called for their creation. There is consequently a tendency to forget the fundamental relationship between them, which leaves many contemporary artists, theorists, and educators unable to explain the place or coherence of dramaturgy in contemporary aesthetics: on one hand when dramaturgy concerns itself solely with the narrative structure of a work, it is not mobilized to divest itself of the concomitant dominant ideologies, forgetting that now a new relationship to the spectator and to ideology must be forged; on the other hand, when dramaturgy is rightly reappropriated outside of narrative the tendency is to divorce the discussion and practice from its historical precedent, to assume that the process and constitutive relations are different from poetic dramaturgy⁹. The result of the former is an unfortunate coincidence of critical intentions with an

9 An interesting collision of just this thinking with the practical history of dramaturgy is expressed in Behrndt's article, in which she cites Vera Mantero's experience of the dramaturg as an "instrument of power and control." Mantero's producers told her she had to work with a dramaturg in order to receive funding. What is not addressed by Behrndt or Lepecki, who also speaks of the

unyielding false consciousness. The result of the latter is an ambiguity in its very definition. This very ambiguity is often referenced and even applauded, but has often led to predictable replications of the same false consciousness. With the democratization of art and of spectatorship in the aesthetic regime, we must also form a parallel aesthetic and critical dramaturgy.

Brecht, along with current explorations of dance and post-dramatic performance, have already made great headway in this direction. Just as Rancière's shift in the paradigm of art's categorization from modernism and postmodernism to poetic and aesthetic, so the same shift is helpful in driving dramaturgy. Rather than confining dramaturgy to the study of narrative, let us engage the actual dialectical relationships that constitute it, and not exempt it from the historical character of spectatorship and art identification. The fact that dramaturgy first gained traction as a signifying concept during the poetic regime does not mitigate those relational processes to narrative alone; narrative structure exists in rapport with the view that justifies it. Now that art does not rely on narrative or hierarchical structures for its identification, we must forge the dramaturgies that support these new modes.

event, is that the alternative dramaturgies they discuss are replications of the same relationship of control.

“...he himself walks about enchanted, in ecstasy, like the gods he saw walking in his dreams. He is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art: in these paroxysms of intoxication the artistic power of all nature reveals itself to the highest gratification of the primordial unity.”

Nietzsche – *The Birth of Tragedy*, 37

As dramaturgy has expanded into more varied literary and performance practices, the primary contradiction that demands demystification is the relationship between art making/viewing and narrative. Now that we do not rely on narrative as the basis for art's identification nor for the inspiration of its creation, how do we revise its place in practices of reflection and interpretation? The arts, even dance, have proclaimed their autonomy through technical investigation of their own means and constitutions, and are in the process of discovering their renewed relationality. This reintegration has prompted new forms of art's perception. The shift from the poetic regime is not mitigated to reappraisals of the role of narrative: the very function of mimesis is now varied, as is the hierarchy of discursive meaning over conceptions of “presence” and “image”. Dramaturgy, previously considered the structuring of a story, or a storied event, has renewed vigor and seeks new purpose; narrative, in its myriad multiple contexts, frames, and applications, is not alone in cohering or defining a dramaturgy. Accordingly, the terms of coherence must be reevaluated to allow for these new creation and viewing practices. Said differently, what has the coherence of art production and dissemination been, of which narrative is a particular derivation?

To unearth the precise terms of this cohesion, let's examine the multiple resonances of art production and consumption in the poetic regime. “Narrative” crudely defined as the imitation of action, does not exist in a naïve form: narrative is created in part by its own conveyance. Thereby it is doubly changed, first in its assumption of form, second in its reception by a reader or spectator. These

are the two primary sites of dramaturgy in the poetic regime: the relationship between the narrative and the form it bears, and the relationship of this complete work and the spectator. These two spheres are analogous in many ways and are not cleanly divisible practically or theoretically. Practically, looking at dramaturgy as bridging these two apparently distinct spheres of action helps elucidate the dramaturg as a combination of editor and “writing coach” of a playwright, but also as a producer or literary manager who ushers work to specified audiences and monitors the ensuing relationship. Theoretically, the groundwork is laid by Aristotle who not only details how a narrative be best constructed, but incorporates a spectator's reactions to the work into his very definition of the form itself. In other words, form is neither separate from art's inception nor from its reception. But how do the ideas of art gain pertinence within the poetic regime? Through corresponding forms of production and intelligibility.

As an example of the conflictual relations of production and intelligibility that mark art's dissemination in the poetic regime, let's examine Lessing's *Hamburg Dramaturgy*. By so doing I hope to simultaneously unpack these relations and also begin a discussion about “dramaturgy,” a term frequently used when only certain aspects of it are intended.

Hamburg Dramaturgy, a foundational and even definitional text in the history of dramaturgy, is generally read as a revision and interpretation of Aristotelian thought. Consider, however, that the preface does not concern itself directly with Tragedy or dramatic theory, but with theater management, and that the role of “dramaturg” was founded practically, not solely theoretically. Upon the founding of the Hamburg National Theatre in 1767, Lessing was contracted by “the enterprising director of what was to have been the first permanent German theatre devoted to the performance of serious European plays and supported by a group of Hamburg business men” (vii). Lessing was very aware of the opportunity this presented, though not clear on what role he would, or was able, to play. In his preface

he remarks that “the best managers have degraded a free art to the level of a trade which permits its master to carry on the business as negligently and selfishly as he likes if only necessity or luxury bring him customers.” In response, “an association of friends of the stage have laid their hands to the work and have combined to work according to a common plan for the public good...out of this first change, even with only meagre encouragement from the public, all other improvements needed by our theatre could quickly and easily spring” (2).

While the founding of a theater by a wealthy director and a group of businessmen would not mark a shift in today's theater, (and indeed Lessing's theories are also in want of historical perspective), it is imperative that what follows is properly framed by a managerial and financial architecture of the theater. He writes in the final section, “When a year and day ago some good folk in this place conceived the idea of trying whether something more could not be done for the German theatre, than could be done under the management of an old-fashioned manager, I do not know how it was that they thought of me and dreamed that I could be useful to such an undertaking” (258). And so, as neither actor nor poet, but armed with a vision for dramatic art and heartened by a sense of renewed relations of production, Lessing becomes the first named dramaturg.

In contradiction to the view that an orthodox dramaturgy is solely the imposition of structure or an external influence, and that it is one and the same with the oblique unity of narrative, throughout *Hamburg Dramaturgy* Lessing articulates what he hopes theater to become. Both Lessing's thoughts and actions, then, have resonance in our current usage of “dramaturg” and “dramaturgy.” It is at once the position that mediates production, rife with managerial and financial implications, and the directive towards a new theater. In this sense, dramaturgy is nothing but a statement of what theater should be, and a dramaturg a person to influence this direction. Prescient of the current application of dramaturgy, Lessing wrote widely on the valuation of process over product, the search for truth over “possession” of

it. It has not been insignificant for the subsequent history of dramaturgy that Lessing's criticism found in Aristotle a "plumb-line" (263). The consolidation of Aristotelian doctrine and the role of dramaturgy in relations of production in a theater was thus sealed.

As Aristotle claims, the plot, or "the structure of the incidents" is most important. The poetic regime is primarily concerned with the imitation of actions, not of people. What, then, is the relationship between the artist and the material chosen as fodder for art? "In constructing the plot and working it out with the proper diction, the poet should place the scene, as far as possible, before his eyes. In this way, seeing everything with the utmost vividness, as if he were a spectator of the action" (Poetics XVII). Re-imagining the artist as a spectator of the action has a few implications. First, it is the artist's senses (it should occur before his eyes) that ensure the plausibility of the plot. Second, for a brief moment the artist stands in an analogous position to the material as the audience to the presented work.

To the first point, the structure of incidents must be plausible. An audience must find the presented imitation to be a possible eventuality according to their sensible experience (Poetics IX). Embedded within the mimetic act is the presentation of an agreed upon "real world" defined by a common sensible experience. The artistic work is, however, still an imitation, and need not (should not, according to Aristotle) have actually occurred. The witnessing of an event that has not occurred, and the subsequent structuring of that event specific to the work of art are elements of non reality that may be termed "fictive," as they are acts of imagination and crucial to identifying what we are seeing as a work of art and not real. The imitation of action, narrative, consists then in an interplay between a real world based on sensory experience, and a fictive.

The spectator is also named as a substantive player in the definition of tragedy. Rather than parsing form into an autonomous entity, the form itself requires a specific intended reaction in the

fulfillment of its definitional grounds. According to Aristotle, a tragedy must inspire fear and pity. Let's first discuss fear, which is important for two reasons. First, as Aristotle explains, fear is instilled "by the misfortune of a man like ourselves" (Poetics XIII). By locating a character who is similar to how we view ourselves, a character with whom we can identify, we are locating an element of the real, which is an aspect of ourselves, within the fictive. Some aspect of ourselves has been translated into the fictive realm of art. This identification is now based on both an adequation of reality as we know it and of who we are. It could be that this potential of mimesis inherent in the poetic regime, the difference between locating "the real" in the actions that happen versus the characters involved, led to its own divergence from Aristotle's initial pronouncement, though still within the range he established. By this I refer to the proliferation of character driven work, which by not privileging plot, generate tensions that begins to reshape the alignment between the normative structure of the poetic regime and the structure of society. By privileging character over action there is a rupture of order— while the ethical and poetic regimes are each reliant upon a logical and real orders, respectively, to steer their course, the realm of character is nearly inherently inscrutable. Perhaps for this reason we see even the earliest works that could be considered "character driven," such as Hamlet, contradictory and frustrating to the critic. Structuralist thinkers such as Umberto Eco even go so far as to suggest its illogic. In Lukács' analysis of Joyce's Ulysses, for example, he concludes that Joyce dehistoricizes man, unfoundedly alienating him from mankind, lost to his own formative influences. While one can follow Lukács to this end, it may also be helpful to consider that both writers were profoundly interested in the unconscious mind, albeit their investigations began from opposing initiatives. What is certain, however, is that any probing of "character" will quickly unearth contradictions and pose unanswerable questions; the most blatant error would be to limit the unconscious workings a character's mind to the

comprehension of the author.¹⁰ It is for this reason that character driven work begins to challenge the poetic regime while still being shaped by it. The workings of the unconscious do not directly parallel the functioning of the real world, but do not completely detach from it. It is the interplay of the real and the fictive that generates the desired response (in this case, Aristotle proposes, fear). The identification of the real is critical, without which there is no tension between the real and the fictive and the response is not generated.

The recognition of the real, the acknowledgment of a material reality as the basic form of reality also marks a shift from the ethical regime. In Plato's conception, the "idea," and the logical order of things is distinct from the world in which we live, which is but an imitation. Aristotle locates a communal, material reality as the basis of experience. The complications of experience and individual perception, however, are never far away. Perhaps the character/plot dialectic can again be helpful in illustrating one way in which the aesthetic order of reality emerges. Let's consider the individual, the character, in relation to society, the order (whatever form that may be). As Marx noted early on, while Aristotle appears to be correct in his positioning of the material world, humans are more complex than this. While an person exists as an individual with regard to humankind at large (*zoon politikon*), each person still has a consciousness of being human. In order to not deny this fact, Marx concludes that humans are at once individuals and humans in general, with consciousness of both simultaneously.

In his consciousness of species man confirms his real social life and simply repeats his real existence in thought, just as conversely the being of the species confirms itself in species-consciousness and is for itself in its generality as a thinking being.

Man, much as he may therefore be a particular individual (and it is precisely his particularity which makes him an individual, and a real individual social being), is just as much the totality—the ideal totality—the subjective existence of thought and experienced society present for itself; just as he exists also in the real world as the awareness and the real enjoyment of social existence, and as a totality of human life-activity. (Tucker 86)

¹⁰ There is a parallel discussion of reality versus the unconscious in Bakhtin's analysis of Dostoyevsky, in which he contends that in his novels "the life experience of the characters and their discourse may be resolved as far as plot is concerned, but internally they remain incomplete and unresolved" (349).

Similarly, individual good exists, but it is comprehensible that this is not also always general good. “Good” is reevaluated depending on its position. This is the same relationship of the character with regards to a larger order. There is a consciousness of the general order and the individual order, and these may not align comprehensively. The aestheticization of the character, the inner, indeterminate logic and inner-workings of character become their own art.

Pity, the second response mandated by Aristotle, is best produced by “unmerited misfortune,” which is to say that the actions and qualities of a character should not have caused the events that then befall him. There is a continuous Action that is separate from the intentions of the individual characters, namely the Plot. The character is the passive agent, not that she does not perform actions, but that the action of the story was not in her control. Here we see that Aristotle's structure of Tragedy is reliant on the spectator's identification with the passive. The paradox of Oedipus, for instance, is that the character who appears to be the active agent is incapable of productive action, in other words, passive. The volition and ability to affect change is not afforded the tragic character of an Aristotelian structure.

Now to the second point, that the artist stands for a brief moment as a spectator to the raw material that will be shaped into a work of art. Following from the reversal of active/passive already discussed, here the spectator becomes an active participant, actively watching and identifying, locating himself, his community, and the happenings of this community within a fictional world. The artist, then, the author, is not the sole speaking voice. It is just such an argument that Bakhtin makes for Dostoyevsky's work. A novel in its entirety may be seen as an utterance of the author, but what “the characters *say* constitutes an arena of never-ending struggle with others' words, in all realms of life and creative ideological activity” (349). The characters respond to the various discourses that populate the

world of the novel. This includes what characters say about each other, their ethical judgements, and the unresolved/unresolvable ideological world views. From this vantage point, of the artist as spectator, the material then rendered as “art” is variously a statement of holy or ethical resonance, of reality/social narrative, and even the aesthetic constitution of reality and ourselves. Each of these, by virtue of the distance between artist and subject, suggests a connection to the material that is not based on the intellect proper or traditional sensate modes.¹¹ Each involve an imagining, an ethereal link to what is already “known”. Art, then, through the presence of an unconscious mind, establishes a new connection to the same reality, a reality whose unity was created by perception; this new connection, or re-perception of reality, may disturb or reinforce the original.

In Nietzsche explores just this proposition in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Through the paradox of creation, he finds unity through contradiction. The duplicity of reality and dreams, or reality and intoxication, parallels the subject/object dialectic; through the renegotiation of subject/object, identity of artist in relation to the material of his work, his inspiration, the conscious and unconscious discussed here begin to correspond to the Apollonian and Dionysian impulses. In the fifth section he discusses how the Dionysian artist, alternately the unconscious, the self-speaking subject, does not use images, but enacts primordial pain itself and its primordial reechoing. The dreamer, however, lives in images and is protected from the reality of his characters and scenes. In contrast, the images of the Dionysian artist are nothing but himself. The enactment of self, or the invocation of “I” does not refer to the sober, waking version of himself, but rather the portion of self that is embedded in and is constituted by reality. This leads into the actual subject being released, and we realize that we ourselves are only images and artistic projections of another (the true author). “For it is only as an aesthetic phenomenon

11 “It is a labour in vain to recapture it: all the efforts of our intellect must prove futile. The past is hidden somewhere outside the realm, beyond the reach of intellect, in some material object (in the sensation which that material object will give us) of which we have no inkling. And it depends on chance whether or not we come upon this object before we ourselves must die” (Proust 47-48).

that existence and the world are eternally justified.” In the act of creation he becomes subject and object, poet, actor, and spectator.

Thus we have the translation of an inspiration that may constitute an unconscious thought, some hint of the artistic mind, to a communicable idea that is recognizable to an audience; this translation, derived from a common sensible reality, exerts a normalizing influence on the idea itself. In such a way was every art form considered mimetic, an imitation of an idea or an action. Even this division, however, should not be left unscrutinized. The unconscious mind may well itself be structured by the same distribution of the sensible that structures experience. In a parallel fashion, structure may not be immediately perceived and interpreted by a spectator, but apprehended subliminally.

The duality of the unconscious, from the unconscious artist and its persistence in the unconscious spectator, is not without precedent; the depoliticized view of art, that of art's autonomy from real life processes and structures of power and oppression, frequently relies on the occurrence of this duality. Here, however, I suggest quite the opposite. The structured unconscious is reflective of the same reality, and so it is through dreams, art, and unconscious actions that we can glean the potential of future perception and action. The contradiction between the unconscious and conscious, not as oppositional forces in themselves, but as an expression of how an intangible, such as a thought, impulse, imagining, etc., is substantiated in a communal reality. The purveyance of the imaginary is thereby reordered, or restructured, multiple times, and signifies its own subject.

Lessing makes a similar claim himself in discussing how the “rules” or structures of dramatic composition are internal to the artist. Not being limited by rules, a genius also has the proof of rules within himself (96th essay). The genius artist comprehends the rules, and without aspiring to them, they emerge in the work. For the genius, then, the structures are not an externally imposed apparatus, but an unconscious development. At the same time, however, he contends that “To act with a purpose

is what raises man above the brutes, to invent with a purpose, to imitate with a purpose, is what distinguishes genius from the petty artists who only invent in order to invent, imitate in order to imitate” (34th essay). To act with a purpose, or restated in the vocabulary employed here, an action of the conscious mind, serves to separate the genius artist from the petty as well. Again we fall upon the same dialectic. Rather than viewing art as singularly an act of conscious will and craft, or the opposite, as the pure fancy of an unconscious creativity, it is both. While it is more convenient to associate structure and rules (and dramaturgy itself) with externally-imposed conscious thought, and “genius” with the unconscious, Lessing rightly allows for a more complex understanding.

These instabilities between narrative structure, a common sensible world, the unconscious, and larger forms of control are the contradictions of the poetic regime that lead to its rupture. Brecht's writing is illustrative of just this point: while still concerned with narrative and narrative structure, he notes its limitations¹² and begins to reformulate its basic elements. Brecht's dramaturgy marked a deviation from Aristotle, but the precise nature of this deviation comes alongside points of accordance. Seen through the vocabulary developed here, Brecht's advances are twofold: a new conflation of the ethical and poetic regimes, and a recognition of “the real” beyond mimetic action which reflects a passage into the aesthetic¹³. Further, his term “*verfremdungseffect*” can be most easily understood within same relationships that we have already discussed: one in the work's production, and one in its recognition.

As per the first point, how the ethical and the poetic are revisited, the shift of regimes implies a shift from the conception of Idea to material in shared reality. For Brecht, similar to how for Marx both

12 “Even to dramatize a simple newspaper report one needs something much more than the dramatic technique of a Hebbel or an Ibsen...It is impossible to explain a present-day character by features or a present-day action by motives that would have been adequate in our father's time” (Brecht 30). It is interesting that here Brecht points out the incompatibility of dramatic technique with his contemporary reality, character, and discourse. It is not simply subject matter that cannot be commensurated with the poetic regime, but larger ways of being and making.

13 Richard Schechner has noted that the transition from text based to production dramaturgy began with Brecht. While I am not actually convinced of this, I think the concordance of my proposition of locating a “real” outside of the poetic paradigm with his non-textual dramaturgy is interesting, both being based on a previously unaccounted for sensual experience.

the universal (genus) and the species are contained within each individual, the contemplative/rational exists within the mind of each spectator. Rather than aspiring towards an Idea essentially unattainable, Brecht proposed (oddly prescient of Rancière) that the Idea is contained within each individual, and not separate, and is therefore subject to the critical faculty of the spectator. The fact that the Idea does not exist at that historical moment is ultimately his purpose: the impetus towards change is derived from a cognition of a state of the world that does not align with its present state. Rather than this new Idea being a reflection of an ontologically prior Idea, it is the opposite, one that creates its own ethos¹⁴.

The presence of narrative and Aristotelian structure is only in light of this capacity. The struggle of the individual is understood in relation to larger states of society, represented on stage either literally or by structural presence. The narrative must drive the story to a certain conclusion, as already discussed, but the story of the individual is not privileged over the larger narrative. It is a reappraisal of both the genus/species dichotomy and the subscriptive genres of each. As Aristotle replaced the order of the Idea with the order of society, which then becomes transparent held before the order of poetic art, Brecht exposes the machinery of both. The duality of thinking and sensing in the spectator prompts us to scrutinize both the processes of the poetic regime and the social order. It is to this contradiction between the narrative of the individual and the larger narrative and circumstance of society that his term “epic theater” refers, and revealingly, the phrase is not rooted in the verbiage of politics, but poetics.

The dramatic theatre's spectator says: Yes, I have felt like that too – Just like me – It's only natural – It'll never change – The sufferings of this man appal me, because they are inescapable – That's great art; it all seems the most obvious thing in the world – I weep when they weep, I laugh when they laugh.

The epic theatre's spectator says: I'd never have thought it – That's not the way – That's extraordinary, hardly believable – It's got to stop – The sufferings of this man appall me, because they are unnecessary – That's great art: nothing obvious in it – I laugh when they weep, I weep when they

14 Rancière makes an interesting observation that “the encounter Brecht proposed, of politics and its supposed audience (workers conscious of the capitalist system) never took place, which means that its suitability to its militant referent was never really tested” (*The Politics of Aesthetics* 58).

laugh. (Brecht 71)

Rather than being led along unconscious to the unfolding of narrative and ideology, the Brechtian spectator is made more aware and more critical of both art and the world around her. The emotional response to parallel the imitated emotional is subverted by a critical act: the dramatic situation is appraised against a larger context, one from which it cannot be extricated. The reversals indicated here, thought in the place of emotion, judgment in place of stultification, are executed the *alienation effect*, another fundamental Brechtian term.

Alienation, or distancing, refers both to the actor from the part being acted, as well as the audience from the performance being experienced. Through this technique, the actor may illustrate his or her own opinions of the subject matter, and not attempt to lose individual identity to mimetic action. The audience, too, is not fully emotional, but pensive. There is self-awareness of spectator as spectator, actor as actor; both are individuals with shared experience outside the theater, and neither are subsumed in the performance by their reciprocal roles.¹⁵ What this duplicity also engenders is a radically new point of identification. The actor, apart from and regardless of mimetic action is now a touchstone for the audience. The person from everyday life is now suddenly subject to the lens of art's identification, and the spectator identifies with an aspect of "the real" not based on mimetic action. The intrusion of non-mimetic action does not disturb the lens, but rather is assimilated into it. By virtue of *verfremdungseffect* both actors and spectators are granted a volition denied under strict dramatic theater. Brecht's dramaturgy, then, is one of relocating the performer on the stage and the spectator's point of identification.

This has various implications for the current state of dramaturgy. Our original conception of

15 Early Marx noted self-consciousness as a basic human characteristic. The simultaneous instancing of the individual and the community, man and Man both existing in each individual, is present in Brechtian theater both on stage in the actor's relation to the narrative and implied larger social mechanisms, and off the stage in the spectator's contemplation.

dramaturgy is now complicated: narrative and form are more rightly understood as one expression of the artistic process based on a reframing of “the real” and how this framing finds identification by a spectator. Negotiating this relationship, between the unfolding form surrounding and supporting the points of identification is more precisely the definition of dramaturgy. Rather than narrative, which is but one form and development of this relationship, and rather than structure, which is itself historical and at times unconscious, dramaturgy is a more central and complex site. As regards the unconscious, one possibility is that dramaturgy, as it appeals to structure, must evenly address the unconscious in its exertions, and a second is that it does not actually bridge the gap between unstructured and structured, but actually between conscious and unconscious minds, leaving structure to play upon both. It also suggests that Brecht's distanciation effect is not only applicable to the spectator but to the artist as well, a conversation already in motion surrounding the role of “a dramaturg.”

Artistic practice since Brecht has meant further elaborations of these ideas. The concept of “presence,” allowing the performer to exist on stage without mimetic action, and an integration of the “discontinuous” clearly stem from this base. As has been noted, Rather than the point of identification resting in the fictive, in the character or events portrayed, it is with the performer and the performer's presence.

The performer is a shifting, often multiple, presence: their work seems to draw our attention as viewers to their authenticity and reality and, at the same time, to their sense of being constructed as theatrical elements...These performers are hybrids, although not strictly postmodern for they are fundamentally themselves; they appear relaxed on stage and easy with the shifting parameters of the performance. They communicate a sense of knowing who and where they are.” (Eckersall p. 7)

Even earlier, this same sentiment was suggested by Lehmann¹⁶ in his seminal work on postdramatic theater, the break from traditional, illusion-based mimetic theater gives “preference to presence over

16 Lehmann disagrees with my contention that this work follows from Brecht: “What Brecht achieved can no longer be understood one-sidedly as a revolutionary counter-design to tradition...it becomes increasingly apparent that [...] the theory of epic theatre constituted a renewal and completion of classical dramaturgy” (33).

representation” (109). And further, dramatic theater

...wanted to construct a fictive cosmos[...] the principle that what we perceive in the theatre can be referred to a “world,” i.e., to a totality. Wholeness, illusion and world representation are inherent in the model “drama” [...]. Dramatic theatre ends when these elements are no longer the regulating principle but merely one possible variant of theatrical art.” (22)

Embedded within these examples expounding upon the “real,” or an aspect of reality located within the scope of art identification, and the discontinuity of negating the regulating principle of consistent narrative and multiple presences of each performer, there is a contradiction: the further unity of real life and aesthetic experience also promotes a disunity.

Aesthetic dramaturgy is how work organizes and coheres based on other forms of experience and contemplation (theory, source material, specific artistic processes and practices, reflection, etc.). The shift from poetic to aesthetic dramaturgy is not based on an exclusion of narrative, but rather the engagement of additional principles of production and recognition. The imitation of action, narrative structure, and even the domination of the meaning of words over images are reevaluated in the aesthetic regime. Images and multiple presences constitute a new form of dramaturgy based on aesthetic experience.

Where we locate artists, dramaturgs, and spectators in relation to art is a fundamental contemporary question- it moves the aestheticization of process itself, and the relation between process and product, to the fore. I would argue that this is also a danger, however, because overly aestheticizing process, as we have seen with other treatments of labor and character, de-historicizes and removes it from its actual relations.¹⁷ That concern aside, it is clear that the current functions of “dramaturgs,” despite being insecure about how to define “dramaturgy,” are multiple and far-reaching. From guiding

¹⁷ Interestingly, in a manner rather happily inconsistent with his writings, in an interview André Lepecki mentioned receiving the title of “dramaturge” once “it became part of the institution of production,” once “one is getting a fee, etc., you have to have a name for what you do” (SARMA).

reflection sessions to sharing source material, from finding overlap with theoretical and critical discourses to discussing compositional and narrative presences, dramaturgs are revitalizing the relationships previously confined to narrative. As we shall see with the work of Martha Clarke, source material, particularly from artistic genres outside of her own, does not exert a simplistic influence but becomes the basis for aesthetic structure. The relevance of theoretical investigation in embodied movement practices shifts the points of identification from the fictive (the character), to the real (the performer), then even to the abstract (the theoretical). Each of these functions asks the same questions: where do we locate ourselves in the work, and of what are we conscious.

What we learn from this excursion into the theoretical history of dramaturgy is that while narrative/imitation itself may appear to have been the focal point, it is in fact a particular machination of more fundamental relationships. This connection lends perspective to the diversity of roles currently played by dramaturgs, and gives further agency to the dramaturgy of critical art. The present tension between a spectator's ability to locate art beyond narrative and an adherence to narrative as the primary structuring force of art compromises the scope and depth of dramaturgy as an artistic and reflective process. Similarly, the engagement of a pure aesthetics as separate from real world experience, which is highly structured, is equally unproductive.

“The entire methodological apparatus of the mathematical and natural sciences is directed toward mastery over *mute objects, brute things*, that do not reveal themselves in words. That do not *comment on themselves*. Acquiring knowledge here is not connected with receiving and interpreting words or signs from the object under consideration.”

Bakhtin – Discourse in the Novel, 351

The antagonisms and conflicts between regimes of artistic production and identification are therefore always in flux, and the task of the dramaturg is to trace these dynamics. As the contradictions within each regime begin to rumble, the dramaturg needs to sense these reverberations and respond. Our interaction with art is not separate from the rest of our lives, but inherently entwined with our political being. In order to portray the full ramifications of this shifting terrain as currently manifested in off-Broadway theater, I point to two productions directed by Martha Clarke. The first, *Chéri*, premiered at the Signature Theater in the fall of 2013, and *The Threepenny Opera* at the Atlantic Theater Company in the spring of 2014. Clarke, known for her extensive background in dance and choreography, has devised a number of works that blend movement and abstract situations with dramatic narrative. Often deriving inspiration from visual art, her work has a complex relationship to narrative. Interestingly, in the two pieces I will discuss here, both are adaptations or revisions of narrative driven works: *Chéri*, and *The Last of Chéri*, are two novellas by 19th-20th century French writer Colette, and *The Threepenny Opera* written by Bertolt Brecht and composed by Kurt Weill. While Clarke admittedly often prefers to begin her process without words or story, here both works were already Poetically structured. As such, the dynamics of aesthetics were never completely unbridled, but had to find their way into the established framework.

In what follows, I hope to make two points: first, to clearly illustrate the current structures of poetic and aesthetic dramaturgies in Clarke's work; and second, to demonstrate how each dramaturgy in

itself, as well as their antimony, are fundamentally political. Despite a lack of acknowledged political intention, Clarke's aesthetics are political because they directly contest the hierarchy and false consciousness of poetic production. Rather than giving each element a place commensurate to its position, one that facilitates the narrative development and coheres with actor training methods and spectator's viewing habits alike, Clarke's equality of images debases this structure. Furthermore, because they exist nearly entirely in the aesthetic realm, their presence cannot be immediately apprehended. A spectator must decide where to look and why, and is granted the space to react individually. Additionally, Brecht and Weill already connected the overt politics of discourse and the politics of aesthetic and aesthetic experience (the spectator's experience of art) in the text itself and Brecht's theoretical writings. These connections, based on attaching political discourse to a common sensual experience of the world, and a particular framing of art that grants agency to the actors and spectators separate from the driving force of Poetic dramaturgy, are developed in Clarke's production.

This is not meant to be a commentary on Clarke's intentions, but rather the dramaturgy of the pieces. As I have grappled with throughout these meditations, the unconscious is a formidable presence both in artistic and political experience and endeavors. By engaging the dramaturgy of Clarke's work, examining the ways that the conscious and unconscious impulses of creation and spectatorship may align, I am not assigning a specific intentionality to Clarke, but investigating how these particular expressions may manifest. Employing the methods discussed, in which apolitical art is itself a contradiction in terms, Clarke's work can be most clearly understood as an exploration of a particular aesthetic form that has clear political force without political authorial intention. In future examinations of her aesthetic design I hope to discuss her specific techniques and methods, but for the purposes here I will relegate my discussion to clarifying aesthetic and critical dramaturgies. Suffice it to say that despite no acknowledgement of political intentionality, on nearly every level of decision

making there is a clear duality of conscious and unconscious at aesthetic and political levels. What emerges is quite unique to Clarke and her collaborators, and I look forward to divulging a more specific account of how this world is constructed.

Before entering this world, a few considerations about the pieces themselves are necessary. Perhaps the most important issue is to grapple with the place this piece occupies in a contemporary off-Broadway consciousness. Many of the songs quickly became standards, in particular *The Ballad of Mack the Knife*. While even the use of “opera” in the title was an explicit point for Brecht and Weill, *Threepenny Opera* is now fully a musical. Ironically, it has been noted that *Threepenny* was one of the earliest pieces to demonstrate that musicals could be economically viable off-Broadway, and since then it has been attempted in New York City on numerous occasions. This information is important because, I contend, *Threepenny* is viewed within the commercial framework of a musical¹⁸. The ramifications of this are vast considering how extensively the structures of narrative and musical theater dictate audience/spectator relationships and the unfolding of performance. Brecht's politics lie in contrast to this artistic entrepreneurship. However, the politics, like the aesthetics, have changed since the piece premiered. *Threepenny* was an early work of Brecht, and he had arguably not entirely developed his theories of art and politics. Even still, his overt stance is anachronistic in the landscape of contemporary theater, and raises numerous questions of intent and attention on the both sides of the proscenium. Far from rousing a spectator to new conclusions, the reiteration of 1920's and 1930's discourse would not provoke the contemplation he argued for in his theoretical writings; it has been incorporated into the public ethos. This is not to imply that there is not value to further iterations, or that the basic inquiry is invalid, but simply that the statements have different resonance now than a

18 More than referring to a broad mix of acting, singing, and dancing, “Musicals” are created by specific production standards formed in light of commercial viability. This form of production is reflected by the audience, who knows what to expect and how to view what they will see. For this reason, the libretto and score of a musical could be performed in such a way that the product is not itself a musical.

century ago. The true politics of a Threepenny production would be in the novel framing of aesthetic and poetic experience that forces an audience to reapproach that basic framework which proves true the assimilated dicta.

Another point is that, as mentioned earlier, the poetic progression and political statement are everywhere entwined with questions of a common perceptible reality, which is to say, an aesthetics. It is an aesthetic of life, a question of where the agreed reality lies, that pulsates through the text; and then further, what the aesthetic of this reality is, how it is presented, that informs political relationships. From the first scene in Peachum's Beggar Outfitting Shop the treatment of aesthetics is duplicitous and politically incisive. The reality is that all the characters in this shop are poor. Even still, they wear costumes and present a particular appearance of poverty, one that will awaken middle-class generosity. At first the language and 'play within a play' intimation may suggest to the contemporary viewer a meta-theatricality, but more than that they are the beginnings of the alienation, or distantiating effect discussed earlier. The multiple layers of mimetic acting do not take us farther from the truth, but closer to reality. Accordingly, the presence of the audience also approaches reality: Threepenny speaks clearly to a middle class audience who both separate themselves from the poor class, but cannot help but agree with the values and statements of reality they issue forth. The character of Mack the Knife sums up this paradox: aesthetically he appeals to the middle class, and he voices their sensibilities while at the same time being actually a degenerate, lower class product of circumstance who, by the rules of the Poetics, should be taught a lesson. By causing a middle-class audience to identify with him, yet simultaneously be unable to excuse his actions without pointing to the socialist politics of the play, becomes the beginning of the alienation effect.

Additionally, these questions of appearance will persist through the entire play, beginning with the first scene of Filch procuring a beggar-appropriate costume (as if the reality of his destitution were

not enough). Filch, explaining his current predicament, says “So now you see me,” and Peachum interjects, “I see you,” sensory perception becomes a privileged trope. This culminates in moments such as Peachum's stand against Tiger Brown, where the ultimate threat is “What would it look like?” and as Peachum bids Macheath a derisive farewell, he taunts him: “and soon you'll be seen nowhere at all.”¹⁹ It is the visibility, the perceptibility of the poor that Peachum threatens to reveal. And this revelation bears an aesthetic weight equal to leverage Macheath's narrative trajectory. It should come as no surprise that Peachum is the character who wields the majority of these weighty thematic lines. He becomes the Tiresias, and Macheath the Oedipus.

In the early stages of Clarke's current *Threepenny Opera* production, everywhere you looked on stage you saw images and evocations, none of which denoted a specific meaning. However, the struggle between these mute images against the harsh discursivity of text and narrative is heavily swayed in the favor of the Poetics. The weight of theatrical tradition and analysis, which by virtue of its own textual nature, is too great. The actors and audience alike, who are accustomed to resolution rather than struggle, suddenly do not know how to play or how to observe. And so, while traces of this initial thrust are still present, nearly all have been stripped away or assimilated into the narrative.

Beginning with the first number, “Mack the Knife,” the conflict begins. After a quick introduction:

You are about to see an opera for beggars. Since it was conceived with a splendor only a beggar could imagine, and had to be so cheap that even a beggar could afford it, it's called the 3 Penny Opera.²⁰

A man playing Mr. Peachum pulls back a vaudeville style curtain to reveal a woman sprawled out, limbs akimbo. A dog licks her leg and backside. An imposing figure who we later discover to be Mack the

19 It should come as no surprise that Peachum is the character who wields the majority of these weighty thematic lines. He is the Tiresias, active in perception and revelation, and Macheath the Oedipus, always active but condemned to passivity.

20 Not delivered entirely humorously, this short introduction is an immediate suspension of reality. The complete negation of reality in these lines should set a tone for understanding the play. A leftist, or class conscious audience must immediately balk at the delegitimacy of this political overture.

Knife watches the scene. He approaches and an unnamed man pulls the dog away. Mack the Knife is thus first introduced as a spectator. The audience may not have noticed the reproduction in the lobby display, but the opening image was inspired by a work done by Rudolph Schlichter, of a man watching a dog drinking an undefined pool of liquid next to a woman similarly displayed. A woman playing a prostitute looks for customers in the audience. A man dressed as a beggar enters and, upon seeing Macheath, dons a pair of dark glasses, removes his hat to hold out like a beggar, and uses his cane as if he were blind. The presence of mimetic action and shifting roles on stage is already an acknowledged affect of humanity and dramatic technique. (Indeed, the question of “how one acts” returns later in the play).

Ironically, “Mack the Knife” is sung by a chorus member, and so despite Macheath's presence on the stage he is not in the spotlight. The series of street-scenes that create the collage of stage action in the song are illustrative of this world. While there is a story unfolding that shows the meeting of Macheath and Polly Peachum up through the procuring of a wedding dress for their impending marriage, there is not a clear hierarchy of images that would guide a spectator's eye in this direction. Instead, the series of images and experiences translated on to the stage are illustrative of the sensory world we are about to enter, and the struggle of voices within the form itself²¹.

Following Brecht's logic of epic theater, while the individual conflict, the traditional narrative of Threepenny Opera, may center around Macheath's survival, the “epic“ is the visibility of the poor. The potential of a March of the Poorest of the Poor would upset the aesthetic constitution of the state. Throughout the play there is a theme of appearances and recognition, and the language of visibility is itself a presence in the text. It is this verbiage that confronts the poetic structure and carries the

21 Before introducing the textual framework for the piece, it is important to keep in mind that there is often no text for the ensemble, and the relationship between ensemble and text is complex. While images do emerge from text, and in certain moments the characters played by the ensemble have text, the “ensemble” as imagined in Clarke's production is inherently non-textual. This separation, the presence, action, and function, of the ensemble is distinct from the roles the performers may play.

political message. There are two primary aesthetic issues. The presence of the poor class as a sensible phenomena emerges as the ultimate threat to disturb the regime. Conversely, Mack's tragedy is also one of perception: he is always seen. The paradox of perception is both engine to the narrative and a debasement of it. One on hand the “problem” of the play is a problem of visibility: the poor must remain unseen and Macheath cannot help but be seen, and on the other hand the narrative is itself nullified and Macheath may as well be let free.

Consider Peachum's comment to Filch, “Now I see you.” What he means is that Filch's story is a common one, one that Peachum knows without him telling it. He also implies that he may know more about who Filch is and how he ended up as he is than Filch does himself. More importantly, however, it links this knowledge with the sensory input of a shared world. Similarly, Peachum's final words to Macheath are, “you are seen only in a prison cell – and in a very short time, you will be seen nowhere at all.” The impending doom, Macheath's death, is adequately summed up by excluding him from the sensory world. Vanquishing him from perception is to condemn him to the most horrible of fates, which textually hearkens back to the state of the poor. Macheath's paradoxical character is that of being of the lower class but symbolizing middle class aspirations and success, albeit through lower class means (crime). While the narrative refers to Macheath's execution, it is through the language of aesthetics that the threat accrues meaning; what Peachum is ultimately threatening is to reduce Macheath to his original position among the poor, the mute, imperceptible masses.

The ensemble members are intended to be “mute,” but due to Clarke's aesthetics they are in constant combat with the visibility of the principals. The off-stage verbiage of the conflict frequently returns to locating “the story,” which is tantamount to an inevitably “proper” procedure. The use of the rather benign word “story” belies the procedural implications of hierarchy and mechanisms of control. Simply by virtue of placing the dramatic elements of the narrative into a more equal terrain with the

rest of the work, questions are raised, and new possibilities grappled with. Beyond the frequent invocation of “serving the story,” a phrase never far from the lips of many theater practitioners, the principals found themselves ad-libbing exclamations to silence the ensemble. The first of these can be found in the text, but now there are new additions. The rule is clear: the ensemble is not meant to populate the stage as individuals, unique and contemplative on their own, but to build a world for the named characters to populate, who convey the esteemed source of knowledge in the form of “the story.” Not simply the intervention of a new story, the unnamed characters “interrupt.” Returning briefly to earlier allusions of Foucault's continuities and discontinuities, to interrupt is a microformation of the same phenomena. To interrupt is to “suspend the continuous accumulation of knowledge, interrupt its slow development, and force it to enter a new time, cut it off from its empirical origin and its original motivations, cleanse it of its imaginary complicities” (4). The multiple presences on stage that interrupt the narrative, that prevent its progression as a privileged discourse, forcing the named characters to silence the distraction, threaten the ontological development and status of the narrative itself. By inserting a new voice against the implicitly proper knowledge of narrative, the modality of discourse is shifted and reapproached; it is not a competition of narratives, but a threat to our complicity in narrative.

This is also practically true as a performance of labor. As the named and unnamed characters vie for visibility, the ensemble arranges and rearranges the set. In order to smooth all transitions, giving the effect of each scene melting into the next, the ensemble move furniture, set pieces, and props during one scene for the subsequent. For the performers, they are both part of the scene and “working,” and for the audience they are both visible and invisible. The question arises of whether to notice, or whether one is supposed to notice. The performance of labor is not unsubstantial- having a practical job to do, performing the act of building a world for the named characters to inhabit, is another level of

narrative reality. For many directors, and for most theatrical works this process would go unremarked, but Clarke's aesthetics challenges this assumption. The struggle for a democratized stage is the struggle between the image and the narrative, formed by and reflected back upon reality.

Related to the performance of work, the depictions of the whorehouse are a fascinating exploration of the same relationship. First off, it is important to state that this scene was identified very early on in the planning stages of the piece as a moment to unleash the ensemble. Before the scene would begin as written, Clarke could use the opportunity to build her world of images and sensuality. The reality of the whorehouse as a place of business born of desperation and poverty exists as a fact and as a narrative force, but not as a formative aesthetic property. Quite to the contrary, the whores and johns are mostly harmonious, and the whorehouse is more of a judgment free space for those seeking comfort outside society's norms. The prostitutes kiss and fondle one another regardless of the job or a customer's presence, and the men grope one another privately as well. More than being a place solely for men to buy women, it is a liminal space of physicality and corporeality. In fact, the only whore who has a definitive relation to money making is Jenny, who uses "Pirate Jenny" to voice her vengeful desires. The ensemble's relationship to the transactional world is other, and while the reality of poverty and subjugation is not neglected, the sense of inclusiveness and comfortability is palpable. Jenny is the only character who does not share this sense. The coincidence of a slightly more democratic space for the performers, where they can evoke more fully and take up more space, and a marked division between them and the world of commerce and business, speaks to a politics of expression based on economics but not limited to its pertinent political discourse. Reappropriating the whorehouse as a wholesome environment, while still acknowledging its harsh reality, reimagines it as a place for mute images to speak and be heard.

And from where did these images come? A primary influence on Clarke's work is from visual

art. Works by Schlichter, such as the opening moment already mentioned, and by Grosz, Schad, Dix, and August Sander were all heavily influential, and in some cases, apparent to the knowledgeable eye. With the exception of a certain physical posture and demeanor from an Egon Schiele, the source material stems from the realist, or objectivist reaction to Expressionism. By insisting on the harsh realities of life, often explored with biting sarcasm and flagrancy, both factual information and personal experience materialized in their work. Depictions of an unseen and unvoiced reality are exposed in form and color, and while in reaction to Expressionism, not without retaining some of its lessons. To this point, while Clarke might not attest to a particular relationship between artistic expression and reality, or to politics, there is a radical consistency in source material and compatibility with the libretto and score. The images she adapts to the stage are already situated as invocations of “mute voices.”

Another primary influence on the imagery and sensual world of *Threepenny* from outside the post-expressionist school was the work of Brassai. Although a different time and place, Brassai's object of study was, too, one of a silenced reality. In fact, of his transition to photography he says that he wanted to paint, “But life in Paris was so interesting, that I couldn't bear to lock myself away and get on with my artwork...I was much more interested in everything which I saw at night²². Those images haunted me....” (Gautrand 52). Clarke conjures precisely these haunting images of nightlife, formed within the modality of mute images in their first incarnation, and propagated as such in this production.

Lastly, there is the final choral anthem, in which the entire company striding downstage singing revolutionary lyrics in unison. Simultaneously, they assume their ascribed hierarchical places for the curtain call in order of importance. Mack is in the middle with Polly, the Peachums, Jenny, Tiger Brown, and Lucy. Clarke, in response to the visual effect of the costumes, the close proximity of the

22 A tangential thought is how Brassai's comment relates to the cloistered life of dancers, and even Rancière's basic premise of artisans not being able to be in two places at once. Time and space are fundamental to artistic production on the most practical of levels, on the largest and smallest of scales: of language, city, day/night, etc. This quote from Brassai speaks directly to the time of life experience and making art.

stage to the audience, and the lights, (in other words, the aesthetic appeal *en toto*) moves an ensemble member closer to center than one of the principals. Usurping the narrative's ordered system, by which artistic forms directly correspond to social and political ideology, raises two possibilities: the privileging of aesthetics over narrative, and the accession of an ensemble member in a position of higher visibility. In both cases, it is the slightest hint towards a democratic theater and a reappraisal of poetic dramaturgy as the sole guiding force in decision making.

There is an analogy between the struggle between named and unnamed characters in *Threepenny*, and the sensual, aesthetic experience of images and the discursive, “real” work in *Chéri*. On one side there is no clear indication of how one should react or what one should observe, and the other is based on a clear hierarchy that privileges specific modes of viewing and apprehension. Just as the unnamed characters form a world of mute images, speaking subjects that cannot be heard, the sensual world of *Chéri* combats against the speaking agents of narrative. The silent figures are politicized both by the aesthetic dramaturgy of the piece as well as by its narrative development.

Chéri and *The Last of Chéri* tell the story of Chéri, the handsome son of a courtesan, who begins a relationship with Lea, a close friend of his mother. Those in their circle assumed the passion would fade and life would return to be what it was, but instead their connection persists. Finally, Chéri's mother decides that he must marry an eligible, age-appropriate, woman of a wealthy family. Chéri obeys, and leaves Lea, who understands and foresaw the predicament in which they find themselves. A fleeting, single-night of hope, notwithstanding, the two part ways. Shortly after marrying, Chéri is recruited into the army to fight in WWI. When he returns, he cannot reintegrate into his former life. Dissatisfaction with his station and the people around him, coupled with yearnings for Lea nearly drive him mad. He attempts to reconcile with Lea, but finds her changed. He himself is altered by time and experience, and there is none of their former love left for them. In despair, Chéri

kills himself.

The narrative conflict of *Chéri* is that Chéri and Lea's love for one another upsets the financial arrangements that create and support their lives. The aesthetic conflict is between the prosaic world of quotidian movement that prevails outside their relationship and the classical lyricism within.

Understood in this way, Chéri's final solo serves to unite the political and the aesthetic, shattering the tenability of the sublime and real. The tragic realization is not that he has lost Lea, but rather that he has lost the aesthetic dimension of himself, and the political reality that he is left with cannot be altered or accepted. When he finally looks in the mirror, the moment that incites his suicide, the revealed tragedy is twofold: not only does he see Lea, removed and impalpable behind the veneer of glass, but he does not see himself. The loss of both of these realities, of a sensual, tangible Lea and of the aesthetic dimension of himself, signal an irremediable state, one to which there is no resolution.

As has elsewhere already been noted, the world Chéri returns to after the war no longer privileges physicality and sensuality, which has been replaced by the bourgeois codes of routine work and profit. It has also been noted that the reason for his suicide is his inability to reconcile his desire for the past with his present life, that he can no longer comprehend or calculate time in a conventional manner, and that the mirror emerges as a central device marking his confusion. I specify this confusion of past and present lives, time, and the role of the mirror in Martha Clarke's *Chéri* to emphasize the political conflict between their normative structuring in the routine outside world and their discontinuity in the internal, sensual world. While in the novellas the mirror contradicts his expectations of youth and beauty when he looks at himself, in Clarke's he does see youth and beauty as in his expectations, but not his own. By finding Lea in the mirror the reversal is two-fold: he sees the embodiment of the sensual world that was never tenable in his modern world, but now its untenability reinforced by not being tactile; second, he does not see himself at all. While this latter point is closer to

the effect created in the book, in Clarke's production the thought may occur as an afterthought. Rather than seeing himself as haggard and broken in his troubled state, he does not see himself at all. The affirmation of his sensual reality, confirmed in Charlotte's opening monologue and witnessed repeatedly throughout the performance, no longer exists. Tellingly, it is also from the mirror that the gun, as if by magic, appears in his hand. This direct connection between the impetus for his suicide and the disappearance of his sensuous self, combined with the irreconcilability of the sensual world with the modern world, insists that the temporal divide noted in the book as "his desire for the past with his present life" indeed holds true for Clarke's production, but situates his aesthetic conflict more firmly in the political realm.

In Clarke's *Chéri*, the physical and sensual world of his prebellum and prenuptial life is bound to his life with Lea. *Chéri* does not appear on stage without Lea. This world in which they coexist is cloistered off from the world at large both by the information we learn from Charlotte as well as aesthetically by how the world is infused with dance. *Chéri* and Lea are played by classical ballet dancers, and this physicality defines their relationship and connection to one another. The first 9 minutes are a series of Ravel valse which, while tracking the course of a single day also represent the passage of years. The conflation and confusion of time that is so prominent and disorienting in narrative-based work, such as in the novella, is exposed here as a basic aspect of the world. The viewer is introduced to a world where multiple agencies of time coexist and do not necessarily correlate; the passage of nine minutes is both a whole day and a longer, indeterminate period. Shortly after they return to bed, Charlotte enters and informs that they have been together for 6 years.

The particular and peculiar mix of dance and mimetic theater used in Clarke's production speaks to an aestheticization of everyday life that marks it from the outside transactional world and comments on the political conflict between them. The verbal outside world of pedestrian movement intrudes upon

the poetry and grace of their love in the form of Charlotte and the myriad impositions of modern reality that she carries with her. This occurs within the narrative and aesthetic. Charlotte suggests narratively that their love is not in accordance with the financial rules of the world, that he must marry.

Additionally, each time she enters the audience notes the passage of time. The prosaic world Charlotte represents and manifests on stage is real in a way that is more immediately familiar. Her movement is quotidian and time passes in a comprehensible way. When she enters the space she is free to acknowledge the audience in a way that Chéri and Lea do not. While this is not surprising or experimental, it is a building block of the piece. The performer who speaks, who invokes a tradition of theater that still preserves some consideration for the fourth wall and only breaks it intentionally, deals directly and personally with the audience, and the ballet dancers, from a presentational style that is based on direct engagement, are reversed in their expected roles.

While one might expect ballet movement and vocabulary to represent the grandiose or successful, here it is quite the opposite. Ballet becomes the sensual beauty that does not pertain to the financial relations and political stability of the outside world. The ballet of Chéri's stage retains certain aspects of prior forms, but not all. The basic formulation of ballet positions, from the grounding of turn-out, is based in relation to a specific facing toward the audience. Since Balanchine, this has been increasingly experimented with by showing the ballet dancer with varied facings. By separating turnout from its presentational relationship to the audience, turnout gains a new significance within technique. Examples of this include viewing it as opposing forces within the body, an idea of circularity emanating from 5th position of the legs, and non muscular explorations of the mobility in the hip joint and around the trochanters. These ideas of the body, of which there are multitudes stemming from classical technique, are re-appropriated outside the monumental and hegemonic qualities of ballet. Here, many classical lines are preserved but others are not, and the relationship to

the audience is different. I do not mean to imply that Clarke or the dancers initiated this as a verbal conversation, but that it was a clear underlying source of decision making and choreographic creation. Moreover, as the presence of ballet in the piece thematically aligns with the private and the sensual, and in opposition to the discursive and transactional – which more fully associate with the hegemonic – we must subsequently reevaluate what else undergoes such an inversion: as ballet is removed from its original continuity of the State, what emerges in its place is the untailed pedestrian movement of the actor who plays Charlotte.

There are a few implications to explore here. First, the suggestion becomes that the prosaic actions of Chéri and Lea are not executed as pedestrian. Despite the quotidian association with everyday actions, such as walking to the window, dressing and undressing, examining oneself in the mirror, or reading the paper, the spectator should not “read” these actions as anything but dance when performed by Chéri and Lea. As dance scholar and professor Katie Glasner observed in a private conversation, they do not walk as a normal person would, but move and step inflected by ballet. Separating the identification of the real world from the movement of everyday life as portrayed by Chéri and Lea prompts an audience to understand them differently²³.

There are also non-narrative patterns that supplement this theorization. Lea is continually opening the windows and Charlotte is continually closing them. While the logic established earlier concerning space within the apartment and the world beyond might lead one to wager that this would happen in reverse, that Charlotte would open them and Lea close them, the opposite is true. Within the piece, when Lea opens the window it is either to allow in the light of the morning sun or the evening moon, not the world in its entirety but only the natural elements harmonious with their sensual world. Even the sound of the trotting of a passing carriage enters through the window as an aesthetic delight,

23 According to the text of the novel and Clarke's production, Charlotte was the dancer. The disconnect between discursive and sensual is oddly resonant in the discordance of facts with performance.

carrying no further connotations. The window transforms all that comes through it into an aestheticized version of itself.

Charlotte also leaves letters and postcards, both symbolic of the outside world in their material arrival and representative of the discursive language of the outside world that has no bearing within the apartment. It is not surprising, then, that in Chéri's solo, during his final steps toward suicide, he briefly fingers Charlotte's letter before dropping it to the floor. The gesture is symbolic of Chéri's inability to confront both his lost love for Lea, who had written the letter or been the implicit catalyst of the postcard, and the real world. It is also a disavowal of the literary world, preferring to remain and die in the world of images that, perhaps, have no immediate signification.

In *Chéri* we see the clash not simply of a private sensual world with the public transactional, but of aesthetic with the discursive, representational world. In the former, time does not elapse but accumulate, and space is not limited by narrative reality but continued by the presence of the characters. Items can amass on the table over time, and the table is not indicative of a specific table, the bed not of a specific bed²⁴. The impossibility of Chéri's life is also, then, the untenability of images over language.

We see, then, the similarity of antagonisms between speaking and mute subjects in both *Threepenny Opera* and *Chéri*, and the political implications of both. Broadly, the struggle for democratic, non-hierarchical access is captured by this conflict. Each player both by virtue of how her presence is embodied and by the reflection of this embodiment in the narrative is an agent of contradiction. The political nature of both narratives combined with the fundamentally political struggle between Clarke's aesthetics and the implicit domination of narrative create an experience of sensory and discursive resonance. I do not contend that either piece is “perfect,” or unilaterally

24 There is a certain irony that Plato's image of a bed as imitation of an Idea, here occurs as a unity of particular narrative experience, and a more general, unheard experience. The threat of the mute subject as a vast multitude lurks behind every political and artistic discourse.

consistent, but that they both challenge basic assumptions about the source of political consciousness and traditional aesthetic experience. Further, without acknowledging the aesthetic and critical dramaturgies of the piece, the pieces are mitigated to a discursive realm that has little to do with their actual manifest presence or intention.

Throughout these meditations I attempt to unearth the historical and theoretical grounding of dramaturgy, and properly locate the structuring of narrative as conceived by Aristotle as Poetic Dramaturgy. In doing so, the formative aspects and relationships of dramaturgy that find expression in the poetic regime as narrative, are mobilized to find new expression in the aesthetic realm. This is not to suggest that many other writers have not written about alternative dramaturgies; to the contrary, myriad such studies already exist, and many artists employ dramaturgs and deploy these alternative methods. I contend, however, that a renewed conception of the theoretical and practical history of narrative dramaturgy aids these pursuits, providing clearer modes of discussion and modalities of performance. Without this link to their antecedents, there is the danger of new dramaturgies falling prey to the same neglects. I do not propose avoiding narrative or story, but interrogating how such structures change the dramaturgy of a work. How are the fundamental relationships of production and consumption actually being expressed? Rather than casting the dye of an isomorphic dramaturgy, we should examine the underlying relationships as manifested by multiple presences.

To this end, dramaturgy is not simply how a work is structured; dramaturgy is more fundamentally understood as a bridge between unconscious and conscious minds, as well as the reflection of this bridge as cast between the artist and the spectator. The ethical, poetic, and aesthetic manifestations of reality move between the unconscious and the conscious as structures in themselves and as material to be structured. Examining how we structure these elements is immediately relevant to the aesthetic course of our daily experience. It is just this relevance, this basic overlap within the

common foundation of politics and aesthetics, that both gives weight to aesthetic dramaturgy and cries for a critical dramaturgy; we must not overlook the ways that poetics and aesthetics tend towards hegemonic constructions.

Critical art, previously thought subject to contemporaneous political discourse, has renewed vigor as a statement of and influence upon sensible experience. Dramaturgy is thus mobilized in relation to this critical consciousness. By tracking points of identification and their relationship to critical consciousness, we prevent adherence to ideological structures. An aesthetics based on change rather than stasis both challenges the monolithic ideology of the poetic form and gives shape and direction to the postmodern ideology of instability and chance encounter.

Despite my focus on aesthetics, I do not believe that discourse is exhausted; with time, aesthetic development will reintegrate into discursive practice. The realignment of structure and dynamism with aesthetic experience will propitiate the currently anxious relationships between politics and aesthetics, creation and intention, artist and spectator. Soon, beyond allowing voices to speak and be heard, the question may return to how we respond.

What follows is the structure and discussion of a piece, which is in itself the exploration and elaboration of the theoretical material already discussed. Accordingly, the dialogue of creation and reflection is pursued from the inception of the ideas through their framing, transmission, revision, and ultimate translation into the bodies and senses of others, performers and spectators alike. It is not, however, an exercise in mastery- the collaborating artists have shaped the piece from the first moment of their involvement, and will doubtless continue to do so as the piece evolves. In that sense, I too will be translating and inhabiting²⁵ the work that I first proposed.

The initial idea was to pack dramatic and post-dramatic forms of performance into the same space, into the same bodies. In my plan, the dramatic elements would stem from my own conception of American style naturalism in current theater, and the post-dramatic in the form of technical contemporary dance and alternative modalities of performance based on relocating the speaking subject within the performer. The juxtaposition of the discursive, mimetic theater of the dramatic, and the abstract, immediate theater of dance was phenomenally appealing, and I wondered how the apparent disjunctures of performance style and material could be reconceived. The amorphous bonds between the two could be examined without doing injustice to the complexities of either. Each could also provide commentary on the other. The images, allusions, and self-referentiality of technical dance could interact with the logos and narrative of the poetic regime. Reconstructions of social narrative alongside that which appears to elude intellection.

The consistency of the idea lies in a political potential I locate in this very divide: as the body, the material engine of interaction and productivity, is restored to its place of historical potency and

25 Placing the author as an inhabitant within the work, watching it evolve and cultivating its unique ecology, is an elaboration of my earlier discussion of an artist standing as a witness before her subject.

immediacy, the subsequent emergences of interaction and production are reprioritized, The terrain of contemporary dance, at once mechanical and human, illusory and mimetic, is presented as the landscape from which narrative and discursive thought emerges. In this way, the narrative is repopulated by the uncanny, and perception as apperception. By admitting the performing bodies into a realm of dance separate from their speaking voices or the understood dramatic scene, perception (of images) and intellection (of discourse) are heightened and troubled. What is taken for granted is rearranged, displaced.

Opposed to both art that leaves all juridication and assignation of meaning to the spectator as well as that which leads an audience down a prescribed intentionality, I intend to conflate the democratic appeal of the former and the critical necessity of the latter. The reality of the work exists in itself and is accounted for, but the reconstitution and application of these contradictions is not withheld from the spectator, who is then responsible for them. Even during the “lecture” portions, each moment is the summation of many voices, statements of being and existence, and convictions of how to live. The lectures are meant to voice an opinion, but not a definitive one. It is the compounded effect of a provocative contemplation of the world we inhabit juxtaposed with an aesthetic landscape that the spectator will respond to. This is reflected on various levels of the production: in the casting of the dancers, who would not be physically or temperamentally compatible in many other pieces; in the temporality of the piece, which is divided between day and night; between the dance and the pedestrian; the poem and the lecture.

In the piece I use a split form, half written as a lecture on art and politics, and half a dance inspired by a poem. These two types of performance could be generically understood by an audience to be opposed to one another, a lecture is pedagogical, logical, whereas a dance based on a poem is reflective, evocative. Similarly the performances of each are opposed, lectures are presentational and

externally oriented, whereas the latter is internal, visceral. I subvert these binaries in a number of ways, and blend these performance genres, generating new forms of each.

Through this blending of genres and subversions of binaries, I am interested in the “disunities” and instabilities. The instability both of discourse and of aesthetics. The political lecture becomes nearly music, an aesthetic phenomenon, replete with signifying postures and socially generated performance roles. The text itself stems from a European tradition of philosophical argumentation that is colonial and patriarchal. The instance of such a discourse in order to prove a radical point is not merely a discursive exercise, but one that challenges the aesthetics of the performers themselves. They both wear heels, suggestive not just of femininity but of a varied presentation of self. The reconstructed posture and new relation to the floor changes the dance and the movement quite literally. The audience may perceive the performers' genders differently as well, and this is surely part of the blending process, but there is also the revised corporeal construction and aesthetic. The movement and the images that emerge from their multiple presences becomes the discourse, while the text is aestheticized. The rolling podium and table both reflect this discontinuity and dynamism as well. Nothing is static or stable. The movement and susceptibility towards change and migration are paramount. The discourse and the images literally travel.

The movement I generated for the dancers was diligently and painstakingly wrought. Conscious of the various movement traditions I was drawing from, I wanted each moment and sensibility to be carefully considered. With the male dancer, who is an NYU Tisch Dance BFA graduate and has worked with Sean Curran, among other choreographers, I found movement to emphasize his natural grace and long limbs. He has a sense of weight and fall that brought my mind to early Limon and Humphreys technique. Accordingly, the fall, the space between the vertical and horizontal axis, immediately suggestive of life and death, is where life occurs. It is the state of imbalance and motion.

It is inertia. With the male dancer I wanted to develop this, catalyzing the “male” role as the unstable. Further, I give him tremendous room to improvise. Much has already been written about improvisation, in general and specific to dance, but in this case it was a practical decision. He is an especially able and comfortable performer, and watching him make movement decisions in the moment brought out the themes and intentions in a surprising way. Because of this, we collaborated to structure his improvisations based on movement impulses, styles, actions, character, and dramatic situations, but did not choreograph whole dances. Instead, he has a number of phrases to move in and out of.

The female dancer is athletic and stable. A very kinetic mover, she is muscular and dynamic. Interestingly, her aggressive and incredibly fluid style looks best when she has extremely specific movements to work from. The more detailed the choreography, the more tension manifested between her lush, full-bodied movement and the precision of the vocabulary. And so, despite my physical similarity to the male dancer, the movement I created for her is more directly from my body. This unexpected situation became a motivating force for me, pushing me to develop my own movement style. It forced me to decide before entering the studio how the counterpoint between them would work, and how the movement would connect to the other unities (and disunities) of the piece. Ultimately, the movement is almost “pointilistic,” with inflections from Trisha Brown style modern dance and hip-hop. This precision and control in the movement will stabilize her against the flowing, loose-limbed quality of the male dancer. Their disparate vocabularies will hopefully make for interesting counterpoint while apart, and evolve in interesting ways when they move together.

Most of the movement I created with sneakers on, but once I realized how this influenced my process I began to vary my practice. As the footage of my choreographic explorations indicate, it took many months to find my physical language. The idea of a physical, or movement language is especially relevant for a few reasons. I wanted the consistency of a technical language that generates movement

by its very limitations. When any movement is possible, there is only the illusion of freedom; when the limits of freedom are clear, then creativity and inventiveness have a boundary to push against, they are in relation to something. Moreover, these limits should not be arbitrary, but informed by a detailed understanding of the body and of movement. They are built upon knowledge and investigation, and therefore arise almost organically from the understanding itself²⁶. Language is also important to me in its resonance as a structure capable of communication. Not Poetic communication, of course, but rather through the fields of expression as in development and investigation by contemporary and modern dancers. Just as certain musical licks call forth Jazz, so do particular qualities and sensibilities summon movement traditions. I believe this internal, insular dialogue among dancers is fundamental to the trajectory of the art form. This curiosity, this fascination with itself, is at times its own propeller. While I do attribute a large degree of elitism to this insularity, the dance community is a reality and we must work within it.

Soon, I realized that I also wanted to invoke an instance of politics. I wanted the audience to have a more highly curated vision of what they were seeing. At first, I considered involving a political party, such as the International Socialist Organization (ISO) to perhaps hand out fliers and constitute a notable presence in the theater. I also considered constructing the script as a politically charged debate, one that would invariably divide the audience. As I pursued my ideas further, however, I realized that my interest more rightly lay in the nuances of meta-politics and the shared domain of politics and aesthetics. I realized that my original goal of framing the political perspective for the audience did not entail the agenda-driven motives of convincing an audience of my opinion or political inclination. At other moments an opinion on a political matter was reflective of its own real conditions, thus Brecht's work can be seen as deepened by his overt political commentary and not limited by it. I believe at this

26 I hope to investigate this further using Jodi Melnick's piece "Solo/Deluxe Version" as a prime example. What emerges from an eloquent body as it interacts with systems of control (a Foucauldian discipline)?

moment, however, there is not such a clear connection. Our art must renegotiate the basic claim to perception and knowledge, and be more concerned with the sensorium of reality we come to view as political. In this piece I attempt to provoke an argument just along those lines, and frame the experience of dance in a particular way. Just as Brecht's theory was concerned substantially with how political reality becomes a political statement on the stage becomes a political experience for the spectator, I am interested in how an audience views and contemplates art. How this experience is later interpreted or manifested in action is not clear in this moment, or perhaps any heretofore, which would imply a teleology towards the post-political.

The use of Yiddish is intended in its full aesthetic/political force. It is the history of Yiddish as the people's language, as a primarily spoken language, belonging to a particular sphere of existence and not truly admitted outside of that or recognized as a literary language. The standardization of Yiddish as a language was not promoted until the 20th century, and is still contested terrain. Many consider it to be a jargon rather than a language, but most of these doubts are contradicted by the actual, abundant literary history of Yiddish, less than 5% of which is currently available in English. Perhaps more important, Yiddish speakers are currently diminishing and the language is hardly heard at all.

Yiddish occupies a complex and compromised place whereby the linguistic connection between a people and discursive reality has been obliterated. Because these words (the yiddish *parole*) no longer form a discourse, but rather inform other discourses as we excavate their prior significance, we can see and hear them more rightly as images. They are the mute expressions of sign, of hieroglyph, of sound that are absorbed much the way the movements and presence of a dancer might be absorbed. The fact that we may translate these images into recognizable meanings must then be re-incorporated as we reflect on the initial experience of them. Yiddish is as such a reflection of consciousness and unconsciousness, and the process of apperception, whereby its sensual existence must be assimilated

into our individual aestheto-political histories. In other words, the Yiddish language, in this context, has dual status as a language and a non-language; it refers to both our linguistic and our non-linguistic minds. As Glatshateyn notes, “Language itself has been bankrupted” (“Jacob Glatstein on Yiddish poetry after the Holocaust.”, 7:25). While he was referring to language in general, that language itself was debased by human experience, it is critical that his identity as a Yiddish poet and the fiercely shifting relevance of Yiddish to common life inform this statement. Taking it at face value in specific connection to Yiddish as a language that was abandoned because it no longer had the value of a language, we must wonder what access a poem written in a bankrupt language grants us. What depth of experience, what impulse to forge or efface the conscious and unconscious, what flash of ourselves appears in this continuum?

Further, what does it mean to engage Yiddish as it diminishes from the general experience? In the same interview, Glatshateyn says, “It occurs to me that being a Yiddish poet implies an element of consciousness” (2:50). What he means is that there is an intentionality that constitutes the decision to write poetry in Yiddish. It is a sense of who the audience is, where the language itself resides, and how the formation of a poem in that language speaks to that historical moment. I hope to engage Yiddish poetry, sung in a classical, operatic style, with just this in mind. The discontinuity of Yiddish from everyday experience, and its multiple presence as the language of an oppressed people and an aesthetic language, assert a new position in this moment.

Thematically, will use “day and night” to explore the images/poetics discussed earlier, and issues of work. As Rancière expounded in his research in the 1970's and 80's, the work done by night is, as a process, a commentary on time, space, and eligibility, and in product, a source of critical potential. Just as he traces the roots of the Poetic regime to the basic time and space restrictions that prevent artisans from participating in town hall meetings, so the same division persists today. We must

constantly question modes of participation and evaluate labor based on its pertinence in an economic system and political accessibility. What work is done by day? What work by night? What does the sheer concept of working at night imply? To my mind, the simple act of working at night has serious implications for investigating experience. Why would a person work at night? After a day's work, what has been satisfied and what is left unsatisfied? Or, for most of the working class, what is left us after a life of work?

nakhtik: a danced political lecture

In-progress performance script as of May 1st

Podium on wheels with a paper on it is down stage left. A table on wheels is up stage right. A piano and music stand are up stage left. All on strange angles. Robert enters with an almost-timid demeanor and a music book of Chopin's Nocturnes. He walks over to the podium and takes the paper off of it. He puts it on a music stand. He sits at the piano and sets up his music book. Moves as if about to play. Elliott enters in heels. As he walks to the podium he is distant, a little bitchy, but still connecting, almost flirting, with the audience. He begins to imitate a speaking subject. Tamrin follows soon after in her heels. She stops part way to the podium, seeing Elliott there. She takes off her heels. Looks around, Turns. Begins to dance. As she begins Sequence A, she starts to speak.

Lecture #1

TAMRIN

(Sensually, as if she is telling a story)

I'm here today to discuss art and politics. To begin, how do we know what art is when we see or hear it? Art could be relegated to the stage, the concert hall, the museum, or some other specific arena that designates the distinction and facilitates the consumption of what we call art, just as the offices and meeting places of government, town halls, are the arenas of politics. As we know, however, both experientially and philosophically, neither art nor politics only exist in these narrow venues. Our daily lives are permeated by both. The question, then, is two fold: how and where do these spheres interact in our daily lives? And then, what further relationships can we infer? Is there a politics of aesthetics? An aesthetics of politics?

During this first paragraph she is performing Sequence A, and finishes speaking just before beginning the floor section. Elliott has been shifting sides of the podium, rotating as Tamrin speaks. He drops to the floor around the last line, and begins to speak while crawling away. During the next paragraph his movement is an improv based on angularity and linearity, inflected by the vocabulary we have created together.

ELLIOTT

(Like a UN speech)

I argue that people are political because they possess the power of speech. That speech is the ability to designate and voice a distinction between right and wrong, desirable and undesirable, the prescribed and the proscribed. By locating the incidence of politics at this stage, I am suggesting that politics is, in its most primary form, a matter of perception. Politics is based on perceiving and being perceived: what is audible and visible versus what is mute and invisible. We, as political beings, have sensual experience that are based on who has this power, whose speech is heard and whose speech has been excluded from discourse. This is the aesthetics of politics.

In this time Tamrin has danced the podium upstage and Elliott finishes underneath the table. She gestures to Robert to begin playing. During the next paragraph Tamrin is dancing with a wine glass, then uncorking a bottle of wine, speaking as if an enchanting hostess.

TAMRIN

Art operates within and upon this distribution of sensory experience. It engages the same distribution of time and space, but to what purpose? Art has no consequence in itself. But, Art becomes a practice of radical potential, (*becoming more severe*) it can rearrange the sensible world where inequality is normalized. Suddenly a mute voice in the common world can be heard, a grunt of pain or triumph translated into a decipherable word. Art can simultaneously subvert the sensorium of our everyday aesthetic experience of the world (make us experience the world differently), revealing the possibilities of change, and also render visible the figures that we do not see. (*Tamrin pours the wine into the glass*) Thus, the politics of aesthetics.

Nocturne #1

Dancers move between drinking at the podium, laying down on the floor dreaming, and writing at the table. The stations begin to shift and grow abstracted. Finally, when Elliott puts down the wine glass on the table, they cue in on each other and touch feet in the middle of the stage. All the music in the Nocturne sections is improvised off of various Chopin Nocturnes.

Lecture #2

Finishing the duet, Elliott walks to the music stand and takes the paper off of it. Tamrin dances to the table and lies on it on her back. Elliott lays down with the paper and begins to read. Robert walks over and takes it from him. Elliott puts his heels on while speaking, and then improvises using sculptural poses.

ELLIOTT

Dance now exists outside of both music and story. While free to engage both, it is not constrained to either. The art of dance is an expression of the body with its own internal logic and inclinations, and its formative studies explore the capacities of the body both autonomous of and in relation to the world around it. This includes how the newfound eloquence of the body might temper or even contradict the dominant ideologies about proper uses of the body in contemporary society.

Tamrin, laid backwards on the table, has inched it upstage and climbed on top of it before speaking. She moves through various poses inspired by depictions of women in classical art, and how she feels in heels. Elliott dances around her on the floor with heels on.

TAMRIN

Consider three ideologies of the body: first, in relation to the divide between physical and intellectual labor, second in relation to the fulfillment of humanity occurring in the mind, and third in that our minds are more human, our bodies more animal. The first perception implies the body as a site of labor. The second, that the body is an inessential component of the human essence

ELLIOTT

(interjecting, and beginning to take off heels and place them on the table)

(consider depictions of future humans where they are mobile brains without bodies at all),

TAMRIN

(resuming)

the third that the body is the human connection to an idea of “the animal” and of animal functions. A site of oppressed labor, disinherited knowledge and experience, and subhuman practice is now a source of eloquence and critical abstraction.

Tamrin now begins to put on the heels herself as Elliott wheels her across upstage right. Once they are on, she looks about unsure of herself. Elliott finally puts the table down stage right, and walks to the podium to retrieve make-up and mirror. Just as he finishes his paragraph, he hands the mirror to Tamrin.

ELLIOTT

(as if a scientist showing a specimen)

But how does movement becomes “eloquent”? What abstractions can the dancing body produce? The first step ontologically is through reconstructing the posture, movement quality, and coordination of the body, which we commonly refer to as technique. Technique, however, does not simply liberate the body from its crude, socially constructed state; technique is its own form of control and domination of the body. When you watch a dancer, the range of motion and illusion of freedom is achieved through further subservience to a form of control. Said differently, rather than watching an expression of freedom, you are watching the struggle for freedom.

Tamrin looks at herself in the mirror and makes a face of disgust or displeasure. She puts it behind her back. Elliott finds a chair from the audience, sits down, and begins doing his makeup using the mirror Tamrin is holding.

TAMRIN

In this sense, the domination of technique, like that of everyday life, does not completely efface the creative spirit that prompts humans to create: the dancing body becomes a living metaphor for the struggle between the forces that dictate our ways of being in line with the status quo, and the possibility of creating our own history.

Nocturne #2 – (dialogue improvised)

As Tamrin finishes speaking, Elliott takes the mirror and continues doing his eyes. Tamrin dances in the heels as the music swells. She takes them off and begins throwing them up at the wall. It's as if she has sneaked over to his house and wants him to come out. Elliot stands up from his table and looks down as if out of a window. She runs over to the table and they both put on lipstick together as if in a mirror. They put the lipstick down and put hands on table. They begin moving the table about, staying completely connected, as if the table were a Ouija Board, until they land upstage center-ish on an angle with Tamrin closer to the upstage wall. Tamrin sinks down onto the table with her elbows and Elliott fills the wine glass up at the podium. When he returns they enter a mechanical world. He is offering her a drink but she refuses. This has 3 permutations before Tamrin breaks away. Elliott picks up mirror mechanically while Tamrin dances her mech-dance. He approaches her and offers the glass

twice when she stops in "beauty pose." Finally, she joins him at the table where he has been repeating a sequence of making her drink even though she wasn't there. They make "Self-portrait with Dr. Arrieta" pose by Goya. She drinks and they begin to improvise the following dialogue about dreams.

ELLIOTT

I had a nightmare last night that my body was stuck in pattern. I was walking when I realized it. With each step I realized that it was determined. It was terrifying because I would realize just after I took the step that I didn't have a choice, I had to step in that way and in that direction. So then I started flailing and moving like a crazy person, running in circles, but each time even if I surprised myself I would still have the same feeling that it was all determined, that I had had no choice.

TAMRIN

I had this dream that I was in a dark house and I had to write down what I was going through. That somehow I had to leave a record of my thoughts, my experience. But it was so dark I couldn't see for sure if what I was writing down was going to be comprehensible, or even leave a mark at all.

With the next line, they stand. Tamrin walks to podium and begins pushing it down stage left while Elliott pushes table up stage right. Once they arrive, they lay their respective props on their sides. Elliott stands between the legs of the table and Tamrin lays on the podium.

ELLIOTT

I had this dream in a different language using words that I don't know. Somehow I understood everything even though the signs were all different. (People said things that made complete sense but were grammatically wrong, and said nonsense that was grammatically correct.) (I had a dream that no one understood anything I said even though I was speaking clearly and correctly, and I could understand everyone around me even though they were speaking gibberish.

TAMRIN

I dreamed that people kept saying things to me and I didn't know how to respond. Then I would call "line!" and someone I couldn't see would tell me what to say.

Well sometimes I pretend to be someone i'm not, and then one time in a dream I actually was that person and I learned all this stuff about the person I thought I invented.

ELLIOTT

I dream that my bed is a stage. All the time!

Lecture #3

TAMRIN

The contemporary dancer is on an impossible quest: to speak without speaking.

ELLIOTT

The movements of a dancing body do not have an assigned discursive meaning like the words of a language. One cannot point to a particular movement and indicate what exactly is being said.

TAMRIN

The dancing body, in this sense, is mute. It does not tell you what to think or how to interpret it. Divorced from narrative and music, there is no longer an immediate dramatic situation to indicate a correlation between movement and emotion.

ELLIOTT

From the material body emerge abstractions, possibilities. Despite being discursively mute, despite not prescribing meaning, the material body generates new modes of being and making through its material connection...

TAMRIN

to the same experiential world as its audience and its manifest struggle between creative potential and structures of control. What is being communicated?

At this point Tamrin begins walking towards Elliott, who delivers the next lines to the audience. As she nears him, she disrobes and hangs her robe on the legs of the table. Tamrin says her last line to Elliott, as if saying goodbye.

ELLIOTT

This is dependent on the spectator, who is invited to adventure with the artist and translate the unique, specialized occurrence. Rather than passively observing, or basking in beauty of an art that serves ideology, the spectator is tasked to identify with the performed conflict, not its resolution.

TAMRIN

The fundamental contradiction of critical art is that it poses questions that it cannot answer, promises that which it cannot deliver.

Nocturne #3

Tamrin begins to sing Yankev Glatshteyn's poem "Chopin-Nocturne" as she walks over to the music stand with the paper on it. Elliott sits between the legs of the table. As Tamrin sings, Elliott dances, referencing moments of the journey. He finishes alone, sitting with his back to everyone but still moving, in Tamrin's shadow, which is cast across the floor like the shadow of a tree. She looks at him.

Blackout.

א

וועסט קומען מיט קליינע רייד
און שלעפּעריקע אויגן
וועסט מיר ברענגען פֿולע אוצרות נאַכט
זע, וויפֿל שעמעוודיקע פֿרייד פֿאַר דינע פֿינגער
האַב איך מיטגעבראַכט
אַזוי וועסטו זאָגן
צו דיין שווינגנדיקן באַזינגער
וואָס וואַרט אויף דיר אילע נאַכט

צערטלען וועל איך
די געוואַנטקייט פֿון דינע באַרוועסע פֿיסלעך
ווען וועסט אַנטלויפֿן פֿון טאַטנס הויז
כוועל דיר לייענען אַלע שענסטע גריסלעך
וואָס כּוּהאַב דיר קיין מאָל נישט געשיקט
אַן אַטעם ביסטו געלאָפֿן איבער אַ שוואַרצע
בריק
כוועל דיר שוין קיין מאָל נישט לאָזן גיין צוריק

אין דער פֿרי וועלן ערשטע טאַגלעך
וואַרעמען די קאַלטע שויב
צוגעדעקט מיט אַ שטילן טונקל
וועט עפֿענען די אויגן אַ דערשראַקענע טויב
און איך וועל קוים זיין לעבן דיר
אַזוי קוים אַז דו וועסט זוכן מיין קול
און איך וועל זיך דיר אינדריםלען
ווי אין פֿאַרנאַכטן אַ שווינגנדיקער בוים
ווי אַ צייטער פֿון אַ צווייג
קוים
ווי אַ שלאָפֿנדיקער בוים

ב

אין די פֿאַרנאַכטן קומען אונדזערע לעבנס
אַנטקעגן
און זיצן אין שאַטן
מיר שווינגן. סײַז אונדז ריידן פֿאַרבאַטן
דיין קלוג טראַכטן איז דער וויסער וויין
פֿון מין זיין. כּוּזיפֿ דעם קילן געטראַנק
און שרייב אָפּ דיין יעדער געדאַנק

אַ וונדערלעך, וונדערלעך
ווי סײַפֿאַרן זיך אונדזערע טעג
און ווערן נעכט
פֿון ווייטן זינגט אַ שטילער ברעג
אַבער מיר גלייבן קיין מאָל נישט יענעם וועג
אַ וונדער, נאַכטיקער וונדער
מיר עלטערן זיך באַזונדער
יאָר-אַיין יאָר-אויס
און צוזאַמען ווערן מיר יונגע פֿרייד
ווי ווייל דו טראַכסט מיך
אויף די כּוואַליעס פֿון דינע שטומע רייד
?איז וואָס אַז איך בין נישטאַ
?אַז דו ביסט נישטאַ
די נאַכט אַליין יז דאָ
און אין איר זינגען מיר
פֿאַרפֿלאַנצט ווי איין שאַטן פֿון אַ בוים
קוים, קוים

Chopin-Nokturn

-Yankev Glatshteyn

A

You will come with small words
and sleepy eyes,
you'll bring me full treasures of night.
“Look how many bashful joys for your fingers
I've brought with me.”
You will say
to your silent singer
who waits for you every night.

I will caress
the daring of your naked little feet
when you run away from your childhood home.
I'll read you all the prettiest letters
I never sent.
Breathless, you ran over a black bridge
that I will never let you cross again.

In the morning the first hints of day
will warm the cold window pane,
a frightened bird, clothed in silent darkness
will open its eyes.
And I will be nearly beside you,
nearly, nearly that you'll search for my voice,
and i'll imagine you
as a once-upon-a-time story,
and I'll dream you
like a silent tree in the twilight
like the tremble of a branch
nearly
like a sleeping tree

B

In the twilight our lives come together
and sit in shadow.
We are silent. Speaking is forbidden.
Your smart wit is the white wine
of my being.
I sip the cool drink
and write down your every thought.

Ah wonderful, wonderful.
How our days couple
and become nights.
From far away sings a silent shore
but we never believed in such a way.
Ah wonder, nighttime wonder,
year in, year out,
and together we become young joys.
How gently you ponder me
on the waves of your silent words.
So what that I am not here?
That you are not here?
The night alone is here.
And we are within the night,
planted like the shadow of a tree.
Nearly,
nearly.

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