The Stage on Screen: The Representation of Theatre in Film

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation explores the various ways in which film uses theatre by representing it onscreen. Neither documentary recordings of theatre nor screen adaptations of plays, films that represent theatre constitute a distinct group among theatre-related films which, as a specific group, has been overlooked. It is my goal to show how these films, beyond providing examples of the function of theatricality in film, offer a unique approach to the relationship between the two art forms. By comparing the historical, social, political, and artistic contexts in which they were created and which they represent, I explore the roles in which European and American film directors have cast theatre since the 1940s, and how these roles rather serve a cinematic logic than a theatrical one.

I distinguish three approaches with which to explore the representation of the stage on screen: historical, political, and intertextual. I do not provide an exhaustive survey of all the films in each category, but rather focus on a few significant examples. On the other hand I do not limit my exploration of each film to one approach only. Indeed, far from being mutually exclusive, these three approaches are often valid for a same film, which participates in the complexity of the onscreen representations of theatre. I alternatively rely on Bourdieu’s sociology of distinction, Morin’s study of stars, Genette’s definitions of literary transtextuality, Deleuze’s philosophy of cinema, and Bazin’s theories on theatre and film to elucidate the directors’ various strategies of representing the stage onscreen.

In the first part I analyze how cinematic representations of theatre history are informed by film directors’ desire to legitimize film as art. Although this self-legitimizing tendency is not limited to representations of theatre history, I draw on Bergman’s The
Seventh Seal, Gance’s Capitaine Fracasse and Carné’s Les enfants du paradis to argue that such representations endow films with the cultural legitimacy that theatre possesses by simple virtue of its “age.” In the second part I look at the ways in which directors use theatre and past political regimes to mirror their current cinematic and political situations. The double distancing that Lubitsch, Truffaut, Szabó, Dresen, and Henckel von Donnersmarck operate in To Be or Not to Be, Le dernier métro, Mephisto, Stilles Land, and Das Leben der Anderen, respectively, exposes the ways in which theatre and film can be coopted by ideological discourse. The third part is centered on Almodóvar’s Todo sobre mi madre and its intricate uses of play-within-a-film (invoking Tennessee Williams and Lorca), film-within-a-film (referring to Mankiewicz’ All about Eve and Cassavetes’ Opening Night), and play-within-a-film-within-a-film. I explore how Almodóvar grounds the psychological and social outlining of the female characters of mother and star in their transtextual dimension, which culminates in an exploration of mirrors as metonymy for film’s representation of theatre.
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Introduction

Although it has been a recurrent device, from D. W. Griffith's 1909 *A Drunkard's Reformation* to Matias Lira's 2010 *Drama*, the representation of theatre in film brings forth a unique situation in which the intertwining of the two arts leads each to shed a new light on the other. Rather than on the similarities and differences between theatre and film, I focus on the ways in which film uses theatre by representing it onscreen, and explore how this representation affects both theatre and film. However, because the impact that each art has on the other’s image takes its roots in their simultaneous proximity and distance, some preliminary comparative remarks are necessary. Theatre and film’s proximity, sometimes overlooked in the constant effort made to distinguish them, is what makes the conditions of their comparison and combination so special:

Both are performance arts that ordinarily involve an audience gathering at a prescribed time in a theatre to witness a scheduled event (like dance and live music and unlike painting, sculpture and novels). Both, traditionally at least, are narrative (they tell stories) and mimetic (they represent life). (Hurt 8)

Both, moreover, stand on the borderline between entertainment and art, and suffer immediate consequences if they stray on either side of that border: "the highest artistic achievement in both seems to require deep roots in popular conventions" (Hurt 8).

It is within this common framework that the history of their relationship unfolds; it is because they are so close that the question of their differentiation became so crucial from the very outset. Gregory Waller recounts the passionate debate that followed the invention of cinema; the first, obvious discrepancy between theatre and film being the presence or absence of the spoken word, theatre was soon presented as the realm of the spoken word, and cinema that of the word-free image. Although silent movies’ acting technique and visual effects came
directly from the stage, and gradually disappeared due to their overly theatrical nature, it
became common to believe that "the theatre is for the ear, and the film for the eye"
(Biberman, in Waller 103).

The distinction, which was very early on challenged by practitioners of both arts, eventually became technically obsolete with the appearance of talkies.¹ For Waller, however, it continued to pervade the critical debate on theatre and film, stuck in an irreducible antagonism: while pro-theatre critics praise the actual presence of man onstage, pro-cinema critics praise the actual presence of the world on screen (Waller 76). Theatre and film are subjected to a "separate but equal" theory: provided they know their limits and stay within them, both media can remain true to themselves and maintain an equal qualitative level (Waller 91).² And so, for Waller, the "clearly defined, mutually exclusive approaches to the stage/screen debate" that had been drawn out as early as 1912 still "persist, with little modification, today" (Waller 4-5).

While such exclusive approaches have undeniably informed the critical debate, I argue that they are outdated in academic and critical circles – and, to an even greater extent, onstage³ and onscreen. Indeed, directors’ representation of theatre onscreen constitutes if the not only one, at least one of their answers to this debate, an answer that undermines the strict opposition between the two media and that dispenses with the generalities pervading the historical debate summarized by Waller. Yet the originality of these films’ use of theatre has

¹ Artaud’s "theatre of cruelty" was designed precisely to end "the supremacy of words in the theatre" (Artaud, Le théâtre et son double 105), to "break theatre's subjection to text" (Artaud, Le théâtre et son double 137), to create a "unique language half-way between gesture and thought" (Artaud, Le théâtre et son double 138), and to foster performances containing "a physical and objective element, sensitive to all" (Artaud, Le théâtre et son double 144). Conversely, Mankiewicz claimed to be writing "plays for the screen […] for audiences who come to listen to a film as well as to look at it" (in Dauth 22). Here and throughout this study, all translations are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

² The theory takes its roots in Laocoön in which G. E. Lessing draws out the boundaries of the respective domains of the visual arts and poetry. One of the many distinctions Lessing makes between the two arts is that what painting imitates through "figures and colors in space" poetry imitates through "articulated sounds in time" (Lessing 78).

³ See the work of the Wooster Group or of René Pollesch, for example.
been entirely overlooked. This oversight can arguably be traced back to the intermediary formal position of such films. They are neither "filmed" (or "canned") performances, recordings of plays that were staged and performed in a theatre, nor screen adaptations of plays. They are written originally and specifically for the medium of cinema. They do, however, unfold in or around the theatre, and include, as their main characters, actors and/or troupes. But their nature as film allows directors to reveal aspects of theatre that theatre audiences do not have access to, in space (the backstage area) and/or in time (rehearsals, repeated performances).

To be sure, even these criteria are not sufficient to dissipate the formal fuzziness surrounding these films. The boundaries between filmed play, adaptation, and representation of theatre can be extremely (and intentionally) blurry. A film such as Louis Malle's *Vanya on 42nd Street* is a case in point in this respect. The film starts in the streets of New York, and Louis Malle's camera follows what will turn out to be the actors of the play, for now chatting, eating, walking briskly, evoking Chekhov in India, knishes, and the actor's fate in New York. As the director, André Gregory, and the spectators settle in the abandoned theatre, Malle lays the ground for the multiple "examples of identification of the actors and the characters" (Madorskaia). The actors unobtrusively adopt their characters' initial positions for the top of the play, while still behaving according to their actors' selves: the actor playing Vanya, for instance, complains of being tired and lies down on a bench; when he wakes up, he is Vanya, waking up from his nap.

Malle's film stands exactly half-way between filmed theatre and adaptation: it presents itself as a documentary about the work of real actors on Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*, which André Gregory's troupe rehearsed for four years and only performed for reduced audiences of invited guests. In her article "*Vanya 42ème rue* de Louis Malle: une expérience sur les rapports entre théâtre et cinéma," Marie-Thérèse Journot notes that as Malle solves "in
the field [...] the difficult synthesis between cinema and theatre, one feels the constant urge to record reality, but with cinematographic means only" (in Prédal, Le théâtre 53). Malle himself was clear about his intentions: "What I wanted was to shoot a documentary on Chekhov, while turning Chekhov into a documentary filmmaker of our lives" (in Prédal, Le théâtre 53).

So just like the genre of Chekhov's play, which seems to constantly oscillate between comedy and tragedy, Malle's "experimentation" or "lab experiment," this "somewhat mutant cinematic object," stands at the threshold of genres (Lalanne 59). On the one hand, "unlike the frame of filmed theatre which shows a universe with very specific boundaries and defines everyone's place, the filmed universe can only be defined here by the position of the camera, because it is the universe of documentary: everything has not been onstage, and in fact, there is no stage" (Journot, in Prédal, Le théâtre 53). But, as Journot notes, Malle's frames and camera positions go beyond those of the documentary: at the beginning of the first two acts the audience can be seen in the background between two actors in the foreground, so that the film audience faces the theatre audience in a situation which recalls, precisely, the representation of theatre performances in films (ibid.).

And as the play unfolds the film veers more and more towards adaptation: cinema gradually takes over as the play gets more intimate and tense. If Malle allows Gregory to intervene between the first sets of acts, there is no interruption between acts three and four. Framing, lighting and sound begin to abstract the performance from the larger space of the theater. As the performance progresses, framing becomes tighter, close-ups more frequent.

(Madorskaia)

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4 So does Al Pacino's Looking for Richard (1996), which stands at the crossroads between documentary, adaptation, and filmed theatre. But where Malle truly blends genres, Al Pacino alternates between them from one scene to the next.
Yet the film does not end like an adaptation, but more like a play, as Gregory and the rest of the cast come to join the actors who are left onstage at the end of the play: “And so the film that opened in the most documentary, extroverted mode, comes to its close in the theater, reminding us that this was all about the theater after all” (Madorskaia).

The success and difficulty of Malle's film lies in its constant threading in and out of the various modes of theatre and film’s interaction. It mirrors Chekhov's view of life and humanity as represented in his plays, Gregory's conception of theatre, in which rehearsal and process matter more than performance, and is emblematic of the experimental side of Malle's oeuvre. But Vanya on 42nd Street also exemplifies the porosity of the boundaries between the various modes of relationship between theatre and film, and the conceptual difficulty inherent in the task of defining such modes of relationship between the two arts.

Films such as Vanya on 42nd Street are fascinating by their formal and artistic inventiveness, but because they twist the conventions of the onscreen representation of theatre I did not include them in the body of my dissertation, devoted to outlining these conventions. I have hence selected films that are not documentaries, filmed theatre, or adaptations – but films whose fictional world include at least one theatrical performance scene and at least one major character belonging to the world of theatre. A lot has already been written on the process of adaptation, which has become a genre in and of itself and is ruled by laws that do not pertain to films representing theatre. As for cinematic experiments such as Malle's, by excluding them my goal is not to glorify "mainstream" cinema against avant-garde one, but on the contrary to work on unequivocal case-studies so as to fully bring out, by contrast, the formal ingeniousness of such experiments.

I have doubled this restriction in film genres by another one, that of the genre of the represented performances. All the films in this dissertation display traditional theatrical situations in which actors perform a pre-existing text on a stage in front of an audience.
Again, this reductive definition of theatre, which excludes other performance forms such as opera, musical theatre, circus, street theatre, performance art, etc., is not meant to deny the existence or discard the artistic merits of more experimental or cross-genre forms, but similarly to provide cases of straightforward theatrical situations whose frame can subsequently be applied and contrasted to less traditional theatrical performances.

To ensure the coherence and homogeneity of the theatrical and cinematic references I limited the geographic span of this dissertation to Western drama and cinema and focused on European and North American plays and films. Finally, I decided not to include any silent film to avoid too great a formal discrepancy between the embedding films and the embedded plays. This dissertation "starts" in the early 1940s, at a time when sound and dialogue could be found onscreen as well as onstage.

Having outlined the boundaries of my project, I would now like to place the issue of the representation of the stage onscreen back into the general context of the relationship between theatre and film. Films that represent theatre constitute a fraction of the group of films that, one way or another, bear a relationship to theatre. Indeed, if films representing theatre tend to display formal theatrical features, many, if not most theatrical films do not represent theatre. How does, then, the onscreen representation of theatre relate to the concepts of theatricality and anti-theatricality, used by scholars and critics to limn film's relationship to theatre?

David Saltz defines theatricality as a "presentational mode of performance that draws attention to its own status as theatre and as artifice"; the term originally applies to theatre performances, but, as Saltz notes, "theatricality has little meaning in contexts where virtually all dramatic performance is overtly theatrical, such as most non-Western theatre, or Western theatre prior to the nineteenth century" (Saltz). In fact, the concept emerged partly thanks to its opposite, anti-theatricality, whose origins Saltz traces back to Diderot, but which "did not
gain wide currency until the end of the following century with the advent of realistic drama and production, and, most significantly, the new medium of film" (Saltz). Examining the role of film in the development of the concept of anti-theatricality thus provides the background against which to inspect the onscreen representation of theatre.

In "'All the Frame's a Stage': (Anti-)Theatricality and Cinematic Modernism," Charlie Keil maps out a history of cinema's self-fashioning in theatrical and anti-theatrical terms, whose three stages provide insightful ways to single out the specificity of the representation of the stage onscreen. Keil starts by noting how film’s reliance on theatre to define itself derives logically from the two media's similarities. Structurally, "both typically involved actors engaged in the enactment of stories," and historically, one of film's first applications was recording live theatrical performances; the very name of the first films, "photoplays" and "silent stages," convey cinema's essential "indebtedness to theatre" (Keil 77). However, far from "making a case for film as art," cinema's various "legitimating strategies," such as hiring theatre actors, "to appropriate the cultural cachet accorded to its predecessor" made it look like "a diminished imitator" and diluted its formal uniqueness (Keil 77).

Cinema's anti-theatricality became its first self-defense strategy, which directors applied in two opposite directions. On the one hand, filmmakers tried to "incorporate cinema's penchant for capturing the outside world, a world largely unavailable to theatrical modes of presentation"; on the other they focused "on the ways in which cinema was *not* reality, which became a way for accounting for its art-making capacity" (Keil 77-78). Cinema was thus to be understood as "distinct from both reality *and* theatrical artifice" (Keil 78).

Cinema's formal autonomy came from its capacity to discard, with montage, framing and angle variations, and multiple shots in single scenes, the three principles which Béla Balázs outlined as the pillars of traditional theatre: "the spectator sees the enacted scene as a whole
in space, always seeing the whole of the space"; "the spectator always sees the stage from a fixed unchanging distance"; and "the spectator's angle of vision does not change" (Balázs 30).

What Keil does not mention is that if cinema's infancy is thus characterized by a rejection of theatricality, this rejection is not necessarily coupled with a rejection of theatre as a subject, as Griffith's *A Drunkard's Reformation* demonstrates. Indeed, Griffith inaugurates one of the major uses of the onscreen representation of theatre: as model for the way the director wishes his film to work on the audience. Denis Lévy characterizes Griffith's short film as the "first reflexive film, which among others asks the question of meaning as effect on the spectator, inasmuch as it goes through the identification to the hero" (in Prédal, *Le théâtre* 13). In the central performance scene, the alternation of shots taken from the house and reverse-shots taken from the stage with slightly different angles and frames makes the film audience aware of the embedding of media, thereby mimicking the moral awareness that the play is imparting to the "drunkard" spectator. In addition to its narrative role, the use of theatre and its formal representation conjure up a comparison "through which the fate of film as art is at stake" (Lévy, in Prédal, *Le théâtre* 13).

Griffith, like all the directors whose work I analyze, could have chosen to include cinema in his film, and not theatre. The drunkard's reformation could have been triggered by having the eponymous character attend a film, and not a play. This is all the more striking in this case as the embedded play is an adaptation of Zola's novel *L'assommoir* (1877), which Griffith could have as easily imagined adapted to the screen – and which in fact was adapted to the screen the same year as Griffith's film by Albert Capellani.5

The recurring question, then, is that of the motive(s) underlying the directors' choices for embedding theatre instead of film, even in the midst of an anti-theatrical cinematic period.

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5 Capellani's film *L'assommoir* came out in October 1909 in the United States under the title *Drink*. 
For Lévy, Griffith's choice of theatre is indicative of the early stages of cinema, and of its struggle to both integrate and distinguish itself from theatre and theatricality:

It is that the film’s real effects are immeasurable: the film still needs to achieve the same status of work of art as the theatre play [...]. And such is the reality of The Drunkard's Reformation, its horizon, its question up in the air: film itself, its destiny as art, its impure relationship to other arts. (Lévy, in Prédal, Le théâtre 16)

But this argument can, mutatis mutandis, be extended to all subsequent films, even those made after film’s “destiny as art” had been recognized. Griffith expresses the complex fascination theatre exerts on filmmakers and underscores, with the embedded theatrical performance, theatre's simultaneous role as historical model and formal counter-example for film. It is precisely inasmuch as they distinguish theatre from theatricality that filmmakers make insightful historical and reflexive use of the former while expressing their formal and aesthetic position by using, or not, the latter.

Keil locates the second stage of cinema's response to theatre in the decade after World War Two, and describes it as being marked by André Bazin's rehabilitation and magnification of theatre as a source of inspiration for cinema, both in form and matter. For Bazin, cinema's photographic roots endow it with the mission of reproducing reality as faithfully as its technology permits – which, by the same token, settles the controversial introduction of sound in film: cinema can "contend with sound and remain art" (Keil 82). Cinema's post-war realism relies on the very features that make it similar to theatre, "the long take, deep focus and staging in depth" (Keil 82). Bazin thus focuses more on theatricality and on the process of adaptation than on the representation of theatre – but his analyses nonetheless map out a certain definition of cinematic space and time that frames and sometimes clashes with the embedded theatrical space and time.
Keil locates Bazin's admiration for the two emblematic directors of this trend, Orson Welles and Jean Renoir, in their respect for "cinema's ontology": both allow more "spectatorial freedom" and render the world in its complexity (Keil 82-83). In Welles' oeuvre, "no longer a stigma, the association with theatre represents liberation from the interpretative dictates of Hollywood classical découpage and staging" (Keil 83). *Citizen Kane* (1941) in particular "aided in the promotion of performance and staging as central to the film's production of complex meanings" (Keil 84).

In *La règle du jeu* (1939) Renoir's "persistently moving camera" not only "follows characters and links actions" but also "establishes the film's frame as endlessly mobile and fluid" – so that "by the end, all space has become performative space, and the guests can no longer distinguish between staged entertainments and impassioned real-life pursuits" (Keil 85). For Keil, "the modernist paradox of *Rules of the Game* is that it uses a realist aesthetic to reinforce the inherent artificiality of the world it exposes and defines as real" (Keil 86).

With or without actually representing theatre, then, theatricality allows both directors to bring their films closer to life using the means by which theatre itself is closer to life than film, such as the actual presence of actors and objects. Film and theatre’s respective authenticity is another recurring issue in all the films I explore in this dissertation, an issue that bears formal but also political implications. If, on the one hand, embedding a performance pulls the film away from reality by adding more fictional levels, the fact that it is a theatre performance, and not a film, actually brings the embedding film closer to reality, endows it with a theatrical-like presence. On the formal level, the question becomes whether it is the embedded theatre that endows the embedding film with more authenticity, or the other way round. On the political level, the issue is that of film’s attempt at being more reactive, and interactive, by representing live performances.
Keil defines the third stage of cinema's anti-theatricality as the "post-war model of modernism," based on "Clement Greenberg's notions of how the modernist medium strives to define the limits of its own form" (Keil 87). In the modernist understanding of cinema which developed in the 1960s,

not only should the modernist film foreground those features of cinematic practice which define it as a medium, but it should do so to demonstrate the process by which film becomes art. In this way, every modernist film's subject is the manner in which it comes to create itself, a subject realizable only in a self-conscious examination of the very fundamentals of film form employed. (Keil 87)

Like the early cinematic anti-theatricality, this modernist trend manifested itself in two opposite forms. On the one hand, it led to films such as Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* (1966), "films that become compendia of their directors' previously demonstrated concerns and styles" (Keil 88). On the other it led to films that questioned the very rules on which cinema was built. Keil's alternatives provide further criteria with which to refine the formal boundaries of the onscreen representation of theatre.

Although Keil does not mention it as an example, Joseph L. Mankiewicz' last film *Sleuth* (1972) decidedly belongs to the first modernist category, and transcribes metaphorically the theatre/film duality that informs Mankiewicz' oeuvre. Like *Persona*, it is focused on two figures who become each other's double, and explores a major dimension of theatre without representing it *per se*: while in *Persona* the two women define themselves by their respective language and silence, in *Sleuth* the two men play at outplaying each other.

Divided into three acts, Mankiewicz' film is set in one place (Andrew Wyke's mansion) and involves only two characters, the aristocratic Andrew Wyke and his wife's

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6 Adapted from Anthony Shaffer’s 1970 play *Sleuth.*
lover the hairdresser Milo Tindle. Although the action unfolds over a day and a half, slightly longer than the classical unity of time requires, Youri Deschamps notices that time switches during the third act: Milo grants Wyke fifteen minutes to find clues that would incriminate him of the alleged murder of his mistress, and "under Milo's command diegetic times blends in with narrative time and Mankiewicz moves from suspended time to real time for fifteen minutes exactly" (Deschamps, in Prédal, Le théâtre 194). Without representing a traditional theatrical performance, then, Mankiewicz plays with the formal features of classical theatre.

While many of his previous films were centered on "a director obsessed or made by theatre, for his glory or his demise," here the action consists in the opposition between two director-characters, each of whom must outplay the other with his staging (Deschamps, in Prédal, Le théâtre 199). But for Deschamps, the two characters are, in fact, personifications of theatre and cinema. Milo Tindle would personify "cinema, the popular art which gradually managed to win the esteem of the elite," while Andrew Wyke would personify "theatre, the secular and bourgeois art which only lacks a nobility title" (Deschamps, in Prédal, Le théâtre 202).

By seducing Wyke's wife Tindle oversteps his boundaries; "to revenge itself, theatre will do all it can to assert its superiority over cinema, the upstart art, and to reclaim its rights" (ibid.).

If, in the initial scene, Tindle-Cinema loses his way in the maze designed by Wyke-Theatre, as the film unfolds Tindle-Cinema's capacity to observe, learn from, and copy Wyke-Theatre leads him, to Wyke's amazement, to outgrow his master. By the end of the film, "in front of Tindle-Cinema's flexibility of adaptation, Wyke-Theatre only offers the grimacing ugliness of stiffness" (ibid.). Without embedding a play or referencing cinema, then, Mankiewicz dramatizes the central issue that informs his entire oeuvre, the interaction between theatre and film, into a final allegory:
Here, Mankiewicz' theatricality becomes pure reflexivity, wonders about itself, about what grounds or refutes it, and the author goes so far as to direct the main criticism uttered against his cinematic oeuvre, 'filmed theatre,' to transform it into one of the plot's central conflicts. (ibid.)

Because it does not represent theatre, Sleuth is not part of the central corpus of this dissertation, but the metaphorical reading it provides informs my analyses of the representation of the stage onscreen. Indeed, the social distinction conceptualized by Pierre Bourdieu between theatre as high legitimate art and film as lower self-legitimizing art is one that underlies this whole study. More generally, I systematically look at the embedded performances in the light of the larger context, be it religious, social, historical, or political, in which theatre and film inscribe themselves. The directors’ representation of theatre always also functions, I argue, as an allegory of the world in which their film is set and/or shot.

As I mentioned earlier, however, Mankiewicz' tactic only accounts for one of the ways in which this modernist trend expressed itself. For "if modernism's ultimate goal was for a given art form to revel in its ability to know itself, this could be achieved as much through an oppositional invocation of accepted norms as through sustained internal analysis" – and so other directors started "systematically defying the accepted formal norms associated with classical cinema" and using cinema's protean capacities to explore its relationship to other arts (Keil 88).

Theatricality became a way for directors such as Jean-Luc Godard or Jacques Rivette to both push film beyond its specific representational limits and to challenge its conventional illusionism:

Here was a mode of presentation which could only be understood as deliberately referring to the constructedness of the theatrical world, hence dispelling any sense of the illusionistic engagement offered by the cinema of
This play on theatricality and illusion led filmmakers to emphasize the flatness of the cinematic image as opposed to the depth of the theatrical image – recalling the insertion of melodramatic tableaux in early cinema. The modernist trend thus unwittingly brings us back to the initial stages of the theatre-cinema relationship (Keil 89) – thereby providing a way for me to link the historical and the structural dimensions of my analyses throughout the chapters.

Keil concludes his overview of cinema's journey in the realm of theatricality and anti-theatricality by evoking Baz Luhrmann's Moulin Rouge (2001) and Lars Van Trier's Dogville (2003), "two films whose radically different approaches to a stylized mise-en-scène can only reveal current gestures toward theatricality as deliberately, even proudly, empty" (Keil 90). In its post-modern era, film cannot count on theatricality to define its own "plenitude," but becomes instead "the post-modern era’s privileged marker of outmoded aesthetics" (Keil 90).

It is telling to note that Keil’s conclusion once more brings together a film that represents live performances (Moulin Rouge) and another whose relationship to theatre is based solely on its formal choices: the town of "Dogville" is represented by a black open stage-space with no walls but chalk drawings outlining the set and props. Keil does not take this distinction once into account, and, in this respect, his article is symptomatic of the ways in which films representing theatre have been examined indiscriminately among theatrical films. In the minority within the oeuvre of directors focused on theatricality, films that represent theatre have not been the object of a separate study. This dissertation is designed to remedy this oversight, and to highlight the practical and explicit answers these films provide to critics' and directors' formal and conceptual questioning of the two arts.

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7 The recent surge of 3D films opens yet another chapter of the spatial relationship between theatre and film.
Due to my chronological choices, the films I explore belong to the second and third stages outlined by Keil, post-war realism and post-war modernism. But because I focus on the representation of theatre, and not on cinematic theatricality, the overarching concerns expressed in the three periods outlined by Keil find their way in all the films of this study. By embedding plays within their films the directors raise at once the issues of film's historical relationship to theatre, relationship to fiction and reality, and self-awareness.\(^8\)

The interest that such issues have sparked, as the proliferation of "wing scenes" testifies to, is revelatory of a larger tendency which Linda Hutcheon describes in her introduction to *A Theory of Parody*: "the modern world seems fascinated by the ability of our human systems to refer to themselves in an unending mirroring process" (Hutcheon 1). Through the mirroring process they create between embedded theatre and embedding film, the films representing theatre become incarnations of what Hutcheon designates as modern parody, this "ironic playing with multiple conventions, this extended repetition with critical difference" (Hutcheon 7).

By their form and history theatre and film already lend themselves to the process of parody: the century-old and heavily-coded form of theatre is particularly "open to parody" (Hutcheon 18), while film, the art form of modernity, is the ideal form with which to parody it. But it is also in the kind of audience parody requires that Hutcheon's theory sheds light on the implications of the onscreen representation of theatre. Parody can exist and work only if it is recognized and decoded as such; it thus necessarily transforms readers into "active co-creators" of the parodic text (Hutcheon 93). The active stance required from the reader in a

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\(^8\) These three dimensions are precisely those which Rudolf Arnheim praises in Jacques Feyder's opera rehearsal scene in his silent film *Les nouveaux messieurs* (1929). Unlike the many "usually uninteresting" wing scenes, the "vividness" of Feyder's scene is "achieved by a clever camera angle. The spectator feels as if he were himself in the very center of the bustle of the stage crowd" (Arnheim 53-54). The camera, in the flies, captures the stagehand working and letting a long rope down on the stage: "The abysmal depth, the contrast between the brightly lit stage and the dark flies, the jerking rope, the difference in size between the darkly silhouetted men up above and the others below on the illuminated stage – everything contributes to make the scene startlingly lifelike. One seems to smell the dust and the cold air of the stage" (Arnheim 54). In other words, the scene’s quality derives, for Arnheim, from its being simultaneously related to the theatre, lifelike, and aware of its artistic status.
literary parody is akin to that required of theatre audiences, without which there can be no performance. In this respect, representing theatre onscreen participates in the ever-more refined ways in which film has tried to involve its audience as actively as theatre and to answer the accusations leveled against it of annihilating the audience's free will and reflexive capacity.

For Hutcheon, the audience's active involvement in modern parody requires a triple competence: linguistic (the audience must understand what is said and implied), rhetorical and generic (the audience must know the norm in order to recognize the deviation from the canon), and ideological (in its form and presuppositions, the parody is an elitist form of discourse); such competences can only be found in culturally democratic and sophisticated societies with institutionalized aesthetic, social, and ideological values (Hutcheon 94-95). The modern flourishing of parody thus appears to be a specific expression of the twentieth-century Western world. To be sure, creating a form out of the questioning of the very act of aesthetic production has its roots in the Renaissance genre of "imitation"; however, "the ironic distance of modern parody might well come from a loss of that earlier humanist faith in cultural continuity and stability that ensured the sharing of codes necessary to the comprehension of such double coded works" (Hutcheon 10).

On the one hand, then, parody requires clear sets of values and a shared institutionalized culture, just like the representation of theatre in film requires clear sets of theatrical and cinematic references; on the other hand it stems from a feeling of loss of traditional cultural references, just like the embedding of theatre in film blurs the established distinctions between genres, forms, periods, and levels of fiction. Parody is characteristic of the "technological world in which culture has replaced nature as the subject of art" (Hutcheon 82) – or in which theatre has replaced nature as the subject of film. And so, by imitating "art
[theatre] more than life, parody [a film representing theatre] self-consciously and self-critically recognizes its own nature" (Hutcheon 27).

Like parody, then, the representation of theatre in film is an oxymoron, an "authorized transgression" at once "conservative and revolutionary" (Hutcheon 26), hence "one of the ways in which modern artists have managed to come to terms with the weight of the past" (Hutcheon 29). Indeed, although the films I examine were written and directed in various countries over half a century, it seems that all these films emerged out of a common quest to find new strategies of understanding the world. In this respect, they follow the pattern Manfred Schmeling outlines in the case of metatheatrical forms. For Schmeling, "reflexive forms appear at very specific periods, that is, when the literary tradition coincides with expectancies to the point of boredom, and in places where this literary tradition, having become too canonical, is overtaken by the extra-literary evolution, economic, social, etc." (Schmeling 9).

In an effort to understand how formal and larger cultural issues interplay in the representation of theatre in film, my analyses draw on various fields, from literary criticism to sociology, from philosophy to theatre and film studies. By confronting, among others, Gérard Genette’s definitions of literary transtextuality, Pierre Bourdieuf’s sociology of cultural distinction and Edgar Morin’s sociological study of stars, Gilles Deleuze’s philosophy of cinema, and André Bazin’s theories on theatre and film, I explore the various ways in which film affects, alters, and enriches the image of theatre as a medium and as an art form. I define the overarching relationship between stage and screen through the concept of wings, from its most literal to its most metaphorical acceptance, and define each three parts of this dissertation by focusing on one of the ways in which wings inform the representation of the stage onscreen.
In the first part, "From theatre history to film prehistory: theatre in the wings of film’s artistic legitimation," I explore the ways in which the screen representation of pre-cinematic theatre transform theatre history into cinema's pre-history. In The Seventh Seal, Capitaine Fracasse, and Les enfants du paradis, Bergman, Gance, and Carné offer the viewer a glimpse of the historical wings of film’s accession to the status of independent art. From the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth and Nineteenth Century, each chapter offers a vision of film’s appropriation and rewriting of theatre's history.

In the second part, "Theatre and film behind the political scenes," I analyze the political implications of the screen representation of theatre after film and explore the political wings of twentieth-century theatre and film. I examine the double political and formal distanciation of these films, which use theatre and either Nazi Germany (for the chapters on To Be or Not to Be, Le dernier métro, Mephisto) or East Germany (for the chapter on Stilles Land and Das Leben der Anderen), as a way to deal with themselves, as films and as products of a particular historical and political period.

In the third part, "The cinematic wings of theatre," I focus on the intricate transtextual web Almodóvar builds in his film Todo sobre mi madre with its simultaneous references to plays (A Streetcar Named Desire and Haciendo Lorca) and films that themselves represent theatre (All about Eve and Opening Night). To do justice to Almodóvar’s transtexual work I do not devote one chapter to a single film, as was the case in the previous parts. Rather, I explore how Almodóvar grounds the psychological and social outlining of the types of the mother and the star in their transtexual dimension and in the spatial confrontation between offstage and off-screen, which culminates in an exploration of mirrors as metonymy for film’s representation of theatre.

This dissertation does not pretend to be an exhaustive study of the representation of theatre in film. But it is my goal to do justice the filmmakers whose fascination for theatre led
to propose innovative ways of dramatizing this unparalleled connivance between two arts, and to sketch, through the analyses of their representation of the stage onscreen, an image of the world they were intended for, and against.
Part I: From theatre history to film prehistory: theatre in the wings of film’s artistic legitimation

Vivid evocations of pre-cinematic theatrical productions can be found in pictorial, textual, and even musical sources; but film is the only medium through which contemporary audiences can witness such productions – or rather, representations of such productions – almost as if they had been there. Regardless of their degree of historical accuracy, films that represent pre-cinematic theatrical performances shape audiences’ vision of theatre history and supersede whatever other images they might have of this history. This is not to say that film does not alter whatever contemporary performance it might record. Rather, it implies that in the absence of any first-hand knowledge of these past performances with which the director and actors on the one hand and the audience on the other could compare the representation, the re-presentation necessarily tends to become re-fashioning for the former, and presentation for the latter.

By representing theatre history, directors rewrite this history for contemporary audiences. But their rewriting of theatre history also fashions the history of film. First because of cinema's historical borrowing of form, content, and practitioners, from theatre, representing theatre's past also means representing some aspect of cinema's past. Second because the way in which directors represent theatrical performances is also shaped by the present conditions in which the film is shot. As much as it is informed by the historical context of the period it is set in, the representation of any pre-cinematic theatrical performance is also always informed by the historical context in which the film is shot in general, and by the status of the theatre-film relationship in particular.

Cinema's constant urge to legitimize itself as an independent art form for the first decades of its existence took the form, as Keil points out, of a strong general anti-theatrical
stance. But inasmuch as it did not prevent film directors from representing theatrical performances, I argue that the appropriation of theatre history constitutes one of the tactics of this legitimization process, one that continued well after film started to be recognized as an art in the 1920s in Europe. More specifically, directors sought, in their representation of pre-cinematic theatre, to appropriate two aspects of theatre history that remain irreducibly foreign to film, theatre’s link to the sacred, and the aura it gained by its millennia old existence.

The theory that classical theatre grew "out of cult origins" (Fischer-Lichte 33) or that "again and again theatre has come out of ritual" (Esslin, Anatomy of Drama 28) has been dominant throughout the twentieth century – and widely contrasted to cinema’s secular and technical origins. The former, however, is contradicted, as Eli Rozik contends, both by the available evidence and the lack of evidence concerning the birth of theatre in the Antiquity (Rozik x). And the latter was soon forgotten in the face of cinema’s new ritualistic dimension (brought forth by its dark room, crowded audience, and “magical” projections) and religious themes and content.

There is, in fact, nothing inherently religious or secular about either theatre or film. For Rozik, “theatre is a specific imagistic medium (i.e. a method of representation or, rather, an instrument of thinking and communication), and as such its roots lie in the spontaneous image-making faculty of the human psyche” (Rozik xi). Film is yet another iconic medium, that is, a medium whose basic unit is the image (Rozik 19). This definition makes both media equally independent from religion or ritual; as media, they can be used for ritualistic purposes and convey a religious content – or not.

Stanley Kaufman's assertion that "theatre began as a sacred event and eventually included the profane" while "film began as a profane event and eventually included the sacred" (in Knopf 161) is thus a historically inaccurate (if pleasing) chiasmus. Indeed, it reveals how it is film itself that benefits from portraying theatre as “a direct extension of
religious ritual” (Esslin, *Anatomy of Drama* 28) – as bearing a special relationship to the sacred: film’s self-legitimizing strategy relies on its appropriating theatre’s religious dimension. The strategy, then, is not to put theatre and film on an equal footing by secularizing and thereby downgrading theatre, but rather to raise film to theatre’s sacred dimension, and hence justify film’s aspiration to be qualified as high art. Inasmuch as film directors were looking for such religious roots for their own films, then, representing theatrical performances was a good strategy. More specifically, their choice of theatrical performances had to go towards historical periods in which religion and theatre were, if not essentially, at least strongly connected.

Quite strikingly, although there are quite a few filmed adaptations of Greek plays, I have yet to find a film that deals directly with "the birth of theatre" or that takes Greek theatre and religious rituals of tragedy and comedy as its principal background. However, there are quite a few films representing theatre that are set in the Middle Ages. Indeed, the Middle Ages provide an equivalent, if not better alternative to the Greek theatrical Golden Age. On the one hand, in both periods political power was strictly connected to the religious one. On the other medieval drama, even more than Greek Drama, is closer to modern European drama and sensibility in its form, themes – and in the Christian religion it is based on. I thus focus my first chapter, centered on film's appropriation of theatre's religious dimension, on Bergman's *The Seventh Seal*, set in Medieval Scandinavia.

In addition to its sacred dimension, the other aspect of theatre history film covets is its sheer length. Even today, cinema's hundred and fifteen years of existence cannot compare to theatre's two thousand five hundred years of "official" existence. Pierre Bourdieu’s analyses

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9 For example, *Antigoni* (Yorgos Javellas, 1961) and *Oedipus Rex* (Tyrone Guthrie, 1957).

of the direct link between aristocracy, time, and tradition can be readily applied to theatre by contrast to film:

Paradoxically, precocity is an effect of seniority: aristocracy is the form par excellence of precocity since it is nothing other than the seniority which is the birthright of the offspring of ancient families (at least in societies in which age and aristocracy – virtually equivalent notions – are recognized as values).

(Bourdieu & Nice 70)

The association between age and nobility is precisely that which theatre benefits from and which film can only hope to bridge by placing itself as the heir of this ancient tradition: “Legitimate manners owe their value to the fact that they manifest the rarest conditions of acquisition, that is, a social power over time which is tacitly recognized as the supreme excellence” (Bourdieu & Nice 71). For cinema, becoming legitimate means gaining control over time in general, and its past in particular – that is, over theatre. Representing pre-cinematic theatre thus allows film directors to transform it into film’s prehistory, thereby endowing cinema with theatre's long-standing artistic legitimacy.

As Shyon Baumann develops in Hollywood Highbrow, film’s transformation from entertainment to art was very different in Europe, especially in France, and in the United States. Film’s shift from entertainment to art was already effective in France in the 1920s; it only came to pass in the United States in the 1960s, in part due to French intellectuals who applied to Hollywood films their auteur theory (Baumann 10). Beyond the national differences in the process and time of film’s artistic legitimization, however, this legitimization was in all cases the result of conscious efforts on the part of the cinematic industry. This effort, I argue, is especially palpable in films that represent theatre, even if they were shot after film’s accession to the status as art.

11 Ricciotto Canudo created the first cine-club in France in 1921 (Club des amis du septième art), and France quickly became the “model for an art world for film” (Baumann 27).
Indeed, the first factor which Baumann credits as leading to film’s legitimization is “the creation of an opportunity space through social change outside the art world in question” (Baumann 14). He summarizes and applies to film the theory developed by DiMaggio about theatre:

the advent of film altered the market conditions for dramatic entertainment. Film quickly drew into a popular form of drama, a role the theatre had served. With the increased competition at the lowbrow end of the spectrum, theater was encouraged to change its format and to serve as a higher form of drama, a change that was facilitated by the presence of the models established by operas, museums, and symphonies available for emulation. (Baumann 14-15)

What film had been for theatre, television became for film – the newer, more technologically advanced, and lower cultural form of entertainment for the masses that allowed its predecessor to truly attain artistic legitimacy. Onscreen representations of theatre thus bring out the process through which film unwittingly pushed theatre towards a higher artistic status, and later sought to gain artistic recognition for itself.

What film contributed to turn theatre into, and which it strives to become in its turn, is a special form of culture deserving honor and prestige. This category has a twofold relationship to high status. On the one hand, high status is a characteristic that art possesses. On the other hand, high status is also something that art bestows on its creators and audiences. Knowledge of and appreciation for good art can generate high status for individuals. (Baumann 6)

Before it can bestow its high status on individuals, the art form in the process of gaining artistic legitimacy needs to cater to the taste of those who can bestow such legitimacy, the higher-class audience. Consequently, it is not only the historical aristocratic aura theatre gained through its longevity but also its “aristocratic” audience that film needs to appropriate.
To explore the complex social mechanisms at work in theatre and film’s relationship I have chosen Gance's *Capitaine Fracasse*. Its setting in seventeenth-century France brings out the continuity of the social stakes underlying the embedded theatre and the embedding film.

Having outlined in my first two chapters to the religious and social dimension of cinema's appropriation of theatre history, I explore in my third chapter the implications of such appropriation in cinema's self-definition as the medium of modernity against theatre as the art of tradition in Marcel Carné’s *Les enfants du paradis*. Film's artistic legitimization also entails asserting its uniqueness as a new art, and highlighting the unique new way in which it can handle even the most traditional and coded art form of theatre. Again, it is quite striking that although a few films include scene of early slide shows or magic lanterns (such as, for instance, Bergman's *Fanny och Alexander*) very few are devoted to the inventors of cinema, or represent the first cinematic projections.

However, this is not as surprising as it seems. By emphasizing the practical over the mythical such representations would have jeopardized film's legitimization process. On the other hand, representing the nineteenth-century theatrical forms that influenced cinema, as Marcel Carné does in *Les enfants du paradis*, becomes a way to represent film's simultaneous continuity and break with theatre – its actual accession to the real artistic form it aspires to be.
Chapter 1: Theatre, Film and Religion in Bergman's The Seventh Seal

To those who have not recently watched the film, choosing Bergman's The Seventh Seal to analyze the way in which film appropriates theatre's religious dimension might appear odd. Critics and audiences usually remember the tall blond knight playing chess with Death in a plague-ridden world. They almost never recall that the effectiveness of this image is largely due to its being set off by contrasting humorous and tender scenes in which the Knight encounters a troupe of travelling actors and ultimately saves them from Death. This chapter focuses on the forgotten aspect of the film, its representation of the troupe's performances and adventures in the religious medieval setting, and the way in which this representation exemplifies film’s legitimization process through the appropriation of theatre's alleged religious roots.

Although Bergman strictly separated his cinematic and theatrical careers, directing plays in the winter and films in the summer, many of his movies have been called "theatrical." In the case of The Seventh Seal (1957), theatricality marked the film's very inception: its starting point was a one-act play entitled The Wood Painting (1955) that Bergman had written for his theatre students. Both the play and the film are based on historical events (the plague that killed one third of the Swedish population between 1349 and 1359), personal childhood memories (Bergman's visit to the Härkeberga Church covered with thirteenth century frescoes), pieces of music (Carl Orff's Carmina Burana) and composers (Sibelius), and the writings of Scandinavian philosophers and playwrights (Kierkegaard, Swedenborg, Strindberg, Hjalmar Bergman) (Bragg 29). Both relate a Knight's desperate existential quest for God in a Sweden at once real and fictional, past and present.

This, however, is as far as the parallelism goes. As Bergman himself recounted, he soon left the play behind and went in a completely different direction in the writing of his film (Bergman, Images 232). The Seventh Seal is not an adaptation of the play, nor can its
intimate relationship to theatre be traced back only to its theatrical origins. While Wood Painting is a theatrical exploration of religious issues, The Seventh Seal is a cinematic exploration of the interplay between theatre and religion.

Indeed, the most obvious way in which the film differs from Wood Painting is by the addition of a troupe of travelling actors. The insertion of these characters transforms The Seventh Seal from a theatrical film into a film that represents pre-cinematic theatre. On the one hand, this insertion can be read as the materialization of Bergman's creative evolution from the play to the film. Inasmuch as the play inspired him to write and direct the film, the embedded actors come across as a tribute to the history of the film's creation. But there is more to this insertion than a mere personal or anecdotal dimension. Its self-referentiality goes beyond the frame of Wood Painting and The Seventh Seal; it functions as an image of the historical evolution between theatre and film. By representing medieval theatre in his film Bergman offers his vision of the way in which film reinvents and appropriates theatre's religious origins as part of its artistic self-legitimization.
Theatricality in *The Seventh Seal*

To follow the stages of Bergman's creative process, the first section of this chapter is devoted to the film's theatricality, which underlies its representation of theatre. The film's first theatrical element is its structure, which Bergman designed so as to follow the unities of time, place, and action derived from the early modern reading of Aristotle's *Poetics* (7, 10-12). Not only does the film start at dawn and end at dawn the following day, but it is divided in almost as many sequences as there are hours in a day: it falls into twenty-one sequences, the tenth of which starts exactly halfway through the movie and consists of a scene occurring at noon. As far as place is concerned, the characters move from coastline to countryside to forest, but this evolution remains within the larger frame of an inescapably barren Scandinavian landscape. And the film relies on one main action, the chess game between the Knight and Death, which appears three times at three key stages of the game and of the film: their beginning, middle, and end. The progression of the game thus parallels that of the movie along the three Aristotelian stages of storytelling (Aristotle 10).

By conferring this theatrical structure on his film Bergman lays the ground for the intertextual continuity he establishes between *The Seventh Seal* and *Hamlet*. Without either "representing" or even mentioning the name of the play – after all the film, like the play itself, is set before Shakespeare's time – he superimposes recurring references to *Hamlet* onto the film plot (the Knight's quest for God during the respite Death grants him). Bergman thus turns Shakespeare's play into the blueprint on which the film is tailored while trying to escape it – much like early cinema borrowed plots and actors from theatre while trying to detach itself from its theatrical model.

The first time that we meet the travelling actors Jof asks Skat, the director of the troupe, when they are to perform their next play, to which Skat answers: "At the saints' feast in Elsinore" (Bergman, FS 145-146). Bergman could have chosen any Scandinavian village
name as the travelling actors' destination. With Elsinore he transports the physical geography of Sweden into the mythical geography of Shakespeare's Denmark, and superimposes onto the film's time and action those of Shakespeare's play. The Shakespearean reference is further brought to the fore by Skat's status as the troupe's coarse first player, a position which instantly turns him into a comic incarnation of his Shakespearean counterpart.¹²

After this initial reference the film and the play unfold at the same pace in parallel planes – so that the film's temporal unity is similarly doubled by another temporal theatrical layer. Just as the travelling actors perform "The Mousetrap" in the middle of Shakespeare's third and central act, Skat, Jof and his wife Mia perform their song-and-dance in the film's central sequence. As in Shakespeare's play, their performance is attended by a mysterious outsider figure of a scholar Prince/crusader Knight plagued with existential doubts. And as in Shakespeare's play, the performance and the encounter with the players both help the Knight/Prince in their quest and impel them towards their death. The Hamlet reference is reiterated in the Knight's dialogue with the actors after the performance:

KNIGHT. Where are you going next?

JOF. Up to the saints' feast at Elsinore.

KNIGHT. I wouldn't advise you to go there.

JOF. Why not, if I may ask?

KNIGHT. The plague has spread in that direction, following the coast line south. It's said that people are dying by the tens of thousands. (Bergman, FS 173)

It is as if the film's main characters were trying to prevent the film from following the play it shadows towards its deathly resolution. And it is precisely there, in the film's unwitting

¹² He is, in this respect, even closer to Stoppard's version of the same character, the "Player," in Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead, to which I will return later.
following of its theatrical precedent, that Bergman situates the complexity of the historical continuity between the two art forms.

Indeed, the film follows the play's tragic unfolding of events until the end: in both plots the main character, his family, and his friends, die, while the actors survive. Bergman even goes as far as to follow the play's scenes of comic relief. As the film progresses Skat abandons the troupe to enjoy a brief affair with Lisa; and Bergman shapes Skat and Lisa's husband Plog, who eventually catches them, as two comical Shakespearean characters. For Peter Cowie, Skat and Plog function as "puppet-show" villains just like Macbeth's porter (Cowie 149). However, The Seventh Seal does not unfold in Macbeth's feudal Scotland, but rather in Hamlet's rotten Scandinavia, during the same fictional time – turning the "puppet-show" villains into none other than Hamlet's gravediggers.

In Bergman's film the gravediggers' grave bantering (Hamlet V.1, 1-60) become an insult joust with Lisa as the winner's prize. Bergman transcribes visually the verbal contest by alternating close-ups of the contestants with close-ups of the spectators (Jof, Mia, and Jöns) standing in the middle, successively turning their eyes right and left to look at Plog and Skat off screen. Skat, who loses the contest, pretends to take his own life to redeem himself, his fake death being further reminiscent of the comic and tragic connotations of the gravediggers' scene.

In Skat, then, Bergman mixes together Hamlet's First Player and Gravedigger, as if to bring comedy and tragedy closer together. This kinship is clinched by Skat's final scene opposite Death. After some self-congratulatory remarks – "Now that was a good scene. I'm really a good actor. After all, why shouldn't I be a little pleased with myself?" (Bergman, FS 190) – Skat decides to spend the night in the tree and to go to Elsinore in the morning to

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13 This comic scene, shot like a tennis game, foreshadows Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's question game in Stoppard's play (Act 1, 33-35), which, in the filmed adaptation, unfolds while the characters are in fact playing tennis, and which Guildenstern ends with the Hamlet quote: "That's the question."
perform and make a lot of money. Instead of which Death, in an exact replication of medieval iconography, appears and starts sawing the tree Skat is sitting in:

DEATH. I'm sawing down your tree because your time is up.

SKAT. It won't do. I haven't got time.

DEATH. So you haven't got time.

SKAT. No, I have my performance.

DEATH. Then it's been cancelled because of death.

SKAT. My contract.

DEATH. Your contract is terminated.

SKAT. My children, my family.

DEATH. Shame on you, Skat!

SKAT. Yes, I'm ashamed.

*Death begins to saw again. The tree creaks.*

SKAT. Isn't there any way to get off? Aren't there any special rules for actors?

DEATH. No, not in this case.

SKAT. No loopholes, no exceptions?

*Death saws. [...]*

*The tree falls. The forest becomes silent again.* (Bergman, FS 191-192)

This exchange is yet again reminiscent of Stoppard's witty and absurd treatment of Hamlet in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead, which was performed for the first time in 1966, a decade after Bergman's movie. In Stoppard's play Hamlet functions as what Gérard Genette called, in Palimpsestes, a "hypotext," that is, as a pre-existing text from which the "hypertext" is derived and on which it is grafted, but not as a commentary (Genette 13). For
Genette, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead is a "paraleptic continuation" or "transfocalisation" of Shakespeare's play written in the style of Beckett's Waiting for Godot (Genette 416).

The Seventh Seal can also be read as one of Hamlet's hypertexts, as an existential variation on Hamlet. For Andrew Sarris, the Knight embodies the modern skeptic, spiritual heir of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Camus, in a movie which he distinguishes as "perhaps the first genuinely existential film" (Sarris 51). While Bergman's existential reading of Hamlet reflects the period in which the film was shot, the very fact that Bergman models his film so closely yet unobtrusively on Hamlet is indicative of the complex relationship he establishes between theatre and film. The Seventh Seal's relationship to Hamlet becomes a metonymy of film's ambivalent artistic relationship to theatre, at once inspired and enriched by its theatrical precedent in matter and manner, and struggling to detach itself from this precedent to achieve its own artistic meaning.

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14 A paraleptic continuation fills lateral ellipses, answering the question: What was X, in this case Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, doing, when Y, here Hamlet, was doing…? (Cf. Genette 197-198)
Theatre and religion in The Seventh Seal

Theatricality, in The Seventh Seal, thus provides the ground on which Bergman builds his representation of theatre and explores theatre and film's respective relationship to religion.

Bergman begins by presenting the theatre troupe: Skat, the director and first actor; Jof, the second actor; Mia, Jof's wife and the troupe's female lead; and Mia and Jof's son Mikael. Their names, and the way they are shot in the film, appearing always in bucolic, peaceful and softly lit surroundings, turn Jof, Mia, and Mikael into incarnations of the Holy Family, whom Bergman evokes through theatrical images. Jof foresees in Mikael a miracle-doer, an actor-Jesus who would juggle with balls as he would with the Trinity and perform "the one impossible trick": "make one of the balls stand absolutely still in the air" (Bergman, FS 144).

On the other hand, Jof, Mia, and Skat form a theatrical trinity which Bergman immediately relates to religion:

... [Skat] wears a crudely made death mask.

SKAT. Is this supposed to be a mask for an actor? If the priests didn't pay us so well, I'd say no thank you.

JOF. Are you going to play Death?

SKAT. Just think, scaring decent folk out of their wits with this kind of nonsense.

JOF. When are we supposed to do this play?

SKAT. At the saints' feast in Elsinore. We're going to perform right on the church steps, believe it or not. […]

JOF. And what part am I to play?

SKAT. You’re such a damn fool, so you’re going to be the Soul of Man.

JOF. That’s a bad part, of course.
SKAT. Who makes the decisions around here? Who is the director of the company anyhow? (Bergman, FS 145-146)

This time it is not the religious trinity which is described in theatrical terms but the theatrical trinity which is linked to the Church, depending on it both for its subsistence and for the content of the play it performs. By dividing the sequence in two Bergman underscores how the two trinities between which Jof and Mia oscillate never overlap: Mikael and Skat are never present on screen at the same time. But by presenting both the religious and the theatrical trinities in the same sequence one after the other, Bergman infuses them with each other's imagery and signification, as if it were impossible to separate them.

Jof and Skat's status as theatre professionals and their reference to the allegorical role of the "Soul of Man" conspire to inscribe their upcoming performance within one of the major medieval theatrical genres: the morality play. It is in these allegorical dramas featuring conflicts between good and bad forces to win man's soul that the shift was made "from biblical history to the contemporary world, from biblical characters to human types and personified human qualities" (Cawley xiv-xv). Unlike the religious cycle plays, mainly performed by amateurs, these plays providing advice on how to live better were gradually secularized and performed by professionals. By superimposing the Biblical figures of Joseph and Mary on Jof and Mia, professional medieval actors performing religiously inspired plays, Bergman thus recreates onscreen an ideal Christian version of the mythical Greek unity between theatre and religion.

Skat and Jof do not explicitly mention the title of the play they are to perform. Yet the Death mask worn by Skat and the character of the "Soul of Man" evoke the most famous morality play, Everyman, whose ending is similar to Bergman's film in its central character's
"progressive abandonment and increasing isolation" (Cawley xv). However, instead of it being Jof, the actor cast in the role of the Soul of Man, who undergoes the voyage of death, it is the Knight. In a variation on the episodes undergone by Everyman, the Knight confesses himself to Death dressed up as a priest, witnesses the burning of a witch and a procession of flagellants, and dies, becoming the embodiment of the character who is to be played by Jof.

While Bergman represents the actor as separate from the fictional character he is to embody, he merges, in the figure of the Knight, the two theatrical characters of Hamlet and Everyman. On the one hand, Bergman confers a religious dimension onto the actor Jof. On the other, he confers a theatrical dimension on the religious figure of the Knight. Or, more precisely, the religiously skeptical Knight who, riding north towards his castle "further and further away from Christianity's birthplace where God has died in [his heart]," is "cast allegorically into the void of modern disbelief," geographically and spiritually severed from religion's roots and meaning (Sarris 52). Jof and the Knight embody contrary figures, a "real" actor and a Biblical character, and a "real" skeptic and a theatrical character. Their opposition reflects the recurring pattern of oppositions set off by the initial chess game, while their interdependence further reinforces the connection between theatre and religion. It is as if Jof and the Knight were at once actor and character, and each other's theatrical/religious reflection.

This complex set of mirroring reaches its apex in the film's central sequence, the only one in which a theatrical performance is actually represented. As I have mentioned, the film's embedded performance is already foregrounded by its structural position at the centre of the movie, and inside the fiction by its taking place at noon, in the middle of the day. Significantly, it also marks the beginning of the interaction between the Knight and the actors. Before the performance their scenes alternate; after the performance the Knight and

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15 Bergman's choice is thus more theatrically than historically significant as *Everyman* was written around 1495, more than a century after the era of the Swedish Plague in which the film is set.
the actors share scenes and frames. In the actual performance scene, which functions a transition between these two stages, they are never present onscreen in the same frame but partake in the same event: we see consecutive shots of the Knight watching and of the actors performing. In rendering their simultaneous togetherness and apartness, the montage and framing transcribe the essence of a theatrical event in which audience and performers share a common time and space while existing in different fictional worlds and levels.

When the sequence opens, "Skat beats the drums, Jof blows the flute, Mia performs a gay and lively dance" (Bergman, FS 157). Their costume and moves immediately characterize them as stock theatrical characters: Mia's seductive dance as the unfaithful wife, Skat's gaze and indecent gestures as the lover, Jof's horns and long face as the cuckold husband. "When they have finished Skat comes forward and bows" (ibid) – and is greeted by a tomato thrown from the crowd and heavy laughter. He exits the stage in a rage, throwing insults at Jof.

In the script Bergman had originally planned this dance to be the silent mimed summary of the upcoming tragedy – a further echo of Hamlet's "Mousetrap." Instead, what follows in the film is a farcical number sung and danced by Jof and Mia, involving comically mixed up animals cries. The song's refrain, however, casts an ominous note among the animal cries: "The black one dances on the shore/squats on the shore/runs on the shore/makes dung on the shore/the black one stays, stays on the shore." The identity of the "black one" is never made explicit, but the context of the film makes it clear: it is Death. The song's lyrics thus subtly draw the mood away from farce into a much darker realm.

Still, the performance ranges far from the morality play planned by the troupe – and offers instead an almost cliché representation of a medieval performance. The stock theatrical triangle of characters, basic comic devices and moves, and absence of any psychological or intellectual dimension to the performance are not meant to be taken as historically accurate so
much as Bergman's personal tributes to medieval theatre, "the sort of theatre I love most of all: robust, direct, concrete, substantial, sensual" (Bergman, in Cowie 142). Bergman's words hint at the bias informing his re-fashioning and idealization of medieval drama. Indeed, the embedded performance conveys theatre's physical and comic dimension as much as Bergman's existential reading of Hamlet does its intellectual and tragic dimension. The performance thus becomes the idealized theatrical origin from which the film itself, as theatre’s offspring, would have emerged.

Consequently, the sequence reveals surprising little of the performance itself, and focuses instead on its surroundings. Not only does Bergman start the sequence in the middle of the actors' number, but it is only a matter of seconds before Skat is booed off the stage, so that the film audience catches the performance at the precise moment when the theatre audience jeopardizes its continuation. The camera itself seems to yield to the theatre audience: instead of showing us Jof and Mia's performance, it follows Skat offstage, where Skat is soon joined by a woman in the audience (Lisa) with whom he managed to have an evocative exchange of looks onstage.

By taking his camera backstage Bergman makes full use of cinema's capacity to unveil theatre's hidden spaces to the film audience. The opposite points of view of the internal theatre audience and the external film audience, the latter watching the back of what the former sees onscreen, is further reinforced by the common "soundtrack" they share: Skat and Lisa's silent frolicking unfolds over the auditory background of the invisible onstage performance. The backstage performance thus appears as a perfect silent film scene, thereby becoming the cinematic flipside of Bergman's idealized medieval theatrical performance. At the very moment when the embedded performance presents the film audience with a stock image of the origin of Western drama, it also offers an allegorical nutshell history of cinema.
Bergman divides the sequence into three stages: birth, growth, and emancipation. Birth: as the camera follows Skat offstage, cinema literally emerges from the back of the theatre. Growth: as Skat's and Lisa's silent pantomime unfolds backstage, accompanied by the music coming from the stage, cinema detaches itself from theatre while still relying heavily on theatrical tools, techniques, plots, and actors. Emancipation: as Skat noiselessly runs off with Lisa and abandons the troupe in the midst of the performance, cinema cuts the umbilical cord from theatre.

To carry the allegory further, cinema's emancipation threatens theatre: had it not been for the procession of flagellants which interrupts it, Jof and Mia's performance would have eventually been jeopardized by Skat's absence. Indeed, without Skat's entrance the already shaky performance would have stopped and failed utterly, metaphorically signifying cinema's responsibility in the death of theatre. As it is, however, it is not cinema that provokes theatre's demise but a fanatic religious performance which supersedes the theatrical one both aurally and visually.

Just as Jof and Mia are singing about the "black one" staying on the shore, evoking the figure of Death on the shore at the beginning of the movie, their playing and singing fade out as the singing of the flagellants fades in. As it turns out, the flagellants are also singing about death. They accompany their physical rites of penitence and atonement with verses of the Dies Irae, on which the film opened but which stopped abruptly upon Death's apparition on the shore.

As the religious music gradually drowns the stage music, the flagellants' entrance shifts the scene's spatial organization. The transition from the onstage performance to the offstage one is brought about by the camera zooming in on Jof and Mia until their faces appear in a close-up frame. This zooming-in is not only psychologically accurate in transcribing the actors' growing dismay and horror as the procession takes over their
performance, but also prepares the radical disruption of the performance set-up. For Jof and Mia, the flagellants come "into the frame" from behind the audience. By offering another performance in the opposite direction of the one already happening, the flagellants literally steal the show and make the audience turn their back to the stage. Suddenly facing in the same direction as their former audience, the actors on the stage, "deprived of their role," become "nothing more than spectators of a performance that escaped them" (Grandgeorge 67).

Along with their performance, it is the religion Jof and Mia embody that the flagellants also confront. Bergman stages this religious opposition by placing the flagellants' cross right at the centre of the frame, between the leading priest in the foreground and Jof and Mia on the boards in the background. It is as if Bergman were delineating, within the frame itself, squares of a religious chessboard. The two sets of performers are separated horizontally by the cross and vertically by the different planes in which they stand, thereby manifesting the religious opposition shaping the new spatial organization between performers and audience.

The represented stage is thus not only central in its position in the film, but it also stands in the middle between two other types of spectacle, contrasting in space as well as in shape: cinema, born at the back of the stage, feeding off of theatre's content, and actors; and a ritualistic religion, born in front of the stage, building on theatre as form and performative spectacle. The spatial alignment of the religious, theatrical, and cinematic performances mimic the order of their chronological appearance, while their simultaneity, in the film, highlights the way in which they define themselves against each other.

Indeed, Jof and Mia's "holy" theatre is threatened by the flagellants' empty religious ritual on one side and Skat's empty ham acting on the other:

PLOG. I'll kill him anyway.
LISA. Yes, do that, just kill him. He isn't even a human being.

JÖNS. Hell, he's an actor.

LISA. He is only false beard, false teeth, false smiles, rehearsed lines, and he's as empty as a jug. Just kill him. (Bergman, FS 188)

The threat is real: the flagellants and Skat eventually die in the film. Bergman's idealized representation of medieval theatre, then, is also an ideal image of the spiritual dimension it would require in order to survive. But Bergman’s vision of theatre’s involvement in religious rites does not grant theatre impunity: the performance scene signals the dissolution of Jof, Mia and Skat's theatrical trinity. By contrast, it is because it is both religiously and theatrically meaningful that the trinity of Jof, Mia and Mikael survives.  

As for film, the depiction of its backstage birth on the opposite side of the religious performance would first seem to suggest that the elements from theatre it borrows and feeds on are not its religious ones. Yet its very connection to theatre establishes the possibility of its accessing to a true spiritual dimension, hence to artistic and cultural legitimacy.

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16 Bergman reiterated a similar distinction between empty religious rite and meaningful theatrical one in Fanny and Alexander, whose first scene depicts the Ekhdal family playing the annual Christmas pageant in their theatre. Oskar Ekhdal, the theatre owner and manager, plays the role of Joseph, his wife Emily plays Archangel Gabriel, and Fanny and Alexander embody little angels. Following the medieval tradition of Christmas pageant plays, Bergman casts his characters in programmatic religious roles foreshadowing the ones they are to play in the film itself. When Oskar dies, Emily stops all theatrical activity under the spell of her second-husband-to-be, Bishop Vergerus, whose vision of theatre, life, and religion is akin to that of the flagellants in The Seventh Seal (Bergman had originally written the role for Max von Sydow, who plays the Knight in The Seventh Seal). The end of Fanny and Alexander features the triumph of theatre and spirituality as Emily, having survived her second husband's tyranny and death, reopens Oskar's theatre and prepares a production of Strindberg's A Dream Play.
Theatre and the off-screen

By relying on cinematic formal features, Bergman offers an alternative to the flagellants' spectacle and reveals the more intimate spirituality presiding over Jof and Mia's theatrical figures. Paradoxically, Jof is less close to Skat, his fellow actor, than to the Knight, with whom he shares the ability to see what others cannot. Both Jof and the Knight are seers, a characteristic that simultaneously ties them to theatre and religion. But it is through specifically cinematic devices that Bergman builds these visions – through film that he manifests theatre's spiritual dimension.

At the beginning of the film, right after the Knight's first appearance onscreen, Death appears to the Knight, and, as we soon find out, to the Knight only. Neither his squire Jöns nor any other character ever sees Death, who almost always appears alone onscreen or in a frame with the Knight until the final scene.17 Having mysteriously appeared on the shore in a full shot, Death starts to walk slowly towards the Knight and the camera, eventually filling the screen with his black cloak, before reappearing, as if he had not stopped, still walking towards the Knight but now away from the camera, his back turned to it. Bergman has Death literally walk through the camera, materializing the Knight's sudden access to a hitherto hidden dimension.

This hidden dimension is what Gilles Deleuze describes as the absolute and invisible "out-of-screen" or, as I would rather call it to keep the parallel with the stage, the off-screen, which denotes "a more disturbing presence, one which cannot even be said to exist, but rather to 'insist' or 'subsist,' a more radical Elsewhere, outside homogeneous space and time" (Deleuze, Tomlinson & Habberjam 17). Bergman uses here what Deleuze describes as Dreyer's "ascetic method: the more the image is spatially closed, even reduced to two

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17 The two exceptions are during the second part of the chess game, when Death and the Knight are on the first plane while Jof, Mia, Mikael and their carriage stand between the two of them all of the way on the last plane of the frame (Fig. 1); and when Death saws Skat's tree. In the latter scene Death appears behind Skat, unbeknownst to him, and the tree separates the two figures in the frame.
dimensions, the greater is its capacity to open itself on to a fourth dimension which is time, and on to a fifth which is Spirit" (ibid.). When Death walks "through" the camera the image is more than spatially closed – it is entirely black, and signals the opening of the respite that Death is willing to grant the Knight, the length of a chess game.

Bergman takes on a slightly different approach with Jof. A few seconds after Jof appears onscreen for the first time, waking up and practicing his morning tricks, he suddenly turns towards the camera, looks straight at it, and smiles, as if he were having a vision. Jof's direct gaze into the camera, uncomfortably breaking the cinematic "fourth wall," leads the film audience to wonder about the recipient of his smile. Bergman finally reverses the camera angle so as to merge the audience's point of view merges with Jof's and reveal what Jof sees: the Virgin Mary teaching baby Jesus how to walk.

This time, the scene illustrates Deleuze's first definition of the off-screen, the hidden ensemble which "exists elsewhere, to one side or around" what is seen in the frame (Deleuze, Tomlinson & Habberjam 17). The off-screen is, in this case, relative – it is off only relatively to what is onscreen and can, at any moment, be made visible. Which is precisely what happens here: we first see Jof, then what he sees; Bergman creates an off-screen space, then materializes it onscreen. Unlike with the Knight, the disquieting presence of the off-screen is qualified here by its eventual visibility, which makes Jof's vision as reassuring as the Knight’s was disquieting.

By pairing each off-screen method with one character Bergman contrasts the two characters' spiritual direction, Jof tending towards Paradise and the Knight towards some kind of Hell. However, the two scenes do not impose any particular kind of religious belief nor moral judgment onto the audience so much as give them an inkling of a non-spatial spiritual dimension which transcends institutionalized religion. Indeed, Bergman does not connote either scene morally, but rather highlights their inseparability, just as Deleuze remarks on the
two aspects of the off-screen’s simultaneously presence. While the relative off-screen establishes the “actualisable relation with other sets,” the absolute off-screen establishes the "virtual relation with the whole" through the "limitation and neutralisation" of the relative off-screen" (Deleuze, Tomlinson & Habberjam 18). Similarly, Jof constantly seeks to establish horizontal links with his fellow men while the Knight desperately seeks to connect himself vertically to God.

But Bergman’s use of the off-screen not only shapes the film's spiritual dimension; it also outlines the material off-screen space from which the audience is watching the film. Death’s blackening of the screen and Jof's direct gaze into the camera blur the traditional distinction between screen and off-screen and explode the film characters’ and the film audience’s spatial landmarks alike. In both cases the evocation of the off-screen gives life to the back of the screen, to the world beyond the camera, a world only accessible to Jof and the Knight but visible to the audience – the very space, in fact, where the audience dwells.

However, the way in which these cinematic devices function is itself based on theatrical mechanisms. The first scene transports the fiction onto the other side – the audience's side – of the screen, just like a performance can spill out of the stage into the house. In the second scene the actor looks straight into the camera, mimicking theatre actors’ direct look and address to the audience. The very cinematic devices which allow Bergman to concretize the film's spiritual dimension, then, are also the ones through which he endows the film with theatrical characteristics. The cinematic off-screen becomes the token of film’s accessibility to its sought-for spiritual dimension and of its ultimate reliance, to do so, on theatre, and on the spirituality theatre achieves through the interaction it generates between audience and performers.

The Knight and Jof thus become the seers through which the film audience gains access to the spiritual continuity between theatre and cinema. It is, in fact, through their eyes
that the audience watches the entire film. When they appear together in the same scenes the Knight and Jof function as the audience's proxy by becoming spectators of the flagellants' performance, for instance, or of Plog and Skat's insult duel to win Lisa. And when they are not in the same frame, one becomes the seer through which the other seer is seen. In accordance with their respective theatrical roles as performer and spectator, we see Jof's only formal performance in the film through the Knight's eyes. And in a perfect but unexpected symmetry, the end of the film features a *coup de théâtre* in which Jof becomes the seer through which we watch the Knight perform.

Waking up in the middle of the night Jof witnesses the third encounter between the Knight and Death around the chessboard, sharing, for the first time, the Knight's vision. The Knight, having noticed the terrified Jof silently escaping with Mia and the child, immediately covers for them by playing a trick on Death. Pretending to make a clumsy move he "accidentally" knocks over all the chess pieces from the board, and looks straight in Death's eyes:

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KNIGHT. I've forgotten how the pieces stood.
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DEATH (*laughs contentedly*). But I have not forgotten. You can't get away that easily. (Bergman, FS 196)
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The Knight cannot escape, but Jof and Mia do, as Death is too busy reconstructing the game to notice them leaving. It is thanks to the Knight's unexpected talent for playacting that Death does not discover the true meaning of the Knight's move – and it is thanks to Death's distracted vision that Jof and Mia survive.

When Death then asks whether the Knight has gained anything from the delay it has granted him, the Knight answers in the affirmative, looking straight at the camera towards the actors taking off. This gaze puts the Knight and the actors back into their initial theatrical position: the Knight watches the actors. But it also conjures up for the third time the world
beyond the camera. This time what stands on the other side of the camera is neither Death nor
the Virgin Mary but the actors; neither Hell nor Paradise but Theatre. By turning Theatre into
the film’s off-screen Bergman asserts the essential artistic and spiritual continuity linking the
two art forms, as if theatre itself became cinema’s spiritual guarantor.

Through Jof and the Knight Bergman brings his film full circle. Just as the film opens
on the Knight's vision of Death, it closes on Jof's vision of Death. At the beginning of the
film Death's apparition in complete silence interrupts the Dies Irae and the voiceover reading
John's "Revelation." At the end, after three theatrical knocks on the Knight's castle door,
Death disappears on the horizon to the same verses, leading, in a macabre dance, his six
victims: the Knight, Jöns, Skat, Lisa, Plog, and Raval. This image, an iconic evocation of
medieval painting (Fig. 2), is gradually superimposed on a close-up of Jof's face. It is the only
time in the film that Bergman uses superimposition, making the audience literally see the
dance through Jof's eyes. But the superimposition also combines the two previous uses of the
off-screen. On the one hand, the superimposed image of the death dance constitutes an
extension of the off-screen around the close-up of Jof's face. On the other, the
superimposition also reduces the image's dimension and encloses the vision within the
 contours of Jof's face, and mind – thereby conjuring up Bergman's version of the disquieting
"Elsewhere" described by Deleuze.

The film, however, does not end on a cinematic vision of a medieval macabre dance,
but on Jof and Mia taking up the road again to Elsinore. The film's final image of the actors'
travelling from village to village unobtrusively reinforces the historical continuity between
embedded theatre and embedding film. In the early 1910s the dream of producers and

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18 Raval, the malicious seminarian who convinced the Knight to embark for the crusades and threatens to rape
the mute girl, dies of the plague in the film and is not present in the scene but is part of the macabre dance.
Conversely, neither the mute girl nor the Knight's wife, who reads John's "Revelation" at the end of the film, is
part of this dance, although it is made clear in the previous scene that Death takes them along too. Critics have
discussed this point at length, but a compelling reason for it is yet to be found, other than the fact that this final
scene was entirely improvised and acted out with whichever actors were on the set when the ray of sun suddenly
lit the hill the way Bergman wanted it.
managers who abandoned theatre for cinema was to be able to enlarge theatre's scope, as theatre manager Daniel V. Arthur raved: "I am going to make it possible to transport Broadway to the most remote hamlets… I am going to send, by means of miles and miles of films, the greatest actors in the world in the greatest plays ever written into every nook and corner of the country" (in Waller 144-145). Bergman's last image inscribes the modern dream spawned by cinema's technological reproducibility within the earliest forms of medieval theatre.

By ending his film on the allegorical image of the Holy Family of theatre actors triumphing over Death and taking up their itinerant performance life, Bergman reiterates his belief in cinema’s spiritual grounding in theatre. In fact, it is less for theatre itself than for film that Bergman works out the intricacies of religion’s theatricality and theatre’s spirituality. In *The Seventh Seal* Bergman reinvents theatre’s religious roots and turns theatre into the mythical origin of the possible combination of spectacle and spirituality. The film’s concomitant evocation of theatre and of an off-screen, spiritual dimension bypasses cinema’s secular origins and ultimately supports film’s claim to artistic worth.
Fig. 1. The Knight and Death playing chess, with Jof and Mia in the background. © UFOLEIS
Fig. 2. The Dance of Death
Chapter Two: Theatre, Film and Society in Gance’s Capitaine Fracasse

Like The Seventh Seal, Capitaine Fracasse recounts the adventures of a nobleman whose life and beliefs are altered by his encounter with a troupe of travelling actors. Like Bergman’s, Gance’s representation of pre-cinematic theatre is informed by his desire to endow film with theatre’s legitimacy. But whereas Bergman focuses his exploration on film’s recreation and appropriation of theatre’s religious origins, Gance focuses his on film’s recreation and appropriation of theatre’s social legitimacy.

Capitaine Fracasse is to this day almost entirely forgotten, even in France where the Gautier novel from which it is adapted is widely read in schools. It follows, in this respect, the fate of almost all of Gance's talking pictures, which never obtained the huge success his silent films had. While, to take up Norma Desmond’s words, the pictures were getting “small,” Gance kept on dreaming big:

The Capitaine Fracasse! Son of the three Musketeers and father of Cyrano, wine from Champagne, dazzling lace, fireworks! It is all our spirit and all our French heart.

In a time of skepticism where science, politics, and materialism are tearing out men's last illusions, Capitaine Fracasse appears like a radiant work, regenerating energy and idealism.

It is Shakespeare, Hugo, Gustave Doré, Musset, Alexandre Dumas, Rostand, and it is, at the same time and because of it, the very prototype of an international work par excellence.

Chivalrous, moving, picaresque, Théophile Gautier's novel constitutes a kind of synthesis of our national spirit where all the proud feelings which made

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19 Both The Seventh Seal and Capitaine Fracasse are indebted to Goethe's Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship (1795-1796), in which the eponymous character, a member of the bourgeoisie, slowly finds his real self through his attempts at becoming an actor and leading a troupe.

20 Among his most famous, J'accuse (1919), La roue (1923), and Napoléon (1927).
the fame of love and cloak-and-dagger novels fight for pre-eminence. From Rabelais' laughter to Cyrano's panache, from Villon's poetry to Scarron's verve, from Commedia dell'Arte's enthusiasm to Abbé Prévost's sentimentality, Fracasse is a multiple oeuvre, warm, sparkling, which wonderfully sums up the enthusiastic qualities of our country and this at a time when it is useful that one should remember them abroad. [...] You have to go back to The Mark of Zorro\textsuperscript{21} to find this sort of balance of the successful work, made of brio, vitality, boldness, and emotion.

If people are willing to trust me, I am certain I can lead this work, so typically French, to the extreme limits of success, Capitaine Fracasse remaining one of my directing dreams. (Abel Gance, Proposal sent out to producers, Fonds Abel Gance, Bifi)

Gance’s emphasis on the “Frenchness” of his project is a direct consequence of the troubled political times in which he was preparing it. In Pétain’s France, returning to French traditions was the best tactic to see one’s project realized. Gance had already dedicated his preceding movie \textit{Vénus aveugle} (1941) to Pétain and was similarly planning on dedicating his \textit{Fracasse} to Pétain in these terms: ”Humble homage to our venerated Maréchal to contribute to the rebirth of the French chivalrous spirit.”\textsuperscript{22} The dedication did not make it to the film's release, but its similarity in tone and spirit to Gance’s proposal is telling of the political pressure weighing on the arts at the time.

Beyond Gance’s surface compliance to the Vichy rhetoric, however, the avalanche of references testifies to Gance’s deeper artistic goal to place his project at the crossroads between high/aristocratic and low/popular artistic traditions. On the one hand, he lists

\textsuperscript{21} Although Gance does not specify which version of Zorro’s adventures he is alluding to, it seems likely that he is referring to Niblo's \textit{The Mark of Zorro} (1920) with Douglas Fairbanks.

\textsuperscript{22} ”Humble hommage à notre vénéré Maréchal pour aider à la renaissance de l’esprit chevaleresque français.”
canonical romantic figures of the French pictorial and literary traditions, along with two other
canonical foreign theatrical references, Shakespeare and the Commedia dell’Arte, which
appealed to popular and high audiences alike in their time. On the other, he links the fictional
characters of Cyrano, the Three Musketeers, and Fracasse himself, to the cinematic figure of
Zorro. By highlighting the continuity between the novelistic, theatrical, and cinematic
embodiments of the noble yet popular cloak-and-dagger knight, Gance presents himself as
the director who will materialize a similar continuity between novel, theatre, and cinema. His
“marketing” techniques and emphasis on “Frenchness” are thus as social and cultural as they
are political: the film will be successful because it will bring together aristocratic and popular
audiences, high literature and spectacle, theatre and film.

Capitaine Fracasse, however, was far from being as successful as Gance expected, in
part because of the dreadful conditions it was shot in. Throughout his work on the film Gance
had to defend himself against right-wing accusations of displaying "Jewish aesthetics" and
left-wing ones of not having fled and/or resisted the Occupation. Gance had to fall back on
his ten-year old project of Fracasse when the Censor\(^{23}\) refused the project he submitted after
Vénus aveugle. In addition to these various psychological pressures, Gance faced all the
material difficulties that threatened French directors who refused to work for the Continental,
a German-owned production company founded in Paris in the early days of the Occupation.
He had no money, equipment, film stock, costumes, or food. The shooting started in August
1942 but underwent repeated delays due to actors' illnesses and conflicting engagements,
financial and political restrictions, and Gance’s own perfectionism. Changes of production
tactics eventually demanded that the film be reduced by half to be shown in one episode. No
agreement was found regarding the final cut, which was made without Gance’s consent or

\(^{23}\) A mixed organization constituted of the French COIC, Organization Committee of the Cinematic Industry,
and the German Propaganda and Censure administration.
supervision, leading Gance to fight, in vain, to have his name withdrawn from the credits (Icart 322).

The film was severely attacked upon its release in various right to extreme-right newspapers, mainly on the grounds of its outdated theatricality and/or representation of outdated theatre. François Vinneuil, in Je suis partout,\(^{24}\) equates the film with a ruined theatre: "We err haphazardly in the wings of an old theatre, where a demented stage-manager has mixed the cast-offs of Cyrano, Hernani, and Faust. Not one living image. Everything is rags, cardboard, dust" (June 25, 1943). And in the June 28, 1943 edition of Les ondes,\(^{25}\) Pierre Leprohon attacks the film for being too theatrical: "What we used to appreciate in Gance disappears under the overflow of flashiness, of a theatrical romanticism which is the very opposite of the art of film." For Leprohon, the film contains too many tableaux and close-ups which slow the action down, and, having been shot like a grand opera striving to include all the arts, ends up being "a hybrid worthless and styleless form." As for the actors, Leprohon only exonerates Fernand Gravey, the then hugely popular lead actor, from acting "in the dramatic style of a provincial theatre,” which all the others do, “overplaying their already strongly delineated ‘types.'"

Disowned by its creator, butchered by various outside editors, and convicted of heretic hybridization with theatre by the critics, the film is nowadays virtually impossible to find outside of cinémathèques. However, I argue that it is precisely to its theatricality and representation of theatre that Capitaine Fracasse owes its cinematic value. Gance explores the historical social stigma against theatre, theatre’s popularity, and its “nobility” so as better to transpose these social mechanisms onto film and endow cinema with theatre’s aristocratic aura. In the course of the chapter I analyze how Gance defines theatre’s ambivalent social

\(^{24}\) The most active and influential collaborationist French newspaper, containing virulent anti-Semitic and Nazi propaganda.

\(^{25}\) The journal of Radio Paris, entirely edited under the control of the German Embassy in Paris.
status and its complex links to the aristocracy before exploring his representation of

Corneille’s *L’illusion comique*. I finish by outlining the ways in which Gance envisions the

artistic and social continuity between theatre and film. Whenever possible, I complete my

analyses of film scenes with analyses of Gance’s original screenplays. In the absence of the

lost cut scenes, the screenplays provide indications as to how Gance had dreamt the film and

articulated his vision of the social and artistic relationship between theatre and film.

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26 Five versions of Gance’s screenplay are kept in the Fonds Abel Gance at the Bibliothèque du Film in Paris.
Theatre and the aristocracy

Gance grounds his depiction of the world of theatre in the social context of seventeenth-century France, and establishes, from the very beginning of the film, the social prejudices attached to it. The film opens on an unexpected confrontation between the world of theatre and that of the aristocracy: on a stormy night, the Baron de Sigognac, last descendent of a ruined aristocratic family, provides shelter to a troupe of travelling actors. A series of social adjustments ensues. The actors happen to be in better financial shape than the despondent Sigognac in his dilapidated castle. The proud Sigognac refuses to share the actors' meal until his hunger prevails upon any other social consideration. But when the actors hear Sigognac’s servant Pierre call him "Monsieur le Baron" they suddenly stop eating and rise in awe – so that, thanks to the unchanged frame, the seated Sigognac becomes surrounded by headless upright bodies around the table. After an awkward pause filled with confused whispers of "Baron," "Marquis," "Prince," Sigognac resumes his dinner and invites the actors to follow his example.

As Gance further shows, the social gap between the two is also religiously connoted.27 When Pierre opens the door to the actors and sees Matamore in the stormy night he murmurs: "It's the devil!" and refuses at first to obey the Baron and tend to the actors: "But Sir, they are miscreants!" Similarly, when Sigognac's cousin, the Marquis des Bruyères, and his friend the Duc de Vallombreuse, later see the Baron mingle with actors, the Duc wittily voices common anti-actor prejudices of seventeenth-century France: "Outside Paris ham actors are mostly debauched crooks forced to live in poverty by this god-forsaken trade. Very often they are

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27 The Church’s condemnation of professional actors in Rome had never been rescinded, and flourished again in reaction to noblemen and rulers’ extended theatrical patronage. In France Louis XIII was the first to try and reverse the tendency: in the 1630s he granted subsidies to the company of the Comédiens du Roi while Richelieu patronized the troupe du Marais, whose leading actor, Floridor (Josias de Soulas), was an aristocrat (Brockett 212). Several playwrights wrote plays in defense of actors' moral quality and dignity, and Louis XIII went as far as issuing a decree in 1641 stating his wish that "the actors' profession […] not be considered worthy of blame nor prejudicial to their reputation in society" (in Brockett 212). This legal decree, however, did not alter the religious decrees that forbade actors to receive any religious sacrament.
foundlings grown into swindlers” ("En province les histrions sont plus souvent des débauchés ou des escrocs réduits à la misère par ce métier d'excommuniés. Le plus souvent, des enfants volés qui se font voleurs"). Gance thus voices the prejudices against actors on both ends of the social ladder through an aristocrat and a servant, revealing the extent to which theatre stands outside of the established social and religious order.

As the film unfolds the world of theatre and that of aristocracy remain clearly separated. After Sigognac, egged on by his extreme poverty and his attraction for the "jeune première" Isabelle, decides to follow the actors, he repeatedly tries to hide from the Marquis des Bruyères that he is involved in a theatre troupe. When he inherits Matamore’s role after the latter’s death, he refuses to act under his own name but chooses instead the pseudonym Capitaine Fracasse. And although the actors and Sigognac risk their lives for each other, they do so in the way demanded by their social position: the Baron engages in swordfights, while the actors organize elaborate plans of escape involving costumes and tricks.

Gance’s representation of the world of theatre makes it clear that no matter how “noble” the accumulation of years has made it, there is nothing intrinsically aristocratic about theatre other than its audience and patrons – just as there is nothing intrinsically popular about it other than the other half of its audience, and its members. But by being neither intrinsically one or the other, the millennia-old disreputable trade also becomes the form of entertainment that can please audiences from all social levels and be both popular and aristocratic. Having set up the historical background of theatre’s social position, then, Gance uses his main two characters to undermine it and highlight the links between theatre and aristocracy – thereby laying the ground for film’s recuperation of theatre’s social aura.

His aristocratic birth notwithstanding, Sigognac shares two major aspects of the actors’ condition: poverty, and a natural ability to perform. After Sigognac’s first

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28 Regardless of the growing popularity of acting throughout the seventeenth century, “the social and religious stigma attached to it led most performers to assume stage names when they went into the theatre” (Brockett 207). A nobleman would have had even more reason to do so.
performance as Capitaine Fracasse Blazius, the troupe leader, congratulates him: "You are a born actor!" Sigognac's real understanding of the chivalrous dimension of aristocracy significantly distinguishes him from the Duc de Vallombreuse, who displays the traditional aristocratic disdain for actors and commoners. But Sigognac’s disinterested theatrical talent equally distinguishes him from to the troupe's "lover" Léandre, the seductive actor on the lookout for social and amorous conquests.

As for Isabelle, she is herself the product of the union between theatre and aristocracy. Daughter of an actress and a prince (the Duc de Vallombreuse's own father, as is revealed at the end of the film), Isabelle displays true and passionate theatrical talent on the one hand and chastity and refinement on the other. The uniqueness of this combination is brought out by the two female characters functioning as Isabelle’s foils. While the troupe's "maid" Zerbine embodies the flirty actress ready to follow any rich nobleman, the aristocratic Yolande de Foix is as proud and haughty as her fiancé the Duc de Vallombreuse.

Indeed, throughout the film Isabelle is shown to be nobler and more modest than the aristocrats – her character thereby exemplifying the "ambivalent position between all social classes" in which actors from itinerant commedia dell'Arte troupes found themselves in (Fischer-Lichte 136). Great actresses in particular, who belonged to no particular social class and came mainly from acting families, were treated as aristocrats by the public: "It was this popular ability of the actresses to transform themselves which fascinated the spectators and caused them to heap honours on them which were normally only given to personalities of high rank" (Fischer-Lichte 136).

Isabelle's dual origin makes her the personification of the figure of the great actor or actress acceding to the level of the aristocracy classes through her art. This is precisely what Richard Steel asserted in his eulogy of the famous British actor Thomas Betterton (1635-

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29 This would also have been true in France, which adopted many Italian theatrical traditions. Assia Norris, the actress playing Isabelle in the film, was Italian herself.
1710) when he declared that actors who played kings were like kings themselves – prompting Joseph Roach to reflect that

with growing audacity, performers, whose celebrity was achieved, did not wait for the grave before they claimed their place in the public eye beside aristocrats and royals, whose celebrity was ascribed. This does not mean that they thereby became altogether socially acceptable, but it does mean that they became increasingly interesting. (Roach 38)

In Isabelle’s case her noble origin combines with the aristocratic characters she embodies to fully legitimize her accession to the aristocracy – which climaxes in her marriage with Sigognac at the end of the film.

To be sure, Isabelle and Sigognac’s wedding remains impossible until the official discovery of Isabelle’s aristocratic lineage and Sigognac’s regaining of his family wealth; moreover, it confirms Sigognac and Isabelle's definitive retirement from the theatre, while the troupe goes back on the road. It nonetheless celebrates the union between theatre and aristocracy, thereby foretelling the union between movie stars and the aristocracy, sealed in the twenties by the weddings between female stars and aristocrats, part of the “mythico-real life of Hollywood stars” (Morin 8). ³⁰ The film’s final marriage is thus exemplary of the way in which Gance bridges theatre and cinema through the links they entertain with the aristocracy.

Through Isabelle and Sigognac, Gance manifests the possible union that derives from the mutual fascination actors and aristocrats exert on each other. In the film the mutual fascination stems from the concomitant proximity and distance linking the two worlds. Actors are fascinated by those whose social origin is so high above theirs, and yet whom they embody or interact with onstage. Aristocrats are fascinated by those whose life seems so free

³⁰ The trend did not, in fact, stop in the twenties, as Grace Kelly’s marriage with the Prince Rainier de Monaco in 1956 or Clotilde Coureau’s marriage to the Prince Emanuele Filiberto di Savoia in 2003 testify to.
and far from theirs, and yet who represent them so well. If Isabelle and Sigognac’s belonging to the two worlds greatly facilitates their union, it is also revelatory of the remarkable similarity in the way both worlds function beyond their apparent strict separation.

Indeed, while there might be nothing aristocratic about theatre, Gance reveals the common theatricality and role-playing that underlies both theatre and the aristocracy. In a scene reminiscent of nineteenth-century vaudevilles he devises a parallel plot featuring the seduction of the Marquis and Marquise des Bruyères by Zerbine and Léandre respectively. Always on the lookout for aristocrats to luster their ego and social status, Zerbine and Léandre prove so incapable of escaping their theatrical forms that their actions turn out to be mere reactions to their stage roles. Léandre very much wants to extend his theatrical role of the lover to his offstage life, and to make it real by having an affair with the Marquise. Zerbine, conversely, does all she can to leave her stage role behind and become the Marquis' mistress in all senses of the term:

ZERBINE. You know in life I rather like to change roles.
MARQUIS. Let me do the same and become your servant. […]
ZERBINE. One hour, one evening, one night…?
MARQUIS. Why establish a limit to our comedy?
ZERBINE. Because before accepting a role we like to know if it is long enough.
MARQUIS. It would last as long as the play.
ZERBINE. One performance…
MARQUIS. Oh, since you would be its author I forbid you to think this. You must be so talented. Oh theatre, theatre!31 (Fig. 3)

31 ZERBINE. Vous savez dans la vie j'aime assez changer d'emploi.
MARQUIS. Laissez-moi en faire autant et devenir votre serviteur. […]
ZERBINE. Une heure, un soir, une nuit…?
MARQUIS. Pourquoi fixer une limite à notre comédie?
This exchange testifies to the characters' awareness that they are playing a comedy that reverses their "real life" roles to assuage their physical desires. The Marquis and the Marquise perfectly perform their roles as aristocrats titillated by the actors’ moral and physical freedom. Léandre and Zerbine perfectly perform their roles as actors succumbing to the aristocrats’ admiration and social aura. Gance’s parallel montage brings out the humorous similarity between the scenes between Zerbine and the Marquis, and between Léandre and the Marquise, and the shared role-playing they consciously engage themselves in. This climaxes with the juxtaposition of the Marquis and the Marquise's saying the exact same line to their respective theatrical lovers: "I must confess that I am fascinated by everything that happens behind your boards..." ("Je vous avoue que tout ce qui se passe derrière vos tréteaux me passionne…") – a line that contradicts the Marquis’ previous opinions about actors in his conversation with the Duc de Vallombreuse at the beginning of the film.

When they officially abide by social conventions, aristocrats scoff at actors. Privately, however, their alleged fascination for hidden backstage activity becomes the justification for bypassing constraining social rules and flirting with actors. But the similar line reveals how this private behavior is as socially coded as the public one – and how the same role-playing informs both worlds. On the one hand Gance shows how the actors allow the aristocrats to dally with the illusion that they are individuals free from social conventions at the very moment when their words reveal the extent to which their behavior is entirely molded by their social class. On the other, he reveals how the aristocrats allow the actors to entertain the fancy that they deserve the wealth, rank, and consideration they lack. If the actors are seduced by the possibility of experiencing what they consider to be the golden world of aristocracy, the aristocrats are seduced by the possibility to enact what they imagine to be the actors'

ZERBINE. Parce qu'avant d'accepter un rôle nous aimons bien savoir s'il est suffisamment long.
MARQUIS. Il durera aussi longtemps que la pièce.
ZERBINE. Une seule représentation…
MARQUIS. Oh, étant donné que vous en seriez l'auteur je vous défends bien de croire ça… Vous devez avoir tellement de talent. Oh le théâtre, le théâtre!
libertine offstage life. The only way to gain what they want is by playing each other’s game – which they do all the more easily as their life is nothing else but acting, socially or onstage.
Fig. 3. Zerbine and the Marquis des Bruyères’ backstage flirting, watched by Blazius.
Capitaine Fracasse’s Comical Illusion

The fascination and illusion between aristocrats and actors lie at the heart of Gance’s film as much as at the heart of the only play represented in the film, Corneille's *L'illusion comique* (The Comical Illusion, 1635). In this early play Corneille uses theatrical illusion and metatheatricality to expose aristocrats’ illusions about actors in particular, and more generally, the illusions underlying men's social positions and opinions. Including *L'illusion comique* in the film was not an original idea by Gance, since the play is already present in Gautier's *Capitaine Fracasse*; but Gautier only mentions it in passing, and the play is never performed in the novel. In the film, conversely, the performances of all other plays are either cancelled or announced but not shown, so that Corneille's play is the only one actually performed onscreen.

The screenplays suggest, in fact, that Gance intended to use *L'illusion comique* throughout his film, in at least two of the five transtextual techniques outlined by Genette. As a recurring intertext, whose "effective presence" in or "co-presence" to the film would take the form of multiple quotes and performances (Genette 8); and as an underlying hypotext, whose plot and characters would have been systematically grafted onto the film (Genette 13). It is not clear whether Gance's plans changed before or during the shooting period, or were altered at the editing stage, but Corneille’s play features less prominently than Gance had originally planned – even if still as the film’s intertext and hypotext. It remains that much of the film’s theatricality derives from the play, and Gance models his embedding of theatrical illusion onscreen on Corneille’s embedding of theatrical illusion onstage.

Corneille acknowledges in his dedication that the very form of *L'illusion comique* is a consequence of its metatheatrical dimension. The play’s traditional five-act structure offsets its non-traditional mixing of genres that turns, in Corneille’s own words, the play into a "strange monster": "The first act is only a prologue, the next three make up an incomplete
comedy, the last is a tragedy, and all these stitched together make a comedy" (Corneille & Muir 57). Although the genre mixing is ultimately justified by the various levels of fiction, it is Corneille’s play with form, genre, and illusion that Gance takes up in his film.

How does Corneille build his play’s metatheatrical illusion? In Act one, Alcandre, a magician, agrees to help Pridamant find his son Clindor by showing Pridamant a reenactment of Clindor's adventures. Acts two, three, and four consist in a play within the play as Alcandre and Pridamant watch onstage the representation of Clindor's adventures, his love for Isabelle, and his struggles against his rivals Matamore and Adraste. Act five, which seems to be the continuation of the former three acts (same characters, same names, and similar situations), is in fact the performance of a tragedy featuring Clindor and Isabelle, now happily married, and their friends, who have all become actors. Act five thus consists in a play within the play within the play. But Alcandre does not mention this changing of fictional level, so that both interior and exterior audiences are deceived until Alcandre reveals that the tragedy was only a play and assures Pridamant that he will soon be reunited with his famous actor son Clindor.

The play's metatheatricality is clearly exposed from the outset: Alcandre seizes his magic wand and a curtain opens onstage, revealing the costumes of Clindor and his friends:

   ALCANDRE. I'll tell you the whole tale
   Of his adventures and of his amours.
   However, if you feel strong enough,
   You could, by an illusion, see his life
   And all these happenings set forth in your view
   By phantoms which, like living men, would show
Their actual gestures, speech, appearances.\(^{32}\) (I.2, 147-153; Corneille & Muir 63)

Pridamant's position, Alcandre's words, and the opening of the curtain recreate within the play the conditions of theatre, that is, the unfolding of a mimetic action, in the sense of re-enactment of 'real' or 'fictional' events, involving the actions and interactions of human beings, real or simulated (e.g. puppets or cartoon characters) before an audience as though they were happening at that very moment. (Esslin, Field of Drama 28)

Here, however, the human beings are not simulated by puppets or cartoon characters, but by "specters similar to animated bodies" – as if they were shadows projected in front of Pridamant's eyes. There are, then, no actors reenacting Clindor's adventures, only shadows that evoke as much the moving shadows of Plato's Cave as the players in Shakespeare's Midsummer Night's Dream – or, for a modern audience, the shadow of actors projected on a cinema screen. The very words that Corneille uses to set up a theatrical performance onstage could be viably reinterpreted cinematically, and turn Pridamant into a magician projectionist.

What Corneille represents is, in fact, the most basic level of performance on which both theatre and cinema are based: a spectator watching an illusion enacted in front of his eyes – regardless of the form of this reenactment. It is almost as if he were showing the way to go from play-within-the-play to play-within-the-film.

Gance, then, starts by endowing his film with the structure of Corneille’s play. He molds the content of Gautier’s novel into a circular five-act pattern that comes back to its starting point. The film's first and last acts unfold in Sigognac's castle and function as the

\(^{32}\) ALCANDRE. Je vais de ses amours
Et de tous ses hasards vous faire le discours.
Toutefois, si votre âme était assez hardie,
Sous une illusion vous pourriez voir sa vie,
Et tous ses accidents devant vous exprimés
Par des spectres pareils à des corps animés:
Il ne leur manquera ni geste ni parole. (I.2, 147-153; Corneille 196)
exposition/prologue (Sigognac provides shelter to the actors and decides to go with them) and denouement/epilogue (Sigognac is reunited with Isabelle and the actors leave them to their happiness). Gance's middle three acts are similar to Corneille's inasmuch as they contain their share of adventures and coups de théâtre: in the second act we see Sigognac accompany the troupe as its painter and poet; in the third act he inherits the role of Matamore, and becomes one of the troupe's leading actors; in the fourth he runs to the rescue of Isabelle, kidnapped by the Duc de Vallombreuse. Although Gance does not ascribe a specific genre to each act, the film, like the play, oscillates between cloak-and-dagger adventure movie (Sigognac's multiple sword fights), romantic comedy (Isabelle and Sigognac's love story), vaudeville (the episode between the Marquis and Marquise des Bruyères and Zerbine and Léandre), and melodrama (the secret of Isabelle's birth).

If the film’s theatrical structure remains unobtrusive, Gance explicitly follows Corneille by foregrounding the film’s embedded theatrical dimension on the one hand, and blurring it on the other. The actors make their entrance in the film as they would onstage, with three loud knocks, here on the castle door, followed by the opening of the door in lieu of curtain (Fig. 4). But Gance also creates, after Corneille, a direct continuity between the embedding film and the embedded theatrical world through the characters’ programmatic names. Just as Corneille's Clindor and Isabelle, having become actors, embody characters named Clindor and Isabelle, Gance's Léandre, Isabelle, Zerbine, and Matamore embody the Isabelles, Léandres, Zerbines, and Matamores from the French seventeenth-century comedies, including the Isabelle and Matamore from Corneille's own play.

Corneille and Gance’s tactic consists in simultaneously embedding a theatrical layer in their fiction and designing it as closely as possible to the embedded fiction, be it theatrical or cinematic, so as to blend the two. Pridamant, unaware of the change of levels of fiction in Act five, mistakes Clindor's theatrical death for reality and laments the death of his son.
Similarly, when the novice Baron overhears without seeing them Isabelle and Léandre exchange love vows and mourn the secrecy they have to maintain, he mistakes the theatrical lines for reality and leaves in a jealous rage. Corneille dispels the illusion by having Alcandre show Pridamant Clindor counting the performance’s takings, and explaining that what he saw was only a play. Gance also dispels the illusion, but for the audience only, by panning the camera to the right to reveal Isabelle and Léandre, book in hand, reading a scripted love scene featuring characters named Isabelle and Léandre. In both cases the outside audience laughs at the inside audience’s gullibility – hence at their own.

Indeed, Sigognac’s falling for the theatrical illusion mirrors the film audience’s falling for the cinematic illusion, the latter appearing all the more real as it reveals the theatrical illusion. Sigognac’s passage from the one who believes in the illusion to the one who creates it for others thus mimics the awareness that Gance wishes his film to impart to the audience. Sigognac is deceived only as long as he accompanies the troupe as poet and painter. When he inherits Matamore’s role and becomes an actor, he literally goes on the other side of illusion. His accession to the status of actor takes the form of an improvised audition-speech from Corneille's play in front of the troupe:

MATAMORE. A noise! Quick, hide. No there is nothing now.

More boldly; I am all atremble still.

I hear them. Fly! This sound was just the wind.

Let us make use of night's dark mantle then. (III.7, 851-854; Corneille & Muir 87)

The lines themselves relate the various illusions to which Matamore succumbs in his cowardice. In Corneille's play Matamore intones them inside a creaking house; Gance has

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Sigognac deliver Matamore’s lines outside in the woods, at night, with "real" noises, "real" wind and "real" shadows. Sigognac now plays at having illusions, delighting both the inside audience (the troupe) and the film spectators, who do not laugh at him anymore but with him, aware of the variously embedded levels of illusions.

The rite of passage during which Sigognac takes on Matamore’s role mirrors the one through which Gance takes up Corneille’s. By inheriting from Matamore, Sigognac becomes Capitaine Fracasse; by inheriting from Corneille, Gance creates the film Capitaine Fracasse. The continuity between the theatrical and the cinematic characters inside the fiction becomes the metonymy for the continuity between theatre and film that underlies Gance’s project. But Gance also never loses sight of the social agenda underlying this continuity. The ease with which Sigognac takes up the role and finds the right acting style for it, a much longer and complicated process in the novel, further testifies to the aristocracy’s talent for role-playing and links to theatricality. The mock-audition thus foreshadows the film’s upcoming aristocratic and theatrical performance scene, and its extreme mixing of theatrical and cinematic illusion.

The performance scene opens with a poster announcing Scudéry’s Lygdamon et Lydias (1629) and Corneille’s L’illusion comique, described, following Corneille’s words, as an "extravagant gallantry." This characterization becomes all the more appropriate for the film as Sigognac, to defend Isabelle against Vallombreuse’s passes, challenges him to a duel. Instead of Scudéry’s play, then, Gance represents another performance – the aristocratic pendant to the actors’ performance. The aristocratic performance is also announced, so to speak, by a poster: Gance cuts from the dressing rooms to an official sign displaying the Cardinal de Richelieu’s edict forbidding duels. The proximity of the two posters highlights

34 "galanterie extravagante" (1660 "Examen" of L’illusion Comique, Corneille 194).
35 Richelieu did promulgate an edict forbidding duels on June 2nd, 1626, in a (vain) effort to curb the dueling fashion among noblemen.
the play and duel’s common nature as performance. Just as plays, duels take place in specifically delineated spaces, are attended by witnesses, are strictly coded – and, unlike plays, can prove really fatal to its actors.

But the sign also echoes a previous one, which the actors encounter earlier on their path, forbidding travelling actors and tramps from establishing camp outside a village. In this respect the sign foregrounds the difference with which political decisions weigh on various social classes: the actors are forced to leave the village, while the duel proceeds in spite of the interdiction. Indeed, contrary to acting, usually reserved to commoners, dueling is an aristocratic prerogative. In accordance to the rule excluding commoners from duels, Vallombreuse only accepts to fight the actor Fracasse when he is given assurance that Sigognac is a nobleman. The film’s only performance scene, then, marks the climax of Gance’s onscreen recreation of theatre’s social role, aura, and legacy.

Gance models the duel part of the performance scene on the most famous theatrical duel scene in the French canon, that of Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1897), published over thirty years after Gautier's novel. By giving French audiences a positive image of its theatrical, cultural, literary, and chivalrous tradition, Rostand’s play had played a key role in restoring France's self-confidence after a series of political disasters (the defeat against the Prussians in 1871 and subsequent loss of Alsace-Lorraine, the multiple political and financial scandals, and the Dreyfus Affair, to name but a few). In similarly politically troubled times, Gance’s reliance on *Cyrano* partakes both in his political effort to revalorize the moral of his defeated country and in his artistic tactic to inscribe in his film in the continuity of France’s theatrical and literary tradition.36

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36 This was all the easier as Rostand’s play had already been adapted for the screen at least twice before Gance’s film, by Albert Capellani in 1911 (*Les aventures de Cyrano de Bergerac*) and Augusto Genina in 1925 (*Cyrano de Bergerac*).
Gance peppers his film with various inter- and hypotextual references to Rostand's play from the very first images. In its original prose version, virtually unchanged in all five versions of the screenplay, the scene would have been yet another instance of such links to Rostand's play in general, and to its famous duel scene between Cyrano and the Duc de Guiche's protégé, the Vicomte, in particular (I.4). In both the play and the film, the duels unfold in similar conditions: they take place in the (metaphorical for the latter) wings of the theatrical performance, and replace the theatrical performance the audience was to have witnessed.

In the final version of the film, however, the scene is written entirely in rhyming alexandrines, like Rostand's play. The series of intertextual references to Rostand's scene becomes, through Gance's formal imitation, a pastiche fulfilling in every respect Genette's definition as a kind of "tribute" an author pays to another using "a non-satirical regime of imitation" which mixes "mockery and admiring reference" (Genette 129). As the comparison between the two scenes reveals, Gance puts more admiration than mockery in this imitation, further manifesting the film's indebtedness to Cyrano's theatricality.

Here is Rostand duel scene:

CYRANO. Ow!

VISCOUNT. What's wrong?

CYRANO. My sword has got the cramps!

VISCOUNT (drawing his sword). So be it!

CYRANO. I'll show you a weapon with a soul!

37 In the film's opening credits Sigognac appears wearing his future Matamore mask, which Gance made much more long-nosed than traditional ones, transforming Sigognac/Fracasse into a reincarnation of Cyrano. When the actors arrive in Sigognac's castle we learn that they arrive straight from Bergerac where their performance was a big success. As for the Duc de Vallombreuse, he is Gance's version of Cyrano's rival, the Duc de Guiche. In Rostand's play the Duc de Guiche hires highwaymen to defeat Cyrano at the Porte de Nesles, leading to the famous eponymous battle (Rostand I.7, II.4). In the film Vallombreuse is presented as the one who plotted against Cyrano for the "Battle of the Porte de Nesles" and hires the same highwayman and an even bigger group of men to defeat Fracasse.
VISCOUNT (*contemptuously*). Poet!

CYRANO. Yes, sir, poet! – and in that role I'll improvise a ballad while we're fighting.

VISCOUNT. A ballad?

CYRANO. You may not know that style of writing.

Three verses of eight lines. And then a coda

Of four lines more – to add the dash of soda.

VISCOUNT. You –

CYRANO. I'll assemble the poem as we go And hit home on the final couplet.38 (I.4; Rostand & Fry 22-23)

And Gance's duel scene:

... *Sigognac promptly puts on his picaresque Fracasse mask...* [...]

VALLOMBREUSE. A duke, mingle... with...

SIGOGNAC. ... an actor!

You put me, Sir, right below naught.

Let me, if you please, rise in your esteem.

VAL. And how will you prove it?

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38 CYRANO. Aye!...

LE VICOMTE. Qu'avez-vous?

CYRANO. J'ai des fourmis dans mon épée!

LE VICOMTE [tirant la sienne]. Soit.

CYRANO. Je vais vous donner un petit coup charmant.

LE VICOMTE [méprisant]. Poète!...

CYRANO. Oui, monsieur, poète! Et tellement, Qu'en ferraillant je vais – hop! – à l'improvisade,

Vous composer une ballade.

LE VICOMTE. Une ballade?

CYRANO. Vous ne doutez pas de ce que c'est, je crois?

LE VICOMTE. Mais...

CYRANO [récitant comme une leçon]. La ballade, donc, se compose de trois Couplets de huit vers...

LE VICOMTE [piétinant]. Oh!

CYRANO [continuant]. Et d'un envoi de quatre...

LE VICOMTE. Vous...

CYRANO. Je vais tout ensemble en faire une et me battre,

Et vous toucher, monsieur, au dernier vers. (Rostand, I.4, 391-402; 102-104)
SIG. By rhyming!

VAL (scornfully). You do theatre, in short, at every moment!

SIG (sharpening his sword and his dagger). Indeed, and with this stylus dipped in your blood

I will rime you a very beautiful last act! […]

[The duel starts, and Sigognac proves to be a much better fencer than Vallombreuse expected.]

VAL. I misjudged you, baron and gitano…

Who taught you?

SIG (bowing). My friend Cyrano! (Gance, in Icart 345-346)

Gance's scene is not, as the anonymous critic deplores in the otherwise rather positive review published in Comoedia40 (June 26, 1943), "plagiarized from Cyrano" – were it only because the source of Gance's inspiration is clearly stated within the dialogue itself. On the contrary, it is a pastiche feeding on the original's tone, verse, and images. And Gance’s personal touch is clearly visible in the way the scene is as cinematically crafted as it is theatrically. Gance models the rhythm of the shots and the montage on that of the verses: following the lines and rhyming patterns he alternates travelling shots, close-ups, and larger

39 VALLOMBREUSE. Un duc, se gâter... avec...
SIGOGNAC. … un comédien!
Vous me placez, Monsieur, juste au-dessous de rien.
Laissez-moi, s'il vous plaît, monter dans votre estime.
VALLOMBREUSE. Et comment faites-vous pour le prouver?
SIGOGNAC. Je rime!
VALLOMBREUSE (dédaigneusement). Vous faites du théâtre en somme à tout instant!
SIGOGNAC (aiguisant son épée et sa dague). Certes, et de ce stylet trempé dans votre sang,
Je vais vous rimailler un très beau dernier acte! […]
VALLOMBREUSE. Je vous méséstimais, baron et gitano…
Qui donc vous a appris?
SIGOGNAC (saluant). Mon ami Cyrano!

40 One of the most active cultural newspapers during the Occupation, Comoedia was officially apolitical and independent, but was nonetheless subtly "pétainiste” and collaborationist.
shots of the fighters and of their witnesses, thereby "establishing a sort of visual versification parallel to the auditory rhymes" (Icard 323).

Far from disowning the scene's theatricality, then, Gance foregrounds it in all possible ways – including, last but not least, by having Sigognac fight with this Matamore mask on. The long-nosed mask heightens Sigognac’s resemblance to Cyrano, materializes Vallombreuse's confrontation with his own dismissive opinions about actors, and highlights the theatricality of duels and of aristocratic life in general. Indeed, Gance cuts directly from the Cyrano-inspired duel scene to the performance of L’illusion comique, effectively merging the two scenes into one. The merging is all the seamless as the two scenes display similar theatrical and cinematic languages: in both scenes the characters speak in rhyming alexandrines, and Gance uses similar montage, point of view, and framing techniques to create a parallel visual cinematic versification in both.

When Gance interrupts the duel scene right before its end and cuts to the stage performance, he recreates for the film audience, with the montage, the suspense and anxiety experienced by the two Isabelles onstage. In Corneille's play Isabelle fears for Clindor who has been put in prison and condemned to death after having killed his rival Adraste. In Gance's film Isabelle fears for Sigognac, a fear that changes to despair when she sees Vallombreuse sitting in his box. The situations are so similar that the lines spoken onstage function for both the embedded theatrical fiction and the embedding cinematic one:

ZERBINE/LYSE. What will the fruit be of this facile grief?

Will all that weeping till you lose your looks

Bring back your lover from the gates of death?

Think rather of a notable conquest:

I know one eager for your service now,
A man incomparable…41 (IV.2, 1044-1049; Corneille & Muir 94)

Each alexandrine becomes a double-entendre for the film audience: both Isabelle are under threat of being forced into a marriage to a wealthy nobleman they do not love; both are crying for their lover who is in danger of death. By molding his film onto the play, Gance creates the conditions for a complete blending between theatre and film, a blending designed for the enjoyment of the film audience. Unlike the inside theatre audience, who cannot decipher these double-entendres, and Pridamant, the theatre audience within the play, who does not know he is watching a play, the now-educated film audience savors the merging into one of the several layers of fictions.

This merging climaxes with Sigognacl’s coup de théâtre entrance without his Matamore mask on, as if the theatrical performance were less theatrical than the duel (Fig. 5). That is precisely Gance’s whole point in opposing the duel and the play: while he explicitly foregrounds the duel’s theatricality and artificiality, he takes from the play what he needs to highlight its relevance to the actors’ life, its “truth” beyond the stage. When he enters Sigognacl first delivers Matamore’s lines (II.2), then a string of alexandrines coined by Gance, until he finally delivers Clindor’s lines (IV.7). In a single tirade he jumps from Act II to Act IV and from the character whom Isabelle constantly rebuffs to the one she loves and marries – an evolution that foreshadows the one that takes place in the film. Paradoxically, then, it is in the dueling performance that Gance showcases Sigognacl’s acting skills, while he uses the actual stage performance to reveal the depth of Sigognacl’s cinematic character.

Indeed, the Corneille performance, in some respect the most crafted moment in the film, becomes the moment of deepest emotion. After the various shots taken from the

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41 ZERBINE/LYSE. Quel fruit espérez-vous de vos douleurs frivoles?
Pensez-vous, pour pleurer et ternir vos appas,
Rappeler votre amant des portes du trépas?
Songez plutôt à faire une illustre conquête:
Je sais pour vos liens une âme toute prête,
Un homme incomparable. (IV.2, 1038-1043; Corneille 207)
aristocrats’ boxes, from the wings, and from the stage, the close-up on Isabelle's face when she confesses her love for Sigognac/Clindor and the zooming in on their two figures from behind the rows of spectators as they finally fall into each other's arms testify to the actors' sudden shift from performance to "real life" – and cinematically render Gance's evocative stage directions:

Isabelle cries on his arm. Sigognac is truly himself as he plays. The scene so much corresponds to reality that one can no longer distinguish the actor from the man, no more, in fact, than with Isabelle, whose tears overcome the audience. (Fonds Abel Gance, Scénario Capitaine Fracasse Version 1 167, Version 2 120, Version 3 170-171)

Isabelle and Sigognac dare to be sincere at this moment. Never in their life would they have dared to be what they are here. Their hands are shaking, tears are running on their cheeks. (Fonds Abel Gance, Scénario Capitaine Fracasse Version 4 106, Version 5 128)

Gance thus places truth at the heart of theatricality and artificiality – turning the performance scene into an allegory of the role of theatre in his film. By revealing how the actors find their true selves onstage, Gance mirrors the way in which film reaches its filmic nature through its representation of theatre. To take up Gance’s own words, the added artificiality that embedded theatre gives film allows it to “dare to be sincere” – sincere about its illusionistic nature, sincere about its links to theatre, and about the ways in which it represents and recreates them in its self-legitimizing endeavor.
Fig. 4. Sigognac and Pierre open the door to Matamore.
Fig. 5. Sigognac’s stage entrance as Matamore.
The Road to Film’s Aristocracy

The performance scene, interrupted by the police sent by Vallombreuse, does not find its resolution onstage, but off, in the film itself. As such, the film’s resolution clinches the continuity between theatre and film that Gance establishes throughout his film, and makes visible by the recurring close-up shot of a slowly advancing chariot wheel on a country road. The shot opens the films, punctuates it, and leads it to its end, coupled to a song whose rhythm, assonances, and repetitive lyrics ("Avec l'horizon pour décor,/Tourne la roue, oui tourne encore,""Taking the horizon as set,/ The wheel is turning, yes turning round and round") mimic the wheel's circular movement. This audio-visual leitmotiv materializes the passage from the old theatrical chariots that bore travelling actors to the film reels bearing the images projected on the screen. The wheel and reel thus function as the symbol of the continuity between the two arts – while also subtly bridging the life conditions of seventeenth century itinerant theatre troupes and those of the French population forced on the road by the German invasion.

Further playing on the wheel motif, Gance brings his film full circle by closing it on a variation of its prologue, so that the epilogue closes the film both structurally, symbolically, and in its relationship to theatre. Like at the beginning of the film, a storm breaks out above Sigognac’s now-refurbished castle. Sigognac’s dejected "No, Pierre, life does not end like in the theatre" is immediately followed by three knocks, reminiscent of the three opening knocks, then three more, announcing the film's imminent end. Sigognac's parallel gesture of opening the door gives way to what seems to be Matamore's ghost, repeating verbatim the words of his predecessor; Sigognac instantly believes that he is being sent for by a messenger of Death.

42 It also references the silent movie which made Gance famous, La Roue (1923).
Had it stopped there the ending would have been strikingly similar to that of *The Seventh Seal*, in which all the characters are grouped in the Knight's castle during a storm, hear knocking at the door, and are suddenly faced with Death itself ready to take them away. However, Gance transforms this nightmarish vision into a paradisiacal one: the storm stops as suddenly as in *The Seventh Seal*, signifying, too, that "all is accomplished" – but this time for the better: Isabelle appears, floating amidst actors playing instruments and dancing. The macabre dance is transformed into a dance of life and happiness.

When Sigognac finally realizes that all this is "real," and that he is neither dead nor dreaming, Blazius and Pierre congratulate each other: "It's better than theatre!" It is better than theatre because it is "real life." But the staging of this epilogue is theatre, since Blazius and Pierre staged it so that it be better than life itself – which, as Sigognac was just saying, does not end as well as it sometimes does in plays. Without leaving the audience time to ponder the implications of these two lines, Gance closes the film on yet a third line, this time delivered by Zerbine: "Between theatre and life, I have made my choice." In the film all the characters compare theatre and life and eventually chose between the two; the actors take up their travels while Sigognac and Isabelle give up the theatre and settle in their castle. This line, however, remains somewhat cryptic. Are actors condemned to live onstage only? Are aristocrats condemned to live "for real" what actors perform onstage? And what about the audience? Is there a real choice to be made between theatre and life – or is that choice itself part of the illusion that theatre, and film, debunk?

In the Baroque model informing Corneille's early plays, the empirical world, as *theatrum mundi*, "reflects the mirror game of true theatre. And true theatre with its false bottom, either betraying reality as illusion or illusion as reality, becomes itself a specific mimesis of the empirical world" (Schmeling 19). By Corneille's time the religious, social, and

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43 The mute girl's only line in Bergman's film, which leads right into the Dance of Death.
political function of plays within plays had been clearly defined: metatheatricality was to "reflect the human condition – that is, a man acting under the gaze of God or acting in a politically hierarchic society" (Schmeling 21). And it is precisely the position of theatre within this political and social hierarchy that Corneille defends in Alcandre's final praise of theatre, "this noble trade" (V.5, 1635; 214), which does not appear in the film:

ALCANDRE. [...] the stage today

Is prized so highly it is idolized.
What in your day was looked upon with scorn
Today is loved by all the men of taste:
A Paris talking-point, joy of provincial towns,
The diversion which our princes most enjoy,
The people's favorite and the lords' delight
(V.6, 1769-1775; Corneille & Muir 118)

In the wake of Gougenot's and Scudéry's attempts to defend actors in their plays, Corneille rebukes, with Alcandre's final lines, the social stigma attached to theatre, and the contempt its practitioners are met with on all levels of society. Theatre, greatly admired by the King itself, has become an officially protected art – hence both socially and financially worthy. Indeed, Corneille praises theatre’s capacity to entertain commoners and aristocrats alike. Beyond its announced comical effect, then, Corneille reveals his metatheatrical device to be the principal weapon with which he undermines social illusions through theatrical ones.

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44 ALCANDRE. [...] A présent le théâtre
Est en un point si haut que chacun l'idolâtre,
Et ce que votre temps voyait avec mépris
Est aujourd'hui l'amour de tous les bons esprits,
L'entretien de Paris, le souhait des provinces,
Le divertissement le plus doux de nos princes,
Les délices du peuple, et le plaisir des grands; (V.5, 1645-1651; Corneille 214)

45 Cf. La comédie des comédiens (1631-1632) by Gougenot, and La comédie des comédiens (1632/1634) by Georges de Scudéry, both of which closely precede the first performance of L’illusion comique.
Gance takes up the same weapon towards similar ends – transposed to film. By representing theatre in general and Corneille’s play in particular Gance hints at the social stigma that plagued cinema in its early days. Early French film audiences were primarily members of the working class and cinema was shunned, in France like elsewhere, by critics and higher-class audiences for whom it was nothing more than “the cheap show for cheap people” (in Baumann 23). Yet France was the first country in which film became seen as art; from the 1920s on “the audience concerned was the middle-class intellectual and cultural elites; they saw themselves as working for the defense of French cinema and of cinema as a cultural form” (Crisp, in Baumann 27). Like Corneille’s play for theatre, Gance’s film thus reflects the recent and still undergoing change of cinema’s social status. By taking up Corneille’s metatheatricality and transposing it to his film, it is theatre’s links to “high society” and its simultaneous capacity to please members of all social backgrounds that Gance wishes to impart to his film. The play-within-the-film becomes the device through which Gance establishes the continuity between theatre and film, and legitimizes the latter through the former.

The choice between theatre and life thus becomes a choice between which side of the stage one stands on – which side of the illusion one enjoys. On the one hand, film prolongs “ever after” theatre’s capacity to sublimate life, and far surpasses theatre in the number of spectators it can reach. From Cyrano to Zorro to Fracasse, Gance establishes a through-line that anchors cinema in popular literary and theatrical tradition and reveals film’s capacity to feed on and magnify theatrical spectacle. On the other hand, Gance’s embedding of a play in his film is a direct answer to the social distinction, brought about by the invention of cinema, between the stage as "an aristocratic institution which catered to the intellectual and cultural elite” and the movies “as the art 'of the people'” (Waller 78-79).
Indeed, by embedding a play that is itself built on embedded levels, Gance not only brings the stage at the heart of film but introduces complex levels of distancing that directly appeal to intellectuals’ artistic tastes. As Bourdieu notes in his introduction to *La distinction*, intellectuals could be said to believe in the representation – literature, theatre, painting – more than in the things represented, whereas the people chiefly expect representations and the conventions which govern them to allow them to believe ‘naively’ in the things represented. (Bourdieu & Nice 5)

Gance’s cinematic emulation of Corneille’s metatheatricality thus undermines intellectuals’ potential “disgust” towards an art form that was considered as relying on the “removal of the distance, in which freedom is asserted, between the representation and the thing represented” bringing about “alienation, the loss of the subject in the object, immediate submission to the immediate present under the enslaving violence of the ‘agreeable’” (Bourdieu & Nice 488).

*Capitaine Fracasse* is designed to please both the masses and the intellectuals, to appeal to the former’s taste for spectacle and to the latter’s taste for intricate levels of representation. The film’s representation of theatre thus becomes the principal tool with which it asserts its own artistic legitimacy, and its status as the form of entertainment capable of bridging the modern reality of film’s mass audiences and theatre’s affinities with the highest levels of society.
Chapter Three: Going from Theatre to Film in Carné’s *Les enfants du paradis*

*Les enfants du paradis* is time and again revered not only as Marcel Carné’s best film but also as "the greatest French motion picture ever made" (Lanzoni 128). In fact, Carné received in 1979 a special César to honor *Les enfants du paradis* as "the best French film in the history of the talking pictures" (McCann, in Powrie 51). This is all the more remarkable as the conditions in which the film was shot could be ranked the worst in French cinema history. Like for Gance, the project Carné submitted to the Censor after *Les visiteurs du soir* (1942) was rejected, which considerably limited the range of action of Carné and his screenwriter and collaborator Jacques Prévert for their "replacement" project *Les enfants du paradis*. The production team, the sets, and the actors greatly suffered from the material conditions of the Occupation, the lack of material, food, and time, as well as from the climate of fear and urgency pervading the country. Military threats, the Allies' invasion of Sicily, and the occupation of the entire French territory eventually led the Nice studios to close and the shooting to be interrupted. Started in August 1943, the film was not released before May 1945.  

None of this troubled political background is visible in the film, which Prévert sets in the allegedly carefree late 1820s and early 1830s Paris, more than a century before the film’s shooting. But these decades themselves were in fact marked by major political and artistic upheavals. The *Révolution de Juillet* in July 1830 led to the creation of a new constitutional monarchy, a first step towards democracy that put an end to several centuries of absolute monarchy in France. The new king, Louis-Philippe, no longer came from the Bourbon dynasty (the French ruling dynasty since Henri IV) but from the Orléans dynasty; he was a supporter of the French Revolution, and his reign cemented the change from the old white monarchic flag to the current blue, white and red one.

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46 Part of the delay was also intentional, as Carné wanted his film to be the first one released in free France.
While France was entering the realm of political modernity, so was its theatrical world. "Eagerly awaited by Parisian audiences, who saw the event as a showdown between romanticism and classicism and as an apotheosis of the battle between the moderns and the ancients that had been raging for at least two decades," the première of Hugo's *Hernani* (February 1830) crystallized theatrical trends and political oppositions (Gluck 354).\(^{47}\) Several nights and months of relentless battles ensued, after which the Moderns, proponents of Romantic drama led by Hugo (and Théophile Gautier, future author of *Le capitaine Fracasse*), finally defeated the Ancients, proponents of neo-classical forms.\(^{48}\) The clash of theatrical genres, which eventually led to the birth of modern French drama, was in fact, revelatory of two opposite cultural, ideological, and political worldviews:

On the one side was romantic drama and its ancestor, the melodrama, which embodied a distinctly populist and dynamic conception of modernity still deeply anchored within the ethos of the French Revolution; on the other side was, not classicism, but the comédie-Vaudeville, which represented a more respectable, bourgeois cultural ethic triumphantly claiming ground by the 1830s. (Gluck 359)

Prévert thus sets his script in a symbolically charged period of artistic and political revolutions paving the way for modernity and democracy. However, Prévert's script is silent on these issues. Divided into two "periods" taking place in 1827 and 1833, the film conveniently jumps over the political Revolution, as if it had never happened (Turk 245) – and indeed, nothing seems to have changed in Paris between the first and the second period.

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\(^{47}\) "Fearing that *Hernani* might become the occasion for political turbulence, the progovernment paper *La Quotidienne* warned, 'However great importance the performance of 'Hernani' may have for the republic of letters, the French monarchy cannot be concerned about it'" (Gluck 354).

\(^{48}\) "Writing eight years after the performance, Gautier remembered *Hernani* as a mock-heroic battlefield on which 'the champions of romanticism and the athletes of classicism clashed and fought with all the unparalleled fury and passionate ardor that only literary antagonism can provoke; each verse was taken and retaken in assault. One evening, it was the romanticists who lost a speech, the next, they recaptured it and the classicists, beaten, brought to another line a formidable artillery of hisses, bird calls, screeches, and the combat was re-engaged with even more spirit" (Gluck 355)."
Moreover, the spatial delineation which limits the film's set to the Boulevard du Temple and its popular theatres excludes the Comédie Française and the other "high-art" venues where the theatrical revolution was taking place. The film therefore seems to be as uninterested in the political, social, and artistic issues of the period it was set in as to the ones of the period it was shot in.

Carné and Prévert had little choice to do otherwise as far as the political situation was concerned. All films under the Occupation had to be apolitical, or at best very obliquely political. Situating the plot in a depoliticized period from the past and centering the film on artistic themes were among the best ways to make the Censor approve of the script and give the authorization to shoot the film. Prévert's decision to ignore the theatrical changes happening at the time is less easy to understand. To be sure, showing any kind of revolution, even artistic, resulting in a victory of "moderns," was not likely to be well received in the reactionary France of Vichy. Still, Prévert's systematic focus on almost all theatrical genres except Romantic and high drama cannot be solely justified by the political conditions under which he was writing. I argue that Prévert's representation of the period of the birth of modern French drama is not directed towards foreshadowing modern drama as much as towards what it led to some fifty years later, that is, the birth of cinema.

Indeed, what critics noticed first was the film's connections to both theatrical and cinematic traditions. In a Figaro article the film was presented as the heir of Les mystères de Paris, The Three Penny Opera and Les Visiteurs du soir (10/03/1945), while in an article from L'Aurore its language "that cuts as deep as a sharp sword" was hailed as the precursor of Mankiewicz' All about Eve and the Barefoot Contessa (01/12/1973) – both of which are

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49 For a complete list and analysis of the film's political references, see Turk's "Politics and Theatre in Les enfants du paradis" (Child of Paradise, chapter 11, 245-267).

50 Shakespeare’s Othello, represented in the film, did not fall in the category of high drama or tragedy in nineteenth-century France, but was often considered, like most of Shakespeare’s tragedies, as pertaining to melodrama.
centered on theatre and film. But critics also noted Prévert and Carné's deliberate attempt at blurring distinctions between theatre and film and at reverting back to the common features of these two arts, thereby creating a film about the relationship "between city and theatre, fictional and real characters, theatre and pantomime, silent and speaking cinema, theatre and cinema, actors and men, in short, art and life" (Sadoul, Les lettres françaises n°47, 17/03/1945).

In The Seventh Seal and in Capitaine Fracasse Bergman and Gance highlighted respectively theatre’s religious and social auras in an effort to recover them for their own movies and for film in general. In Les enfants du paradis Carné designs the embedded performances as materialization of film’s theatrical origins, thereby setting his film at the threshold of theatrical tradition and cinematic modernity. In Bergman's film both the actors and the number we see them perform are fictional; in Gance's film, a real play is performed by fictional actors; Carné's film, conversely, is based on the life of real actors and on historical productions of real plays. The film’s grounding in this historical background further brings out Carné’s goal to turn his film into the manifestation of the turning-point between theatre and film.
Theatricality and the appropriation of modern theatrical genres in *Les enfants du paradis*

As is mostly the case for films representing theatre, *Les enfants du paradis* is also a formally theatrical film, and presents itself as such from the very beginning. After the camera zooms in on a theatrical frame made of a stage and curtains, the title of the movie's first period, "Boulevard du Crime,"\(^{51}\) appears on the curtains at the end of the credits. As if it were a play, the film begins when the stage curtains rises, projecting us right into the cinematic world. Independently of any embedded theatrical performance, then, the film itself is set up as an embedded fictional event happening on the historical and theatrical stage of Paris' popular drama scene. The film thus opens by revealing its status as reflexive theatrical and cinematic performance.

However, unlike *The Seventh Seal* and *Capitaine Fracasse*, it is not modeled on the neo-classical theatrical codes. The film does not fall into the traditional theatrical five-act structure, nor does it follow the unity of time. It does follow the unity of space (Paris) and action (the four male characters' desire for Garance) but by doing so the film reaches the very opposite of what these unities are supposed to bring. The double focus on Garance and Paris triggers a series of temporal ellipses going against the unity of space: whenever Garance disappears from the Parisian scene, the film jumps ahead to her next appearance. Carné and Prévert thus seem to deliberately avoid and subvert neo-classical theatrical forms.

The film’s theatricality is to be found elsewhere, in its appropriation of the more recent theatrical forms it represents or builds upon – and by showing these theatrical forms’ link to early cinema, Carné establishes his film’s theatricality as the ultimate token of its cinematic and artistic worth.

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\(^{51}\) “Boulevard of Crime” was the nickname of the “Boulevard du Temple,” where all the popular theatres were located in Paris. The nickname refers to the crimes committed in the melodramas performed there (Turk 223).
Pantomime

The oldest genre and first performance that takes place in the film is Baptiste’s pantomime. Inspired by the mime Jean-Gaspard (known as Baptiste) Deburau (1796-1846), who resuscitated the art of pantomime in the 1830s and modernized the French Pierrot inherited from the Commedia dell'arte Pedrolino, Baptiste’s character was in fact the starting point of the film – the character that Jean-Louis Barrault talked about to Carné and Prévert when they first discussed the possibility of doing a film together. Jean-Louis Barrault himself launched a new rebirth and evolution of pantomime and of the Pierrot figure exactly one century after Deburau, thereby affecting "the course of French theatre in the mid-twentieth century as massively as Debureau was alleged to have done in the mid-nineteenth" (Turk 256-257).

The film is both faithful to the career of "the most perfect actor who ever lived" (Théophile Gautier, in Turk 256) and to the romantic legend it triggered. On the one hand, Debureau did perform at the Théâtre des Funambules (the "Tightrope Walkers" Theatre), did become famous overnight by replacing last minute the Pierrot of the theatre, and did bring "greater composure to the role" and expand "Pierrot's repertory" – even though it is probably another mime who embodied Pierrot in Cot d'Ordan's pantomime "Le Marrrrrrchand d'habits!" represented in the film (Turk 255). On the other, "Les enfants du paradis endeavors to perpetuate theatrical lore, not rectify history" – and Carné and Prévert, far from denouncing the embellishments that the Romantics, Nodier, Baudelaire, and Gautier himself, had brought on Debureau’s persona and artistic significance, "extolled the reputed dramatic power of the historical Debureau in order to showcase the genuine gifts of Jean-Louis Barrault" (Turk 256).

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52 This evolution of the art of pantomime was initially conducted with, and later against, Etienne Decroux, who plays Baptiste’s father in the film.
Indeed, the longest and only complete pantomime performance in the film is the only one not historically inspired; it is also the one in which Carné highlights pantomime’s relationship to film. Unjustly accused of having stolen her neighbor’s watch, Garance is on the verge of being taken away by the police. The policeman's ultimate call for a witness, however, is unexpectedly answered by a disincarnate "Moi!" ("Me!") coming from an invisible origin. In the next shot, the camera’s low-angle, unobtrusively manifesting the point of view of the voice, captures the crowd’s surprise and their instantaneous turning towards the camera. The next reverse high-angle shot links the voice to its body, that of Baptiste on the boards, as if the "Moi!" had been an intertitle from a silent film.

Instead of describing what he saw, however, Baptiste mimes it, embodying at once Garance, her neighbor, and the thief (Lacenaire) – thus revealing his theatrical talent. Carné alternates long and close-up shots of Baptiste onstage and of Garance and the audience members until Garance is finally free to go. A final alternation of shots shows Garance silently throwing a flower to Baptiste before leaving, and Baptiste toying with it in a medium shot as he watches her go. On the one hand, then, the scene obviously pays tribute to the art of pantomime, and to physical theatre. On the other, the way the scene is shot is clearly reminiscent of silent film techniques, and of the representation of theatre in silent films, such as in Griffith’s *A Drunkard’s Reformation* (in which the performance has as decisive an impact on the destiny of the spectator as it does here).

The subsequent pantomime performances, although more theatrically refined (they all take place indoors, with sets, costumes, and music, according to a pre-established script and choreography) all bear a distinct relationship to film. On the most obvious level, because they unfold without words, they constitute silent film interludes throughout the embedding talking film. But they always also reflect or foreshadow the situations that the characters find themselves in offstage – that is, in the film. The pantomime, watched by Montray, in which
Pierrot/Baptiste loses the Goddess/Garance to Arlequin/Frédérick immediately follows the scene when Baptiste runs off from Garance's room, leaving the door open for Frédérick – who himself loses Garance to Montray after the performance (Fig. 6). Similarly, Pierrot/Baptiste’s killing of the Jericho figure onstage in the last pantomime foreshadows Baptiste and Jericho’s final altercation (which was to have led to Jericho’s murder, and to the film’s third part).

In *Les enfants du paradis*, then, pantomimes constantly reasserts the presence of film’s silent origins while providing strong visual summaries of crucial plot situations. In this respect, they function as tableaux – the device which, for Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs, acted as the formal and historical link between theatre and film. Since the middle of the eighteenth century and following Lessing's *Laocoön*,

> painting was rescued from the charge of being mere opsis in so far as it was able, like drama, to imitate action, understood as a causal process with the beginning, middle, and end. [...] a shift was under way in the conception of drama at this time from a rhetorical one focused on the speeches of the actors to a spectacular one emphasizing what could be seen on the stage. The new conception of the picture was rapidly adapted to this new conception of drama.

(Brewster & Jacobs 11)

Although pantomimes are used as tableaux in the film, then, the genre that truly conjugates this new conception of picture and drama in the nineteenth-century is melodrama – the second genre represented in the film.
Fig. 6. Frédérick, Baptiste and Garance playing their offstage role onstage in a pantomime.
Melodrama

The most popular genre in early nineteenth-century France and Europe, melodrama spoke in a populist style that appealed to both the poorest and most uneducated classes as well as to the middle orders, providing them with a common vocabulary and common images for conceptualizing the nature of modern cultural experience. This experience was given shape through formulaic characters and plot structures that required little or no knowledge of the sophisticated conventions of the classic theater. (Gluck 360)

According to the 1817 anonymous tract "Traité du mélodrame" which spells out the characteristics of the genre, its stock characters are "a buffoon, a tyrant, an innocent and persecuted woman, a knight, and [...] some domesticated animals" (in Gluck 360). After all possible vicissitudes imaginable, last minute reversals, and improbable coincidences, melodramas all end with the tyrant's defeat and the lovers' marriage.

The genre is now regarded as "the essential prototype of all later forms of modern popular culture, including the novel" (Gluck 359) – but also of cinema. Indeed, melodramas' episodic plots "with wide latitude in the motivation and resolution situations" and their "reliance on strong or emphatic situations accompanied by highly spectacular staging" would eventually find their ways into early film script construction (Brewster & Jacobs 27). Just as melodrama were interspersed with spectacular tableaux which clinched the action at the end of each scene and act, the "playwriting technique, and later script construction for films, made use of a conception of plot as a series of situations" (Brewster & Jacobs 22) which "should take the form of pictures" or "tableaux" (Brewster & Jacobs 29). For Brewster and Jacobs, then, it was not late nineteenth- – early twentieth-century theatre that strove to be cinematic, but cinema which "strove to be theatrical, or to assimilate a particular theatrical tradition, that of pictorialism" (Brewster & Jacobs 214).
Brewster and Jacobs’ vision of the historical and formal links between theatre and early cinema is clearly visible in *Les enfants du paradis*. Carné highlights the various stages of Garance's life by designing key shots as tableaux inspired by the French nineteenth-century pictorial tradition, and Ingres in particular. When Baptiste and Garance come home drenched by the rain Baptiste shyly turns around while Garance takes off her clothes. When he turns back to face her, Garance is seated on her bed with the bed cover wrapped around her as if she came right out of one of Ingres' "Odalisques" paintings, especially "La grande Odalisque" (Turk 322). The length of the still shot befits Baptiste's stupefaction, but also literally transforms the image into a tableau (Fig. 7). Garance later tells the police that she poses for a painter called "Monsieur Ingres" (Turk 322). In the second part of the film, when her life with the Comte de Montray has almost turned her into an aristocrat, Garance's silhouette, seen while sitting in her box or at her mirror, still conjures up Ingres' paintings, but now his later portraits of high society women such as "Madame Inès Moitessier" and "Madame Inès Moitessier assise" (Turk 337).

Carné uses the same device in his representation of virtually all the film’s embedded theatrical performances. In addition to pantomime, he ties the device back to its historical origin by applying them to performances of melodramas. Of *L’auberge des Adrets*, the 1823 "melodrama in three acts with spectacle" by Antier, Saint-Amand and Paulyante, featuring the adventures of Robert Macaire, a criminal which became Frédérick Lemaître's stage alter ego, we effectively see nothing but tableaux. Marie, Macaire's wife, with her hands joined in prayer downstage, watched by Macaire and his accomplice half-hidden stage right; Macaire's confrontation with the policeman (Fig. 8); Marie mourning over the corpse of what should have been Macaire's body, but is, thanks to Macaire's parody, the policeman's body; and, eventually, Macaire's overdramatic death in the stalls.

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53 *L’auberge des Adrets* is the play that made the historical Frédérick Lemaître (1800-1876) famous, and contributed to making him the rebel romantic actor par excellence, "the greatest actor of this century, perhaps the most miraculous stage player of all times" (Victor Hugo, in Turk 259).
Classified and staged as melodrama in nineteenth-century France, Shakespeare’s *Othello*, also starring Frédérick Lemaître as Othello,⁵⁴ is reduced to two tableaux: Iago egging on Othello to strangle Desdemona (IV.1, 195-207), in front of a painted backdrop representing a Venetian-inspired castle tower and arcades (Fig. 9); and Othello strangling Desdemona in a lavish four-poster bed and gothic room (V.2, 51-55, 87) (Fig. 10). The curtain that falls immediately after the murder further brings out the tableau as striking visual summary of the play – to the expense of the end of Shakespeare’s play, frequently dispensed with or altered in nineteenth-century stagings. Carné’s use of tableaux, the salient formal feature of melodrama, as the unifying theatrical device for his film is thus revelatory of his agenda to build his film’s theatricality out of the theatrical forms that influenced early cinema.

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⁵⁴ For Théophile Gautier, “… Frédérick is truly the world’s greatest actor… a truly Shakespearean figure, as great, simple, and multiform as nature herself” (in Turk 259). Othello, however, is one of the few Shakespearean roles that the historical Frédérick Lemaître never played.
Fig. 7. Garance as an Ingres Odalisque.
Fig. 8. One of the tableaux from L’auberge des Adrets: Frédérick Lemaître as Robert Macaire with the Policeman. Roger Forster, ©ADAGP, Paris 2011.
Fig. 9. Othello’s first tableau: Frédérick Lemaître as Othello with Iago. Roger Forster, ©ADAGP, Paris 2011.
Fig. 10. Othello’s second tableau: Frédérick Lemaître as Othello killing Desdemona.
**Vaudeville**

After pantomime and melodrama, the third theatrical genre on which the film feeds, albeit slightly differently than the first two, is the comédie-vaudeville, thanks to the third historically-inspired character Pierre-François Lacenaire (1800-1836). A crook and criminal who became the talk of the town after writing a volume of memoirs and poetry in prison before his execution, Lacenaire never wrote any plays. In the film, however, Prévert has him work on a vaudeville entitled "La mauvaise conduite" ("The Bad Behavior") and rant against melodramas "in which people kill each other without hurting each other."

By the 1840s, "not only was the melodrama aesthetically discredited but it also became morally suspect as well" – and the genre which replaced it was none other than vaudeville, "unambiguously identified with the newly rich and increasingly respectable commercial middle classes":

The plots of the comédie-Vaudeville were constructed to appeal to such audiences. They were characterized by close fidelity to contemporary life, by an ethic of prudence and pragmatism, and above all by a kind of moral Puritanism that was becoming a dominant feature of bourgeois life. The Vaudeville succeeded in being relevant, entertaining, and morally uplifting at the same time. (Gluck 362)

In an interesting twist, Frédérick the actor is cast in the defense of morally questionable melodrama, while Lacenaire the crook takes the side of the morally upright vaudeville that succeeded it.⁵⁵

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⁵⁵ If both genres (and characters) have equal claims to modernity, being both realistic, far from traditional comedic forms, centered on contemporary events, and appealing to the individualistic sensibility, their vision of modernity was radically different: "The melodrama identified the modern with dynamic change and an eschatological politics; the Vaudeville, with stability and middle-class values. The melodrama defined the innermost truths of individuality in terms of passion, emotional and physical excess, and the struggle against injustice; the Vaudeville saw the exemplary modern self in terms of moderation, common sense, and conformity to social norms. The heroes of the melodrama were placed in an allegorical universe of historical adversity and were engaged in a cosmic battle between the forces of good and evil; the characters of the comédie-Vaudeville
Not a single word of Lacenaire’s play is read or performed during the film; its title, however, is highly programmatic: it is Lacenaire's bad behavior and will to hurt the inaccessible Garance which plunge the movie headlong into (melodrama. Lacenaire is never seen working on his play, but Garance comments on the constant theatricality of his words: "You speak all the time, it’s like the theatre. It’s entertaining and it’s restful." Lacenaire’s later summary of the plot of his play can be applied word for word to the film itself. Speaking to Frédérick, he describes his play as the story of two people who love each other, lose one another, find each other again, and lose one another again – the exact account of what happens to Garance and Baptiste. The reason why Lacenaire's play is never performed on stage is because it is actually being performed as the film itself – as if Les enfants du paradis were a film adaptation of its embedded play La mauvaise conduite.

Indeed, the parallel between Lacenaire's vaudeville and the film, at first only hinted at, culminates in the scathing exchange between Frédérick, still dressed up as Othello, the Comte de Montray, and Lacenaire himself, after Frédérick's performance of Othello. Upon being asked whether the play he is writing is a tragedy, Lacenaire answers: "No, a vaudeville, a farce, or a tragedy, why not, if you like. All these are the same. There is no difference, or such a small one... Rest assured, gentlemen, it [the play] will be performed; indeed, it is already being performed" – and has been since the beginning of the movie.

Lacenaire then easily fends off Montray's attempt to throw him out by a coup de théâtre: "I assure you, sir, that you would be wrong in trying to humiliate me. You could not succeed in it anyway. I am not a vaudeville character! Whereas you are one. And I'll prove it" upon which he draws the window curtain, theatrically revealing Garance and Baptiste kissing (Fig. 11). Unlike in Othello, in which such a revelation never occurs because the proof of

functioned in realistically conceived drawing rooms and country estates and were concerned with the daily conflicts of social life" (Gluck 364).
Desdemona’s unfaithfulness does not exist, Carné creates in the film a variation on the play they have all just been watching on stage:

As Lacenaire gleefully draws the curtain and exposes Montray as a cuckold, he thereby provides the "ocular proof" (III.iii.357) so crucial to Shakespeare’s plot. In a manner that reinforces the dramatic coup Lacenaire has just executed, Prévert substitutes the curtain for the handkerchief in order to underscore the theatricality of Lacenaire’s gesture. Ever aware of the structure and technique of the drama he, as an erstwhile "Public Writer" composes, Lacenaire precedes his physical annihilation of Montray with a theatrical one.

(Ganim 59)

Lacenaire's theatrical gesture could have been part of a comédie-vaudeville in which the villain would reveal to the cuckold husband his unfaithful wife; it could also have been part of a melodrama, or a pantomime. But what matters here is less the genre than the medium, and Carné’s underlying, through Lacenaire, the theatricality of all the characters’ destiny.

Indeed, the Comte de Montray answers to this theatrical gesture by another one: he challenges Frédérick to a duel. As I have shown in the previous chapter, duels were typically aristocratic performances; they became accessible to a wider part of the population, including actors, in the nineteenth century. Earlier in the film Frédérick actually fights in a duel against one of the authors of L’auberge des Adrets. Here, however, Montray’s challenge becomes almost comical as it is not directed against Baptiste, Garance’s actual lover, but against Frédérick, who has virtually nothing to do with the situation at that point. But the duel never takes place; Lacenaire, too meticulous a playwright to let chance play its part, kills Montray the next morning – and concludes by telling his frightened accomplice Avril: "My poor Avril, the play is over. You can go now." Lacenaire's play is over, and so is the film.
Fig. 11. Lacenaire’s coup de théâtre. Roger Forster, ©ADAGP, Paris 2011.
From the embedded theatrical genres to the genre of the embedding film

Less than to a specific genre, then, it is to the accumulation and blending of the embedded theatrical genres that Carné ascribes his film’s theatricality. If on the one hand Carné attaches each character to a specific theatrical genre, on the other he systematically blurs these distinctions by having characters act in plays which are outside their genre (when, for example, Frédérick and Garance act in Baptiste's pantomime) or by transforming a genre into something it is not (when Pierrot kills the peddler figure in the midst of a comic and romantic pantomime, or when Macaire makes the audience roar with laughter instead of shudder with fear). Like in the case of *L’illusion comique*, the accumulation and merging of embedded genres and performances confuses the genre of the film. The multiple possibilities Lacenaire offers to describe the genre of his play are, in fact, relevant to the film itself. Is *Les enfants du paradis* a tragedy? A comedy? A melodrama? A vaudeville? A tragicomedy? A dark farce? It is none of these, and all at the same time.

It is certainly not a pantomime, and yet Garance's presence in the movie follows exactly the *Funambules* director's definition of pantomime as a succession of apparitions and disappearances. It is not a Greek tragedy, and yet Fil-de-soie, the falsely blind beggar, becomes an ironic reincarnation of Sophocles' Tiresias (Turk 313), while Montray's jealousy and social pride do constitute a kind of hubris, accordingly checked by his being stabbed in a bathtub in a re-enactment of Agamemnon's mythical murder (reinforced by his wearing a oriental, Greek-looking toga). It is not a classical French tragedy either, and yet it follows some of its rules as we do not see Montray's murder, the only crime committed "for real" in the film. Instead Carné evokes it through the soundtrack (the Count's last breath, the noise of his body falling in the water) and the emotions reflected on Avril's face. In a last play on Montray's name (a homonym of the verb *montrer*, to show), Carné hides his death, binding himself to the classical theatrical rule that no violent action should be shown on stage, but
only be reported. And the film is no more an existential drama than it is a tragedy; yet like *Waiting for Godot*, it "begins virtually in medias res, has an undepicted middle, and ends inconclusively" (Turk 232), and its characters are constantly aware, as Clov in *Endgame*, that "something is taking its course" (Beckett, *Endgame* 13).

*Les enfants du paradis* cannot be reduced to a single theatrical genre precisely because, as a film, it mixes them all at once. Carné is thus less interested in these genres for themselves than for their influence on film. This is already visible in the very first performance represented onscreen, in which Garance, in the street fair booth the "Well of Truth," sits naked in a revolving bathtub with water up to her shoulders, holding a mirror and watching herself. Unsurprisingly, the audience that comes in to watch is entirely male, and is comprised of four spectators, foreshadowing the four characters fighting for Garance’s love in the film. The black room, the mirror, and the peepshow dimension of the performance establish, from the very outset, the link between theatre and film, and provide the angle with which to read all the subsequent performances.

Indeed, just as Garance’s performance precedes and introduces those of her admirers, Garance herself, the entirely fictional character fabricated by Carné and Prévert, is the one through whom we meet the historically inspired characters of Baptiste, Frédérick, and Lacenaire. As the film unfolds, she makes the three characters become who they are, and accomplish their destiny. A figure of the "real" woman, her role becomes "to precipitate the destiny of those who come near her. At her contact, each becomes who he is, for better or for worse: the actor acts, the assassin assassinates, the lover loves" (*La Croix*, 14/01/1974). However, inasmuch as the three historical characters are linked to theatrical genres, Garance’s role is also that of historical catalyst. By making the characters become who they
are, Garance metaphorically helps these theatrical genres mature into the art form they informed, film.\textsuperscript{56}

Indeed, the order in which the characters appear is telling of Carné’s symbolical representation of the birth of cinema. Following Garance we move seamlessly from melodrama (Frédérick) to the vaudeville (Lacenaire) to pantomime/silent films (Bapiste). What Carné stages in the film's opening sequences, then, is a condensed teleological version of theatre's history culminating in the invention of silent cinema. The length of the film therefore becomes the metaphorical passing, "in real time," from theatre to film – Les enfants du paradis, as a talking picture, becoming the last link in the chain, and the embodiment of film’s newest form.

\textsuperscript{56} Garance’s role also functions on the political level: as Turk points out, Garance can also be read as the symbol of France, not least because their names rhyme (Turk 246). However, Turk himself acknowledges the limitations of this reading, especially regarding the opposite symbolic dimension of the Conte de Montray which cannot be equated to the Nazis (Turk 247). However, Garance’s final choice for Montray over Baptiste comes across as Carné and Prévert’s darkest expression of France’s political choices at the time when they were writing and shooting the film.
Theatre and film from tradition to modernity

Carné’s representation of nineteenth-century theatre endows *Les enfants du paradis* with a theatricality geared towards film. In addition to such theatrical techniques as the tableau that highlight film’s theatrical roots, Carné also uses specifically cinematic techniques to underscore the cinematic destiny of the genres he represents. One striking feature of the embedded performances in the film is that, unlike most real theatrical performances, they are neither completed nor repeated.

The three staged pantomimes in which Baptiste acts are all interrupted.\(^{57}\) We see Garance performing "Naked Truth in the Well" for a few seconds, and the next time she appears onscreen she announces that the fairground booth has closed. We witness *L’auberge des Adrets* through one continually interrupted rehearsal and the equally disrupted final scene of the opening night's performance, after which the play is closed due to Frédérick's injury in the duel against one of the authors. And *Othello* is evoked by a multiplicity of discrete moments throughout the movie: Frédérick learning his lines in bed, discovering jealousy in Garance's box, and finally performing the role – of which only ten lines are spoken onscreen. Carné therefore represents theatre in a fundamentally incomplete, precarious, and elusive manner.

The accumulation of performances and their interruption foreground the cinematic device of the montage through which they are manifested. The film's "consistent aesthetic of incompleteness" (Turk 233) functions as a commentary on the fragmented nature of cinematic images and montage: bits and pieces of various performances, “stitched together,” to take up Corneille’s words, make a whole film.

Indeed, in *Les enfants du paradis* there is no world outside of theatre – the film is as large as the theatre it represents. In *The Seventh Seal* and in *Capitaine Fracasse* the world of

\(^{57}\) Baptiste's performance on the boards outside of the theatre is the only complete performance in the film – but, like the others, it is not repeated.
theatre is pitted against the outside world, the tension between actors and theatre-lovers on the one hand, and non-actors and those who disapprove on the other, shape the films’ depiction of the world’s religious, social, and artistic organization. In Carné's film, conversely, there is no external structure or higher power governing theatre and its position and role within society at large. All the characters, even smaller ones, are linked to the world of theatre – the rag-and-bone man Jéricho sells his goods to the theatres for props and costumes, Madame Hermine, the lodger, gladly opens her rooms on credit to actors – so that there is, effectively, no one and nothing outside the theatre.

And yet the film’s wholeness and unity, which it derives from theatre, is an illusion inasmuch as it excludes as many theatrical genres and venues as it includes. The embedded theatrical world is limited to the Boulevard theatre, the popular stages of melodramas, fair booths, and pantomimes – that is, the low theatrical half of nineteenth-century French theatre. Prévert’s and Carné’s exclusion signal their deliberate agenda to pay tribute to popular forms of art; and it is precisely popular dramatic forms that led to the invention of cinema, itself regarded as a popular art as opposed to high drama. Indeed, the only virtue that theatre purists recognized to film was purging theatre of its lower forms such as vaudeville, spectacle, and melodrama (Waller 51). By manifesting the continuity between popular theatrical forms and cinema, Carné undermines the opposition between theatre as high art and cinema as low one – thereby reinforcing film’s claim to artistic legitimacy.

This claim is all the stronger as Carné delineates the popular theatrical world encompassed in his film with two traditional theatrical figures, Pierrot and Othello. In the tradition of the Commedia dell'Arte Pierrot's pale face and muteness contrasts with the boisterous multicolored Harlequin; in Shakespeare's play Othello's dark and fiery figure clashes with the innocent white Desdemona. Harlequin and Desdemona only make a fleeting
apparition onstage, so that, in keeping with Carné’s play on fragmentation, the film is structured on the opposition between Pierrot and Othello.

On the one side, then, is the Italian tradition, that of improvisation, of comedy, of travelling comedians, of music and dance on boards. The French version of its main figure is the white-clad and white-skinned Pierrot, whose dreaminess, delicacy, shyness, innocence, clumsiness, and purity make him both a poetical and a comical figure. On the other side is the English Elizabethan theatrical tradition, embodied by the complex, jealous, strong, soldiery, and black-skinned Othello, Pierrot's exact opposite. For Montray and his friends, Shakespeare, guilty of using common language, evoking everyday objects (such as Desdemona’s handkerchief), and disrespecting the three classical unities (Forbes 44), creates, in Othello, a "narrow-minded and blood-thirsty brute" representative of his "bestial and frenzied" ("forcené") theatre.

Opposed by the theatrical tradition they come from and the color of their skin and costume, Pierrot and Othello mark the extreme boundaries of the theatrical sub-world circumscribed by the film.58 They also define the types of audiences that attend the performances. On the one hand, the Comte de Montray, who, like the Marquis des Bruyères and the Duc de Vallombreuse in Capitaine Fracasse, both despises low theatrical forms and is titillated by its actresses on- and offstage. As his name indicates, theatre, for him, is the place to be seen, and to show off. On the other hand, the children of paradise, the anonymous, boisterous, low-class spectators alternatively booing and cheering as they put performances on trial from the "paradise," the highest and cheapest category of seats in the theatre (Fig. 12).59


59 In one of the early performances, a spectator sitting in the orchestra yells to the audience of the paradise: "Shut up, up there, we can’t hear the pantomime!" ("Vos gueules, là haut, on n’entend plus la pantomime!").
In the non-democratic France of the 1830s, the "paradise" was the only place where the opinions of the lower classes were ever taken into account and where their cultural decisions influenced "France’s theatrical patrimony" (Turk 251). And it is precisely these spectators – not the aristocrats like Montray and his friends, who belong in higher theatrical venues – who would make the "cultural decision" to desert theatres and fill movie-theatres. What they saw on stage they would soon be able to see more, and more cheaply, onscreen. In the film’s final scene, then, Carné foreshadows the passing between popular theatrical forms to the popular medium of cinema. Like Bergmand and Gance, Carné closes his film on a macabre dance – this time, a wild carnival in which all the characters meet an equally dire fate. The carnival opens with Lacenaire and Avril going to murder Montray. Lacenaire’s calm demeanor in the midst of the crowds and during the murder clinches his image as the Baudelairien dandy who, in his effort to set himself apart from others at all times, takes "pleasure in surprising people and a proud satisfaction in never being surprised" (Baudelaire 233).  

Baudelaire’s "flâneur" of modern cities feeds off of modern urban crowds and dives pleasurably "in the numerous, in the undulating, in movement, in the fleeing and infinite," in this "immense reservoir of electricity" (Baudelaire 212-213). Carné seems to both adopt the Baudelairian vision of the crowd and to darken it. Indeed, the crowd provides the background against which all the film’s character disappear one by one: Lacenaire is left waiting for the police and for his execution, having killed Montray. Baptiste is drowned in sounds and wild movements, forever separated from Garance, herself also swallowed by the crowd. And amidst all this, the complete absence of Frédérick goes unnoticed. The only ones who remain are those responsible for the disappearance of the characters, the spectators of the paradis dancing madly as black-masked Pierrots, in a combination of "the film’s two dominant

60 The original nickname of the historical Lacenaire, the "poet-assassin," soon became the "dandy-assassin," and finally the "dandy of crime."
theatrical motifs: the Harlequinade and Othello" (Ganim 63). The very spectators who had clapped for Baptiste now revel in "sadistic mockery of [his] demise" (Ganim 63).

In a preview of events to come the film closes on a vision of nineteenth-century popular theatre perishing at the hands of the very crowd that had brought it to ascendance. Carné's rendering of the crowd of hybrid black and white "Pierrothellos" overflowing the streets and relentlessly swallowing all the film's characters offers a symbolic vision of the destruction of popular theatre on which cinema was created. The closing sequence thus mirrors the film's opening: Carné and Prévert design it as a condensed metaphorical representation of the end of nineteenth-century theatre and early cinema. By doing so it is not only modern cinema, but also Les enfants du paradis itself, whose birth and origins they retrace. The end of the movie provides the metaphorical conditions for its beginning.

And so the curtain falls back on the Boulevard du Crime as it had risen at the beginning, the camera zooms out as it had zoomed in, and Carné and Prévert leave the audience to take stock of the unique blending of genres and media their film displays. In a 1986 article in Le Figaro Carné and Prévert are credited for having invented "a genre which had never been imagined," half Russian doll and half labyrinth: "theatre in cinema, cinema in theatre." Indeed, this might be the best definition of the film, and the key to the balance it achieves between tradition and modernity. Modernity, for Baudelaire, is "the transitory, the fugitive, the contingent" (Baudelaire 216) – which can be applied to the historical forms of popular drama, engulfed by cinema, and to the very aesthetic of film itself. In Les enfants du paradis Prévert and Carné enact film’s unique status between theatrical tradition and artistic modernity by following Baudelaire's recipe to reach modernity: to "make out, in the trend, the poetical aspect it can have within the historical, to draw the eternal from the transitory" (215).
Fig. 12. The children of paradise. Roger Forster, ©ADAGP, Paris 2011.
In the twentieth century, theatre's reflexivity, according to Manfred Schmeling, "is first a way of writing and presenting the history of theatre in a dramatic form" (Schmeling 99). Through the ensuing confrontation with theatrical conventions, theatrical self-reflexivity becomes, second, a way to "put into question our entire reality," and ask: "can our pluralist and disjointed world be represented?" (Schmeling 100).

Although the first part of this dissertation deals with plays embedded in films, Schmeling's ideas on metatheatricality can readily be applied to all three films: by representing theatrical performances in their films Bergman, Gance, and Carné fulfill the two functions that Schmeling ascribes to metatheatricality in plays. Theatre-within-theatre "constitutes a kind of literary history within the work itself," so that all metatheatrical plays emit a judgment "on a literary past in general and on the conditions of production and reception of the genre in particular" (Schmeling 8). Their "immanent hermeneutic function," moreover, allows them to "signal what belongs to a bygone tradition and to make the reader/spectator aware of an evolution" (Schmeling 8-9). The representation of theatre in The Seventh Seal, Capitaine Fracasse, and Les enfants du paradis similarly offers "a kind of theatrical history" geared towards the invention of the film and towards the latter appropriation of theatre’s artistic legitimacy.

The reflexive dimension the three directors create and play with highlights the continuity between theatre and cinema, so that the films reclaim for themselves the qualities they endowed on theatre by representing it. Film’s capacity to at once represent the stage, reveal backstage mechanisms, and live up to theatre’ spiritual, social, and artistic dimension fully legitimizes its claim to equal artistic worth than theatre.
Part II: Theatre and film behind the political scenes

The representation of pre-cinematic theatre allows directors to represent film history, or prehistory, metaphorically. But film directors hardly prove more direct when they represent theatrical events that are contemporary to film. The theoretical arguments, industrial rivalries, and aesthetic exchanges between the two arts that shaped the form and content of early cinematic production have not been dramatized in film. In fact, directors have avoided straightforward representations of the transition from theatre to film, and of theatre's artistic influence on the development of film, as much as they have neglected to reflect, in their films, on the way in which cinema has influenced the writing and staging of plays.

Instead of using theatre to bring the audience into the wings of cinema as a medium, quite a few film directors have used theatre to bring the audience into the wings of cinema as a political tool, and to explore political role of theatre and film. This tendency is not widespread and homogeneous enough to constitute a school specializing in the political representation of the stage onscreen. However, a distinct trend can be singled out among films representing theatre, a trend which transcends nationalities and periods, and in which the representation of theatre is set against the troubled background of a political dictatorship, especially against the two forms of totalitarian ideologies that came to prominence in the 1930s, fascism and communism.

Film directors' interest in these political movements seems all the more relevant as political authorities, especially in Germany, were quick to turn cinema's development to their advantage. The Nazis used cinema to shape and broadcast their propaganda; they oversaw the filming of all major political events, and the production of 1,094 feature films between 1933
and 1945 (Rentschler 7). Therein lays the true modernity of the Nazi regime, as Albert Speer explained in his final address at the Nuremberg trials:

Hitler's dictatorship differed in one fundamental point from all its predecessors in history. His was the first dictatorship in the present period of modern technical development, a dictatorship which made complete use of all technical means in a perfect manner for the domination of its own nation. Through technical devices like the radio and the loud-speaker, eighty million people were deprived of independent thought. It was thereby possible to subject them to the will of one man. (in Marrus 224-225)

Although both theatre and cinema industries, like all other industries, were faced with similar material difficulties, propaganda efforts, and censorship mechanisms under the Third Reich, cinema was ultimately more closely associated to the Nazi regime, for two reasons. First, films were always presented in conjunction with newsreels broadcasting propaganda images and official information about the status of the war, whereas theatrical performances were free from such political frames. Second, as the Nazis gradually took control of Europe, their cinematic production and the propaganda it relayed crossed borders much more easily than theatre. Mass reproduction technology made it easier and cheaper for films to travel and to reach mass audiences than plays. And if the talkies signaled the end of film as international art, the development of dubbing techniques partially made up for it by breaking the language barrier, rendering German films internationally available. Cinema was thus inevitably drawn into far greater alignment with the repressive ideology than theatre, which always retained an autonomous space.

But there is more to cinema's contribution to a repressive ideology than mere historical conjuncture. Theoreticians did not fail to point out, very early on, the limited freedom at play in the relationship between film and its audience. For Martin Esslin, in The
Field of Drama, the "only truly distinctive feature" that distinguishes live from recorded drama "is its ability to establish an immediate inter-action between performers and audience, a continuous feedback of reactions" (Esslin, Field of Drama 92). Theatre allows for a more direct, hence more democratic, relationship between spectators and actors who mutually adjust their actions and reactions to each other:

This phenomenon amounts to a continuous process of feedback between the performers and the audience: by reacting to the audience, the actors modify the audience's reaction and that modified reaction, in turn, is felt by the actors – and so on. (Esslin, Field of Drama 93)

The spectator, "presented with a predetermined, given space, the stage, [...] which constantly remains within the range of his focused and peripheral vision, [...] can look wherever he feels the focus of the action resides at any given moment" (Esslin, Field of Drama 94). Describing the theatrical event in cinematic terms, Esslin notes that "the spectator in live performance does what the camera does for him in the cinematic forms of drama: he creates a sequence of close-ups and long-shots, a freely chosen 'montage' of focused images" (Esslin, Field of Drama 94, emphasis mine). Although a theatre director does guide the audience's point of view through the staging, lights, costumes, music, etc., spectators have the choice to follow his guidance or not. And so, Esslin concludes, "the difference between the cinematic and the live dramatic media merely derives from the fact that the spectator is freer to compose his own 'editing' of the action" (Esslin, Field of Drama 95, emphasis mine).

To be sure, this freedom is strictly limited by the form, spatial layout, and conventions of each specific theatrical performance – but it remains greater in theatre than in film. Esslin completes his comparative analysis by describing a film director's process in theatrical terms:

The director of a film (abetted by the editor) tries to replicate the choices – where to look at any moment in the dramatic action – that an ideal spectator
would make; but, in addition, he has the power to compel the spectator to look at certain things and to restrict his ability to look at others, which he, as director, wants to conceal or withhold. (Esslin, *Field of Drama* 95)

Unlike a theatre director in a traditional performance setup, a film director can show to the film audience what theatre audiences cannot see, such as rehearsals or the backstage area; but the film audience remains entirely subjected to the director's choices. And because the film is recorded once and for all, the relationship between audience and performers is anything but reciprocal: the actors can affect their spectators but cannot be affected by them.

In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947) Horkheimer and Adorno radicalize this vision of cinema. Drawing on their firsthand experience of totalitarianism in Germany and mass culture in the United State they expose how films impose their reality on helpless audiences:

> The whole world is made to pass through the filter of the culture industry. The old experience of the movie-goer, who sees the world outside as an extension of the film he has just left (because the latter is intent upon reproducing the world of everyday perceptions), is now the producer's guideline. The more intensely and flawlessly his techniques duplicate empirical objects, the easier it is today for the illusion to prevail that the outside world is the straightforward continuation of that presented on the screen. This purpose has been furthered by mechanical reproduction since the lightning takeover by the sound film. [...] Real life is becoming indistinguishable from the movies. The sound film, far surpassing the theatre of illusion, leaves no room for imagination or reflection on the part of the audience, who is unable to respond within the structure of the film, yet deviate from its precise detail without the thread of the story; hence the film forces its victims to equate it directly with reality. (Horkheimer & Adorno 126)
Horkheimer and Adorno clearly link cinema's technical progress and its mastery of sound as one of the main factors for its "totalitarian" threat: by making films talk, the film industry seems to have deprived the audience of its voice. Not only does cinema as a medium effectively deprive spectators of their free will, but its production techniques, targeted for mass audiences, are strikingly similar to propaganda mechanisms:

Everybody must behave (as if spontaneously) in accordance with his previously determined and indexed level, and choose the category of mass product turned out for his type. Consumers appear as statistics on research, organization charts, and are divided by income groups into red, green and blue areas; the technique is that used for any type of propaganda. (Horkheimer & Adorno 123)

A full chapter of Andreas Huyssen’s *After the Great Divide* is devoted to this vision of the culture industry, its limitations, and the many criticisms it was met with, especially concerning cinema (“Adorno in Reverse”). In spite of the legitimate objections that have been formulated against it, however, Horkheimer and Adorno's theory remains exemplary of the ways in which film can be considered as standing much closer to an authoritative political model than to a democratic one, both formally and in terms of production.

In this light, film's collusion with totalitarian ideologies appears to be neither surprising nor haphazard. And since the collapse of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union did not lead to a similar collapse of film as art form or to any major structural change in the film industry, one can safely assume that cinema was not "deideologized" but merely switched to serving the winners' ideologies. These ideologies, politically democratic and subtler in their means, do not use film in such a systematic or programmatic way – yet in their submission to economical constraints, social data, and their underlying political vision, they are arguably as invasive as the totalitarian ones.
Such continuity in cinema's ideological use might explain why so few film directors openly deal with the industry's involvement in totalitarian regimes – and why some prefer to represent theatre. The goal of this chapter is to explore the motives and mechanisms behind directors' political representation of post-cinematic theatre, and how they function as answers to the accusation of cinema's ideological and political tendencies. To make these tendencies as clear as possible I focus on films set in the two totalitarian or authoritarian ideologies Germany experienced in the twentieth century: Nazism for Lubitsch's *To Be or Not To Be* (USA, 1942), Truffaut's *Le dernier métro* (France, 1980), and Szabó's *Mephisto* (Hungary, 1981); socialism for Dresen's *Stilles Land* (Germany, 1992) and Donnersmarck's *Das Leben der Anderen* (Germany, 2006).

These films come from widely different, chronological, geographical, political, and artistic contexts. What they share in common is their representation of theatre on the one hand, and Germany, or elements of German international politics, on the other. These double representations have a distancing effect, offering in each case a stand-in for a more proximate context: just as the films do not represent film itself, but rather theatre, none of them is set in the context they are shot in, but rather in Nazi-dominated Europe or Socialist Germany. This distancing effect allows the directors to examine their own context, both aesthetic and political, through the lens of an "other." This is not say that there is any equation of theatre with extremist regimes, but rather that there is a homologism of methodological gesture on both the artistic/formal level and the political/content one. Therefore I will concern myself not only with each film's formal and political representation, but also limn the negative representations that each representation implies, thereby outlining the mechanisms at work between embedded theatre, embedding film, and politics.
Chapter Four: Lubitsch's *To Be or Not to Be* (1942)

In *To Be or Not to Be* Ernst Lubitsch takes up and refines the strategy he had used with *Ninotchka* (1939) – make a comedy about a totalitarian country – and mixes it with elements from Chaplin's *The Great Dictator*. He replaces the USSR by the Nazi-invaded Poland, has the high-ranking government official confront actors, instead of members of the high-society, and inserts "true" and "false" Hitler figures. Like *Ninotchka*, *To Be or Not to Be* provides yet another brilliant example of the "Lubitsch touch" and of the director's use of humor in his depiction of personal and political relationships. Like *The Great Dictator*, it denounces Nazi figures, including Hitler, as histrionic.

Unlike these two films, however, *To Be or Not to Be* is built on a double representation: that of theatrical performances, and that of a Hollywood-designed Poland subjected to Hitler. With these two intertwined set of representations Lubitsch expresses his belief in the theatrical nature of Hitler's power, and designs a counterpropaganda film modeled on the Nazi propaganda it denounces. This leads Lubitsch to unveil, through the embedded performances and the Nazi/Polish setting, the political mechanisms at work in film in general, and in Hollywood in particular.
Theatrical, cinematic, and political background

Cinematic propaganda from Hollywood to Berlin

More than any other anterior regime, the Nazi regime relied on cinema to stage its propaganda manifestations to such an extent that Syberberg, in Hitler, a Film from Germany (1977), characterized the Third Reich as a "sustained cinematic event" (in Rentschler 1). The most emblematic film among this "cinematization" of reality was Leni Riefenstahl's documentary film The Triumph of the Will in which she "recorded" the 1934 Nazi Nuremberg rally, editing it into an easily distributable cinematic event. Riefenstahl's film became the model for the following yearly Nuremberg rallies, and the symbol of Nazi cinematic propaganda.

Apart from these documentary-type films, the cinema of the Third Reich answered authorities' guidelines for art as entertainment. Dominated by "generic productions," half of the Reich's cinematic output constituted comedies and musicals – the so-called "heitere" or "cheerful" films (Rentschler 7). Films were meant to divert people from the grim reality of their lives more than to serve as propaganda tools. As Rentschler puts it, they "emanated from a Ministry of Illusion, not a ministry of Fear," which oversaw studios more akin to "dream factories" than to "propaganda machines" (Rentschler 7-9).

However, these seemingly innocuous films also served a more devious aim. The escapism they provided was not the only reason why comedies were preferred by the Nazis. As Kenneth Burke points out, comedy "deals with man in society" while tragedy deals with "the cosmic man" (Burke 42). Through comedies the Nazis could better achieve their goal of subjugating each individual to society. Goebbels' "film policy sought to politicize film art in an unparalleled manner; he aimed to do nothing less than transform it into a discipline of distraction. German film would become a crucial means of dominating people from within, a vehicle to occupy psychic space, a medium of emotional remote control" (Rentschler 110).
The cinematic industry whose comedies were the most famous and whose audience's emotional control was the most effective was Hollywood. Officially, Goebbels banned the broadcasting of American films and looked down on German directors' admiration for "the professional craft, seemingly inexhaustible talent, and – all the more so since the coming of sound – technical prowess behind American movies" (Rentschler 103). But the one area in which Goebbels "believed German films could learn from their ideological enemy" was "cinema's ability to intoxicate mass audiences" (Rentschler 109). More than anything else, it was Hollywood's expertise at ideological manipulation of the masses that Goebbels sought to surpass:

The strength of American film lay in its undeniable physical immediacy and visceral appeal, its grand power to enchant and enrapture, its capacity for fostering viewer identification with sights and sounds made by someone else. It could sustain interest, gripping and engrossing spectators while granting them the illusion of comfort and freedom. The cinema offered escape in the form of compelling fantasies and worlds bigger than life. (Rentschler 109)

Goebbels was not the only one to be aware of film's totalitarian potential. Both Hollywood and the American federal authorities became increasingly conscious of film's influence on the shaping of the opinions of the masses. Directors' ideological exploitation of the medium made it necessary for authorities to increase the "regulation of the political content of films" (Rosenberg 214). Already in 1940-1941 – a decade before the McCarthy era – the congress started to investigate alleged political subversion in Hollywood, at a time when isolationism was the guiding political principle and anti-Semitism still very much tolerated. Pearl Harbor (December 1941) changed the setting entirely: "Virtually overnight, Hollywood was given a green light to transform itself for the American war effort" (Rosenberg 214). Hollywood's ideological manipulation changed content, not form, testifying
to the possible application of its method to any ideological discourse – including the very ideology it was now helping to fight against.

*Lubitsch, Shakespeare, and the Nazis*

Lubitsch's comic variation on Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, shot in Hollywood in 1941 and released in March 1942, clearly belongs to the Hollywood anti-Nazi propaganda trend.\(^6\) However, Lubitsch's personal situation made the film differ quite significantly from its counterparts. Because of Lubitsch's theatrical background – he acted in Max Reinhardt's company for seven years (Carringer 1) – and the attacks he was subjected to in Germany,\(^6\) the film has an intensely personal tone. But the film also stands out because of the genre and method Lubitsch used. A master of the comic genre encouraged by the Nazis, Lubitsch designed a counter-propaganda comedy that would undermine the propaganda at work in Nazi comedies and politics at large – as well as in Hollywood itself. As Steven Tifft puts it, "not only does the film's screwball activity periodically give way to moments of propagandist homage to the Polish resistance and the RAF but, more profoundly, its comic rhetoric [...] seems to have been conceived from the outset in terms of its vexing affinity to propaganda" (Tifft 5).

But why choose, as a setting for this counterpropaganda comedy, theatre? And why Shakespeare? Answering the latter question might help answering the former. In 1941, Shakespeare mattered because he expressed the wholeness and integrity of a borderless European consciousness, and simultaneously because he embodied Britain, which for a long time fought alone against Nazi Germany, and which

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61 Along with, amongst others, Fritz Lang's *Man Hunt* (1941), Hawks' *Sergeant York* (1941), Ervin Pichel's *The Man I Married* (1941), and Michael Curtiz' *Casablanca* (1942).

62 "A 'pet hate of Hitler's,' because of the ways in which he had flaunted his Jewishness in his early films, the Nazis stripped Lubitsch of his German citizenship in 1935. In Berlin train stations a poster of Lubitsch could be seen with the caption, 'The Archetypal Jew,' and he was specifically targeted in the 1940 hate film *The Eternal Jew /Der ewige Jude*" (Gemünden 61).
was virtually the one European country that still remained an unconquered and uncompromised land. (Rosenberg 213)

In the film Shakespeare stands "not only for the very essence of English culture and tradition but also [for] broadly shared humanistic concerns" (Gemünden 78). And last but not least, Shakespeare mattered because he had been appropriated by the Nazis.

The Nazis' appropriation of Shakespeare continued the German trend, or almost, for George Steiner, "lunacy," which originated in "the Enlightenment" (in Bonnell 5). In the late nineteenth century Shakespeare was praised for its "Germanic" and "Protestant" spirit, while Berlin was compared to Elizabethan London (Bonnell 6). On the eve of the First World War dramatists and theatre directors eagerly justified their continuing to program Shakespearean plays in their season:

No people, not even the English, have the same right to Shakespeare as that which the German people have won. Shakespeare's characters are a part of our world, his soul has become one with ours: even if he was born and buried in England, Germany is thus the country in which he is truly alive.

(Hauptmann, in Bonnell 65)

The poet who most splendidly expresses the spirit of these days is Shakespeare. He is no Englishman. It is no foreign indulgence when we perform him. It is national pride to present the dramatist whom we have won for ourselves, and to show now of all times that he belongs to us. (Ihering, in Bonnell 65)

During the Nazi era similar arguments were used to support renewed Shakespeare appropriations: "we recognize in Shakespeare the same racial fundamental Nordic element from which we have learned to derive the highest values of our own people" (Schlösser, in Bonnell 139). So that while, on the practical level, the Nazis relied on Shakespeare's plays to
"fill the gaps in their repertoires left by banned works with safe and reliable classics" (Bonnell 139), their theorists, like the writer Hermann Burte, updated the ideological grounds on which Shakespeare's presence in the German theatrical pantheon had been founded:

Shakespeare belongs as much to us as he does to the English; indeed we know him and perform his plays better than they do. And we boldly assert that as Germans of 1940 we in truth are closer to the spirit of the Elizabethan English and their genius William than the Englishmen of today, behind whose throne lurks and rules that Shylock whom Shakespeare recognized and rejected. (in Bonnell 141)

In fact, "Lubitsch's inspiration for mounting an anti-Hitler work in the form of a burlesque revisitation of Hamlet" (Tifft 5) might very well have originated in a meditation on propaganda led by Hitler himself in Mein Kampf: "When the nations on this planet fight for existence – when the question of destiny, 'to be or not to be,' cries out for a solution – then all considerations of humanitarianism or aesthetics crumble into nothingness" (in Tifft 1). Hitler's Hamlet-inspired vision of art as subservient to a country's political goals lurks in the background of the film, egging Lubitsch on to avenge Shakespeare's tainted purity by debunking the premises of Nazi propaganda.

And the core of the Nazi propaganda was none other than Hitler himself, who relied on his acting skills to hold his audience in his power. Hitler carefully rehearsed each move, expression, and mouth-opening gesture he made in public, painstakingly turning himself into a "fabricated public myth" whose strength was derived from its unflinching mechanism (Tifft 18-19). He "saw himself as a clever dissimulator who could 'fool people' into believing anything and who was, he said, 'the greatest actor in Europe'" (Waite, in Tifft 17). Hitler's acting skills were heightened by his resemblance to Charlie Chaplin's cinematic figure of the
little tramp, whose rising popularity on the screen in the twenties and thirties was paralleled by Hitler's rising popularity in Germany.\textsuperscript{63}

\textsuperscript{63} Feeling "authorized to parody someone who had parodied his figure of the little tramp" (Gemünden 66), Chaplin shot \textit{The Great Dictator} in 1939 as an "indignant attempt to repudiate the likeness," which led to "the rumored banning of that film by an even more furious Hitler" (Tifft 17).
Lubitsch’s theatrical counter-propaganda

_Gestapo_

In _To Be or Not to Be_ Lubitsch provides a systematic answer to Hitler's use of theatrical and cinematic form and content to serve his political ends. Much like Nazi Hollywood-inspired propaganda films, Lubitsch's film consciously recreates the outside reality. And like the Nazi-recreated reality, Lubitsch' filmic world is highly theatrical. Lubitsch loses no time in establishing the parallel between his world and Hitler's. The histrionic voice of the film's narrator opens the film by commenting on its first images featuring the odd presence of Hitler alone in the streets of Warsaw:

'Can it be true? It must be true, no doubt! The Man with the Little Mustache! Adolf Hitler! [...] Anyhow, how did he get here? What happened?' Within the context of the film, however, the question is more than political: 'how did Hitler get here, into a Hollywood comedy of manners?' Adroitly, Lubitsch manages to guarantee from the outset that the question of how Hitler got into his film is inextricably bound up with the question of how he got into Poland in September 1939 – more generally, how he contrived to occupy a position of such terrible power. (Tifft 13-14)

Without seeming to answer the voice's questions a flashback takes us to the Gestapo Headquarters in Berlin, where Hitler makes a second entrance. Greeted by a series of "Heil Hitler!" Hitler answers: "Heil myself!" Upon which Lubitsch cuts to the director springing from his seat and interrupting the rehearsal of the play that the film audience now realizes was what it was witnessing:

The gag suggests that Hitler did _not_ get here by speaking in his own voice, which would confuse and mortify his motives and actions. His use of the first person instigates a collapse of theatrical illusion and his persona at once [...].
Only by staging himself as a spectacle of something other than himself could
Hitler gain the power to extend his presence throughout Europe. (Tifft 14)

Lubitsch's method thus consists in unveiling the illusion created by his own film, and by
cinema in general: what the audience thought was the film – hence a "real" or documentary
recounting of Hitler's path from Berlin to Warsaw – is in fact a play, hence "not real."

However, for its director Dobosh the whole point of the invented embedded play
"Gestapo" is that it has to be a "realistic drama… a document of Nazi Germany."
Consequently, Dobosh systematically rejects the "non-real" elements from the play, from
Bronski's attempt at using the first person as an added comic touch, to his very impersonation
of Hitler, which Dobosh does not deem realistic enough:

DOBOSH [to the makeup designer, about Bronski]. It's not convincing. To me
he's just a man with a little moustache.

MAKEUP DESIGNER. But so is Hitler! [...] DOBOSH. That picture! That is what he should look like!

BRONSKI. But that picture was taken of me.

DOBOSH. Then the picture is wrong too. (Fig. 13)

Without a "real" Nazi yardstick against which to test the verisimilitude of his impersonation
Bronski goes out into the street and proves his point to the film spectators who indeed witness
the stupefied looks on the by-passers' faces – until a little girl comes and asks Bronski for his
autograph.

Lubitsch thus seamlessly brings us back to the beginning of the film, having, in fact,
answered the question of Hitler's presence in the streets of Warsaw. Hitler is

there – or anywhere else – only because, and as long as, the public submits its
credence to 'the man with the little mustache.' But he is also 'there' because a
comic actor wishes to vindicate his own powers of mimicry, having been
driven to the streets by those who believe it improper and infeasible to subject
Hitler to comic miming (even in the interests of resisting him [...]}. (Tifft 16)

Lubitsch's first move, then, consists in unveiling how any ideological propaganda can be
latched on to a cinematic illusion. Unlike in an actual theatre, onscreen representations of
theatre allows directors to hide the theatrical frame revealing that what is seen is theatre.
Lubitsch plays with film's capacity to turn an artificial theatre performance into an
“authentic” cinematic scene, and hints at film’s power to blend a fictional world with the
outside reality – the very power which Adorno and Horkheimer exposed. By blurring the off-
and onstage worlds he posits theatre as the common paradigm through which to understand
both the real and the invented characters represented in his film. If the film audience sees no
difference between a "false" onstage Hitler and a "real" offstage Hitler, it is because the actor
and Hitler are equally theatrical, and equally skilled actors.

Lubitsch's initial blurred alternation between onstage and offstage performances
underline how theatrical politics is. But Lubitsch also quickly exposes the way in which
theatre itself functions as a political instrument. On the morning of the opening performance
of "Gestapo," an agent of the foreign ministry interrupts the dress rehearsal and announces
that the play's performance has been forbidden by the Polish authorities:

MINISTERIAL AGENT. Sorry, we know the play has artistic value.

DOBOSH. It has much more than that...

MINISTERIAL AGENT. That's precisely why it can't open. It might offend
Hitler.

Dobosh's "much more" alludes to the very dimension of theatre which the dominant ideology
wishes to control, its political dimension.

The control mechanisms are shown to be successful: Lubitsch cuts immediately to the
theatre poster of the play on which a rectification placard has been stuck: "Change of
program. Tonight: *Hamlet."* The actors, yielding to the political power, replace a politically loaded contemporary play not only by a canonical play deemed politically harmless by the censor, but by a Nazi-favorite Shakespearean classic. After underlying the political and theatrical characters' theatricality, then, Lubitsch opposes "Gestapo" and *Hamlet* to expose the wideness of theatre's political range, and completes his equation between the world of theatre and that of politics.

Lubitsch's presentation of theatre and politics as two intertwined stages merely re-enacts the basic Nazi propaganda premise: that art and politics are one. Goebbels constantly defined his and Hitler's political mission as an artistic one: "We feel ourselves as more than politicians, but also as artistic individuals. I am even of the opinion that politics is the highest form of art, because sculptors shape stone [...] and poets shape words. The statesman, however, shapes the masses so that the masses emerge as a people" (in Gadberry 81). By presenting *Hamlet* as a play bearing the Nazi stamp of approval, Lubitsch highlights the urgency to reclaim Shakespeare, both on the theatrical and the political stage, onto the side of democracy and freedom.
Fig. 13. Dobosh pointing to the picture which Bronski’s Hitler should look like.
Hamlet and The Merchant of Venice

And so Lubitsch orchestrates a strategy to perpetuate the anti-Nazi political mission of "Gestapo" by transferring it onto another canonical, albeit controversial, Shakespearean play, The Merchant of Venice. While Hamlet officially replaces the forbidden "Gestapo" onstage, The Merchant of Venice becomes its informal understudy offstage. On the one hand Lubitsch inserts three onstage performance scenes of the Shakespearean play the Nazis appropriated the most. On the other he inserts three offstage performances of the Shakespearean play which gradually disappeared from German stages as the "Jewish question" intensified. It is as if Lubitsch set up the two plays as symbols of the opposing political and artistic forces between the Nazis and their opponents in 1941-1942 so as better to reclaim one through the other.

Lubitsch's tactic, however, seems paradoxically directed against his aim. He does not try to reclaim Hamlet by representing the play's universally recognized political and theatrical qualities. He does not allude to any particular critically-acclaimed American performance of Hamlet.\(^{64}\) In fact, the embedded performance comes across as much more traditional in its set and costume than John Barrymore’s, Arthur Hopkins’ and Robert Edmond Jones’s ground-breaking 1922 Hamlet production, featuring “a massive flight of stairs centre stage, beyond which rose a towering Gothic arch,” as well as wavering greenish light projected onto a cyclorama beyond the arch” for the ghost (Morrison, in Wells & Stanton 247). Lubitsch does not stage strikingly beautiful, elaborate, or innovative embedded performances of the play, nor does he represent the effective political lesson of the play-within-the-play to support the film's political goal (Fig. 14).

\(^{64}\) Such as Edwin Booth's hundred consecutive performances as Hamlet in New York's Winter Garden Theatre in 1864-65 (Morrison, in Wells & Stanton 241), John Barrymore’s hundred and one consecutive performances as Hamlet in 1922 (Morrison, in Wells & Stanton 247), John Gielgud’s 1936 Broadway production, or Maurice Evans’ performance in Hamlet’s first uncut Broadway production in 1938-1939 (Morrison, in Wells & Stanton 250).
Instead, Lubitsch shows about as much from the play as Hitler used in his book, and as the film title announces. The first performance we see of Hamlet will prove exactly identical to the two subsequent ones, and equally dreadful – the same bad acting, the same stale period costumes and sets, the same traditional staging. And, to top it all, Lubitsch famously turns Joseph Tura's/Hamlet's canonical line, "To be or not to be," into a signal which Maria Tura/Ophelia gives to her lover to go and meet her backstage – yet another feature of the performance that will be repeated. The three Hamlet performances are thus disrupted at their climax by a young man's noisy exit from the house, to Tura's growing dismay and jealousy.

If anything, then, Lubitsch and his characters treat Hamlet with the utmost flippancy. The first poster announcing the play features first "Joseph Tura" in huge letters then "and Maria Tura" in a smaller font, then "in Hamlet" in a still smaller font so that "by Shakespeare," in very small letter, is barely visible at the bottom of the poster. Instead of being served by the actors the play is reduced to serving its actors, Tura's bloated ego on the one hand, Maria's erotic adventures on the other. Lubitsch not only exposes the play's political compromise with the Nazis, but he effectively turns the epitome of Shakespearean tragedy into a vulgar farce. Indeed, the actor playing Tura, Jack Benny (1894-1974), was not a classical actor but a comedian and vaudevillian famous for his radio and television programs. It was his humor and sense of comic timing, not his tragic acting skills, which made him so popular from the thirties all the way into the sixties. Casting him as Tura was as paradoxical and unexpected as trying to reclaim Shakespeare by downplaying his most famous play.

Lubitsch balances his irreverent attitude towards Hamlet, however, by the seriousness with which he represents The Merchant of Venice, as if he were deliberately trying to invert the Nazis' attitude towards the respective plays. This is visible in the way Lubitsch introduces
the first "performance" of The Merchant of Venice. At the beginning of the film the shot of the poster announcing the Teatr Polski's performance of Hamlet misleads the audience into expecting excerpts from Hamlet onstage. Instead, we only see trivial backstage activity: the actor playing Claudius hitting the chandelier with his crown, Tura/Hamlet ordering a salami sandwich and a beer, and the two actors Greenberg and Bronski dressed up as spear-bearers.

Greenberg's complaint about their lagging career leads him to recite Shylock's monologue up to the last but one sentence. He and Bronski then revert to complaining about being relegated to the role of spear-bearers, and, for Greenberg, about not being allowed to play Shylock. The "interdiction" hints at the anti-Semitic climate which gradually forbade theatres to program The Merchant of Venice even without an official directive – but in Lubitsch's comic depiction of the theatrical milieu in which Greenberg and Bronski evolve, the reason why the play is not performed is Tura's infatuation with his own acting in Hamlet.

The second performance of The Merchant of Venice is set off in advance by the second Hamlet performance, even more farcical than the first one. A middle shot of Tura as he is about to deliver the fatal "To be or not to be" sets up the contrasting reverse shot from the stage of Maria's lover Sobinski noisily leaving the house at the prearranged signal. As Tura barely recovers from the blow, a long shot taken from the back of the house brings in the same frame Tura stuck onstage as Hamlet and Sobinski on his way to see Maria, before a final middle shot of the outraged Tura dissolves into Sobinski arriving at Maria's dressing room door. Through montage Lubitsch contrasts the actor's simultaneous tragic status onstage and comic one offstage, but also foreshadows actors's powerlessness in the face of onstage events.

Indeed, it is not Maria's backstage romantic comedy which interrupts Hamlet, but the Nazis' bigger performance of their invasion and bombing of Warsaw. Sheltered in the cellar
of the theatre, the actors are reduced to being spectators of the Nazis, incapable of censoring those who censored them and to win back the show for themselves:

TURA. Well anyway we don't have to worry about the Nazi play anymore.

ACTOR PLAYING CLAUDIUS. No, the Nazis themselves are putting on a show now, and a much bigger one.

MARIA. There's no censor to stop them.

[Cut to shots of crumbling buildings, then Bronski and Greenberg walking among the ruins of Warsaw]

NARRATOR VOICE-OVER. Unhappy Poland. Attacked without a word of warning by a ruthless conqueror. Warsaw destroyed for the sake of destruction. The curtain had fallen on the Polish drama. A tragedy, with no relief in sight. There was a Nazi tank against every Polish hope. And the people were stunned and helpless.

[Bronski and Greenberg stop in front of the bombed theatre.]

GREENBERG. There was no censor to stop them.

By explicitly stating the theatrical nature of the Nazis' war performance and showing the destroyed theatre, Lubitsch exposes the physical displacement of the theatrical stage into the streets. The Nazis, by turning the world into the stage of their political tragedy, literally prevent actors from performing their theatrical tragedy. Lubitsch highlights what is at stake from then on in the film: the actors' use of Shakespeare to reclaim their stage becomes a metonymy of the Polish resistance's reclaiming of the Polish territory – just as Lubitsch's film and reclaim of Shakespeare for Hollywood becomes a metonymy for the United States' fight for democracy and freedom.

Following the political change, the second evocation of *The Merchant of Venice* is more tragic and politically loaded than the first one. Lubitsch designs it, in fact, as a "real
life" dramatic counterpoint to the initial performance that had unfolded in a comic theatrical setting. The monologue follows inserts of posters which do not announce Hamlet performances anymore but rather warn the population with "Verboten," "Internment in Concentration Camp," "Death Penalty," and "Shot on sight." As the camera zooms out of the close-up on Greenberg delivering the monologue to Bronski, Lubitsch reveals, this time, the "real" tragic setting around them. The spear props have become snow shovels, the backstage dressing-room, the streets of Warsaw – and the two actors' complaint about spear-bearing has transformed into a nostalgic longing. The scene clearly highlights "Lubitsch's linking of performativity in the film to real-life occasions: snow shoveling was a form of forced labor for Polish Jews…" (Gemünden 71-72). The references to The Merchant of Venice thus evoke the political realm like the Hamlet references evoked the theatrical one.

But Lubitsch does not separate theatre and politics here more than elsewhere: the scene conjures up Hamlet as much as the historical reality of Nazi-occupied Poland. Indeed, Bronski and Greenberg's darkly humorous dialogue and shoveling echo those of Hamlet's gravediggers (V.1). At this stage of the movie, and of the war, it might very well be their own grave that the two actors are digging, an association further brought out by Lubitsch's decision to cut Shylock's monologue again after its last but one phrase: "If you poison us, do we not die?" (III.1, 61-62). While the second performance of Hamlet, by replacing the forbidden performance of the play "Gestapo," attempts to conceal theatre's subservience to politics and censorship, the second evocation of The Merchant of Venice explicitly mirrors the worsening of the political situation.

Before the third performance of both Hamlet and The Merchant of Venice, however, the actors undergo serious offstage acting lessons. As the film unfolds, Lubitsch proceeds to orchestrate a series of mirroring transformations that turn theatrical spaces into political one, and vice versa. The actors transform the stage of the bombed theatre into the Gestapo
Headquarters, while the Nazis, Joseph, and Maria take turns in transforming the Gestapo headquarters into the stage of their own performance. Following these spatial transformations, Tura successively impersonates Gestapo Colonel Ehrhardt for the double-agent Siletsky at the Gestapo-like theatre, then Siletsky for Ehrhardt at the theatre-like Gestapo. In both cases, these transformations are made possible thanks to the props, costumes, and familiarity with the Nazi apparatus the theatre troupe gained by rehearsing "Gestapo."

But for all their training, the actors of the Teatr Polski turn out to be far worse actors than the Nazis. Siletsky, in particular, proves worthy of his Führer's talent. Not only does Siletsky see through Tura's bad impersonation of Ehrhardt, but he gives Tura an acting lesson by dying a true actor's death alone on stage, lit by a spotlight, collapsing in a dramatic gesture and using his last breath to utter a feeble "Heil Hitler" (Fig. 15). It is, in fact, so well acted, that, as Gilles Jacob notes, the audience expects him to stand up again and bow (Jacob 154).

Forced to embody the now dead Siletsky in front of the real Colonel Ehrhardt, Tura immediately applies Siletsky's acting lesson. He acts like the real Siletsky while, to his (and the audience’s) surprise, the real Ehrhardt turns out to act just the way Tura had portrayed him. But Tura, incapable of resisting the temptation to have his artistic talent praised, even by his opponent, probes Ehrhardt's opinion on the "great Polish actor Joseph Tura." The audience cannot but side with Colonel Ehrhardt when he answers Tura/Siletsky: "What he [Tura] did to Shakespeare we are now doing to Poland." With this funny and controversial line Lubitsch reminds the film spectators of the metonymical process at work (reclaiming Shakespeare, and the theatre, equals reclaiming the Polish territory), and questions the side they are on. The film spectators have witnessed Tura's stale and pompous embodiment of

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65 In his autobiography, Benny narrates how his father left the theatre as soon as he saw his son in a Nazi uniform doing the Hitler salute. For two weeks Benny’s father would not talk to his son. When Benny finally managed to explain to him that he was only role-playing in the film, his father agreed to see the film again – and it became his favorite Benny movie (Benny 151).
Hamlet twice already, and "our laughter confirms our tentative solidarity with the joker" (Tifft 8). At this point, the outcome seems to be in favor of the Nazis, who control the performance and have a better grasp on Shakespeare than the actors who are supposed to redeem Shakespeare, and Poland.

When the Nazis discover Siletsky's body, Ehrhardt stages a confrontation between the real dead Siletsky and the false living one to unmask the impostor. By that time, however, Tura's acting skills have finally taken over his ego, allowing him to turn the performance against its director. Unruffled by his mirror corpse, Tura shaves Siletsky's beard and replaces it with the extra false beard he had brought in his pocket:

Thus Tura's false beard, a flaw in his impersonation of the living Siletsky, now ensures his perfect mimicry of the dead one (and vice versa) – much as Bronski's false mustache had guaranteed his likeness to "the man with the little mustache," who was himself initially defined by the attenuated, fetishized effect of that intrinsically burlesque bit of facial hair. (Tifft 32)

By using yet another metonymy which locates the source of the Nazi power in theatrical props Lubitsch exposes the Nazis' Achilles heel. If the Nazis are actors, then the only way to defeat them is to find better actors who can put on a better show. By outplaying the Nazis, Tura proves that the Polish actors can rise to the challenge.

And so they do in the film's last sequence, a mirror of its beginning – the actors' final offstage piece of acting, on which their going back to onstage acting depends. Like the beginning of the film, the sequence is centered on the figure of Hitler. Remembering Lubitsch's initial trick, the film audience's instinct is to not give credence to the Hitler figure who has come to watch an operetta at the Teatr Polski. But Lubitsch tricks his audience again: this time, it is supposed to be the "real" Hitler. And in fact, it is: Hitler's last appearance in the film is a quote from Leni Riefenstahl's
now famous composition showing Hitler from the back with the Germans looking up to him from *Triumph of the Will* [...]. Apart from indicating Lubitsch's familiarity with Nazi propaganda the quote suggests that when you want to show the real Hitler you have to do it the way he has been immortalized by Riefenstahl's film. (Gemünden 66)

By inserting Riefenstahl's images into his film Lubitsch clinches the underlying thesis on which the film is built, that Hitler is an actor playing his own role – indeed, that Hitler is nothing but his theatrical persona.

And so, technically, Hitler could be replaced by someone with equally good acting skills. Bronski therefore gets to impersonate Hitler, surrounded this time by real Nazis who serve as immediate yardstick of Bronski's impersonation. Opposite him is Greenberg, playing Shylock to Hitler in a scene that seals the blending of "Gestapo" and The Merchant of Venice. The third offstage performance of Shylock's monologue becomes the scene of the true confrontation between the emblematic Nazi and the emblematic Jew, Germany and the United States, propaganda and art. Lubitsch's ultimate move to reclaim Shakespeare thus entails transforming the play from an expressive but passive political mirror into an active tool of political resistance.

The sequence marks the climax of Lubitsch's presentation of theatre as political art and of politics as theatrical art. As the theatre audience starts singing the German national anthem, Greenberg jumps out in front of Hitler's guards in the hall of the theatre. Bronski, who had previously slipped into Hitler's box, comes out of the box as Hitler, to whom Greenberg poignantly delivers Shylock's monologue:

Lubitsch now lets Greenberg conclude his monologue with the line he had held back in the earlier instances: "And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?" Significantly, "revenge" will be Greenberg's last word in the film,
and its delivery is accompanied by his first full close-up of the film, thus emphasizing a refusal of victimhood. Furthermore, this line is not included in the script and must be seen as a direct response to the changed political situation after the attack on Pearl Harbor, which occurred during the production of the film. (Gemünden 72)

The political message is clear. And for all its lack of verisimilitude, the actors' performance works: Hitler's troupes, and moments later, Ehrhardt himself, fall for the illusion. Thanks to Greenberg's Shylock, the actors escape under the nose of the real Nazis, and safely reach England.

Significantly, however, Greenberg is the only one who does not make it to England. His absence is not mentioned by any other member of the troupe, and therefore goes unremarked by the spectators; it is, however, telling of the film's political and theatrical resolution:

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\text{to have included him would have diminished the aura of ever-present danger against which the comedy of the film gains its peculiar force, and perpetuated a lie about the situation of the Jews. Greenberg's absence tells us that all the victories in his film have had their price, and that the enemy portrayed here is a real one. (Rosenberg 235)}
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Yet Shylock's monologue and "revenge" serve as Lubitsch's clear warning that Hitler will not have the last word over Shakespeare.

But Shylock's monologue and Bronski's Hitler also serve Lubitsch's ongoing counterpropaganda enterprise by allowing him to establish a link between embedded performances and embedding film. As Rosenberg notes, censorship applied on three levels in the film: the Teatr Polski cannot play "Gestapo," the anti-Nazi play; Greenberg is not allowed to play Shylock; and American filmmakers exert a self-censorship on their representation of
Jews, their life and experience in Europe, shying away from representing the war in Europe as a "Jewish struggle" (Rosenberg 214). In his effort to unmask propaganda – hence censorship – on both side of the Atlantic, Lubitsch circumvents these interdictions. Indeed, "these taboos are systematically violated in the film, albeit at a carefully controlled subplot level": by playing Shylock, Greenberg helps the Polski Theatre "carry off a real-life anti-Nazi play" with Polish resistance, which results in a "bold and profound use of a Jewish character as a pivotal figure in the story, precisely at a time when cinematic portrayal of Jews was a delicate and controversial matter" (Rosenberg 214).

The success of the combined offstage performances of The Merchant of Venice and "Gestapo" leads to the actors' final onstage performance of Hamlet. Exactly identical to the previous two, up to Maria's British lover replacing the Polish one and exiting the house on the now familiar cue, the third Hamlet performance does not register the political evolution whatsoever. In contrast to The Merchant of Venice whose role as political mirror and resistance tool is reinforced every time it is quoted, the Hamlet performances remain entirely impervious to the surrounding political situation.

The political situation is in fact the only variable factor in the three performances. The first Hamlet performance takes place in a still free and sovereign Poland; the second takes place in occupied Poland, and the third, in England. More than the play itself, it is the geographical evolution of its performances which become meaningful, on three levels. First, Poland was the country of origin of Jack Benny, born Benjamin Kubelski to a Jewish Polish immigrant. Casting Benny as Tura was therefore not as preposterous as it seemed, and adds on a serious biographical undertone to the play's farcical representation. Second, by closing the film on a representation of Hamlet in England, Lubitsch symbolizes the victory of having reclaimed Shakespeare and brought the Bard home. And third, the repeated Hamlet performances, no matter how bad they are, testify to the canonical play's resilience and
capacity to emerge unscathed from the Nazi appropriation. Not only does Hamlet come home, but Hamlet has the last line in the film – even if interrupted.

Indeed, the method which Lubitsch has the actors use, that is, outplay the Nazis at their own game by using theatre, is the very method which Hamlet uses himself to unmask Claudius. By not representing Hamlet's most obvious instance of play-within-the play Lubitsch highlights its role as model for his own play-within-the-film. With a pun on the recurring joke about Hitler as a piece of cheese, Lubitsch literally sets up a Shakespearean "Mousetrap" with which to catch the Nazis. Except that Lubitsch's trap ultimately works less by what it reveals than by the possibilities it opens. On their way to the airport to flee to England the actors hear a bomb of the Polish resistance, which their theatrical scheme has just saved. Through their performance the actors have debunked the Nazis' theatrical power; it is now up to the underground and the army to debunk the Nazis' military power.

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66 This is reminiscent of how Benny ended his acts with deliberately awful performances of canonical pieces for violin.
Fig. 14. Jack Benny as Hamlet.
Fig. 15. Siletsky’s theatrical death in Lubitsch’s *To Be or Not to Be* (Astoria Film (Roma); Métropole Film, Soci).
From theatrical to cinematic resistance

Lubitsch thus establishes a direct continuity between cultural and martial resistance. But cultural resistance, for Lubitsch works in two ways. On the one hand it entails, with and in the film, reclaiming plays and author, here the most emblematic Shakespeare, from the Nazi grasp. On the other, is refers to a resistance which is theatrical in means, but political in goals. Unlike Lubitsch's, the actors' multiple schemes are not instigated by their urge to defend theatre or culture, but by the pressing need to save the Polish underground and help the resistance.

What Lubitsch reveals, then, is that theatre actors and directors are the best equipped to trick the Nazis not because they have any right over Shakespeare or even because they have a better grasp of theatrical literature or performance, but because the Nazi regime is itself theatrical. To be sure, this vision testifies to the period in which Lubitsch shot his movie: in 1941 the Nazis were not considered to be the epitome of evil just yet. But it also testifies to Lubitsch's lucidity about the mechanisms on which Hitler built his power: it is precisely in answer to the Third Reich's unprecedented reliance on propaganda, hence on theatricality, that Lubitsch highlights the capacity to act as the main skill with which to fight the Nazis on their own ground.67

And so, as theatre becomes a metonymy for the larger political situation, it also becomes the metonymy for the embedding film. The formal and political distancing that Lubitsch operates with theatre and Poland brings out, by contrast, what is at stake in Hollywood and in America. By the end of the film, the Polish actors have outgrown the

67 This is precisely the reason why Lubitsch cast Benny as Tura, as Lubitsch himself said to Benny when Benny asked him why he cast a comedian and not an actor: "Jack, I tell you. In the first place, you are known as an entertainer and not as an actor. Consequently, if in this film you give a fine dramatic performance – I, Lubitsch, will get all the credit. That, Jack, is number one. Now I tell you number two. You think you are a comedian. You are not a comedian. You are not even a clown. You are fooling the public for thirty years. You are fooling even yourself. A clown – he is a performer what is doing funny things. A comedian – he is a performer what is saying funny things. But you, Jack, you are an actor, you are an actor playing the part of a comedian and this you are doing very well. But do not worry, I keep your secret to myself" (Lubitsch, in Benny 150).
masters of theatrical acting, and Lubitsch has debunked the Nazi propaganda by directing a better propaganda film than the Nazis themselves:

In To Be or Not to Be the theater stands in for the cinema; the film thereby self-reflexively questions the effectiveness of the actors' theatrical opposition to the Nazi occupation. Hamlet's decision to "act" through the theater, so to speak, is thus transported to both the narrative and the production of the film.

(Melehy 22)

As an expatriate German Jew in Hollywood, Lubitsch shoots a film responding to his homeland's political crisis which affects both his identity and his artistry. To the question "of what use are performance and imagination in the face of the reality of disaster?" Lubitsch's answer is "at once bold and simple: to continue doing what one does best and therefore to make a comedy out of the disaster" (Carringer 30).

Lubitsch's double distanciation, then, paves the way for the film's dramatic efficiency. As a metonymy for the film, the successful theatrical performances guarantee within the fiction the effectiveness of Lubitsch's film outside the fiction. As a metaphor for World War Two's political stage, the ultimately successfully resisting Poland foreshadows the Allies' victory. But Lubitsch's distanciation is also a reflexive mirroring. Inasmuch as it is directed against propaganda, To Be or Not to Be is directed against Hollywood, the source of all cinematic propaganda, as much as again the Nazis. Indeed, it is the German cinema of the Nazi era which relied "on classical Hollywood conventions" and copied and borrowed "American techniques and popular genres" (Rentschler 23) – not the other way round. Lubitsch denounces the American invention of these propaganda tools as much as he decries the Nazi implementation of such tools.

This is where the immutability of the Hamlet performances takes on yet another meaning. The performances' imperviousness to the political climate mirrors, in fact, the fate
of the cinematic industry, whose structures and functioning were unaffected by the opposite propaganda they served in Germany or in the United States. Like Hamlet, the cinematic industry was appropriated by the Nazis, and reclaimed by the winners – but emerged unscathed by the conflict and continued to serve the dominant ideology. To Be or Not to Be thus functions as a political and cinematic testament of its author: in it, Lubitsch exerts to the fullest various film techniques and unmasks their power over audiences, explicitly debunking the Nazis' power and implicitly condemning their now opponents for having helped, albeit unwittingly, their rise to power. As Lubitsch himself stated, "I had made up my mind to make a picture with no attempt to relieve anybody from anything at any time" (in Rosenberg 224).

And yet Lubitsch's radical project does not preclude laughter. With distanciation and mirroring comes humor, but humor which is not to be understood as a source of comic relief. "For Lubitsch, laughter was a matter of intense high seriousness. It was a weapon of war: an expression of the health of a society, and a vehicle of self-knowledge" (Rosenberg 223). By making the audience alternatively laugh at and with the actors, at and with the Nazis, "Lubitsch's elaborate comedy of disguise has slyly muddled the boundary between Nazi and non-Nazi, thus both liberating and unsettling audiences in the same stroke" (Rosenberg 230). In To Be or Not to Be Lubitsch voices his political beliefs by holding to the American audience, through theatre and Poland, a mirror of its own falling for Hollywood propaganda.
Chapter Five: Truffaut's *Le dernier métro*

Truffaut's *Le dernier métro* (1980) seems to have been modeled both on and against *To Be or Not to Be*. On the one hand, it takes up many features of Lubitsch's film. Both films follow a theatre troupe in a Nazi-occupied European capital. Both films start with a street scene and end with the representation of a play. Both embedded theatre troupes are led by a married couple, in which the wife (Maria and Marion) professes her love for her husband while having extramarital affairs. And, last but not least, both troupes struggle against censorship and are, even if to varying degrees, involved in political resistance against the Nazis.

On the other hand, while Lubitsch explicitly designs his film as a counterpropaganda comedy and as an active political tool, Truffaut explicitly designs his film as a defense of the artist's non-political commitment. In *Les films de ma vie*, which was released a few years before *Le dernier métro*, Truffaut lays out his vision of cinema-oriented cinema:

> When I was a critic, I thought that a successful film had simultaneously to express an idea of the world and an idea of cinema [...]. Today, I demand that a film express either the joy of making cinema or the agony of making cinema. I am not at all interested in anything in between; I am not interested in all those films that do not pulse. (Truffaut 6)

Truffaut's idea of a pulsating film entails that the film's mirroring of its director outweigh its mirroring of the world; that, in short, its universal and political dimensions be by-products of its personal and artistic dimension.

In her book *New Wave, New Novel, New Politics*, Lynn Higgins sums up Truffaut's political position: Truffaut "does not believe in political filmmaking, and he rejects engagement for reasons he claims are autobiographical" (Higgins 149). Truffaut manifests this position in his films by focusing them not on historical situations but on "how individuals
respond to an extraordinary situation" (Higgins 151). In light of which Truffaut's answer to the question why the historical background of the Occupation was not more clearly drawn out in *Le dernier métro* was predictably: "It is not the point of the film, I mostly want to outline the relationships of a certain number of characters in an exceptional ambiance. Since they are actors, they do not exactly experience this period like everyone else" (in Gillain 393).

The major difference, then, between *Le dernier métro* and *To Be or Not to Be* is that Lubitsch uses theatre as a background to deal with the political situation, while Truffaut uses the political situation as a background to deal with a theatrical situation. The difference in their approach can be traced back to, among others, the time and place where each film was made, and the biography and aesthetic world of both directors. But beyond the contextual difference Truffaut follows Lubitsch's double distanciation gesture: by representing theatre and Paris in 1942, it is also film and Paris in 1980 that Truffaut explores. Even as Truffaut advocates cultural resistance and multiplies theatrical and cinematic references to highlight the film's artistic rather than political realm, he ultimately echoes Lubitsch's representation of theatre as the ideal medium through which to foster political consciousness.
Le dernier métro mirror of Truffaut’s life, works, and cinematic tastes

Truffaut’s Le dernier métro is the second part of a trilogy which started with La nuit américaine (Day for Night, 1973), centered on cinema, and was supposed to be followed by a film on musical-hall that was never completed (Higgins 149). Here is how Truffaut presents Le dernier métro: "Its structure makes the film close to La nuit américaine. It unfolds behind the scenes of the world of actors, contains five or six roles of roughly the same importance. There are the classic unities of time, place, and action that are often used and liked in France. The general tone will come across as less casual than in La nuit américaine because the story takes place during the Occupation in 1942" (Archives Truffaut, texte d'entretien68).

Tailored on the pattern of La nuit américaine, the film follows the making of a play from first rehearsal to opening night and subsequent performances. The troupe's main goal throughout the film is to maintain their theatre open after its German Jewish director Lucas Steiner (Heinz Bennent) allegedly fled from France. In his absence, Lucas's wife Marion Steiner (Catherine Deneuve) takes on the direction of the theatre, hiring the famous actor Bernard Grangier (Gérard Depardieu) to act in the play whose staging will be carried on by the senior actor in the troupe, Jean-Loup Cottins (Jean Poiret). We soon find out, however, that Marion hides Lucas in the cellar of the theatre. As the film unfolds, the fate of the actors, their characters, and the French political situation become more and more intertwined – while still bearing Truffaut's personal stamp. In La nuit américaine Truffaut himself played the role of the film director; in Le dernier métro he is present through the character of Jacquot, son of the theatre's porter, who is the same age than Truffaut was during the Occupation.

Indeed, Le dernier métro can be read as a personal and artistic testament. Truffaut designs the main embedded play of his film as a series of references to his own cinematic career. While in the first treatment of the script the play was to be Strindberg's Miss Julie, as

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68 Parts of this interview were subsequently reproduced in "Le cinéma selon François Truffaut" edited by Anne Gillain.
early as the first version of the script Truffaut replaces it with "La disparue" ("The vanished lady"), presented as a nineteenth-century Norwegian play by Karen Bergen. In fact, no such playwright or play ever existed. But "La disparue" was the original title of Truffaut's 1978 movie La chambre verte (Higgings 241, note 17), and the play's last line is identical to the closing line of Truffaut's only previous collaboration with Catherine Deneuve, La sirène du Mississippi (1969).  

The represented embedded play, then, could be considered as a theatrical digest of Truffaut's cinematic career.

Truffaut adds another layer of intertextual echoes by weaving, into these personal references and the echoes of Lubitsch's To Be or Not to Be, references to Carné's Les enfants du paradis, to which he pays tribute in the very first scene of Le dernier métro (Higgins 155). At the beginning of Les enfants du paradis Carné frames Frédérick (Brasseur) flirting with Garance (Arletty) in front of the Théâtre des Funambules in a middle shot travelling to the left, and signifies Frédérick's (temporary) failure by having Garance exiting the frame to the left, leaving Frédérick alone in a close-up shot. Truffaut's film opens on a middle shot travelling to the right of a woman walking in the street towards the Théâtre Montmartre. She is soon caught up by Bernard who tries to flirt with her using the same technique than Frédérick, and whose failure is made similarly apparent when he finds himself alone in the frame in a close-up shot. As we later learn, the woman is the costume designer of the theatre where Bernard has just been hired, and her name, Arlette, is a direct homage to Arletty.

Truffaut's opening pastiche informs the rest of the film: like Carné, Truffaut links his characters through a complex web of unrequited loves and converging thwarted desires centered on Garance/Marion. And like in Carné's film, the characters' personal relationships are mirrored in and enhanced by their professional interaction. Carné's film is thus to be understood not only as a key hypotext for Le dernier métro but also as a yardstick with which

69 “Vous aimer est une joie… mais aussi une souffrance” (“Loving you is a joy… but also a suffering”).
Truffaut established the testament value of his own career, as Truffaut himself acknowledged: "I have made twenty-three films, some good and some not as good. Well, I would give them all without exception to have authored Les enfants du paradis" (in Amiel 213).

But there is yet another way in which Truffaut followed Carné's film: in the "escapism" which prompted Carné and Prévert to set their film one century before the time of the film shooting:

Just as Les enfants du paradis (Carné, 1943-1945) stayed out of the turbulence of its time and found inspiration in the theatrical universe of the Boulevard du Temple, Le dernier métro circumvents the crisis and its contingencies by reverting to the core of creation" (Le Gras, in Amiel 213).

What crisis was France undergoing in 1980? Higgins characterizes Truffaut's belated representation of his memories of the war and the Occupation as part of a larger trend among French artists to deal with these memories in the 1980s (Higgins 144). The Algerian war, the strikes of May 1968, Klaus Barbie's extradition from Bolivia and subsequent trial in Lyon in 1987, the rising right-wing extremist parties and theories, the death of De Gaulle in 1970, and with the election of François Mitterrand in 1981, the first socialist government since Léon Blum's in 1936, led to a generalized climate of historical nostalgia in France.

Indeed, it is the very same trend which led Marcel Ophuls to shoot his groundbreaking documentary Le chagrin et la pitié in 1969: "After May 1968 the French public was momentarily willing, if belatedly, to take a collective backward look at the war, perhaps for the first time, [Ophuls] explains, but shortly thereafter the floodgates of memory snapped shut again" (Higgins 208). Released in 1971, the film was not broadcast on television before October 1981 – one of the first decisions of Mitterrand's newly appointed Minister of Culture (Higgins 209). The double scandal of the documentary's content and of its
delayed broadcasting highlights the historical climate in which Truffaut himself was working on *Le dernier métro*:

… what Ophuls' documentary challenged was the tremendous investment in the official Gaullist construction of history, according to which national unity in resisting the occupier was marred only by a handful of traitors, cowards, and fools. Even more persistent was the belief that collaborators and resisters were themselves two clearly defined and completely distinct groups. *Le chagrin et la pitié* shatters such Manichean views of the Occupation and delineates instead a complex array of degrees and forms of collaboration and resistance. (Higgins 191)

Truffaut himself was very aware of the impact and signification of Ophuls' documentary for the country:

I believe that Marcel Ophuls' film *Le chagrin et la pitié* – despite attacks on it from all sides, and despite the fact that French television still refuses to show it so as not to chagrin those who had been pitiless – is the film that describes with the greatest exactitude and good faith the spectrum of French behavior in the 1940-45 period. (Truffaut, in Bazin 15)

Indeed, Truffaut seems to have conceived of *Le dernier métro* "as a fictional counterpart to Ophuls' documentary" (Higgins 151). Like *Le chagrin et la pitié*, *Le dernier métro* builds a portrait of an era out of fragmentary vignettes of individual behavior. Spectators of these films are not meant to identify with a single character, but to appreciate the subtle complexities of political behavior, the variety of heroism, and the motives of villainy in a stressful and treacherous situation. (Higgins 151-152)
At first glance, then, there seems to be little in common between Carné's overt escapism and refusal to deal with politics in his film, and Truffaut's more direct handling, even if in the background, of the Occupation. However, Truffaut does follow Carné's method by relying on historical anecdotes and picturesque details rather than on stricter historical studies to anchor his film in its historical setting. In fact, there seems to be even fewer references to the 1980s in *Le dernier métro* than there were of the 1940s in *Les enfants du paradis* – and Truffaut cannot claim censorship as valid defense. But through his representation of theatre in the 1940s it is not so much a documentary vision of theatre under the Occupation that Truffaut wishes to voice rather than his 1980 opinion on the respective position of art and politics.

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70 The film was shot in the Théâtre Saint Georges, a Montmartre theatre which stayed open during the War. The character of Marion Steiner was inspired by the few women who ran theatres in Paris during the War. And some of the plot events were taken from actors' and actresses' memoirs, like Jean Marais's fight with a collaborating journalist, or Sacha Guitry's arrest at the Liberation.

71 Such as, for example, women replacing absent stockings by dying their legs with tea and drawing the stocking line with a pencil; black market scenes; or Jacquot growing tobacco in the courtyard.
In defense of non-political art

**Censorship and the political invasion of theatre**

In *Le dernier métro* cultural resistance functions as a defense mechanism against the intrusion of politics in theatre. It is even personified in the figure of Daxiat, reviewer for the fascist newspaper *Je suis partout* ("I am everywhere"), effective censor and ruler of the Parisian theatre world of the Occupation. His views on arts' subservience to politics clearly clash against the Steiners' belief in non-political art:

> MARION. You know, I have always seen Lucas buy all the newspapers but he only read the entertainment pages… And I do like him. So, politics…

> DAXIAT. You are wrong: everything is political. (Archives Truffaut, *Le dernier métro*, First bound-version of the script 118)

In fact, Daxiat's views on art and politics exactly reflect those expressed by Goebbels at the second annual Reich Theatre Festival Week in June 1935: "It is not true that the artist is unpolitical, for political means nothing else but to serve the public with understanding" (in Gadberry 22).

Daxiat's intrusions into the Steiners' theatre symbolize politics' larger invasion of theatre. At one point in the film Daxiat arrives unannounced in the middle of a rehearsal and interrupts it; upon his departure, "the camera leaves the stage and follows him in a long pan until he exits into the street. Through his mere presence, through his bulk, he has managed to invert the set-up of the spectacle to his own benefit" (Lardeau 19). The camera pan manifests the shifting of the show from stage to house: the real show is not run by actors anymore, but by politicians. As he follows Daxiat until he exits the theatre Truffaut effectively creates a hole within the theatre's wholeness, a hole that expresses theatre's dependence on the outside political situation.
This climaxes when Daxiat purposefully arrives late to the play's opening night performance. In a scene symmetrical to those in which Maria's successive lovers exit during the Hamlet performances in To Be or Not to Be, Daxiat noisily enters when the performance has already started and goes to take his seat in the middle of the row, disturbing both spectators and actors. While the spectators hush him, Marion/Helena hides between the letter she is holding and whispers to Cottins, who has been trying to negotiate with Daxiat throughout the film: "Your Daxiat is a louse!" ("Quel salaud ton Daxiat!"). By creating a counter-performance Daxiat literally steals the show and forces actors and spectators alike to become the spectators of his one-man show. The alternation of shots from the room and the stage manifests the conflict of power at work between him and the actors, and ultimately confirm the stage's subservience to politics.

Indeed, as Lardeau concludes, Daxiat is nothing but "an eye which, by literally enacting the name of his journal, neutralizes the closed space of the theatre" (Lardeau 19). Daxiat's personification of censorship is all the more effective as Truffaut cast a non-professional actor, Jean-Louis Richard, to play Daxiat, thereby creating a total identification between the actor and his character (Lardeau 19). By placing opposite him such actors as Deneuve, Depardieu, and Poiret to play the actors in the film, Truffaut clearly contrasts the personification of censorship against the internationally-renowned figures of French theatre and cinema. Like Lubitsch, Truffaut plays with the audience's identification process, not by making the audience unwittingly laugh at the popular actor(s) with the Nazis, but by making visible, through the casting, the power of political censorship on art.
Theatre’s cultural resistance

Against such a threat cultural resistance becomes as urgent a necessity as political resistance. While in Lubitsch's film the two go together and the actors cooperate with the Polish underground by lending them their theatrical skills, in Truffaut's film the two are practically mutually exclusive. As French agents of the Gestapo search the theatre during a performance Marion enrolls Bernard to help her conceal Lucas' presence in the basement. In the film the two men exchange a few lines after the Gestapo leaves the basement, culminating in Lucas's final line:

LUCAS. Tell me, is my wife beautiful? I'm going to ask you a question, Bernard. She is in love with you. But do you love her?

Bernard does not answer and looks away silently.

Up until the final version of the script, however, Lucas and Bernard were supposed to have had the following exchange:

LUCAS. Is that so... because you are already a member of the resistance, you carry suitcases... and the show? Have you thought about it? One day you are caught with one of your suitcases and that night there can be no performance...

BERNARD. Mr. Steiner, I don't know if you are aware of this, but these days there is a war going on up there.

LUCAS. If I am aware of it? It is against me they are waging war, not against you, against me, Lucas STEINER. But they can go to hell, I am staying here, I am keeping the theatre open, every night the play that Lucas Steiner chose, adapted, and staged is being performed, this is how I am resisting...

(Dialogues Jean-Claude Grumberg, Archives Truffaut)
In his current position Lucas' cultural resistance is the only one he can exert. Bernard, conversely, has the choice, and jeopardizes Lucas' resistance by being a member of the underground as well. The encounter with Lucas leads him to choose political resistance, and to leave the theatre.

On the first level Lucas' words echo the most widespread argument towards cultural resistance, according to which theatre greatly improved the daily life, moral, and national pride of Parisians during the Occupation:

It is not fleeing in the face of reality, as some censors might think, but a kind of self-defense, the instinctive desire to breathe the air of freedom for a few hours, that of French art. We do not go to the cinema where only German newsreels and disgusting films are being shown. At the theatre Parisians are among themselves, they find their own specific intellectual and moral atmosphere again. The actors who stayed at their post do not "collaborate" with the occupant, they carry out a national duty. (Soukchomline, in Halimi 137)

Soukchomline's general exoneration of actors who worked under the Occupation would need to be examined on a case-by-case basis, and would in any case be difficult to extend to the rest of the population who also "stayed at their post." But actors and directors did benefit from a special status, and were not only credited for having eased Parisians' daily life, but also for having contributed to save Paris. Indeed, the prestige of French theatre and the fact that Paris remained Paris throughout the Occupation, brimming with shows gilding the surface of a darker reality, might have been the reason why Paris still exists today, as film director Jean Delannoy explained: "For if Von Scholtitz did not execute Hitler's orders to blow up Paris, it is likely that it was due to Paris' and France's prestige" (in Halimi 245).

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72 Having just arrived to Paris, a German is said to have remarked: "You seem very happy for defeated people" ("Vous avez l'air bien gais pour des vaincus!") (Halimi 9).
Bernard and Lucas' argument, however, is not only meant to participate in the ongoing historical debate about the respective merits of cultural and martial resistance. In fact, Truffaut's decision not to include the dialogue in the final version of the film testifies to his attempt at mitigating the opposition between the two. But Lucas clearly stands as Truffaut's mouthpiece by showing that courage "did not consist in defying the enemy (even with panache, see Depardieu's attitude), but to find the means, at all costs, to keep up with an artistic fight, even at the cost of anonymity" (Toubiana 37). Confined off the theatrical and political stages, Lucas becomes the "guarantor of theatre's authenticity, the guardian of its rule" (Lardeau 20). Ultimately, "this will to maintain a strict separation between the domain of artistic creation and that of social reality (possibly susceptible of a political transformation) defines the director's ethics and freedom for Truffaut" (Lardeau 20). More than historically accurate, Lucas' physical position is true to Truffaut's creative stance.
From Lucas’s theatre to Truffaut’s cinema

Beyond the historical merits of cultural resistance, then, it is his personal apolitical vision of directing that Truffaut outlines in his film. Indeed, Lucas is able to direct the show from his basement, by listening to the rehearsal through a heating conduit. This "hearing aid" is reminiscent of Truffaut's own partial deafness, and stands in direct opposition to Daxiat's eye. As the film draws to an end the ear of free artistic creation wins against the eye of political censorship: Daxiat is seen escaping from Paris wearing an eye-patch and stepping through a burning X reminiscent of a similar image from Lubitsch's To Be or Not to Be, "the X of censorship or denial" (Higgins 167) (Fig. 16). The impact of Daxiat's damaging visual power becomes obvious as Lucas is blinded when he comes out of the basement, mumbling Goethe's alleged last words "Mehr Licht!" ("More light"). However, as the audience soon finds out, Lucas recovers from his temporary blindness and resumes his direction of the theatre.

Truffaut's idea for Lucas' first post-war production changed even more radically than for the other embedded play in the film. The film was originally to close on Ibsen's Doll's House. But like with "La disparue" Truffaut ultimately chose to close his film on an entirely fictional play whose title is never explicitly mentioned, and which is not even presented as a play. The scene opens on Marion walking in a hospital corridor leading to a room where Bernard is recovering from severe injuries. Marion, now a widow, finally confesses her love for Bernard, who rejects it and sends her away. She leaves, and right at the moment when the film audience believes that this is the end of the film, the curtain falls, the camera pulls back and we realize that this was "only" a play. The film's last scene is, in fact, the last scene of the embedded play featuring Marion and Bernard in what seems to be their own roles. What we mistook for cinema was theatre, hinting at the embedding film itself and, once more, at

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73 A Doll's House was performed in Paris in February 1941 at the Théâtre des Ambassadeurs, with a brilliant cast whose performance received rave reviews (Halimi 46).
Truffaut's career: by having Marion slip between Bernard and Lucas during the curtain call, Truffaut nods to his famous other *ménage à trois Jules et Jim* (1962).

The blurring between theatre and cinema was deftly orchestrated by Lucas earlier in the film:

*Lucas describes his new project to Marion*

LUCAS. I will write it for you, made-to-measure. Are you listening to me?

MARION. I am listening.

LUCAS. So, it is a woman, cruel…

MARION. Cruel, me?

LUCAS. I am talking about the character. And yes: she is soft, tender, in love even, and yet she is cruel. Without knowing it, without wanting it, she is cruel, in spite of herself. It will be amazing, you'll see. I will make her talk without literature, with every day words. I will use your expressions, you understand?

MARION. Yes. What I really understand is that from now on everything that I say might be held against me. (Truffaut final script 95)

Lucas is not only the director, but the author of the play. The film audience takes the theatrical fiction for the cinematic “reality” because Lucas modeled the former on the latter—and because Truffaut, like Lubitsch for “Gestapo,” purposefully hides offscreen the theatrical frame.

By having Lucas write and direct his own play Truffaut exposes his use of the embedded theatre as mirror for the embedding film, and unobtrusively voices the common underlying political dimension of theatre and film: their representation of everyday life. Like his mouthpiece Lucas, it is by staying out of politics and focusing instead on the details of
everyday life that Truffaut believes he can transform life into art. He drives his point home with Bernard:

If Truffaut does not judge between ceasing to be an actor to become a member of the underground and being an actor member of the underground, he at least makes a choice: Depardieu comes back onstage to play his own role. Theatre reasserts itself when it can deal with real history in trompe l’oeil again – the same tactic through which Steiner had stood up to Daxiat. (Lardeau 20)

Indeed, Lucas and Marion literally trick Daxiat's eye throughout the film – just as Truffaut tricks ours in the last scene.

For Higgins, Truffaut's ending on "a slight of hand, a theatrical trick" is an indication that he definitely refuses to take a stand on the political background he depicts (Higgins 152). Truffaut makes the film audience as incapable of choosing between theatre and film as between artistic and martial resistance, or indeed, between "neutral" passivity and collaboration. In this respect Marion's bowing between Lucas and Bernard symbolizes Truffaut's middle line, which sharply contrasts with Lubitsch's resolute side-taking:

In Le dernier métro the characters cannot fully pursue their ideas, they constantly have to compromise. [...] This is what makes everyone identify with the film. Because in life we often do not realize our dreams and content ourselves with compromises.

My film is forgiving of people who did not take sides, towards those who continued to do their job as if nothing were happening. (Truffaut, in Gillain 392).

But there is more to this "theatrical trick" than a mere expression of non-commitment. By concealing theatre as film Truffaut expresses the constant role-playing the population resorted to to deceive the Nazi and French authorities. In the film all the members of the
theatre troupe lead at least one hidden life. Bernard is a member of the underground; Nadine, the troupe's ingénue, does radio, film, theatre, and voice-overs jobs for the French and the Germans indiscriminately; Lucas, allegedly in South America, hides in the cellar of the theatre in Paris; and Marion’s love for Lucas does not prevent her from being attracted to Bernard, and occasionally other men too.

Even objects lead double lives in Truffaut's film: Bernard transforms a record-player into a bomb, Raymond the stagehand carries a black-market ham in a cello case, then uses bicycle lights as footlights. As Higgins rightly observes, "the basic premise of Le dernier métro – that everyone is an actor hiding behind a role at all times – is paradoxically consistent both with the narrative aesthetic of the Nouvelle Vague and with the historical reality of the Occupation" (Higgins 153). In Lubitsch's film, the actors have the required skills to help the underground defeat the Nazis. In Truffaut's film, theatre becomes the institutionalized form of the population's constant performance against authorities.

Like in To Be or Not to Be, performance is a matter of life and death in Le dernier métro: for both audience and actors, theatre becomes the medium by which one resists to the contemporary political context, and therefore also the art form through which a collective political memory can be worked out. Truffaut's distanciation of time and medium thus simultaneously works on the personal, national, and artistic levels. By representing the Occupation he materializes his own childhood memories and those of his peers, hence providing a mental landscape of the generation running France in 1980. By embedding theatre he brings out the mechanisms of his intertextual and self-referential cinematic method, but also reveals the apolitical conditions he deems necessary to theatre and cinema’s lasting impact. By confronting each art and period to its distanced double Truffaut enacts the distance he advocates between art and politics.
Fig. 16. Daxiat’s escape.
Chapter Six: Szabó's Mephisto

In a 2006 interview with Susan Suleiman István Szabó reflects on the nature of Kádár's authoritative regime in Hungary (1956-1988). Like in other Eastern European countries, Kádár installed a communist dictatorship which forced artists to make compromises; but unlike in other Russian satellites, "if you wanted to say something, even about politics, you had possibilities. Of course you had limits, but you could push against them. [...] Lots of filmmakers spoke openly in their films, if they found a way to do it. [...] we could come to terms, negotiate, find a new title or subtitle" (Suleiman, Conversation).

Szabó's Mephisto (1981), adapted from Klaus Mann's eponymous novel, is the direct product of this balance between expression and repression, censorship and artistic freedom. Set in Germany in the 1930s, Mephisto follows the artistic rise and political compromises of the actor Hendrik Höfgen, fictional figure modeled after the real actor Gustav Gründgens.

But in Szabó's film Höfgen stands for more than Gründgens. He becomes the embodiment of the artist living under a politically repressive regime, the artist whose artistic choices cannot but also be political. Szabó confirmed and even extended this reading in a 1989 interview: "when I tell a story with German heroes, I also tell something about the history of all of us" (in Mills 261). Including himself. In January 2006, the Hungarian political newspaper Elet es Irodalom revealed that Szabó worked as an informer for the communist security services:

Szabo, 67, spied on classmates at the College of Theater Art, Elet es Irodalom said in its Jan. 27 edition.

The next day, Szabo told the daily Nepszabadsag that he agreed to become an informer so that he could provide selective data to authorities and protect a

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74 This theme is a recurrent one in Szabó's filmography; twenty years after Mephisto he directed Der Fall Furtwängler (Taking Sides) (2001), a film which explores Berlin Philharmonic conductor Wilhelm Furtwangler's involvement with the Nazi regime.
friend who had participated in the 1956 uprising. Szabo said he only reported comments he knew would be passed on by others. "This was the bravest, most daring thing I did in my life," Szabo told Nepszabadsag. (Penz)

In light of these revelations, Szabó's scrutiny of the mechanisms of artistic and political compromise takes on particular relevance. The point is not to look for autobiographical elements or atonement in *Mephisto*, but rather to explore the resonances of Szabó's double transposition and mirroring of Communist Hungary through Nazi Germany, and of film through theatre.

The differences between the novel and the film reveal Szabó's careful set up of this double mirroring. Instead of expanding on Klaus Mann's indications that Höfgen's time is equally divided between theatre and film, Szabó paradoxically seems to reduce the importance of cinema for his character by only inserting one extended episode in which Höfgen is seen shooting a film. However, this episode is crucial in its political and geographical meaning: while in Mann's novel the film shoots happen mainly in Germany, in Szabó's film the shooting sequence takes place in Hungary. The only reference to Szabó's homeland is thus paired with the only reference to filmmaking, while the rest of the film unfolds in the German theatre world.

Szabó further tightens this double correspondence by setting up the Hungarian episode as Höfgen's main occasion to escape Nazi Germany. The burning of the Reichstag and the Nazis' subsequent seizure of power occur in the midst of the film shoot, at the end of which the film director hires Höfgen for his next film, giving him a chance to continue acting outside of Germany. Höfgen seems ready to accept, but is easily won over back to Germany by a letter from a fellow actress assuring him that she has pleaded in his favor to Lotte Lindenthal, herself an actress and the lover of the Minister-Präsident (modeled after the actress Emmy Sonnemann and Göring, respectively). Szabó does not merely transpose from
film to theatre or Hungary to Germany; in the latter case at least, he represents the exact counterpart of the current political situation: in the 1980s it was West Germany which offered dissident East European intellectuals a haven against Communist dictatorships. Beyond its appearances as historical fiction, then, *Mephisto* is to be read as a historical and formal metaphor.
Höfgen and Faust

Like Lubitsch's *To Be or Not to Be*, Szabó's title clearly announces its intertextual reference to Goethe's *Faust*. In this respect Szabó's choice is faithful to Klaus Mann's novel and to Gustav Gründgens' career. Gründgens "debuted as Mephisto in Berlin in Lothar Müthel's production at the Schauspielhaus am Gendarmenmarkt in 1932, the centennial year of Goethe's death" (Grange, in Gadberry 81). Gründgens' performance made him famous almost overnight, and attracted the attention of Göring, who made Gründgens his protégé after having seen him perform. In 1934 Göring appointed Gründgens head of the Schauspielhaus, where Gründgens staged and acted in numerous plays; but his signature role remained Mephisto.

Less than in the choice of the play, then, Szabó's personal touch is visible in the way he represents it. Goethe's *Faust* serves a dual goal: showcasing Höfgen's (and Klaus Maria Brandauer's) talent, and providing a theatrical rendering of the political evolution between the Weimar and the Nazi eras. *Faust* is performed twice in the film, once before and once during the Nazi period; both performances feature Höfgen as Mephisto, but they unfold in opposite sets and costumes. Szabó further reinforces the performances' aesthetic difference by selecting different politically relevant excerpts from the play each time, thereby providing the audience with two theatrical images of the country's cultural and political stage.

The first production reflects the aesthetic sensibility of the Weimar avant-garde. The stage, bathed in a mysterious blue light, is almost bare, except for a central white platform and a stylized Gothic armchair at the back. The back wall serves as a screen on which images of wind-blown curtains with superimposed crosses are projected. While Szabó sets up a visual rendition of Weimar theatrical avant-garde onstage, he manifests the political threat menacing it through the film's editing. He cuts directly from Miklas, Höfgen's former fellow actor, training the *Hitlerjugend* ("Hitler Youth") and shouting: "We follow the Führer!" to
Höfgen/Mephisto's: "Blood is a very special juice" in a close-up shot (Goethe & Arndt 46; Study 1740). The juxtaposition of the two scenes exposes the two-way collusion between theatre and politics. On the one hand it underlines the theatrical dimension of the Nazi propaganda; on the other it announces the advent of Hitler as a blood-thirsty Mephisto.

Indeed, Mephisto's line comes right after Faust and Mephisto have sealed their pact. As the performance scene unfolds, Szabó switches twice from long shot to close-up frames, highlighting two passages from the play that ominously foreshadow Höfgen's upcoming pact with the Nazis. In an instance of dramatic irony, Höfgen himself, as Mephisto, describes in the first excerpt the opportunism he will fall prey to:

MEPHISTO. No bars and bounds are set for you.

If anywhere you feel like snatching
Chance relish, sweets of passage catching,
May what delights prove wholesome too.
Just help yourself and don't be coy. (Goethe & Arndt 47; Study 1760-1764)

In the second excerpt it is his artistic ambition, vanity, and hubris which Höfgen unwittingly discloses through Mephisto's lines. Szabó cuts from a long shot to a close-up just as Faust reiterates his commitment to the pact, prompting Mephisto's assertion of the superiority of art to life:

FAUST. And yet I choose it!

MEPHISTO. Worthily decided!

I fear just one thing, for my part:

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75 "Blut ist ein ganz besonderer Saft" (Goethe 49).

76 Euch ist kein Maß und Ziel gesetzt.
Beliebt's Euch, überall zu naschen,
Im Fliehen etwas zu erhaschen,
Bekomm Euch wohl, was Euch ergetzt.
Nur greift mir zu und seid nicht blöde! (Goethe 50)
Short is the time, and long is art.\(^\text{77}\) (Goethe & Arndt 47; Study 1785-1787)

From that moment on Szabó alternatively focuses the close-up on Faust, leaving Mephisto blurred, and on Mephisto, leaving Faust blurred, and eventually out of frame, as if to manifest Mephisto's taking over both the play and the film:

FAUST. What am I, if it is past human power
To conquer mankind's loftiest plane,
The crown toward which all sense strain?

MEPHISTOPHELES. You are, all told – just what you are.
Put wigs on of a million powdered rolls,
Increase your height with ell-high actor's soles,
You still remain just what you are.\(^\text{78}\) (Goethe & Arndt 48; Study 1803-1810)

The camera angle answers Faust's question as much as Mephistopheles' words. Instead of being taken from the house, as the long-shot was, the close-up of the two actors is taken from upstage, a uniquely cinematic take on theatre enclosing them between the theatre audience and the film audience's respective gazes. Caught between the upstage wall and the house, between a theatrical and a cinematic point of view, Faust, Mephisto, and the actors embodying them cannot escape their "nature" and are bound to remain what they are. This, for Höfgen, means to remain an actor whose art overrides all political and moral considerations.

\(^\text{77}\) FAUST. Allein ich will!
MEPHISTOPHELES. Das läßt sich hören!
Doch nur von \textit{einem} ist mir bang:
Dir Zeit ist kurz, die Kunst ist lang. (Goethe 50-51)

\(^\text{78}\) FAUST. Was bin ich denn, wenn es nicht möglich ist,
Der Menschheit Krone zu erringen,
Nach der sich alle Sinne dringen?
MEPHISTOPHELES. Du bist am Ende – was du bist.
\textit{Setz dir Perücken auf von Millionen Locken},
\textit{Setz deinen Fuß auf ellenhohe Socken},
Du bleibst doch immer, was du bist. (Goethe 51)
Szabó turns Mephisto's "You still remain just what you are" into a summary of the play and film. Szabó ends his first representation of the play on this line, followed by clapping and the house lights coming up, paving the way for Höfgen's variation on Mephisto's line at the end of the film. As a whole, then, Szabó's first representation of Faust simultaneously functions on three levels: theatrical – the set provides a snapshot of Weimar aesthetics; political – the editing manifest the threat weighing on the regime; and psychological – the Faust excerpts limn the opportunism and vanity which led some to believe that they could profit from the Nazis with impunity. Szabó's representation of Faust, much more detailed than in Klaus Mann's novel, thus provides the three levels at which Höfgen's compromises take place.

In the second Faust performance Höfgen stars again as Mephisto in a production reflecting the new dominant ideology. All the avant-garde "modern" elements have disappeared – banned as "degenerate." Instead, the production features a nineteenth-century-type backdrop painted with a forest and rocks in front of which a Gothic arch stands as the main piece of scenery. The set exemplifies the Nazis' desire to return to a pure art nurtured by "blood and soil," the only concepts they saw as giving artists any "vitality or value" (Pois, in Gadberry 22).

While the sets manifest the differences between the Weimar and Nazi theatrical aesthetics, the second series of Faust lines chosen by Szabó reflects the new political circumstances. The excerpts from the two Faust performances come in reverse order: whereas the first excerpt is taken from after Faust's bargain, but unfolds in the film before Hitler's election, the second takes place before the pact in the play, but after Hitler's arrival to power in the film, as if Szabó were trying to reach back to theatrical roots to illuminate political events. Indeed, Szabó centers the second excerpt on one of the play's most famous passages, in which Mephisto triumphantly defines himself:
FAUST. [...] All right – who are you, then?

MEPHISTOPHELES. Part of that force which would

Do ever evil, and does ever good.

FAUST. And that conundrum of a phrase implies?

MEPHISTOPHELES. The spirit which eternally denies!

And justly so; for all that which is wrought

Deserves that it should come to naught;

Hence it were best if nothing were engendered.

Which is why all things you have rendered

By terms like sin, destruction – evil, in brief

Are my true element-in-chief.79 (Goethe & Arndt 36-37; Study 1335-1344)

There too the camera work heightens the scope of words uttered on stage. While the dialogue between Mephisto and Faust goes back and forth Szabó frames the stage in a long shot. During Mephisto's last lines, however, Szabó cuts to a close-up shot of Höfgen, emphasizing the blending between the actor and the character. On the one hand Mephisto's ironic self-definition as a character who does good in spite of his desire to do evil provides an insight into Höfgen's moral and artistic dilemma. On the other Mephisto's defiant proclamation of his "true" nature echoes the Nazis' defiant proclamations of theirs,80 to which

79 FAUST. [...] Nun gut, wer bist du denn?
MEPHISTOPHELES. Ein Teil von jener Kraft,
Die stets das Böse will und stets das Gute schafft.
FAUST. Was ist mit diesem Rätselwort gemeint?
MEPHISTOPHELES. Ich bin der Geist, der stets verneint!
Und das mit Recht; denn alles, was entsteht,
Ist wert, daß es zugrunde geht;
Drum besser wär's, daß nichts entstünde.
So ist denn alles, was ihr Sünde,
Zerstörung, kurz, das Böse nennt,
Mein eigentliches Element. (Goethe 39)

80 See Hannah Arendt's analysis of the Nazis' open disclosure of their crimes: "This impression [that it was safer to be a member of a Nazi paramilitary organization than a loyal Republican] was greatly strengthened by the specific use the Nazis made of their political crimes. They always admitted them publicly, never apologized for
Europe remained deaf until it was too late. The second performance's set, lines, and systematic contrast to the first performance thus expose the consequences of Höfgen's theatrical, political, and psychological compromises.

Only one aspect of the first production remains unchanged in the second: Höfgen/Mephisto's white mask-like makeup, as if the only thing that had not changed since the Weimar Republic was the nature of the country's politics as a theatrical game of masks. Indeed, Szabó turns Mephisto's white mask into the key element of the inversion between stage and house, between theatre and politics. During the intermission of the second performance the Minister-Präsident calls Höfgen to his box. A series of alternating close-ups reveals, as Piette remarks, a striking facial resemblance between the two men: "Both bald heads look like skulls. The faces are pale. The cheekbones are protruding. The eyebrows are angular. The jaws jut. The difference is that the General is not wearing any makeup: Höfgen is" (Piette 137).

The real Mephisto, in the film, is not Höfgen, but the Minister-Präsident, who, like in Goethe's play, deftly orchestrates his appearances so as always to be at the centre of the spotlights. Szabó closes the series of close-ups with a series of long shots alternatively taken from the box and from the house. The last long shot, taken from the stage, features the two men facing each other and shaking hands in the background, while in the foreground the audience members, their backs turned to the stage, silently and avidly observe the two men. Just like Daxiat, in Le dernier métro, asserted his political performance over the actors' theatrical one by disrupting their show, the Minister-Präsident steals the show by moving it from the stage to his box during intermission. Szabó thereby redefines the onstage performance as part and metonymy of the regime's larger political performance: the

'excesses of the lower ranks' – such apologies were used only by Nazi sympathizers – and impressed the population as being very different from the 'idle talkers' of other parties" (Arendt 42).
performance scene ends after the intermission, but the second half of the play continues outside the theatre, on the political stage, with the Minister-Präsident as Mephisto.

Opposite him Höfgen becomes the modern incarnation of the Faust figure – "a self-deceived, post-modern, un-romantic Faust" whose first name he shares (Piette 137). The onstage Mephisto reveals himself to be an offstage Faust, and as such, Höfgen embodies the figure of the intellectual who sells his soul to the devil so as to perfect the pursuit of his art. Szabó highlights Höfgen's personification of compromise by designing his fate as a variation of Faust's. The fair and virginal Gretchen becomes Juliette, Höfgen's black dance teacher and lover, whom he sacrifices in order to climb the prestige ladder of the theatrical world. And Faust's pact with Mephisto takes the form, later in the film, of Höfgen's signing his name right under the Minister-Präsident's at a Nazi sculptor's atelier.

Part of the pact includes, for Höfgen, being appointed Intendant (theatre director) of one of the leading Berlin theatres by the Minister-Präsident. In this Szabó is faithful to Gründgens' career – Göring appointed Gründgens Intendant of the Schauspielhaus am Gendarmenmarkt in 1933 – but he also outlines a fourth level at which the artist's compromises take place: the institutional level. As Göring's cog in the wheel of theatrical institutions, Gründgens "enjoyed the favor" of his master but was not "at liberty to make artistic choices wholly independent of political pressures" (Grange, in Gadberry 85). He nonetheless managed to make the compromises worthwhile for his career: while working as Intendant he was able to continue acting in film, in addition to acting in eighteen productions and directing six (Grange, in Gadberry 84). Mephisto had as positive an impact on Gründgens/Höfgen’s career as he did on Faust’s.
Höfgen and Hamlet

Aside from Gründgen's title role as Mephisto, "a great personal triumph was the title role in his 1936 production of Hamlet" (Grange, in Gadberry 84). Hamlet is the only other play which is expanded upon in the film, without being actually represented. While Faust becomes the symbol of Höfgen's theatrical success and political pact with the Nazis, Hamlet becomes the symbol of Höfgen's deeper theatrical failure caused by his political pact. As Intendant, director, and lead actor, Höfgen leads the press conference in which he presents his production as the perfect concretization of Nazi ideology. Szabó models Höfgen's words on Goebbels' official directives to theatre directors: "German art of the next decade will be heroic, steely romantic, factual without sentimentality, and mindful of its communal duty, or it won't exist" (in Gadberry 78). Having brushed aside the traditional Romantic and Weimar views of Hamlet as weak, indecisive, decadent, and paralyzed by his thoughts, Höfgen characterizes Hamlet as the epitome of the Nazi character, "a man from the North," strong and energetic, who kills ("Hamlet ist ein nordischer Mensch. Er tötet").

Höfgen's rhetoric underlines not only the political foundations of the play's performance but also the play's role in Nazi political discourse. Höfgen summarizes his vision of the play by substituting the active "to do or not to do" to Hamlet's more contemplative "to be or not to be" – a substitution which, for Höfgen, makes the play a true "popular work" ("ein völkisches Werk") in the tradition of Greek tragedies. And indeed, Hamlet performances were used by Nazi officials to inspire the German people to "wrestle and finally defeat their gloomy, passive natures by forcing themselves to take action against their oppressors" (Mills 261). For them, following Hamlet meant following Hitler who, as

81 In the early thirties Hamlet had been staged in contemporary clothing by the Jewish director Leopold Jessner in Berlin's Schauspielhaus, with the renowned Jewish actor Fritz Kortner in the title role. This production testified, for the Nazi purist ideologue Alfred Rosenberg, to Jessner's imposition of his "hyper-modern, Bolshevistic, mollusk-like and neurasthenic aesthetics" on classics (Gadberry 76).
"energetic and tough" as Hamlet, had taken action by abrogating the World War I treaties and turning Germany into a war machine (Mills 261).

Szabó does not try to reclaim Shakespeare, however, or at least not like Lubitsch. From Mephisto's "You are just what you are" to Hamlet's "To be or not to be" to Höfgen's "To do or not to do," Szabó uses theatre to expose the mechanisms by which the head of an official cultural institution relays the dominant ideology and transforms art into political propaganda. The successive shifts signal how propaganda shifts art’s realm from being to doing, to having an immediate, specific, and calculated effect on the population it is designed for. And it is inasmuch as they both strive to transform art into propaganda that Szabó connects the Communism he works under and the Nazism he represents.

Indeed, Szabó has Höfgen conclude this hard-line Nazi press conference with the same words he had uttered earlier in the film to his fellow communist actors rehearsing Brecht's incomplete play The Breadshop (Der Brotladen, 1930). For the young communist Höfgen, theatre had to be revolutionary, and everything had to come together to bring about "the right theatre – a total theatre" ("das richtige Theater – ein totales Theater"). "The hall, lights, walls, movements, sounds, all must blend into a highly effective whole" ("Der Saal, die Lichter, die Wände, die Bewegungen, die Töne, das alles muss zu einer großen Wirkung zusammenschmelzen") so as to shock and mobilize workers, and foster their active response and collaboration in the theatrical process. For the Nazi-serving Höfgen, the Hamlet production should similarly be a "total theatre" experience designed to "shock and mobilize" the entire population.

The ideological flexibility of Höfgen's words derives from their referring as much to Wagner's "Gesamtkunstwerk" as to Brecht's epic theatre with its demand for the spectators' active participation and "free and highly mobile" intellect (Brecht & Willet 190). Höfgen's evolution from a Communist/Brechtian ideal to a Fascist/Wagnerian one is all the more
seamless as it does not require any alteration of his theatrical conceptions or rhetoric, which seem to be applicable to virtually any play he is working on and any ideology he is working under. The striking echo between Höfgen's speeches is not to be found in Klaus Mann's novel; it is purely Szabó's invention. Szabó thus anchors his double mirroring in Höfgen’s character, whom he designs as synchronically embodying theatre and cinema and diachronically embodying Communism and Nazism.

And yet there is more to Höfgen than a symbol, no matter how complex. Through him Szabó also explores the key issue underlying his oeuvre as a director and artist: the psychological mechanisms by which artists can be tricked (or trick themselves) into believing that they can make political compromises while maintaining their artistic integrity. As the Hamlet references make clear in the film, artistic integrity cannot remain entirely untainted by political compromises. Höfgen is shown talking about Hamlet, but we never hear him actually deliver Hamlet's lines; he is shown describing Hamlet, but never impersonating him. The closest words to the play we are given to hear are those from the press conference, as if the Nazi subtext had replaced Shakespeare's text. And Szabó jumps over the performance by using the applause at the end of the press conference to cut directly to the opening night's curtain call, the closest images of the performance we are given to see. The curtain call appears as schematic as the press conference: it opens on rows of spear-bearers getting aligned, in front of which the richly white-clad blond Ophelia and the black-clad Hamlet then come to bow, alone, the other actors being dispensed with.

While the press conference and curtain call manifest Höfgen's official and visible political success (a reverse shot of the house shows the Minister-Präsident clapping and approving Höfgen's performance), the ellipsis transcribes Höfgen's hidden but real artistic failure. In Klaus Mann's novel Hamlet is the only character Höfgen does not successfully inhabit and perform:
With Mephisto he had been sure of each tone and each gesture from the first moment on. But the Danish Prince was unwieldy, he refused to cooperate. Hendrik fought to conquer him. ‘I will not leave you!’ shouted the actor. Hamlet, however, answered him – his back to him, sad, mocking, endlessly arrogant –: ‘You resemble the spirit you understand – not me!’

Indeed, when Höfgen marries Nicoletta von Niebuhr, his Ophelia, the celebration does not offer an alternative happy ending to Shakespeare's tragedy. Instead, the new perfect Aryan couple is suddenly surrounded by a string of Mephistos, the spirits Höfgen understands, wildly dancing around them – reminding Höfgen that he remains nothing but what he is.

In Klaus Mann's novel it is Hamlet himself who makes Höfgen aware of the mutual exclusiveness of political compromise and artistic integrity: "[...] You had the choice, my dear, between nobility and your career. Well, you have made your choice [...]" (Mann 377).

Göring knew that "it is always easier to make an artist into a National Socialist than the other way around" (in Gadberry 80) because, as Gründgens himself declared, "[...] for actors, grand roles are a higher priority than politics. This lack of political education the German actor shares with the German population in general" (in Gadberry 85). And so, convincing outstanding directors to remain and continue working was not difficult: many believed they could accommodate themselves to the new conditions while remaining somehow unpolitical. There were of course political consequences in remaining unpolitical, as Fritz Stern has shown; using culture to remain unpolitical is a long tradition in Germany, Stern noted, and directors in the Third Reich, like many Germans, 'used their greatest

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82 "Beim Mephisto war er, vom ersten Augenblick an, jedes Tones und jener Geste sicher gewesen. Der Dänenprinz aber war spröde, er verweigerte sich. Hendrik kämpfte um ihm. 'Ich lasse dich nicht!' rief der Schauspieler. Hamlet jedoch antwortete ihm – abgewendet, traurig, spöttisch, unendlich hochmütig –: 'Du gleicht dem Geist, den du begreifst – nicht mir!'"

achievement, their culture, to augment and excuse their greatest failure, their politics.' (Grange, in Gadberry 80)
Szabó makes his symbolic and psychological political explorations converge in the last scene of the film. Unlike in the novel, which ends in Höfgens' house, the film ends in the newly-built Olympic stadium in which the Minister-Präsident traps Höfgen. The Olympic stadium, by evoking the confrontation between Communist and Nazi athletes, becomes a spatial expression of Höfgen's metaphorical position between the fictional time and the time when the film was shot. To the Minister-Präsident's darting all the stadium's follow-spots on him and yelling his name to the echo, the blinded Höfgen murmurs back in a close-up: "What do they want from me? I am only an actor!" ("Was wollen sie von mir? Ich bin nur ein Schauspieler!"). And as he delivers his version of Mephisto's line he looks straight into the camera, as if he were pleading non-guilty to the film-audience.

This last formal feature transforms the film audience into Höfgen's jury. Throughout his film Szabó has made clear that there is no such thing as being "only" an actor in the Third Reich, or, for that matter, in any dictatorial or totalitarian regime. By virtue of having continued to act on stage, Höfgen has trodden on the political stage. Indeed, for Jacques Debû-Bridel, the actors and directors who continued to work under the banner of political "neutrality" in Nazi-occupied Europe did more harm than if they had taken a clear political stance, as they became "unconscious but fearsome accomplices of the new order" (in Halimi 37). And yet Szabó was well aware of the sequel to this episode of Gründgens' life. Gründgens' political compromises made him more than just an actor, but his acting talent eventually absolved him of his political compromises. Gründgens went on performing on German stages until his death in 1963. Klaus Mann, "appalled that the political situation in Germany had changed so very little since the collapse of the Hitler dictatorship," committed suicide in Cannes after his West German publisher refused to publish his book in 1947 (Mills 255).
Höfgen's final look into the camera thus binds together the film's fictional time, the time when the film was made, and the moment when it is viewed. It similarly clinches the series of correspondences Szabó establishes between the various levels of fictions, from the embedded theatrical characters to the film audience, from Mephisto/Faust to Höfgen and to himself. In their essay "Intellectuals as a class" (1973-1974) György Konrad and Iván Szelény theorize the throughline that Szabó establishes in his film by analyzing Hungarian intellectuals' frame of mind under Communism:

The great majority of the intellectual class saw that there was no place for them in the ruling elite, gave up their political ambitions, and acknowledged the political leadership of the ruling elite. If at heart they did not accept the elite's monopoly of power and only waited for the first opportunity to question it, for the time being they had no desire to enter the elite either, or even to replace it, but simply, but throwing their gradually increasing professional weight into the balance, to arrive at a reasonable compromise with the ruling elite. By the late 1950s and early 1960s the conditions had ripened on both sides for such a compromise, at once cynical and heartfelt. (in Stokes 149)

Beyond Gründgens, then, Szabó turns the film audience into the jury of all artists living in a repressive political regime – of all artists forced to make political compromises. Szabó sets his exploration of this issue in the Nazi Germany theatre world so as to bypass the political censorship weighing on Hungarian cinema; in this respect the film's very existence and release depends on this double formal and political mirroring. But, as Szabó himself acknowledged, Hungarian censorship was not so strong that it could be held sole responsible for such a transposition. Like in Lubitsch's case, the significance of the embedded plays themselves seems to have played a key role in Szabó’s choice to represent theatre, and to operate this double political and theatrical transposition. The German theatre world is the
ideal setting for the film because of the particular status it confers on Goethe's Faust and Shakespeare's Hamlet, centered on moral and artistic compromise, and reaction or lack thereof to political wrongdoing, respectively. The combination of the two plays allows Szabó to ground historically his exploration of artistry, compromise, and guilt while expanding its philosophical and political range.

The representation of these two plays ultimately raises the issue of the fate of canonical plays in politically troubled times. Unlike films, plays from the theatre canon are constantly staged and re-staged. By virtue of the nature of theatre these canonical plays need to be made "present" for every new production — and that implies being made relevant to the period they are performed in. The very process of staging a canonical play therefore involves making compromises with the period it was written in, the period it is set in, and the period it is performed in. If Truffaut uses theatre as a metaphor highlighting the daily performances populations were forced to stage to lure authorities, Szabó uses the compromises implied in the very act of mounting a theatrical production as a metaphor for the individual compromises made by all artists, from Faust to himself.

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84 “Remakes” of old canonical films do exist but do not function like new productions of canonical plays since they are must deal with the old film's images as much as its screenplay.
Chapter Seven: Dresen's *Stilles Land* and Henckel von Donnersmarck's *Das Leben der Anderen*

Like Lubitsch, Truffaut, and Szabó, Dresen and Henckel von Donnersmarck share a double political and artistic concern. In spite of their different background (Andreas Dresen was born in East Germany in 1963 and raised by a single mother actress; Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck was born in 1973 into a noble family in West Germany), both centered their first feature film on East Germany and theatre. Released in 1992, not even three years after the events it depicts, Dresen's *Stilles Land* is set in a provincial theatre, and follows the course of a production of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in the Fall of 1989. Released in 2006, Henckel von Donnersmarck's *Das Leben der Anderen* is set in Berlin in 1984 then 1991, and focuses on the role of the GDR and its ruling Socialist Unity Party of Germany (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*, SED) in the creation and production of new plays.

In their films, both directors contrast the wide political gap and small period of time separating the former dictatorial East-German regime and the contemporary democratic reunified Germany. By representing theatre within their film they similarly contrast the simultaneously wide and small distance separating film and theatre in content and in form. The formal distancing doubling the political one is the result of a deliberate choice on the directors’ part. They could as easily have shot a film on the East German cinematic world, on the DEFA and its coercive regulation of the GDR's cinematic production. Why, then, chose theatre?

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85 Virtually all of the GDR's cinematic production was controlled by the DEFA (Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft – German Film Joint Stock Company, 1946-1992), of which the Soviets controlled 55% and the Germans 45% (Allan 4). An "additional agreement drawn up by the SED" and signed by both the German and the Russian factions stipulated that "a select committee would be presented with an outline of the company's plans and would be shown rough cuts and completed versions of the films produced" (Allan 4). On top of which yet another commission, which became known as the DEFA-commission, was created to act as a link between DEFA and SED Central Committee "on matters relating to changes in personnel" (Allan 4).
If cinema outdid theatre as a political tool in Nazi Germany, theatre was predominant over cinema in the political and cultural landscape of the GDR. Indeed, in 1988 the GDR hosted the greatest number of theatres in the world proportionally to its size and population – sixty-eight theatres and around two hundred performance spaces (Hammerthaler, in Hasche 187) – and devoted 20% of its cultural budget to the theatre (Hammerthaler, in Hasche 197). The quality of the country's theatrical output is as impressive as its quantity. Bertolt Brecht and Heiner Müller, Frank Castorf, Benno Besson, Adolf Dresen, and Matthias Langhoff, to name but the most famous playwrights and directors respectively, were responsible for an unprecedented and unequalled level of productions of both classics and new plays, and for the country's international recognition in the world of theatre.

Because of its "public effectiveness" ("öffentliche Wirksamkeit") and its function as international symbol of East German culture, the authorities subjected theatre to an even stricter political control than other arts (Hammerthaler, in Hasche 246). And it was the government's excessive belief in theatre's political power that reinforced its political role:

Theatre in East Germany was always taken seriously. In fact, we received much more attention than was our due. Six hundred spectators do not rush out of the theatre, pick up a pitchfork, and overthrow the government just because they have head something critical, bad, or even subversive about the state. But those in power seemed to be convinced that this would happen. It was a completely exaggerated estimation of the power of the arts that led, in turn, to their suppression. (Weigel, in Guntner 221)

The ever-increasing bureaucratization of the party and its censorship structures eventually endowed theatre with real political impact:

The other side of this calcification was that the party simply got tired of this continual trouble with the arts. In fact, in the end there was not much
interference anymore. In the eighties there were many performances which helped to change the way people thought about the state; their attitude toward the state and politics became increasingly critical, and that gave them a stronger voice in their self-determination. (Weigel, in Guntner 222)

Even if the party's artistic control grew relatively laxer in the final years, theatrical activities continued to be heavily monitored by the regime. The Association of Theatre Practitioners (*Verband der Theaterschaffenden*), which encompassed the vast majority of the "artists and academics who were active in the theatres of the GDR," worked, at best, as a platform where members' voices could be heard, at worst as a transmission belt from the regime (Hammerthaler, in Hasche 193-194). The publication, sales, and distribution of plays was monopolized by a unique state-overlooked publication house, so that writing and directing a play necessarily meant compromising with the authorities (Hammerthaler, in Hasche 195).

The extent to which all the intellectuals "who made their compromises with the regime should be castigated for their complicity in sustaining a dictatorship has been the subject of furious debate in the years since the GDR's collapse" (Fulbrook 78). Because theatre was the performing art whose collusion with the regime was the most visible, the debate has been far more heated about playwrights and theatre directors than about film directors. Dresen's and Henckel von Donnersmarck's political and formal distancing thus appears as an artistic response to the GDR's politicization of theatre. By turning theatre into a metonymy for the GDR's entire political and cultural policies, the two directors take stock, in their film, of the political and artistic impact of the GDR in reunified Germany.
Dresen: Stilles Land

In the GDR, all theatre was political: "to the party, theatre meant 'socialist realism' and plays dealing with the contemporary reality of the GDR. It rejected any 'decadent,' 'bourgeois' influences from 'the West' such as 'Absurd Theatre" (Guntner 34). Forbidden in the GDR on account of its embodying the "quintessence of Western decadence," Beckett's Waiting for Godot eventually received its East German premiere in March 1987 at the Dresden Staatsschauspiel, directed by Wolfgang Engel (Hasche 229). Dresen does not specify whether the play was actually performed during the 1989/1990 season in the provincial towns he visited to gather material for his film. However, the play's emblematic political and cultural relevance to the GDR made it the ideal play through which to design a fictional 1989/1990 season – as Ralf Schenk's headline "Warten auf die Wende" ("Waiting for the 'Turn'") makes clear (Berliner Zeitung 13-10-92).

Following the play's rehearsal and performance in a small East German town on the eve of the fall of the Berlin Wall, Dresen divides the process into four stages symbolizing the last stages of the GDR's existence. In the opening rehearsal speech to the actors Dresen has Kai, the young director, expose his first directorial choice: casting Uschi, one of the troupe's actresses, as Estragon, thereby turning the two tramps into an old East German couple. Moreover, the set's central element, a car with a tree growing out of its hood, provides a theatrical symbol of the theatre's deficient bus, and of the country's immobility more generally. Like Vladimir and Estragon, the actors, and the entire GDR population, are stuck,

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86 Thirty-four years after the German premiere of the play at the Schlossparktheater in West Berlin (Hasse 229), and twelve years after Beckett's staging of his own play at the Schiller Theater in West Berlin in 1975 (Puchner 169).

87 Regardless of whether there was an actual production of Beckett's play in the Fall 1989 in the GDR, this symbolic casting decision was without any doubt made by Dresen himself as Beckett's estate would certainly not have allowed it for an actual theatrical performance.
waiting for something, "still." The first rehearsals thus set the tone: Beckett's play will function as the mirror of the country's political and social situation.

Kai's second directorial choice derives from his realization of the echo between "Godot" and "Gott." Kai's ignorance of the scholarly theatrical literature in which the polysemous ramifications of the name "Godot" in French, English and German have been widely debated hints at the censorship at work in the GDR: access to Western scholarly material and theatrical production accounts was heavily restricted. However, Kai's tentative conclusion in the speech he delivers to his actors ("We must all become God ourselves, right?" "Wir müssen selber Gott sein, oder nicht?") echoes Nietzsche's madman speech in The Gay Science (1882): "God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. […] Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?" (Nietzsche 181). The Nietzschean echo highlights Dresen's vision of the play as a call for political lucidity and action. The true socialism that the GDR has been waiting for is dead, and will never come. The alternative is therefore to keep waiting, like Beckett's characters, or to take action.

Rehearsals continue while the rest of the population indeed starts to take action, so that the dress rehearsal takes place right after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Inspired by a speech by Thomas, a Wessie, on the two necessary ingredients of theatre, "stage and imagination" ("Bühne und Fantasie"), the actors unexpectedly make the play come together. Up to here Dresen only shows the actors deliver one line from the play: "We're waiting for Godot," a line which comes back as a leitmotif throughout the film as it does throughout the play (Beckett, Godot 29, 159, 239, 281, 289, 309). This time Dresen chooses to show a longer excerpt from the play's second act:

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88 Cf. Estragon's line "[…] Yes, now I remember, yesterday evening we spent blathering about nothing in particular. That's been going on now for half a century" (Beckett, Godot 231).

89 Two of the intellectuals' privileges in the GDR were access to restricted information and the right to travel. Such privileges, however, were restricted to "high-level" intellectuals – in the world of theatre, to major directors, actors, or playwrights (Hammerthaler, in Hasche 258). A young and unknown director like Kai would certainly not have been part of that privileged group.
VLADIMIR. […] What are we doing here, that is the question. And we are blessed in this, that we happen to know the answer. Yes, in this immense confusion one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come—

ESTRAGON. Ah!

POZZO. Help!

VLADIMIR. Or for night to fall. (Pause) We have kept our appointment and that's an end to that. We are not saints, but we have kept our appointment.

How many people can boast as much?

ESTRAGON. Billions.

VLADIMIR. You think so?

ESTRAGON. I don’t know.

VLADIMIR. You may be right.

POZZO. Help!

VLADIMIR. All I know is that the hours are long, under these conditions, and constrain us to beguile them with proceedings which – how shall I say – which may at first sight seem reasonable, until they become a habit. You may say it is to prevent our reason from foundering. No doubt. But has it not long been straying in the night without end of the abyssal depths?

That's what I sometimes wonder. You follow my reasoning?

ESTRAGON (aphoristic for once). We are all born mad. Some remain so.

( Beckett, Godot 289-291)

Vladimir's absurd reasoning, call for action, and deafness to Pozzo's cry for help, contrasted with Estragon's successive approvals, disapprovals, and aphorism, contain all the aspirations, broken dreams, contradictory feelings, desire for change, and ultimate disillusion fostered by East Germany's collapse. Dresen uses uniquely cinematic techniques to reinforce
these theatrical echoes. The excerpt starts with a long shot of the entire stage; as the scene unfolds a forward travelling brings the audience closer and closer to the actors, so that at the end of the scene Vladimir and Estragon appear in close-up. During Vladimir's last line Dresen cuts to close-ups of troupe members attending the dress rehearsal before returning to a close-up of the actors for the end of the excerpt. Dresen's editing and framing thus formally bridge the distance between Beckett's theatrical words and characters and the reality of the former GDR and of its population.

However, Dresen does more than linking Beckett and the GDR: through the excerpt's intertextual echoes he highlights the former's play with the theatrical canon, and its political significance. Dresen sets up the excerpt so that both its opening and closing lines allude to *Hamlet*: the former parodies Hamlet's "To be or not to be, that is the question," and the latter evokes Hamlet's alleged madness: "I am but mad north-north-west" (II.2, 373; 223). Although *Hamlet*, Beckett's hypotext, is never mentioned in the film, the two references are obvious enough that they are as immediately perceptible for the film audience as they would have been for East German theatre audience.

Unlike Beckett's play, *Hamlet* was appropriated by the GDR from the very beginning. In 1945 *Hamlet* became the second play performed in the newly reopened Deutsches Theatre,\(^90\) in a performance that encapsulated, according to its director Gustav von Wangenheim, the socialism foreshadowed by Shakespeare's humanism. "Hamlet's remarks on how and what to perform became the official credo for Shakespeare reception in the GDR, and the play within the play became a metaphor for the role of the theatre in building up a socialist state" (Guntner 32). In February 1946 Wangenheim urged young audience members attending his staging of *Hamlet* to take example on Shakespeare's character: "Be radical like Hamlet. Think things through the end. Act with decision! We are more fortunate than

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\(^{90}\) The first one was Lessing's *Nathan der Weise*. 
Shakespeare's Hamlet because we know the way out. We understand the purpose of our struggle"91 (in Guntner 32).

For all of Wangenheim's exhortations, however, it is Hamlet's hesitations, constant questioning, and systematic postponing of action that Beckett's characters and the GDR population seem to imitate in Stilles Land. What Dresen stages is the break between theatre (from the Ancient Greek "to watch") and drama (from the Ancient Greek "to act"). In the film the provincial actors do not really act; they become spectators of Berliners and watch them cause the Berlin Wall to fall. Action has left theatre and gone into the streets, causing the government to react to it, as the exchange between one of the troupe's actors and a policeman who arrests him testifies:

THEO. I'm an actor, so I need to take the train, I have a performance!

POLICEMAN. Today it's a different performance and we decide what is playing.

While authorities decide what plays in the streets, they could not care less about Kai's political staging of Waiting for Godot – and the population does not seem more interested in it than the authorities. Attendance is so low that the director of the theatre soon replaces Kai's production by another play. The film ends on alternate shots of Kai, facing onstage the limelight and the empty house, and facing outside a straight empty road, as immobile as Vladimir and Estragon at the end of both acts of Beckett's play.92 The formal distance Dresen introduces in his film by embedding theatre transposes the distance he exposes between theatre, and the arts in general, and politics in the last years of the GDR. The difficulties,

91 Wangenheim's words function as the exact counterpart to the Nazi press conference in Mephisto, and confirm the play's political elasticity hinted at in Szabó's film.

92 ESTRAGON (Act 1) / VLADIMIR (Act 2). Well? Shall we go?
VLADIMIR (Act 1) / ESTRAGON (Act 2). Yes, let's go.
They do not move. (Beckett, Godot 187, 357)
necessity, and ultimate impossibility of taking action at the heart of Waiting for Godot and Hamlet provide striking theatrical images of the country's political stillness.

No matter how good a "passive" mirror of the GDR theatre might be, however, Dresen questions its active political impact. And through Kai's and theatre's political inadequacies, it is his own and cinema's political stillness which Dresen ultimately exposes. The only reference to cinema, in the film, is heard in Uschi's repeated "See you soon in Hollywood!" ("Bis bald in Hollywood!"). Uschi's ironical farewell formula defines the "West" and its cinema as a utopia, a non-existent because non-reachable land which neither the dissolving of the GDR and the promises of West Germany nor theatre and cinema bring any closer. By embedding drama/action within cinema, whose Greek roots, kinesis, means movement, Dresen confronts theatre's and cinema's ideal active dynamism with the reality of their political limited significance and incapacity to make things move forward.
Henckel von Donnersmarck: Das Leben der Anderen

Unlike Stilles Land, Das Leben der Anderen takes place in Berlin's theatre milieu, right at the center of the "action." And while Dresen emphasizes the provincial distance between theatre and politics, Henckel von Donnersmarck limns the heavily politicization of Berlin's theatre world. In Das Leben der Anderen all characters are defined by their theatrical activity as much as by their political position, so that the issue is no longer the absence of theatre's impact on the political life but on the contrary the overwhelming political impact on the theatrical life. The film's double formal and political distancing thus offers, beyond its historical reflection, an image of the political mechanisms behind artistic creation.

The film's main character, the fictional playwright Georg Dreyman, is presented from the outset as a linientreu (following the line of the party) artist. The premiere of his new play, "Gesichter der Liebe" ("Faces of Love"), is a heavily politically connoted cultural event. Performed in the fictional Gerhart-Hauptmann Theater, presented as East-Berlin’s biggest venue, it is directed by Egon Schwalber, a director whom we learn is an informal Stasi-informer under the name "Max Reinhardt." It is attended by Stasi officers (among them Gerd Wiesler, the other main character of the film, who will later become in charge of spying on Dreyman) as well as by Grubitz, the head of the cultural surveillance department in the Ministry of State Security, and even by Hempf, a Minister member of the SED.

The play itself seems as indebted to the party as Dreyman is. The first time it is performed onscreen the play's opening scene unfolds in a factory. Its main characters are female workers, and, as the screenplay indicates, the opening scene should even have featured "a true hymn to the proletariat" (Donnersmarck, VA 27). In the film no such hymn is either heard or hinted at onstage. The excerpt starts with the play's main character Marta (played by Christa-Maria Sieland, Dreyman's girlfriend) suddenly having a vision about the death of the husband of one of her co-workers. After Marta's vision the film music gradually
covers the words of the play, as if Wiesler, through whose eyes the film audience watches the embedding play, stopped paying attention to the lines and focused rather on Hempf's and Dreyman's respective reactions to the play. However short and incomplete, the excerpt is enough to indicate that the play has been conceived to please the party, and that Dreyman has subjected his art to the dominant ideology.

Towards the end of the movie, the revival of "Faces of Love" ten years after its premiere in the same theatre but in a reunified city and country leads to a very different production, as Henckel von Donnersmarck describes in the script: "The factory hall has become a white room with six abstract doors in front of which six women are standing, with black fluid dresses. On the right, isolated in a luminous cone, Marta. It is a black woman wearing a prophet toga and who performs the role eloquently" (Donnersmarck, VA 141). The scene in the movie differs slightly insofar as the "white room with the abstract doors" has become a black background against which four white panels are lined up on an upstage-downstage diagonal. Four women hidden behind them simultaneously step in front of them when Marta starts having her vision, not fainting this time but looking straight at the audience, as if in a trance.

Like Szabó's two versions of Faust, the two performances of Dreyman's play in opposite political contexts highlight the aesthetical and ideological gap between the two eras. However, unlike Goethe's Faust, written long before both the Weimar and the Nazi periods, Dreyman's play is entirely a product of the GDR. The major difference between the two productions of the same play calls into question the degree to which the play was bound to the regime in the first place. Was it that easy to transform what seemed to be such a political play into such an abstract one? Is it really only a matter of staging, costume, set, and director? Or was the play truly more ambiguous and/or subtle than could be expressed in the GDR?
The impact of politics on artistic and theatrical creation becomes the very subject of the conversion between Hempf and Dreyman, who both exit the house in the middle of the second performance and meet in the lobby of the theatre. Asked by Hempf why he has not been able to write since the fall of the Berlin Wall, Dreyman remains silent. Instead of answering the questions raised by the difference between the two productions, then, their conversation raises more questions still. To what extent did Dreyman really believe in the regime, personally and in his writing? Was he only paying lip-service to its ideology, or was his creativity truly fueled by it? Are we to believe Hempf's attempt at deciphering Dreyman's writer's block?:

HEMPF. […] What can one write in this Federal Republic of Germany: there is nothing in which you can believe in anymore, nothing against which you can rebel… (Henckel von Donnersmarck, LA 149)

Hempf's line echoes some East German directors' beliefs on the artistic benefits of the regime's political oppression. For Adolf Dresen, for instance,

the negative side of the East German Theatre was precisely that which made it so excellent. They put a lid on us, so we knew exactly what we were up against. We were all convinced Marxists – Tragelehn, Heiner Müller – we were all friends. We wanted socialism but none of us wanted the brand that was being practiced in the GDR. […]

[After Honecker's 1971 putsch and the relative subsequent political liberalization] the lid pushing down on us was missing, and we needed to have something to push against. A common opponent had helped to weld ensembles together, and now they started to fall apart because there was nothing to work against. The political pressure had been removed but exactly that had kept us
together. Now the link was broken. This 'liberalization' didn't lead to a new truth or truthfulness in art but to corruption. (in Guntner 154-155)

Dreyman's obstinate silence against Hempf's insinuations does not shed light on the mystery of his personal motivations – but it does foreground the prime, if unresolved, role of politics as a source of artistic inspiration.

Indeed, political authorities in the film do not only choose who can work or not, but also which words can be used, onstage and off. Early on Dreyman capitalizes on the success of his play to try and plead for his friend, the director Albert Jerska. When he tells Hempf that Jerska has been blacklisted after having signed a compromising document, Hempf urges Dreyman to speak more cautiously, denying the concept more than the fact: "His interdiction to work? It doesn't exist here. You should choose your words more carefully" (Henckel von Donnermarck, LA 34). With this line Henckel von Donnersmarck subtly reminds the film audience the extent to which censorship shaped not only political and everyday life, but also the artistic and theatrical one. In the GDR, the way plays were written was no more entirely up to the playwright than the way they were performed was entirely up to the director.

Dreyman and Jerska thus become fictional embodiments of the GDR's most famous playwrights and directors, Brecht and Müller. Both Brecht and Müller drew heavily on socialism to write and direct their plays, while criticizing its East German version and entertaining complex relationships with the regime. For all his people-oriented plays, Brecht became a controversial figure by supporting the Russian crushing of the Berlin workers' revolt in 1953 and receiving the International Stalin Prize for Peace in 1955. As for Heiner Müller, he won the Heinrich-Mann Preis in 1959, and if his relationship to the GDR

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93 In the script Henckel von Donnersmack was more specific than in the movie: Jerska disgraced himself by having signed a petition against the measure depriving the anti-GDR liedermacher Wolf Biermann of his nationality in 1976. This measure launched a widespread protest of intellectuals against the government, and led to a vast number of immigrations.

94 Müller's Gernania Tod in Berlin (1956-1971), for instance, was forbidden because it mentioned a Communist in prison in the GDR, and only received its East-German premiere in 1988.
deteriorated in the sixties and seventies, he was nonetheless able to stay in the country, to write, and to have his plays published and performed in West Germany and abroad. He was even slowly reintegrated in all of the GDR's official theatrical associations in the last year of the regime.

Henckel von Donnermarck does not equate Dreyman with Müller and Jerska with Brecht, but rather personifies, in Dreyman, Brecht and Müller's compromises with the GDR. Jerska, conversely, embodies both figures' artistic independence. On the one hand, the only book which we see Jerska read is Dreyman's volume of Brecht's poetry. Wiesler later secretly seizes Dreyman's book and reads it avidly, as the voiceover of Brecht's words and the tilted close-up shots of Wiesler reading manifest his accession to artistic and political enlightenment. On the other hand, Henckel von Donnersmarck models Jerska's belief in the role of theatre in the GDR on Müller's. Dreyman's line about Jerska: "And he firmly believes in Socialism. He doesn't want to leave. He could work in any theatre in the West" (Henckel von Donnermarck, LA 34), echoes Alexander Weigel's recounting of Müller's refusal to go

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95 In an ironical continuation of censorship issues, Brecht's daughter did not allow Henckel von Donnersmarck to use the first stanza of "Animal Poem," one of Brecht's political Children Songs (1934):


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>German</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tierverse</td>
<td>Animal Poem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Es war einmal ein Adler,</td>
<td>Once there was an eagle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Der hatte viele Tadler</td>
<td>That had many detractors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Die machten ihn herunter</td>
<td>Who were belittling him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Und haben ihn verdächtigt</td>
<td>And who suspected him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Er könnte nicht schwimmen im Teich.</td>
<td>Of not being capable of swimming in the pond.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Da versuchte er es sogleich</td>
<td>So he tried it at once</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Und ging natürlich unter.</td>
<td>And he sank, naturally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Der Tadel war also berechtigt.) [...]</td>
<td>(The rebuke was therefore justified.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Brecht, Gesammelte Werke 508)

He therefore replaced it with the first stanza of Brecht's 1920 love poem:


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>German</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Erinnerung an die Marie A.</td>
<td>Remembering Marie A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An dem Tag im blauen Mond September</td>
<td>It was a day in that blue month September</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Still unter einem jungen Pflaumenbaum</td>
<td>Silent beneath a plum tree's slender shade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Da hielt ich sie, die stille bleiche Liebe</td>
<td>I held her there, my love so pale and silent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In meinem Arm wie einen holden Traum</td>
<td>As if she were a dream that must not fade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Und über uns im schönen Sommerhimmel</td>
<td>Above us in the shining summer heaven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War eine Wolke, die ich lange sah</td>
<td>There was a cloud my eyes dwelt long upon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sie war sehr weiß und ungeheuer oben</td>
<td>It was quite white and very high above us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Und als ich aufsah, war sie nimmer da.</td>
<td>Then I looked up, and found that it had gone.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Brecht, Poetry and Prose 10-11, translation John Willet)
work in West Germany or the United States because "even though he had so many obstacles and difficulties in getting his plays performed, he knew of no other country in which his plays had a comparable social impact" (in Guntner 221).

Jerska's suicide, which precipitates Dreyman's writing of a dissident article for a West German magazine, symbolizes the artistic toll paid by the theatre world for the political compromises of some its members. And like Stilles Land, Das Leben der Anderen gives little credit, if any, to theatre for the role it played in the regime's dissolution. Wiesler's political conversion, sparked by his spying on Dreyman and Christa, is historically fraught; as Funder explains in her article, "this never occurred. It was impossible" (Funder 16). And if Dreyman's article feeds the debate about the GDR in West Germany and launches a wide repression led by the Stasi, neither his article nor his plays are shown to have any direct impact on the end of the regime.

Symbolically, Dreyman's last published work in the film is not a play but a novel dedicated to Wiesler in which the film spectators can surmise he narrates all the episodes they have just witnessed in the film. Dreyman's switching to the novel seems to signify both the end of theatre's unique position in the GDR as well as a larger distrust for images. If Henckel von Donnersmarck exposes how censorship heavily restricted the use of language both publically and privately, he also exposes how the Stasi falsified images and manipulated what the population could see. In this respect, the film is historically accurate in its representation of "details such as how prisoners were ordered to avert their eyes so as not to see others held in prison, or how the vehicles used to transport detainees were disguised as refrigerated vans.

96 "In an interview for the Leipziger Volkszeitung Knabe [the director of the memorial museum set in Hohenschönhausen, "the GDR's main jail for political prisoners"] sets out the reasons why a Stasi man could never have changed sides and tried to save suspects from persecution. Prime among these was the surveillance within the Stasi of its own men and the compartmentalisation of their duties. No single individual such as Wiesler could have sat in an attic listening to the couple, typed the reports, conducted the interrogations and lectured at the academy. Everything was checked and cross-checked; everyone was internally observed. Moreover, the punishment for betrayal of the Stasi was death (not, as in the film, being sent to steam open mail); indeed the last execution in the GDR was of a Stasi man" (Funder 19).
for seafood" (Funder 19). The two embedded performances of Dreyman's play further expose how the same words can lead to the production of widely different productions, and images.

Ultimately, then, Henckel von Donnersmarck does no shield his own film from this pervading distrust for images. The film does not end onstage, but in the library where Wiesler buys Dreyman's novel. The embedded novel transforms the film into its visual counterpart – thereby reminding the film audience of film’s status as historical fiction, and of the nature of cinema as a series of images as fictional as those from the represented theatrical performances.
The five films' depiction of the insidious methods with which totalitarian regimes control their artists turns out to be strikingly similar to the way in which directors are shown to direct their actors. In *Das Leben der Anderen* the Stasi taps the entirety of Dreyman and Christa's apartment, gaining auditory access to their private life. In Truffaut's *Le dernier métro* the director Lucas Steiner, hidden in the cellar, discovers a heating conduit through which he can listen to everything that happens onstage while remaining hidden. In both cases, the listener eventually gains real control over the people he listens to.

To be sure, the Stasi spy and the director work towards opposite goals. As Wiesler's job is to find indicting material about Dreyman, his listening is directed against the playwright, whereas Lucas' listening is meant to help the actors. By listening to them and secretly directing the play through the notes he gives to his wife Marion, he makes the play as good as possible and ensures that the theatre remains open until the end of the war. However, things unfold in unexpected (and unrealistic) directions. In the first case Wiesler slowly gets contaminated by what he hears, becoming partial to the artists he is supposed to denounce, and eventually orchestrating Christa's betrayal to save her and Dreyman. In the second case Lucas does reach his commendable artistic aims and saves the theatre by filling the house, but in the process he also manipulates Marion into having an affair with the play's other lead actor Bernard so as to make their acting even better and "more sincere."

The two films therefore create parallel situations in which political aims and theatrical ones are reached through the same technique. Neither situation could have existed in real life as depicted in the films – and the political and moral implications of wiretapping an entire society are obviously not comparable to those of a director manipulating his wife's romantic life. Moreover, actors are usually aware of their directors' manipulation and accept it as an aspect of the theatrical process meant to better their performance, whereas a dictator's manipulation is directed against the population it aims at subjecting.
But the comparison between the films suggests that being a great director is, *mutatis mutandis*, similar to being a great dictator: it is all about gaining personal information from the actor/population so as to manipulate him/them. Marion’s first name, highlighting her nature as a "marion-ette" whose strings are pulled by her husband (Le Gras, in Amiel 212), turn her into the personification of politically manipulated populations. Ultimately, then, the two manipulating and directing processes differ in space, scale and aims – not in means.

This parallelism is not specific to theatre, however, and could as well be applied to cinema directors. And this is where the director's political and formal mirroring takes all its meaning. Theatre and the extreme political eras of Nazi Germany or the GDR provide the directors with a yardstick with which to reflect on their contemporary political and cinematic situation. On the one hand, theatre's formal features allow for a more direct exploration of the collusion between arts and politics. Because plays are both written and staged in a particular political context and need to be made relevant to whichever subsequent context they are staged in; because theatre is a traditional game of masks; and because it involves the risk of live performance, theatre offers the perfect setting with which to explore men's adaptation and compromise to their political surrounding. On the other hand, the similarities between theatre and film’s directing and political manipulation effectively turn the embedded theatre into a metaphor for the political and ideological dealings at work in film, art, and society at large.
Part III: The cinematic wings of theatre

The last image of Pedro Almodóvar's Todo sobre mi madre features closed golden theatre curtains on which can be read: "To Bette Davis, Gena Rowlands, Romy Schneider…
To all actresses who have played actresses, to all women who act, to men who act and transform themselves into women, to all the people who want to become mothers. To my mother."97 The dedication is broad to say the least, yet its first three names evoke three specific films: All about Eve (Joseph Mankiewicz, 1950), Opening Night (John Cassavetes, 1977), and L'important c'est d'aimer (Andrej Zulawski, 1975). All three films, like Almodóvar's, feature a theatre actress as one of their main characters, and unfold around the interrelated professional and personal crises these actresses undergo.

In "Actresses and Women," one of his "reflections" functioning as epilogues to the published screenplay, Almodóvar expands on his dedication and lists the "many more actresses" to whom he could have extended it (Almodóvar 173). He enumerates figures such as Gloria Swanson in Sunset Boulevard, which was shot the same year as All about Eve and lost to it at the Oscar ceremony; Judy Garland in A Star Is Born, Cukor's 1954 remake of Wellman's 1937 movie which influenced Cassavetes for Opening Night; Ava Gardner in Mankiewicz' The Barefoot Contessa (1954), which unfolds in Hollywood just as All about Eve unfolds on Broadway; Valentina Cortese in Truffaut's La nuit américaine (1973), the cinematic pendant to the theatrical Le dernier métro; and many others (Almodóvar 173-714).
What all these films have in common, which would have justified their presence both in Almodóvar's dedication and in this dissertation, is their reflexive dimension, their featuring, as Almodóvar puts it, "actresses who play actresses."

97 "A Bette Davis, Gena Rowlands, Romy Schneider… A todas las actrices que han hecho de actrices, a todas las mujeres que actúan, a los hombres que actúan y se convierten en mujeres, a todas las personas que quieren ser madres. A mi madre."
And yet sharing a reflexive dimension is not quite enough. All these movies might be thematically related, but had Almodóvar not mentioned any of them, two would still come to mind as obvious sources of inspiration: All about Eve and Opening Night. In addition to the echo in the title, Almodóvar inserted a scene from All about Eve as well as many literal references to the movie within his film. He also designed the car accident scene in Todo sobre mi madre as a pastiche of the car accident scene in Opening Night. And Cassavetes himself acknowledged that All about Eve was one of his main sources of inspiration for Opening Night (Carney, Cassavetes 406).

What these three movies share that the others do not is precisely that which has been the object of this dissertation: an exploration of the relationship between theatre and film. Whereas Almodóvar's extended list contains films about theatre as much as films about cinema, as if being a theatre actress and a film actress did not make any difference, All about Eve, Opening Night and Todo sobre mi madre specifically involve theatre actresses. Unlike Nadine Chevalier (Romy Schneider) in L'important c'est d'aimer who acts in third-rate films to make ends meet, Margo Channing, Myrtle Gordon, and Huma Rojo live off of their theatrical careers and could not even conceive of acting in a film – or, for that matter, in a third-rate play – for monetary reasons. The three actresses are all great professional theatre actresses with no link to the film industry.

By inscribing his film in the wake of All about Eve and Opening Night, then, Almodóvar places it within a specific meta-theatrical cinematic tradition. But whereas Mankiewicz and Cassavetes remain close to and enclosed in the world of theatre, Almodóvar interweaves, in his film, cinematic and theatrical references. He simultaneously represents theatrical performances and films representing theatre. So that while his characters dwell

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98 And, to a certain extent, it does not make any difference: Mankiewicz, Cassavetes, and Almodóvar worked with both theatre and cinema actresses. Indeed, in the three films the directors insert many variously explicit references to this interchange, which I will point out along the way.
exclusively in the world of theatre and have no link to the film industry, Almodóvar explicitly endows his film with a unique half-theatrical and half-cinematic reflexivity.

In his article "The uses of the film-within-a-film device" Nicolas Schmidt distinguishes three non-mutually exclusive foundations of the eponymous device: "when it shows the ways in which a cinematic production works, it exposes the wings; when it inserts at least one film excerpt, it quotes; when it leads the directorial process to reflect upon itself, it mirrors the film we are watching" (in Prédal, *Le cinéma* 103). As convenient as it sounds, this distinction seems somewhat imbalanced: exposing the wings and quoting both entail mirroring, if not the directorial process, at least the medium itself.

But more important, Schmidt's definition borrows terms from various other arts to conceptualize a cinematic reality. The term "wings" comes directly from theatre, which Schmidt himself acknowledges as the most obvious choice: "a film within a film is a means to find oneself at the same time on a 'stage' and in the 'wings,' the reference to theatre being here the simplest and the most immediate one" (in Prédal, *Le cinéma* 103). Schmidt's definition of "wings" as "everything that is not meant to be part of the final product" (*ibid.* ) highlights his metaphorical usage of the term. There are, technically speaking, no "wings" on a film set. And in a theatre, wings have a more specific definition than merely "that which is unseen"; they refer to the actual "space that lies immediately adjacent to a performance space, often architecturally continuous with it but obscured from an audience's sight by the hanging of masking cloths or the intervention of a stage set" – a space in which technicians run the show and actors get "ready to act and make an appearance" (Filmer 159).

Had it not been for theatre, one wonders which metaphor Schmidt would have used to describe this aspect of the film-within-a-film. Moreover, "quotation" refers to the world of literature, and music, while "mirroring" alludes to that of painting – all arts which made use

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99 "A wing is a flat ["a large flat vertical surface forming part of a scene, kept rigid with a frame, supported by braces, jacks, poles, or fly lines"] whose offstage edge is beyond audience sight lines, thus masking the backstage; or it may be a drape serving the same purpose" (Barnes).
of self-reflexivity long before film existed. Schmidt's reliance on non-cinematic concepts to describe a specific cinematic device casts doubts on this specificity. But this structural "impurity" which early critics reproached cinema turned out to be one of its greatest assets over the other arts: unlike them, film can represent them all – hence can use to its advantage many of their specific concepts.

And this is precisely what Almodóvar does in Todo sobre mi madre, in which he exposes the wings of, quotes, and mirrors both the embedded plays and films. In the first chapter I analyze how his definition of theatre as female, a vision he shares with Mankiewicz, leads him to use Tennessee Williams' A Streetcar Named Desire to map out the psychological and spatial landscape of his main character Manuela. In the second chapter I further explore how he builds Manuela’s character by a combination of transtextual, sociological, and psychoanalytical devices, by contrasting her to her cinematic doubles, characters from other films (Eve), types (the star), or embodying another vision of female and formal authenticity (Agrado). This leads me to conclude this part with an analysis of mirrors, which simultaneously function on all above-mentioned levels, and become the metonymy for Almodóvar’s directing process, and film’s representation of theatre.
Chapter Eight: The inner and outer landscape of the stage onscreen

**Almodóvar and Mankiewicz: a female theatre**

Almodóvar is famous for the memorable female roles he creates, and readily confesses his preference for writing female roles and working with actresses:

> When it comes to write and direct [sic], women attract me much more. I've always liked feminine sensitivity and when I create a character it's much easier for me to do a feminine one, and I manage to shape it in a more solid and interesting way. On the other hand, women have more facets, they seem more like protagonist types… We, men, are cut from the same cloth, while women hold a greater mystery inside, they have more nuances and a sensitivity that is more authentic. Really, I personally see more possibilities in a feminine role.

(in Willoquet 23-24)

He traces the origin of *Todo sobre mi madre*, in particular, back to his lifelong fascination for women's capacity to act:

> My original idea was to make a movie on the ability that certain people who are not actors have for acting.

> When I was a kid I remember observing this quality in the women of my family. They pretended more and better than men. And they managed to prevent with their lies more than one tragedy.

> Forty years ago, when I lived there, La Mancha was an arid and machismo land, in whose families the man reigned from his wing armchair upholstered with shiny pleader, while women solved problems for real, silently, often having to lie to him. (Is this the reason why García Lorca said that Spain had always been a country of great actresses?)
Against this Manchegan machismo that I remember (sometimes agitated) from my childhood, women pretended, lied, concealed, and by doing so allowed life to flow and develop without the men finding out about it and obstructing it. (In addition to being vital, it was spectacular. The first performance I saw was that of various women speaking in the patios.) I did not know it, but this was to be one of the themes of my thirteenth film, women's capacity to pretend.

And wounded maternity. And the spontaneous solidarity between women.

(Almodóvar 169)

Almodóvar explicitly characterizes his fascination for women and female theatricality as a reaction against the "catholic and macho" codes of the Spain of his childhood, the patriarchal Spain in which the father figure is an all-powerful substitute for Franco (Escudero 150). The recurrent features of Almodóvar's cinema, such as his use of character-types, his focus on women, his incorporation of metafictional elements, his parody of sexist intertextual references, and his grotesque humor, are all emblematic of the "Movida" that shook Spain in the 1980s and which strongly rejected the values of Franco's Spain (Escudero 154).

For all its historical grounding, however, Almodóvar's vision is strikingly similar to Mankiewicz':

A woman can say yes and no at the same time. A woman wants and does not want at the same time. A woman lies and dissimulates far better than a man because she has been forced to do so in our society. But I would hate for them to lose these wonderful attributes. They are natural attributes as well.

[…] I agree entirely with women when they speak of the impossible life that society gives them, but I envy them their superior "equipment" to confront life. All the social injustice perpetrated against them has sharpened their
defenses. Over the centuries they have developed certain instincts, certain
talents, that they are not willing to abandon, and I do not personally want them
to. I find them infinitely more fascinating than men.\textsuperscript{100} (in Ciment 162)

Writing about men is so damned… limited. They're made up, for the most part, of large, predictable, conforming elements. Men react as they're taught to react, in what they've been taught is a 'manly' way. Women are, by comparison, as if assembled by the wind. They're made up of – and react to – tiny impulses. Inflections. Colors. Sounds. They hear things men cannot. And, further, react to stimuli men either can't feel or must reject as "unmanly." (in Carey 41)

Mankiewicz' eminently personal theory does not pretend, in its precarious balance between nature and nurture, to be more than very generally historically and socially valid. In fact, the numerous accusations of misogyny leveled against Mankiewicz were based on such declarations. However, beyond its questionable scientific accuracy, his theory outlines the ways in which he answered to the general misogynistic trends that pervaded Hollywood at the time. Indeed, between Mankiewicz' birth (1909) and his first films (late 1940s), the rapidly changing condition of women in the United States, which culminated in the feminist movement of the 1960s, led to mixed results on screen.

Since the 1920s, the "increasingly middle-class nature of the cinematic imagination" (Morin 10-11) had brought about "a greater degree of eroticization," a "'realistic'
humanization" and a "new typological combinations of the stars" (Morin 20) – in short, a

\textsuperscript{100} Ciment's book is in French, and Mankiewicz' original quotes in English are unavailable. I am therefore translating Mankiewicz' words back into English and apologize for the somewhat distorted quotes; I will always provide the French "original." In this case: "La femme peut dire oui et non en même temps. La femme veut et ne veut pas en même temps. La femme ment et dissimule infiniment mieux que l'homme car elle a été obligée de le faire dans notre société. Mais je déteste qu'elle perde ses merveilleux attributs. Ce sont aussi des attributs naturels. […] Je suis entièrement d'accord avec les femmes quand elles parlent de la vie impossible que leur fait la société, mais je leur envie leur 'équipement' supérieur pour affronter la vie. Toutes les injustices sociales perpétrées contre elles ont aiguisé leurs défenses. Au cours de siècles, comme dans les lois de l'évolution, elles ont développé certains instincts, certains talents, qu'elles ne sont pas prêtes à abandonner et je ne le désire personnellement pas. Je les trouve infiniment plus fascinantes que les hommes."
secularized version of the mythical screen goddess. By the 1950s, the onscreen image of women was too masculine and modern for men, too traditionally feminine for women, and the number of films centered on female characters was not increasing.

Mankiewicz counters this tendency by devoting the majority of his films to female characters, and, more subjectively, by tracing women's predisposition for acting to two specific female attributes. The first one is women's innate protean "formlessness" or flexibility, which is visible in their hypersensitivity to the world and their ability to react to it. The second one is their acquired talent for lying and dissimulating which they have had to develop in order to survive in a men's world. For Mankiewicz, these two capacities are precisely the ones needed to be a good actor – or rather, actress.

Almodóvar does not go into the nature-nurture debate, but his vision is similar to Mankiewicz inasmuch as it is based on childhood memories, personal experience, and shaped in response to contemporary trends. Regardless of their different historical and cultural background, then, Mankiewicz and Almodóvar follow a similar path that leads them to assert the superiority of women's acting capacities over men's, and ultimately to forge an intrinsically feminine image of theatre. The difference between the two directors lies in their agenda: whereas Mankiewicz looks for the woman behind the actress to explain actresses' talent for acting, Almodóvar looks for the actress behind the woman to explain women's talent for living. Almodóvar's film consists in an exploration of women's, and not actresses', acting capacities.

Almodóvar thus limns his main character Manuela (Cecilia Roth), a nurse, mother, and former amateur actress, against three female theatrical figures from All about Eve and Todo sobre mi madre. These figures belong to a specific place in the theatre: Eve (Anne Baxter) the fan, in the auditorium; Margo (Bette Davis) and Huma (Marisa Paredes), the stars, on stage; and Agrado (Antonia San Juan), the dresser, a modern version of Mankiewicz'
Birdie (Thelma Ritter), backstage. Throughout the film each figure is shown to escape her original spatial position and slip through the traditionally impermeable boundaries between auditorium, stage, and wings. Indeed, the evolution of each of Almodóvar's female characters climaxes with a *coup de théâtre* onstage appearance which brings out their acting talent: Manuela as Stella in *A Streetcar Named Desire*; Huma as the Mother in *Haciendo Lorca*; and Agrado as herself in an improvised stand-up comedy number.

Almodóvar's depiction of theatre as overwhelmingly feminine transposes yet another cinematic reality. Edgar Morin, in his groundbreaking study *The Stars* (1972), characterizes cinema's star system as essentially feminine. He first notes that the star system mainly targets a feminine audience: according to a study by Leo Rosten and Margaret Thorp, eighty percent of fans are female, regardless of the sex of the star (Morin 83). But Morin also notes, echoing Mankiewicz' and Almodóvar's celebration of women as actresses, that the concept of the star itself has been "naturally feminized":

> ‘Mythification’ is effected primarily upon female stars: they are the most ‘fabricated,’ the most idealized, the least real, the most adored. In present-day social conditions, woman is more mythic than man as both subject and object. She is naturally more of star than a man. (Morin 83)

By applying the phenomenon of the female cinematic star-system to the theatre, Almodóvar, like Mankiewicz before him, turns the auditorium and the stage into feminized spaces.

But as I have shown, for Almodóvar theatre's feminine dimension is not an external characteristic which it inherits from cinema. To be sure, women were historically barred from the stage for a long time, and were never barred from the screen. But Almodóvar is less interested in historical truth than in myth. Unlike Hanna Scolnicov, who in her book *Woman's Theatrical Space* explores how "the articulation of the theatrical space is an

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101 In French the noun "star" is feminine, even when it is applied to a male star.
expression of woman's position in society" from the Greeks to contemporary drama, in his film Almodóvar exposes how, on the deepest level, theatre is feminine because women are the "mothers" of theatre.

In fact, Almodóvar locates the mythical birth of theatre in his "childhood's patio":

"Three or four women talking represent for me the origin of life, but also the origin of fiction and narration" – a nucleus which finds its theatrical transposition in dressing rooms, the "sancta santorum of the female universe"102 (Almodóvar 171). It is precisely inasmuch he ignores history that Almodóvar can integrate Mankiewicz' vision so easily and create a mythical lineage modeled on his personal life, from women/mothers to theatre to film/filmmakers.

102 "… el camarino de un teatro, convertido en sancta santorum del universo femenino (equivale al patio de mi niñez. Tres o cuatro mujeres, hablando, significan para mí el origen de la vida, pero también el origen de la ficción y de la narración)."
Tennessee Williams’ *A Streetcar Named Desire* onscreen: Manuela’s mental and spatial catharsis

Almodóvar sketches Manuela's motherhood as a direct consequence of her theatrical "career." As the film unfolds Almodóvar gradually unveils Manuela's past: she met her husband Esteban during an amateur production of *A Streetcar Named Desire* in their native Argentina; she played Stella, he played Kowalski. The two actors, imitating the characters, married, and fled Argentina to settle in Barcelona. When she became pregnant, Manuela left Esteban, who had become a transsexual named Lola, moved to Madrid, and became a nurse to provide for herself and her son Esteban.

The film begins seventeen years later, as Manuela takes Esteban to see a professional production of *Streetcar* featuring Huma Rojo as Blanche and Nina Cruz as Stella for his seventeenth birthday. The play alters Manuela's life for the second time: after the performance, Esteban, running behind Huma's taxi to get an autograph, is hit by a car and dies. The play that gave her a son now takes it away from her. Manuela quits her job, leaves Madrid and goes back to Barcelona in search of Lola – thereby unwittingly following the tour of the *Streetcar* production. She goes to see the play again, becomes Huma's assistant, and ends up replacing Nina last minute as Stella. Deprived of her role as a mother, Manuela is back onstage.

But this second theatrical career leads to a second motherhood period: at the end of the film Manuela has stopped working on- or offstage to raise the orphan son of Sister Rosa and Esteban/Lola. Throughout her life, then, Manuela alternates between the role of mother and that of actress – an alternation which is in fact closer to a continuation as the only role we see her play, Stella, is the role of a mother. Tennessee Williams' play thus becomes a recurring turning point for Manuela; each of its performances transports her from offstage to onstage motherhood and back, literally becoming a matter of life and death for her:
It's as if, all of a sudden, she had rehearsed in this play something that will happen to her in real life. But, on top of that, *A Streetcar Named Desire* becomes a streetcar that runs into the flow of her life, destroying it each time it appears. [...] It's as if the streetcar had run over her several times, every time it had crossed her life. This doesn't mean that I don't love Williams' play, but it takes on an active role. (Almodóvar, in Willoquet 145-146)

Manuela's confrontation with the fictional Stella is "active" inasmuch as it becomes both the source of her thwarted motherhood and the remedy through which she eventually recovers her role as mother. What Manuela undergoes, throughout the film, is in fact an Aristotelian catharsis. In his introduction to the *Poetics* Richard Janko breaks down the stages of Aristotle's catharsis:

> By representing pitiable, terrifying and other painful events, tragedy arouses pity, terror and other painful emotions in the audience, for each according to his own emotional capacity, and so stimulates these emotions as to relieve them by giving them moderate and harmless exercise, thereby bringing the audience nearer to the mean in their emotional responses, and so nearer to virtue in their characters; and with this relief comes pleasure. (in Aristotle xx)

As it turns out, Manuela's evolution in the film exactly follows the stages enumerated by Janko, as if Almodóvar had designed her character as modern illustration of Aristotle's theory. Indeed, Almodóvar doubles his outlining of the psychological stages of Manuela’s catharsis with an exploration of the overlapping theatrical and cinematic spatial frames it unfolds in.
The mental theatrical stages of Manuela’s catharsis

The first condition for the cathartic process is that it is sparked by attending a tragedy. Although Tennessee Williams does not explicitly inscribe his play in a specific genre, Streetcar has been recurrently characterized as a modern tragedy. For Robert Brustein Streetcar, like Miss Julie, displays Strindberg's vision of "the war between the classes as a tragic struggle," while Williams himself, like Strindberg, "barely conceal[s] under a pretense of impartiality his sympathy for the fallen warrior nobility" (Brustein 170). For Raymond Williams, the human condition depicted in Streetcar is "tragic because of the entry of mind on the fierce, and in itself tragic, animal struggle of sex and death" (Williams, Tragedy 119). By embedding one of the most famous modern tragedies in his film, Almodóvar provides the first condition for the theatrical catharsis. 103

The second condition outlined by Janko is that the performance of the tragedy should arouse "pity, terror, and other painful emotions." Almodóvar fulfills the condition by alternating, during the two performances attended by Manuela, shots of the stage and shots of Manuela in the audience, thereby immediately catching her reactions to the performances. During the first performance Manuela and Esteban are sitting side by side. The last scene of the play, which is the only one we see the characters watching, is accompanied by soft tango music – as if Manuela were hearing the music of her motherland, presumably the music of the production she acted in. The tango music and the insertion of Manuela's close-up between two long shots of the stage evoke the double process Manuela is undergoing, both seeing the present performance and remembering her past performance. The painful memories that the performance arouses in Manuela become even more manifest as we see Esteban looking at her mesmerized face on the verge of tears.

103 While Almodóvar includes performances that do not fall under the genre of tragedy in a film which is itself more melodramatic than tragic, the only two plays he represents, by Williams and García Lorca, have been categorized as modern tragedies. On some level, then, Almodóvar equates theatre and tragedy.
When Manuela sees the play a second time in Barcelona, a different music is playing. The performance no longer evokes her youth, but triggers painful memories of her deceased son whose absence is manifested by the empty seat next to her. Almodóvar underscores the parallelism between the two performance scenes by representing the play's last scene again. But instead of using music to depict Manuela's response to the performance he uses camera angles, and suddenly cuts to a long shot taken from behind Manuela whose head partially obstructs the film audience's vision of the stage and the actors.

The shot faithfully reproduces a theatre spectator's point of view. But it also manifests Manuela's painful emotions. Almodóvar frames the shot so that Manuela's head hides the left side of the stage; consequently, when "Stella moves towards the right side of the stage, she looks like she is coming out of Manuela's head, Kowalski too, as if Manuela were imagining them and projecting them onto the stage" (Almodóvar 59). The shot thus renders the scene both more realistic, by evoking a real theatre spectator's point of view, and less realistic, by suggesting that what we see of the performance is all in Manuela's head.

In both scenes, then, Almodóvar uses cinematic devices to reveal how each performance brings Manuela back to the previous performance, linked to a traumatic event from her past. By making Manuela's painful emotions visible and audible he renders her cathartic process visible as well. And Almodóvar pushes the process one step further: Manuela, having found out right before a performance that Nina is suffering from an overdose, convinces Huma to let her replace Nina. Manuela completes her spectatorial catharsis onstage, as it retrospectively becomes clear that her performance marks the climax of her cathartic process. Unlike Aristotle, who limits catharsis to audience members, Almodóvar breaks the boundaries between house and stage by expanding it to include performers as well.
Unlike the two previous performance scenes in which Almodóvar represents Streetcar's last scene, Almodóvar now shows Manuela playing Stella as she is about to have her baby, a scene which we never see Nina perform. And whereas the previous scenes were fairly faithful to Williams' play, this scene diverges quite significantly from its original counterpart. Indeed, Almodóvar entirely rewrites it from the point of view of the performers:

Stella starts to feel ill. She grabs her belly with her hand, and feels that something is beating inside her. [...] 
The contact with the false belly has provoked a regression in Manuela. Esteban is again inside her again, pulsating. [...] 
Without losing sight of Stella's character, Manuela has multiplied the anguish that Nina brought to this scene. The surprise also helps Stanley's character. The actor is not accustomed to such realism. [...] 
Stella bursts into tears. She grips her stomach with her hands.

KOWALSKI (disconcerted). What's the matter Stella?

He is on the verge of saying Manuela instead of Stella.

STELLA-MANUELA. Take me to the hospital…

And she screams for pain. Kowalski takes her in his arms. Stella does not stop crying. It is not the character who cries, but Manuela, and she cannot contain herself. Stanley carries her offstage in a flash. The stage becomes suddenly a desert. The light from the poker players continues to shine.

Manuela's incontrollable wailing can still be heard on the abandoned stage. Finally, the audience bursts into applause.^[104] (Almodóvar 79-81)
Here is Williams' original version of the same scene:

STELLA makes a slight movement. Her look goes suddenly inward as if some interior voice had called her name. She begins a slow, shuffling progress from the bedroom to the kitchen, leaning and resting on the back of the chair and then on the edge of a table with a blind look and listening expression.

STANLEY, finishing with his shirt, is unaware of her reaction.

STANLEY. And wasn't we happy together? Wasn't it all okay? Till she showed here. Hoity-toity, describing me as an ape. He suddenly notices the change in Stella. Hey, what is it, Stell? He crosses to her.

STELLA (quietly). Take me to the hospital.

He is with her now, supporting her with his arm, murmuring indistinguishably as they go outside. The Varsowiana is head, its music rising with sinister rapidity as the bathroom door opens slightly. BLANCHE comes out twisting a washcloth. She begins to whisper the words as the light fade slowly.

BLANCHE. El pan de mais, el pan de mais,

El pan de mais sin sal.

El pan de mais, el pan de mais,

El pan de mais sin sal… (Williams, *Streetcar* Scene Eight, 199)

Apart from the different points of view from which both scenes are written (from within for Almodóvar, from without for Williams), the most obvious difference between the two is that

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Stella estalla en sollozos. Se agarra la tripa con las dos manos.

KOWALSKI (descolocado). ¿Qué te pasa Stella?

Está a punto de decir Manuela en vez de Stella.

STELLA-MANUELA (se coge el vientre). Llévame al hospital…


El escenario se queda de pronto desierto. La luz de los jugadores de póker continúa encendida. Los gemidos incontrolados de Manuela continúan oyéndose en el escenario abandonado. Finalmente los espectadores arrancan a aplaudir."
Blanche is completely absent from Almodóvar's version. Williams' scene closes on Blanche, and on her less and less controllable hallucinations and delusions; in Almodóvar's scene it is Stella who has the last word. Almodóvar's decision to leave the stage empty after Stella's and Stanley's exit and to omit Blanche's last lines turns the scene into the stage of Stella's drama, not Blanche's. If Williams' Streetcar is "All about Blanche," Almodóvar's Streetcar is "All about Stella."

However, as the screenplay indicates, "all about Stella" also means "all about Manuela" as the two of them are united into one in the "Stella-Manuela" stage direction: "Manuela has incorporated Stella into her own identity and in this manner the frontiers between fiction and reality, between life and performance, become blurred" (Gómez 286).

Just as he did with Manuela in the audience, Almodóvar focuses on the way the play affects her as a performer – and as a grieving mother, hence the change of point of view in the rewriting of the scene. Her loud crying and indistinct moaning as Stella echo her crying and moaning in the street just after Esteban has been run over by a car. By acting the pain of childbirth onstage Manuela goes through a "harmless" version of the real pain of having lost her own child, and is eventually relieved by it.

Almodóvar's appropriation of Streetcar transforms it into the tragedy of a mother. The adapted embedded play thus provides a literary precedent to the embedding film's exploration of motherhood as role, and endows it with a specific theatrical shape.105 After all, there are

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105 In this respect, Almodóvar's version of the play is much closer to Kazan's adaptation of the play than Williams' original play. In the play Stella's final distress is soothed by Stanley's fingers finding "the opening of her blouse" and his comforting words (Williams, Streetcar 226). In Kazan's film, conversely, Stella refuses to go back inside her house, and instead leaves with her baby; STELLA. We're not going back in there. Not this time. We're never going back. Never, never back, never back again. And then Stella turns and proceeds with strength and confidence up the stairs to Eunice's apartment. (in Garrett 484)

The film closes on Stanley's shouts, "Stella! Stella!" to which Stella had obeyed earlier in the film, but which now echo in the empty courtyard, suggesting that Stella might indeed never go back to her husband. Similarly, in Almodóvar's version Stella "is not acquiescent as she is in Williams' original" and "she leaves Stanley" (Maddison 267). Stanley does call to her but without moving or stopping to play poker. As for Stella, she "doesn't just go upstairs" but she leaves "the stage all together" (Maddison 267).
many more obvious and central mother roles in the theatrical canon which Almodóvar could have relied on. But it is inasmuch as Williams' play defines motherhood in relationship to both womanhood and sisterhood that it seems so fitting to Almodóvar's project: in the course of the film Manuela's motherhood will also be defined in relationship to Agrado's womanhood and Sister Rosa's sisterhood.

For now, however, the scene climax marks the height of Manuela's acting "career": after going on as Stella, she leaves theatre behind and reverts back to being a mother for yet another Esteban. Almodóvar thus brings Manuela's story full circle: as was the case seventeen years before, she becomes a mother thanks to a theatrical experience.
The spatial stages of Manuela’s catharsis

The cathartic process Manuela undergoes is reinforced, throughout the film, by the aesthetics of the represented Streetcar production, which Almodóvar designed as a combination of an "abstract set and hyperrealist contemporary costumes" (Almodóvar 26). For Almodóvar, everything onstage, including the characters' feelings, has to be "completely realistic" – so that if "the set can be reminiscent of Bob Wilson's essential bareness," the performance has to be "hardcore realistic" (Almodóvar 26).

The naturalism that Almodóvar is looking for is obviously not historical. The Robert Wilson aesthetic, visible in the backdrop screen lit from behind by fluorescent blue light, one of Wilson's visual trademarks, is a far cry from Tennessee Williams' baroque Southern ambiance. Yet the performances' eerie lighting provides a theatrical background against which the reality of the character's feelings can be deployed. By emphasizing the performances' simultaneous theatricality and realism, Almodóvar highlights, at once, the cathartic process' theatrical roots and its "real" effects, thereby providing the ideal conditions for it to unfold.

Indeed, it is the back wall, or, in this case, the back screen, which Branislav Jakovljevic singles out as the focal point of actors and spectators' energies in naturalistic drama:

… the performative force of naturalistic theatre is directed not toward the immaterial front wall but toward the visible, material rear wall that delineates the physical boundaries of the stage. If the immaterial front wall establishes the relation of discontinuity between stage and auditorium, then the material back wall restores the continuity; it is a concrete object with other concrete objects arranged on and in relation to it, which evokes the concrete world behind it. […] The encounter between the playwright, performers, and the
audience does not happen, as it is commonly assumed, on the transparent screen of the invisible front wall. It occurs in the offstage area. Offstage is the ambiguous sphere where the 'unreality' of the theatrical event and experimental 'reality' of the audience interact, merge, and shape each other. If the footlights and the convention of the immaterial fourth wall affirm the neat distinction between 'reality' and 'unreality,' the back wall and offstage area question this distinction. (Jakovljevic 436)

For Jakovljevic, the realness of the back wall promises the offstage extension of the onstage world. Or, in Hanna Scolnicov's words, the back wall becomes the materialization of the audience's extension into the theatre space (the architectural "shell or the hulk within which each performance creates its own theatrical space") of this theatrical space (the organized, "autonomous space" where "the action of the play unfolds" and "which does not have to submit to natural laws," the "composite creation of the play, mise-en-scène, acting, choreography, scenery, lighting, etc., as well as the given theatre space") (Scolnicov 2-3). The theatrical space's invasion of the theatre space contradicts the audience's rational knowledge that there is nothing behind the back wall but wings, dressing rooms, and technical booths. But it also testifies to the essential theatrical contract, the audience's willing suspension of disbelief.

By having a non-realistic set element, the back-lit screen, function as the back wall, hence signify the material continuity between theatre and theatrical space, Almodóvar underscores the fictional nature of the theatrical space. And yet he also highlights its realness by playing on what Scolnicov calls the theatrical space within, "the space on stage within our field of vision, the space in which the actors perform in front of our eyes," and the theatrical space without, unseen "offstage spaces […] implied by the play but not constituting part of the spectacle, i.e. not realized on stage" (Scolnicov 3). When Stanley carries Stella-Manuela
offstage the camera does not follow them but remains focused on the stage, rendering the point of view of a theatre spectator. If the actors are invisible, however, they remain audible as "Manuela's incontrollable moaning can still be heard on the abandoned stage" (Almodóvar 81). Beliz Gücbilmez outlines how, as a rule,

all the entrances and exits point to a separation and connection of the inside and the outside, the stage and the offstage, and prevent them from merging. But whenever a sound or voice is heard onstage (and in the auditorium for sure), the presence of the offstage becomes impossible to ignore. […] When a sound or voice is heard and there is nothing to see on the stage, one experiences a shift in the focus of reception: the auditory dimension replaces the obligatory visual aspect of theatre and the shift itself threatens the sage habitude of "watching theatre." (Gücbilmez 155)

Almodóvar’s onscreen recreation of a theatrical experience of the theatrical space without confronts viewers’ experience as theatre and film audience members, and challenges the clear-cut distinction between the two.

Indeed, Almodóvar challenges the spectators’ knowledge of the strict separation between on- and offstage by exposing how the theatrical space within expands into the wings. In order to do so he at first underscores the usual strict delineation between the two spaces. Manuela does not go directly from being a spectator to a performer; she goes on stage only after she has spent some time working as Huma Rojo's personal assistant, that is, after having experienced daily the reality of theatre's backstage proceedings. Almodóvar alternates medium shots of Manuela, watching the play from the wings next to a light projector and
silently mouthing Stella's words, with medium shots of the actresses performing onstage. The separation between on- and offstage could not be clearer.  

However, the angles of the shots of the stage do not exactly coincide with Manuela's position, and on Blanche's line "Where's my heart?" Almodóvar cuts to a close-up of Huma's face, explicitly distinguishing the camera from Manuela's point of view. Right after Stella's "Shall I help you?" and Blanche's answer "Yes," Almodóvar cuts again to Huma's dressing room with a close-up on the speakers. The camera, zooming out, reveals Manuela listening "to the rest of the scene through the speakers while she prepares tea for Huma" (Almodóvar 75). Not only, then, is Manuela doing for Huma backstage what Stella is doing for Blanche onstage, a parallelism which foreshadows Manuela's loss of boundaries in her impersonation of Stella, but Almodóvar presents us with the reverse shot of the empty stage with Manuela crying offstage. This time we see the offstage space (the dressing room) and hear what is going on onstage (dialogues of the ongoing performance).

By representing first the backstage space orally and the stage visually, then the stage orally and the offstage visually, Almodóvar takes ingenious advantage of film's capacity to play with theatre's practical and spatial setup to distinguish between the various ways in which the two spaces are related. Designed to facilitate the actors' and technicians' backstage work in relationship to the onstage performance, speakers are not meant to expand the onstage world in any other capacity than the technical one. But their presence testifies to at

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106 Scolnicov's concepts of the theatrical space within/without describe the same reality as onstage and offstage. The problem with the latter concepts, for her, is that "they refer primarily to the stage – which is not a universal feature of all theatres – and to the actual space within which the performance takes place. By contrast, the theatrical spaces within and without refer to the universe created initially by the play and realized in performance" (Scolnicov 4). However, in Todo sobre mi madre there is, indeed, a stage, and while Scolnicov’s distinction functions for the audience, it is problematic when applied to performers or their backstage assistants who simultaneously deal with the actual space and the fictional universe. I therefore alternate between the two terminologies to distinguish the experiences of spectators and performers.

107 All these lines are not in Williams' play but are part of Almodóvar's rewriting of the play in the film; moreover, the last two lines are not in the script and are said onstage in the scene:

BLANCHE. Donde esta mi corazón? […]
[STELLA. Te ayudas?
BLANCHE. Sí.] (Almodóvar 75)
least some level of interchange. Similarly, Stella's offstage sobs extend the theatrical space within and create the theatrical space without, translating "the invisible into the visible" (Güçbilmez 154) – or, rather, the invisible into the audible – which testifies to yet another level of interchange between the two spaces.

Indeed, it is by revealing each other’s hidden spaces that each medium confers an added level of realism on the other – and on their shared characters/actors. Their capacity to reveal these hidden spaces can be traced back to their fundamentally opposed representation of space, which Bazin singles out as the media’s ultimate irreducible difference:

Because it is only part of the architecture of the stage, the décor of the theatre is thus an area materially enclosed, limited, circumscribed, the only discoveries of which are those of our collusive imagination.

Its appearances are turned inward facing the public and the footlights. It exists by virtue of its reverse side and of anything beyond, as the painting exists by virtue of its frame. Just as the picture is not to be confounded with the scene it represents and is not a window in the wall. The stage and the décor where the action unfolds constitute an aesthetic microcosm inserted perforce into the universe but essentially distinct from the Nature which surrounds it.

It is not the same with cinema, the basic principle of which is a denial of any frontiers to action.

The idea of a locus dramaticus is not only alien to, it is essentially a contradiction of the concept of the screen. The screen is not a frame like that of a picture but a mask which allows only a part of the action to be seen. When a character moves off screen, we accept the fact that he is out of sight, but he continues to exist in his own capacity at some other place in the décor which is hidden from us. There are no wings to the screen. There could not be without
destroying its specific illusion, which is to make of a revolver or of a face the very center of the universe. In contrast to the stage the space of the screen is centrifugal. (Bazin & Gray 104-105)

Almodóvar seems to be acutely aware of these opposite spatial forces in theatre and film, of the dichotomy between the theatrical frame surrounded by wings, and the cinematic frame with no wings or offstage space but functioning as a mask. During the first Streetcar performance scene he alternates long shots of the stage taken from the house, reproducing a theatre audience's point of view, with close-ups of Huma as Blanche. These close-ups, however, are shot from above the actress, an angle which is close to but does not entirely coincide with the point of view of the actor playing the doctor, bent over Huma. Huma then whispers Blanche's last lines very softly – too softly for any theatre audience to hear.

With these devices Almodóvar switches from filming the scene as performed onstage to filming it as if it were a cinematic adaptation of the play. The close-ups and the whispered lines fleetingly turn Huma's face into the center of the film, not of the stage, and reverse the centripetal theatrical space into a centrifugal cinematic one. Because these two moments occur within an alternation of shots of the stage and of Manuela responding to the performance, Almodóvar uses the transformation of the theatrical space they imply to convey the play's critical role in the shaping of Manuela's destiny as a spectator.

Conversely, when Almodóvar has the audience hear the theatrical action continuing offstage while the camera remains framed on a long shot of the stage, he simultaneously acknowledges theatre's centripetal space and provides an exception to the rule. This exception, however, is all the more believable as it concurs with cinema's centrifugal spatial dynamic, hinted at in the earlier performance scene. By having Stella/Manuela cry both off-screen and offstage, Almodóvar confers the off-screen "reality" onto the offstage extension of
the onstage world. Almodóvar now suggests the play's critical role in the shaping of Manuela's destiny as a performer.

His representation of *A Streetcar Named Desire* leads Almodóvar to limn the cathartic process which Manuela experiences as spectator and performer and to outline the spaces within which this process takes place. This amounts to define, in both cases, how the visible and the invisible affect each other: how what Manuela sees and performs works on her memories, and vice versa; how the visible space informs the invisible space, and vice versa. It is as if Almodóvar were recreating his character's mental landscape by representing and connecting the physical theatrical and cinematic spaces in which she evolves. The embedding of theatre thus becomes a window into the cinematic character's mind – or, as Jacques Rivette put it in a 1996 interview, theatre becomes "the primal scene of cinema's unconscious" (in Morrey 150, note 6). This is not to say that Almodóvar's approach is purely or even mainly psychoanalytically oriented; but Almodóvar's appropriation of Tennessee Williams' play allows him to limn Manuela's inner landscape against the spatial background of the stage onscreen.

Almodóvar closes Manuela's theatrical adventure the day after she impersonates Stella where it all started, in Huma's dressing room. As soon as Manuela enters the dressing room, Nina accuses her: "You had it all planned, bitch! You are like Eve Harrington and you learnt the text by heart on purpose! It's impossible to learn the text only by hearing it through the speakers, damn it! Who do you take me for, an asshole?" Almodóvar humorously hints at the speakers which he uses to build the on/offstage dichotomy by making Nina aware that they cannot be held solely "responsible" for Manuela's transition from wings to stage. However, her reference to Mankiewicz' character provides an alternate cinematic reading of Manuela's character: the theatrical Manuela-Stella is also the cinematic Manuela-Eve.
Chapter Nine: Manuela and her doubles

**Manuela and Eve**

Manuela's theatrical adventure is framed by two references to Mankiewicz' film, and two dressing room scenes in which Mankiewicz' Eve is conjured: the scene in which Eve meets the actress Margo Channing in her dressing room, inserted by Almodóvar at the beginning of his own film; and the scene in which Nina accuses Manuela of being Eve Harrington, designed by Almodóvar as an echo of Mankiewicz' scene. Both Eve and Manuela are similar inasmuch as they are the main acting character in their respective films; the questions becomes in what sense of the word each character acts.

*A physical parallel*

Even before considering their acting, however, Manuela and Eve look strikingly similar. The scene in which Manuela and Esteban go to see *A Streetcar Named Desire* opens on Manuela standing in front of a wall-sized poster of the play featuring Huma Rojo's face as Blanche. Standing in front of the theatre door with her raincoat, Manuela becomes a modern incarnation of Eve when she first appears in Mankiewicz' film: "It is threatening to rain that night and Manuela has dressed with this eventuality in mind. She remembers the introduction of Anne Baxter in *All about Eve*" (Almodóvar 25) (Fig. 17).

The scene foreshadows the relationship between Manuela and Huma. Manuela's vulnerability in front of Huma's looming face denotes the way in which Huma is unwittingly about to shatter Manuela's life, while the blending of Manuela's red raincoat and Huma's red lips evokes Esteban's blood that is about to link them. And inasmuch as it foreshadows the relationship between Manuela and Huma, the scene further brings out Manuela's similarity to Eve by inverting a similar scene from *All about Eve* in which Mankiewicz foreshadows Eve and Margo's relationship.
In *All about Eve* it is Margo who, coming in late to read for the audition of critic Addison DeWitt's protégée Miss Caswell, learns from Addison that Eve has become her new understudy, that she has read for her, and that the audition is already over. As Margo tries to contain her rage Mankiewicz cuts to a medium shot revealing, behind Margo, the larger-than-life poster of the play she is starring in and which represents a stylized picture of a beautiful slim young woman holding a gun out.

The camera angle and the size of the poster turn the drawn figure into a reflection of the young woman Margo was and dreams she could still be, and materializes Margo's anger and desire to kill her rival. Indeed, the poster shows how the younger and slimmer Eve physically corresponds to the role much more than Margo. Already looking the part, Eve is getting closer to acting it by having become Margo's understudy. So that ultimately it is less Margo’s agenda than Eve’s that the shot exposes: "kill" Margo from the back – a death threat which Almodóvar transcribes with his use of the color red.

The poster scene thus visually contains the root of the parallelism between Manuela and Eve which Almodóvar expands on in the film. Manuela's figure is presented as a color reincarnation of Eve's, while Manuela's relationship to Huma appears as a variation on Eve's relationship to Margo. It therefore comes as no surprise that Almodóvar's first reference to Mankiewicz' film takes the form of a direct quotation of the scene in which Eve meets Margo.
Fig. 17. Manuela as the modern Eve.
Eve and Manuela's auditions: from fan to assistant

The first dressing room scene introduces the central theme and locus of Mankiewicz' film: theatre. Theatre is present in the scene on three levels: physically – the scene unfolds in Margo Channing's dressing room, one of the film's key locations, placing the characters in their "natural" theatrical environment; allegorically – each of the characters personifies a distinct theatrical figure: the star (Margo), the director (Bill, Margo's fiancé), the dresser (Birdie), the playwright (Lloyd), the playwright's wife (Karen, Margo's friend), and the fan (Eve); and discursively – Mankiewicz' directorial counterpart in the film, Bill, launches in a lofty definition of theatre as the "Ivory Green Room":

BILL [to Eve]. The theatuh, the theatuh – what book of rules says the theatre exists only within some ugly buildings crowded into one square mile of New York City? Or London, Paris or Vienna? Listen Junior, and learn. Do you want to know what the theatre is? A flea circus. Also opera. Also rodeos, carnivals, ballets, Indian tribal dances, Punch and Judy, a one-man band – all Theatre. Where there's magic and make-believe and an audience, there's Theatre. Donald Duck, Ibsen and The Lone Ranger, Sarah Bernhardt and Poodles Hanneford, Lunt and Fontanne, Betty Grable – Rex the Wild Horse and Eleanora Duse – all theatre. You don't understand them all, you don't like them all – why should you? The Theatre's for everybody, you included, but not exclusively – so don't approve or disapprove. It may not be your Theatre, but it's Theatre for somebody, somewhere… (in Carey 159-160)

However, it is not Bill who gives Eve a theatrical lesson in the scene, but rather Eve who gives them all one. As the characters realize at the end of the film, Bill's pompous

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109 This is one of the moments in which Mankiewicz consciously mixes theatrical and cinematic references, unobtrusively asserting the underlying similarity and constant interchange between the two art forms even as he has Bill define Theatre.
discourse is much less effective than Eve's unobtrusive performance. Summoned to tell about herself, Eve starts a perfectly melodramatic (and entirely invented) narration of her past, which encapsulates all the essential ingredients of melodramatic plots listed by Mark Allinson: "omniscient narration, twists and reversals, chance events and encounters, and secrets" – as well as flashbacks, a "result of the need for dramatic action without the sense of progression" (in Epps & Kakoudaki 142).

Eve's misty eyes, revealed by close-ups, endow her words with the irresistible melancholy of painful yet cherished memories, giving the impression that her narration follows a series of personal flashbacks. And the narration itself conforms completely to all melodramatic criteria: it is built on twists and reversals (the accidental death of her "husband" Eddie, her escaping from a thankless job in a brewery), chance events and encounters (her attending a play by Lloyd featuring Margo in San Francisco, her meeting Karen backstage), and secrets (her unbridled imagination, her long-time secret devotion for Margo).

Eve's impeccable acting is topped by her mastery of melodramatic effects: by speaking "simply and without self-pity" (Carey 148) Eve makes others cry while she herself finishes "dry-eyed and self-composed" (Carey 150). In a tour de force performance she manages to render her spectators, themselves all involved in the theatre trade, oblivious to the theatricality of her monologue. Only Birdie sees through Eve's tricks:

BIRDIE. What a story. Everything but the bloodhounds snapping at her rear end.

MARGO. There are some human experiences, Birdie, that do not take place in a vaudeville house – and that even a fifth-rate vaudevillian should understand and respect. (in Carey, 150-151)

Margo's rebuke contains the very source of her error: Eve's melodramatic narration is typical of a vaudeville house play, which is why Birdie, the vaudevillian, remains impervious to its
sentimental tricks. All the other characters fall for it and, by believing Eve, crown Eve's first "audition" with success. As her first reward, Eve becomes Margo's assistant.

In Todo sobre mi madre Manuela also goes through an "audition" before being hired by Huma. While Eve's audition was all words, however, Manuela's audition is all actions. But Almodóvar orchestrates a series of events which follow a similar arc that starts right after the second Streetcar performance and leads up to Manuela becoming Huma's assistant. Coming out of the performance Manuela sees Nina leave the theatre; goes to Huma's dressing room, tells Huma that Nina has left and agrees to help her look for Nina; drives Huma around Barcelona, and eventually succeeds in finding Nina. Having forgotten her purse in Huma's car, Manuela comes back to the theatre on the following day to retrieve it. Huma, impressed by Manuela's resourcefulness, hires her as her assistant.

Manuela passes the audition by acting in the sense of doing, just as Eve passes hers by acting in the sense of playing; both are hired because of their acting skills. Moreover, the series of events which leads Manuela from being an audience member to being Huma's assistant also consists in a series of small melodramatic "twists and reversals, chance events and encounters, and secrets." Both Eve and Manuela, then, move from the auditorium into the wings thanks to their acting in a melodramatic "performance," premeditated by the former, unpremeditated by the latter.

Instead of inserting the entire “audition” scene from All about Eve, however, Almodóvar contents himself with drawing on it to mould his own. The brief excerpt he quotes immediately precedes Eve's audition, and this time equates Eve with Manuela's son Esteban, fan of both Bette Davis and Huma Rojo. Almodóvar cuts directly from the film's credits to the dressing room scene in which Margo, taking her make-up off, rants about fans and autograph hunters:
MARGO. Autograph Fiends. They're not people – those little beasts that run around in packs like coyotes -

KAREN. They're your fans – your audience -

MARGO. They're nobody's fans. They're juvenile delinquents – they're mental defectives, they're nobody's audience. They never see a play or a movie even – they're never indoors long enough! (in Carey 139-140)

Upon which Karen brings Eve in; the excerpt ends on Eve and Margo's handshake. While the excerpt introduces the recurrent figure of the fan haunting the three films, Margo's last line resonates as a reminder of the embedded fictional levels at work here. Through Margo Almodóvar spells out the situation: his film is built on a film in which a theatre actress speaks about plays and films.

No sooner is this almost dizzying reflexivity evoked than it is also spatially materialized. The quoted scene unfolds in Margo's dressing room; in Mankiewicz' film, the centrifugal cinematic space gives the audience the illusion that the space is continuing off-screen, and that a change in the camera angle could reveal the rest of the backstage space, the wings, the stage, the auditorium, the entrance hall, the street, etc. However, Almodóvar reverses this dynamic by inserting the scene into his film: the television screen on which the scene is broadcasted functions as a frame preventing the image from expanding outside of the screen. What continues off-screen here is not Mankiewicz' film, but Manuela's apartment. Whereas the representation of theatre onscreen leads to the contamination of the embedded theatrical space by the film's centrifugal movement, the representation of another film onscreen annihilates the embedded film's centrifugal movement, and endows it with a theatrical centripetal dynamic.

With this shift in spatial dynamics Almodóvar emulates Mankiewicz, who presented All about Eve as an adaptation of a play. Marguerite Chabrol convincingly divides
Mankiewicz' film into a five-act structure, with the opening and closing sequences functioning as prologue and epilogue, thereby showing how the film follows the eminently theatrical unities of time, place, and action (Chabrol 80). The theatrical structure and the film's brilliant dialogues allowed Mankiewicz, upon the film release, to publicize the screenplay as a play and to engender doubts in the shrewdest critics' minds. François Chalais recalls this ambiguity, prompted by the film's "perfect alliance between thought and form": "Mankiewicz wrote such a miraculously perfect story that many believed it was not an original scenario, but that it was taken from an already existing successful play – without being able to make out the act division" (Chalais 42).

The film's five-act division is partially obscured by its overarching novelistic structure: All about Eve consists, in fact, of a series of flashbacks narrated by the successive voiceovers of Karen, Margo, and Addison. Moreover, the stages of Eve's career, which delineate each act, never take place onscreen, but always off, or, to quote Virginia Woolf, "between the acts":

> Between the first and the second act she has become [Margo's] secretary;
> between the second and the third, she has become her understudy; between the third and the fourth, she has made her debut as an actress; and between the fourth and the fifth, she has become an experienced actress. (Chabrol 82)

By inserting the dressing room scene in his film Almodóvar endows All about Eve with a theatrical spatial dynamic, thereby enhancing All about Eve's theatrical form in relation to its novelistic structure. What Mankiewicz suggests by endowing his film with strong theatrical characteristics Almodóvar foregrounds by embedding it in his own film. In both cases, then, the films start by laying out the stage on which the characters' acting is to unfold.

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110 All about Eve was released in the decade prior to “the legitimation of Hollywood film as art” which Shyon Baumann argues “occurred mainly during the 1960s” (Baumann 3). Mankiewicz’ tactic can thus be read as participating in the effort to raise film to theatre’s cultural status as art.
From assistant to understudy: conquering the wings

While Eve's career shifts take place off-screen, Manuela's evolution from spectator to assistant, from assistant to one-time understudy, and from understudy out of the theatre world entirely, takes place onscreen but backstage, in Huma's dressing room. Almodóvar shows what Mankiewicz hides, manifesting again the divergence between their two agendas and between the two types of acting their characters demonstrate: devoid of any theatrical ambition, Manuela acts/does openly what Eve acts/plays secretly. But in both cases Eve and Manuela's transition from offstage assistant to onstage understudy takes the form of a conquest of the off-space.

I have already shown how Almodóvar alternates between shots of Manuela watching Huma perform from the wings, mouthing Stella's words along with Nina, and shots of Manuela hearing the actresses' voice backstage through the dressing-room speakers. This play on the visual and the oral planes is a variation on the only scene, in All about Eve, which actually unfolds in the wings. Eve watches the very end of Margo's performance "from the wings. The audience is NEVER VISIBLE. Eve in the foreground, her back to CAMERA. Margo and company taking a curtain call" (Mankiewicz, in Carey 171) (Fig. 18). Mankiewicz' tactic consists in splitting his shot into three parts: two visual planes, Eve in the foreground and Margo in the background, and one oral one, the invisible but audible audience.

This split shot replicates a typical theatrical experience inasmuch as it gives the film spectators the choice to focus on whichever part of the shot they choose. To take up Esslin's analysis again, a theatre spectator "can look wherever he feels the focus of the action resides at any given moment"; a film director, as first and primary spectator of the action, tries to replicate the choices – where to look at any moment in the dramatic action – that an ideal spectator would make; but, in addition, he has the power
to compel the spectator to look at certain things and to restrict his ability to look at others, which he, as director, wants to conceal or withhold. (Esslin, Field of Drama 94-95)

Mankiewicz exerts his cinematic prerogative by concealing the theatre audience and choosing a camera angle which considerably restricts the film audience’s vision of the stage, wings, and protagonists. But by splitting the focus of the scene into two visual planes and one oral dimension, he endows the film audience with a cinematic experience of the theatrical freedom.

Reinforcing a film's theatricality rather than reducing it is precisely what Bazin hails as the best stage-to-screen adaptation technique. In fact, Mankiewicz' tactic is similar to that deployed by Cocteau in his screen adaptation of his own play Les parents terribles (1948). Bazin analyzes the film at length as one of the best examples of an adaptation that does not commit the "heresy of filmed theatre" and pretends to try and “make us forget the conventions of the theatre” (Bazin & Gray 87). He particularly focuses on the end of the film, when Cocteau has the camera follow Yvonne's backward movement with a backward travelling, and includes within the frame both Yvonne and what she is watching – just as we see both Eve and what she is watching in All about Eve. As Bazin points out, “the purpose of the shot is to show not that [Yvonne] is looking, not even her gaze, it is to see her actually looking” (Bazin & Gray 93).

With such a shot Cocteau rejects the many cinematic points of view at his disposal and deliberately confines himself to "the viewpoint of the spectator, the only denominator common to stage and screen" (Bazin & Gray 93). Therein resides, for Bazin, the success of Cocteau's adaptation:

So Cocteau maintains the essentially theatrical character of his play. Instead of trying like so many others to dissolve it in cinema, on the contrary he uses the
resources of the camera to point up, to underline, to confirm the structure of
the scenes and their psychological corollaries. The specific help given here by
cinema can only be described as an added measure of the theatrical. (Bazin &
Gray 93)

Like Cocteau, Mankiewicz uses the camera to add theatricality to his film by
underscoring the spatial restrictions of the wings – thereby reinforcing the sense that his film
was adapted from a play. By making the real focus of the shot neither Eve, nor Margo, nor
the theatre audience, but Eve watching Margo and hearing the audience, Mankiewicz tailors
the shot to the film spectators' unique point of view, thereby transforming them into the
privileged spectators of Eve's acting. The framing, depth of field, and off-screen sound,
whose combination adds theatricality to the shot, foreground not the onstage play but the
offstage one, written, directed, and performed by Eve.

Eve's play is constituted by her professional ascension – a metaphorical vertical
ascension which takes the form of a geographical horizontal invasion of the "theatre space."
Mankiewicz signifies her moving up through the theatrical hierarchy by showing her moving
across through the various areas of the theatre. Eve goes from fan to assistant by conquering
Margo's dressing room; she is now about to go from assistant to understudy by conquering
the wings, one step closer to the stage. The following exchange, which provides an insight
into her strategy, was to conclude the sequence:

EVE. I must say you can certainly tell Mr. Sampson's been gone a month.

MARGO. You certainly can. Especially if you're me between now and
tomorrow morning.

EVE. I mean the performance. Except for you, you'd think he'd never directed
it – it's disgraceful the way they change everything around.

MARGO (smiles). Well, teacher's away and actors will be actors.
EVE. During you second act scene with your father, Roger Ferraday's supposed to stay way upstage at the arch. He's been coming closer down every night.

MARGO. When he gets too close, I'll spit in his eye. (Mankiewicz, in Carey 173)

Eve's hypocrisy might have come across too clearly at this stage of the film for Mankiewicz to keep the exchange; it would also have shifted the film's audience attention onto Margo's stage performance, as opposed to Eve's offstage performance. But it is telling of Eve's strategy, a mixture of flattery and of making Margo aware of her intimate knowledge of the production – two key qualities in a potential understudy.

Manuela's progression through the theatrical spaces follows a similar spatial pattern which leads from the outside door to the dressing room to the wings to the stage. She too convinces Huma that she can replace Nina last-minute by a series of arguments stressing her knowledge of the play and the production:

MANUELA. I know her role by heart, from hearing it through the speakers.

HUMA. But do you know how to act?

MANUELA. I can lie very well, and I am used to improvising.

HUMA. So I have seen. (Almodóvar 78)

In Manuela's case the skills which guarantee the quality of her onstage acting are the result of her offstage acting. In fact, Almodóvar would characterize those skills as the direct consequence of being a woman. Lying and improvising are the two major acting techniques which Manuela, like every woman for Almodóvar (and Mankiewicz), has had to learn in order to take control of her life in a male-dominated world. Manuela does not get the part because of her offstage scheming – since she never intends to replace Nina, let alone Huma. She gets the part because of the theatrical skills she has developed and shown offstage.
Fig. 18. Margo’s offscreen curtain call in Mankiewicz’ *All about Eve*. © 20th Century Fox
The performance and its aftermath: Manuela as the anti-Eve

Both Eve and Manuela's careers culminate in an onstage performance – in theatrical acting. In *All about Eve* Eve's performance is not shown. As in earlier instances Mankiewicz jumps over Eve's career shift and cuts directly to Margo's dressing room – or rather, to Eve's dressing room, at least for the night – where Eve receives the visits of her admirers after her performance. The scene echoes and inverts the initial dressing room scene: Eve, having conquered the stage at last, comes back to her initial battlefield wearing her enemy's uniform, Margo's costume and wig. However, if the comparison between the two scenes reveals the extent of Eve's success, it also reveals the extent of her failure. Just as he came to congratulate Margo, Bill comes to congratulate Eve, but he rebuffs Eve's pass at him and leaves. Eve is apparently more successful with Addison, who takes her to dinner and effectively starts working as her agent. But he does so having discovered, unbeknownst to her, the truth behind her melodramatic past.

In *Todo sobre mi madre* Almodóvar takes an opposite tack: we do see Manuela perform Nina's role, and the following dressing room scene does not mark the beginning but the end of Manuela's acting "career." Almodóvar, however, designs the scene as an echo of Mankiewicz' first dressing room scene. Accused by Nina of being like Eve Harrington, Manuela starts telling her story just like Eve. With her son's death, her arrival in Barcelona at the same time as the *Streetcar* production, her chance encounters with Agrado, Sister Rosa, Huma, and Nina, and the secret of her former husband's sexual transformation, Manuela's story is every bit as melodramatic as Eve's.

And like Eve, Manuela delivers her monologue to two actresses fully versed in the art of theatre; but unlike her Manuela does not try to act or pull melodramatic tricks on them, and her truthful monologue elicits the exact opposite response. Eve does not cry so as to make her audience cry; and Mankiewicz hints at the fact that she is lying by not transforming her
invented memories into images on the screen. Manuela, conversely, cries while telling her story, while Huma and Nina do not; and her monologue prompts the film's second flashback, Huma's vision of Esteban under the rain tapping at her car window. For Almodóvar, Manuela is in fact an Anti-Eve:

Although Nina mentioned her at the beginning, none of the three women thinks of All about Eve, even if the situation resembles the sequence that Manuela saw with her son, when Eve enters Margo/Davis' dressing room and inundates her with lies and ambition. Manuela is the Anti-Eve Harrington. Eve was crazy about gossiping and climbing up and Manuela does not even feel capable of saying one word to defend herself. (Almodóvar 84)

The difference which Almodóvar stresses between Eva and Manuela is neither one of onstage behavior – both are good actresses – nor, ultimately, one of offstage behavior – both act offstage as well as on. The difference is that Eve is a careerist who considers the stage as a means to achieve fame and glory; she is, according to Mankiewicz himself, "a predatory animal, she does not need to act on stage"¹¹¹ (in Ciment 207). She could have chosen any other field than theatre to reach her goal – indeed, no sooner does she achieve success on Broadway than she seeks to go to Hollywood. Manuela, on the other hand, is a woman for whom the stage is yet another place where she does what she does everywhere else, act out roles. Not being a predatory animal, Manuela does not need to act onstage either, since her life already consists in acting as a mother and as a nurse, a professional version of motherhood.

The difference, then, is that for Eve all the world is an offstage, while for Manuela, all the world is a stage.¹¹² And it is this difference which ultimately informs the films' respective

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¹¹¹ "Eve est un animal prédateur, elle n'a pas besoin de jouer sur scène."

¹¹² This distinction echoes the two directors’ respective explorations: Mankiewicz explores what makes a woman a good actress onstage; Almodóvar, what makes a woman an everyday offstage actress.
spatial delineations. Since Mankiewicz centers his film on Eve's offstage acting and plotting, he never shows any stage performance onscreen. And as her path to success is one that she forges backstage, Mankiewicz locates all her scenes with Karen, her "pawn," in literal (the backstage door, the dressing room) or metaphorical (the coat room in Margo's house, the bathroom in a restaurant) backstage areas. Conversely, by centering his film on Manuela Almodóvar shows multiple stage performances onscreen, but also shows Manuela's performances as nurse and mother in non-theatrical places, at the hospital (in organ transplant training sessions for doctors) and at home (being mother and nurse for Esteban, Rosa, and Rosa's Esteban).
The film’s eponymous figures

This difference does make Manuela the "Anti-Eve" – but it also reveals the extent to which Eve functions as the hypotextual cinematic figure on which Manuela is built. And this relationship between the two characters extends to the films themselves, named after Eve and Manuela. Indeed, the scene in which Almodóvar inserts Mankiewicz’ excerpt is also the one in which he introduces the title of his own film. While Manuela is cooking dinner Esteban waits, pen in hand, for All about Eve to start on television. The credits of Mankiewicz' film end with the film's Spanish title, "Eva al desnudo," which could be translated as "Eve exposed." Esteban criticizes this translation and offers a more literal one instead: "Todo sobre Eva." He then seizes his notebook and starts writing "Todo sobre" – but before he finishes Almodóvar cuts to a shot taken from under Esteban's pencil, as if the screen had become the page. When Almodóvar comes back to a close-up of Esteban and Manuela, the title of the film "Todo sobre mi madre" divides the screen in two, with Esteban on the left and Manuela on the right.

Just as he designs Manuela as Eve's hypotextual figure, then, Almodóvar designs the title of his film as a parody of Mankiewicz' title. As Genette points out, "any brief, notorious, and characteristic utterance is so to say naturally destined to be parodied. The most typical and actual case is in all likelihood that of titles" (Genette 53). Generally determined by the genre and time in which it originates, a title functions, "like the name of an animal, as index: half pedigree, half birth certificate. [...] The third determining factor, which is obviously the author's personal invention, often operates as a variation on a model or frame imposed by usage" (ibid.). Genette concludes that "any title contains, to a variable degree, a part of transtextual allusion which is a sketch of generic 'contract'" (Genette 54).

Almodóvar's title does function as the film's pedigree and birth certificate: it references the name of its "parent," Mankiewicz' film, by taking up the formula "All about…"
Almodóvar's "personal invention" is embodied in the change from "Eve" to "my mother."

And, finally, the transtextual allusion evokes the two films' contract with their viewers.

In Mankiewicz' film, it is Addison who voices the contract. Shortly after the beginning of the opening scene, unfolding during the Sarah Siddons Awards ceremony, Addison's voice-over evokes the film's title: "Eve – but more of Eve, later. All about Eve, in fact" (Mankiewicz, in Carey 117). But as the scene closes Addison's voice thwarts the viewer's expectations to see the contract fulfilled: "Eve. You all know all about Eve – what can there be to know that you don't know?" (Mankiewicz, in Carey 128) – all the more so as Addison's narration is taken over by Karen. Brought into the film by Addison's direct address, the audience is left to its own devices to make out anything about Eve.

In Almodóvar's film it is Esteban who expresses the contract with the audience by writing the title in his notebook before it appears onscreen. Almodóvar's use of the first person pronoun "my" and of the generic "mother" instead of the character's name Manuela makes the contract with the audience simultaneously personal and ambiguous: is the film about Esteban's mother or Almodóvar's mother? Just as in Mankiewicz' film, the audience's expectations to know more are thwarted as Esteban dies within the first twenty minutes of the film, casting serious doubt on the ways in which the initial title contract can be carried out. What the reference to All about Eve makes clear, however, is that Almodóvar's "Mother" is to be understood as the personification of motherhood, just as Eve is the personification of womanhood. If we know all about Eve, the first woman responsible for the first evil deed, then we know all about Manuela, the quintessential mother.

Mankiewicz did not make a mistake, then, when he titled his film All about Eve and not "All about Margo," as Carey suggested (Carey 104). Margo might be the true actress, but she is not the one who acts in the film – what she really does is react to Eve's acting. As for Manuela, all her actions are prompted by her major role in life, being a mother – so that,
again, the film's title pays tribute to the active principle in her. While with *Streetcar*
Almodóvar designed the intricacies of Manuela's mental landscape, with *All about Eve* he
limns the realm of her activity. To turn Rivette's phrase around, one could say that
Almodóvar uses Mankiewicz' film to present cinema as the conscious arena of theatre's
acting.
Manuela and Huma: mother versus star

All about Eve and Opening Night both revolve around the central character of the star, emphatically designated as such from the very outset of the films by the directors' mouthpiece. In All about Eve Addison's opening voice-over narration introduces Margo thus:

ADDISON. Margo Channing is a star of the theatre. She made her first stage appearance at the age of four in Midsummer Night's Dream. She played a fairy and entered – quite unexpectedly – stark naked. She has been a star ever since. Margo is a great star. A true star. She never was or will be anything less or anything else.\(^{113}\) (Mankiewicz, in Carey 121-122)

In the first scene of Opening Night Maurice (John Cassavetes), Myrtle's fellow actor and former lover, is less wordy but as demonstrative: he tries to get rid of autograph hunters by pointing towards Myrtle and saying: "Myrtle Gordon's the star of the show."

In Todo sobre mi madre Almodóvar opts for even fewer words by highlighting the star's iconic dimension: he introduces Huma Rojo through the poster of A Streetcar Named Desire, featuring a huge close-up of her face. Indeed, Almodóvar's Huma is modeled on Tennessee Williams' Blanche, as well as on Eve's model and enemy Margo Channing, but also on Bette Davis, who becomes the fictional source of Huma's name just as All about Eve is the source of his film's title:

HUMA. I started smoking because of Bette Davis. To imitate her. […] That’s why I call myself Huma.\(^{114}\) (Almodóvar 63)

And if Bette Davis gives Huma her name, it is another star, Gena Rowlands, who gives her her look: "Huma wears a long dress and a Sybil cape, one of those with openings for the arms at waist-height. The cape is a tribute to Gena Rowlands in Opening Night" (Almodóvar 62).

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\(^{113}\) The evolution of Addison's line from "star of the theatre" to "star" alone is yet another instance where Mankiewicz expresses his belief in the at least partial interchangeability between the realms of theatre and film.

\(^{114}\) HUMA. Empecé a fumar por culpa de Bette Davis. Por imitarla. […] Por eso me puse Huma. (From the Spanish humear, to smoke)
Huma Rojo/Marisa Paredes, Margo Channing/Bette Davis, Myrtle Gordon/Gena Rowlands – Almodóvar plays with the three fictional stars and the three real stars embodying them, making his character a mixture of both real and emblematic star figures. More than another character, then, it is another type against which Almodóvar defines Manuela’s motherhood. Indeed, Almodóvar defines Huma's stardom as the exact opposite of Manuela's motherhood.\textsuperscript{115} Manuela, as nurse and mother, displays a socially-valued and responsible behavior: she does not drink or smoke, manages to raise her child on her own, is always on time, and solves problems instead of creating them. Conversely, Huma, like Margo and Myrtle, is coded as a star by her characteristic behaviour. All three stars drink and smoke heavily, transform their dressing room into reception halls, attract autograph hunters, have no children or family (even if they are involved in a relationship), care about no other's schedule but their own, and frequently enter into fights and/or tantrums.

If these coded behaviors characterize stars, stars cannot be reduced to them – nor is the negative definition of a star as the opposite of a mother sufficient. What, then, is a star? Edgar Morin defines a star as a "composite creature" born from the union between actor and character (Morin 29). The conditions of its birth are very specific:

The star appears only at the level of the hero of a major film. The star is absent when powerful economic means are missing, when instead of osmosis there is absorption of the actor by the hero, when there is no lasting connection between actor and role (character parts), or finally when osmosis between character and actor occurs only at the level of a secondary role. (Morin 28-29)

To invoke a film which greatly influenced Cassavetes in \textit{Opening Night}, "a star is born" when there is lasting osmosis between the film's hero and the actor playing that hero – that is,\textsuperscript{115} Cassavetes similarly defined Myrtle as the exact opposite of a mother and a wife: "She's not interested in children, she's not interested in men, even if she still is capable of romantic feelings. Myrtle has a job to do, a career, and that's the most important thing for her. Her whole life is acting, being an actress" (in Carney, \textit{Cassavetes} 413).
when the osmosis lasts beyond the film itself. By definition, then, a star blurs the distinction between fiction and reality, between on- and off-screen.

Such a lasting blurring or osmosis is cinema's "unspecific specificity":

A stage actor has never become a star to this degree, has never been able to play so important a role within and beyond the spectacle. The movies have invented and revealed the star. Which is a curious paradox [...]. The original phenomenon of the star has nothing originating and apparently nothing necessary about it: nothing in the technical and aesthetic nature of the movies immediately required the star. [...] And yet, capable as it is of forgoing the actor, the cinema invents or hypostatizes the star when the star in no way seems to participate in its essence. The stars are typically a cinematic phenomenon, and yet there is nothing specifically cinematic about them.

(Morin 4)

The career path of Bette Davis, Gena Rowlands, and Marisa Paredes confirms Morin's analysis. If all three actresses attended theatre schools and began their career onstage, they only became stars once they started acting in films. Even though Zander Brietzke notices today a reverse "migratory pattern" which provides successful movie stars the opportunity to act on Broadway (Brietzke xi), it nonetheless remains that it is cinema which creates true stars, and not theatre. In all three films, however, the directors ignore or transpose the social reality of cinematic stardom onto theatre: the actresses that the three stars embody are decidedly stage actresses. Margo Channing, Myrtle Gordon, and Huma Rojo never even mention the cinema; they are theatre stars – and do not, therefore, answer to Morin's definition of movie stars.

But then again these three theatre stars are not embodied by "regular" actresses, or even lead actresses. They are embodied by real cinema stars; and as Morin himself points out,
a character played by a star "profits by the star's qualities" as much as the star playing it
profits from the character's qualities (Morin 29). Thanks to the stars' essential blurring of
boundaries between fiction and reality, then, Margo, Myrtle, and Huma inherit the cinematic
stardom of Bette, Gena, and Marisa, while Bette, Gena, and Marisa inherit in their turn the
theatrical aura and artistic cachet of the theatre actresses they interpret.

The formal blurring between fiction and reality is doubled by a psychological one,
which Thierry Jousse characterizes as hysteria. In his study of Opening Night Jousse defines
stardom as a direct product of hysteria which "links the inside and the outside of the body, at
once emanation from the organism tearing the body and exteriorized manifestation of
inassimilable electricity" (Jousse 80). If Jousse does not entirely equate hysteria and stardom,
he nonetheless points out that a person suffering from hysteria is "always also an actor (or
actress). If (s)he overdoes it, it is because (s)he wants to be noticed by the other" (Jousse 86).
Excessive hysterical natures are thus more likely to foster stars, and to shape star
temperaments.

In the course of his analysis of Myrtle's character Jousse delineates how this excessive
temperament takes the form of a loss of the distinction between onstage and off, the very
definition of stardom for Morin. Indeed, each three stars are shown to lose their grasp on
"reality." In All about Eve Mankiewicz has Margo ruin Bill's birthday party with outbursts of
drunken anger, irony, and sadness, culminating in a final row:

MARGO [to Bill]. This is my house, not a theatre! In my house you're a guest,
not a director -

KAREN. Then stop being a star - stop treating your guests as your supporting
cast!

ADDISON. Hear, hear…

LLOYD. Now let's not get into a big hassle –
KAREN. It's about time we did! It's about time Margo realized that what's
attractive on stage need not necessarily be attractive off! (Mankiewicz, in
Carey 229)

Margo's initial attempt to distinguish her house from the theatre turns against her; it is she
who does not respect the distinction by being a star as much onstage as off.

However, like Mankiewicz himself Margo is a highly articulate intellectual who
always retains a certain level of self-awareness even when she loses her temper. Margo's
famous line which immediately precedes the party, "Fasten your seatbelts. It's going to be a
bumpy night," and her exit pun on the salutation of the Roman gladiators about to fight in the
arena, "Ave Caesar moriturí te salutant," demonstrate, in their irony, that she is very aware of
her hysterical star-like behavior. Margo is always conscious that she is acting, even as she
cannot control it. Indeed, there is one thing that Margo's hysteria does not affect: her
performances. Margo is known to be late for dinners, rehearsals, lunches, and auditions – but
she is also known to be always on time for performances.

Conversely, Cassavetes's Myrtle in Opening Night illustrates the director's "anti-
intellectual bias" (Lopate 164). Myrtle "does not know clearly herself to what extent she is
simulating"; as she herself confesses to the director in a moment of lucidity between two
hysterical outbursts:

MYRTLE. Manny, I'm in trouble, I'm not acting.

Myrtle's confession suggests a double failure which is again based on the dual meaning of the
verb. She has lost her capacity to act, to play, to pretend, to be a character as opposed to
herself. But she has also lost her ability to act, to do, to live, as she is "no longer able to
initiate an action that solicits a response or reaction from others or that opens a chain of new
possibilities in the world around her" (King 110). Myrtle cannot act or react: she has, in her
own words, lost "the reality of reality."
In this respect Jousse notices that Myrtle's hysteria parallels the one evoked by Antonin Artaud in Le Pêse-nerfs (Jousse 83). Artaud describes his theatrical hysteria as "a sort of constant loss of the normal level of reality" putting him "in a state of extreme jolt, sunny spell of unreality, with in a corner of oneself pieces from the real world" (Artaud, Œuvres 161). Artaud seems to voice Myrtle's inner self when he notes: "I am at the point where I do not touch life anymore, but have within me all the appetites and the insisting titillation of being. I have but one occupation, make myself again" (Artaud, Œuvres 164).

And for Myrtle, making herself one again means finding her character. Myrtle's hysteria is, in fact, fully integrated to her theatrical process: "her hysteria hides her posing, it puzzles everyone, they – her entourage, like her first spectators – are all at her show, they do not let her out of their sight, she is a constant show, relentlessly" (Benoliel 51). Ultimately, then, Margo's hysteria is a theatrical mode of private behavior, whereas Myrtle's hysteria is her professional mode of acting. Unlike Margo, Myrtle also shows up late, and drunk, to performances.

Huma's hysteria is halfway between Margo's and Myrtle's. Her fights with Nina, which culminate in their both having to spend a night at the hospital, suggest that her hysteria is a theatrical mode of private behavior. The one instance when we see her lose grip on reality, however, testifies to the haunting offstage presence of the character she embodies on stage. To thank Manuela, whom she has just met, for agreeing to drive her around Barcelona to find Nina, Huma repeats the exact same words she has just delivered onstage as Blanche: "Whoever you are – I have always depended on the kindness of strangers" (Williams, Streetcar Scene Eleven, 225). Unlike Manuela, whose smile and side-glance to Huma make it clear that she is aware of the actress' mixing of theatre and life, Huma seems entirely oblivious to it.

116 HUMA. Gracias. Quienquiera que seas, siempre he confiado en la bondad de los desconocidos. (Almodóvar 63)
But it is precisely because Margo, Myrtle, and Huma cannot refrain from acting offstage that they are not only stars, but also great actresses. For Mankiewicz, a true actress is "a woman whose need to act equates with her need to breathe. Who, when she isn't 'on' – just isn't, at all" (in Carey 19-20). For Cassavetes, "a professional performer is someone who is never off stage, never not acting" (Carney, American Dreaming 249) – and so Myrtle, the professional actress *par excellence*, "can never come offstage" (Labarthe, in Benoliel 51).

The reason why Margo, Myrtle, and Huma are in trouble is not, as Myrtle says, that they are not acting, but that they are doing nothing but acting, hence never living.

This is particularly clear in *Opening Night*, in which neither the characters nor the audience can ever tell for sure whether the film characters are being themselves as film characters or are acting as their theatrical characters. As Todd Berliner puts it, the "confusion about whether the actors are in character or not persists throughout the movie and makes watching *Opening Night* an uneasy experience, an uneasiness the film inherits from live theater" (Berliner 12). Although it is not as extreme with Mankiewicz and Almodóvar, a similar confusion pervades *All about Eve* and *Todo sobre mi madre*, as all three films expose acting as "a condition of life, not simply the activity of performers on stage" (Berliner 12).

And so,

as an actress, Myrtle, through the grace of acting, should be able to put her affection (in both senses of the term) at a distance, to distinguish between the real and the imaginary. It is the therapeutic function of theatre. But either she is acting all the time, in life as onstage, or she no longer acts at all, so that any distinction between hysteria and theatre is impossible. She loses the sense of acting as acting, and this is precisely what constitutes her specific hysteria.

(Jousse 88)
Jousse's remark can be applied to Margo and Huma as well as Myrtle, and highlights the psychological mechanisms on which Almodóvar builds the opposition between his characters. Manuela's real catharsis as an audience member and mother intersects with Huma's loss of boundaries as performer and star, hence incapacity to go through a cathartic process.

Beyond its physiological definition, then, hysteria, according to Jousse, is nothing more than "the very form of love," and voices the stars' "fundamental and excessive demand for love" (Jousse 80). Jousse's psychological and psychoanalytical description concurs with Morin's social definition of a star as "above all an actress or an actor who becomes the subject of the myth of love, to the point of instigating a veritable cult" (Morin 30). Indeed, the main indication that Eve is not a star and will never become one like Margo is that she tries to be a star, and aspires to success.

Real stars like Margo, Myrtle, and Huma seem to have success in spite of themselves. They have "It," and even though, for Joseph Roach, one of the many mysteries that make "It fascinating" is precisely "the open question whether It is a 'God-given' gift to the fortunate few or the hardscrabble self-selection of the fiercely driven" (Roach 8), the three stars seem to be naturally endowed with "that strange magnetism which attracts both sexes" (Glyn, in Roach 4). In fact, Huma tells Manuela what Eve does not know, that "success has neither taste nor smell, and when you get used to it it's as if it didn't exist" (Almodóvar 63). What real stars live off of, hence constantly lack, is not success, but love.

The combination of Jousse’s and Morin’s approaches sheds light on the greatest threat looming over stars: their fading physical beauty, which, after a certain age, does not guarantee them the same outpouring of love from their audience. The three directors make this issue all the more pressing by duplicating it on all levels of fiction: the three real cinema stars, the three fictional theatre stars, and the three characters these stars play in the films are
all threatened by what Mankiewicz calls the "professional menopause," the age when actresses' "gratifying public identity," which has functioned as their "private identity," "ceases to exist" (in Carey 26).

The career of Bette Davis (1908-1989), who was forty-two at the time of All about Eve, was seriously lagging when Mankiewicz gave her the role, precisely because she had gone over the forty-year old limit. Mankiewicz heightens the age issue in the film by making Margo forty, older than she is in Mary Orr's original story, and making her fiancé Bill younger than her. Although her career seems to be at its peak, Margo is thus particularly susceptible to the fear of aging both personally and professionally. Mankiewicz makes this fear visible by having Margo deliver her over-theatrical exit line at Bill's birthday party "Happy birthday, welcome home, and we-who-are-about-to-die-salute-you..." (Mankiewicz, in Carey 230) in front of the portrait of a fat old eighteen-century actress, providing a glimpse of what Margo could soon become. And although we never see excerpts from the play Margo stars in, its title, "Aged in Wood," explicitly extends the issue into the embedded theatrical level.

Gena Rowlands, born in 1930, was forty-seven when she shot Opening Night. Although she claimed that age did not matter, she consistently refused to disclose her age, or lied about it in interviews (Carney, Cassavetes 409-410). In the film, Myrtle similarly refuses three times to tell her age to Sarah, the playwright character author of the film's embedded play "The Second Woman"117:

SARAH. Well if you can't say your age then you can't accept my play. [...] 
MYRTLE. I'm looking for a way to play this part where age doesn't make any difference.

117 Cassavetes had originally offered Sarah's role to Bette Davis, who turned it down (Carney, Cassavetes 416).
This is a difficult proposition as Virginia, Myrtle's character in the play, struggles with menopause and is caught up between her ex-husband, now married to a younger woman, and her current lover.

Marisa Paredes, born in 1946, was fifty-three when she played Huma in Todo sobre mi madre. The age issue is not overtly evoked in the film, but hinted at through the sizeable age difference between Huma and her lover Nina. And it is, like in the other two films, extended onstage: in Streetcar Blanche keeps on lying about her age:

   BLANCHE. [...] I – I don't know why Stella wants to observe my birthday!
   I'd much rather forget it – when you – reach twenty-seven! Well – age is a subject that you'd prefer to – ignore!
   STANLEY. Twenty-seven! (Williams, Streetcar Scene Eight, 197)

Blanche's actual age, although it is not disclosed, would still be much lower than that of both Marisa Paredes and Huma Rojo.

The threat age poses for actresses, and stars in particular, is all the stronger as the stars' existence entirely depends on their fans – that is, on very young people. This "sect of the faithful who wear relics and otherwise consecrate themselves to worship" (Morin 57) is indeed characterized by the erotic-religious dimension of its devotion to the star, as well as the youth of its members. According to the study by Leo Rosten and Margaret Thorp evoked by Morin, seventy-five to ninety percent of fans are less than twenty-one years old (Morin 83).118

Eve, Esteban, and Nancy correspond to this description: all three are young and devoted enough to wait for their star under the rain at the door of the theatre. Because Eve is...

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118 A 1997 survey of France’s Ministry of Culture released in 1998 revealed that 88% of the teenagers between the age of twelve and seventeen go at least once a year to the cinema, as opposed to 47% of the population between the age of thirty-five and forty-nine (Esquenazi 22-23). Conversely, only 7% of the French population ever goes to the theatre (Esquenazi 23). Esquenazi does not provide details as to the average age of the French theatre-goer. In the United States, the statistics released by the Broadway League for the 2009-2010 season indicate that the average Broadway theatre-goer was about forty-eight years old (http://www.broadwayleague.com/index.php?url_identifier=the-demographics-of-the-broadway-audience).
a "fake" fan she does not exactly fall into the appropriate age category (born in 1923, Anne Baxter was twenty-seven at the time of All about Eve), nor does she ask Margo for an autograph. But Esteban (played by the then twenty-two year old Eloy Azorín) and Nancy (played by the then twenty-year old Laura Johnson), both seventeen years old in their respective films, are perfect illustrations of the figure of the fan, and meet a similar fate very early on: they both die while running after their star’s car. The fans’ youth, and in these two cases, their untimely death, serve as a constant reminder of the star's aging and mortality, thereby feeding their private insecurity and their ever-growing need of love.

For all of Margo's tempestuous recriminations against autograph hunters, however, stars would not exist without fans. And along with their age, it is their number which is decisive. The Hollywood fan mail departments are, in Morin's terms, "veritable meteorological services that regard the number of letters a star receives as an exact barometer of her popularity" (Morin 58). Mankiewicz, who hired Marilyn Monroe for the role of Miss Caswell, a minor role as a bad actress, in All about Eve, was well aware of it:

Let me testify at once that while I was instrumental in getting her the part of Miss Caswell, I did not make a star of Marilyn Monroe. No individual, to the best of my pretty extensive knowledge, ever made a star. That is a power and privilege restricted only to the unfathomable, improbable, and altogether unworthy authority known as the Mass Audience. (in Carey 76)

This constitutes the other major differences between stars and mothers. A woman becomes a star or a mother thanks to the younger generation. But while age threatens a star's existence it does not affect a mother, whose role is no more dependent on her age than on her children's age. And if it takes millions of fans to make a star, it only takes one child to make a mother.

As both Manuela's child and Huma's fan, Esteban encapsulates this tension. The death of her

119"Letters addressed to Hollywood stars can be estimated at several million a year. [...] According to Margaret Thorp, a major star receives three thousand letters a week" (Morin 58).
only child is devastating for Manuela, whereas Huma is unaware of the very existence, let alone death, of Esteban, one her many fans, until Manuela tells her his story.

Huma’s last appearance onstage eventually transcends the mother-star dichotomy that pervades the film. Indeed, the role she is seen rehearsing is that of a mother— that, in fact, of The Mother in Haciendo Lorca ("Doing Lorca"). Conceived and staged by Lluís Pascual in 1996 with Nuria Espert and Alfredo Alcón, the show became, from a revisiting of Bodas de sangre (Blood Wedding) through the characters of the Moon and Death, an hour and a half evening of poetry from various Lorca texts interwoven to excerpts from Bodas de sangre.

Almodóvar frames the embedded excerpt very differently than those of Streetcar. Unlike Streetcar, the play is never referred to by its title, and is simply evoked once in Manuela's departure letter to Huma and Agrado: "you will surely have a lot of success with the homage to Lorca" (Almodóvar 119). And unlike Streetcar again, no poster of the performance is ever shown on screen.

Moreover, while Streetcar is shown multiple times in performance, Haciendo Lorca is shown only once, in rehearsal. The elaborate set and full auditorium of the Streetcar performances are now replaced with a bare stage and an empty auditorium. Robert Wilson's distinctive lights have become work lights. And instead of the elaborate wigs and costumes she wore as Blanche, Huma has "tied her hair with hairpins and has improvised a gypsy costume made of secondhand clothes" (Almodóvar 118). As Huma delivers the Mother's monologue Lluís Pascual, playing his own role, coaches her on the one gesture which accompanies her monologue: kneading flour and water together, symbolizing mothers' quintessential nurturing role (Fig. 19):

HUMA/MOTHER. There are people who think that a child is a one day affair. But it's not like that. It takes a long time. That's why it's so terrible to see your blood spilt on the ground. A fountain that spouts for a minute and has
When I reached my son, he was lying in the middle of the road. I wet my hands with his blood and I licked them with my tongue. Because it was mine. *Animals lick them clean don't they? I wouldn't be squeamish about my child.* You don't know what that means. I'd put the earth soaked by it in a monstrance of glass and topaz…

Lorca's words and Luis Pascual's staging function as a Spanish sequel to Williams' play and as a theatrical echo of Almódóvar's film: the kneading echoes Manuela's cooking for Esteban, while the scene described by the Mother echoes Manuela's running towards her dead son. Manuela's only words at the time were a mix of "hijo mio" ("my son") and of desperate inarticulate sounds which she repeated again on stage as Stella. This time Almodóvar provides Manuela with an articulate voice through Huma.

Almodóvar thus designs the scene as a theatrical sublimation of the cinematic opposition between mother and star. By representing a star playing the role of a mother he provides closure for both Manuela and Huma. On the one hand, the scene brings Manuela's catharsis full circle by transforming her into a theatre character and voicing her catharsis in the character's lines. On the other, it signals Huma’s success in overcoming her "professional menopause." Huma is not only ready to perform roles that are fitting for her age; the star is now capable of playing a mother.

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HUMA/MADRE. Hay gente que piensa que los hijos son cosa de un día. Pero se tarda mucho. Mucho. Por eso es tan terrible ver la sangre de un hijo derramada por el suelo... […] Una fuente que corre durante un minuto y a nosotras nos ha costado años. Cuando yo descubrí a mi hijo, estaba tumbado en mitad de la calle. Me mojé las manos de sangre y me las lamí con la lengua. Porque era mí. *Los animales los lamen, ¿verdad? A mí no me da asco de mi hijo.* Tú no sabes lo que es eso. En una custodia de cristal y topacios pondría yo la tierra empapada por su sangre... (García Lorca, in Almodóvar 118).
Fig. 19. Huma rehearsing *Haciendo Lorca* with Lluis Pascual (Pathé Distribution).
Manuela and Agrado: "Madre y puta"

After the fan and the star, the third figure with which Almodóvar further delineates Manuela's acting and motherhood is that of Agrado. By pitting these two figures against each other Almodóvar plays with the Castillan dictate "Madre o puta" which influenced Hollywood's representation of women. Indeed, the mother/whore opposition can be found in many non-Hollywood films, in Seventh Seal with Lisa and Mia, in Les enfants du paradis with Garance and Nathalie, in Opening Night with Myrtle and Dorothy – and even in A Streetcar Named Desire with Blanche and Stella. Going past the dictate's moral implications of purity and truth versus depravation and fakeness, Almodóvar uses it to challenge the boundaries of authenticity and artificiality – one the very key issues underlying the opposition between theatre and film.

While Almodóvar starts by setting up the traditional opposition between the two figures with Manuela and Agrado, Mark Allinson notes that he proceeds to systematically undermine it. Manuela dresses as a prostitute to visit Sister Rosa with Agrado, and later confesses to Sister Rosa: "I'm not a whore, I've never been one. They've fucked me up a lot but I've never been a whore" ("… no soy puta, nunca lo he sido. Me han puteado mucho, pero nunca he sido puta") (Almodóvar 66). Her line is significant inasmuch as it equates "'whore' (puta) with what is done to someone rather than what they do" (Allinson 74). If one were to follow this definition, both Agrado and Manuela (and again Sister Rosa) could be called whores. "On the other hand, Agrado's role in life is 'to make other people's lives happier,' not that different from the role of the mother" (Allinson 74), and once again, according to this definition both Agrado and Manuela (and again Sister Rosa) could be called mothers.

Having undermined the dichotomy, Almodóvar further links the two "professions" by emphasizing their respective theatricality. As a nurse Manuela acts in training videos that help doctors learn how to talk to patients' family about organ transplants. And Almodóvar's
camera turns the prostitute camp where Agrado works into a real outdoors theatre: "... most cars keep circulating. Their drivers are there to look not buy. This is a street theatre of a curiously pure kind, a tableau vivant in which the audience moves but the actors do not" (Hughes, in Epps & Kakoudaki 55). The variously gendered and transvestite prostitutes become actors whose make-up and costumes are "designed to enhance their performance on a stage whose lighting is provided by the headlights of the cars" (Edwards 192). It is in the acting skills they require that Manuela's and Agrado's job meet, thereby turning theatre into the domain that completes the systematic undermining of the traditional cinematic and social distinction between mother and prostitute.

And, as it turns out, both Manuela and Agrado end up being Huma's assistant, that is, being a mother figure within a theatrical context: "in All About My Mother motherhood is equated with acting, with the production of a performance. Motherhood is not a biological given but a chosen role, fashioned by women’s experience" (Maddison 279). Indeed, Manuela and Agrado perform the same motherly tasks for Huma and Nina in the dressing room than Manuela does for the two Estebans (dressing and undressing, cooking, preparing, or ordering meals); Agrado even sews while the actresses are onstage. And just as Manuela prevents a performance from being cancelled by performing in Streetcar, Agrado makes up for the last-minute cancellation of a Streetcar performance by improvising a one-woman show, the third theatrical performance embedded in the film.

Agrado’s improvised performance crystallizes her dual theatrical and cinematic origins. The comic relief she brings to each of her screen appearances confirms her affiliation with the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spanish graciosos, equivalent of the Elizabethan fools, whose function was to serve higher-ranked characters and to make them (and the audience) laugh (Edwards 192). On the other hand, like Manuela and Huma for Eve

121 Although Agrado’s character was inspired by the very real story of a Spanish man who went to Paris to become a woman, settled there, and renamed herself Agrado because her goal was to please others.
and Margo, Agrado functions as a colorful version a character from *All about Eve*, the
dresser Birdie. Both Agrado and Birdie are the star's dressers, and both the former
vaudevillian and the former transsexual prostitute share a rare talent for speaking their mind
plainly, thereby making the characters and the film audience laugh. But ultimately, it is their
deep understanding of theatricality, honesty, and authenticity, which gives them an edge over
other characters.

Stepping onstage to announce that the performance is cancelled, Agrado turns her
announcement into a one-woman show on the theme of authenticity. This man-turned-woman
decomposes the traditional forms of gallant poetry and improvises a blason enumerating and
praising all the foreign non-organic elements which transformed him into her, but which are
now proof of her authenticity as the woman he had always dreamt he would be. The
dichotomy between fakeness and authenticity pervades, in fact, more than just Agrado's story.
It informs the form of her narration, which is a real performance, since Agrado is on stage in
front of an audience, but not a real play, as the closed curtains behind her indicate. It also
mirrors the physicality of her body, whose outer appearance as a female body barely conceals
its artificiality and incompleteness.

In a final blurring between nature and culture, Agrado concludes: "What did I tell
you, it costs a lot to be authentic! But we shouldn't be stingy with our appearance. A woman
is the most authentic when she starts to resemble what she had dreamt for herself"
(Almodóvar 104). Responding to this final statement, Ballesteros notes that "Agrado's
monologue suspends the scenic illusion to make a compensatory gesture by which an
artificially 'constructed' woman would be the most authentic extension of the 'natural'
woman" (in Epps & Kakoudaki 88).

Agrado's onstage challenge of the boundaries between fakeness and authenticity
offers a comic variation of Manuela's tragic questioning of these boundaries as Stella. Agrado
is the most authentic when she plays the role of the woman she has become, just as Manuela is the most authentic when she plays the role of a mother. Almodóvar not only uses theatre to undermine the dichotomy between mother and whore; he also uses it to reverse the audience's conceptions about theatricality, and establishes role playing as the characters' most authentic behavior.

Indeed, Agrado's (in)authenticity can be applied to all of the film's embedded performances: Streetcar, Haciendo Lorca, and Agrado's monologue are at once authentic and inauthentic. Authentic, because Streetcar it is a real play, Haciendo Lorca is a real show whose actual director is seen on screen, and Agrado's situation was inspired by a real anecdote. Inauthentic, because Almodóvar modifies the original text of Streetcar, and occasionally films it as a cinematic adaptation instead of a theatrical performance. Because neither Huma Rojo nor Marisa Paredes ever performed in Haciendo Lorca. And because Agrado's improvisation itself stretches the limits of verisimilitude.

For one thing, Agrado is the star's dresser, not the star herself, which makes it very unlikely that the director of the theatre would let her go onstage at all. Moreover, Ballesteros remarks that the "audience's sympathetic and cheerful" response to Agrado's monologue is definitely not realistic, and "undoubtedly more a manifestation of Almodóvar's own position towards gender ambiguity than a plausible account of spectatorial identification with the trials and tribulations of transformative surgery"; it rather seems to script "a response for the extradiegetic audience that would be similarly cheerful and sympathetic" (in Epps & Kakoudaki 87).

Agrado's body and the theatre represented are equally (in)authentic – and so is, by extension, the embedding film which represents them. In keeping with the film's recurring organ transplant theme, Todo sobre mi madre is made of bits and pieces of heterogeneous

122 Instead of leaving the theatre whose general lighting system had failed and caused a performance to be cancelled, the Argentinian actress Lola Membibres decided to improvise a solo performance and talk to the audience about her life standing up in front of the closed curtain (Almodóvar 117).
media, arts, cultures, and periods. Even without taking into consideration the variety of styles of the other embedded art forms and art works (from Gaudi to Capote, from Chagall to Ismaël Lo), the embedded theatrical performances themselves belong to such different genres as tragedy and stand-up comedy, and still coalesce into a film, unique representative of a genre which Almodóvar created with it, the "screwball drama" (Almodóvar 183). The film's artificiality thus appears to be the result of its absorption of the performance's artificiality, and becomes the price to pay for the embedding of authentic performances.

Almodóvar thus sets up a precarious balance between artificiality and authenticity by playing with his film's various fictional levels. By showing how inauthentic theatre is, the film gains authenticity; but because of its patchwork nature and its absorption of the performances' artificiality the film itself becomes artificial and, by contrast, highlights the embedded theatre’s authenticity. Almodóvar conjures up the traditional century-old division between theatre and film recalled by Waller, that the former is authentic thanks to the presence of the actors in the room, and the latter thanks to the presence of the world on screen (Waller 76), so as better to put them back to back. With his representation of theatre he unveils the mechanism by which each art endows itself with the authenticity it sees as lacking in the other. So that instead of denouncing an intrinsic artificiality in the other art, Almodóvar reveals how each art creates the measure of the other's artificiality by comparing it to its own authenticity. In Almodóvar's world,

everything is real, and everything is false – which may mean that we are being asked, here and in the entire film, to construct and accommodate a 'place'
where the choice between the two, and the very formulation of such an alternative, would no longer be necessary. (Bersani and Dutoit 110)
Chapter Ten: Mirrors

Almodóvar’s redefinition of authenticity with Agrado’s character reflects the larger aesthetics informing his entire oeuvre. Like Agrado, Almodóvar’s films are at once unmistakably his and filled with references to and excerpts of many other artworks from different periods, genres, and media. Including other artists' work in his own has always been part of Almodóvar's *ars poetica*; speaking of *La mala educaccion* (*The Bad Education*, 2004) he declared: "everything that isn't autobiographical is plagiarism" (in D'Lugo 7). For Almodóvar, artworks are meant to be looted; in *Todo sobre mi madre*, he appropriates the artworks he “loots” by mirroring them.

Indeed, mirrors function as the unifying leitmotif that unites the embedded artworks and the embedding film. All of Almodóvar's quotations, references, or appropriations either themselves include mirrors or are manifested in the film through a mirroring device.123 This is already visible with the title of the film, which mirrors Mankiewicz’ title and is presented through a mirroring shot. Almodóvar’s shot of Esteban writing the title of the film on his notebook transforms the screen into the notebook page, as if the film audience had suddenly been transported on the other side of a magic looking-glass through which it could see the film. This unexpected shift of point of view foreshadows the role of mirrors as the unifying leitmotif of Almodóvar’s transtextual practices, and limns the position Almodóvar reserved to the film audience: the spectators will literally watch the film from the other side of the screen/mirror, and of the stage.

Right after this initial passing behind the mirror, the excerpt from *All about Eve* that appears onscreen is itself centered on a mirror. It is the scene of Eve and Margo’s first confrontation in Margo's dressing room, which Almodóvar does not quote entirely but which

123 This is not only restricted to films and plays: when Manuela arrives to Barcelona, the first shot we see of Gaudí’s Sagrada Familia is its reflexion on the window of Manuela’s taxi. The copy of the Chagall picture painted by Rosa’s mother can also be considered as a mirror image of the real painting.
is telling of the role mirrors play in both films. The scene opens with Margo sitting in front of her mirror, a mirror which reflects the crude image of a forty-year-old actress whose hair has been worn out by wigs and whose face sags under its make-up. When Margo insists that Eve tell her story, she turns away from her mirror, and remains focused on Eve until the end of the narration, which fully convinces her:

But what is it that is really convincing? The tragic turn of a life, or the interpretation that is made of it? By listening to Eve it is her own acting talent that Margo appreciates and recognizes as in a mirror, or the ideal reflection finally rid of the devastating stigmata of time. (Deschamps 86)

Eve's narration functions as a mirror which she holds in front of Margo – a much more flattering mirror than Margo's real one. Indeed, at the end of Eve's story, it is not Margo's face which appears in her mirror when Margo turns back towards it, but, thanks to a subtle change in the camera angle, Eve's.

In Opening Night it is also in Myrtle’s dressing room mirror that Nancy, Myrtle’s dead fan, appears to Myrtle for the first time. When she reappears in Myrtle’s bathroom mirror, she replaces Myrtle’s reflection just as Eve’s replaced Margo’s. After Myrtle leaves the frame on her way to wash her face Cassavetes cuts to a shot of a back and blond hair over the sink, which we expect to be Myrtle's. But the face that appears in close-up in the mirror turns out to be Nancy's, while the camera zooms out to reveal Myrtle watching her. As Jousse notes, there is no cinematic special effect to blend Myrtle's and Nancy's faces; the blondness of their heads is sufficient to render them "entirely indistinguishable" (Jousse 96).

As Nancy’s reflection gradually takes over Myrtle, Myrtle’s own reflection slowly disintegrates. In the following dressing-room scene Myrtle all but loses her image, split into three: the large wall-mirror reflects Myrtle's bust and face; a small white round mirror reflects half of her face; and a smaller round mirror reflects her eye at the beginning of the scene, and
her hair at the end (Fig. 20). Myrtle's physical disintegration becomes strikingly visual here as the "staging explicitly displays the fragmentation of a self which has literally been shattered to pieces" (Jousse 111).

Almodóvar designs the dressing room scene in which Huma hires Manuela as her assistant as a variation on these preceding scenes. At the beginning of the scene Huma’s image is simultaneously reflected on the four wall mirrors. The film audience thus sees a cubist shot of one profile, two sides, and one front image of Huma’s face. At the end of the scene, it is Manuela's turn to be reflected in the four mirrors. In both cases, the split image manifests the characters’ disintegration and emotional distress. Later, when Manuela convinces Huma that she can replace Nina as Stella, Almodóvar alternates between close-ups of Manuela and Huma's reflected faces in the mirror, using the mirror, like Mankiewicz and Cassavetes, to make visible the desire and rivalry between fan and star – the young and the old.

But in Opening Night and Todo sobre mi madre it is not the star who dies, but the fan. In fact, Esteban’s death scene functions as a pastiche of Nancy’s death scene: both fans, drenched by the rain, tap on the star’s car window transformed into one-way mirrors in which they can see themselves while Myrtle and Huma see them. Both run behind the star’s car, and die run over by another car (Fig. 21). In Jean Cocteau’s Orphée (1950), the eponymous character discovers that mirrors are Death’s “gates.” \[124\] In Opening Night and in Todo sobre mi madre the two dead characters come back to haunt the stars through mirrors: Myrtle sees Nancy instead of her reflection, while Esteban’s picture appears among the many pictures Huma has stuck on her dressing-room mirror at the end of the film.

\[124\] HEURTEBISE (to Orphée). I will disclose to you the secret of secrets: mirrors are the gates through which Death comes and goes. In fact, watch yourself all your life in a mirror and you will see Death working like bees in a glass hive. (Je vous livre le secret des secrets: les miroirs sont les portes par lesquelles la Mort vient et va. Du reste regardez-vous toute votre vie dans un miroir et vous verrez la Mort travailler comme les abeilles dans une ruche de verre.)
As gateways to a mysterious “Elsewhere,” then, mirrors help create Deleuze’s absolute off-screen and make film’s spiritual dimension visible. In this respect they become the symbol of the cinematic screen, which, for Bazin, functions as a magic mirror that retains the images it receives and delays their reflection:

It is false to say that the screen is incapable of putting us ‘in the presence of’ the actor. It does so in the same way as a mirror – one must agree that the mirror relays the presence of the person reflected in it – but it is a mirror with a delayed reflection, the tin foil of which retains the image. (Bazin & Gray 97)

Myrtle and Huma are put in presence of Nancy and Esteban just as the film audience is put in presence with the film characters, but also with the characters from the embedded plays they embody, and from the other films they evoke. From death’s gates to stars’ accessories, from formal link between the embedded references to symbol of Almodóvar’s aesthetic tactic – mirrors function as openings through which the film’s various dimensions interact.

This opening is all the more striking in Almodóvar’s film as mirrors are confined to the very closed space of the dressing room, where "everything is at the same time very intimate and very spectacular, two qualities which are inseparably reflected in all [of Almodóvar's] films" (Strauss 166). In Todo sobre mi madre the balance between the intimate and the spectacular Almodóvar achieves through mirrors becomes the metaphor of the film’s balance between theatre and film. And it is precisely mirrors’ liminal presence between the two media that Almodóvar borrows from All about Eve and Opening Night.

From All about Eve Almodóvar seems to have taken up Mankiewicz’ use of mirrors as the device that creates film’s reflexivity through theatre. Right after the performance during which Eve watches Margo's curtain call from the wings, Eve allegedly takes Margo's dress to the costume shop; Margo catches her in front of a backstage full-length mirror looking at herself with the dress in front of her. Mankiewicz frames the image as a
symmetrical reflection of the shot of Eve watching Margo from the wings. While Margo stood onstage in the background between Eve in the wings, her back in the foreground, and the audience in the house off-screen, it is now the backstage mirror which stands between Margo's back in the foreground and Eve in the background. The aim of the symmetrical shot is thus to watch Margo watching Eve watching herself. The angle, framing, and use of the depth of focus similarly underscore the film's theatricality, but by placing the mirror center-frame in a shot that is itself a reflection of a previous shot, Mankiewicz defines this theatricality as the basis of the film's reflexivity.

Mankiewicz' variation on the scene at the end of the film further confirms mirrors’ linking of theatre to film's reflexivity. In the final scene Eve comes back from the Sarah Siddons Award ceremony and suddenly notices in the mirror the reflection of a young woman asleep in her hotel room. Eve's young fan, Phoebe, appears to Eve as Eve had appeared to Margo: in her mirror. But Phoebe, president of her high school's Eve-Harrington-fan-club, turns out to be, even more than Eve, the epitome of the fan figure described by Morin. She goes through the same stages than Eve did with Margo, but faster. By the end of the scene Eve has virtually hired her as her assistant, and goes to sleep. Phoebe immediately seizes the occasion to put on Eve's coat, and holding her award, bows in front of Eve's three-fold full-length mirror as if she were receiving the award herself. Phoebe sees herself as Eve just as Eve had seen herself as Margo in the wings.

When theatre was at stake, the single mirror stood between the two actresses, placing them in a duel-like position. Now the scene features a three-part mirror whose parts, by reflecting one another, create a multitude of Phoebe's bowing. The multiplication of images evokes Eve's (and Phoebe's) imminent departure to Hollywood, whose trade is the mass production of images. Phoebe's endless reflections thus signal more than yet another cycle of
a young ambitious actress replacing an older one; they mirror the multiplication of images on which Hollywood thrives. 125

From Opening Night Almodóvar borrows mirrors’ disrupting of theatre’s unity of space. Mirrors are present in both sets of the film’s embedded play “The Second Woman.” During one of the performances a long shot captures Myrtle/Virginia in the bathroom of her former husband’s apartment, looking at herself in a mirror in profile, while in the background the edge of the stage and the audience can be seen through the open door. The camera angle hides both Myrtle's reflection in the mirror and the origin of the point of view it originates from. The shot does not manifest the point of view of another actor onstage nor of a technician offstage, since the bathroom is empty and closed at the back. The only "person" watching Myrtle from that angle is, in fact, the film spectator, watching the play from a virtual upstage. As Myrtle/Virginia stands exactly midway between theatre and film audiences, she herself becomes the mirror and the screen reflecting both audiences.

In the other set of the play, as red as the former was blue, the bathroom mirror has been replaced by the huge photograph of an old woman, part of a series of portraits Virginia's current husband Maurice/Marty has shot (Fig. 22). The photograph becomes a prescient mirror, Myrtle/Virginia's anticipated reflection. Although it is not a close-up but a full-length picture, its looming presence evokes Bazin’s belief in close-up as the cinematic tool which compensates for the loss of the actors' bodily presence: "What we lose by way of direct witness do we not recapture thanks to the artificial proximity provided by photographic enlargement?" (Bazin & Gray 98). Here it is as if Cassavetes had isolated onstage one of the

125 Mankiewicz’ scene is itself a variation on the last scene of Orson Welles' The Lady from Shanghai (1947). In it Michael O'Hara (Orson Welles), Elsa Bannister (Rita Hayworth), and Arthur Bannister (Everett Sloane) engage in a deadly fight in a glass house full of mirrors. After shooting at each other’s reflections, Elsa and Arthur end up shooting each other – and Michael leaves Elsa dying alone amidst the broken glass. For Phoebe, Elsa's gun has been replaced by Eve's award, which functions both as the goal and as the weapon with which to reach it: Eve's ambition and need to be flattered.
twenty-four images per second of his film. The picture thus simultaneously represents Myrtle/Virginia's theatrical future, and cinema's theatrical and photographic past.

The recurrent shots of the picture and of mirrors pave the way for theatre’s final shrinking from three to two dimensions in the film. Emmanuelle Costa de Beauregard notices how, in the last scene of the opening night performance of "The Second Woman," the actors' improvised "stylized choreography" unfolds on a horizontal line between stage left and stage right, creating a "two-dimensional" space without depth – in effect, "dematerializing the theatrical space" (Costa de Beauregard 256). For her, the flat onstage pattern and the long shot in which Cassavetes frames it connotes puppet theatre. If this might be relevant for an analysis of the characters' psychology, it would be more accurate, on a formal level, to note that the stage's final flatness functions as the climax of the mirror/picture leitmotif. By working against the theatrical depth of field Cassavetes mirrors the flattening that the theatrical stage is subjected to on screen (and which Keil described as being characteristic of the modernist stage of film’s relationship to theatre).

It is precisely here that Laurence Giavarini locates the main difference between Opening Night and All about Eve. In the former all is theatre, but theatre broken into pieces, which deeply differentiates the film from those which previously addressed theatrical performance, for example All about Eve by Mankiewicz (1950). Indeed the latter separate the theatrical stage and the space of cinema while linking them in a mirroring game without really breaking the conventional opposition between reality and fiction. (Giavarini 12)

Giavarini goes on to argue that Cassavetes introduces no confusion between theatre and cinema in his film as
the word “confusion” implies a denied duality, whereas there aren't really two
texts in Opening Night, a theatrical fiction and a cinematic fiction, but one
self-consciously ambivalent text – this works in both domains, on- and
offstage, and it constitutes one spatial material for the film. (Giavarini 12)

With the mirrors Cassavetes does not mirror theatre; he dismantles theatre and puts it
back together in a way which ignores one of theatre's essential physical qualities: the unity of
space. "Everything is theatre in Opening Night […]. That is, since there is an actress,
everything is a stage" (Giavarini 12). The fragmentation of Myrtle's image through mirrors
and pictures is thus more than a way to reflect the actress' loss of boundaries – it is also a way
of exploring what cinema does with and to theatre's intrinsic spatial unity. If, as Labarthe puts
it, "theatre contaminates all the rest" in the movie (in Benoliel 50), it is because the film
depives it of its unity of space, so that theatre invades all other spaces. Giavarini concludes:

if Cassavetes employs theatre to speak about cinema, his own cinematic
oeuvre, it is not only because he comes from theatre, or because one
historically preexists the other (and is it even true in this America which
narrates itself as a myth through cinema?), but it is to talk about the creation of
a show: theatre brings to film the concrete, spatially structured representation
of an artist’s physical fear. What is beautiful in Opening Night is that by
breaking theatre to pieces, Cassavetes restores its integrity simultaneously as a
place and as an experience… (Giavarini 13)

It is both the reflexive dimension theatre brings to film and the way in which film
recreates theatre as space and experience that Almodóvar appropriates through mirrors. But
unlike Mankiewicz, whose last scene evokes the cinematic multiplication of images, and
Cassavetes, who ends on a “flat” representation of theatre, Almodóvar closes his film in
Huma’s dressing room, bringing the film back to the closed space of women and of theatre.
At the end of the film Manuela comes in Huma’s dressing room just as Agrado finishes to dress her before the beginning of the show. Manuela announces that Rosa’s Esteban is now HIV-negative; Agrado reveals that Nina has left Huma, is married, and has a son.

In the script Huma, after these two announcements, goes towards the door and stops on the threshold of her dressing room. She turns back, punctuates her last line to Manuela, "I will see you after the show," by a hurt smile, and exits as the stage-manager's off-screen voice announces: "The show is about to start!" (Almodóvar 122). By explicitly closing on the beginning of a new performance the script establishes a final parallelism between Huma’s acting and Manuela’s renewed motherhood.

In the actual film Huma turns back and tells Manuela, in a dark and somber tone contrasting with the previous happy mood of reunion, "I will see you later." Almodóvar then cuts directly to the final dedication. Instead of underlining the common new beginning of Huma and Manuela, Almodóvar shifts the emphasis onto Huma’s role as mirror. He no longer captures her reflection in the mirror but instead frames Huma herself in the doorway, evoking Morin’s definition of stars’ merging with their own image: "the star is in effect subjectively determined by her double on the screen. She is nothing since her image is everything. She is everything since she is this image too" (Morin 53). As a star and as a theatre actress onscreen, Huma embodies, at the end of the film, the mirror through which the film audience goes from stage to screen. Neither smile nor reference to the performance is needed. What matters is what the star sees, and reveals when one looks at her; what the film exposes about theatre, and what theatre reveals about film when represented onscreen.

126 HUMA (en la puerta, se vuelve). Te veo después de la función… Antes de salir le lanza a Manuela una sonrisa dolorida. OFF REGIDOR. ¡La función va a empezar!

127 “Te veo luego.”
Fig. 20. Myrtle’s split reflection.
Fig. 21. Nancy’s death.
Fig. 22. Myrtle, Maurice and Manny rehearsing in front of the photograph of the old woman.
Epilogue: *Va savoir*

I'd like to film *Six Characters in Search of an Author* to show through cinema what theatre is. By being realistic one discovers the theatre, and by being theatrical… These are the boxes of *Le carrosse d'or*: behind the theatre there is life, and behind life, the theatre. I started from the imaginary and discovered reality; but behind reality, there is again imagination. (Godard, in Keil 86)

Four decades after this interview Rivette realized Godard's wish almost word for word: borrowing situations and characters from Renoir's *Le carrosse d'or*, Rivette follows, in *Va savoir* (*Who Knows?*) (2001), an Italian troupe's performances of Luigi Pirandello's *Come tu mi vuoi* (*As You Desire Me*) in Paris, and centers the film on six characters, two actors from the troupe and four of their variously related admirers.

For Keil, Godard's 1962 quote, and quest, are emblematic of the modernist stage of cinema's relationship to theatricality. How should we interpret, then, its striking relevance to Rivette's 2001 film? Is Godard early, or Rivette late? Neither, inasmuch as Godard, by referencing Pirandello and Renoir, conjures up figures of artistic reflexivity, the master of twentieth-century metatheatricality and the "boss" of the representation of theatre in film, who transcend periods and genres. Rivette's *Va savoir* brings together these two figures as if to create, at the turn of the twenty-first century, a compendium of twentieth-century reflexivity of theatre in film.

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128 To take up Jacques Aumont's title, "Renoir le patron, Rivette le passeur."
**Va savoir, theatre, film, and life**

Although *Va savoir* opens and closes onstage, it is not theatrical in its structure, or at least not strictly so. The unity of time exists (the length of the troupe's tour in Paris) but far exceeds twenty-four hours. Similarly, the unity of space (Paris) far exceeds the classical unique room. And although there is again an overarching unity of action (all the main characters bear a more or less distant relationship to the actors from the troupe) there are at least three parallel stories going on at once in the film, on top of the ongoing performances of the Pirandello play. Finally, the film is full of *coups de théâtre* but does not fall into three or five acts.

More than a directly theatrical structure, then, the film seems to derive its theatricality from its reference to Renoir’s *Le carrosse d'or* – and its representation of theatre. In *Jacques Rivette* Douglas Morrey and Allison Smith list the main three elements that Rivette borrowed from *Le carrosse d'or*. First, "the name of Camille" (or Camilla, in the English version of Renoir's film) for the main female character, played by Jeanne Balibar in *Va savoir* and Anna Magnani in *Le carrosse d'or*. Second, Camille's "presence at the centre of a theatre troupe acting in what is not her first language" – Renoir's Italian troupe tours the New World, and Camilla has to perform in English; Rivette's Italian troupe is on tour in Paris, and performs in the original Italian, leading Camille to perform in Italian in her hometown. Third, Camille's "trio of suitors" – in Renoir's film, Felipe, the Viceroy, and the torero Ramon; in Rivette's film, Ugo, the troupe leader and Camille's lover, Pierre her ex-lover, professor of Philosophy, and Arthur, a crook (Morrey & Smith 211).

While Rivette's borrowing mainly concerns Camille's character, they in fact outline the status of theatre in his film: Camilla is Renoir's character for whom the tension between life and theatre is the strongest. After Camilla solves the film plot by giving the golden coach
to the Church, Renoir resolves the tension between the several layers of fiction in the final
dialogue between Antonio, the troupe leader and Renoir’s mouthpiece, and Camilla:

ANTONIO. Don't waste your time in the so-called real life. You belong to us, the actors, acrobats, mimes, clowns, mountebanks. Your only way to find happiness is on any stage, any platform, any public place during those two little hours when you become another person, your true self.

CAMILLA: Felipe, Ramon, the Viceroy... disappeared, gone. Don't they exist anymore?

ANTONIO. Disappeared. Now they are a part of the audience. Do you miss them?

CAMILLA. A little.

Upon which Camilla/Magnani looks straight into the camera in a medium close-up shot, before Renoir zooms out and ends on the same image he started with, the framed stage of a classical theatre. Camilla's final choice is clear: like Zerbine in Gance's Capitaine Fracasse, she chooses theatre over life.

The tension between theatre and life is the first driving force which Patrice Blouin outlines in Va savoir. It manifests itself in Camille, who oscillates between "stage fright" and "fear" ("trouille"), respectively (Blouin 74). It also informs the film’s time, and language. Theatre takes place at night, in Italian, and brings Camille and Ugo together – whereas “life” takes place during the day, in French, and brings Camille and Ugo apart. The use of a foreign language therefore combines with the night/day dichotomy so as "to demarcate a virtual space for the performance of theatre, or of magic" (Morrey & Smith 169).

And yet Rivette keeps on undermining this dichotomy on all levels. As Blouin remarks, Rivette films the performances with a very cinematic camera, multiple angles

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129 The choice of Italian was a deliberate wink to Renoir’s film, and beliefs. For Renoir, Italy was "the active symbol of a certain civilization," and the source of the major influence on French classical theatre (Rivette & Truffaut 22).
(including from the wings or upstage of the actors), and close-up frames which are decidedly non-theatrical. Conversely, he films Camille's reunion with Pierre with a fixed camera forcing Camille to enter the frame from the right as if she were performing onstage: "for Camille, the outside world is a stricter theatre than the one which welcomes the troupe" (Blouin 74). On top of the inverted camera work, Rivette blurs the distinction between inside theatre audience and outside film audience by depriving both of supertitles or subtitles during the performance scenes. The foreign language does demarcate theatre from life, but the mutual incomprehension binding the theatre and film audiences reinforces the camera work's undermining of the difference between the two media.

Indeed, Rivette starts the film by creating an onstage space that is "continuous and inseparable with the offstage":

The first minute of the film, in fact, takes place in a non-space: a temporary, bounded – and mobile – magic circle of performance is created by a single spotlight which an unidentifiable figure apparently draws with as it moves this way and that through featureless darkness. (Morrey & Smith167)

It is as impossible to tell whether the figure is an actor or an actress, or whether the frame corresponds to the stage or the screen,

so that the directive voices which we hear and to which figure and light apparently respond may issue from on- or off-screen; may even, notionally, be part of our own space, especially if shown in a cinema with the capacity for sourced and directed sound. (ibid.)

With a cut the camera abruptly follows Camille offstage and reveals a shadowy backstage area barely distinct from the stage. Rivette does not stop there:

The device to use dominant movement to cover cuts allows Rivette to extend this unbounded space further, from the dark theatre corridors and staircases to
the narrow night-time street outside, then to the very similar corridors and staircases of Camille and Ugo's hotel – in which they talk critically about the appearance of the theatre they have just left, thereby evoking that space as an imaginary superposition on this one. Thus the stage extends outwards into the city. (Morrey & Smith 168)

And it is in such spatial terms that Blouin voices the second set of oppositions that make the film move forward – that between the centrifugal screenplay and the centripetal directing. While the script sends Ugo and Camille away from each other, and from theatre (Camille threatens to abandon both Ugo and Pirandello for Pierre, Ugo is tempted to abandon both Camille and Goldoni for Dominique), Rivette's centripetal mise-en-scène constantly tries "to reunite, in a single frame and on a same stage, the troupe modified and reinforced by its external additions" (Blouin 74). The centrifugal and centripetal motions are precisely those which Bazin characterizes as typically cinematic and theatrical, respectively, and which Almodóvar plays with in Todo sobre mi madre. The two opposite but complementary forces on which the film is built, then, are none other than the opposite and complementary forces of theatre and cinema.

This complementarity could be summed up in the title of the play that Rivette embeds in Va savoir: Come tu mi vuoi. This lesser known play by the master of metatheatricality features a nameless and amnesiac "strange lady" whose current identity as Elma, the high-end prostitute in the 1930s Berlin, contrasts with her possible past as Lucia, Bruno Pieri's virtuous young bride who disappeared after Bruno left to war and their villa was ransacked by the German army. The woman's attempt at becoming the one Bruno lost ultimately fails; the play closes on her final choice to go back to her Berlin life.

In Come tu mi vuoi the play within the play consists in the woman's playing at being who she might once have been – having become herself a professional performer, "a dancer
at the 'Lari-Fari'" (Pirandello & Putnam 37). The duality of the woman is explicit in her two names, both of which refer to a natural element and to a distinct civilization:

THE STRANGE LADY. Elma, did you hear? Do you know what it means?

Water… Water…

As she says this, she moves her fingers, stretching out her hands, by way of signifying the deliberate lack of consistency in the life she now leads.

(Pirandello & Putnam 30)

Against the Arabic name for water, Lucia, the Latin name referring to light. Both are essential to life, and both are formless, and cannot be tamed or shaped. They can only be what others desire of them.

By inserting the play in his film Rivette makes clear that representing theatre onscreen ultimately amounts to containing theatre within the cinematic form, to turning theatre into what the film desires it to be. Indeed, Rivette, like Mankiewicz, did not manage to shift from directing films to directing plays. Morrey and Smith locate the roots of Rivette’s failed attempts at theatre directing in his incapacity to entirely renounce to the "fixity" of cinema, to accept "the lack of directorial control over a theatrical performance" (Morrey 151). Rivette himself confessed the main problem he encountered with theatre actors in a 1996 interview with the NRF: "They can do what they like on stage… It moves all the time" (Morrey 151, note 7). Just as Pirandello remains in control of his plays, even when he inserts audience members within them, "in practice, Rivette's championing of flux and process and dynamic development is always a tightly controlled illusion of which he remains the artificer" (Morrey 151). In Va savoir, theatre is as Rivette desires it: both freer than film and fixed by it.
Rivette’s philosophy of the stage onscreen

The last in a long series of films on theatre, Va Savoir manifests yet again Rivette’s credo, which he voiced in a 1968 interview to Les Cahiers du cinema after L’amour fou, that "all films are about theatre. There is no other subject… If you choose a subject which deals closely or distantly with theatre, you're within the truth of cinema and borne up [by it]" (in Morrey 150, note 4). In his article "Mesure pour mesurer: théâtre et cinéma chez Jacques Rivette," Alain Ménil acknowledges the uniqueness of Rivette’s screen representation of theatre and points out that "Rivette constantly works to foil the presuppositions that usually create the frame for the confrontation between theatre and film" (Ménil 72). It is with Ménil’s analysis of Rivette’s vision of theatre that I want to conclude this study and entertain perspectives for the future of this relationship.

Ménil defines Rivette's conception of the relationship between theatre and cinema as the exact opposite of Bazin's ideas. As Charlie Keil outlined in his article, Bazin launched, in the fifties, a successful campaign for theatre's rehabilitation in film, thereby shaping the theoretical and critical framework in which scholars and critics have since analyzed the interaction between theatre and cinema. The problem, for Ménil, is precisely that there seems to be no possible way of analyzing the interaction between the two media outside the frames provided by Bazin – and that these unquestioned frames are inherently flawed.

Ménil first addresses the image of theatre that emerges from Bazin's analyses. By locating the difference between theatre and cinema in the difference between their respective off-spaces Bazin wrongly equates the screen to the fourth wall, constructs the offstage and the off-screen, invisible to the audience, as homogeneous and equal spaces, and reduces the stage to a closed, frontal, and framed area (Ménil 72). Ménil accuses Bazin of having bequeathed cinema scholars with a vision of theatre that has lost touch with the spatial and technological transformations theatre has undergone since the 1950s: "the theatre of the
cinema lover is quite often an aesthetic monster which no longer exists outside the fantasy of movie theatres" (Ménil 72).

In my introduction I consciously excluded all the films representing non-traditional theatrical performances to deal with a manageable and homogeneous corpus of films, and of performances. This led me to exclude such theatrical genres as the circus performances of DeMille's The Greatest Show on Earth (1952) or Ophüls' Lola Montès (1954), the street theatre performances of Fellini's La Strada (1954), the music and dance performances of Powell and Pressburger's The Red Shoes (1948), Minelli's An American in Paris (1951), or Saura's Carmen (1983), and the cabaret/strip-tease performances of Egoyan's Exotica (1994). Inasmuch as they adhere to different formal rules, each of these performance types deserves a separate study. But inasmuch as they are all live performances in front of an audience they could potentially have been part of this study. By excluding them I have subscribed to Bazin’s traditional vision of theatre, which no longer reflects, if it ever has, the majority of the theatrical works performed.

However right Ménil is in pointing out the limited scope of Bazin’s vision, I am convinced that Bazin's theories provide useful frames and insights to analyze more experimental performances. Moreover, representing performances that question traditional theatrical forms does not necessarily imply that the representation itself questions the relationship between theatre and film. What this dissertation shows is that it is possible to have an innovative vision of the interaction between theatre and film while representing traditional theatrical forms onscreen – indeed, the relative homogeneity of the represented theatre does not translate into a homogeneity in the films, their genres, styles, and modes of representation of theatre.

Ménil further distinguishes three theses on which Bazin's theoretical reflections are built. To begin with, "film is originally an avatar from theatre" (Ménil 74). Theatre,
omnipresent in film through its appurtenance to the realm of "drama," represents the infinite virtual possibilities of which only one is actualized in the film. According to the second thesis, films did not start to be theatrical when they started to "talk," since there has always been the presence of the theatrical actor since the earliest days of film (Ménil 75). In this respect cinema can be described as extending theatre with better technical means. The third thesis, by prolonging the first two, inverts them: cinema is the "end," the "truth," the "accomplishment" of theatre to such an extent that far from being one of theatre's avatars, it is "theatre raised to its entelechy" (Ménil 76).

For Ménil, Rivette's teleology is the exact opposite of Bazin's inasmuch as it posits theatre as "film's truth" (Ménil 77). Cinema cannot be an avatar of theatre: Rivette's characters constantly alternate between the stage and the cinematic world as between two distinct realms which do not blend (Ménil 80). But film is also not theatre's entelechy since, in Rivette's world, theatre does not represent cinema's potential dimension (Ménil 81). Quite the contrary: if one defines potential as "that which has less existence than the actual," then film is less actual than theatre. It is not that film as a succession of images has less reality than the theatre which it is the image of, but rather that the finished version of a film representing theatre is nothing more than a residual trace of the theatrical presence it depicts; it is only one of the possibilities of seeing what happened:

Far from inscribing itself in the teleological perspective of an actualization of potentials or of a realization of possibilities, filmmaking discovers in the mechanical recording of a live reality which unfolded in front of it and which will not repeat itself, the form of its powerlessness, the sign of its failure, the emblem of its inferiority. (Ménil 81-82)

In a nutshell, while Bazin's historical perspective would define film as the actualization of theatre's potentiality, Rivette's more structural approach would define theatre
as the actualization of film’s potentiality. Both visions are, to a certain extent, valid, and have been variously explored in the films under study. But more importantly, Ménil's answer to Bazin highlights that theatre and film do not exist jointly with the same level of actuality. Ménil’s drawing on Aristotle's concepts highlights how theatre and film function as an actualizing force for each other, bring the other art to its entelechy – and endow it with more reality. This is what lies at the heart of Almodóvar’s Todo sobre mi madre, which he frames in terms of authenticity. Film is theatre's entelechy because a film can be drawn out of theatre's potentiality – which gives authority to Bazin's position. But theatre is also film’s entelechy because it retains more actuality than cinema's potentiality.

The onscreen representation of theatre transposes the stale qualitative rivalry between the two art forms into a deeper philosophical and ontological question. This question can never find an ultimate theoretical answer, but finds a host of practical ones as directors endlessly combine the respective degree of actuality with which they endow theatre and film.
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