

# ONTOLOGY OF ABSENCE

by

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## DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

*I, Sylwia Dobkowska, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.*

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DATE: 10.11.2014



# ABSTRACT

This thesis examines what absence is and how it works in a performance. I study the paradox of representation, whereby absence is never absent and presence is not present. I have named this using the oxymoron *present absence*.

In my research I question the dualistic philosophy which defines a sign as a relationship between a signifier (a thing) and a certain signified (its meaning), and I look for another interpretation of absence in performance. I use Jacques Derrida's philosophy and survey various theories in theatre studies, which define limits of presence and absence. I do not agree with all of them, but they provide important and different perspectives on the question of absence.

These theoretical perspectives on presence and absence are applied to a number of examples of visual culture drawn from theatre, performance and art. A structure of visual representation is studied as *writing*. I refer to Derrida's theory of arche-writing, which is a non-linear form of writing that does not rely on defining being

as presence. Present absence is studied through linguistic theory and tested in the three-dimensional space of performance. In this thesis I apply Derrida's philosophy to read objects in Chapter 3, human beings in Chapter 4, and the structure of language, without referring to its essence in the concept of presence, in Chapter 5. I build my argument on the premise that representation can be read as metaphor. I use Derrida's term *grapheme*, not only to refer to negative marks in writing as he does, but also to refer to a *word* in arche-writing. I test the plausibility of my theory in the thesis. My research provides an alternative account of the mode of reading the notion of absence in performance. I find the significance of absence in political context of visual culture.



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisor Professor Dan Rebellato for inspiring my research with his excellent analysis and complex questions. I am grateful for the invaluable guidance I received throughout my doctoral studies. I also wish to thank my advisor, Dr Sophie Nield, who provided constructive comments and insightful questions that developed my research.

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# ONTOLOGY OF ABSENCE

A PLAN OF THE PHD THESIS

INTRODUCTION

## INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1  
PRESENT ABSENCE IN PHILOSOPHY

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DERRIDA IN THEATRE

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those principles of a transcendental idea being defined as *the true theatre or art* reflects on, and shapes, criteria for *good* or *bad* performances. The courage to find a logical way to make this theory comprehensible supported my need to conduct this research, which questions the premises of the dualistic system. For me, the most difficult question was what happens when one presents absence? Is it the absence of presence that one displays? If so, every representation is an absence of presence, so what is it? I am committed to explaining this question, as it concerns one of the fundamental issues for theatre studies. In order to find some answers, I have delved into the history of theatre and the history of philosophy. However, theories alone do not provide an answer with regard to the system of representation *something* in theatre or even in the wider sense, in daily life. This is where I examined philosophy's dualistic use of structural methods to explain structure of language and thought. I studied poststructuralism, but then I realised that what is encompassed under the term is so diverse that its subject matter could only be a entirely new subject for a PhD thesis. Therefore, I decided to focus my research on philosophy that provides theoretical insights into my

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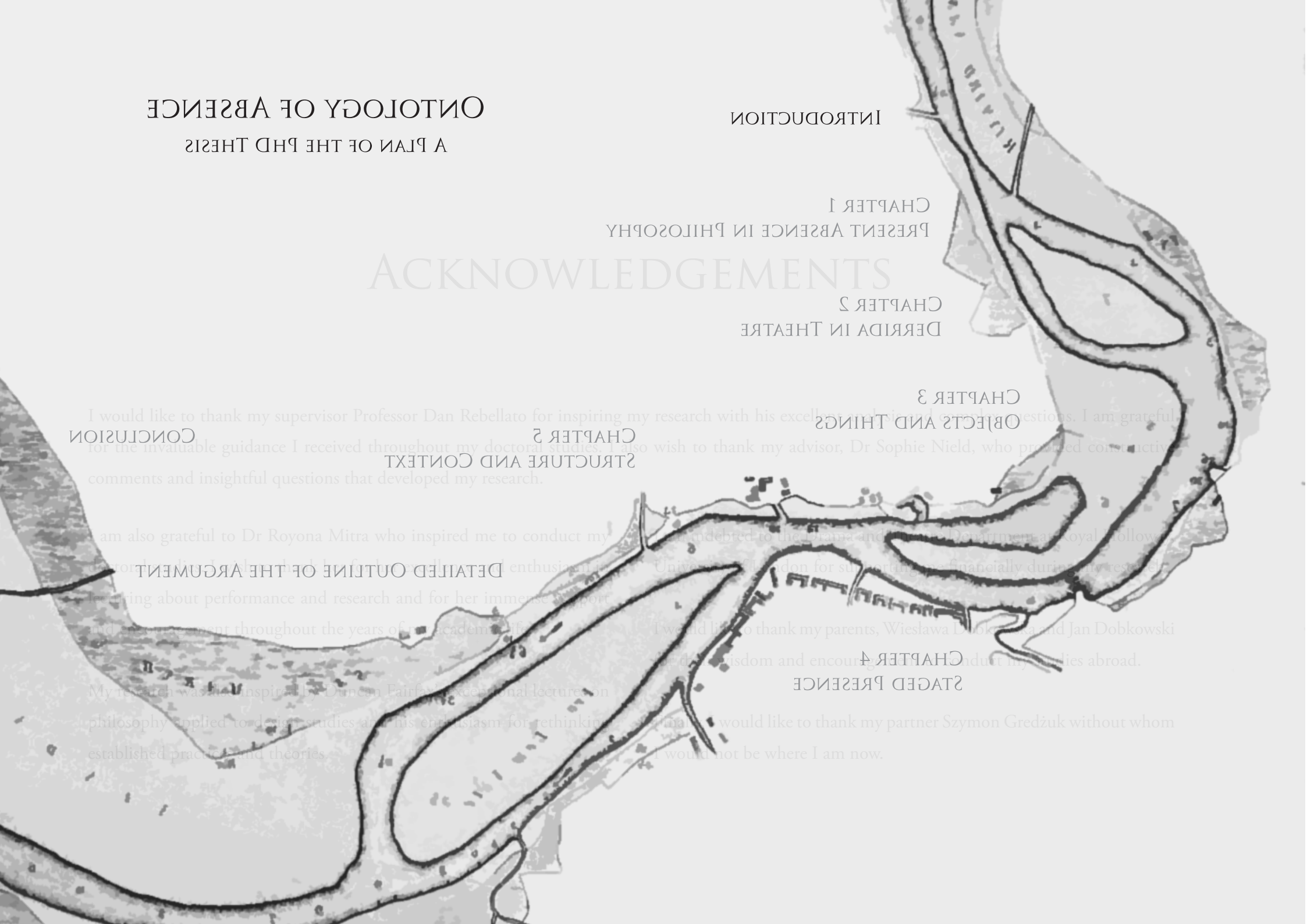
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# INTRODUCTION

A dualistic way of thinking is virtually embedded in language and, inevitably, in thought. This is a system of thought that is constructed using two principles. A sign is made of a signifier and a signified, such as an object and its idea. Ever since I can remember I have been taught that there is always an ideal of something behind that thing, which is its essence. In accordance to this theory I could find an idea behind everything, in whichever way one would name the signified. That could also include presence in the idea of perfection that could not be achieved, and could only result in disappointment. In this way, I have also analysed theatre as an unspeakable sharing of emotion or imagination that represents non-achievable perfection. Theatre seemed to represent ideals. Performances were about something that was missing in the moment of performing. I have been taught that the symbolic layer of art is its essence and the author's interpretation is *the only right one*. However, there was something that I could not understand: how is something that is presented as absent in the moment of spectating reasonably explained or analysed? In many cases, this is explored as the thing that makes theatre interesting. Is it? How? As much as I have tried, I do not understand how

those principles of a transcendental idea being defined as *the true theatre or art* reflects on, and shapes, criteria for *good* or *bad* performances. The courage to find a logical way to make this theory comprehensible supported my need to conduct this research, which questions the premises of the dualistic system. For me, the most difficult question was what happens when one presents absence? Is it the absence of presence that one displays? If so, every representation is an absence of presence, so what is it? I am committed to explaining this question, as it concerns one of the fundamental issues for theatre studies. In order to find some answers, I have studied theatre theory, which is discussed in this thesis, but such theories alone do not provide an answer with regard to the system used when representing *something* in theatre or even, in the wider sense, in visual culture. This is why I examined philosophies that do not use dualistic or structural methods to explain structures of language and thought. I studied poststructuralism, but then I realised that what is encompassed under the term is so diverse that its subject matter could form an entirely new subject for a PhD thesis. Therefore, I decided to focus my research on philosophy that provides theoretical insights into my

question of absence. When I began my research I found Derrida's theories at times confusing and it required effort to understand them. The more I read his works, the more it became apparent that his philosophy provides an account that is ultimately different to other philosophies I have encountered; it contrasts with other thought and embraces difference, while simultaneously being comprehensible and logical. The philosophy of Derrida provides an argument with regard to an alternative method of shaping thought when compared to dualistic philosophy, and applying his theories to theatre was one of many methods of understanding the paradox of the presence of absence in theatre and art. I do not argue that my answer is the only or the *right* answer to the question of absence. No answer is. It remains a possibility and a supplement.

I am keen to answer questions as to how one can understand meaning and ideas of absence, without referring to belief alone. The key issue of the thesis is the question of absence. How can one understand what is absence in theatre without the necessity of defining it outside of non-rational terms, such as transcendental presence or an ideal concept behind a representation? The primary difficulty of the discourse is the fact that one must use language in its dualistic function in order to create meaning. A text might question the function of writing and structure of textuality. This is the difficulty that Derrida also found in his philosophy. His writing can be referred to as text within a text, where his work of re-reading other texts questions the way we take for granted the structure of communication. However, he points out that perfect communication is

impossible in many instances, as the text does not carry a full meaning, but there are certain patterns of terms that evoke a similar meaning to the author and reader. I have also studied this theory in many dimensions in my thesis; there is something that embraces multiple extensions of present absence in communication and interpretation in every chapter. I test the plausibility of the notion of present absence and study its features, using examples of visual culture, such as in the first chapter, when I assess *aporia*, in Chapter 1 and Chapter 3 in the section in which I assess drama and absorption, in Chapter 4 when surveying theatre theories with regard to communicating immediacy, and also in Chapter 5, where the entire chapter is dedicated to a discussion of context and the structure of meaning. I am aware that the theory of questioning ideology is also an ideology. Paradoxically, this does not exclude the coherence of Derrida's argument, as his philosophy dealing with other philosophies is still a part of the history of thought. Moreover, he argues for the play of intertextuality, rather than belief in the origin of the idea. Words are always in a certain association with one another, depending on the reader's knowledge. My research studies Derrida's traces and applies them to theatre studies which includes all forms of visual culture. I do not argue in favour of the possibility of present absence beyond drama, theatre or art in relation to some privileged metaphysical 'beyond', but neither do I rigidly stick within artistic modes moving between these forms, not beyond them. I argue for playing with their potential from a perspective of present absence. With this thesis, I wish to join the discourse on representation in

visual culture and open up the discussion on present absence as offering a potential for future redefinitions of entities in theatre studies that have a foundation in the metaphysics of presence. Definitions are not fixed, as they always have been redefined; what is more, in accordance with Derrida, they are never finite. Therefore, they cannot be present and this allows the potential for the discovery of other associations of terms and things in which the reader can participate. In the metaphysics of absence, the play of meaning is an activity that does not happen in the 'ideal world' of the signified, or in the future or past, but as a process of reading.

Theories, such as division between theatre, drama and art on the basis of the notion of presence or immediacy in live performance, are questioned in this research. The reasons for their division could be a consequence of defining presence as a transcendental signified. When surveying the fixed identities of visual culture from the perspective of the play of signifiers, present absence, rather than with reference to the signified, then the categories and hierarchies between genres are lost and are impossible to define. This perspective can result in encouraging hybridity between definitions and forms, and lack of authority in the process of play. If there are no perfect and pure genres, as the concept does not have a transcendental existence to refer to, then the ever-changing visual culture that plays with graphemes might be one of the options that could emerge from reading this research. Therefore, readers shape the potential of this study.

This particular chapter introduces my research on the ontology

of absence in its being as process. I divide the chapter into subsections that refer to specific features of the research and the thesis. The following section is concerned with the research problem, and also underlines the originality of my work and the significance of my research. Another section deals with the thesis outline which outlines how the work develops, and which briefly refers to theories and practical examples that I discuss in this research. I conduct a literature review throughout the thesis, in accordance with the particular dimensions of the subject I study. Following the outline, there is a discussion with how the research is conducted. The methodology section is divided into research philosophy, which is the key strategy I used to develop this study, and the methods used in order to shape the thesis. A further discussion deals with how and why this thesis is presented in this particular format. An introduction to Derrida's philosophy and its association with theatre and visual culture is in the first chapter and the second one on 'Derrida in Theatre'.

## RESEARCH PROBLEM

Traditionally, a sign of something represents something in its absence. Representation is a reference to presence that is not there. Therefore, it concerns something that is *beyond* reach. Some people need to evoke it as presence. To this presence are added qualities and values, which representation does not possess, although it is in front of one's eyes. It also goes in the opposite direction; some define presence as what is in

front of them. Something is defined as immediate, although the thing that is present portrays something else... This is difficult, and I question this logic and argue that absence is present in ways other than the perspective of essence of presence being in *beyond*. I search for a different interpretation of absence, as the one I have known does not provide a sufficient answer. This thesis builds on theories that have also drawn on Derrida in their studies of linguistics and theatre. For example, in *Presence in Play* Cormac Power stated that 'It still remains for us to reconcile the Derridean critique of presence with the experience of theatre's "presence"' (135). In his later work on "'The emptiness of this stage signifies nothing:" The Material as Sign in Modern Theatre' he discussed the complexities of applying the system of signification to the materiality of theatre. As he poses, 'If the stage and its objects are already encoded as signs, then does that mean that materiality can no longer be seen as a defining theatrical attribute?' (*Presence in Play* 6). He finds an answer to this question in the close association of signifier and materiality in theatre. In this work, Power names it as 'embodied signification' (*Presence in Play* 10). The thesis, influenced by Power's work, provides another, previously unrepresented, perspective on the subject.

The premise of this thesis is that absence is not entirely absent and presence is not present either. There is no outside presence in the system of signification. I do not focus on performance failure or haunting presence, as failure includes a promise of a perfect act, and haunting presence is presence of an ideology. Both of these examples are pointing

at *the signified*. This is not research into phenomenology, either, as I do not study a phenomenon in its own right, which would also imply experience as presence. This is a study in ontology, or rather the onto-logical process of absence. The play on words is explained in detail in the Chapter 2. The process of moving *onto* logic does not cover the essence of absence as being, but surveys features where absence is present.

Derrida's contribution to hermeneutics provides another perspective on the analysis of performance as textuality. Using his theories in my research places the philosophy of change and difference in the context of visual culture. I have applied the theory of arche-writing to visual culture, while Derrida wrote about arche-writing as writing in a wider sense, without the division between speech and writing, and with spaces in between words as equal signifiers. This is an extension to the theory of writing. Arche-writing is a system of writing with an absent centre, that is, a signifier that does not refer to a signified, but rather to another signifier. This chain of exchange does not have an ultimate reference; from the site of its origin to its destination there is no signified. Arche-writing is a structure that does not distinguish speech and writing in accordance with presence or immediacy, and the units of writing are graphemes.

Graphemes are also termed as 'marks' and 'traces'. The number of alternative names might never end, but for the purposes of clarity in this thesis I will use grapheme primarily. I applied this linguistic theory to theatre studies, but then realised that the boundary of one genre does not

embrace the extent of the theory I wish to engage with. Therefore, visual culture involves language in many forms, such as spoken, visual, text, and other forms of writing. In my thesis, these are all different forms of grapheme, and their relativity and difference argues against the concept of presence as an entity. I study present absence in several dimensions only, but the research could be taken further; the findings could be applied in post-doctoral research in which a methodology of spectacle as arche-writing, with regard to graphemes in their equality. Although it is a complex study, it provides a perspective from which to analyse theatre, not as an ideology that is never fulfilled, but as a play of traces. The process of studying the subject happens through the questioning of authority over interpretation. Present absence is a grapheme that points to a chain of signifiers and does not point to any association of signifier-signified. Through a study of visual culture and theories I survey numerous examples whereby the traditional notion of presence and absence is under discussion.

## POLITICS AND DECONSTRUCTION

Deconstruction is employed to consider the relation between things. I understand politics as a structure of relations. Political meaning of deconstruction is influential to many contemporary thinkers researching political philosophy and theory, such as Richard Beardsworth, Stuart Hall, Judith Butler,\* Slavoj Žižek,\*\* Simon Critchley or Richard Rorty, to name a few. Deconstruction is also a subject of recent publications,

for instance, Martin McQuillan's edited volume *Politics of Deconstruction: Derrida and the Other of Philosophy* (2007). Deconstruction serves as an approach to look closely at any paradoxes or internal contradictions in texts and logic. Derrida's philosophy is significant to unsettle ideologies, and it will become even more crucial with the further influence of technology into the ethical and political questions regarding the identity of the human being.\*\*\* In this thesis, I embrace Stuart Hall's perspective on the notion of identity as a process in the context of politics, as discussed in his text 'Who needs "identity"?'. There, he writes that identity is 'not

\* Judith Butler and Elizabeth Weed in *The question of gender: Joan W. Scott's critical feminism* (2011), Butler's *Undoing Gender* (2004) or *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (1997).

\*\* Slavoj Žižek's 'A plea for a return to Différance' in *Critical Inquiry* 32.3 (2006): 226-249. Žižek explains that he did not agree with Derrida before but after his death he finds similarities or conversation points with Derrida's work.

\*\*\* Some of the questions would involve the right to delete or keep our digital remains as online profiles and accounts. That might not be urging problem now as the Internet is fairly new invention but will become substantial in the nearest future. The growing research filed on digital remains with its centres in commercial companies (such as Microsoft Research Laboratories, Facebook and Google amount others) demonstrates that it is a political subject.

a theory of the knowing subject but, but rather a theory of discursive practice' (Hall 16). There is no centre in the physicality of the subject, but it occupies a new decentred position. According to Hall, identification is a strategic and positional process, 'a process of articulation' ('Who needs "identity"?') 17). Identities are constructed through discourse and within the boundaries of a particular context. I agree with Hall and employ this perspective on identity in my search for the structure of the notion of absence. Another means to find the materiality of absence is deconstruction.

Deconstruction investigates the way the texts are structured. That process does not extend beyond structures of language and context. The function of it is questioning assumptions cumulated with culture and time, and that is ultimately a political process. That process reveals that absence is a concept formed on the lack of one central referent. Due to the lack of central structure, the concept of absence is a creative opportunity for politics to emerge.

The relations between the culturally and socially agreed norms of behaviour and individual expectations for performance reveal the complexity of politics in theatre and performance. My concept of political in theatre draws on theories of Richard Beardsworth, Stuart Hall and Susan Bennett. Hall's and Bennett's theories are examined in the 'Structure and Context' chapter of the thesis. The concept of political in deconstruction influenced the consideration of the relationship between performance and reception in construction of presence. Reception theory

and deconstruction suggest that meanings are formed from the position of authority, but they are not completely set as an entity. Therefore, performance and, in particular, present absence can be used to shift the given and established meanings with particular political significance. The example of absence in presence in the use of Lozano-Hemmer's microphone display is one of the moments where the socially constructed concept of presence and authority is in practice deferred from the event of performance. Finding absence in a preferred narrative can be used to reconsider the political value of open-ended definitions. For Beardsworth, the condition of judgement that already has limits of logic (an aporia) in constructed meaning is the political element in Derrida's philosophy.

### *Originality*

The originality of my thesis lies in an innovative interpretation of absence and presence in theatre and spectacle. I study how absence works in theatre, not from the dualistic perspective, but through its questioning via Derrida's philosophy. I do not aim to provide the only correct interpretation of this complex subject but in this thesis I have chosen specific types of questions which I believe require further exploration. The theory builds on the research of other theorists and finds a distinct perspective that is also necessarily incomplete. This is a field of theatre studies that has emerged since Derrida outlined his theory in the second half of the 20th century. Since then, many researchers have been surveying notions of presence and representation.



However, the theory I propose provides a different perspective on one of the fundamental issues for theatre studies: the question of representation. I propose a mode of reading representation as present absence. In my argument, absence and presence are in the structure of textuality, with no reference point beyond signifiers. The inventiveness of the research lies in the difference that is included in many layers of this thesis, beginning with the choice of philosophy applied to the subject, the methodology based on a questioning hermeneutics, and perhaps never finding an end in any work, as textual interpretation differs from one reader to another. Therefore, this study is devoted to the process of alteration and working through the expanding and changing process that is knowledge, and the value of my research is the future potential of this thesis. This is the process of moving onto a logic of absence.

The need for such a study has been expressed in the *Presence in Play*, published in 2008. Cormac Power discussed the significance of presence(s) in theatre, and on many occasions, such as the paragraph that ends the introduction, he specifically points out that ‘we need to reconcile a set of concerns surrounding notions such as “absence”, “deferral”, “textuality”, and “mediatisation”, with a conception of theatre as a mode of expression whose cornerstone is “presence”’ (14). He then draws a conclusion that embraces his work on presence, in that ‘Theatre affirms its presence by making “presence” enigmatic’ (14). In this thesis, I use this first call as an academic perspective on the significance of conducting such research on present absence. Power’s book is important

to this thesis and provides an argument on multiple dimensions of presences in theatre. Power also provides a remarkable insight with regard to the field of knowledge that engages the question of presence and absence, and dedicates a chapter to the poststructuralist perspective on presence in theatre. Although I draw contrasting conclusions to Power, as my research subject differs from the premises of his text, it remains highly significant. This thesis is my response to a personal need to find answers, as well as to provide an academic account that will serve others with regard to learning how absence is present in visual culture.

In this thesis, I also engage with a question Elinor Fuchs raises in her article ‘Presence and Revenge of Writing: Re-thinking Theatre after Derrida’. Here Fuchs writes that ‘Derrida raises the large question whether philosophy can continue to be philosophy without the support of logocentric metaphysics. Have we arrived at such question in theatre?’ (Fuchs 172). This question, posed almost 30 years ago, still remains valid today. Derrida provides an answer to this enquiry in his writings, and although questioning the system of philosophy in his own philosophical work, has been influential in many other disciplines of knowledge, such as theatre studies. In order to be applied in other areas it must be understood, and to ensure this he uses language in all its various constructions. Derrida deconstructs language through language. In theatre studies, one can question theatre by using it as an example, as I have done. Fuchs’ question has been answered in many ways over the last three decades by using Derrida’s philosophy to re-think theatre and visual culture, which

includes performance art, etc. This question has also been answered in studies that did not directly refer to Fuchs's enquiry, but to re-thinking presence and absence in theatre and art. These studies used theories of absence in reference to the 'hauntology' inspired by Derrida's position in *Spectres of Marx*, as well as the application of the theory of writing in a wider sense in choreography, in design practices, and finding presence in metaphor, while reading a performance. Those theories are studied and referred to in the chapter of this thesis titled 'Derrida in Theatre'. The question regarding presence and representation has been also a subject for others conducting research into theatre studies.

In the article 'When We Talk of Horses: Or, what do we see when we see a play?' Dan Rebellato finds one of the answers to the question of the nature of representation in theatre. This is an engaging account of representation read as metaphor. Few studies embrace the paradox of absence and presence in theatre from a linguistic perspective, as Rebellato does, and I study this in my second chapter, but which also influences the entire thesis. Rebellato proposes an alternative model of the relationship between the stage and the spectator, and his way of describing this relationship is studied in the context of arche-writing in this thesis, in which graphemes are not only words, but are also other elements of spectacle, such as objects, human beings and narrative in context. Context assists in making sense of a metaphor and I consider this dimension of the theory in Chapter 5 'Structure and Context.' In this theory signifiers can point to the plurality of meanings, depending on context. However,

this variable, as context, cannot be carried in a word itself. Metaphor is another name for the play of signifiers. Therefore, I also apply Rebellato's insight to a wider perspective, across the genres of drama, theatre and art.

My research looks for absence. I study dimensions of absence in spectacle, and I explain it by applying the theory of arche-writing to all of the elements that create spectacle. I call those elements graphemes and survey them in accordance with the system of writing that does not have one signified, but has numerous signifiers pointing at other signifiers etc. In looking for a structure of how absence works in theatre, I tested multiple boundaries between entities defined in accordance with a concept of presence, such as drama and theatre, representation and presence, or nature and pretence, to name just a few. I discovered apparent paradoxes that appeared as both possible and reasonable. Quality of presence is assigned equally to dramatic art in Michael Fried's definition of art, and to theatre in Hans-Thies Lehmann analysis of contemporary theatre. Fried associates the notion of absence with theatricality and Lehmann with drama. However, theatre and drama are usually identified as opposites. Derrida had a response to this undecidable boundary between definitions, and of all the names he used for this condition *aporia* was the most common. Those (apparent) contradictions resulted in a theory that discloses multiple dimensions of present absence.

## BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

This is a complex subject, not only because it questions thought through thinking, but also, in accordance with the studied theory, perfect communication is impossible as words do not carry an intention and meaning, but they do provide a pattern of that can be understood. When reading this thesis, one can find different word associations than I thought about when writing this text. There are always further interpretations to come. It is significant to add that this research also forms a part of a greater field of knowledge that has already been established. Derrida's philosophy has been applied to visual culture for decades. All the chapters survey notions of absence and question the ways in which it is defined as presence.

*Chapter 1*

This chapter introduces a broad perspective of present absence in contemporary philosophy. I look at the two contrasting traditions of philosophy that define being either as presence or as absence. The theory of present absence draws on the theory of difference that finds absence in every concept of presence in visual culture. Therefore, to provide a perspective on the subject in this chapter, I outline a theory of difference that is also embedded in visual culture but finds its meaning through the notion of presence. I refer to Laura Cull's concept of differential presence that is formed through her studies on Gilles Deleuze's philosophy.

In this chapter, I refer to the significance of Derrida's philosophy in contemporary performance and theatre studies. I outline the emergence of a new field of research that combines performance studies and philosophy. I examine the current research on the politics of application of apparently contrasting one discipline of knowledge to another. The fields of research represent the binary opposites between practice and research. Therefore, I look at the political implementation of Derrida's philosophy in the work of Richard Beardsworth in *Deconstruction and the Political* as well as its implication in theatre Alison Ross's 'Theatrical Allegory to Political Commitment'. In this chapter, I find that absence is a site of creativity rather than negative presence.

*Chapter 2*

In Chapter 2, I introduce Derrida's philosophy of *différance* in its plurality, which is studied in detail in subsequent parts of the thesis. In this chapter I read Derrida's texts on theatre, and also apply his theory to theatre studies. 'Theatrical art should be the primordial and privileged site of this destruction of imitation: more than any other art, it has been marked by the labor of total representation in which the affirmation of life lets itself be doubled and emptied by negation' (Derrida, *Writing and Difference* 295) as Derrida writes in his text on Antonin Artaud. The gap between representation and responsibility refers to a central signified in *Of Grammatology*. Derrida also suggests a connection between theatre and theory, as theatre encourages philosophical discourses (Derrida,

*Of Grammatology* 304). The subject of present absence is also studied through associations between the human body and the concept of naturalness in the work of the theatre theorist Herbert Blau. He applies Derrida's philosophy in his discourse on theatre, and refers to theatre as a form of thought. His 'anti-theatre' is present through thought. Therefore, reading a page could be a form of theatre. However, the following question remains: are there bodies and physicality in theatre? The association between text and body is studied two-fold throughout the text; in its meaning and form of display. I point towards the graphic aspect of the text in the conclusion of this chapter, whereby the text is simultaneously presented on two pages; one showing articulated words and the other presenting non-articulate elements of writing that are also a significant part of writing, in much the same way as space for breath is a part of pronunciation. This thesis was also developed on the basis of Blau's theory of theatre and textuality, but from a different perspective. I argue for reading visual culture as a form of writing. In this chapter, I also survey elements of Derrida's philosophy that are applied in the following chapters. These include his theories on graphemes, aporia, trace, *différance* and deconstruction, as well as his general discourse on the boundaries of *entities*.

### *Chapter 3*

This chapter tests the boundaries of presence in examples of tangible and nontangible objects. To set out this argument, I use the word

*object* to refer to a tangible item, and *thing* to refer to one that is nontangible. I study the boundary of tangibility when applied to the theory of arche-writing. If they are signifiers, they point at other signifiers (rather than an idea – the signified), despite their material form. They are studied as ever-changing metaphors. Testing of the boundaries of presence and absence also occurs in the theory studied in this chapter, which is based on Fried's division of art and non-art in accordance with the presence of an object, as well as Brown's codification of an object that finds its 'presence' in the function it has. One theory is taken from the perspective of art studies, while the other is from design studies. Both refer to a concept of being in its process, and both are defined equally as present and absent. Fried's division between dramatic art and the theatrical depends on intentionality of action. Therefore, for Fried, dramatic art has the qualities associated with presence. This is his criterion for *good* art. In Chapter 5, I consider a further division between drama and theatre, whereby Lehmann refers to theatre as immediate, with qualities that are linked with presence as intention, while drama is defined as text. Therefore, both forms, in different theories, are identified as present and absent. This chapter also studies one performance and two pieces of installation art. The performance is Akram Khan's *Zero Degrees*, which uses two objects, sculptures that were made by Antony Gormley and cast from the moulds taken from performers and were, in a sense, the performers' doubles. Although they were not alive, their attendance has been defined as *present*. Another example is a thing, light, which is

presented as a signifier that can be associated with qualities given to presence and absence. I study this example in two pieces of installation art. The first is Antony Gormley's *Blind Light*, and the second is James Turrell's *Ganzfeld*. In *Blind Light*, as the title suggests, the light was blinding. As one participant stated, the light provided the experience of being in darkness, but it was a bright darkness. The second piece, *Ganzfeld*, displays space made with light and colour. It presents the *substance* of light and makes the space visible. One can focus on the thingness of light in his installation. With their contrasting qualities these two examples support the theory of spectacle as writing with a lack of a central point of reference in an idea.

#### Chapter 4

In this chapter I study the extent of present absence that is associated with the human being in visual culture. I survey qualities usually associated with presence that serve as a definition of the value that is searched for in a performance. In theatre, one would be the notion of stage presence, whereas in performance art and live art or any other form of art, that would be the concept of liveness. I test the theories and apply them to the character of performer, as well as spectators. In this chapter, I find arguments to support the view that they are all a form of writing. Therefore, to make this text/body association I simultaneously use two meanings of the word 'character'; it is applied to a graphic trace of a letter, as well as to a character in spectacle,

without division between performer and spectator. The chapter is divided into two parts; the first surveys theories of presence in theatre studies, while the second applies the theory to performance analysis.

Presence of the human being is linked with the notion of immediacy and intentionality. This chapter questions the ideologies that are associated with this notion. The theories on stage presence and liveness are studied through works by such researchers as Fuchs, Blau, Roach, Power, Goodall, Phelan and Auslander. They refer to the concept of presence and immediacy in dissimilar ways, but all of the theories are used to develop the argument of the thesis. This study also tests multiple concepts of presence and absence, through the analysis of performances. In *The Life and Death of Marina Abramović* by Robert Wilson, the concept of presence is considered in relation to the notion of liveness that is usually associated with Marina Abramović, the stage presence that is identified with acting techniques and the presentation of design that characterises Wilson's works. *Lecture Notes on a Death Scene* by Analogue tests the notion of self-presence through questioning the ever-present possibility of absence.

#### Chapter 5

This chapter studies the relationship between intertextuality, author and reader. I begin by studying theories of sign and structure of signification, and I then go on to refer to Derrida's theory on structurality and interpretation. Subsequently, I study selected applications of semiotics

in theatre as well as the reception theory. I look at the role of audience in with the notion of undefined meaning. The theory in this chapter is applied to the analysis of three pieces of installation art and one performance. The practical examples have structures that are different to one another, but they all question the fullness and immediacy of presence. This chapter includes *Under Scan* and *Microphones* by Raphael Lozano-Hemmer, *Ghostwriter* by Blast Theory and *Einstein on the Beach* by Robert Wilson.

This chapter questions presence in the structurality of a context. Context is usually defined as a frame of reference that relies on intentionality and interpretation. However, from the perspective of Derrida's philosophy, meaning is not used in the text, and context depends on the interpreter, rather than on transmission through the text. In the next section of the chapter I discuss articles by Gerald Rabkin and works by Roland Barthes. Rabkin writes about performance as textuality, and this research builds on this theory, who adds that it is not only verbal signification that can be a grapheme. In this chapter, I also study his subject of misreading as an opportunity for plural interpretations. In his later works, Barthes wrote about the division between an author's work and the system of language being used. Influenced by Derrida, he pointed out that text cannot be 'purely original' in order to be understood, as it has to be iterable. Moreover, for Barthes, text is a process rather than a product. An author's work can be a product, but the used text inside is a process of reading and creating meanings. Redefining interpretations is a process that supports an argument of

absence of *the central presence* of one meaning.

## METHODOLOGY

The philosophy of my research is based on a poststructural approach to ontology. This research enquires 'why things are what they are' and it is conducted by using a qualitative approach. The data collected are classified in terms of hermeneutics, in particular, the type of hermeneutics called deconstructionism. Arguments and definitions are questioned and reconsidered in accordance with the philosophy of deconstruction. This methodology aims to rethink 'taken for granted' concepts and meanings, such as concepts of presence and absence. In order to efficiently select data, I have divided the resources into primary and secondary categories, in accordance with their impact on the thesis. The primary resources involve textual and critical analysis and spectacles and are studied from the perspective of the theory of the thesis. Secondary sources include academic literature on Derrida's philosophy and theories of analysis of theatre and art practice. From the perspective of the philosophy of difference, hermeneutics is a study of the system of interpretation. That is, it questions the traditional perspective of hermeneutics, just as Derrida questions the metaphysics of presence through using this very system of language. Using another system of 'communication' would not make sense, as to write is to use a structure that must be iterable in order for it to be understood and questioned.

To survey the question of absence and presence in visual culture I have chosen elements of Derrida's philosophy regarding deconstruction. I study his philosophy as well as his theory of theatre and art studies. I also apply the theory to selected examples of art, theatre and performance. Deconstruction happens through questioning theories of presence in application of the theory of grapheme to practical elements. Therefore, visual culture is read as a form of writing. All of the pieces studied in this thesis are contemporary. I have chosen to examine practical cases are based on research theory. However, how significant to the analysis of present absence is my attendance at a spectacle to which I refer in my thesis? To answer this question, I mimicked presence and absence by writing about performances where I was present and the ones where I was absent. In Chapter 3 on 'Objects and Things', I refer to performance and two examples of installation art that I have not seen myself, and in Chapter 4, 'Staged Presence', I have included only performances that I have seen. After this test, I could answer the question of whether it is necessary to attend a spectacle to assist in studying the theory. The answer can be found in Chapter 4.

The scope of the research includes testing the notion of present absence in three dimensions of visual culture. These include objects, human beings and the structure of context. All of the performances and pieces of art discussed in this thesis have been produced since Derrida's death in 2004. The impact of the philosophy of *différance* has also been made after the physical death of the author. Therefore, Derrida's name

became a metaphor for the system of signification. He became a theory. After his death, the usual signified of his name – his physical appearance, disappeared. He is now a signifier for multiple interpretations of his philosophy. Derrida himself has become a play of signifiers associated with his name. One could say that the name Jacques Derrida has been linked with his theories also during his life, I would not deny that, but I would argue that only after his death did the name became an element of a play of signification, as there is no physical person that is the signified. After 2004, Derrida can be found, not in his physical appearance, but in deconstructive readings of other theories and practices. The plurality of perspective on Derrida's theories and himself became his abstract portrait, mentally assembled under his name. I imagine this process as a performance of associations of theories and interpretations, comparable to the play of finding the character of Albert Einstein in Robert Wilson's performance *Einstein on the Beach*. There is not only one representation of Einstein but the plurality of them forms an image that differs from one spectator to another. Comparably, Derrida became *writing* with plurality and difference in its interpretation. Moreover, he became a part of his own theory as difference is one of the key subjects for his philosophy.

In this research, I outline my interpretation of Derrida. His surname is a name for my perception of his philosophy and I apply this interpretation to examples of contemporary visual culture. This timeframe is given only to provide guidance in selecting performances, as there might have been hundreds of others throughout the centuries, but they would

be the subject of other research. However, they all invoke the question of absence through their subject boundaries between entities such as life and death as well as through displaying remote presence.

The pieces involved in this study display differences in multiple dimensions, which is the main reason why I have used such a variety of genres. In Chapter 3, there is an example of physical theatre and two pieces of installation art. Chapter 4 discusses a specific element of Wilson's theatre that is often defined as opera, and a one-to-one performance that Analogue has created. In Chapter 5, I discuss three pieces of installation art and one large-scale performance by Wilson. While studying these cases of visual culture, I also mention other works created by those artists, which do not serve as case studies, but provide a context for the examples I have selected. They differ in terms of the exposure and acclaim that they have generated. All of them include an element of presence that is questioned and redefined through this thesis. Those performances are not the only ones that might be cases for the analysed theory, but they are the most suitable given the scope of this particular research. They are selected examples of the application of deconstruction to the practice of visual culture, and each one has been carefully selected in accordance with their particular element that is studied in the chapter in which they are included.

### *Methods*

The methods used to conduct this research are primarily textual

and visual culture analyses. I write using the first person pronoun, rather than using the third form and naming myself 'the author' throughout the thesis. This is most noticeable in the introduction, outline and conclusion, as those elements mostly refer to my work. I understand that in academic work the third person is read as objective and formal. Writing the thesis as a character of the author (the third person) faces certain impossibilities in this logic of credibility built only on the structure of language. The formal third person and the functional first person are both based on my perspective, and on equal levels, they are both coming from thorough research. The use of first person is employed in this thesis in order to embrace, in a practical manner, another set of apparent oppositions, such as objective or personal, that face aporia.

I apply my interpretation of Derrida's philosophy to the research in numerous ways. I added a 'Detailed Thesis Outline' section that sums up my argument and works as a supplement to the thesis. I conduct the argument through (1) questioning traditionally agreed definitions, (2) using two words for deconstruction in order to display the possibility of multiple interpretations, as well as (3) exhibiting the text on numerous materials, physical materials in different types of paper and multiple case studies which are used to present the associations with words, sentence and meaning.

The first of these occurs throughout the thesis, such as in Chapter 4 in which Fried's distinction between art and theatre in relation to presence is discussed. This question reappears in a different context in



Chapter 5, in which I study Lehmann's work on postdramatic theatre. Although they both make the division between the literal and physical aspects of spectacle on the premise of presence, they draw contrasting conclusions. In Fried's theory, the art object is present, whereas objecthood is theatrical and associated with the qualities of absence. However, in Lehmann's writing, theatre is linked with qualities of presence, whereas drama is literal. These two theories are not presented in the same chapter, as they respond to different examples that test present absence. They work almost as a parenthesis to the thesis. Fried's theory is discussed in Chapter 3 before the first performances of the thesis, and Lehmann's work is included after the last studied example of the thesis. They employ the notion of theatricality and the dramatic in contrasting ways. This contrast of definition argues in favour of reading performance as textuality and presence or absence as present absence.

I apply the second method in order to detach words from the possibility of reading them with their well-known interpretations. It works in exchanging the word for another one. Both of these are synonyms and supplements. This method has been created for the needs of this particular thesis, and is inspired by Derrida's philosophy and his way of conducting an argument. This thesis uses two words that are employed by Derrida to signify elements of his theory and to refer to his philosophy; *deconstruction* and *de-sedimentation*. Deconstruction is the best-known word that has been re-defined by academics and writers for over 40 years. De-sedimentation is less well-known, but this is the word that Derrida

proposed to name the function that has and also is deconstruction. De-sedimentation has an organic feel to it, whereas deconstruction appears to be a technical and cultural term. They are considered at the end of this Introduction. The other words that Derrida used, in order to avoid providing one name for the process of exchange, were trace, aporia, supplement, spacing, etc. They are studied in Chapter 2 on 'Derrida in Theatre', and a list of other substitutions is provided in the footnote to the conclusion to the chapter. However, in accordance with Derrida, the list is never complete, as there are always further words to complement and be complemented. Using different words to place the focus on their function assists in making multiple interpretations in the play of signifiers. This method implements the subject of the research into the process of the reading of the thesis.

The third of the methods listed in the first paragraph concerns exhibition of the text across numerous materials. This also happens throughout the thesis. In a similar manner to the example that studies division of drama and theatre in selected theories, physical objects also appear to be identified on the promise of presence. In the practical example discussed in the second chapter, the notion of light, which is traditionally defined as a sign of presence and its qualities, such as clarity of vision etc., is also displayed as a contrast to visibility – blinding light. The plurality of the materials used here has also shaped the physical presentation of the thesis. To present my argument I use papers with different degrees of opacity. I use them to

display the theory as an image, to detach words from their context and to provide a space for interpretation. This is a method for visualising intertextuality, whereby graphics are also displayed as traces and marks that assist in uttering the argument of the thesis. Moreover, tracing paper is a material that brings together a physical object of paper and Derrida's theory of traces. This material allows the light to pass through and therefore one can see pages behind it. It builds a set that supplements other pages. Sometimes it is numbered as a separate page and at times it is a supplement of one or both of the surrounding pages. Transmission of light is altered in accordance to the type of material used, and pages vary from fully transparent to opaque. The paper is a stage for a play of words and without this space the written sentence would not perform its play of signification. Through different types of papers I increase the space for performance of the theory.

## THE FORMAT OF THE THESIS

My thesis examines visual culture as a form of writing and writing as a form of visual culture. The format of the thesis stages my argument. It involves difference in a physical object. This work is not only my personal journey of finding alternative answers to the question of absence, but also to employ my way of making the statement. However, with regard to the reader, I designed the thesis to be as accessible as possible. I employed graphics in the textual study of performances, as they are elements of

written language. Choosing multiple materials to support my argument on textuality is another way to make a trace. From this perspective, the thesis builds on my previous study of scenography as an undergraduate student, and my practice in setting the narrative into visual objects, and my MA in Design, in which I learned how to work with the usability of text as an object. Since graduating, I have been working as a freelance graphic designer and visuals have become another dimension of my language.

In every part when playing with text as an object, clarity of argument and accessibility of text took priority over other visual aspects of the thesis. With regard to the reader, the text is written in a font that is commonly used for academic purposes and which does not interrupt the process of reading. The only point where the reader might look for continuation of the sentence is when four words are placed on the picture with Marina Abramović, as they stylistically embrace the image and they are easy to read through the size and contrast. In the visual part of the thesis, I have also used words in addition to illustrations in order to present textuality. In the first chapter in particular I create this display of textuality in which I discuss Derrida's philosophy and theatre studies. To visualise a part of the study, I have placed the text on several layers and together they make statements. It remains perfectly readable, within the limits of understanding, and includes the option of detaching words from their sentence associations.

The work has a landscape layout, which is an alternative to portrait

layout in the A4 format. Horizontal perspective is a personal preference for image display. Another element that is different in this work is the position of footnotes in the text. They are usually in the margins of a text, but, by not giving them one single area in the layout, dynamism is added to the composition, while they still remain accessible to the reader. Footnotes are supplements to the main body of the text, but they are still on the same page as the remaining text. They are an addition as well as interference to the argument. I have marked them with the same colour as the main text but it is reduced to 50% of opacity. It is in the grey sphere of being a part of the main text and not belonging to the argument. Being necessary information or a mere addition, footnotes provide marginal information but in my thesis they do not have one place in the page layout. It remains for the reader to judge their significance in the main argument.

In order to assist the reader in navigation while reading, I included a map of my thesis before every chapter. I also made headings throughout the thesis, such that the title of the current chapter is on the right and the thesis title is on the left. In this way, readers can always clearly orientate themselves in the work. The map is a representation of a river with eight stops, and every stop is another part of the thesis. To make the map easy to read, I placed the titles in an order that refers to the river and a current chapter is highlighted with black font. The river is a metaphor and is detached from the reference to the site that the map represents.

The form of the thesis is also associated with Derrida's philosophy.

In *Glas*, Derrida moved outside the university standards of formatting by designing a book with Richard Eckersley. The book is made of texts in different typefaces displayed parallel with each other. In 'Deconstruction and Graphic Design', Ellen Lupton and J. Abbott Miller point towards the significance of margins, spacing and punctuation in the articulation of a text. The visual framework is an element of writing. Graphics are on the border of representation as writing. Typography is a form of written body language, which gives character to the text. Formatting a text is a play on the structure of writing. Footnotes, page numbers, line lengths, margins and spacing are forms of grapheme and, as Lupton noticed, they play a part in the field of grammatology. Lupton described the style as medieval manuscripts combined with modern newspapers. Different structures of medieval manuscripts are involved, from those that present a field of text where margins clearly frame the text, to the style of marginalia in the bible, which is lavishly decorated and contextualised by the commentary of scribes. These two layouts provide contrasting perspectives to questioning the text: that which clearly outlines the text is usually read as closed, and that which displays multiple comments in the margins exhibits text is visually open for re-interpretation. In this thesis I use both forms to allow the readers to define the text for themselves.

The other style that Lupton used in *Glas* is also often found in newspapers that became popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The layout is characterised by multiple and diverse fragments of text that reported a variety of situations. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, images and advertisements

were added to those elements, and organised in accordance with the requirements of marketing and production. In contemporary journals, typography is created for contrasting reasons, from explanation of the text to distraction from its body. The written text acts in typography, in spacing, type style, layout and punctuation. The inclusion of the structure of written text in the research, as well as visual aspects of words, is a way to present the crossing of another dualistic boundary that is traditionally dictated by the idea of presence behind the word. Design, as well as language, works on patterns of representation and choosing how a text will look is another form of choosing words for the text.

## CONCLUSION

The scope of the research is to survey key dimensions of present absence in performance theory, as well as in practice. The novelty of the study is in applying new perspectives on the popular question of absence and presence in theatre, art and all forms of spectacle. I test the ways of materiality of absence in spectacle, and so far I find it in present absence. I explored absence that is never absent, but that is not present either. Presence is also never present. This is the paradox that I test. In this chapter, I have outlined the research problem and its premises, pointed towards the areas of originality in this research and the potential for its development. In providing the thesis outline, I have introduced the key concepts and examples studied in the work. A detailed account of the

literature review can be found throughout the thesis, in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 in their entirety, and in the first sections of Chapters 3, 4 and 5. The theories are divided into key dimensions that study present absence. The particular dimensions are included in separate chapters; for example, tangible and intangible objects are in Chapter 3, the human body and its presence and absence is in Chapter 4, and structure and context are in Chapter 5.

The introduction indicates how I conducted the research. This section was about methodology, the strategy of conducting the research and the methods used in this study as instruments of implementation, and a section providing information on this particular format of the thesis. There are answers to the questions of why the presentation of the thesis looks different and how the difference is demonstrated in the work. This happens in multiple layers, such as in the subject of the thesis that studies *différance*, the format of the work and the re-defined methodology. This is a study in ontology, but I have approached it from the perspective of the metaphysics of absence. I use multiple dimensions of visual culture to survey ways to answer the question of presence as absence.

The next two chapters introduce Derrida's philosophy and its application to theatre studies, as well as to visual culture in a wider sense. In the first chapter I provide a broad perspective on the notion of present absence through finding a comparable but contrasting example in the Performance Philosophy frame. In the second chapter, I introduce the dimensions of the philosophy of *différance* that are further studied

throughout the thesis. I refer to Derrida's notions of deconstruction, *différance*, aporias, trace and grapheme, and play.

In conversation with Professor Toshihiko Izutsu, Derrida wrote about the translatability of the famous name that was coined for his theory – deconstruction. Characteristically, Derrida explained the word deconstruction as everything and nothing: 'What deconstruction is not? Everything of course! What is deconstruction? Nothing of course!' ('Letter to a Japanese Friend' 5). Standing alone, the quote does not provide any answers and makes presence of this term enigmatic, but he referred to presence in *Of Grammatology* in the same way. The above text taken from Derrida's letter makes sense when considering it as a play of text, rather than defining a concept that has a central signified. The play is a way to express, but not define, as defining associates a word with a finitude of meaning. His philosophy is produced through the difference that is in language. In this letter, Derrida pointed out that the difficulty of translation is not only as happening when explaining one language to another, but also in the same language between two users, as it involves a gap (aporia) between one user and another. Translation does not necessarily refer to changing language codes from one type to another, but also in communicating sets of signifiers to another person. Derrida writes extensively about this issue of translation in many texts. This is one of the controversial subjects of dualistic philosophy, that is that Derrida's theory questions ideologies, but it can also be read as an ideology. One can be aware of that, but cannot escape the system of language,

if one wants to be understood. To create a message that will be recognised, iterable words must be used. Therefore, they are never original or finite, as they are not enclosed in themselves. The same premise can be used in relation to deconstruction. The word does not have a clear meaning in French that one might refer to, as Derrida said that 'one should not begin by naively believing that the word "deconstruction" corresponds in French to some clear and univocal signification. There is already in "my" language a serious problem of translation between what here or there can be envisaged for the word, and the usage itself, the reserves of the word' (Derrida, 'Letter to a Japanese Friend' 1). It stands for multiple functions of grammar. In *Of Grammatology* Derrida wanted to point to Heidegger's word *Destruktion*, but in his language this word had an association with 'annihilation or a negative reduction much closer perhaps to Nietzschean "demolition" than to the Heideggerian interpretation or to the type of reading that I proposed' (Derrida, 'Letter to a Japanese Friend' 1). In Derrida's works, the term deconstruction responds to the situation of each signified in the structure of fundamental ideas of ontology of presence ('Letter to a Japanese Friend' 1). Presence of a signified is deconstructed, this word becomes a signifier for another signifier etc., therefore the concept of presence is never present in terms of dualistic philosophy.

This term also has a mechanical dimension, not only in unmaking a construction, but also in rearranging a system of words in a sentence, and also to deconstruct itself is 'to lose its construction' (Derrida, 'Letter to a Japanese Friend' 2). However, the word is not a signified to certain

structures 'which themselves were neither simply ideas, nor forms, nor synthesis, nor systems' (Derrida, 'Letter to a Japanese Friend' 2), and this is one of the elements that differ from the structuralist need to find a linguistic system of meaning from the antistructuralist plurality of ambiguous meanings. Derrida used many other names other than deconstruction, and they were used also in his discourse. Those words included de-sedimented, which is also deployed in this thesis, as well as decomposing, undoing, or calling into question, but the list is never closed, and it is a word that does not refer to one central signified, so it can be substituted with another. Derrida's philosophy does not serve to dismiss all the traditional concepts of metaphysics of presence, but to return to them 'under erasure' (Derrida, 'Letter to a Japanese Friend' 3). He argued strongly that deconstruction is not an analysis, as it does not lead to finding a simple element, origin or essence within a system. This is not a critique either as 'The instance of *krinein* or of *krisis* (decision, choice, judgement, discernment) is itself, as is all the apparatus of transcendental critique, one of the essential "themes" or "objects" of deconstruction' (Derrida, 'Letter to a Japanese Friend' 3). Neither is it a method for Derrida, although many scholars use different interpretations of deconstruction to exchange typical associations of signifier to a signified, that is, it is not simply an application of the qualities of one thing to name the other, such as applying qualities of presence to absence (defined as a thing), or qualities of absence to presence. In this fashion, it is no different to the dualistic perspective, and deconstruction can be

a function working in a dualistic mode.

I do not agree with Derrida on one point. This is his theory, but my understanding of his theory, even in accordance with his texts, is as valid as his interpretation. Derrida wrote that 'It must also be made clear that deconstruction is not even an act or an operation. Not only because there would be something "patient" or "passive" about it [...]. Not only because it does not return to an individual or collective subject who would take the initiative and apply it to an object, a text, a theme, etc.' (Derrida, 'Letter to a Japanese Friend' 3). A form writing in the wider sense, without the distinction between speech and writing and as theatre objects, human beings and narrative function is the de-sedimentation, already contained in the elements of theatre. In contrast to Derrida's words, in theatre and art it is the act of representation that is a statement. Performance is an utterance. That statement is a structure built in the absence of present centre. The structure is political and as such it can be changed. It is on this premise that I have made my argument, and it is my own angle on deconstruction. The next two chapters consider other theories of Derrida and apply them to theatre, and although they include a dense discussion of theory, they are necessary to the argument as they set the theoretical scene for the remainder of the thesis.

# ONTOLOGY OF ABSENCE

A PLAN OF THE PHD THESIS

## PRESENT ABSENCE IN PHILOSOPHY

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1  
PRESENT ABSENCE IN PHILOSOPHY

The chapter provides a wider perspective on the concept of present absence. I discuss the use of the concept of present absence in the context of history and politics. I look at his philosophy from the perspective of two contrasting traditions of philosophy that define the notion of being. This is the division between analytic and continental history of thought, which is represented in the new field of academic research that merges performance and philosophy. Here I discuss the complexity of applying one discipline to another and examine other theories that define relationships between performance and philosophy. These two bodies of knowledge arguably represent binary oppositions between practice and theory, and so merging them together represents a deconstruction akin to my creation of present absence. Furthermore, in the chapter I provide a contrasting view to Cull's theory of being as absence. Laura Cull's theory in certain aspects corresponds with the aims of present absence but has contrasting elements. Cull's theory is based on Gilles Deleuze's philosophy, and the concept of presence in the transformational nature of performance. I look at Derrida's philosophy in visual culture as possessing a potential for transformation.

CHAPTER 2  
DERRIDA IN THEATRE

CHAPTER 3  
OBJECTS AND THINGS

CHAPTER 4  
STAGED PRESENCE

CHAPTER 5  
STRUCTURE AND CONTEXT

I examine the distinction between text and performance with Julia A. Walker's examination of contrasting traditions of philosophies which seem to be the basis for the distinction between writing and performing. Walker draws on the binary oppositions between analytic and continental philosophy in 'The Text/Performance Split across the Continent/Continental Divide'. Walker discusses Derrida's definition of knowledge, one that speaks only to a classic epistemological sense, foreclosing the possibility that there are other ways in which we "know" things in our world' (Walker, 'The Text/Performance Split'). The difference in thought between Derrida and Artaud is a reflection of a much wider division in philosophy. Walker argues that the opposition upon which the philosophy divides into analytic and continental is the same opposition as the one that divides text and performance, and argues that the similarity between them is in the paradoxical relation of the subject and the object being simultaneously the knowing subject and the object of investigation, the 'inside/outside' relationship.

DETAILED OUTLINE OF THE ARGUMENT

CONCLUSION

structures 'which themselves were neither simply ideas, nor forms, nor synthesis, nor systems' (Derrida, 'Letter to a Japanese Friend' 2),

and this is one of the reasons why the structuralist need to find a linguistic system of meaning from the antistructuralist plurality of ambiguous meanings. Derrida used many other names other than deconstruction, and they were used also in his discourse. Those words included de-sedimented, which is also deployed in this thesis, as well as decomposing, undoing, or calling into question, but the list is never closed, and it is a word that does not refer to one central signified, so it can be substituted with another. Derrida's philosophy does not serve to dismiss all the traditional concepts of metaphysics of presence, but to question them 'under erasure' (Derrida, 'Letter to a Japanese Friend' 2).

He argued strongly that deconstruction is not a method for finding a simple element, origin or essence within a system. This is not a critique either as 'The instance of *krinein* or of *krisis* (decision, choice, judgement, discernment) is itself, as is all the apparatus of the essential critique, one of the essential 'themes' or 'objects of deconstruction' (Derrida, 'Letter to a Japanese Friend' 3). Whether it is a method for Derrida, although many scholars use different interpretations of deconstruction, or even a simple association of signifier to a signified, this is, it is not simply an application of the qualities of one thing to name the other, such as applying qualities of presence to absence (defined as a thing), or qualities of absence to presence. In this fact, it is no different to the dualistic perspective, and deconstruction may be a

function working in a dualistic mode.

I do not intend to introduce his theory, but my understanding of his theory, even in accordance with his texts, is as valid as his interpretation. Derrida wrote that it should also be made clear that deconstruction is not even an act of an operation, not only because there would be something 'patient' or 'passive' (Derrida, 1). Nevertheless, because it does not return to an individual or collective subject who would take the initiative and

act on objects, a theme, etc. (Derrida, 'Letter to a Japanese Friend' 2). A fourth writing, in the wider sense, without the distinction between speech and writing and as the objects, human beings and narrative

de-sedimentation, already contained in the elements of theatre. In contrast to Derrida's words, in theatre and art it is the act of representation, that is a statement. Performance is a presence. That statement is a structure built in the

course of performance and as such it can be changed. It is on this premise that I have made my argument, and it is my own angle of deconstruction. The first chapter of this thesis is an introduction of Derrida and applies them to theatre. The second chapter includes a dense discussion of theory, it is necessary to the thesis. The chapter on 'Derrida in Theatre' sets the theoretical base for the remainder of the thesis.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 2 PRESENT ABSENCE IN PHILOSOPHY

CHAPTER 3 DERRIDA IN THEATRE

CHAPTER 4 OBJECTS AND THINGS

CHAPTER 5 STAGED PRESENCE



# PRESENT ABSENCE IN PHILOSOPHY

This chapter provides a wider perspective on the concept of present absence. I discuss the use of Derrida's philosophy in the context of history and politics. I look at his philosophy from the perspective of two contrasting traditions of philosophy that define the notion of being. This is the division between analytic and continental history of thought, which is represented in the new field of academic research that merges performance and philosophy. Here I discuss the complexity of applying of one discipline to another and examine other theories that define relationships between performance and philosophy. These two fields of knowledge arguably represent binary oppositions between practice and theory, text and gesture, so merging them into one branch of knowledge represents a deconstructive move akin to my creation of present absence. Furthermore, in this chapter, I provide a contrasting view to the theory of being as absence. Laura Cull's differential presence theory in certain aspects corresponds with the aims of present absence but has contrasting outcomes. Cull's theory is based on Gilles Deleuze's philosophy, and she finds presence in the transformational nature of performance. I look at Derrida's philosophy in visual culture as possessing a potential for transformation.

I examine the distinction between text and performance with Julia A. Walker's examination of contrasting traditions of philosophies which seem to be the basis for the distinction between writing and performing. Walker draws on the binary oppositions between analytic and continental philosophy in 'The Text/Performance Split across the Analytic/Continental Divide'. Walker discusses Derrida's response to Antonin Artaud's theatre on the premise that Derrida 'insists upon a strict definition of knowledge, one that speaks only to a classic epistemological sense, foreclosing the possibility that there are other ways in which we "know" things in our world' (Walker, 'The Text/Performance Split' 36). The difference in thought between Derrida and Artaud is a reflection of much wider division in philosophy. Walker argues that the opposition upon which the philosophy divides into analytic and continental is the same opposition as the one that divides text and performance. She argues that the similarity between them is in the paradoxical relation of the subject and the object being simultaneously the knowing subject and the object of investigation, the 'inside/outside' relationship.

The questions of how we make sense of theatre and if there

are other kinds of thinking than epistemological can be found also in Cull's work, as she writes about thinking through/with performance: 'thinking as immanent creation, rather than transcendent representation; as that unconscious production forced rather than intended by the subject when it encounters the sensible world; or as the embodied intuition or multiple durations' (Cull, 'How does performance think?' 5). In this example, thinking is not the inside/outside simultaneity as in Walker's work but rather the knowing subject creates the subject of investigation. The dialogue between philosophy and performance and also has been recently embraced by Freddie Rokem in *Philosophers and Thespians: Thinking Performance* from 2010, where he 'examines some of the ways in which performance and theatre "thinks," as well as how philosophy... develops intricate performative strategies' (5). Rokem as well as Cull notice the need for a re-examination of the relationship between theory and practice of philosophy and theory/practice of performance. I examine all of these contributions to look at the politics of application and the interconnections between deconstruction, politics and theatre.

## DERRIDA NOW

The increasing interest in absence and presence across theatre,\* performance and philosophy studies can be observed with the recent emergence of Performance Philosophy as a field of research. The significance of Derrida as a philosopher whose works are widely

\* The interest in linking performance, theatre and philosophy is flourishing in recent years in the context of changing technology that influences aesthetics of performance. The last decade (2004 - 2014) saw many publications that engage in the subject of metaphysics in theatre. The nature of representation in theatre and performance was either defined as presence or as absence. The published research is in the borderline of philosophy and theatre. Some of publications include:

*Postdramatic Theatre* (2006) by Hans Thies Lehmann,  
*Staging Philosophy: Intersections of Theater, Performance, and Philosophy* (2006),  
*It* (2007) by Joseph Roach,  
*Stage Presence* (2008) by Jane Goodall  
*Presence in Play: A Critique of Theories of Presence in the Theatre* (2008) by Cormac Power

applied to visual arts and literature seem to change over time. Taking its lead from Derrida's critique of presence offered in *Of Grammatology*, much writing on visual culture questioned the primacy of presence with all the values associated with this term, such as authority. Derrida's

concept of deconstruction has also been employed in theatre studies. After Derrida's critique of presence in the theatre of Artaud, scholars such as Elinor Fuchs, Herbert Blau, Philip Auslander, among others, have focused on deconstruction and differential aspect of presence in motion and mediation. The question of defining presence and absence in theatre is still unresolved, as some interpret representation as absence and others see representation as a presence.

Derrida's notion of absence, with its characteristics in being deferred and differentiated, has become known as difficult to employ in political and ethical aspects of philosophy. The main argument against Derrida's political theory is that deconstruction offered a deferral of judgement, which might lead to impossibility of action. However, postponing and problematising the status quo are still considered decisions, and researchers such as Richard Beardsworth and Simon Critchley have found political value in Derrida's philosophy. Ethical aspects become a subject of inquiry in Derrida's later writings, when he discusses the politics of being as relations of responsibility and sovereignty, such as in *The Politics of Friendship* (1997), *The Work of Mourning* (2001), *Rogues* (2005) and *Learning to Live Finally* (2007).

Most prominently, the subject has been discussed by Simon Critchley in *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*, where he argues that Derrida's philosophy has always involved political judgement: '[Derrida's] responses to de Man's and Heidegger's political engagement, his work on friendship, on apartheid and Nelson Mandela,

on law, on nationalism and philosophical nationality, on *Geschlecht*, on the university, on nuclear criticism, on the teaching of philosophy (and the list could be continued)' (Critchley 189). The wealth of publications on Derrida and the plurality of application of his philosophy to other disciplines of knowledge confirms the significance of his theory to contemporary thinkers. Recent research on ethics and theatre in Derrida's philosophy is marked by Alison Ross's 2008 'Derrida's Writing-Theatre: From the Theatrical Allegory to Political Commitment', where she refers to Derrida's *Adieu à Emmanuel Levinas*. Ross finds Derrida's political theory in his concept of aporia, an 'aporia between the claim of ethical responsibility to operate in general and the demand for responsibility in the singularity of religious experience to one absolute Other, God' (94). She concludes that the two contrasting notions do not exclude each other but collaborate and work simultaneously. The logic of simultaneity can be noted in Derrida's concept of democracy in *The Politics of Friendship* that merges 'all equal' individuals with their right to 'irreducible singularity or alterity' (Derrida 22). The need to problematise a set of political concepts linked with the concept of presence, such as rights and equality, as well as freedom, is key to Derrida's political strategy. This is not to deny the traditional values of presence but rather to reconsider how they work and why should be defined as the status quo. Thomas Keenan, inspired by Derrida's theory in *Fables of Responsibility: Aberrations and Predicaments in Ethics and Politics*, discusses the impact of deconstruction on politics. Keenan

## *Ontology of Absence*

examines how the 'ungroundedness' in ethics and politics, as in 'the politics have no grounds, no reliable standpoints' (3), is a position for demonstrating that absence of those standpoints was a necessary condition for politics to emerge. Deconstruction in this sense is to make visible the complex relationship between political concepts and their political application. Derrida's early philosophy applied to visual arts examines the primacy of presence as authority whereas his later works on ethics and politics focus on the effect of traditionally defined presence on the reader.

## *Question about Presence in Theatre*

The question about the nature of presence and representation is still relevant in theatre studies, as the method of defining representation is constantly changing. After Derrida's death in 2004, questions about presence and absence re-emerged in visual culture. The notion of deconstruction and removed presence that was used in earlier decades in theatre studies combined with the interest in other philosophies that were defining presence existing in the very moment of performance.

The significance of merging philosophy and visual arts has been noted for some time, Cull's research on Deleuze and the notion of presence resulted in Performance Philosophy, an interdisciplinary field of research established in 2012 which has reignited interest in this area. The Performance Philosophy research group encourages all kinds of connections between performance and philosophy. With this research,

I would like to demonstrate that theories that draw on deconstruction, such as present absence, have a philosophical potential that can still be drawn out in ever-changing contexts. This thesis argues that Derrida's philosophy continues to be suitable for visual culture, when technology and globalisation puts into question the traditional notion of presence as authority.

## DIVISION BETWEEN TEXT AND PERFORMANCE

The division between performance and theatre, presence and absence, text and performance focuses on the textual and performative as ways to convey meaning in visual culture. The division comes from two contrasting philosophical traditions, defined as analytical and continental. Philosophy is often held to have divided into these two strands in the nineteenth century as analytic philosophy – mostly practiced in Anglo-American universities – gravitated towards formal logic, a skepticism towards metaphysics and a quasi-scientific style, while continental philosophy – mostly practiced in continental Europe, but significantly influential in disciplines outside Philosophy in the English-speaking world – persisted in asserting the importance of metaphysics, political engagement, and creative explorations in the writing of philosophy. Derrida's philosophy is the key example of the continental-poststructuralist school of thought that questions established definitions and traditional binary opposites in language.

As such, his philosophy is used in Julia A. Walker's analysis of the text and physicality split that are seen as oppositions.

Walker writes about associated forms of expression with an emphasis on particular socio-cultural context and the development of new communications technologies. In her chapter 'The Text/Performance Split across the Analytic/Continental Divide' in *Staging Philosophy: Intersections of Theater, Performance, and Philosophy*, Walker discusses the split between theories that discuss whether meaning is in language or in the performing body. Walker's central argument was that 'the homology between them lies in an inside/outside relationship between the knowing subject and the object of its investigation' (Walker 20). There, she compares the divided text and performance to the place of the reader within the discourse: "The reader is either "inside" the text he or she performs or "outside" explicating its meanings, in the analytic/continental divide, the knowing subject is either "inside" the object of its investigation by means of a transcendental consciousness or "outside" the formal language in which that object's truth value is recorded' (Walker, 'The Text/Performance Split' 20). Walker discusses implications for both traditions in theatre and explains how the division between being inside/outside of a meaning problematises the concept of presence. Theatre in this regard is a contradiction, as in this context 'vocality and gesture are always both immediate and dehiscent; they always have the ability to appeal to both our affective and our experiential registers directly yet to function as signs within a system of

theatrical signification' (Walker, 'The Text/Performance Split' 44).

Walker argues that there are multiple ways of making meaning in the theatre, not necessary limited to an epistemological form of knowledge. Performance, as a characteristic kind of combination of all sensory information, can compose another kind of knowledge that expands strictly textual interpretations. Walker combined the inside/outside binary opposites into one quality of theatre philosophy that merges cognition with experience, 'rational cognition is inadequate by itself, so is sensuous participation. Theater has the unique ability to shift us between these two perspectives by situating us both inside an imaginative fiction and outside the proscenium frame' (Walker, 'The Text/Performance Split' 36). Walker writes that absorbing something as a part of it and simultaneously as an outsider gives the audience the particular perspective on meaning that is specific to theatre. Walker, in her engaging discourse, attempts to define the ontology of performance and theatre in finding the relation between binary opposites in the notions of live and inscribed.

## PRESENCE AND DIFFERENCE

In this chapter, I provide an alternative perspective on theory about present absence and visual culture I discuss an alternative to Derrida's perspective. A phenomenological perspective is usually defined as the opposite of a poststructuralist position. Deleuze's philosophy

derives from similar questions about difference and presence but provides contrasting answers. I look at the perspective of Deleuze's philosophy in Performance Studies that Cull provides in her numerous publications. Cull's interpretation of Deleuze's philosophy involves the discourse about difference and repetition as a mode of differential presence. Her application of Deleuze to the field of performance results in the reconsideration of notions of art as a creation of an affect, not as a representation. This chapter draws on Cull's questions about the terms those studies use in relation to each other.

Further, part of the chapter examines the politics of the application of those two fields of research, such as performance and philosophy, into of the new field of Performance Philosophy. In her initial discussion about the means of joining those two studies, Cull asked how one field of research can be linked with another without any sense of authority or hierarchy. This is an enquiry about hierarchy and authority that deconstruction engages in when there is a pair of binary opposites considered. Here, the connection between those two fields represents the connection between theory and practice, primarily the link between the mind and the body. Cull addresses the problem in a sophisticated way by indicating that making theory is a process of thinking, and the experience of performance is also a process of reflection. Cull goes further with her examination of the different modes of thinking in Performance Studies, developing the theory that there is a specific and embodied kind of thinking that occurs during a performance. Cull's theory of differential

presence contrasts with present-absence because she looks at presence as a condition of performance that is 'not so much a state to be occupied, but a creative process in which one might take part; differential presence never arrives or ends, but is always complete in and as the process of becoming' ('Differential Presence' 10). The distinction between defining a performance as immediate and finding its process on absence has been developed on the general divisions between two contrasting positions in contemporary philosophy.

#### *Deleuze's Philosophy*

An example of philosophy that argues for immediacy in performance is Deleuze's concept of presence as a process of transition. To compare, Derrida's notion of presence is deferred in time whereas for Deleuze, presence is transformational. Deleuze writes about concepts of difference and multiplicity, where each reading of philosophy is always in relation to the reader's perspective: 'The philosopher creates, he doesn't reflect' (*Negotiations* 122). Hence every interpretation is a dissimilar: 'It's rather like portraiture in painting. Producing mental, conceptual portraits. As in painting, you have to create a likeness, but in a different material: the likeness is something you have to produce, rather than a way of reproducing anything' (Deleuze, *Negotiations* 136).

Deleuze examines philosophy within the context of art. He published a number of political books with Félix Guattari, such as two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, *Anti-Oedipus*, *A Thousand*

*Plateaus* and *What is Philosophy?*. He applies philosophy to art in the form of cinema in *The Movement-Image* and *The Time-Image*, as well as painting in *Francis Bacon*. Although the texts are about art, he expressed in *Negotiations* that this is also a kind of philosophy. For Deleuze, philosophy, as well as art, is a process of creation. This is a mode of presence that is definable as such only in the moment of display as a movement or sensation.

In his work on cinema, he discusses the nature of representation not as a representation but as a movement of an object. Hence, the notion of presence is the transformation of an object in time. The notion of transformation and time has a reference to performance, and there are clear implications of Deleuze's philosophy to the theory of performance. Deleuze worked with theatre practitioner Carmelo Bene on a project to end domination of all kinds of structural influences derived from text, from any script to the structure of the play. Bene aimed to create a non-articulate experience of performance. Together, they wanted to create a performance that has overwhelming number of signs which are not meant to communicate, either to utter meaning or to make any sense. For them, performance in this context is an event where time is a kind of transformative presence. Sound and light, for them, had a different construction than the structure of language, and posing one to another was to manifest against authority the meaning that ideas might have in certain social and political contexts.

Progressing from Deleuze's interdisciplinary approach to

philosophy, Cull finds multiple links between performance and philosophy, drawing attention to performance as a kind of philosophy, as it generates thoughts. Performance in this sense can be defined through the words of Antonin Artaud: 'not to define thoughts but to cause thinking' (Artaud 69). Similar conclusions can be reached in the work of Cull, who merges thinking about performance as a particular process that generates thoughts.

#### *Cull's Differential Presence in Performance Studies*

Cull discusses performance as philosophy, looking at presence as a concept that is a key to Performance Studies. Recently, she co-edited *Manifesto Now! Instructions for Performance* (2013), and she wrote *Theatres of Immanence: Deleuze and the Ethics of Performance* in 2012 and *Deleuze and Performance* (2009). Cull also co-edited an issue of *Performance Research* that focused on the theme of participation (2011). She has published many articles on Performance and Philosophy. One of her early works on Deleuze and Performance Studies discusses in detail the relationship between Deleuze's philosophy of presence and its potential in contemporary research. In *Differential Presence: Deleuze and Performance*, Cull compares Deleuze's philosophy with Derrida's critique of presence.

The notion of difference is discussed by Derrida and Deleuze in two dissimilar ways. For Derrida, difference has an element of postponement in time as well as embedded contrast of oppositions

merged into being. Presence is never present in itself, as it does not have an origin or essence in any form of time. Deleuze finds difference in multiplied presence. In her discourse on Deleuze's idea of presence, Cull sees 'presence as differential presence, is not so much a state to be occupied, but a creative process in which one might take part; differential presence never arrives or ends, but is always complete in and as the process of becoming' ('Differential Presence' 10). Cull's work is significant in the field of performance philosophy as a complementary read on the notion of presence that draws on Deleuze's concept of becoming and the differential presence.

Cull identifies the major distinction between Deleuze's and Derrida's philosophies of presence, arguing that while Derrida writes about presence in its absence, Deleuze finds presence in the realm of materiality (Cull, 'Differential Presence' 24). Although there is dissimilarity between the philosophies, Cull argues that Deleuze's work is not a critique of Derrida's philosophy but rather 'an expansion of a shared concern with the process of differentiation' ('Differential Presence' 24). Cull discusses the notion of differentiation in both philosophies, and she finds that Derrida conducts mainly textual analysis while Deleuze looks at 'other realms, such as thermodynamics and geometry' ('Differential Presence' 25). Hence, Deleuze's notion of difference is applicable to performances that are perceived as an experience of presence, whereas Derrida's textual analysis could be approached differently if the notion of textuality were perceived as a performance of a socially

constructed set of signifiers in motion, which is far from textual analysis.

Presence, according to Cull, is a notion linked with difference: 'Difference, here, is not the "dangerous supplement" that presence both needs and denies as its condition of appearance. Rather, presence can be reconceived with Deleuze as a nonrepresentational experience of difference in itself, as differential presence' (Cull, 'Differential Presence' 25). Presence does not have any unchangeable essence, but it is a process of presenting. For Deleuze, this form of presenting is not a process of constant representation of presence, but it is representation as presence in its plurality without any original. Cull defines Deleuze's notion of representation, 'there is no difference between things and images; perception is imaging, or re-presentation' ('Differential Presence' 26). She argues that Deleuze has a particular category of defining 'the body' that does not depend on the notion of self-presence. Cull also applies Deleuze's notion of becoming to Performance Studies, as it can be useful in analysing how performance affects audiences: 'Deleuze argues for "a thought which moves" over a static image of thought based on determinate concepts by which any given thing can, or cannot, be identified' ('Differential Presence' 53). Concepts as entities of thought are also in a process of change.

In Cull's work, the argument for presence is in the very mode of difference. As she writes, 'the body without organs\*\*' constitutes an \*\* Deleuze's term from *The Logic of Sense*, he names the physical impact of language on the body rather than merely naming and representing its functions.



aspiration towards differential presence, rather than an appeal to simple, or metaphysical presence without difference, as Derrida has suggested' (Cull, 'Differential Presence' 117). However, in Derrida's philosophy, the notion of difference is already within the presence, as it is removed from any monolithic centre or origin. Cull finds the notion of difference as a 'kind of presence rather than a kind of absence' ('Differential Presence' 236). Performers and the audience can share the experience of presence as 'the non-representational thought processes of the affective body' ('Differential Presence' 245). What she calls 'affective body' is something that is always in the process of transformation. The presence is outlined through its material difference.

#### PERFORMANCE AND PHILOSOPHY

Although the question of the nature of representation in theatre and performance and the role of presence and absence was reflected on earlier in theatre studies in the work of Fuchs or Blau, but as a subject of academic research it has emerged only in the last decade. That happened with a number of research projects, such as *Staging Philosophy* in 2006. The project focuses attention on the subject of the application of philosophical perspectives to performance and theatre studies (Krasner and Saltz 2). The book includes fifteen chapters written by different theatre and philosophy researchers who have various perspectives on applications of performance and philosophy. The editors, David Krasner

and David Saltz, divided the chapters into three characteristic areas of theatre/philosophy discourse: 'History and Method,' 'Presence,' and 'Reception.' Their project presents theatre as a similar branch of knowledge to philosophy, and they argue, 'Both theater and philosophy represent humans actively engaging with and in the world, and a basic technique both employ to that end is dialogue' (Krasner and Saltz 3-4). The exchange of arguments is the dialogue that links philosophy and theatre. The questions that are central to some of the chapters are also significant for this thesis, such as the question of the essence of performance and division in the interpretation of representations. The issue is presented in multiple positions, such as in Walker's 'The Text//Performance Split across the Analytic/Continental Divide' (discussed in detail earlier in this chapter), which addresses the division between traditions of philosophies that influenced further branching of perspectives on theatre and performance.

The section on 'Presence' in *Staging Philosophy* is a collection of contrasting positions on the meaning of the element of immediacy as live performance to the debate on the essence of theatre and performance. A prime example of this discourse is represented in this part of the book by Philip Auslander in 'Humanoid Boogie: Reflections on Robotic Performance' and also by Noël Carroll in 'Philosophy and Drama: Performance, Interpretation, and Intentionality'. These two scholars have opposite views of the outcomes of discourse on the meaning of live performance. Auslander writes about the lack of the aesthetic importance of liveness in performance. He describes the case of an exhibition called

*Abacus* by Sergei Shutov, which took place during the 49th Venice Biennial International Exposition of Art (2001). Although the robots in *Abacus* were not capable of cognitive analysis, they had technical skills embedded in them. On this basis, Auslander called the event a performance. His discourse goes further to question the aesthetic need of liveness in performance, as even in the theatre performance everything is planned, and gestures and words are practiced and repeated multiple times in similar ways.

The following chapter by Noël Carroll about ‘Philosophy and Drama: Performance, Interpretation, and Intentionality’, however, examines the question of present and live performance with contrasting outcomes. Carroll inquires about the nature of drama, where he finds that ‘drama-as-performance differs in profound ontological respects from mass mediatised performances’ (105). He writes that drama is an art of theatre in inscription and production, a script as well as performing arts. Carroll identifies this distinction as ‘drama as composition and drama as performance’ (107). In each form of drama, the tokens take different shapes; one is interpretation of performance, and the other has physical properties as objects of composition. For Carroll, drama as art cannot be a mediatised event, as ‘performance of the mass-mediatised token is almost exclusively an affair of matter in motion, whereas the token dramatic performance is ineliminably an artifact of mind’ (115). Hence, the key feature of the mental processes involved in making drama is the reason to characterise a drama as a live event of art.

Another ongoing project that focuses on philosophy and performance is the recent appearance of Performance Philosophy. This discipline discusses links between philosophy and Performance Studies. Performance Philosophy is also an international professional association that was established in 2012, and it initiated the Performance Philosophy book series published by Palgrave Macmillan. The association addresses the increased interest in merging philosophy and performance into one interdisciplinary field of study. Although it seems that philosophy has always been integrated with performance, in recent decades, the number of publications and conference working groups interested in the subject has multiplied. Cull, who is one of the founders and the core convener of the association, notices that for some time, performance studies has been linked only with some philosophies, such Derrida or Austin, whereas other thinkers have not been included in the discourse. Discourses on Nietzsche, Deleuze, Bergson, Lacan, Foucault, Spinoza or Plato also develop how we consider and make visual culture (‘Performance Philosophy’). There is always the potential for Derrida’s or Austin’s philosophies to be applied to visual culture, as the current circumstances of art are developing simultaneously with the progress of technology and culture. As thinking and making are processes that happen in time, they are inseparable from current conditions. The times we live today are inseparable from what we think. In particular, the advent of the Internet and globalisation changed the way we might perceive philosophy and performance. One of the key points of this emerging field is to look

at the philosophy in wider perspective of performance as well as to discuss performance from the philosophical point of view. Performance Philosophy is an association that encourages engagement with philosophy in order to develop theories on performance, such as Cull's writings about performance and Deleuze. Martin Puchner, in *The Drama of Ideas*, writes about Plato's philosophy that has been presented as drama, with Socrates as a character (180). The question of the nature of representation constantly changes with the context of time and despite the wealth of research it seems to re-emerge in new forms, such as through performance. Philosophical questions can be found in performances and exhibitions; all the works discussed in this thesis are controversial and explore difficult but significant problems of being as absence.

#### *Merging Performance and Philosophy*

The *Staging Philosophy* project examined the link between philosophy and performance, and the Performance Philosophy project is also concerned with the politics of joining those two fields. When examining the link between theory as philosophy and practice that can be performance, there appears the problem of the applicability of one discipline to another. In the article 'Performance as Philosophy: Responding to the Problem of "Application"' in *Theatre Research International*, Cull discusses the relationship between philosophy and performance in the context of present times. In this article, Cull asks questions about the need for philosophical discourse in performance

and theatre research in order to assess the meaning and structure of art. Cull writes that this connection between philosophy and performance contributed to articulation of multiple aspects of performance, such as 'art's affective presence and material force' ('Performance as Philosophy' 21). She writes that some philosophies need to be returned to in order to 'rehabilitate the very categories that were so thoroughly deconstructed in the last "theory explosion": "presence", "the body", "the voice"' (Cull, 'Performance as Philosophy' 21).

Dividing philosophy into categories of importance does not answer the call for celebrating the notion of difference that Cull argued for in *Differential Presence: Deleuze and Performance*. The term 'theory explosion' is elaborated as a notion discussed by scholars such as Janelle Reinelt and Joseph Roach, who in *Critical Theory and Performance* name the influence of post-structuralist theory on academic theatre studies from 1970s to 1980s. They name, in particular, 'Derrida's critique of metaphysics, Paul Ricoeur's phenomenology, J.L. Austin's speech/act theory, and Jean Francois Lyotard's conception of the postmodern' (Reinelt and Roach 4). Although their theories influenced the discourse on theatre and performance studies in the past, their theoretical importance is not necessarily exhausted. New readers in the present will find new links between theories and the ever-changing visual culture. Of course, I agree with Cull that there is no need to limit performance and philosophical explorations to the theories of certain thinkers. Philosophy and performance should embrace the notion of difference from many

reflective perspectives.

Cull notices that the link between philosophy and performance might mean, for some, only the application of philosophy to performance, but, as she writes, both are practices of thinking that can be brought in contact with each other. However, she notes how difficult it is to find a link between those two fields without only applying philosophy to performance. Cull looks at performance as a process that generates thoughts and does not need to be explained by philosophy. She argues against the authority of philosophy over performance. Cull proposes that all thoughtful encounters, despite their names as either performance or philosophy, can that generate all kinds of thinking. One kind of thinking Cull identifies is material thinking, which happens through engagement with performance and philosophy; material thinking can happen while reading theories as well as attending performances. Cull explains that linking those two fields of research does not mean that one is losing an identity. Philosophy and performance are related in the sense that both generate thoughts, but as they are growing into new theories and genres, there might not be an identity per se that either performance or philosophy can relate to as original or essential criteria. Cull's response to the methodology of philosophy applied to performance is to look at 'materiality of performance's thinking: its embodied-thinking, participatory-thinking, or durational-thinking – encounters that generate new ideas of what thought is and where, when and how it occurs' ('Performance as Philosophy' 25).

Thinking about visual culture does not happen only during the event, and separating performance thinking and philosophical thinking might not be possible, as I also think about events long after they happened. Merging them into one field is visionary, and creating boundaries at this stage might not be vital to the new field's development. However, there is a structure of relationships between those forms, a structure that is political.

*The Politics of Merging Performance and Philosophy*

The union of performance and philosophy studies generates questions about the politics of applying one discipline to another. This is a question about authority and identity. The association is more often defined through the lens of Hall's notion of identity as a process, a 'discursive practice' (Hall, 'Who needs "identity"?' 16) rather than a fixed subject. Cull examined the association inspired by Deleuze's philosophy of presence. From the perspective of this thesis, the notion of present absence that draws on deconstruction can be seen as a tool to relocate the meanings from their established positions, such as finding political discourse not only through philosophy but also through performance. This aspect of Derrida's philosophy is often said to be impossible to use because it implies a lack of – or infinite deferral of – judgment. However, as has been discussed in this chapter, there have been recent publications on the subject, and Richard Beardsworth identifies Derrida's political thought in the limits of logic.

*Deconstruction and the Political*

Beardsworth discusses this issue in his book *Derrida and the Political*, published in 2013. He argues that Derrida's work is not relativist or apolitical. Following (but not entirely agreeing with) Simon Critchley's *Ethics of Deconstruction*, the position Beardsworth takes in *Derrida and the Political* reinforced the argument that deconstruction is a political theory. Derrida's political thought could be found in his texts on aporia and judgement, where aporia is already in formation of judgement.

The notion of aporia<sup>\*\*\*</sup> has a long history of usage in philosophy, and this is not only Derrida's term, although he defines aporia differently than Sophists, Socrates or Aristotle. Derrida writes about aporia as a

<sup>\*\*\*</sup> Aporia and decision, rather than decision or aporia. 'And' is an important figure that works as a juncture but is impossible as an entity.

mode of thinking, whereas Sophists defined aporia as a confrontation of two equally true and valuable sentences that logically exclude each other. Aristotle found aporia in the notion of time that simultaneously is and cannot be. As Beardsworth explains, 'If time is thought in terms of its divisibility, it is to be thought in terms of now. And yet, the very now of time which gives it its being also robs it of any being, since now is always already past or future. The thinking of time is, therefore, as Aristotle puts it, an "aporetic". Time provokes a thinking which ends up as the aporia (without passage) of thinking' (Beardsworth 32). The difference

between Sophists' aporia and Derrida's aporia lies in his oxymoron of the impossible possibility of perfection. In other words, the condition of the ideality of X is also a condition of its impossibility, so the contradiction focuses on one thing rather than two equally significant but opposite sentences (Beardsworth 32). Beardsworth recognises the link between Derrida's aporia and judgement in the very impossibility of present and measurable decision. He finds that Derrida's political references focus on his claim on the 'closure' of metaphysics. Beardsworth writes about metaphysics as simultaneously infinite and finite as well as 'transcendental and empirical' (xiii). In Derrida's philosophy, the formation of meaning is a process that is set in motion; therefore, the lack of security and stability in making meaning influences the notion of judgement and decision-making. However, by questioning and re-thinking the process of making meaning, Derrida examines the status quo of any dominant authority.

Beardsworth focuses on the side of Derrida's philosophy that promotes inventiveness rather than undecidability. He sees the link between aporia, time and judgement, where Derrida's philosophy acts in favour of the inventive transformation of political judgements. This is the notion of temporality as an active force:

Thinking the political in terms of the violence of conceptual determination, Derrida's philosophy describes the experience of aporia qua an experience of time in recognition of which one judges according to the 'lesser violence'. This inextricable, 'temporal' relation between aporia and judgement has been

severely underestimated by both supporters and detractors of deconstruction. (Beardsworth xiv)

Beardsworth writes about the importance of aporias in the logic of political decisions. This argument is discussed in its complexity throughout Beardsworth's *Derrida and the Political*. In the discourse over the closure of metaphysics, he writes, 'Metaphysical logic reduces the passage of time to presence: its articulations of justice are consequently violent to the experience of time that constitutes the human condition' (xvi). Hence, consideration of time and aporia of judgement is a form of political perspective on deconstruction. Beardsworth finds the relation of aporia of time and human organisation; to change the aporia of time in any organisation is to transform its structure. Beardsworth discusses the relationship between structures of societies, sciences and politics and the way they reflect on democracy as an aporia of the singular responsibility simultaneous with the responsibility to the state. The relationship between structures of theatre and language in the context of Derrida's philosophy has been further examined by Alison Ross.

#### *Theatre and Politics in Deconstruction*

In 2008, Ross presented the argument that Derrida's notion of writing is linked with theatre on plural and particular positions. Ross wrote an article that compares Derrida's language to theatre in political contexts. 'Theatrical Allegory to Political Commitment' was published in *Derrida Today* in 2008. There, she argues that Derrida's notion

of writing has much in common with theatre. 'What distinguishes Derrida from these other writers is that he approaches theatre as a type of writing' (81), Ross writes. In particular, she refers to Derrida's disagreement with Rousseau's text on the essence of writing being in beyond language, where he said 'that what opens meaning and language is writing as the disappearance of natural presence' (Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 160). The quote comes from *Of Grammatology*, a book that, together with other Derrida's early works such as *Margins of Philosophy* (1972), *Dissemination* (1972), *Glas* (1974) and *The Truth in Painting* (1978), influenced this thesis. Ross's article also looks at Derrida's use of the notions of theatricality and political involvement in his early texts about theatre and his later works on ethics.

Ross argues that, in Derrida's philosophy, there has been a change in using deconstruction and ethics over time. In his early works, Derrida focused on conversions of signifiers and joining oppositions as different. In this article she defines two perspectives on the role of aporia and ethics in Derrida's philosophy: an early position that suggests an apparent oxymoron in logic, and a later one that uses those limits of logic as a reason to act.

Ross notices that the discourse about theatre in Derrida's writings continues to implement his theory, and as she notes, there is a difference in his early and late works. In his early works, he uses the example of theatre to talk about the 'metaphysics of presence' and the privilege of presence before absence in Western metaphysics. There,

theatre is referred to as an institution as well as a discourse. In his later works, Derrida applies his earlier terminology to talk about issues of more obvious political importance.

Ross describes theatricality in Derrida's texts in setting the scene of writing, in particular, 'the multiple ways Derrida's writing describes philosophical problems and topics in the theatrical and spatial language of "scenes", "stagings" and "presentations"' (78). Ross also points at Derrida's writing style, which is crafted to refrain from any attempt to set the text's central claim. She finds a form of theatricality in Derrida's staging of his arguments in order to, as she frames it, 'draw attention to the ways meaning is not able to be extracted from the materiality of its existence and communication' (Ross 79). Articulation of a concept in any form can provide an aesthetic experience that produces plurality of meanings, despite any intended outcome.

Ross analyses Derrida's writing as a mode of theatricality, comparing theatre and economy of political events. From Derrida's analysis of meaning, she identifies Derrida's aesthetics concerned with ethical commitment. In Derrida's late works, Ross finds a subjective sense of meaning as a reason to act.

Derrida's description of undecidables as imperatives to act may be described in such a way as to invite others to experience this meaning as binding (in the sense of providing an orientation or motivation to act) but, as he concedes, they cannot be put in the form of a demonstrable proof for others.

In this respect, his analyses may in fact show, despite his intentions, the impotence of the presentation of compelling meaning contexts to generate responsibility. (Ross 90)

As she explains in the notes to the article, by 'responsibility' she means a form of revolutionary movement or activist network.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I presented a wide range of perspectives on the question of presence and absence in theatre and performance studies, writing about the tradition of philosophical thought that has an influence on the division between performance and theatre. I also referred to Derrida's influence on theatre studies, which will be continued in the next chapter on 'Derrida in Theatre'. This chapter provided an example of a theory of performance studies and drew on philosophical positions beyond deconstruction. I outlined the theory of presence in mediation without essence or a structural centre in Deleuze's philosophy. The theory provides another perspective on the problem of differentiated presence, that contrasts with Derrida's philosophy; Deleuze's sense of presence is not deferred.

Looking back on the history of theatre studies, the 1980s and 1990s, the theory of signs in theatre derived from semiotics were complicated and complemented by poststructuralist perspectives. In the 2000s, the notion of poststructuralist thought met the need

to confront technological aspects of everyday, digital life. In the later 2000s and the beginning of 2010s, there is a notable interest in finding ways to merge philosophy and performance. As I write this thesis in 2014, currently performance and philosophy flourishes but still has not revealed its full potential. With the uncertainty of contemporary times in terms of politics and social life, and with the plurality of super-abundant information, Derrida's philosophy gains new significance.

In a response to the recent political conflict in Europe in Eastern Ukraine, Slavoj Žižek wrote about the contemporary economy of tension between superpowers forming a multipolar world rather than referring to one central superpower, the United States: 'Our predicament today is defined by this tension: the global free circulation of commodities is accompanied by growing separations in the social sphere. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the rise of the global market, new walls have begun emerging everywhere, separating peoples and their cultures. Perhaps the very survival of humanity depends of resolving this tension' (Žižek 'Who Can Control'). A theory that provides a perspective on binary oppositions working together has perhaps never been more valuable.

After decades of discourse on Derrida's philosophy and its application to theatre, his thoughts have a continuous pertinence to visual culture, as deconstruction provides a unique perspective on the nature of representation and the role of absence as a positive element.

Derrida's philosophy is the mediation between presence and absence; this mediation is not fully present and is not absent either (Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 159). Performance and theatre is a form of mediation of meaning that can be redefined and is as present as it is absent. Moreover, absence can be also a site of creativity. Beardsworth notices the creative possibility of thinking that 'the best invention is an impossible one. Impossible, however, in a very specific sense: an impossible invention is not a horizon' (101). Therefore, the future is always open-ended as a 'temporal modality of invention' (Beardsworth 101). Hence, change and invention are always in the process of discourse and negotiation, and the relations to aporia have to be aporetic as it cannot be experienced in itself. Performance Philosophy can be described as a process of discourse that is open-ended for the future.



\* In *Spectres of Marx*, Derrida uses the term 'hauntology' (10) to describe the 'undecidable' relationship between presence and absence. It is used to convey the effects (of past situations or experiences) which leave their mark without being either fully present or absent.

\*\* However, this is not 'performance-as-reading practice' that Elinor Fuchs referred to in *Performance as Reading: Language-Music-Text*. It is a work and text distinction that is not a performance and text distinction.

## INTRODUCTION

# ONTOLOGY OF ABSENCE

## A PLAN OF THE PHD THESIS

# DERRIDA IN THEATRE

### CHAPTER 1

#### PRESENT ABSENCE IN PHILOSOPHY

This chapter looks at the notion of present absence in theatre through elements of Derrida's philosophy and its potential application to theatre studies. Analysis of this connection begins with studying in detail the French philosopher's text on Antonin Artaud's *Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation*, which is compared with perspectives from his book *Of Grammatology*. Both texts introduce an exploration of the concepts of presence and absence in theatre studies, which also brings in a discussion of Derrida's philosophical concepts of 'hauntology', 'différance', 'construction/de-sedimentation', 'play' and 'différance' as the central concepts of the thesis.

absence and Derrida's approach could appear to suggest that this research will be examining ideas of performative failure, ghosts, and haunting presence. These subjects are theoretically close to the binary opposition between absence and presence, which is deemed somewhat ambiguous, especially if one is familiar with *Spectres of Marx* or *Copy, Archive*.

### CHAPTER 2

#### DERRIDA IN THEATRE

This chapter examines Derrida's text on Antonin Artaud's *Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation*, which is compared with perspectives from his book *Of Grammatology*. Both texts introduce an exploration of the concepts of presence and absence in theatre studies, which also brings in a discussion of Derrida's philosophical concepts of 'hauntology', 'différance', 'construction/de-sedimentation', 'play' and 'différance' as the central concepts of the thesis.

Such a theory of hauntology,\* where absence is present through memory and experiences from the past. In my thesis I apply the philosopher's concept of différance and de-sedimentation (Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 10).

### CHAPTER 3

#### OBJECTS AND THINGS

This chapter examines Derrida's text on Antonin Artaud's *Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation*, which is compared with perspectives from his book *Of Grammatology*. Both texts introduce an exploration of the concepts of presence and absence in theatre studies, which also brings in a discussion of Derrida's philosophical concepts of 'hauntology', 'différance', 'construction/de-sedimentation', 'play' and 'différance' as the central concepts of the thesis.

of my thesis because they examine Derrida's theory of hauntology,\* where absence is present through memory and experiences from the past. In my thesis I apply the philosopher's concept of différance and de-sedimentation (Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 10).

### CHAPTER 5

#### STRUCTURE AND CONTEXT

The chapter draws on the historical perspectives of Derrida's philosophy and its impact on the development of the field of literature as well as on theatre and performance in the second part of the twentieth century. This chapter looks at the work of thinkers that are inspired by Derrida, such as Elinor Fuchs, Herbert Blau and Philip Auslander. The selected focus on present

of my thesis because they examine Derrida's theory of hauntology,\* where absence is present through memory and experiences from the past. In my thesis I apply the philosopher's concept of différance and de-sedimentation (Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 10). Both terms are used simultaneously in this chapter so as to hopefully and to avoid and to distance the concept from its popular interpretations. This research examines events of theatre and installation art as terms based on concepts of language (not concepts and the language) expressed in a non-linear form of writing. In my argument, conceptual art such as works of theatre and installation

## DETAILED OUTLINE OF THE ARGUMENT

to confront technological aspects of everyday, digital life. In the later 2000s and the beginning of 2010s, there is a notable interest in finding ways to merge performance and philosophy. I write this thesis in 2014, currently performance and philosophy flourishes but still has not revealed its full potential. With the uncertainty of contemporary times in terms of politics and social life, and with the plurality of super-abundant information, Derrida's philosophy gains new significance.

In a response to the recent political conflict in Europe in Eastern Ukraine, Slavoj Žižek wrote about the contemporary economy of tension between superpowers forming a multipolar world rather than a world dominated by one central superpower, the United States. 'Our predicament today is defined by this tension between the two superpowers. The structure and context of commodities is accompanied by growing separations in the social sphere. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the rise of the global market, new walls have begun emerging everywhere, separating peoples and their cultures. Perhaps the very survival of humanity depends of resolving this tension' (Žižek 'Who Gets Control'). Derrida's philosophy provides a perspective on binary oppositions working together that has never been more valuable.

After decades of discourse on Derrida's philosophy and its application to theatre, his thoughts have a continuous pertinence to visual culture, as deconstruction provides a unique perspective on the nature of representation and the role of absence as a positive element.

Derrida's philosophy is the mediation between presence and absence; this mediation is not a simple one. It is not a matter of either/or (Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 159). Performance and theatre is a form of mediation of meaning that can be redefined and is as present as it is absent. Moreover, absence can be also a site of creativity. Beardsworth notes the creative possibility of thinking that the impossible is not impossible one. Impossible, however, in a very specific sense, an impossible invention is not impossible (100). 'Hence, the future is always open-ended' (Derrida in Beardsworth 101). Hence, change and invention are always in the process of discussion and negotiation, and the relations to objects and things cannot be experienced as fixed. Derrida's philosophy can be described as a process of discourse that is open-ended for the future.

# ONTOLOGY OF ABSENCE

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### CONCLUSION

### STRUCTURE AND CONTEXT

### DETAILED OUTLINE OF THE ARGUMENT

### CHAPTER 4 STAGED PRESENCE

### CHAPTER 3 OBJECTS AND THINGS

### CHAPTER 2 DERRIDA IN THEATRE

### CHAPTER 1 PRESENT ABSENCE IN PHILOSOPHY

### INTRODUCTION

\* In *Spectres of Marx* Derrida uses the term 'hauntology' (10) to describe the 'undecidable' or 'unknown' nature of presence and absence. It is used to convey the 'ghostly' effects (of past situations or experiences) which leave their trace without being either fully present or absent.

## DERRIDA IN THEATRE

This chapter looks at the notion of present absence in theatre through elements of Derrida's philosophy, particularly his concept of textuality and its potential application to theatre studies. Analysis of this connection begins with studying in detail the French philosopher's text on Antonin Artaud's theatre, 'The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation', which is compared with perspectives from his book *Of Grammatology*. Both texts introduce an exploration of the concepts of presence and absence in theatre studies, while also bringing into discussion Derrida's philosophy. This chapter looks at notions of trace, aporia, deconstruction/de-sedimentation, play and différance, as they will be applied to examples of theatre and art throughout the thesis. The notion of present absence is incomplete without all of these dimensions.

The chapter draws on the historical perspectives of Derrida's philosophy and its impact on the development of the theory of literature as well as on theatre and performance in the second part of the twentieth century. This chapter looks at the key theatre thinkers that are inspired by Derrida, such as Elinor Fuchs, Herbert Blau and Philip Auslander. The selected focus on present

\*\* However, this is not 'performance-as-reading practice' that Elinor Fuchs referred to in some of her works and does not have the work and text distinction that Barthes proposed in his anthology *Image-Music-Text*.

absence and Derrida's approach could appear to suggest that this research will be examining ideas of performative failure, ghosts, and haunting presence. These subjects are theoretically close to the binary opposition between absence and presence, which is deemed somewhat ambiguous, especially if one is familiar with *Spectres of Marx* or *Copy, Archive, Signature: A Conversation on Photography*. Such theories, although comparable, are not the target of my thesis because they examine Derrida's theory of hauntology,\* where absence is present through memory and experiences from the past. In my thesis I apply the philosopher's concepts of différance and de-sedimentation (Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 10) to examine the construction of presence and absence in theatre and installation art. De-sedimentation is another name for Derrida's well-known theory of deconstruction. Both terms are used simultaneously in this chapter so as to hopefully aid in detaching and dislocating the concept from its popular interpretations. This research examines events of theatre and installation art as forms based on concepts of language (not concepts 'behind' the language) expressed in a non-linear form of writing.\*\* In my argument, 'conceptual art' (such as works of theatre and installation

art) is a form of Derrida's arche-writing, a language that is not derived from speech. While presence depends on moments where the audience reads the metaphors ('traces'), there is an ever-absent play of signifiers. In other words, although theatre happens in front of the audience, presence on stage finds metaphors in the audience's attention (Rebellato 27).\*\*\* Consequently, there is always something remaining that denotes presence, even a representation of absence, as it does not have any signified idea to refer to. This is what I mean by the term 'present absence', and this is the concept of theatre that I seek to examine through the reading of philosophy and theatre – that is theatre, with no essence in human body, text or representation.

Although the concept of absence in theatre associated with Derrida's philosophy is currently a subject of great interest to theatre scholars, absence still seems to be explored only in categories of 'being as presence'. Hence, rather than investigating a phenomenon of absence that represents something not there, which is an absent transcendental signified (a signified which transcends all signifiers), I will seek arguments to support the concept that there is no signified in the first place. That is how I understand ontology of absence in the context of post-structuralism. One could argue that grammatology is supposed to be beyond ontology

so as to underline its distinction from studies on things as such, and essences of things, but in this study I recognise grammatology as another form of ontology, such as language and words can be read in multiple ways. In Derrida's terms ontology can be concerned with the difference of the word's derivation and deferral of its signifiers, such as the word ontology, its literal meaning comes from Greek 'ōn, ont- 'being' + -logy' (Oxford Dictionaries 'ontology'), whereas the differentiation of meaning comes from its English context, as *onto* means moving to a location. Hence, a 'thing' from the word *ontology* can be interpreted as a movement and process of play. It can be read as *onto* – going towards – or can be a supplement of a grapheme. Moreover, logic does not respond to one truth but rather to a process of reasoning, which Derrida 'always already' found in philosophy. Hence, this study is a form of *dislocated* ontology, read primarily as a movement onto logic of absence. Derrida's manifestation of ontology differs from the classical set of associations linked with this term. According to Derrida, his philosophy is debating the notion of logocentrism in epistemology. The concept of logocentrism in language is a mental construction where logos is at the centre and it is present to the mind as being. This presence is an ontological centre for signifiers – the signified. As Derrida wrote in *Of Grammatology*, 'The exteriority of the

\*\*\* In the article 'When We Talk of Horses: Or, what do we see when we see a play?' Dan Rebellato analyses how the audience reflects on a theatrical representation. He writes, 'My own suggestion is that we should understand theatrical representation as metaphorical; actors give performances that become metaphors for the characters, the stage becomes a metaphor for indeterminate imaginary worlds or determinate real ones' (27).

signifier is the exteriority of writing in general, and I shall try to show later that there is no linguistic sign before writing. Without that exteriority, the very idea falls into decay' (14). De-sedimentation implies the lack of essential and transcendental signified and, therefore, there is not only one 'present' to the meaning of ontology. In overview, what is seen as ontology can no longer point towards the essence of being as deconstruction turns away from essentialism. From Derrida's standpoint, ontology is a network of signifiers, traces that suggest some direction of interpretation rather than disclosing the substance or fundamental quality of a thing or idea. Signifiers are traces, supplementary to absence of the transcendental signified (for instance, *being as presence*). Signifiers are chains that substitute one another and do not (as any other part of language) have presence as such, so this is a metaphysics of absence rather than presence.

In Derrida's context, the notion of present absence also involves intertextuality. Whenever an author writes a text, what is produced is already embedded within something else that shaped the writer's thoughts and the author. Written text is created against the background of other pre-existing texts that influence and add to its meaning; thus, text does not stand alone but is folded up inside other texts that came before it. There is no grand narrative or greater meaning behind language as even *nothing* is writing. Context helps to make sense of a metaphor; meaning comes in relation to context in a network of references. Signifiers do not refer to signified but to other signifiers. They form meaning in the process of referring to other signifiers, through signification and play

of *différance*. According to this theory, signifiers can signify an infinite number of meanings depending on context.

Context can suggest a network of signifiers that are a part of an art event. Thus, theatre seems to not only be contained in a room with a stage or in a specific place of performance, it also takes place through forming signifiers which are seen and heard, and this happens through the experience of the audience. Boxing theatre as an event that occurs on stage is given margins and lines of termination in terms of presence. My thesis explores not only dramatic theatre that happens on stage but also other forms of theatre, performative arts and art. In *The Truth in Painting*, Derrida enquired, 'What is the inboxing of a box?' (225) and he proposed that there is 'a box in the box [and] a box outside the box' (231). He also questioned the borderlines of works of art, texts and identity. Hence, his work can assist in analysing theatre and installation art, either dramatic or postdramatic, or any kind of representation of metaphors where things denote other things. What do they present? Perhaps hints of what they could be. Dramatic theatre performs texts and situations that have been prepared and played beforehand (and maybe even before they have been written) and, similarly, postdramatic theatre\*\*\*\* presents a context that provides figures of speech – metaphors. In both examples, theatre is a form of non-linear writing. Theatre is a kind of figurative writing that has its iterability and

\*\*\*\* Lehmann's notion of 'postdramatic theatre' is discussed in Chapter 5.

and spatialisation, as well as a network of signifiers. Every movement is a 'thing' in which everything signifies other signifiers. When one is a part of the audience, simply through 'reading' and receiving the performance, one constructs other metaphors that are closely related to a particular set of experiences, while paying attention and having certain expectations. Theatre is conditioned by multiple things such as place, time or context. Moreover, people who are watching a performance have a certain context as well, as they ask questions in accordance with their own experiences and knowledge. Deconstruction is within the context of the situation that is wider than the performance itself. Derrida argues that this is not something one can apply afterwards as it is already constantly happening in the play while playing. Thinking can begin from anything, but this does not state its origin and *différance*. Hence, thinking for this research is not the *origin* of theatre (as Blau suggests) but is considered as a play of possible signifiers, indeed a 'chain of substitutions' (Derrida, *Positions* 14). In the next part of the chapter, I outline the influence of Derrida's philosophy in the recent history of theatre studies. I refer to the theatre scholars who developed the subject of absence in theatre and performance on the grounds of deconstruction.

#### DERRIDA'S PHILOSOPHY IN THEATRE STUDIES

The notion of deconstruction problematises the association between binary opposites by displaying the contrasting oppositions as

representation of the hierarchy dictated by a social status quo. The politics between being and absence has been important to theatre studies in recent decades. Marvin Carlson, in *Theories of the Theatre: A Historical and Critical Survey from the Greeks to the Present*, situates Derrida's influence on theatre towards the end of the century, beginning in the 1980s and continuing throughout the 1990s. Before that time, in the 1960s and early 1970s, theatre and performance theory focused on experimental practices on the borderline of art and performance. Those practices were engaged in finding the meaning of presence in performance in the notion of time or physicality of the performers (Carlson 516). After Derrida published texts on altered perspective on the nature of representation, Elinor Fuchs reconsidered his philosophy in the environment of theatre. In her key text, which took part in the shift of perspective on the nature of representation, 'Presence and the Revenge of Writing: Re-thinking Theatre after Derrida' from 1985, she wrote that 'culture inescapably takes place within language and writing. At the same time, ... artists have reduced the authority of writing, by frankly bringing it onstage as a separated theatrical element. The performance is neither a reenactment of the logocentric dilemma, as in traditional theatre, nor a rebellion against it' (Fuchs, 'Presence and the Revenge of Writing' 171). Fuchs's article defined the characteristics of the theatre of absence that did not agree on 'the theatrical enterprise of spontaneous speech, with its logocentric claims to origination, authority, authenticity—in short, Presence' (165). She defines the theatre of absence as a form that involves

performance that ‘disperses the center, displaces the subject, destabilizes meaning’ (‘Presence and the Revenge of Writing’ 172). This perspective influences this research on the ontology of absence. Fuchs’s take on Derrida’s philosophy marks a historical shift in the way theatre and performance can be examined, as she looked at absence as a significant element. Philip Auslander further refers to the change over time in the perception of the notion of presence.

The assumption behind much of the experimental theatre and performance of the 1960s (really the period from about 1964 to about 1974) was that because the presence of the actor as one living human being before others is spiritually and psychologically liberating, pure presentation of performer to audience is the best means available to the theatre to make a radical spiritual/political statement. This assumption no longer seems tenable in light of the suspicion that has been cast upon the whole notion of ‘presence,’ a suspicion which derives from the apparent collusion between political structures of authority and the persuasive power of presence. (Auslander, ‘Toward a Concept of the Political’ 24-25)

The subject of deconstruction in visual culture has been influential for the past four decades and still continues to inspire a wealth of publications even after Derrida’s death in October 2004. There are constantly new interpretations on his philosophy such as Richard Beardsworth’s *Derrida and the Political* (2013), Michael

Naas’s *Derrida From Now On* (2008) and the recent *Derrida Now: Current Perspectives in Derrida Studies* (2014) by John William Phillips. The political aspect of his philosophy is significant to Pheng Cheah and Suzanne Guerlac in *Derrida and the Time of the Political* (2009) and in Martin McQuillan’s *Deconstruction After 9/11* (2009). Derrida Today continues to be a prosperous journal in *Derrida and Literature Studies*. Theory, theatre and political association are the subject of Alison Ross’s ‘Theatrical Allegory to Political Commitment’ (2008). Moreover, there are still new publications appearing that were written by Derrida but not published during his life, such as *The Beast and the Sovereign* (2010) or *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason* (2005). There remain a number of lectures and seminars that he gave in the last years of his life which are still waiting to be published.

#### *Key Theatre Thinkers Inspired by Derrida*

The fascination with Derrida’s thoughts about metaphysics in philosophy was noted in the latter part of the twentieth century. Some of the most prominent are the works of Elinor Fuchs, such as ‘Presence and the Revenge of Writing: Re-thinking Theatre after Derrida’ from 1985 and *The Death of Character: Reflections on Theater after Modernism* from 1996. In both texts, Fuchs expresses doubt in the authenticity of the notion of character. In the last position, as the title suggests, with the change of perspective on the structure of theatre, there is not one centre for theatrical performance. The notion of character is no longer

the essence of theatre. She links the traditional notion of character to the structural dualism of traditional metaphysics. Fuchs anticipates of the emergence of theatre without the essence in presence in 'doubting speech, voice, character, self' (*The Death of Character* 90). At the time she published the book, she defined as a point 'at the end of drama and the emerging form of a post-metaphysical theater' (*The Death of Character* 90). She indicates how complex textuality was in theatre in the wake of Derrida's philosophy. Fuchs writes that dramatic form has the potential to be defined in multiple philosophical perspectives, which presently can be seen in the field of Performance Philosophy.

The last paragraph of 'Presence and the Revenge of Writing: Rethinking Theatre after Derrida' seems to be the most prominent example of Fuchs's early response to the notion of textuality and absence in theatre.

Theatre is ever the presence of the absence and the absence of the presence. Both are component in its every motion, but until recently its motions have taken place within phonocentric limits. One might say that we have been witnessing in contemporary theatre, and especially in performance, a representation of the failure of the theatrical enterprise of spontaneous speech with its logocentric claims to origination, authority, authenticity-in short, Presence. This motion amounts to a virtual deconstruction of the defining

hierarchy that has sustained theatre since the Renaissance. The stage has revealed, as Chantal Pontbriand has written about performance, an 'aversion for metaphysics.' Derrida raises the large question whether philosophy can continue to be philosophy without the support of logocentric metaphysics. Have we arrived at such a question in theatre? (Fuchs, 'Presence and the Revenge of Writing' 172)

Fuchs's contribution to the subject of presence and absence in theatre and its relation to the philosophy of poststructuralism is significant, and in this thesis, her texts are examined in a couple of contexts. Fuchs names the poststructuralist theatre 'the theatre of absence'. She provides further explanation for this name in the notes to her article. Fuchs differentiates between presence and presentness in theatre, where the notion of presence is with the fixed entity to look at and presentness is without a tangible object to rely on. Fuchs argues that presentness is a significant element of theatre that she calls 'disarticulation' or 'absence' ('Presence and the Revenge of Writing' 172). This notion is also a subject of Peggy Phelan's theoretical investigations.

Fuchs defines a postmodern theatre as the one that displayed traces in text: 'The text has become an actor. The text comes out from the wings as a separated theatrical element' (*The Death of Character* 91). The author of a text has become a character, and the reader is a spectator of the book, as noted by Rebecca Schneider in her review of *The Death of*



*Character*. Schneider writes, “The character at the wake of character is the reader/spectator/critic/consumer, a scene shift scripted by poststructuralism, enacted by postmodernism, and explicated by Fuchs herself” (453). Schneider observes that the notion of character shifted from the stage to the audience as well as from the page to the reader: ‘Fuchs’s book finds, at the wake of character-centrism, a theatre as full of life as its house is full of questioning spectators’ (453). The notion of a character as text and performer is further employed later in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

Another influential performance thinker that provides a woman’s perspective on the concept of signification, where a representation of female is a result of male politics, is Peggy Phelan. In *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (1993), she writes that ‘In conflating identity politics with visibility [...] “selves” can be adequately represented within the visual or linguistic field. The “hole in the signifier,” “the Real-impossible” which is unsayable, unseeable, and therefore resistant to representation, is ignored’ (10). Phelan notices the importance of absence (the unmarked) in the system of signification, and she examines performance as a process of becoming absent.

Phelan finds ontology of performance in disappearance. She discusses how the body is constructed through sets of signifiers and how performance art uses this construct to modify the perspective on physicality. Phelan involves phenomenological aspects of continental theory and focuses on the body and philosophy. One of her prominent

arguments is that performance ‘can be defined as representation without reproduction’ (*Unmarked* 3). Therefore, its value lies in uniqueness. Phelan’s poetic account on performance is examined in the ‘Staged Presence’ chapter. As she writes in *Unmarked*, ‘Performance honors the idea that a limited number of people in a specific time/space frame can have an experience of value which leaves no visible trace afterward’ (*Unmarked* 149). Phelan developed the ontology of performance as presence as a result of the influence of Derrida’s philosophy of trace and postponement. In the notion of presence as disappearance, ‘performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. . . . Performance’s being, like the ontology of subjectivity . . . becomes itself through disappearance’ (Phelan, *Unmarked* 146). For Phelan, the notion of performance is the presence of possibility and immediacy of presence that is yet not defined.

The notion of spatiality and difference in repetition makes the performance different from written language. She defines Derrida’s theory about difference and postponement in terms of performance, and in the specificity of the genre, the elements of absence that are ‘unmarked’ or untraced in any linguistic capacity are still signifiers. The process of disappearance as absence signifies presence that is never present in itself but it is a practice. A performing body is also in motion; she writes, ‘The body is not coherent; only reading practices . . . make [it]

beautiful, sick, well, living, or dying' (Phelan, *Ends of Performance* 16). Phelan compares a social significance of a gendered body and the theatrical notion of signification. She finds that the female voice and image is represented by a male perspective; hence, a woman's voice is the absent signifier.

there is a dismaying similarity in the beliefs generated about the political efficacy of visible representation. The dangerous complicity between progressives dedicated to visibility politics and conservatives patrolling the borders of museums, movie houses, and mainstream broadcasting is based on their mutual belief that representations can be treated as "real truths" and guarded or championed accordingly. Both sides believe that greater visibility of the hitherto under-represented leads to enhanced political power ... Insufficient understanding of the relationship between visibility, power, identity, and liberation has led both groups to mistake the relation between the real and the representational. (Phelan, *Unmarked* 2)

Phelan writes about representations being made by political and social systems where certain relations are visible and some are hidden. Her notion of theatre presence is linked with the position of authority in a structure.

Philip Auslander examines presence and absence in context of authority and technology. He has written a series of books on the subject of liveness and presence in performance. Auslander's theory that a live

performance might not necessarily be defined in terms of presence is a significant statement to the theatre and performance studies. He discussed the nature of postmodernist performance and cultural politics in *Presence and Resistance: Postmodernism and Cultural Politics in Contemporary American Performance* in 1992, focusing on contemporary postmodern aesthetics of the influence of media (or 'mediatized') culture. In one of the influential articles on presence, 'Against Ontology: Making Distinctions between the Live and the Mediatized' from 1997, he argued that the relation between 'liveness and mediatization must be seen as a relation of dependence and imbrication rather than opposition' (55). Auslander conducts a critique of live performance defined as 'the magic of life theatre' or 'energy' or even 'community', which is somewhere between performers and spectators (*Liveness* 2). He argues that contemporary theatre uses technology to perform in front of the audience. Reproduction and repetition of gestures contributes to live performance. Auslander constructed his critique of liveness on the premise that any form of performance either is mediated or is not a form of disappearance (*Liveness* 54-55). In his recent article 'Digital Liveness: A Historico-Philosophical Perspective' from 2012, he slightly redefines the relation of technology to the concept of liveness.

My review of the history of liveness from the early days of analog sound recording up to the advent of the digital initially led me to the conclusion that our experiencing digital

technologies as live is a function of the technologies' ability to respond to us in real time. I now wish to interrogate my own position in an effort to outline a phenomenological perspective on digital liveness. ('Digital Liveness' 3)

Auslander's premise is that liveness is not set as a condition in itself but is a 'historically variable effect of mediatization' ('Digital Liveness' 3). Hence, as he writes, the live performance is only as long in history as the invention of recording media is, around 100 years (Auslander, 'Digital Liveness' 3). Auslander notices that the distinction between live and recorded performance becomes complex with the invention of radio, as live and recorded material is indistinguishable. For Auslander, 'Liveness is an interaction produced through our engagement with the object and our willingness to accept its claim' ('Digital Liveness' 9). He explains that the technological claim to be perceived as live has to be accepted by the audience to become personally perceived as live; this is the relation between technology and the user. This argument gives a perspective on the subject of presence and absence in contemporary times, where online presence is as present as it is absent, and, as Auslander proposes, it might depend on the acceptance of the user.

The subject of thought and representation has been examined by Herbert Blau, who works with Derrida's philosophy and theatre theory. In *Take up the Bodies: Theater at the Vanishing Point*, Blau argues that theatre presence is an illusion which is always 'ghosted' with words in the wide sense of textuality (*Take up the Bodies* 224). He writes about

the inescapable duality between body and mind in western metaphysics and theatre. Blau questions this process of perceiving, discussing 'perception reflecting upon itself' ('Ideology and Performance' 449), where performance makes visible things that are a part of a story, disappearing as soon as they become apparent. For Blau, the theatrical performance makes the notion of presence a main question for him. Blau looks at theatre presence in absence of material forms such as memory (*Take up the Bodies* 99), which is referred to in detail in a later part of this chapter when I write about the human body and the system of signification.

The work of Joseph Roach is examined in the chapter 'Staged Presence'. Roach is a theatre historian who published a number of influential works for performance and theatre studies, such as *The Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* (1985), *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (1996) and the one which is the most significant to this research, *It* (2007), in which he looks at the notion of the unmediated presence of the performer. An example of the subject of a Derrida-inspired mediation in theatre is examined with the work of Roger Copeland, *The Presence and Mediation* (1990). He is one of the first theatre theorists who wrote that the division/disagreement between theories about theatre proposed by Artaud and Brecht was on the basis of contrasting theories of presence and absence.

## THEATRE AS A TYPE OF FIGURATIVE SCRIPT

According to Derrida's theory, language and theatre are analogues. In 'The Problem of Textuality: Two Exemplary Positions', Edward W. Said compares the issue of textuality in Derrida's and Foucault's philosophies with reference to theatre. Said states: 'textuality is seen to be the written equivalent of a stage for which, paradoxically there are boundaries only to be jumped over, actors only to be decomposed into numerous parts, spectators who enter and exit with impunity, and an author who cannot decide whether he writes, or rewrites, or reads on one side of the stage page or the other' (692). Derrida wrote only a few articles that refer directly to theatre and one of them is 'The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation'. This popular text in theatre scholarship offers a discourse about authenticity, hierarchy and representation. In this study, Derrida analysed the theory of representation proposed by Antonin Artaud in *The Theater and Its Double*. Derrida's opinion about theatre is apparent when he says, 'Theater is born in its own disappearance' ('The Theater of Cruelty' 293), perhaps because of the ephemerality of its form. He wrote that representational theatre is finite and leaves no presence or object behind such as a book or work of art does. Theatre leaves impressions and thoughts; a play is carried through the spectator/reader in the act of attending and reading. Hence, it is a play of signification. Derrida, in reflecting on Artaud's theory, expresses the notion of disappearance as 'destruction of imitation'. Theatre, through representation of life,

'lets itself be doubled and emptied by negation' (Derrida, 'The Theater of Cruelty' 295) as it is not life, but positions non-representation (life itself) as 'original representation' (Derrida, 'The Theater of Cruelty' 299). However, what can be called 'life itself'? There is no singular or essential thing that one can refer to, and so 'original representation' might not take place. When the stage operates as an addition to the play, it represents the prewritten text that was thought of outside the stage. This is the most characteristic example of questioning the phenomenological assumption about presence that has been further developed in theatre studies by Fuchs.

The next example is Derrida's 'La Parole soufflée', which is also about the duality of spoken and written word. Here, Derrida further reveals contradictions in Artaud's claims to end representation in theatre. Derrida finds it impossible to conduct Artaud's theatre of cruelty as a critique of representation because, according to Derrida, it will always remain a representation. There are noticeable differences between Derrida's thoughts and Artaud's philosophy in their perception of signifiers, but they both notice the significance of signs as objects, and the performer and the audience as a part of language of theatre. In *The Theater and Its Double*, Artaud refers to signifiers as present in the moment of performance.

It has not been definitively proved that the language of words is the best possible language. And it seems that on the stage, which is above all a space to fill and a place where something

happens, the language of words may have to give way before a language of signs whose objective aspect is the one that has the most immediate impact on the audience. Considered in this light, the object work of the *mise en scène* assumes a kind of intellectual dignity from the effacement of words behind gestures and from the fact that the esthetic, plastic part of theatre drops its role of decorative intermediary in order to become, in the proper sense of the word, a directly communicative language.

(Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double* 107)

Artaud writes about all the elements that function as theatre, and the key difference between his theory and Derrida's theory is based on the notions of presence and absence. One finds performance as presence in physicality, and the other looks at theatre as a representation. As examined in the previous chapter, this division can be further traced on the differences between traditions of philosophy.

### *Theological Space*

The stage is theological for as long as its structure, following the entirety of tradition, comports the following elements: an author-creator who, absent and from afar, is armed with a text and keeps watch over, assembles, regulates the time or the meaning of representation, letting this latter represent him as concerns what is called the content of his thoughts, his

intentions, his ideas. (Derrida, 'The Theater of Cruelty' 296)

This fragment displays a concept of theatre as a hierarchical structure where, on the one hand, there is a director-creator, the absent god whose thoughts are found by spectators (if such a thing is possible), and on the other hand there are spectators, 'a passive, seated public, a public of spectators, of consumers, of "enjoyers" – as Nietzsche and Artaud both say' (Derrida, 'The Theater of Cruelty' 297). The 'theological stage' is another term for the logocentric and hierarchical stage. In this system, spectators are only supposed to absorb representations that are provided by the director: 'He lets representation represent him through representatives, directors or actors, enslaved interpreters who represent characters who, primarily through what they say, more or less directly represent the thought of the "creator"' (Derrida, 'The Theater of Cruelty' 297). Against this anatomy of theatre comes de-sedimentation, where there is no central signified, but associations of hints and traces. In ruins of hierarchy one can find the concept of the emancipated spectator, which states that the implications of one's own thoughts make sense of the elements of theatre that are not displayed. One can make sense of anything that is suggested to be present or not by relating a thing to a network of associations that already seem to transpire when one is thinking and this is the interplay between presence and absence. Yet, the space of thinking is another feature of marking absence and in Derrida's theory it is named 'spacing'. This is another blurred boundary between writing and 'the space in between present mark': 'Between the non-phonetic

space of writing (even “phonetic” writing) and the space of the stage [...] of dreams the boundary is unsure’ (Derrida and Mehlman, ‘Freud and the Scene of Writing’ 100). This is due to the fact that the space in between marks is also a signifier. This part is presented to outline another dimension of present absence as a signifier of undefined centre of presence.

*Derrida on Theatre: Of Grammatology*

Another Derrida’s text on theatre is in *Of Grammatology*. There, theatre is presented in this text as a place that brings together ‘spectacle and discourse [...] glance and speech [where one can] listen to himself’ (Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 304). In ‘The Theorem and the Theater’, Derrida points out the phonetic value of language, as ‘phonetic writing, it keeps an essential relationship to the presence of a speaking subject in general [...] to the voice as the self-presence of a life which hears itself speak’ (*Of Grammatology* 303). There, he writes about a gap between the representer and represented using the example of an actor and a preacher. The key difference between these two states is ‘ethical responsibility for their words’ (Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 305), there being a detachment between an actor’s speech and his/her own thoughts and beliefs. This concerns the amount of self-presence in the moment of speech (if such a quality can be defined or quantified). Notwithstanding this, the fact that a preacher is speaking out about his beliefs does not mean that the text has not been prepared beforehand in accordance to other texts or any ethical norms that are referred to. The preacher has

dogmatic believes that function as presence. These two situations, the actor ‘acting’ and preacher ‘preaching’, are not significantly different if we look at the actions as a play of metaphors. Language, despite context, is effective as an exchange and performance of signifiers. The difference between them conditions belief in the existence of an essence of a spoken word, a referential point of signification, and the notion of essential presence as ‘the truth’. The example of a preacher and an actor displays Derrida’s later political concept of democracy. There the question of ethics is examined in two ways, as a simultaneous responsibility to the systematic and dominant code and as the singular responsibility. This is another example of aporia in simultaneous existence of those responsibilities, as both are conditioned with contrasting and limited norms. Derrida’s use of deconstruction in his early works might suggest that any signifier can mean any other signifier in a constant play of signification. However, language does not work this way, as in order to be understood, there have to be certain agreements on meaning. Those decided meanings are the preferred readings of the signifier. Derrida, in his later works, published on the subject of responsibility and the implication of ethics and politics in this play of meanings. Therefore, meanings are not in a free play, as they are contingently fixed in particular contexts of time and space. Interpretations happen in social circumstances and depend on context.

*Signifiers of the Body*

Theatre makes objects present through the use of language, even if they are only metaphors without any other reference. What is the link between text and the human body performing in theatre? Herbert Blau, as introduced at the beginning of the chapter, is one of the most influential contemporary theorists of theatre whose works are shaped by Derrida's philosophy. Blau analyses poststructuralism from the perspective of metaphysics of presence, such as being of thought and immediacy in Live Art. Blau's theory about language and textuality proposes that 'we are as much spoken as speaking, inhabited by our language as we speak' ('Ideology and Performance' 458). For Blau, language is somehow embedded in a human being as an element of thought. Yet, defining language as an element of thought implies a reconsideration of the notions of 'self-presence', 'immediacy', and 'thought'. If thought is language (because it is not *made of* anything or *constructed with* anything), then it cannot be present or immediate. These qualities of liveness appear to be key to contemporary live art and those forms integrating the experience of time, art, and performance. Here I introduce Blau's theory from 'Ideology and Performance', where he analyses Live Art, Body Art, and other events that define themselves through concepts of immediacy and liveness. In his opinion, the body is more 'coded' than any other system of language as there are certain elements that control reactions such as 'common sense, accepted opinion, habitual reflexes, the conservatism of instincts [...],

the established view of reality, the taken-for-grantedness and unexamined propositions, about life, about language, about politics of behaviour, about the acting and truth which define that truth' (458). He explores the ideology of performance that responds to the social structure where the human body is embedded. In Blau's 'Ideology and Performance' article, theatre and experimental art are situated in one system of signification. Production of meaning does not depend on one individual but on the person being 'inhabited by language' (Blau, 'Ideology and Performance' 459). This is an immersion in the local context of language. Blau refers to the ideational structure of language and points out that the absent signified is always more meaningful than the thing suggesting a meaning. For Blau, this is the mechanism that joins theatre and performance of any kind. Blau's theory about theatre, a performing body and thought is influenced by Derrida's perspective about opposition between absence and presence. His connection between the human body and a coded object has been influential on the thesis. Next dimension of present absence examines the ideology of presence through the concept of naturalness.

*Naturalness in Theatre as a Commodity*

Concepts of the *naturalness* and *rightness* of something are, according to Blau, other names for ideology, since 'it is the truth of an illusion which we have forgotten is an illusion' ('Ideology and Performance' 446). Here, the binary position of culture and nature

comes into play as another system that is deconstructed by Derrida in his analysis of Lévi-Strauss and Rousseau in *Of Grammatology*. These ideas are analysed in connection to theatre as a structure of culture where naturalness is the 'believable quality'. Not only do actors have to perform *naturalness*, so does theatre as a larger institution:

Everything in the structural reality of theater practice is ideological: not only the price of a ticket, but the conditions of the gathering, the attitude of the ushers, the advertising or want of it in the playbill, program notes or their absence (on the grounds, as they say, that a play ought to speak for itself, which it never does because it ideologically can't), air conditioning in the theater, the size of the candy bar, one's distance from the stage, the thickness of the makeup or its absence, whenever or not you can see the actors sweat, the division of the audience from the stage [...] ideology is a mental set. [...] the use and exposure of lights, and the weird phenomenon of the curtain. (Blau, 'Ideology and Performance' 447)

Curtains are one of the elements of theatre that seem to have their place on the edge of the stage, even if they are not physically there. All of these elements including actors, producers, and designers work with the director, who sets himself or herself the authority to provide played time and scenery. Blau believes that the director decides on 'the interpretation which, as we're told, is ideological to its core, by the

nature of interpretation itself, even when there is no text' ('Ideology and Performance' 447), and therefore it depends on interpretation. One might argue with this statement because even if there is text or just context, there could be as many interpretations as members of an event. Blau described this as, 'Reflecting the idea that the agencies and instruments of perception alter the nature of what is seen' ('Ideology and Performance' 450). The 'relativity of the frames of reference' ('Ideology and Performance' 450) has to be incorporated into the reception of performance. Similar thought about theatre and objects is expressed by Michael Fried in his work on objecthood, art and the beholder. In *Art and Objecthood*, he conveys how theatre gives 'a sense of temporality, of time both passing and to come, simultaneously approaching and receding, as if apprehended in an infinite perspective' (Fried, *Art and Objecthood* 146). Studies by Fried are further applied to this research in the chapter analysing 'Objects and Things' in the framework of deconstruction. Derrida's philosophy also suggests reconsideration of the notion of nothing in context of theatre. Absence is often defined as nothing, a structure of ideology of nothingness build upon an absent centre. For Blau, structure of theatre has been also defined in terms of ideology.

#### *Staging Nothingness: Brain as a Stage*

In 'The Nothing That Is: Aesthetics of Anti-Theater' Blau enquires about a quality that he believes is essential to make theatre. He finds



this quality of *nothing* in a construction of thought, ‘what makes theater? the answer might be Hamletic: thinking makes it so’ (‘The Nothing That Is’ 49). However, Blau recognises that thinking alone would make daydreaming rather than theatre, but the difference relates to the context one is placed in. There is nothing unusual about daydreaming in theatre, but what he argues for is theatre in the mind, an ‘anti-theatrical precedent for keeping a play in the text and staging in the mind’ (‘The Nothing That Is’ 52). Blau identifies anti-theatre as the kind of theatre that is not physically present but present instead in the mind. He pictures it as one particle of theatre, such as matter and anti-matter, and so he analogically recognises theatre and anti-theatre as occurring through ‘materializing as disappearance’ (‘The Nothing That Is’ 57). This theme is close to this research inquiry as it provides reference to the thesis. In discussing anti-theatre, Blau points at theatre that happens in the viewer’s response to the action. The response makes presence through thought. In ‘The Nothing That Is: Aesthetics of Anti-Theater’ he compares anti-theatre to ‘a sort of leak in the Real, it seems brought into being by thought – though maybe the thing itself, disappearing in the perceiving’ (49). For Blau, absence is referred to as a quality and a ‘substance’ that happens in the viewer’s mind. This concept of absence has its origin in recognising the missing element, and therefore it is an idealised signified of the supposed (to be in that place in front of a viewer) presence. Blau’s theatre is ‘inexhaustibly ideational, with a repletion of image’ (‘The Nothing That Is’ 52).

Applying Derrida’s theory to theatre analysis contributes to discovering examples of absence in every presence in theatre. In this research, absence in theatre is a part of every presence as presence always points at some other signifier. Hence, though it appears present, it is not, as there is no point of reference. ‘The Nothing That Is: Aesthetics of Anti-Theater’ provides examples where absence is a portion of the experience of presence. Blau’s theory about thought as theatre is not that far removed from another dimension of present absence that can be found in the structure of binary oppositions in language.

#### TEXT IS EQUALLY PRESENT AS ABSENT

This section of the chapter examines Derrida’s opinion about *in-between-ness* of binary oppositions in examples of grapheme, aporia, trace, and *différance* that have been mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. It is necessary to explore all of these elements as they are relevant to theatre’s present absence elements discussed in the next chapters. The debate about identity of presence is a component of the philosophy of *différance*. The chapter ‘Signature Event Context’ from *Margins of Philosophy* argues that presence of identity is altered through decision and intention of communication, where the act of communication is also extended to the experience of presence that cannot be full, or pure, or transcendental as there is always something missing from interpretation:

this unity of the signifying form is constituted only by its iterability, by the possibility of being repeated in the absence not only of its referent, which goes without saying, but of a determined signified or current intention of signification, as of every present intention of communication. This structural possibility of being severed from its referent or signified (and therefore from communication and its context) seems to me to make of every mark, even if oral, a grapheme in general, that is, as we have seen, the nonpresent remaining of a different mark cut off from its alleged “production” or origin. And I will extend this law even to all “experience” in general, if it is granted that there is no experience of pure presence, but only chains of different marks. (Derrida, ‘Signature Event Context’ 318)

To conduct a critique of the concept of presence, in the perspective of this theory one has to find out how presence is interpreted. Derrida associated presence with (what he called) western metaphysics and logocentrism, where being equals presence. While questioning this idea of being as presence one might enquire, ‘How does one approach the history of logos without falling into the logocentrism which determinates the history of Western metaphysics, even if it is a necessary fiction’ (Syrotinski 23). This issue seems to be apparent only to the surface of the enquiry, because if one traces back the network of meaning that the word *logos* signifies, one would discover how plural and

non-essential the supposed equivalent word *reason* is. Logos is a signifier for words such as reason, intelligence, language, speech, thesis, argument, and definition, etc. (Syrotinski 25). Each one can supplement the word logos, thus, in the logic of *différance* there cannot be a concept of pure reason as ‘[t]he supplement is always the supplement of a supplement. One wishes to go back from the supplement to the source: one must recognize that there is a supplement at the source’ (Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 304). Therefore, the critique of logocentrism already includes the notion of deconstruction because there is a non-essence of logos. Instead of essence there is a play of presence and absence. How can these two opposites be connected together? This question has been interpreted by many scholars in reference to Derrida’s work. One of them, Richard Rorty in *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, explains Derrida’s idea of presence and absence in the schematic way of, ‘Y, the condition of possibility of X, is also the condition of the impossibility of X [to] put a lot more simply: [...] that you cannot use the word “A” without being able to use the word “B”, and vice versa, even though nothing can be both an A and an B’ (16). The condition of possibility of A can be B in the future as a promise or in the past as a memory. In response to Rorty, Derrida wrote a letter that communicates his theory of trace and binary oppositions in relation to the concept of future:

There is the future. [...] There is something to come. [...] That can happen, and I promise in opening the future or in leaving the future open. This is not utopian, it is what takes place here

and now, in a here and now that I regularly try to dissociate from the present. Although this is difficult to explain briefly in this context, I try to dissociate the theme of singularity happening here and now from the theme of presence and, for me, there can be a here and now without presence. (Derrida, 'Remarks on Deconstruction' 83)

The promise of the future to come is a form of present with qualities of absence – it is not, but it is believed as certain to be. Derrida also talks about this impossible element of logocentrism as blurring the edges of presence and absence in his book *Aporias*. *Aporia* is the condition that marks limits in logic in binary oppositions.

### *Aporias*

Derrida explains *aporia* as a nonpassage and 'the experience of what happens' (*Aporias* 12) on the edge of something presented. He explores this as a borderline between false oppositions. In situations where there are no pure oppositions the concept of an edge or border in between things does not have a place. Perhaps this context displays the impossibility of nonpassage. *Aporias* is an example of Derrida's work on binary oppositions and the passage between two contrasting things, where by analysing the impossibility of border and transition between the two he is revealing a play of meanings that no longer exhibit just two hierarchical things in opposition: '[T]he impasse or *aporia*, stems from the fact that there is no limit. There is not yet or there is no longer

a border to cross, no opposition between two sides: the limit is too porous, permeable, and indeterminate' (20). Hence, his work, through discourse on presence and end of an entity, provides a reference point to entity of presence in the context of theatre.

Derrida explores the idea of borderlines between entities. He defines *aporia* as 'the difficult or the impracticable, here the impossible, passage, the refused, denied, or prohibited passage, indeed the nonpassage, which can in fact be something else, the event of a coming or of a future advent [...] which no longer has the form of the movement that consists in passing, traversing, or transmitting' (*Aporias* 8). In this text, Derrida examines the logic of borders. His study on *aporia* in death exposes the impossibility of possible (such as passing a border if there is no singular one), where the example of death appears from impossibility to 'determine time both as entity and as nonentity. And with the motif of the nonentity, or of nothingness, the motif of death is never very far away' (Derrida, *Aporias* 13). Derrida's apparent contradiction in terms is coherently dealt with, while maintaining the paradox, and this text is one of many examples where Derrida deploys deconstruction.

What does *beyond* mean when there is no borderline? Where does an entity finishes? He looks for examples where such borders do not make sense, as in example of limits of truth or being and death. In these examples, one can find plurality of metaphors which may depend on the context in which something is placed. Incompleteness of translation, even in the same language, provides another context for

## *Ontology of Absence*

interpreting and again this can be multiple. Added to this is the idea of incomplete presence, as outlined in *Speech and Phenomena*: 'One then sees quickly that the presence of the perceived present can appear as such only inasmuch as it is continuously compounded with a nonpresence and nonperception, with primary memory and expectation (retention and protention)' (Derrida 64). Derrida unravels the borderline between presence and absence is the notion of trace. This part of the chapter explores different processes that Derrida used to describe the relationship between presence and absence, such as aporia, borderlines, plural traces, and play in opposites.

### *Trace as Polysemic Present Absence*

Traces can equally be signifiers of the past presence or planned future, so this concept offers another illustration by Derrida regarding language not responding to being as presence in time of 'here and now' (presence). Traces can be footprints, a 'route on a map beforehand, or [...] a tracing on a piece of paper of an already present design' (Miller 47). In all these examples, trace is a mark of something 'pre-existing and non-linguistic' (Miller 47) either in the past or future. What roles have traces in the play of signification? They could be marks and grapheme of present absence, and they signify non-presence in the moment of presence. As Miller explains, '[T]race undoes the metaphysical or logocentric concept of time as made up of a present which is present here and now, a past which was once present and future which will one

day be present' (Miller 49). Additionally, in reading *Of Grammatology*, Miller suggests that trace is an 'extended' notion of writing:

Trace is always already there. It is not the result of the marking out of a trace in a world that already exists. The trace is everywhere, like writing, though it would be a mistake to think that the trace is just language, or just writing or just sign-system in the usual sense of that term as a set of marks referring outside themselves. (Miller 48)

After all, one can argue that traces are writing that reflect a set of metaphors linked with space and time. Materiality of presence and absence through artefacts and language is explored in detail in the chapter about 'Objects and Things.'

### *Play in Absence and Presence*

Derrida writes about language as a structure that is traditionally made with oppositions. He forms a network of general terms rather than one name for his theory as the philosophy he conducts is non-essentialist, so terms are not terminated but instead rely on the interplay of differences and signifiers. In an interview with Julia Kristeva featured in *Positions*, Derrida 'situated' the notion of *différance* as 'the systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences, of the spacing by means of which elements are related to each other. Spacing is simultaneously active and passive (the a of *différance* indicates this indecision as concerns activity and passivity, that which cannot be governed by or distributed

between the terms of this opposition) production of the intervals without which the “full” terms would not signify, would not function’ (Derrida, *Positions* 28). This theory makes presence conditional with absence and vice versa. The letter *a* changes the context of this word, adding an element of postponement so it acquires a dimension of time. It becomes deferred difference in one word, where the change in spelling is not audible.

Through this example, Derrida relates his concept of being to a concept of presence that is expanded from Heidegger’s being present through the notion of time. For Derrida, the notion of spacing is not equivalent to lack of positivity of presence, but spacing emerges itself as a mark and via play:

Play is the disruption of presence. The presence of an element is always a signifying and substitutive reference inscribed in a system of differences and the movement of a chain. Play is always play of absence and presence, but if it is to be thought radically, play must be conceived of before the alternative of presence and absence. Being must be conceived as presence or absence on the basis of the possibility of play (Derrida, ‘Structure, Sign, and Play’ 369)

Play is a process and performance of signifiers that occurs through engaging with art, theatre, or installations. However, a thing in sight does not necessarily have presence, because in the context of theatre a thing refers to some other thing; it serves as a metaphor that is present in front of the audience. As metaphor is not a singular and embodied thing, it

could be described as a play of meanings. Derrida refers to oppositions that are joined together as different, without assigning a sense of hierarchy to them. Another way in which he displays his concept of undecidability and the chain of signifiers is to enquire about absence and presence through the use of multiple words that question their absence or presence in logocentric tradition.\*\*\*\*\* Nonetheless, they are not the only means by which Derrida communicates the concept of difference. Just as the usage of three dots (ellipsis) indicates something unspoken and left out, but at the same time offering a trace of something to come, deconstruction is likewise a play of supplementarity as there is always something different to come.

\*\*\*\*\* The words he uses include those explored in this part of the chapter such as aporia, trace, and difference, and also include pharmakon, supplement, hymen, gram, spacing (Kristeva 30).

## CONCLUSION

The function of recognising aporia of present absence in theatre while participating in art events can be compared to thinking about elements of language while reading those words, in particular, thinking about taking a breath while seeing the dot at the end of the sentence. Testing this awareness of *writing* and the always escaping element of it

while reviewing selected pieces of art and theatre will, hopefully, result in another method of analysing ephemeral art events. Certainly, the same question applies to this method as to deconstruction, that is, whether such detachment from logocentrism is possible to achieve, as even when specifying ideas of *différance* or deconstruction one has to identify them with Derrida's name. Hence, they are 'Derrida's concepts' and he introduces definitions and oppositions (Said 683). In the words of Said, 'Derrida shows [...] that *écriture* is not so much only a process of production and effacement, tracing and retracing, but essentially a process of excess, overflowing, of bursting through, just as his own work itself attempts to burst through various conceptual barriers, enclosures, repressions' (583). Said compares Derrida's methods in philosophy to military operations and hunting metaphors. Hunting, as the critic's text 'appears to stand alongside the original text' (Said 682) and *original* text is doubled by the philosopher's text. Military, because it is 'in one respect an attack on a party of colonialists who have tried to make the land and its inhabitants over into a realization of their plans, an attack in turn partly to release prisoners and partly to free land held forcibly' (Said 683). Differences between signifiers are not secondary qualities added to one signified, and language is not replacing or representing an idea because, in this philosophy, language is the play of present absence. The play of language is a process that *does* things *present* (that do not have to be singularly present as they are metaphors) rather than is representation of a certain, idealistic presence. In *Speech and Phenomena*, Derrida explored

the unpronounceable name that in his mind represents *différance*: 'What is unnameable is the play that brings about the nominal effects, the relatively unitary or atomic structures we call names, or chains of substitutions for names' (Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena* 159).

The notion of absence and presence seen through Derrida's interpretation of epistemology corresponds with philosophies that the thinker was familiar with, such as 'Husserl's attitude to signs (and to language) pretended that signs were mere modifications of "a simple presence," as if in using language, presence could ever be present except as *represence* (or representation), reproduction, repetition – to all of which signs were not only inevitable but, paradoxically, the only presence, a *represence* proclaiming the absence of what the sign presented' (Said 684). Husserl looked for presence by removing signs, and for him presence was a kind of self-presence ignoring the language one is speaking in order to reaffirm one's existence. Derrida's perspective on this theory is related by Said: '[F]or every big word like "god" or "reality," there are small words like "and" or "between" or even "is," and Derrida's problematic position is that the big words don't mean anything outside themselves: they are significations attached for their entire sense to all the small words [...] which in turn signify more than they can adequately be understood to be expressing' (685). Derrida pointed out that looking *beyond* writing, is comparable to giving more value to presence, voice, or 'pretending that expression is immediate and does not rely upon the signifying visual chains, which is *écriture*, writing' (Said 685). From this angle, language

does not stand for absent presence of a *better thing*, but a process of interpretation.

This thesis explores deconstruction of presence in theatre, where writing is not only a mark on a piece of paper but is also present in the voice, in representation, and in receiving. Derrida notes that the distinction between writing and speech, in the context of presence and thought, might not be as clear as it appears to be. In *Of Grammatology*, he explores the idea that when we conduct a speech act we are no more present than when we write (although he still reflects on the differences between the two); the reason being that every speech requires the use of language in a certain structure in order to be *meaningful*, so it does not rely solely on immediacy. This example of speech and writing is not the only binary opposition that has been rethought via Derrida's philosophy. He reconsidered traditional divisions between dualities such as presence and absence, the mind as a source of consciousness, identity and its relation with the body and being, and so forth. Deconstruction seems to be a counterargument to the sense of immediacy, liveness, and essence of presence as being.

This chapter presented complex theories from Derrida's philosophy, such as notions of trace, de-sedimentation and *différance*. All of those dimensions are crucial to the thesis as they study aporia of present absence. The thesis can continue to apply theory to practices of theatre and art. In the following chapters I examine how metaphysics of absence work in a range of different forms. The thesis is divided into

chapters that explore Derrida's philosophy in objects, stage presence and the human body on stage and context as well as structure of performance. The next chapter analyses present absence applied to objects in theatre and art. This happens through questioning *fullness* of presence in objects and representation of absence in objecthood, or thingness.

but also the very act of naming. In *Speech and Phenomena*, Derrida explains that the act of naming is not a simple act of labeling, but a complex process of production and effacement, tracing and retracing, but essentially a process of excess, overflowing, of bursting through, just as his own work itself attempts to burst through various conceptual barriers, enclosures, repressions' (583). Said compares Derrida's methods in philosophy to military operations and hunting metaphors. Hunting, as the critic's text 'appears to stand alongside the original text' (Said 682) and *original* text is doubled by the philosopher's text. Military, because it is 'in one respect an attack on a party of colonialists who have tried to make the land and its inhabitants over into a realization of their plans, an attack in turn partly to release prisoners and partly to free land held forcibly' (Said 683). Differences between signifiers are not secondary qualities added to one signified, and language is not replacing or representing an idea because, in this philosophy, language is the play of present absence. The play of language is a process that *does* things *present* (that do not have to be singularly present as they are metaphors) rather than is representation of a certain, idealistic presence. In *Speech and Phenomena*, Derrida explored

the very act of naming as a process of production and effacement, tracing and retracing, but essentially a process of excess, overflowing, of bursting through, just as his own work itself attempts to burst through various conceptual barriers, enclosures, repressions' (583). Said compares Derrida's methods in philosophy to military operations and hunting metaphors. Hunting, as the critic's text 'appears to stand alongside the original text' (Said 682) and *original* text is doubled by the philosopher's text. Military, because it is 'in one respect an attack on a party of colonialists who have tried to make the land and its inhabitants over into a realization of their plans, an attack in turn partly to release prisoners and partly to free land held forcibly' (Said 683). Differences between signifiers are not secondary qualities added to one signified, and language is not replacing or representing an idea because, in this philosophy, language is the play of present absence. The play of language is a process that *does* things *present* (that do not have to be singularly present as they are metaphors) rather than is representation of a certain, idealistic presence. In *Speech and Phenomena*, Derrida explored



# ONTOLOGY OF ABSENCE

A PLAN OF THE PHD THESIS

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STAGED PRESENCE

The chapter examines difference in the binary oppositions of presence and absence in theatre and art. It is studied through examples of objects and things. The division between art represented by objects and things provides case studies for the de-sedimentation of Michael Fried's theory of objecthood. Martin Heidegger's theory of thingness, represented in a design context by Bill Brown. Traditionally, objects are connected with presence, as they are tangible, material entities, whereas things in the chapter are associated with non-material objects such as light or cloud that may possess the quality of being present. This provides an opportunity for deconstruction. Non-linguistic such as light or fog, which are present to the viewer as tangible objects, as an installation 'covered with light' in a light installation and one can see objects a certain distance from the viewer. Conversely, light is visible when reflected from a surface perceived as it appears. It seems clear which is more tangible. However, one could argue that, in practice, light is a material in art. This example demonstrates a spectator's response as presence to something not having a particular shape rather than observing an object that

signifies some other non-present thing, which might be different for each person.

Moreover, all the installations, performances and art objects are known from the same perspective – as theory, and as read from text and images. That method of spectating non-attended events through language is an experiment to test boundaries of play of signifiers and difference. I do not argue that textuality is text in a traditional sense as this thesis studies textuality as the play and difference of signifiers. Reading about performances and art exhibitions is using secondary sources to test the space of the spectator in making metaphors and a sense of difference between analysing attended and non-attended performances and images. In this chapter the space of a spectator to behold art is a key feature and quality of presence as explored through the concept of objecthood. De-sedimentation provides questions about the fullness of the notions of presence and absence. Hence, through the play of objects, one can inquire about the essence of presence. Things provide insight into the presence of the notion of absence. The aim of

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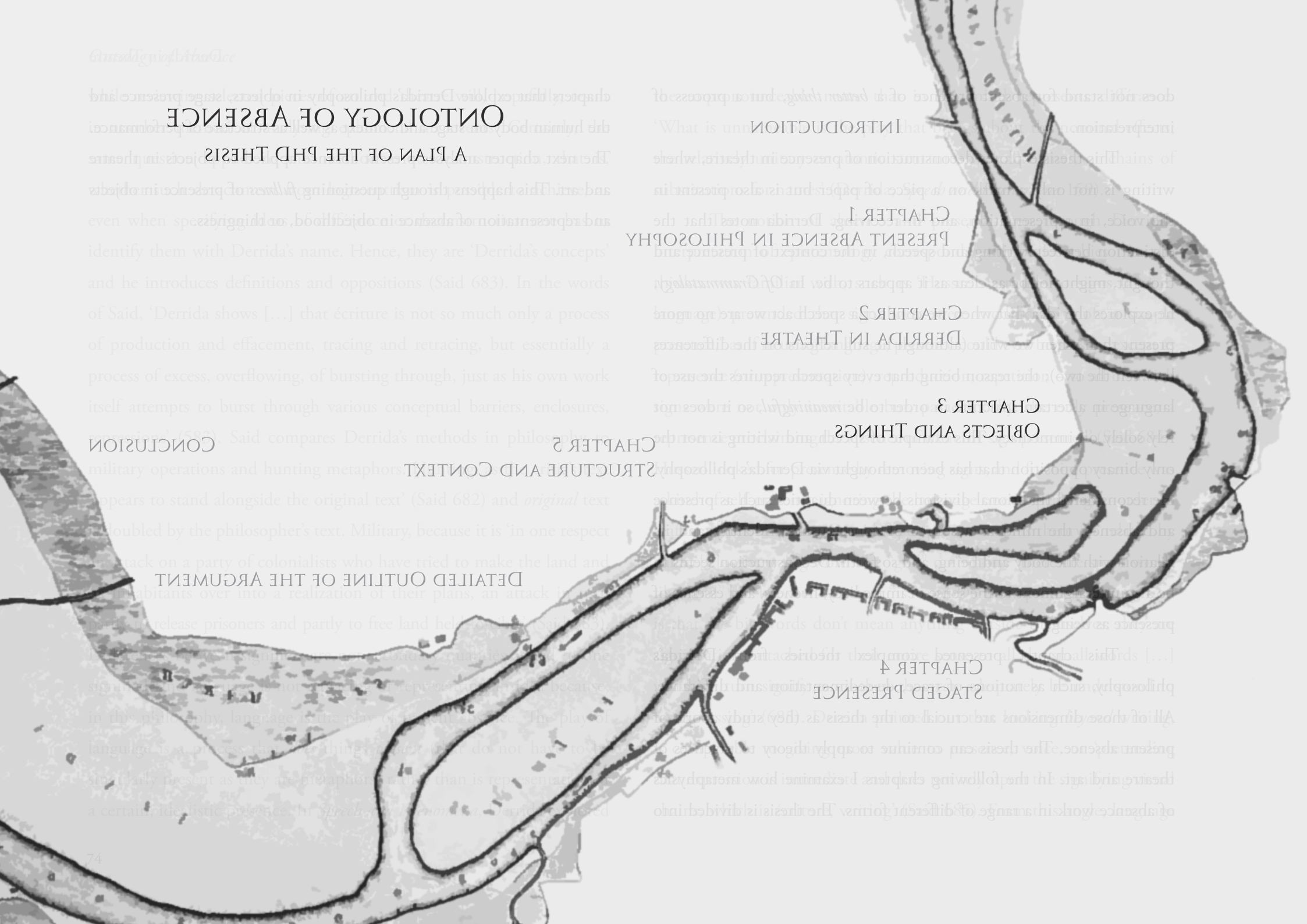
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# OBJECTS AND THINGS

This chapter examines *différance* in the binary oppositions of presence and absence in theatre and art. They are studied through examples of objects and things. The division between art represented by objects and things provides case studies for the de-sedimentation of Michael Fried's theory of objecthood and Martin Heidegger's theory of thingness, represented in a design context by Bill Brown. Traditionally, objects are connected with presence, as they are tangible, material entities, whereas things in this chapter are associated with nonmaterial objects such as light or cloud that *present* absence. This clarity of definition is an opportunity for deconstruction. Nontangibles such as light or fog, could be more present to the viewer than tangible objects, as one is 'covered with light' in the light installation and one only sees objects a certain distance from the viewer. Conversely, light is visible when reflected from a surface, whereas an object is perceived where it appears. It seems clear which is more tangible. However, one could argue that, in practice, light is a material in art. This example demonstrates a spectator's response as presence to something not having a particular shape rather than observing an object that

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the chapter is to explore objects in theatre to progress the research that develops *ontologic* of absence.

Objects are represented in the example of sculptures from Akram Khan's production *Zero Degrees*. The sculptures represent the performers, Khan and Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui. Onstage there are two human bodies and two sculptures, which signify the binary oppositions of presence and absence on many levels. Things are represented by the element of light, as lack of visibility in Antony Gormley's installation *Blind Light* and clear colours with light in the works of James Turrell, such as the *Wolfsburg Project*. In that last project, Turrell made a series of light installations, titled *Ganzfeld*.

This chapter first analyses Fried's distinction between art and objecthood and its dependence on presentness. The next part of the chapter involves Brown's 'thing theory', which points at codification of objects even in the absence of an object and establishes objects' functions as signifiers. In this theory, a thing working in its expected function is only an object when the function or context disappears. This section investigates de-sedimentation of the notion of absence presented through Heidegger's thingness, which is examined in Brown's theory. This form of grapheme is explored through the practice of installation art using mainly light. Those concepts are studied via Derrida's philosophy and are examined in selected pieces of art and theatre. For analysis of Fried's theory, sculptures are examined as performance through material composition, as art objects and as

a part of performance. Fried's notion of presence is expressed in essentialist terms, with clear negation of other theories of being as presence that happen through time. As he wrote in *Art and Objecthood*, 'I want to call attention to the utter pervasiveness – the virtual universality – of the sensibility or mode of being that I have characterized as corrupted or perverted by theater' (168). In this research, his concepts of presence as the essence of an art object and stage presence of an object provide a theoretical framework to analyse sculptures as art objects that have stage presence because they are part of a performance. De-sedimentation of Fried's theory begins with an exploration of a critic's notions of absence and presence in art through theatricality in opposition to dramatic quality and objecthood in contrast with art as object. The theory is applied to a practical example of sculptures and human bodies in a *Zero Degrees* performance.

## DRAMATIC ART AND THEATRICAL OBJECTHOOD

Michael Fried's discourse about the relationship between art and its beholder is explored in this chapter through his books *Absorption and Theatricality* and *Art and Objecthood*. First, this research provides a wider context for his critique of theatricality and modern art, as famously dealt with in the latter book. The notion of presence and absence is explored in *Absorption and Theatricality* as the opposition of qualities defining virtuosity in art, which is Fried's binary opposition of

‘dramatic’ and ‘theatrical’. The critic defines the notion of the dramatic as ‘present to itself’, a sudden, striking event. But in the theatrical context, the word ‘dramatic’ is close to ‘drama’, which suggests something already written. ‘Theatrical’ is something exaggerated, supplementary to dramatic, as representing the present absorption is questionable in theatre in terms of style of representation used in performance. Hence, where is the line between dramatic and theatrical, intended and pretended, and present and absent in theatre? Intended and pretended action is thematically near the subject of naturalness introduced in the previous chapter, which referred to this particular discourse of intentionality and absorption in Fried’s art theory. Fried writes that most literalist works are ‘hollowed’. They apparently have a ‘quality of having an inside [which] is almost blatantly anthropomorphic’, the space of the beholder. ‘What is wrong with literalist work is [...] that the meaning and, equally, the hiddenness of its anthropomorphism are incurably theatrical’ (Fried, *Art and Objecthood* 157). This is the very notion of theatricality that is in opposition, for Fried, to ‘naturalness and presence’. Fried argues against literalist art, as it happens through theatricality and is nothing new in art. From a modernist position, in ‘good’ art, the beholder should not be in any way included in the work, whereas literalist art lets the beholder be a part of art and allows art to pose for a beholder, without whom there is no ‘work as a whole’. The spectator can make art through reading a piece and being involved in its process of signification. Hence, the process of

making chains of signifiers, as an object of art, happens in time and through space. This case explores the borderline between the apparent opposition between naturalness and artificiality. Moreover, the study on the possibility of an impossible borderline between naturalness and the representation of nature displays Derrida’s notion of aporia, also discussed in the previous chapter, which is used in examples of theatre and art. Since the reader is already familiar with the previous discourse of aporia and *différance*, one needs to explore the application of Derrida’s philosophy to Fried’s theatre and art theory.

Fried’s work on *Art and Objecthood* was developed similar to the discourse about the binary opposition between art’s present and absent qualities through associating presence with art and absence with objecthood. About objecthood, he has said, ‘The meaning in this context of “the condition of non-art” is what I have been calling “objecthood”’ (Fried, *Art and Objecthood* 152), which is an object displayed in the context of space and spectating. He defined literalist work as needing spectatorship and as an object already within a situation that is as significant as the object itself. Fried notices that, unlike modernist art, the concept of time is a part of literalist work, as if time and the process of spectating would be the object of art. Displacing an object from a physical entity to the context of spectating opposes Fried’s definition of modernist art. Fried argues that this form of spectating can be defined as a form of theatre. For him, this is not art. He writes, ‘This literalist espousal of objecthood amounts to nothing

other than a plea for a new genre of theater, and theater is now the negation of art' (*Art and Objecthood* 153). From the context of Fried's other work, *Absorption and Theatricality*, one presumes that, by 'theatre', he means the 'notion of theatricality'.

*Absorption and Theatricality*

In *Absorption and Theatricality*, Fried argued that absorptive painting evaluated with the assistance of a dramatic conception of painting and theatricality is the negative side of 'not well-made art'. According to Fried, the relationship between art and beholder determined 'good art'. To achieve a dramatic effect, artists should 'find a way to neutralize or negate the beholder's presence, to establish the fiction that no one is standing before the canvas' (Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality* 108). The critic in this theory explores Diderot's writings on art and drama, as he believes this account of painting started with Diderot and ended with modern art. The relationship between art and beholder has been a subject of debate since the advent of the modern painting, which Fried traced to the mid-eighteenth century.

According to Fried, 'One primitive condition of the art of painting [is] that its objects necessarily imply the presence before them of a beholder' (*Absorption and Theatricality* 4). Fried writes that paintings, through enclosing particularity of composition, light, human poses and choice of objects, escape from 'theatricalizing consequences

of the beholder's presence' (*Absorption and Theatricality* 4). Characters' absorption in their thoughts and actions in Fried's theory is the element of full presence within a painting, not necessarily requiring the beholder to be a part of art as a spectator. This is his condition for a successful painting. In analysing the modern relationship between art and the spectator, Fried argues that the 'absorption' of a painting changed in the eighteenth century, effecting a different relationship between art and its beholder. In French paintings of the first part of the eighteenth century, the depicted person was absorbed by his own state of mind, thereby excluding objects or the beholder in the scene. 'The figure or figures had to seem oblivious to the beholder's presence if the illusion of absorption was to be sustained' (Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality* 66). Fried claims that changed in later paintings in which the depicted persons made eye contact with the beholder, thus being aware of the spectator who views the pictorial drama. Therefore, through dramatic composition and including the beholder as a viewer, the paintings were theatrical. The characters were pretending absorption, so they were theatrical, not authentic. But, as Fried remarks, the paintings depicted action that could or could not happen, so it is almost impossible to judge the intentionality of the acts in the paintings.

*Art and Objecthood*

Where is the borderline between art and theatre? Why give priorities and hierarchy in these debatable 'binary opposites'? At the

beginning of the book, Fried introduces his theory and espouses the view that the literalist representation of objecthood ‘amounted to a new genre of theater’ (*Art and Objecthood* 42). Fried criticises literalist inclusion of the spectator in art because ‘Literalism theatricalized the body, put it endlessly on stage, made it uncanny, or opaque to itself, hollowed it out, deadened its expressiveness, denied its finitude and in a sense its humanness, and so on. There is, I might have said, something vaguely monstrous about the body in literalism’ (Fried, *Art and Objecthood* 42). For Fried, theatricality is the representation of presence, whose portrayal of art is against modernist convention, as in the work of Artaud and Brecht, who argued against theatricality in theatre. But as the reader remembers from a previous chapter, representation is unavoidable in analysing Artaud’s theatre when using Derrida’s philosophy.

Fried explores the notion of a valuable quality in modernist art, and he connects the notion of art with the concept of authenticity and presence (or presentness) and labels that an essential quality. With the possible exception of contemporary art, one can see a work of art at any time, and the work looks the same, whereas theatre lacks this consistency. It is available only at a certain time, as part of an event. ‘Theater addresses [...] a sense of temporality, of time both passing and to come, simultaneously approaching and receding, as if apprehended in an infinite perspective’ (Fried, *Art and Objecthood* 167). Fried believes this is the primary difference between literalist work, painting and

sculpture. An art object has no duration; ‘at every moment the work itself is wholly manifest’ (Fried, *Art and Objecthood* 167). He adds that this gives a sense of presentness, the condition of constant presence to which artworks aspire (*Art and Objecthood* 167). Fried criticises minimalist art, which he terms ‘literalist art’, as ideological and therefore theatrical. He argues that the concept of time and presence associated with modernist art and literalist art contrasts diametrically. In modernist art, time does not matter, because in every instance the artefact is equally present. But in literalist art, time is the notion of presence. In literalist work time becomes an element that provides presentness rather than presence (Fried, *Art and Objecthood* 45).

Owing to an apparent lack of autonomous presence as an art object, Fried believes literalist art and theatre always includes a spectator or beholder, so he argues that theatricality is a deviation from art, which might be considered subjective. Hence, an object has a stage presence and is not an entity unto itself. ‘Literalist sensibility is theatrical because, to begin with, it is concerned with the actual circumstances in which the beholder encounters literalist work. [...] In previous art, “what is to be had from the work is located strictly within [it]”. The experience of literalist art is of an object in a situation – one that, virtually by definition, includes the beholder’ (Fried, *Art and Objecthood* 153). Therefore, this is a function rather than object, because it depends on light, space and the spectator. The object itself is just an element of a greater event of art

presencing through thinking. As he argues, the effect of presence is associated with literalists in the way that 'Presence can be conferred by size or by the look of nonart' (*Art and Objecthood* 152). Morris Louis describes the theatricality effect as 'the largeness of the piece in conjunction with its nonrelational, unitary character, [which] distances the beholder – not just physically but psychically. It is [...] this distancing that makes the beholder a subject and the piece in question [...] an object' (in Fried, *Art and Objecthood* 154). Fried believes the object must be the centre of art, not the spectator. According to the critic, the lack of object in the centre of attention is the case in literalist art and theatre. Hence, the larger the object's scale, the greater the distance between art and the beholder and the greater relevance of object-hood rather than the object of art. To test this association, this chapter analyses the objects in *Zero Degrees* and light installation works by Antony Gormley and James Turrell in which there is no physical object because only colourful light or fog fills the exhibition space. To experience their art, one must enter the objecthood of the art situation. To question the 'clarity of self-presence', this chapter analyses a work of art that has no object. Gormley's art, and likewise Turrell's work, is made with light, but instead of clarity of vision, it plays with opacity in fog. Those two examples inquire about objecthood and the presence of absence in dissimilar ways. In Fried's words, this would be the theatricality of objecthood.

In *Absorption and Theatricality*, Fried argues that, in modern paintings, the notion of absorption within art finds its antithesis in

theatricality. Hence, the art critic claimed a clear opposition between drama and theatre. His book describes drama as absorption through certain action and activity, when characters in a painting are involved in their thoughts, which Fried calls 'present' and 'authentic'. Modernist artists have sought authenticity as the quality that serves virtuosity in a work of art. Theatre, or rather theatricality, happens when the characters are aware of the beholder and pose for them. Hence, for Fried, in the binary opposition of positive and negative, 'drama' is positive, whereas 'theatre' is negative. This discourse is based on the mode of intentionality of the depicted characters, which might not exist. Fried's contribution to the dialogue about the relationship between art and beholder also affects how this relationship can be viewed in theatre. The critic also points out the similarity to the negation of theatricality in Brecht and Artaud's theatres. I suggest this division helps shape self-presence in live art performances. Fried's binary opposition of drama and theatricality can be applied to the basic opposition of speech and writing. But speech (drama) is traditionally associated with presence (presentation), and writing (theatricality) is conventionally linked to the absence of presence and the representation of something. Hence, there is a substitution. This supplement to intentionality, in the paintings analysed by Fried, is the notion of theatricality. In paintings, a dramatic encounter is something that is present through the absorption of characters in their actions, as in a live art experience where a performer is absorbed in an *action* reflected in a physical



*reaction*, that suggests immediacy and presence. Yet, what are the criteria to judge intentionality?

## OBJECT: DRAMATIC ART

### *Zero Degrees: Sculptures and Human Beings*

This part of the chapter applies theory to practice and explores Fried's categories of art identities between presence and absence in art and objecthood. This section is about Derrida's notion of trace in writing shaped like sculptures that are performers, and performers who pretend to be sculptures and tell a real or fictitious story. Objects in theatre are signifiers that, during a performance, help situate a concept in a desired context. Objects can provide the intention to refer to their other functions and compare to the function of pronouns, which refer to other words in language.

An example is the relationship between objects and performers can be examined through Akram Khan's *Zero Degrees*. This is one of Khan's early but well-recognised works that is comparable to his other works such as *Loose in Flight* (2000), *Kaash* (2002), *Ma* (2004), *Sacred Monsters* (2006), *In-I* (2008), *Bahok* (2008), *Confluence* (2009), *Gnosis* (2010), *Vertical Road* (2010) and *Desh* (2011). Khan's characteristic style is a hybrid of genres of theatre, dance and visual arts. He was born in London of Bengali parents, and his Indian heritage is a significant part of his work. To compose a narrative, he merges contemporary western

dance techniques with Kathak, Indian classical dance movements. The combination of the techniques results in his characteristic style of performance. Akram Khan Company was established in 2000, and it has been recognised internationally; in 2012 the company made a short performance in the London Olympic Games Opening Ceremony.

Objects in Akram Khan's performance *Zero Degrees* are limited to a pair of sculptures and performers. The sculptures seem to be supplements for the performers, as they substitute their movement and speech with stillness and silence (Images from this performance are presented in figures 1 and 3). Human beings are called 'objects' in this chapter, as for spectators they can be as present or absent as sculptures. Dancers and sculptures are binary oppositions that in a performance might not occupy a contrasting position. Sculptures and the performers refer to the notion of presence and absence in representation and repetition, which occurs in many dimensions of *Zero Degrees*, from the repetition of words and gestures and two performers' simultaneous speech to sculptures being casted in moulds by performers.

The performance in its narrative deals with the issues of transpassing and being in between entities regarding a definition of identity, politics and geography. *Zero Degrees* involves a concept of being between borders and passing cultural and geographical landmarks, figuratively and literally, for example, cultural belonging or being at the geographical 'degree zero' where London is situated. This relates also to the edges of

life presented in performance, for example, in situations like death, one person's influence over another, or the social limits of acceptable behaviour. Judith Mackrell, reviewing the performance for *The Guardian*, described the narrative in the following way:

The narrative core of the duet is based on a journey Khan made from Bangladesh to India. He reports that guards on the border harassed him because he found himself sharing his train carriage with a dead man. Yet as Cherkaoui narrates the opening chapter of the anecdote with Khan, the unity of their voices, their shared gestures, even their hesitations, makes it seem as though they lived through the story together. (Mackrell, 'Zero Degrees')

Cherkaoui, through simultaneous gestures and speech, is Khan's double. He is a trace to Khan's double belonging to India, his parents' country, and the UK, as he considers himself British. Cherkaoui is also culturally attached to two countries. He was born in Belgium, his mother is Flemish and father Moroccan. The simultaneous repetition of dramatic action reveals the theatricality of the narrative and, because of that, the scene provides a complex play of signifiers. As silent sculptures, both performers become traces of the situation when Khan was beside the corpse, and though he said he wanted to help, he could not, because he could be suspected of murder. However, if a viewer witnessed the performance taking the perspective of sculptures, one can see the bodies of performers as signifiers pointing at an impossibility of passage similar to what the

sculptures are referring to. The issue of in-between-ness is expressed through the narrative and visual aspects of the performance. As argued by Royona Mitra, who writes about Khan's art, his work finds its aesthetics in hybridity. Mitra discusses the relationship between Khan's identity and his art. She analyses his influence on the contemporary physical theatre that emerged from the hybridisation of genres.\* *Zero Degrees* as a performance also crosses borders of art disciplines, as it is made with dancers, a sculptor and a composer: Khan and Cherkaoui working with Gormley and Nitin Sawhney.

The objects that Gormley made for this performance respond to questions posed in other examples of his art. The image from Figure 2 represents one of Gormley's works that is not directly connected with *Zero Degrees*. This is a sculpture from the series *Aperture*, made from 2009 until 2010. This piece tried to show the artist's concept which represents human beings as places of passage between borders, rather than fixed entities. As an artist, he usually engages with signifiers

\* Royona Mitra in "Akram Khan: performing the third space" refers to the notion of physical theatre and finds its distinctiveness in plural forms of embodied expression. She locates the uniqueness of physical theatre in its being undefined, flexible and therefore open to hybridity. Hence, physical theatre finds its features in the possibility of alteration. This is a mode of identifying visual art without closing its potential in fixed characteristics.

relating to the subjects of infinity or the transcendental signified combined with the ephemeral nature of a human being, which presents another set of binary opposites between life and death, presence and absence. According to Veit Loers and Sandy Nairne, who describe his early practises in the book *Stadtische Galerie Regensburg*, 'His sculptures are the allegories of human existence' (38). They are metaphors, a form of arche-writing. Gormley's work is 'based on an individual ontological experience, which at a certain time involved the experience of the body' (Loers and Nairne 38). Their opinion perhaps refers to an object as a signifier, which is the effect of 'absent presence' reflected through the object. A kind of objecthood is reflected through a sculpture in which its function is to signify the beholder's definitions and identities. Hence, the experience becomes an *ontologic* absence, as the place of a human being in the work of art. This stages a human body in process, a play of different signifiers rather than an object of presence with essence.

Was this also the case with the sculptures in *Zero Degrees*? The performance has been analysed through video recordings, reviews and other secondary sources. In this chapter there is no personal opinion about the sculptures' reception. The issue of their impact as potentially 'uncanny', 'natural' or 'dramatic' will be explored through the reviews of theatre critics who provide some information on the audience's reception of the work. Following on from this are two fragments from two different reviews; both mention the figures Gormley made in the play with performers. Jenny Gilbert wrote the first review for

*The Independent*, whereas Judith Mackrell wrote the second one for *The Guardian*.

1. Gormley's contribution lies in a pair of articulated silicone figures made from live casts of each dancer, and their mute, uncomprehending stare adds another layer to the sense of witness and witnessed, bully and bullied, living and inert. Mostly the dummies are simply lugged about or propped up to stand and stare, but when Cherkaoui's double appears to give him a mighty slap in the face it comes as more shocking than funny. (Gilbert, 'Zero Degrees')

2. Gormley's contribution is much quirkier: a pair of life-size silicone dummies that function as rough doubles of the dancers. Inert but curiously emotive, these figures most of the duet just standing witness. But every now and then they are manhandled into the choreography, adding to a work whose overall tone is deliberately odd, a mix of stunning virtuosity and freakish flourishes. (Mackrell, 'Zero Degrees')

Both opinions refer to a sense of contrast enclosed and referred to by the objects of sculptures and performers. The doubles of the dancers are presented as silent witnesses, and the impersonated reaction to a slap is referred to as 'mighty' as if the sculpture had the authority to decide on the hierarchy of human values. In the first review, Gilbert

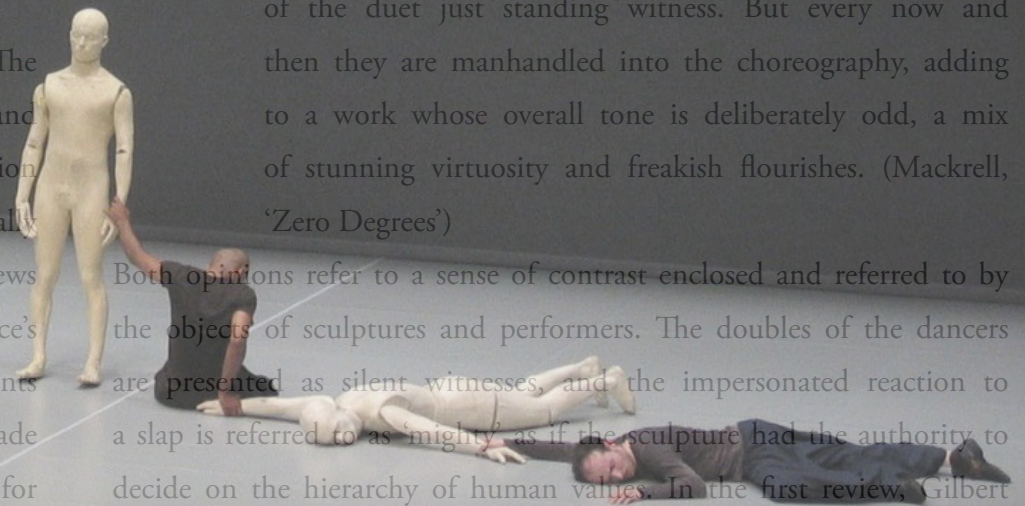


Fig. 1. Cactusbones. *Zero Degrees*. 2005. flickr.com. Web. 16 May 2011.

life presented in performance, for example, in situations like death, one person's influence over another, or the social limits of acceptable behaviour. Judith Mackrell, reviewing the performance for *The Guardian*, described the narrative in the following way:

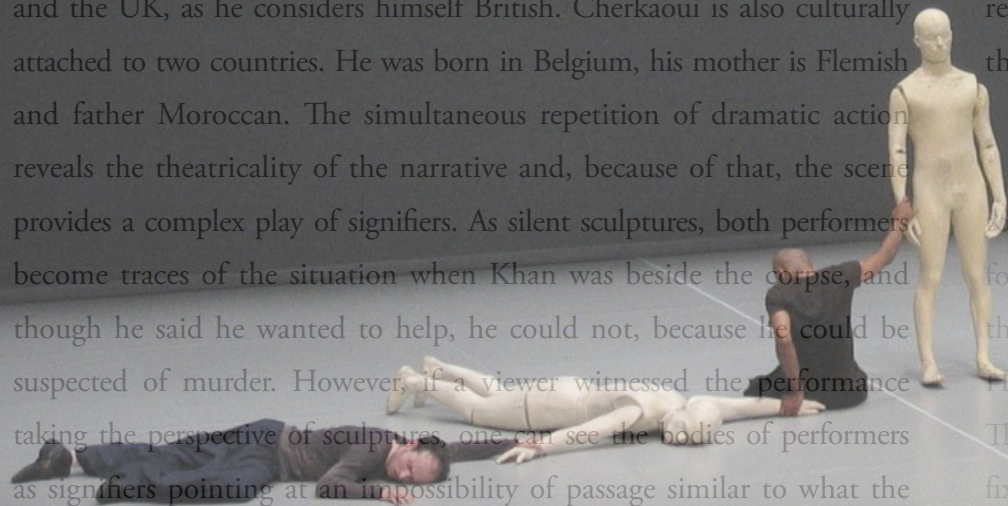
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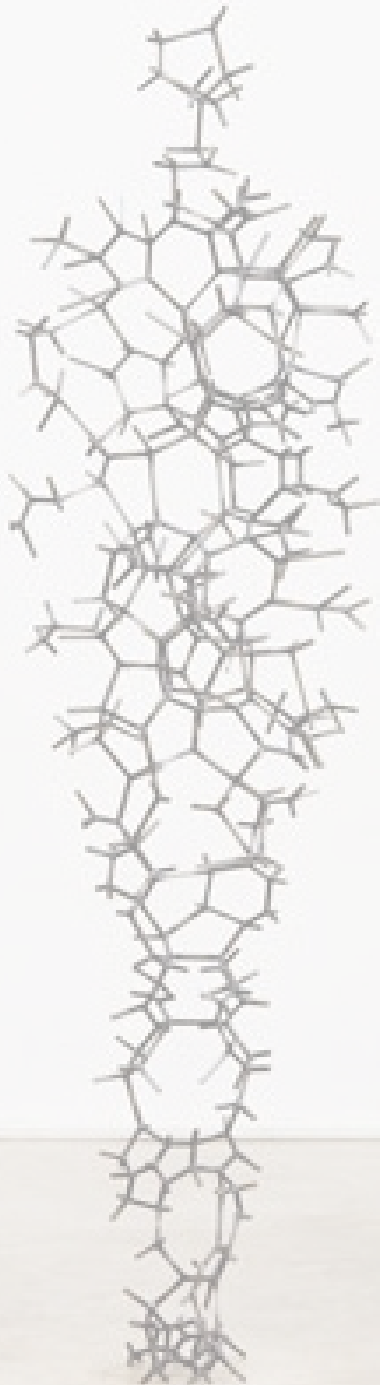
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writes about the uncanny feeling of the personality projected onto the double. The second review presents the dummies as objects that function in a certain way. For example, they are seen as instruments in the choreography of the performance. The two reviews present different opinions about the metaphors the sculptures provide, but they both agree that the doubles caused a reconsideration of awayness through their presence.

According to Derrida, there is no essence or centre of objects' meaning. In *Writing and Difference* Derrida writes that this 'unique point [centre] "escapes structurality" because it can be within the structure and outside it. [...] The center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality has its center elsewhere. The center is not the center' ('Structure, Sign, and Play' 351), the centre as 'a sort of non-locus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions come into play' ('Structure, Sign, and Play' 353-354). Following this theory, there might not be a centre in the structure of meaning; therefore, the metaphor is never purely present. Samuel IJsseling explained this issue with another example: a word. Referring to Derrida's philosophy, he writes that, 'to be capable of meaning something, it has to be fundamentally repeatable and recognizable, and it has to refer to other words to which it is committed' (30), so through this process, a word cannot be original or fully present.

According to Fried's theory of presence in art, the object must



Fig. 3. Gregor, Lutz. Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui. 2005. *lutz-gregor.com*. Web. 16 May 2011.

be 'absorbed in itself' and must not include the spectator in its 'dramatic entity'. Objects are traditionally associated with presence as they are tangible and appear not to depend on time, but how present are they if they signify something different? In this chapter, I argue that objects are graphemes because they signify other signifiers. Moreover, the sculptures studied in this chapter are only accessible to the spectator through seeing them from a certain distance. They invoke many metaphors as human bodies performing in the analysed production. Objects here are studied as a 'moving network of signifiers' rather than 'presence with essence'.

#### THINGS: THINGING AS THEATRICAL OBJECTHOOD

This part of the chapter analyses the theory of objecthood and theatricality previously outlined. Fried's concept is considered through art installations that use light as a material. They question the traditional distinction of the binary opposition between presence and absence through lack of a physical object at the centre of art. The installations focus on the reflection of light on the spectator and the surrounding environment. The absence of an object is present as the production of signifiers in making metaphors. Hence, this absent presence of an object is explored in this chapter through the notion of *things*. Bill Brown, influenced by Martin Heidegger's theory about the 'thingness of things', inquires about the functionality of an object and consideration of it rather than the object itself. This theory seems to refer to

Fried's notion of objecthood. But instead of having the negative connotation of not being accredited as valuable art, thingness objectifies its potential through its expected function and the consideration of other possible ways of using an object. Hence, what a thing might do is more than what it is meant to do, and the possibility of signifying gives present potential, despite the lack of qualities associated with presence. Light is used not only to illuminate, but also to blind. It is perceived as material and reflection. According to Brown, if 'thinking the thing, to borrow Heidegger's phrase, feels like an exercise in belatedness' because of thinking as a response to the thing's function, 'the feeling is provoked by our very capacity to imagine that thinking and thing-ness are distinct' (16). This sentence displays the possibility of thinking through objects or things as discussed in the example of objects – sculptures from *Zero Degrees* – as well as making things through thinking, which happens through metaphors.

Brown's theory relies on Heidegger's late essays, in particular 'The Thing' and 'Building Dwelling Thinking' from the book *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Brown argues for a theory about the 'thinging of the thing', which further applies to Heidegger's concept of being and Being, and his philosophy of presence. This theory about the 'thinging thing' is clarified in the book *A Companion to Heidegger*. Here James Edwards writes about the concept in 'The Thinging of the Thing: The Ethic of Conditionality in Heidegger's Later Work'. He provides an accessible account of the way objects are taken for granted in the



world, with the only attention given to them when they dysfunction, and how different they are to the idea of the 'thinging thing', which is a result of '*poiesis*, the making of things' (Edwards in Dreyfus et al. 457). However, a thing is not something unusual or artistic. As Heidegger explains in his essay 'The Thing', a thing can be an everyday object, for example, a jug:

The jug's presencing is the pure, giving gathering of the onefold fourfold into a single time-space, a single stay. The jug presences as a thing. The jug is the jug as a thing. But how does the thing presence? The thing things. Thinging gathers. Appropriating the fourfold, it gathers the fourfold's stay, its while, into something that stays for a while: into this thing, that thing. (174)

Heidegger's theory is briefly introduced in this essay to provide a context for Brown's assessment of thing theory, which seems similar to the concept of 'objecthood'. Brown's argument refers to the idea that thinking things is a process of creating the possibility of an object and its function. This is the function of design rather than art, since it lets the beholder establish the thing. A thing happens through the realisation of an alternative. The changeable potential of a thing is made through the play of different signifiers. The thing refers to a process that occurs through signifying presence, for something to become present to perception. Brown explains the theory of thing in the following way:

A thing, in contrast, can hardly function as a window. We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us: when the drill breaks, when the car stalls, when the windows get filthy, when their flow within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition, has been arrested, however momentarily. (4)

The thing is made through consideration. Brown argues that things 'lie beyond the grid of intelligibility the way mere things lie outside the grid of *museal* exhibition, outside the order of objects. [...] This is why things appear in the name of relief from ideas' (5). A thing as a mark of something different or yet to come can be explored through Derrida's philosophy. There, the thing is difference, which depends on the play of intertextuality. Brown argues, 'things appear in the name of relief from ideas (what's encountered as opposed to what's thought), it is also why the Thing becomes the most compelling name for that enigma that can only be encircled and which the object (by its presence) necessarily negates' (5). This part of the essay reconsiders a thing through the element of light in the selected installations. Light is metaphorically a sign of presence and is associated with truth. 'By means of this metaphor [light=presence], Plato implies a natural relation between existence and truth or a concept of reality based on an original self-presentation of beings which can be clarified through vision' (Vasseleu 3). Plato's dualistic philosophy influenced generations of Western thinkers and perhaps shaped the metaphysics

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of presence. Traditionally, the notion of light is a sign of presence, perhaps because of its properties of warmth, the feeling of light, its enhancement of vision and that illuminated objects seem to have presence. Cathryn Vasseleu in the *Textures of Light: Vision and Touch in Irigaray, Levinas and Merleau-Ponty* described light by using its metaphorical meaning: 'Seeing light is a metaphor for seeing the invisible in the visible, or seeing things in an intelligible form that holds all that exists together but is itself devoid of sensible qualities' (Vasseleu 3). Light is a material in both Turrell and Gormley's installations. The two examples involve inquiry about absence and presence in two distinct ways, the first through clarity and the second through opacity. In both pieces, the notion of light does not entirely follow the traditional and metaphorical expectations associated with this element.

#### *Blind Light*

The first piece analysed in this section of the chapter is Gormley's installation from 2007, *Blind Light*. Antony Gormley is a sculptor whose works express the human body in space. He refers to the condition of solitude of the human being and its relation to nature. For over forty years, his art encourages thoughts about our place in the world. Although he was born and based in London, his work has been exhibited around the world. His collaboration with Akram Khan is not the time he has been involved in performance. After *Zero Degrees* (2005), he worked

with Hofesh Shechter on *Survivor* (2012), which is an abstract piece that relies on, like much of Gormley's work, sculpture's sense of witnessing. Another collaboration involved choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui on *Sutra* (2013) and *Noetic* (2014). In that performance, Gormley designed a set which resembles some of his well-known drawings.

Pictures from *Blind Light* are presented in figures 4 and 5. The installation was made of 'a very brightly lit glass box filled with a dense cloud, where people will vanish as they enter the chamber but might emerge as shadows for the viewers on the outside of the box' (Vidler et al. 53). This piece can be explored in various ways. For a person inside the glass box, the experience of visual presence to self will be different from that of a person outside the box, observing multiple parts of the human body appearing and disappearing in the white cloud.

In this installation, Gormley inquired about the notion of certainty of presence. In particular, he studied 'losing the sense of certainty' (Vidler 55-56) through light. He researched conditions of experience of absent presence, through one's reference to surroundings. Light could be perceived as a thing that provokes thinking about the process of perception and making associations with the environment. In this context, light illuminates objects, because the only object is the spectator (oneself) and the enlightenment of being lost. The installation, though an art form, creates a kind of performance in which the spectator is simultaneously a performer, audience and

narrator. Gormley's sense of performance seems to rely on the metaphorical disappearance of self and the questioning of issues that are taken for granted. Thus, this is a sort of de-sedimentation of the notion of presence and absence.

In *Blind Light*, it is not the illuminated object that matters, but the illuminating matter that forms the object of metaphor. In this part of the chapter, it is the thing due to its relationship to the thinking process. Gormley's art underlines the metaphorical disappearance of the spectator's presence. The work links the process of thinking to engagement with the work. Regardless of the spectator's position, one can be in the middle of the installation or observing from outside. Thinking about presence and absence in this exact place seems to make a person part of it; the artist said, 'Light itself can be the opposite of illuminating' (Vidler et al. 55). Light can be used in the metaphorical way: not as an element that provides certainty, but as a texture and a platform for thinking with grapheme.

In an interview with Gormley, Jacky Klein and Ralph Rugoff discuss ways of approaching *Blind Light*. Klein has described it as so disorienting, there is a 'feeling of almost losing *yourself*, of not being able to map out the contours of your own body, or being precisely aware where your body ends and someone else's suddenly begins' (Vidler et al. 56). The metaphorical statement hints how *Blind Light* could be perceived, though certainly the spectators were aware of their physical manifestations. Gormley discusses this piece as provoking

spectators to rethink things taken for granted, such as the certainty of borderlines between terms. The blinding light contributes to this disorientation, which is the opposite of light's usual function as the instrument of vision that instils 'pureness' and clarity. This installation equally engages the experience of appearance and disappearance, and that competes with the traditional association of light with certainty. For light to be visible in volume and colour, a surface must reflect it. Hence, light as a medium of art is never fully present in itself.

*James Turrell*

James Turrell's art provides optimal conditions for the light he believes to be a material entity. The artist designs reflective surfaces to provide the experience of perceiving light in its volume and colour and what he considers the illusion of density. Turrell is an artist who uses light and space to explore the human perception. In all of his works, he works with light as an artistic medium. Turrell has created works of light almost his entire life; he began his career in the 1960s with the Projection Pieces in California. The work involved projections on a modified surface. In *Mendota Stoppages* (1967), he incorporated an inside perspective with an outside view as they were accessible to daylight. This tendency continued in his later work in *Skyspace*, *Tunnel* and *Crater* compositions. His work does not rely on any particular object except for the reflection of light in the human retina. Turrell has been involved in a variety of projects involving the notion of light, but this research focuses on his 2009 work,

the *Wolfsburg Project*, which involved installations at the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg. There, James Turrell designed the following:

[A] light-filled space of experience in the tradition of his Ganzfeld Pieces. Making full use of the adaptable architecture system of the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg – unique within the German museum landscape – his installation will be an exploration of space and light: immaterial and material at once. The timelessness and fascination of James Turrell's works derives from his incredible skill at capturing fleeting light and giving it the visual presence and tactile density of a physical body. (Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, 'James Turrell')

This series of installations was wholly designed with light. 'Covering 7 square meters and reaching 12 meters high, [...] the stimulating and colourful environment is an experience for viewers that the artist describes as "feeling with your eyes closed"' (Baker 'James Turrell'). Turrell believes that light in its material qualities is an art object, not an instrument to illuminate objects. If that were realistic, a space with no reflective surface would be a void. Turrell's intention is to make a metaphorical sculpture of light with an unnoticeable source that gives an immersive feeling. Perhaps light in this sense is the outcome of art shaping its surroundings and art's final effect, whereas its source, or the reflective surface, is the instrument used to compose the quality of the light installation. Thus, Turrell emphasises the qualities of light through shaping the reflective surface as a part of the



light installation. In this way, he can control material qualities such as volume and colour. Light is an art material, and the reflection on a surface and the perception of light and colour also depend on sight. The thingness, then, of light is the object, and through questioning its being and purpose, this objecthood tests the traditional binary notion of presence and absence. De-sedimentation of the binary opposites inquires about the borderlines of terms that form distinctions between presence and absence, such as Fried's relationship between art and beholder, as well as dramatic and theatrical scene. I intend for this chapter to raise questions about the proposed binary oppositions and reconsider the finality of terms and authority in making aporia of 'absence' in theatre and art.

Fig. 6. Holzherr, Florian. James Turrell. 2013. *wmagazine.com*. Web. 18 Sept. 2013.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter refers to the idea that objects and things, as nontangible objects, are graphemes. They are traces, a spectator can make metaphors of other objects, however present and absent they seem. Questioning borderlines between objects presented in physical form and as signifiers serves further exploration of the logic of absence in theatre. Moreover, through using examples from art and design theory, the research crosses borderlines between fixed identities of theatre and art disciplines to question the notion of essences, itself surrounded by a borderline. This thesis, through de-sedimentation of edges surrounding multiple appearances of notions of presence and absence, finds the contemporary logic of absence in the language of theatre and art. This chapter's case studies include objects and things that through their function and dysfunction of presence in art, according to Fried, explore the analysed theory of boundaries between binary opposites. The examples used in this chapter question the traditional concept of absence and presence in performance. Except for the transition between entity definitions, they inquire about the concept of self-presence and projecting self-presence on objects through personifications and metaphors, especially regarding the sculptures Gormley made for *Zero Degrees*, when reviews expressed that those doubles were personified with multiple qualities varying from the notion of absence to presence. They were given human qualities and

Fig. 7. Webber, Gwen. *Aten Reign*. 2013. James Turrell at the Guggenheim Museum. [putwordshere.wordpress.com](http://putwordshere.wordpress.com). Web. 18 Sept. 2013.



were believed to have the qualities of those particular performers through being made from performers' figures. Their stillness was defined as witnessing the narrative, which led to the association of wisdom and a sense of hierarchy of values (Gilbert 'Zero Degrees').

However, the human qualities of presence and absence onstage will be examined in the next chapter on 'Staged Presence', which also discusses boundaries in the notion of absence. One example is a performer playing herself, including her life and death in Robert Wilson's theatre. Another is a spectator who is also a performer through considering her own life and the constant possibility of death in a one-to-one performance. I am the spectator, and the next chapter includes a personal account regarding the play of signifiers that decides the borderlines between absence and presence in both performances. I have been in the audience during *The Life and Death of Marina Abramović* and *Lecture Notes on a Death Scene*. The theory of textuality in this research is not enclosed in one genre of art and theatre or method of experiencing the events. This chapter studies the boundaries between theory and practice when applying practice that is known from text and visual representations. Consequently, the play of *différance* between opposites takes place when signifiers used by different writers refer to signifiers from my experience of words. The study of objects and objecthood, or thingness, happens through words only and through rethinking and questioning an object's edges, as all of them are forms of textuality. As in the case of a thing, they refer to

another word.

Reconsideration of the thingness of light links the works of Gormley and Turrell. The element is traditionally associated with presence and its qualities. In *Blind Light*, the light did not provide its expected quality of clarity and visibility, as the spectators were almost deprived of sight and blinded through a cloud with light within which the participants could be immersed. There, the element of light questioned the clarity of the notion of presence and absence. The element of light is also a key component for Turrell, who believes light is a material, not merely particles reflected from a surface. Spectators of his art are involved in the sensation of light. Unlike Gormley's installation, they seemed to respond to a notion of certainty and self-presence in a particular point of time and place – in 'the moment' (Turrell, *Air Mass* 53) – which certainly has been repeated throughout the entire project. However, the 'invisible in the visible' (Vasseleu 3) is the reference point that is always moving from one signifier to another, unable to point to any presence in light. The example of Turrell's installation refers to the concept of present absence as the reassurance of presence without physical form that refers to the theory dealing with the transcendental signifier. But the theory is a metaphor that reflects the structure of signifiers, traces that form the philosophy of transcendence. To be noticed they must be iterative and known; therefore, the concept has no potential to be original and is not transcendental. Hence,



light is a mark that plays the same role in signifying an object,  
as they are letters and phrases in the language.

# ONTOLOGY OF ABSENCE

A PLAN OF THE PHD THESIS

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STAGED PRESENCE

In this chapter the boundaries between absence and presence are discussed through theories of presence and liveness. Presence in these contexts is associated with the immediate and live attendance of character. As Cormac Power observed in *Presence in Play*, it is not unusual to see the word 'stage presence' in the title case format, in particular the word *presence*, often written with a capital P. This suggests phrasing to communicate authority and signifies a transcendental 'stage presence' which this thesis is not arguing for. The word *character* is also used to denote the identity of a person and a mark on a piece of paper, both of which involve a spectator to be present. The element of 'stage presence' always already exist in mediation. This chapter draws on the issue of liveness and its critique, which has been introduced in the second chapter of the thesis, 'Derrida in Theatre'. The opposition between the live and recorded is comparable to the opposition between speech and writing when in the context of Derrida they are both a form of *archi-écriture*. There are a few points to consider when analysing the concept of stage presence, the theory that characterises stage presence, a character in a

play, and the spectator. To suggest the association between theory and character – i.e. that it can be equally a letter and a person – I use the term *act* to mark sections in this chapter, as an action as well as a playtext. The chapter is divided accordingly in order to study the multiple dimensions of stage presence. Hence, as the title suggests, this chapter is staged and presented in a play or performance. The first is an analysis of theory, the second studies the character of a performer, and the third is about the spectator as a character in a play. In continuation with the pervious chapter, I mimic presence and absence in attending or not attending to the performances that I analyse. In this chapter, the performances are experienced personally, in contrast to the performance and instead of what were discussed in the previous chapter. Accordingly, the study of the immediacy of presence is made through attending performances and reading about them. This is a methodological approach to the concept of live and mediation in performance. This chapter is discussed further in the next chapter.

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## STAGED PRESENCE

In this chapter, the boundaries between absence and presence are discussed through theories on stage presence and liveness. Presence in these concepts is associated with the immediate and live attendance of a character. As Cormac Power observed in *Presence in Play*, it is not unusual to see the phrase ‘stage presence’ in the title case format, in particular the word *presence*, often written with a capital P. This suggests phrasing to communicate authority and signifies a transcendental idea of presence, which this thesis is not arguing for. The word *character* is associated equally with an identity in a play and a mark on a piece of paper. Both signifiers involve a spectator to read the traces. Hence, the element of immediacy can always already exist in mediation.\* This chapter draws on the issue of liveness and its critique, which has been introduced in the second chapter of the thesis, ‘Derrida in Theatre’. The opposition between the live and recorded is comparable to the opposition between speech and writing, when in the context of Derrida they are both a form of arche-writing. There are a few points to consider when analysing the concept of stage presence, the theory that characterises stage presence, a character in a

play, and the spectator. To suggest the association between theory and character – i.e. that it can be equally a letter and a person – I use the term *act* to mark sections in this chapter, as an action as well as a playtext. The chapter is divided accordingly in order to study the multiple dimensions of stage presence. Hence, as the title suggests, presence is staged and presented in a play or performance of theory. The first act involves analysis of theory, the second studies the character of a performer, and the third is about the spectator as a character in a play. In continuation with the pervious chapter, I mimic presence and absence in attending or not attending performances that I analyse. In this chapter, the performances are experienced personally, in contrast to the performance and installations that were discussed in the previous chapter. Accordingly, the study of the immediacy of presence is made through attending performances and reading about them. This is a methodological

\* Philip Auslander studies the concept of liveness and mediation in *Liveness: Performance in the Mediatized Culture*, which is discussed further in the chapter.

experiment that tests the context of Derrida's philosophy, where the two methods of acquiring data are comparable forms of hermeneutics.

Performances studied in this chapter include *The Life and Death of Marina Abramović* by Robert Wilson and *Lecture Notes on a Death Scene* by Analogue. The performance directed by Wilson is, as might be expected, about Marina Abramović, who is the subject of the play as well as its protagonist. The performer, known for her live art events, suggested to Wilson that he write a play about her life.\*\* Hence, a performer famous for exhibiting 'liveness' aims to employ a traditional sense of stage presence. Abramović provided her biography, which Wilson used as material to visually compose and add context to the narration of the spectacle. The surreal images made from her biography include Abramović playing multiple roles in them. This is also the case in the other performance discussed in this chapter. In *Lecture Notes on a Death Scene*, the spectator is the main character in the play. There, the surreal images of the character's life are displayed parallel to the possible consequences of decisions in the spectator's life. In this example, the notion of liveness is in the possible consequences of unfulfilled action. The two performances are different from each other in a number of ways, from the scale of the event to the degree of the spectator's involvement that, in this case, happens to be directly proportional. Both of them question the borderlines of presence and absence in stage presence and liveness.

\*\* 'Most performers try to avoid dying a death on stage: performance artist Marina Abramović approached director Robert Wilson with a request that he produce hers' (Hickling, 'The Life and Death of Marina Abramović').

Each chapter about theatre in this thesis discusses a different aspect of present absence. The previous chapter was about questioning the boundaries of presence in objects and objecthood. This chapter is about the human being in the theatre and the margins of absence and presence in stage presence and liveness, and the next chapter studies context and différance. They all display different dimensions of present absence in theatre studies in the context of Derrida's philosophy. What I hope to achieve through this particular chapter is to demonstrate the lack of hierarchy between graphemes that are in different forms, either as a character that presents a theory, as speech and gestures on stage, or as spectators' thoughts.

## ACT ONE: THEORY ON STAGE PRESENCE

Arguments on stage presence in this research include studies by such researchers as Elinor Fuchs, Herbert Blau, Joseph Roach, Cormac Power, Jane Goodall, and Philip Auslander. They identify stage presence in multiple ways, from the ephemeral feeling of the spectator to the quality of a performer. De-sedimentation and the practice of

re-joining signifiers might come into use when one analyses the play of presence and absence in the theatre. This was also observed by Power, who points out in his research that the philosophy of Derrida can be applied to theatre to a greater extent in order to provide new methods to study theatre. The notion of presence is the subject of Power's exploration in his *Presence in Play: A Critique of Theories of Presence in the Theatre*. The chapter 'Deconstructing Presence' analyses the notion of presence through post-structural philosophy to study how theatre practitioners 'have sought to expose the stage as a site of representation and citation rather than "Presence" and "immediacy"' (Power, *Presence in Play* 118). This is a very significant work regarding my thesis as there are not many coherent accounts of Derrida and notion of presence in theatre. Power's division of 'reference' and 'immediacy' is similar to Derrida's distinction between speech and writing, which are not opposite, as they are both graphemes. Moreover, Power argues that presence is not a monolithic concept in theatre and one should rather study the play of presences instead of one 'transcendental presence'.

Power encourages the reconsideration of presence(s) in the context of Derrida's philosophy and argues that 'a number of contemporary theatre theorists have not fully engaged with important facets of Derrida's thought' (*Presence in Play* 118) and in his argument 'traditional assumptions about theatre as an art form whose essence is "presence" must be radically rethought in the light of Derrida's writings' (*Presence in*

*Play* 121). Power accepts the idea of presence, but not as a homogenous structure. Although his work is influential on my work there are a few dissimilarities between his theory and mine, developing mainly from the fact that he defends presence and I write about absence. The distinctions between his work and this thesis are that Power finds a plurality of definitions of presence in theatre, while this study questions presence as an entity. I refer to Derrida's theory of the metaphysics of absence and seek to de-sediment traditional conditions of theatre that associate being with presence. Power points out that the concept of 're-presented presence' is a subject of discourse not only in dramatic theatre but also in physical/dance theatre. He writes about Fuchs and Auslander's ideas about 'aura' and charisma' as a de-hierarchical concept of presence. That is not the presence of play-text but of an actor or performer, as both 'Philip Auslander and Fuchs see presence as a fundamental problem for contemporary theatre, and suggest that the deconstruction of presence is vital for theatre's continuing viability as an art form with the capacity to subvert and challenge prevalent ideologies' (Power, *Presence in Play* 127). This thesis is not displaying the Theatre of Absence, as Fuchs terms the revival of essentialism in (post-) theatre. I do not argue for 'post-metaphysical theatre', as de-sedimentation is always in the language already, so there can be no 'post-' without an end to metaphysics. The difference is also in the metaphysics of absence, not as a signifier of a lack of presence but as a play of signifiers with no essential terms. Power writes that 'there is perhaps a hidden desire

to uncover the essential substance of theatre: theatre as “literally” text’ (*Presence in Play* 134) and, as he adds, this is an assumption about an essence. Power refers to the script as a form of writing in performance. I argue in my thesis that the literal representation of a text in performance is not only the form of writing as objects, human beings and structure of performance are also a form of writing. However, despite the differences, my thesis would not emerge in the form it is in now if not for Power’s work on presence(s) in theatre. His work is one of the most coherent in the complex subject of presence in theatre and therefore his research is a key source here.

Another theatre scholar using the concept of stage presence is Herbert Blau. In his book *Take up the Bodies*, considers thought and play as a ‘play of mind’, which becomes a habit of mind. He compares a play and presence in theatre to the mode of dreaming, understood from the perspective of the modes of consciousness and unconsciousness associated with Freud’s philosophy, as he writes, ‘The thing which moves us is increasingly on the edge of disappearance. Whether in or out of perspective, we are always at the vanishing point’ (Blau, *Take Up the Bodies* 28), and he argues that illusion in theatre is more present than presence. As he writes,

[W]here the action is, in this last space of thought, the thing which—in an age of unavoidable introspection—is most specifically theatrical: the refusal of conceptual relief, the desire to get as close to the thought of theater as theater

would be if, in a conspiracy of illusion and history, it were reflecting upon itself. (*Take Up the Bodies* 19)

Blau recognises the distinction between theatre and thought, but he notices the power of the unspoken or suggested, but not physically present presence: ‘We see what should probably not be seen, that from which, really, we should turn away. What makes it so? Thinking makes it so’ (Blau, *Take Up the Bodies* 86). The author considers thought and play as a habit of mind, which evolved from play. ‘As we turn things over and over, the theater becomes—in the doubling consciousness of the play-within-the-play – what we think about it. The result may be a methodological tautology, erasing error with more error’ (Blau, *Take Up the Bodies* 19). As he writes, this is the ‘reflection upon illusion. In reflection on the reflections, the work itself may lead to a kind of impacted structure, moving by association and elision (as in a dream), reifying particulars to the point of exhaustion (as in dream interpretation)’ (*Take Up the Bodies* 19). Blau compares theatre to oneiric visions, based on Freud’s idea of thinking in dreams known/felt as experience. ‘[T]hinking, in a peculiar way. The central experience, as I’ve said, is the activity of reflection, as if it were embodiment of Kant’s theory that time and space are necessary forms of thought’ (*Take Up the Bodies* 146). In the context of deconstruction, thought is constructed in the play of intertextuality and language, so the reference of thought is the same as that of speech, writing, or textuality – that is, never present in itself.

The definition of presence on stage has also been a point



of interest to other theatre researchers such as Jane Goodall. In *Stage Presence*, she argues that the idea behind research is not to 'demystify presence, but to discover just how this mysterious attribute has been articulated and what kinds of imagery surround it' (7). Here she indicates that presence also exists within a concept of absence, but the researcher writes about absence as a transcendental signified, which provides a different argument from Derrida's philosophy. According to Goodall,

One of the strangest paradoxes of stage presence is that, the more powerfully it draws us into the here and now, the more palpably it seems to connect us to a time zone that stretches beyond the boundaries of natural life, to invoke the supernatural. (169–170)

This theory of stage presence states that the more physically present or personal it becomes (as it involves experience from the past or a possible future), the more it encourages imagination, as this is how I define the 'supernatural' in her writing. Goodall argues for presence as a being that exists even if it is not explained by words. It is an uncanny feeling of presence. This is the aspect of theatre that reminds undefined. Presence, for Goodall, is a quality that cannot be named with one phrase as she terms it as magnetism and art of theatre. She argues for presence being lined with something she terms as energy or mystery (17-19) applied to technique, where presence is in an act. Goodall looks at the notion of stage presence not only as a spiritual construct based on belief but also as a construction made with the norms of Western society. Her theory,

touched upon in this chapter, provides arguments regarding the role of the 'essence of presence' in the unexplainable quality of theatre. This way of defining the notion of stage presence is noticeable in contemporary theatre discourse. Goodall's discourse provides a perspective on how qualities of theatre are currently analysed. I cannot agree with her on this definition of presence as she finds the essence of presence *beyond* signification. I argue that presence and absence are signifiers without its essence in a metaphysical *beyond*.

In this research, both the written character and the performer, as well as the spectator, are traces and supplements of other graphemes distant in time (deferred) and space (differed) in deference to absence. The notion of character is a grapheme that includes trace and mark. In accordance to the philosophy of *différance*:

[There] can be no assurance of the bond between thought and speech, there can be no single moment at which utterance originates and no single point of origin; and if no originary principle can be identified, then such a thing as a self-same presence is merely a 'self'-serving illusion. (Fuchs, *The Death of Character* 73)

The association between Derrida's philosophy and theatre is also explored by Elinor Fuchs in *The Death of Character*, where she points out that writing is the element that links Derrida's theory of presence in metaphysics and the illusion of presence as immediacy in theatre. Fuchs refers to Derrida's theory and applies this philosophy to

contemporary theatre. In the chapter 'Signaling through the Signs', she 'align[s] his attack on metaphysical presence with the undermining of theatrical presence' (Fuchs, *The Death of Character* 11). Hence, she notices the need to rethink stage presence in accordance with the changes in philosophy driven by the metaphysics of absence.

A theatre researcher who applied Derrida's theory to the notion of character is Philip Auslander. In the article "'Just Be Your Self": Logocentrism and difference in performance theory', he analyses Derrida's notion of the 'metaphysics of presence' and applies his findings to the formation of stage presence and character in a play. He compares acting in theatre studies to language in philosophy, with both being 'transparent medium which provides access to truth, logos or a grounding concept which functions as logos within a particular production' (Auslander, 'Just be yourself' 53). Traditionally the sense of presence on stage is associated with intentionality in one's acting, directing, and writings. Yet, it still remains almost impossible to find criteria for intention or pretention on the stage. Auslander compares three different theatre models that constitute 'actor's self as the logos of performance' ('Just be yourself' 54), and these are the stage characters as interpreted by Stanislavsky, Brecht, and Grotowski. Stanislavsky focuses on expressing the intentionality of an action by recalling an experience that happened to the actor. Brecht makes a distinction between an actor and a character, stating that the actor makes another 'entity', both of the character as well as himself when

presented on the stage as an actor. Hence, here is the double pretending of the intentionality of presence. Grotowski, however, 'believes that the actor must use the disguise [presence of a character] by her role to cut away the disguise [self-presence] imposed on her by socialization and expose the most basic levels of self' (Auslander, 'Just be yourself' 54). Norms of binary oppositions, where presence is the quality above absence in many terms, places the human mind above body, and divides the mind into consciousness above unconsciousness.

Auslander compares Stanislavsky's construction of character in theatre through the actor's experience to the notion of writing, perceived in the wide sense of the word. He points to Derrida's use of writing in 'Freud and the Scene of Writing' where it is as a term that 'describe[s] psychic functions as well as the recording of language' ('Just be yourself' 55). Auslander discusses Derrida's notion of writing in a greater sense. He refers to Derrida's interpretation of Fried's theory of the unconscious reviving in consciousness, as one will write what is already known to a person and always already written in one's unconsciousness. This thesis questions the hierarchical oppositions between consciousness, unconsciousness, body, and mind; they are all just differences that form a structure of intertextuality. In Brecht's theatre, 'in order that the actor's commentary on the character be meaningful to the audience, the actor must be present as herself as well as in character and her own persona must carry greater authority than the role' (Auslander, 'Just be yourself' 56). Hence, there are two

characters represented by one actor: one plays the character in a play, and the other one plays the actor. Grotowski describes another process of forming a character. He refers to the character as a medium for the self-exposure of an actor. ‘The Poor Theatre is not only of the self but for the self – its purpose is to serve as therapy for both actor and spectator’ (Auslander, ‘Just be yourself’ 57). Grotowski uses the elementary function of language as an interpretation of emotions, as he believes in the sense of self-presence in physical presence. Auslander, in his article, compares those systems of self-presence to the one that can be found in Derrida’s reading of Artaud. Auslander writes that ‘the body too is constructed by difference. [...] Because it is organized, the body is not organic, undifferentiated presence’ (‘Just be yourself’ 58). Auslander finds Derrida’s texts pointing at the plurality of a human being in the instance that ‘the body is not more purely present to itself than is the mind. [...] Pure self-expression is no more possible on a physical level than on a verbal level because of the mediation of difference’ (‘Just be yourself’ 58). He also compared acting to Derrida’s notion of writing ‘under erasure’ that both uses the metaphysics of presence and erases it. The metaphysics of presence in his example refers to acting methods that can be both used as well as undermined, such as gestures that are used to present abilities rather than meaning.

### *Liveness*

The issue of liveness is associated with a debate over mediated and live performance, and both forms are traditionally located as opposites. The terminology used to identify liveness in live performance is usually far from Derrida’s philosophy. As Auslander writes in *Liveness*, it is ‘invoking clichés and mystifications like “the magic of live theatre”, the “energy” that supposedly exist between performers and spectators in a live event, and the “community” that live performance is often said to create among performers and spectator’ (*Liveness* 2). Auslander argues against this meaning and word association of liveness, as it suggests a division between live ‘real’ events and mediated events that are ‘reproduced’. With the opinion that all ‘live’ events are rehearsed, organised and placed in a structure of language, there is no place for liveness as a correlation of immediacy. Auslander argues against the notion of liveness in performance as ‘the ontology of performance’ (*Liveness* 39), which was described as such by Peggy Phelan:

Performance’s only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. Performance’s being, like the ontology of subjectivity proposed here, becomes itself

through disappearance. [...] The disappearance of the object is fundamental to performance; it rehearses and repeats the disappearance of the subject who longs always to be remembered. (*Unmarked* 146)

Phelan locates presence in performance in the live physical presence of a performer and the ephemerality of the event, and the function of language in performance as external. In accordance with Auslander, 'Phelan posits performance as nonreproductive and writing as a form of reproduction, allowing her to conclude that writing (language) cannot capture performance' (*Liveness* 40). In Auslander's theory, Phelan's position serves an example of placing live performance in opposition to the mediated form, although live performance depends on repetitions, arrangement and structure of communication, despite the fact that, as Derrida continuously expresses, writing in the wider sense has to be iterable and already within a structure of reference in order to be received as language. Therefore, where is the boundary between live and mediated? Auslander questions this opposition and argues against the notion of liveness occurring only in performance-in-disappearance: 'Disappearance, existence only in the present moment, is not, then, an ontological quality of live performance that distinguishes it from modes of technical reproduction. Both live performance and the performance of mediation are predicated on disappearance' (*Liveness* 45). This is another example of the de-sedimentation of identities, where borderlines between supposed

oppositions are not as distinctive as they appear to be: 'live or mediated, are now equal: none is perceived as auratic or authentic; the live performance is just one more reproduction of a given text or one more reproducible text' (Auslander, *Liveness* 50). However, while the focus of Auslander's work is different from this research, it remains vital to this study. This thesis uses the theory that Auslander employs in a wider context. It implements not only prewritten or designed performances as writing, but writing as the grapheme that Derrida expressed in his philosophy. This research studies experience as a form of writing in seeking the constant renaming of present absence. In his search for the signified of the word liveness as immediacy, Auslander writes that:

[...] the mediated is engrained in the live is apparent in the structure of the English word immediate. The root from is the word mediate of which immediate is, of course, the negation. Mediation is thus embedded within the immediate; the relation of mediation and the immediate is one of mutual dependence, not precession. [...] Live performance is always already inscribed with traces of the possibility of technical mediation [...] that defines it as live. (*Liveness* 53)

Hence, in accordance with Auslander, liveness is in between these two terms, equally mediated as immediate. In this thesis, I argue that liveness exists only in terms. Supplementation of one name with another is also a part of the live event, but one can look at it as

a process of mediation between one signifier and another.

Power, in *Presence in Play*, distinguishes the notion of presence in theatre from liveness, saying they 'should be separate and distinct' (166). He argues that liveness is a notion that 'applies only to events within a technological context' (166). As he writes:

[...] theatre tends to present us with a 'now' which at the same time is not now, a 'here' which is not here, it quickly becomes apparent that theatrical presence has little in common with liveness. [...] presence implies qualities far more elusive, enigmatic, and perhaps 'magical' than the notion of liveness. (Power, *Presence in Play* 166)

The distinction seems to be made based on the notion of authenticity as liveness, in accordance with Power, 'refers to a veil of pretended now-ness and immediacy' (*Presence in Play* 167) and presence is a more complex notion redefined throughout history. Power finds multiple perspectives of presence in theatre that so far have not been defined in such complex terms. His work on presence discusses a plurality of perspectives on a notion that is not monolithic. He also defines presence in theatre through Derrida's philosophy: as he writes, 'there is nothing outside representation, I argue that presence can be seen as a function of theatrical signification' (Power, *Presence in Play* 8). I agree with Power on that, but in the context of this thesis, I would argue that this is not presence in metaphysical terms, and it can be read as writing in the wider sense. Hence, it is as present as it is absent in its

exchange of signifiers. In the context of Derrida's philosophy, presence and liveness have similar functions as signifiers that point at other signifiers. Hence, one might not be more present than the other.

The supplementation is a conversation of characters that 'redefine' theory. In next sections of this chapter I will suggest that the character is not a letter on a page but a performer and a spectator. Boundaries of presence and absence in liveness and stage presence are studied in examples drawn from theatre. Both performances involve the subject of the ultimate borderline of the physical presence of the human being and crossing the line between life and death. This theme was also introduced in the second chapter of the thesis in the fragment analysing Derrida's text on the boundaries of life; it is about the aporia between the possible and the impossible. In this chapter, performances signify this subject in a comparable way, but the spectacles themselves differ from each other. In the first one the spectator is almost excluded from the subject, watching the performance from afar where a performer is described as the one who has the quality of presence, whereas in the second performance the spectator is the main character in a play and presence is supposed to be in one's thoughts. All of these forms of certainty are questioned in the following sections. This part of the chapter investigates stage presence in the performer and spectator, and the first play studied is *The Life and Death of Marina Abramović* by Robert Wilson in collaborative work with Antony Hegarty and Willem Dafoe.



Fig. 9. *Life and Death of Marina Abramović*. 2011. [comunidad.uem.es](http://comunidad.uem.es). Web. 26 May 2013.

## ACT TWO: THE PERFORMER AS A CHARACTER

*The Life and Death of Marina Abramović*

The title of the play suggests that the performance is about Abramović's life as well as its end and both notions are equally representable. The performer, who argues for live art and liveness as the main characteristics of her art, is the key character in a performance about her own life. In the context of the studied philosophy, this performance is not more 'live' or 'present' than her pieces of live art. *The Life and Death of Marina Abramović* begins and ends with Abramović's death. At the beginning of the performance there were three black coffins on stage, with three women each wearing a mask presenting the stylised face of Marina Abramović. In a grey background – as if painted with watercolours – one could see three Dobermans looking for something among scarlet bones lying on the stage (see fig. 10). The performance ends with a scene where the three figures with Abramović in the centre ascend above the coffins (see fig. 9). In this act, her presence can be interpreted as a suggestion, a signifier, of the transcendental signifier of presence *beyond* the physical and living body. However, the scene relies heavily on the context of Christian images, which refer to certain beliefs, so the signified is never pointing at one thing; it is never present, as it constantly refers to other words, images, and interpretations. This is a visual association of language, without which

the interpretation would appear differently.

In this performance, the character that aims to display stage presence is Abramović. There she exhibits her work and elements from her personal life. The artist is known for her work in live art and her determination to find a way to document and preserve this form of art, which is based on ephemerality. In collaboration with Wilson, her personal narrative has been redefined by the series of surreal images composed in a style characteristic of Wilson's theatre, where there is no coherent narrative. These are different from the presentations that Abramović was previously identified with; there are no cuts, no danger, no emotions, just images and references. In her career she has had 'a stranger point a loaded gun at her head, sat in silence for 700 hours and set herself on fire' (O'Hagan, 'Interview: Marina Abramović'). She is a performance artist and not an actress, as one can see and hear in the performance. Perhaps her way of non-acting in this performance in itself makes the statement that she is a performance artist.

Marina Abramović, a performance artist from the former Yugoslavia, enquires into the relationship of the human body and structures of society – in relation to other human beings and personal emotions through the genre of performance art – throughout her 40-year career. Her art is known as a representation of her physical pain. In Abramović's performances, particularly the early ones, there was an element of risk, and they often included her bleeding as a result of her cutting herself. There was always a possibility of losing what she

## *Ontology of Absence*

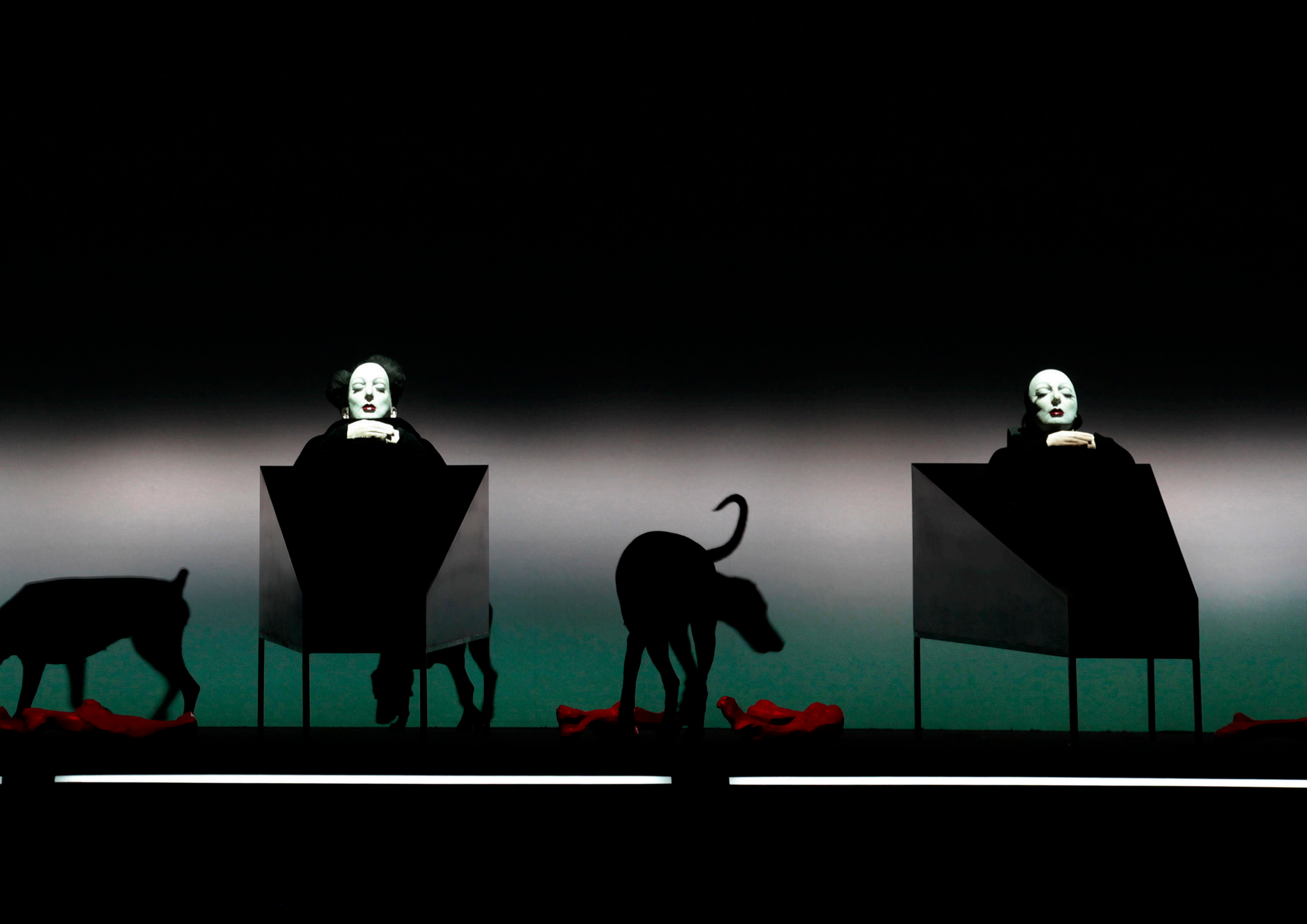
calls presence, by which she is referring to consciousness and an awareness of being in front of an audience. Her early experimental works looked into limitations of her body, her mind and her relationship with the audience. For example, in *Rhythm 0* she 'placed 72 objects, including a candle, a rose, a scalpel, some pins and a gun, on a table and invited audience members to apply them to her body in whatever way they chose as she stood, unresisting, for 6 hours' (Kim, 'Listening to Marina Abramović'). The audience participated in this performance, as some of them wanted to assault her, while others got into a fight to protect her.

Her later works with Ulay (his full name is Frank Uwe Laysiepen) seemed to focus on the ritual of forming one's identity. Their performances explored personal proximity, such as in the performance *Breathing In/Breathing Out*. In that piece, they were continuously sharing one breath for as long as they had consciousness. They lasted under 20 minutes, as they both fainted from lack of oxygen. After splitting up with Ulay, she gave individual performances. One recent one, which deals with the subject of presence and absence, is *The Artist Is Present* from 2010. The piece was performed in the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and lasted for over 700 hours. It examined stillness and silence of the artist as an artwork. Spectators could have a seat opposite the artist, but they had to remain silent and not communicate any message during the time of the performance. For Abramović, presence is sharing awareness with the spectators during the



Fig. 10. Jansch, Lucie. *Life and Death of Marina Abramović*. 2011. [cultureelpersbureau.nl](http://cultureelpersbureau.nl). Web. 26 May 2013.





time of spectating. However, in the context of this research I would argue that the entire event was built as a structure, and there were norms through which the event was approached. Therefore, it is not only silence that one encounters. Absence of words was in parallel to the presence of the spectacle's structure. The qualities that are traditionally associated with presence happened through presenting absence of voice or action. That is, this was still a performance that was an exchange of signification, but did not follow the expected relationship of signifiers.

Abramović's current work also involves preserving and documenting ephemeral forms of art that are performances. This work is contradictory at first glance, but in her foundation in New York, the

There remains the question of the preservation of her art. She finds a question of presence and nature of representation and refers to it as an ideology that is based on the concept of *truth*. In the interview with *The Guardian*, when she was asked what the difference is between performance art and theatre, she answered that theatre is fake and performance is *real*. She gave examples of a knife, blood and emotions that are pretend or real, depending on the side of the spectrum.\*\*\* However, how immediate can it be when her action is still to represent? Abramović argues that through her performance she can embrace and transform something that she calls energy and this goes beyond the performance space. This seems to be problematic, in that what exactly does she refer to when speaking of energy? As she said in her *Guardian*

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interview, for her this is the essence of performance art. Still, this does not provide any reasonable explanation. The ideology is based on a concept of presence that is centred in her persona. How does she preserve this presence?

In Wilson's spectacles she represents her perspective on herself. In the review of *The Life and Death of Marina Abramović*, Joshua Abrams

stated that 'the production offered a provocative challenge to notions of representation through the collaboration of artists whose work engages with differing modes of bodily presence' (Abrams 267). Robert Wilson, Abramović, Willem Dafoe and Antony Hegarty propose dissimilar concepts of presence on stage. In this spectacle, there were references to Abramović's earlier pieces of performance art, for example, the first scene might have referred to *Balkan Baroque*. In that performance, she washed a vast amount of cows' bones of blood, while simultaneously singing folk songs from her country. However, I agree with Abrams that this performance seemed to be a piece of Wilson's theatre, rather than involving elements of Abramović's performance art. Abrams sees the major difference between theatre and performance in the notion of time, as he states that having in mind 'an oversimplification, theatre bends time to fit structure, while performance art allows real time to produce structure' (Abrams 267). I find this concept stimulating, but, in the context of the argument I conduct, I cannot agree with it. Structure is a field of references, either in theatre or performance. I do not deny differences between those structures, but one is no one *true* or more *present* than the other.

The value of authenticity and intentionality in art has been studied in the previous chapter on 'Objects and Things' which discussed Fried's argument on theatricality and dramatic art. I argue that live art is no less true or fake than theatre or other forms of spectacle. Elements of Abramović's previous works of live art\*\*\*\*

were used in this performance, but in *The Life and Death of Marina Abramović* she did not present any emotional responses to her work. Hence, how would she identify the live art used in theatre? Perhaps in the same way as other moments of her life are performed: 'References to earlier performance art abound, though it's all too easy to miss Wilson's sly contextualisations. And despite her living presence, Abramović's art gets somehow buried by her life, however inventively retold' (Searle, 'Manchester International Festival'. In 'Manchester International Festival: Room with No View', Adrian Searle describes the performance in the following way:

[f]unereal stage pictures peopled by nine mini-Marinas and a pack of prowling doberman dogs, with narration provided by Willem Dafoe in an orange mullet and heavy pan-stick makeup that puts you in mind of Batman's the Joker MC-ing a Berlin cabaret. But it's the music that binds everything together, with the chilling ululation of traditional Serbian singer Svetlana Spajic merging into fragile songs written and performed by Antony Hegarty, of Antony and the Johnsons. There are moments that will stay with you forever; others that simply seem to take that long. (Searle, 'Manchester International Festival')

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In *The Fortnightly Review*, Anthony Howell describes the performance as a dream-like scene where there is no narrative. According to the review, ‘Some members of the audience complained that the production was so stylized that they couldn’t “identify” with the artist’s pain as a child with an unfortunate nose and a domineering mother. If “I is another”, there is no self with whom to identify’ (Howell, ‘The Life and Death of Marina Abramovic’). Although it might be assumed that Abramović would be described in reviews as ‘having stage presence’, it was Willem Dafoe who was described as mesmerising, ‘delivering his lines in a gruff New York accent that’s as expressive as a musical instrument. Every word he speaks is mesmerising’ (Dorment, ‘The Life and Death of Marina Abramovic’). He is a trained actor, hence the way he demonstrates words and gestures might be clearer than Abramović’s expression. As a performance artist, she defines her quality of presence as liveness rather than stage presence.

However, stage presence is comparable to liveness, as both concepts identify the immediate presence of the performer, and both include notions of the authenticity and intentionality of action. Although they seem similar, there is a difference in the definition of ‘theatricality’ and ‘dramatic art’ between them. Stage presence is associated with theatre and acting, and liveness with live art and performance art. This is the very distinction between theatricality and dramatic art that Fried argued in his articles, analysed in the previous chapter on ‘Objects and Things’. In the context of Derrida

they are no opposites, as both of them are different forms of signification. Neither stage presence nor liveness are original or immediate, just as speech is not immediate, and they need certain patterns of gestures, behaviour, and words that are repeatable in order to be used in communication. Moreover, in every instance a given performance, act of theatre, and live art are prepared before the performance; even improvisation has a grammatology of graphemes and is constructed with the use of language. In this thesis, my arguments move on to the logic of absence in theatre and art in Derrida’s philosophy. In this study, liveness as well as presence form a structure of signifiers that constantly refer to other signifiers. Hence, they are not present or immediate, as they do not point to any single signified.

### ACT THREE: SPECTATOR AS A CHARACTER

#### *Lecture Notes on a Death Scene*

*Lecture Notes on a Death Scene* was created by the Analogue and directed by Liam Jarvis. Analogue is a promising theatre company that was established in 2007 by Hannah Barker and Liam Jarvis, both drama graduates from Royal Holloway University of London. The theatre company is based in London. Their intelligent way of displaying narrative makes them outstanding. Barker is a journalist, and Jarvis is a PhD researcher at Royal Holloway University of London. They create

ideas that encourage reconsidering what theatre is and how theory influences the way they works with narratives. They usually use multimedia in their work (with a couple of exceptions), but they use it as a means to display present times rather than an end in itself. They experiment with forms of theatre to focus on difficult social issues.

*Mile End* was their first performance. It was made for the Lion and Unicorn pub in Kentish Town. The play deals with a mentally ill person causing the unexpected death of a stranger by pushing them from the underground platform into the path of a train. The narrative draws on the stories of suicides in the underground in London, and Mile End is the name of one of the underground stations. The company makes the story complex by involving an element of chance and chaos into the storyline. Hence, here is the unpredictable death caused by a stranger. *Mile End* played during the theatre festival in Edinburgh in 2007, where it won a Fringe First award. The company continues to receive awards and prizes for outstanding theatre practice.

The performance discussed in this chapter is a contrast to their previous work. Although in *Lecture Notes on a Death Scene* (2010), as in other works, they use clever ways to tell a story, the difference lies in the fact that the performance is not as high-tech as their other pieces, such as *Beachy Head* (2009) or *2401 Objects* (2011).

In Analogue's performances, film projections and live video feeds work together with actors and other theatre techniques, such as wind made by a waving board, in order to tell a story. The theatre

company explores complex social problems, such as the impact of a suicide on the family or unresolved consequences of decisions that were not made. Recent plays by Analogue are *2401 Objects* (2011) and *Re-Enactments* (2013), both of which deal with the subject of memory.

The performance *Lecture Notes on a Death Scene* examines liveness and stage presence through questioning both forms, and it plays with plural narratives and the apparent multiple choices that the spectator can make. Presence and absence are displayed as alternative 'choices' that may be present, so presence remains within the sphere of possibility. There is only one spectator at a time and the person is confronted with an apparent multitude of possible reactions and decisions. The storyline is based on a retrospective contemplation of a decision that has been made, which leads a person to the ultimate consequence of the end of one's life. This is very different from Abramović's 'deaths' (plural, as the play begins and ends with her death), as Analogue's production suggests a personal end of being. Abramović's deaths were stylised through Robert Wilson's images, responding to images embedded in culture such as Christian depictions of saints. In the performance created by Analogue, the main character is the mirror; one is experienced through the self-reflection of a spectator. The mirror is operated from behind, which allows for different viewing angles depending on the part played.

The narration of the play can be heard through the recorded voice of the narrator. The voice accompanies the spectator throughout

the play and can be associated with a kind of external exhibition of thoughts. Although it was a male actor creating the voice, it almost lost its gender when followed as a display of personal dilemma. Being a female spectator did not interfere with assimilating the voice to one's own thoughts; one simply remembered that it was male. For this spectator the use of a male voice in the narrative remained unquestioned until almost a year and a half after the performance. If the voice was indeed neutral, I would not remember that it was male, but despite this mismatch of genres, I took it as the 'voice of reason'. There are many possible explanations as to why a male voice could be experienced as a voice of thought, such as the very example that I have provided – reason. The male voice has usually been connected with the binary opposition between male and female, where male has been associated with the qualities of presence and culture, and female with the values of absence and nature. A discourse on the distinction between nature and culture, presence and absence happens throughout the thesis. Derrida writes about the metaphysics of presence being embedded in Western thought and displaying itself in the qualities of presence that are added to the signifier of authority. In this example the value of reason is represented by the male voice.

In the recording, the spectator is addressed not only as a character or the viewer, referred to as 'you', but as multiple versions of 'you'. The one, physical 'you' that has 'already made decisions' is distinguished from another 'you' that will perform other actions, which in consequence

will lead to different choices. This potential stratification of presence seems to refer to the concept of a 'multiverse' where, in another 'universe', one would have a different life as a consequence of different choices. Always remaining possible is another version of the 'present' moment as a different 'now' that constantly accompanies the 'here', i.e. the multitude of absent presence where decisions are never defined.

There, the spectator analyses the moment of making a decision that leads to death; the possibility of death is a 'present' but unfulfilled result. *Lecture Notes on a Death Scene* is based on the assumption that the only moment of presence is the moment of decision, the 'here and now', as every choice can be incorporated into physical action. Lyn Gardner, in a review in *The Guardian*, described the play as a 'game that takes you into a dark forest of possibilities, along many paths, with many possible destinations' (Gardner, 'Lecture Notes on a Death Scene'). The complex enquiry about decisions involves many questions, such as what is the 'freedom of choice' that the narrator refers to, or whether making a decision is an instant thing or derived from a set of consequences that have shaped a situation one finds oneself in, etc. These questions refer to the subject of free will, which is one of the key discourses in philosophy and involves theories about the constraints of decisions and the politics involved in human interactions. Experience of this play reminds one of experiencing a labyrinthine set of choices, opinions, and questions. This experience is planned and designed by the director, as the work is influenced by Jorge



Like Borges's novel *The Garden of Forking Paths*, a portrait of the author is placed on the desk next to the chair where the speaker is seated. At the beginning of the play the spectator is asked to make a hole in this picture with the tip of pencil on the table. The narrator suggests that the author's lie should be the place to put pencil. In this moment, metaphorically, the viewer becomes a 'murderer', while further on in the play the spectator is a 'victim'. The motif continues throughout the performance, as the narrative plays with the motif of simultaneity of oppositions. For first few seconds the spectator is asked to look at the performance through the hole in the paper, which is a metaphor for looking through Borges's 'mind'.

In this play, the spectator is given a choice to possibly alter the narrative by deciding on simple actions, such as to leave or not to pick up a phone, to pay attention to the action and instructions as part of a play, etc. Certainly, denying collaboration would alter the planned narrative and, being aware that this is just a piece of theatre, one plays the part of a spectator and participates in the performance. There is the freedom of choice. There are only a few evident alternatives, either somebody does something, or they do not, but there are many more options one can choose. The question 'what if?' seems to remain with the spectator throughout the play and the possibility of alternative answers suggests further consequences of decisions, however passive or active the spectator's reaction to the judgement might be. Being aware that this is a performance produces a certain mode of behaviour as one

follows the structure of the play.

The forking paths of the storyline are based on several narratives that exist simultaneously. Some of them, such as being a spectator, narrator, student, murderer, victim, etc. are displayed at the same time as the doubt and possible other choices that are not present, where one decision leads to a chain of other decisions that brings a person to the ultimate consequence, i.e. death. The use of a mirror is both literal and metaphorical reflection upon oneself. The work responds to a theory that the only moment of presence is in the moment of decision, 'the here and now'. The only constant and present quality is the possibility of making diverse decisions changing one's perception of them. Hence, choices can be a play of signifiers, referring to a network of other signifiers, such as how the multiplicity of 'you' in the performance redefine the changeable notion of being as a metaphor.

Furthermore, not only is the main character constantly redefined through language in this play, but objects are also not fully available to sight. In the beginning of the play the spectator enters the dark room and follows a white line to the performance space. Then almost every object is shown via a spotlight, without connection to the rest of the body or structure associated with the displayed item, such as a hand with a stick or a book. Even the spectator is presented in such a way that at first one might not recognise that it is a mirror showing one's reflection. The same thing happens with the voice recording; every narrative is suggested through a series of questions and cut at a certain

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point; hence, the spectator is creating the story by 'answering' questions and imagining the story to be lucid. The lack of visibility also plays with the interpretation of what might be there, what the face of the person holding the stick or what the forest looks like. Visual and aural perspectives are not separate, as together they shape the experience of this play. When the narrator suggests an object or phenomenon and it is not shown to the eye, perhaps it is indicated as a metaphor, a thing as something else.

In this example, the spectator is the main character who becomes a grapheme in the play of intertextuality. A grapheme is the smallest part in writing, but in the context of Derrida's philosophy it displays an association between space, movement, and language. This word connects with writing in a wider sense. This notion of writing may be associated in multiple ways within theatre and performative arts, not only in the examples of a script for drama, cues for technical performance, notes for music, choreography for dance, or the meaning behind a representation, etc., but also, according to Derrida, as "writing" for all that gives rise to an inscription in general, whether it is literal or not and even if what it distributes in space is alien to the order of voice' (*Of Grammatology* 9). Writing becomes more than just a literal inscription. This is a form of writing that 'draws' the character of the spectator in the space of a performance. There the 'outline' of the character is constantly redefined, which leaves a trace in the spectator as 'always already' to refine oneself in terms of an

ever-changing self-definition.

Which one is more present, the character in the text, the character of the performer, or the character of the spectator? According to the philosophy studied here, none of them. None is more present than the others, as they are all a part of the intertextuality. All of the characters are drawn from words already associated in the structure of language, and presence and absence exist in the exchange of signifiers. Hence, they are never present or absent 'in themselves'. They do not rely on a belief in the essence of a thing, but on the constant play of signifiers, and this is the 'always already' changing metaphor of the self-presence of 'you', as happens in *Lecture Notes on a Death Scene*. The performance plays with the borderlines between definitions, as the main character in the play is simultaneously also a spectator. Although the narrative seems personal, it is just an appearance, as the viewer is not even defined as oneself, because apart from being identified as a spectator there is no place to mention one's name. Gardner underlined this in her review:

The show explores the illusion of choice and cleverly suggests, through tiny shifts of perspective and ways of seeing, that our picture of the world is nothing but a conjuring trick. We think we are in control and know the complete jigsaw, but we have only a single piece of it. (Gardner, 'Lecture Notes on a Death Scene')

In this play, one, as a spectator, can become everybody suggested by the director and nobody in particular. This performance, which

lasts for half an hour and involves only three people at a time, namely the spectator and two cast members, one of whom is the director as well, and a few objects, exhibits how in such minimal conditions one can enquire about personal and universal questions about absence and presence.

Fig. 13. Kwasniak, Mike. *Lecture Notes on a Death Scene*. 2010. Courtesy of Analogue. 8 Aug. 2013.

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point; hence, the spectator is creating the story by 'answering' questions and imagining the story to be lucid. The lack of visibility also plays with the interpretation of what might be there, what the face of the person holding the stick or what the forest looks like. Visual and aural perspectives are not separate, as together they shape the experience of this play. When the narrator suggests an object or phenomenon and it is not shown to the eye, perhaps it is indicated as a metaphor, a thing as something else.

In this example, the spectator is the main character who becomes a grapheme in the play of intertextuality. A grapheme is the smallest part in writing, but in the context of Derrida's philosophy it displays an association between space, movement, and language. This word connects with writing in a wider sense. This notion of writing may be associated in multiple ways within theatre and performative arts, not only in the examples of a script for drama, one for technical performance, notes for music, choreography for dance, or the meaning behind a representation, etc., but also, according to Derrida, as "writing" for all that gives rise to an inscription in general, whether it is literal or not and even if what it distributes in space is alien to the order of voice" (*Of Grammatology* 9). Writing becomes more than just a literal inscription. This is a form of writing that draws the character of the spectator in the space of a performance. There the 'outline' of the character is constantly redefined, which leaves a trace in the spectator as 'always already' to refine oneself in terms of an

ever-changing self-definition.

Which one is more present, the character in the text, the character of the performer, or the character of the spectator? According to the philosophy studied here, none of them. None is more present than the others, as they are all a part of the intertextuality. All of the characters are drawn from words already associated in the structure of language, and presence and absence exist in the exchange of signifiers. Hence, they are never present or absent 'in themselves'. They do not rely on a belief in the essence of a thing, but on the constant play of signifiers, and this is the 'always already' changing metaphor of the self-presence of you, as happens in *Lecture Notes on a Death Scene*. The performance plays with the borderlines between definitions, as the main character in the play is simultaneously also a spectator. Although the narrative seems personal, it is just an appearance, as the viewer is not even defined as oneself, because apart from being identified as a spectator there is no place to mention one's name. Gardner underlined this in her review: "The show explores the illusion of choice and cleverly suggests, through tiny shifts of perspective and ways of seeing, that our picture of the world is nothing but a conjuring trick. We think we are in control and know the complete jigsaw, but we have only a single piece of it." (Gardner, 'Lecture Notes on a Death Scene')

In this play, one, as a spectator, can become everybody suggested by the director and nobody in particular. This performance, which

lasts for half an hour and involves only three people at a time, namely the spectator and two cast members, one of whom is the director as well, and a few objects, exhibits how in such minimal conditions one can enquire about personal and universal questions about absence and presence.



Fig. 14. Kwasniak, Mike. *Lecture Notes on a Death Scene*. 2010.  
Courtesy of Analogue. 8 Aug. 2013.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter studies the terms ‘absence’ and ‘presence’ in theatre performances that involve a human being acting as a stage presence and liveness. These concepts have different dimensions: they are a part of theatre theory, and can be applied to a performer or a spectator. Therefore, this chapter is divided into three sections that provide structure to the analysis. They are entitled *acts*, because of the association between theory and theatre, which also occurs with the word *character*. All of the sections enquire about presence and absence; the first one is about theory, and the following parts sections into examples of two contrasting performances. Both study notions of theatre and art presence that are traditionally defined by immediacy and live attendance. This chapter questions the transcendental presence behind immediacy and stage presence in favour of regarding them as a form of signification. Hence, the stage presence or liveness of a performer is referred to as character and grapheme. As discussed in this chapter, all the character forms display different graphemes that are not hierarchically organised, as they are equal to each other. These concepts are studied in accordance to theatre studies, which includes research that analyses theatre in the context of Derrida’s philosophy.

Traditionally stage presence in theatre theory is studied from two perspectives. On the one hand there is the spectator who decides whether a performer has qualities associated with stage presence, and

these are identified by using words such as ‘aura’, ‘charisma’, and ‘mesmerism’. On the other hand, the actor or performer can have a stage presence with the notion of ‘character’, i.e. a persona that the performer is playing. Aspects of stage presence have associations in language that ensures that the term endlessly plays with meaning, as it is a metaphor for interpretation. Whether that quality of stage presence is defined from the perspective of the spectator or that of the performer depends in great measure on what is defined as intentional, as studied in the chapter on ‘Objects and Things’. This characteristic is impossible to state, as every action or act of speech is not original. If one’s self-presence is a play of texts and contexts, then there is no origin to intention. Without presence as ‘truth’ and a ‘transcendental signified’, there is no ‘truth’ as ‘intended’ signification, therefore there is no opposition between intended and pretended.

The previous chapter on ‘Objects and Things’ studied installations and a performance that I have not seen myself, so as to test my argument relative to events only known from their textual representation. In the current chapter I have attended both events, but to develop the argument I also used reviews and other sources. This was a methodological experiment was conducted to apply in practice the discourse that surrounds the notion of liveness. In Auslander’s book entitled using the very word *Liveness*, he argues that any borderline between live, represented, or recorded performance might not be as distinguishable as it seems. This division also applies to Fried’s argument



illustrated in the previous chapter on the 'dramatic' action and 'theatrical' act. It seems impossible to define a borderline between these words and, in accordance with Derrida's theory, there are no hierarches between 'oppositions', because they are not opposite, just different. Perhaps they are just different forms of interpretations; both of them rely on intertextuality and none is more present or absent as they do not have essence or 'present centre'.

The discourse about opposition of presence and absence encourages consideration of other opposites in theatre, such as spectacle and spectator, which have been touched upon in this chapter, especially in the example of the spectator as a main character in the play. This issue of opposition between spectator and artist is further discussed in the next chapter on 'Structure and Context'. This chapter enquires about present absence as a network of signifiers, and refers to the theory of signs in theatre as well as studying further the notion of intertextuality and the context of interpretation. Further examples of spectacles include installation art, such as *Under Scan, Microphones* by Raphael Lozano-Hemmer and *Ghostwriter* by Blast Theory, and another performance directed by Robert Wilson, *Einstein on the Beach*.

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illustrated in the previous chapter on the dramatic situation and theatrical act. It seems impossible to define a borderline between these words and their associated concepts. The theory of presence is not a simple matter of opposition, but a complex one. Perhaps the most difficult part of the theory is the notion of intentionality and non-intentionality. This chapter is divided into three parts. The first part discusses the difference between the notion of presence and absence. The second part discusses the notion of intentionality and non-intentionality. The third part discusses the notion of presence and absence in the context of Derrida's philosophy.

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### DETAILED OUTLINE OF THE ARGUMENT

The intention of this chapter is to enquire about the structure of meaning. In other words, I intend to mean through this chapter in the moment of writing? and (b) What are you, as a reader, going to make of it?

What is my authorial intention? What text when, to construct it, I use words that are iterable, as well as a language structure, and my knowledge about the material concerned? This issue of authorship and textuality in literature has been a point of interest for researchers such as Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida, whose work I analyse in this chapter. In reading the first sentence of the text, I notice the associations that compose the sentence, the make structures of meaning. These relations include a series of questions that are also studied in this chapter. Questions involve issues of structure and essence, such as, how can one include intention in the text and experience? What is the structure of intentionality?

CHAPTER 4

STAGED PRESENCE

Hence, the first section of the chapter discusses semiotics and Derrida's theory, which is followed by a second section dealing

with a study of interpretation, textuality and sign in theatre. In this second part, I do not trace the origin of semiology in theatre, or give every example of its application in theatre, as it outside of this research. This chapter focuses on the notion of textuality and interpretation in relation to the theory studied in this

In the first part of the chapter, the concept of structure in relation to theories that have been deconstructed by Derrida's philosophy, in particular those concerned with structurality in relation to absent centre or essence. I examine the reception theory and the role of spectator in creating meaning

related to the work of Marvin Carlson, Susan Bennett, Stanley Liebman and Martin. The theory is tested in a later part of the chapter in a series of studies of dimensions of intentionality and context in examples of theatre and installation.

The subject of intention in theatre and art is associated with the notion of 'now and here' which is traditionally assigned to theatrical presence. According to Derrida, it is theatrical presence in the dramatic narrative embodied in the total *mise-en-scene*. Here the narrative

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illustrated in the previous chapter on the dramatic action and 'theatrical' act. It seems impossible to define a difference between these words and, perhaps, there are no hierarchies between 'oppositions,' because they are not opposites, just different. Perhaps they are just different forms of interpretations; both of them rely on intertextuality and nondistinction of present or absent as they do not have essence or presence centre, with one divided in two parts. This is the first of the two parts of the present centre, with one divided in two parts. This is the first of the two parts of the present centre, with one divided in two parts.

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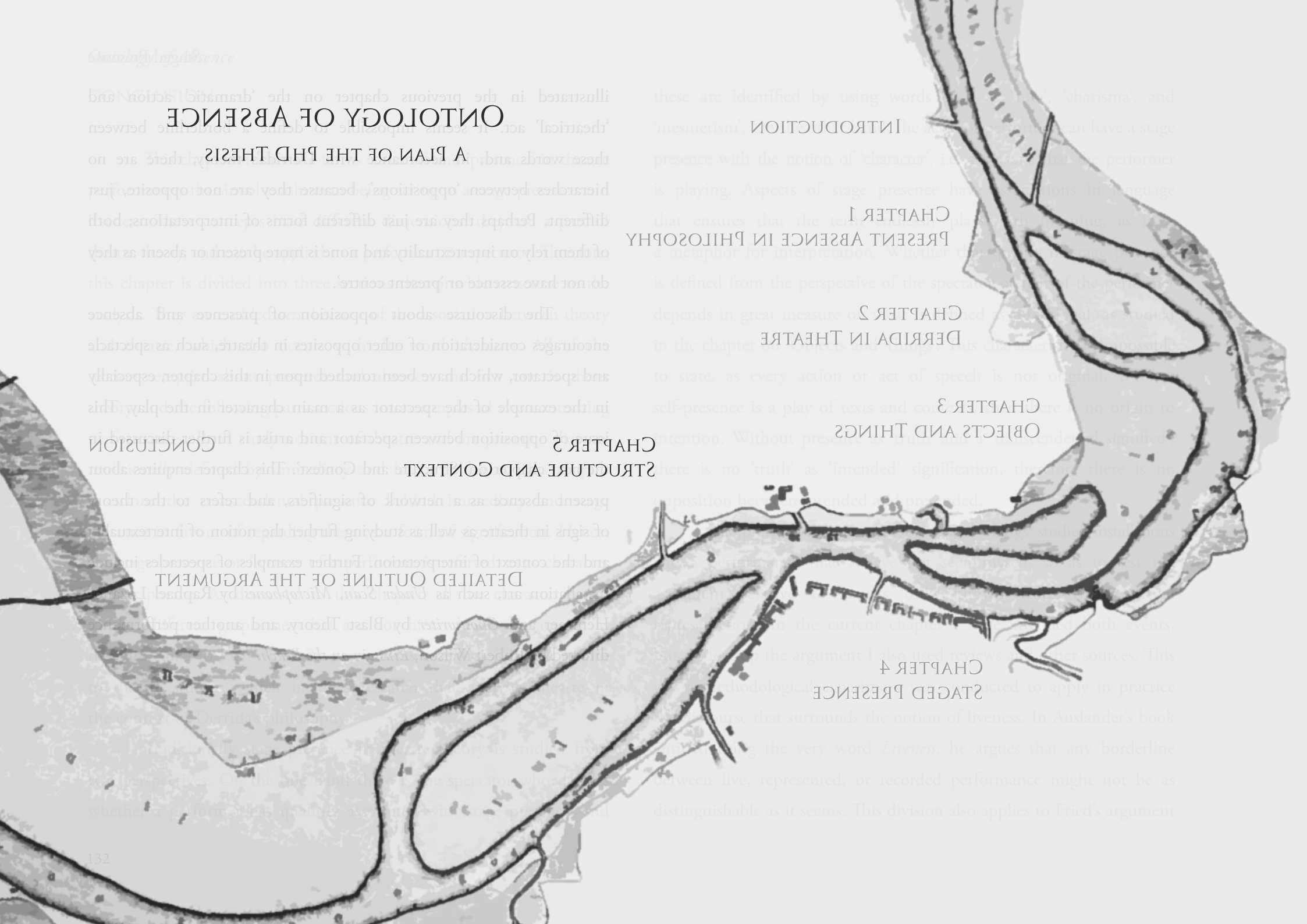
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# STRUCTURE AND CONTEXT

The intention of this chapter is to enquire about the structure of meaning. In other words, it is a debate between (a) What do I, as an author, intend to mean through this chapter in the moment of writing? and (b) What are you, as a reader, going to make of it? What is my authority over the text when, to construct it, I use words that are iterable, as well as a language structure, and my knowledge about the material concerned? This issue of authorship and textuality in theatre has been a point of interest for researchers such as Roland Barthes and Gerald Rabkin, whose works are analysed in this chapter. Re-reading the first sentence in the paragraph assists in locating its plurality, i.e. it indicates the associations of words that compose the sentence that make structures of meaning. Those relations include a series of questions that are also studied in this work. Some of the questions involve issues of structure and essence, such as, how can one include intention in the text and experience? What is the structure of intentionality?

Hence, the first section of the chapter discusses semiotics and Derrida's theory, which is followed by a second section dealing

with a study of interpretation, textuality and sign in theatre. In this second part, I do not trace the origin of semiology in theatre, or give every example of its application in theatre, as it outside of this research. This chapter focuses on the notion of textuality and interpretation in relation to the theory studied in this thesis. In the first part of the chapter, the concept of sign is studied from a wider perspective, in relation to theories that have been deconstructed by Derrida's philosophy, in particular those concerned with structurality in relation to absent centre or essence. I examine the reception theory and the role of spectator in creating meaning. I refer to the work of Marvin Carlson, Susan Bennett, Stanley Fish and Stuart Hall. The theory is tested in a later part of the chapter in a series of studies of dimensions of intentionality and context in examples of theatre and installation art.

The subject of intention in theatre and art is associated with the moment of 'now and here' which is traditionally assigned to presence. According to Fuchs, it is theatrical presence in 'the dramatic narrative as embodied in the total *mise-en-scene*. Here the narrative

becomes so present as to be happening now' (Fuchs, *The Death of Character* 70), and this presence of now is studied in this part of the thesis. 'Context', in this chapter, is a frame of reference that is associated with now-ness and intentionality. This issue is faced with a conception of structure that in contrast to the traditional perspective has no centre or full presence. There the frame has no boundaries but relies on intertextuality. Hence, present absence is researched through theories of context as well as structure. Theory is analysed in examples of theatre and art that display specific types of structures. It is applied to four contrasting pieces; three of them are examples of installation art and one is a performance. All of the installations are made for participation, and play with supposed immediacy and emphasise, as well as question, different constructions of meaning through context. The first one, *Under Scan*, is a visual installation by Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, and his videos are triggered by passers-by and projected onto their shadows. *Ghostwriter*, by Blast Theory, is exclusively aural and needs a participant to perform a journey contextualised by a recording. *Microphones*, by Lozano-Hemmer, connects visual, aural and participatory elements. The performance *Einstein on the Beach*, by Robert Wilson, is a classic example of a sense of detachment from immediate action, and this happens through the use of altered motion on stage and repeated elements where there is no unified narrative. Spectators participate in this performance through selecting which piece of the performance one will not see;

as there is no interval the spectators are welcome to choose their own interval(s).

## PRESENT ABSENCE IN SEMIOTICS

Traditionally, presence and absence are considered *through* signs. The signified is 'behind' a signifier, as the word absence stands for an *idea* of absence – the meaning. 'The sign is usually said to be put in the place of the thing itself, the present thing, "thing" here standing equally for meaning or referent. The sign represents the present in its absence. It takes the place of the present [...] The sign, in this sense, is deferred presence' ('Différance' 10), as Derrida expresses in the chapter 'Différance' from *Margins and Philosophy*. This is the system that was also defined by Ferdinand de Saussure as well as by Charles Sanders Peirce, the latter developing the theory as he added an individual aspect to Saussure's concept. For Saussure, signified is an idea, a concept of something. In his *Course in General Linguistics* he argues that a signifier does not have a point of reference in the world, not even any certain association with the idea it signifies. Hence, the difference and relation between words distinguish it from other words. The dimension added by Peirce is an interpretant in relation of signifier and signified. He divides the sign in accordance with the relation between sign and interpreter. According to Peirce, a 'sign, or representamen, is something which stands to somebody

for something in some respect and capacity' ('Logic as semiotic' 5). In his semiology, all thoughts are signs and their relation to the signified is arbitrary. This has been followed by the adherents of the semiotic tradition, where 'self-knowledge comes not from introspection, from an inquiry into a putative "inner world" of autonomous consciousness and sense-constructing acts [...] but from reflection upon the field of expressions in which one finds oneself' (Innis 2). According to Peirce, ideas are signs, as the mind is structured as a sign process ('Logic as semiotic' 3). In 'Logic as Semiotic: A Theory of Signs', Peirce writes that a 'Sign, or Representamen, is a First which stands in such a genuine triadic relation to a Second, called its Object, as to be capable of determining a Third, called Interpretant, to assume the same triadic relation to its Object in which it stands itself to the same Object' ('Logic as semiotic' 99). In other words, the first one (the sign) is the reality where the sign takes place; the second one (the object) is the thing that suggests a sign; and the third one (the interpretant) is the effect a sign has on a person who is interpreting it. In 'Letters to Lady Welby', a section of *Values in a Universe of Chance, Selected Writings*, Peirce argues, 'Thirdness is the triadic relation existing between a sign, its object, and the interpreting thought [...] a sign mediates between the interpretant sign and its object' (389). Thus, the sign mediates an object, even if the object does not physically exist. Roland Barthes, another influential theorist of semiotics, also studies this issue.

Barthes researches the complex relations between semiotic analysis and, in particular, the role of the interpreter in the structure of a culture. He studies models of signification, either verbal or nonverbal, and the role of images in imposing ideology on society. In his 'Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative', he argues that narratives are embedded in the world in multiple forms: 'Narrative is present in myth, legend, fables, tales, short stories, epics, history, tragedy, drama (suspense drama), comedy pantomime, paintings [...] stained-glass windows, movies, local news, conversation' (Barthes, *Introduction to the Structural Analysis* 237). He argues that, in the entire history of mankind there was never a time without narrative. Barthes looks at the structure of narrative in the narrative itself, from general theory to individual examples that are either included in, or exceptions to, the hypothetical structure of description. With the use of theory, he describes and classifies things. The theory he uses involves hierarchical elements of codification (letter, word, sentence, the structure of the sentence in relation to other sentences, etc.). Barthes divides the study of narrative into the smallest units that provided the essence of a narrative, and everything is significant in a narrative. In accordance with Barthes, art consists of a system that includes all of its elements as narrative units, but in a piece of art the separate units compromise their individual significance in favour of the overall meaning, as, for example, words in a sentence that constitute a 'logical string of nuclei, linked together by a solidarity relation' (*Introduction to*

*the Structural Analysis* 253). Hence, a sentence involves a complete (present) logic that is inseparable from its name. It is a double process that is characterised by duality of form and meaning. In his later work, Barthes studies different forms of language, such as nonverbal events and images or paintings. In his early writings, unlike Derrida, he argues for defining structures of significance and assigning elements of (nuclei) to precise positions in the system. His later texts are different, as they embrace Derrida's philosophy. They are analysed in the latter part of this chapter, and in association with sign and theatre.

In accordance to Barthes's early writings, the process of connecting signs is also the process of making a narrative. This process seems to be analogous to connecting dots. Let us imagine a platform with unnumbered dots, such as a piece of paper or a night sky. The way they can be connected depends on the person drawing the line. In traditional metaphysics one would say that there is a constellation that is present because its idea or concept is inscribed in the night sky. However, what I can see are dots of light. Perhaps, if trust is placed in science, they are not even there at the moment their light reaches the Earth. In the end, if one wishes to link the dots, they might reveal an image – will that image be a constellation? That is the case of authority. If one connects the dots in accordance with the system of classification of stars that is 'true' and recognised by a number of people, then yes, that can be a constellation. Otherwise, it is one's own, and maybe even a random, association of dots. A comparable issue is with

other *concepts*. Although the possibilities of different connections of words seem to be limited, they might not be, as it is unusual to see exact copies. However, there are norms of grammar and iteration that have to be applied in order to state something, such as drawing a line in order to connect the dots, but only an agreed upon constellation of words makes a concept that can be agreed upon as 'correct'. Otherwise the sentences might not have the authority to claim to be *original ideas*, as they are *misreadings*. I will elaborate further on the notion of misreading and intentionality in the next section dealing with sign and theatre. What deconstruction changes in this relationship is the authority in the constellation of words that makes, not only one meaning, but as many associations of words as there are readers. If there is not only one meaning in an idea then there is no essence in the structure of a concept. In other words, a 'signified concept is never present in and of itself, in a sufficient presence that would refer only to itself [...] every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by means of the systematic play of differences' (Derrida, 'Différance' 11). This particular play seems to happen in ever changing contexts.

Context studied as a frame of reference relies on intentionality and meaning, whereas the structure of signifiers does not have a present centre or meaning. In 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', Derrida studies the structurality of structures.



He refers to the absence of an essence or present centre in any structure. In this text, he writes that the structure has always been reduced to the centre that is supposed to be the presence of a thing, which is fixed and limits the play of such structure. However, there is a certain contradiction in the traditional concept of the centre: 'it has been always thought that the center, which is by definition unique, constituted that very thing within a structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurality. This is why classical thought concerning structure could say that the center is, paradoxically, within the structure and outside it [...] the totality has its center elsewhere' (Derrida, *Writing and Difference* 279). The centre of a structure is constantly redefined and substituted, and it is a surrounding arrangement of elements where something develops as a valuable quality: 'is the determination of Being as presence in all senses of the word. It could be shown that all the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the center have always designated an invariable presence [...] (essence, existence, substance, subject) [...] transcendental, consciousness, God, man and so forth' (Derrida, *Writing and Difference* 279-280). Those words refer to the structure of signifiers that are constantly in motion and redefining what they signify. Even the structure of signifiers defining presence points at other signifiers, so presence does not have an essence. Presence is not absent either because that would mean that signifiers point at a transcendental signified when the signifier is absence of presence: 'the center could not be thought in

the form of a present-being, that the center had no natural site, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of nonlocus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions come into play' (Derrida, *Writing and Difference* 280). Therefore, present absence and absent presence in theatre and art are in play with *ruptures* in the metaphysics of presence. Implementation of the theory of being as absence, without restricting the framing to art or theatre, opens up defined entities and identities to collaboration and hybridity. De-sedimentation, or to use a different word, deconstruction, can be a device that works with contemporary hermeneutics through questioning hermeneutics. Derrida noted that there is no point in trying to find different ways to conduct the study, because there is no language that would not include the history of metaphysics. Discourse is always in a certain form and has a system of logic implemented in the lexicon and syntax. The 'metaphysics of presence is shaken with the help of the concept of [the] sign' (Derrida, *Writing and Difference* 281). To remain a metaphysical concept there has to be a radical difference between signifier and signified; Derrida places the difference between signifiers so that a signifier never refers to another signifier as a fixed signified. In this way, the metaphysical concept of presence is never present in itself as there is no ideal and transcendental being outside the system of signification. Every concept is a structure of words, but words have other associations of signifiers. Hence, 'language bears within itself the necessity of its own critique' (Derrida, *Writing and Difference* 284) and, as introduced in

the first page of the chapter, Derrida suggested two ways to conduct such a critique. The first one would be to question how the words evolve, but it might be almost impossible to track the history of all the words used in philosophy, whereas the second way is ‘conserving all these old concepts within the domain of empirical discovery while here and there denouncing their limits, treating them as tools which can still be used. No longer is any truth value attributed to them [...] they are employed to destroy the old machinery to which they belong and of which they themselves are pieces’ (Derrida, *Writing and Difference* 284), while this ‘methodological value is not affected by its “ontological” nonvalue’ (Derrida, *Writing and Difference* 285). It is not to abandon the history and philosophy of metaphysics, but to study it in a different way the values of traditional fundamental truths, such as fullness of presence, authority or the transcendental signified.

Present absence is a metaphor of de-authorising a signifier from the original signified and generating multiple contexts and meanings. In metaphysics of absence there is more than one frame of reference besides the central signified, so meaning is not fixed. There is no promise of presence or essence of meaning. Signifiers supplement each other in the absence of the signified. Being as presence, which traditionally is referred to as a frame that has a fixed centre, does not have an essence or a transcendental presence behind a signifier. Hence, there is no longer one definition of presence and therefore signifiers can refer to the multiple associations that they have. In the absence of

a fixed centre, which traditionally defines presence as truth or idea, there is a play of signifiers that refer to each other. This is an opportunity that this chapter explores – because of the lack of one central signified that guarantees meaning and intention, there are no limits of meanings. One is no longer obligated to find the origin of the meaning and context that form the intention of the author, as there is no meaning that is the one true meaning.

Hence, present absence is the motion of supplementation, where signifiers are always already representations. Derrida, in several texts, suggests two ways of conducting an interpretation of interpretation; one is structuralism that seeks the origins of words and fundamental ideas, and the second one, which this thesis studies, provides the opportunity for multiple meanings in a signifier. Therefore, his kind of writing in the wide sense manifests its openness for interpretation. This theory reflects the contemporary version of hermeneutics, not as looking for one presence, but for supplementation of hyperlinks already redefined in relation to other codes in the system of iterability. The contemporary ‘region of historicity’ (Derrida, *Writing and Difference* 370) is characterised by accessibility to large amounts of information without the necessary burden of authority.

Discourse on context, as intentionality, presence, meaning or thought, appears frequently in Derrida’s texts, as in the example of ‘Signature Event Context’ and *Limited Inc.* The context is never

completely decided or certain as:

The system of this interpretation (which is also, in a certain manner, *the* system of interpretation, or in any case of all hermeneutical interpretation), however currently accepted it may be, or inasmuch as it is current, like common sense, has been *represented* through the history of philosophy. I would even go so far as to say that it is the interpretation of writing that is peculiar and proper to philosophy. [Derrida's italics] (Derrida, *Limited Inc* 3)

The notion of absence of the addressee when writing, and the absence of the sender when reading, produces different effects from those intended, and it is impossible to define the criteria of intentionality. The discourse between the notions of intentionality and theatricality brings the reader back to my third thesis chapter, 'Objects and Things', when this very division traditionally decided whenever art could be valuable or not. Derrida conducted a similar discourse about the valorisation of language with Austin's arguments about performative and constative utterance. Austin, in *How To Do Things With Words*, defined a performative utterance as those utterances that can achieve something with the use of words only, whereas constative utterances are descriptions of something. Derrida argued that Austin, in his theory, did not include the possibility of multiple interpretations of words depending on context and intentionality. According to Austin, a non-serious act of speech is not a successful performative one:

'Language [...] used not seriously, but in many ways parasitic upon its normal use [...] all this we are excluding from consideration' (Austin 21). Derrida replied that there is no pure performative, as interpretation and writing does not include the author's intentionality. Yet again, there is the division between the included and excluded, valuable and disregarded, but where is the borderline between the terms, and who decides on the hierarchy between signs? Every sign can have multiple contexts and non-hierarchical interpretations.

A message has to communicate something to the reader; despite the difference in time and space of codification and recodification, it has to be iterable. If that does not happen, then it is not a written sign: 'all writing must, therefore, be capable of functioning in the radical absence of every empirically determined receiver in general. And this absence is not a continuous modification of presence, it is a rupture in presence, the "death" or the possibility of the "death" of the receiver inscribed in the structure of the mark' (Derrida, *Limited Inc* 8). Writing produces a possibility of interpretation, and because it is not fully definable it assists with intertextuality. The written sign can therefore be placed in different contexts, and this absence of essential presence of context is also analysed in the philosopher's theory of structures. 'One can perhaps come to recognize other possibilities in it by inscribing it or grafting it onto other chains. No context can entirely enclose it. Nor any code, the code here being both the possibility and impossibility of writing,

of its essential iterability (repetition/alterity)' (Derrida, *Limited Inc* 9). The absence that Derrida writes about is referred to as a rupture that is associated with the spacing that 'constitutes the written sign: spacing which separates it from other elements of the internal contextual chain [...] This spacing is not the simple negativity of a lacuna but rather the emergence of the mark' (*Limited Inc* 9-10). Derrida extends the notion of writing also to the traditional notion of experience, which he reconsiders as 'there is no experience consisting of pure presence but only of chains of differential marks' (*Limited Inc* 10) and this thesis has been written to apply this theory to theatre. The play with the supplementation of signifiers is another example of the use of present absence.

## SIGN AND THEATRE

Theatre and semiotic theory has been a subject of discourse for many decades, from the perspective of a dualism that always includes the referential signified in representation. The questions emerging from this perspective enquire whether every element of theatre conveys meaning and, if so, where is the meaning, etc. There is a discourse about the bodily and conceptual duality of meaning. However, the scope and subject of this thesis do include tracing the origins of semiotic analysis, but rather the difference in reading and approaches to textuality. Few of the researchers in theatre have

been closely studied in this chapter. In contrast to other studies on theatre and sign in both French and English,\* Patrice Pavis, in *Languages of the Stage: Essays in the Semiology of Theatre*, as well as in *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*, argues for relativity of meaning in accordance with a particular event and specific spectators. Pavis studies local structures of interpretation. In the latter book, his share a theme based on the intercultural associations of signs and theatre. Other researchers influenced by post-structuralism at that time, such as Gerald Rabkin, have also studied this concept of local interpretations instead of one model of conducting an analysis.

\* This includes Keir Elam's work on *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, or Ficher-Lichte's work from the early 1990s, *The Semiotics of Theatre*, to name few.

Rabkin, in 'Is There a Text on This Stage?' enquired about the relationship between text and theatre. He studied different forms of text and theatre, from play to performance as textuality. Rabkin pointed at the notion of textuality depicted in Derrida's philosophy as a 'self-conditioning mass whose limits are unknowable' ('Is there a Text' 149). He describes the Anglo-American tradition of using language as an artefact of communication that assigns the notion of presence to speech rather than writing. In contrast to this, in film studies the notion of textuality is also found in the nonverbal (Rabkin,

‘Is there a Text’ 149). In theatre studies there is a notion of immediacy that makes textuality problematic. However, if one were to analyse immediacy and the philosophy of *différance*, which can be found in the previous chapter on ‘Staged Presence’, then one would find that the textuality of performance is not immediate, as it is never fully present. In his article, Rabkin writes that textuality is ‘corporealised in performance’ through the use of script. This study can also be applied, not only to script in theatre – or text, in Barthes’s terms – but also to writing in a wider sense.

One can question whether textuality is not already in the performance, as in order to create other signifiers it has to use a certain system of signification known to the audience. In Rabkin’s analysis of Richard Schechner’s performative processes, he points at Schechner’s inversed text and script hierarchy in performance, with script ‘representing the basic code of the theatre event’ (‘Is there a Text’ 150). However, Rabkin argues that this theatre model is the inversion of a system of performance but that textuality should not be a hierarchical quality, and neither ‘privileged nor deprivileged’ (‘Is there a Text’ 150). He examines text as restricted neither to systems of language nor to artistic expression. Anything that can be read as a message to the receiver is a text. Moreover, Rabkin writes about performance as text, as he states that ‘since performance can be read, it constitutes its own textuality; but it is a complex textuality because it is created from the usually prior textuality of the play and score’ (‘Is

there a Text’ 151). This thesis extends this discourse. A performance and other forms of art are also forms of utterance. Not only, as Rabkin argues, does textuality derive from script, but nonverbal and verbal signification is as much a form of grapheme as the script.

Text does not belong to an author, as Barthes famously states in his chapter on ‘The Death of the Author’ from *Image-Music-Text*. Through this argument he expresses the opinion that a piece of work might belong to somebody who wrote it, but the text that is involved in the work is a citation, and if the discourse is a subject for debate, then the author has the same control over the meaning that any reader has. Text is a ‘tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture’ (Barthes, ‘The Death of the Author’ 146). In his other piece, ‘From Work to Text’, he further elaborates on the word *text*, displaying it in multiple positions. He writes about text as an object, a methodological field, an activity of production rather than a product, outside of hierarchies of genre and as a plural and irreducible network. In his argument, the reader is the ‘space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost’ (Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* 148) and he continues that ‘a text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination’ (*Image, Music, Text* 148). It is not the author but the reader who is the destination of a text. Hence, in accordance with Barthes, ‘the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author’ (*Image, Music, Text* 148). His study on text can be contextualised alongside Derrida’s deconstruction.

However, while Barthes is involved in the linguistic site of textuality, Derrida associates writing, not only with textuality, but also with nonverbal communication as well as other forms of representation. Derrida looks at writing as a site of the play of signifiers, whereas Barthes proposes the reader as a site where intertextuality takes place. Barthes and Derrida's theories are incorporated into Rabkin's argument, which also involves theatre studies. In accordance with Rabkin, 'The Work is an object that is displayed; the Text a methodological field that is demonstrated' ('Is there a Text' 152). He brings forward another argument for textuality, as Stanley Fish has assessed interpretation is not as an outcome of reading, but happens in the process of reading. Hence, reading gives a text its form. Text then happens in the process of interpretation, not vice versa. Rabkin enquires as to how the theatre text is read by the audience, and, in answer to that, he provides a model recognising a plurality of theatre text that involves further questioning and enquiry. However, he comes to the conclusion that, while the playwright's interpretation is relevant to the play, it is read through the matrix of interpretation. This argument is a continuation of his earlier article on 'The Play of Misreading, Text/Theatre/Deconstruction', where he writes that all interpretations are certain forms of misreading of text. As he clarifies:

[The] playwright misreads his own text because he is trapped in prison-house of language; the traditional director unconsciously misreads the play even when striving to be

faithful to it; the experimental director consciously misreads both the score and the performance text; the audience collectively misreads all the misreadings. (Rabkin, 'The Play of Misreading' 60)

Rabkin also finds his article to be a misreading and, in accordance with this reasoning, even this text is a misreading of his theory. Misreading as an opportunity for new structures of interpretation is a reading of deconstruction that was a popular subject among researchers in the 1970s and 1980s. At that time, researchers from Yale University, such as Hillis Miller, Paul de Man, Harold Bloom, and Geoffrey Hartman, together with Jacques Derrida, enquired about types of misreadings and deconstruction. They published a book called *Deconstruction and Criticism* that studied the subject of interpretation and the role of the reader in assembling a meaning.

#### RECEPTION THEORY ON THE NOTION OF UNDEFINED

Reception theory is closely related to reader-response theory from literature studies. Reception theory engages with the questions about meaning, in particular, how an audience makes or contributes to the meaning of an artwork. In the perspective of the thesis the question about spectatorship would involve how a signifier in performances causes particular responses in the audience. The response to the theatrical performance can be traced to Greek plays that seemed to aim for

the feeling of *catharsis* which was a kind of purification of emotions with simultaneous feeling of fear and pity\*\* (Aristotle, 'On the Art of Poetry' 49-50). Reception theory was developed when the attention shifted from the work of art itself to the meaning it generates. Theories on where meaning is generated relied on the theories that provided answers on how we make sense of the world around us. Phenomenology, a tradition of thought that developed from philosophy of Edmund Husserl, suggests that the spectator is a part of art, as the human perception, with all its limitations, makes the artwork significant in the very moment of spectating. The tradition of poststructuralism also finds a spectator being a part of the artwork but on slightly different conditions. The process of reading the artwork implies extending the signifier's perception to other contexts, as reading already involves intercontextuality. In other words, the difference is in the perception of time. In phenomenology, the 'now' moment is presence. In the poststructuralist thought, the 'now' presents absence as is perceived through the contexts of things from the past and things yet to come. Although in both traditions of philosophy time is the process of happening the thing that makes the key difference between them is the relation between time and the subject.

\*\* 'Fear and pity may be excited by means of spectacle; but they can also take their rise from the very structure of the action' (Aristotle, 'On the Art of Poetry' 49).

### *Reception Theory and Theatre Studies*

The issues of indeterminacy of meaning and the position of spectatorship are explored through the works of the key figures that developed this theory. The key question involves the authority of an author over meaning. Derrida suggests that the reader's interpretation is as important as the writer's interpretation. When one person reads his text aloud, Derrida noted that the text no longer on the author's intention: 'All of a sudden someone puts a text right in front of you again in another context... It can reconcile you with what you've done, make you love it or hate it. There are a thousand possibilities. Yet one thing is certain in all this diversity, and that is that it's never the same' (Derrida, *The Ear of the Other* 158). The issue of plurality of interpretation and the spectator's role in its creation is a significant and complex subject in theatre discourse. Other researchers dealing with the subject of indeterminacy of meaning and the role of social and political context the work of theatre include Gerald Rabkin, Roland Barthes, Marvin Carlson and Susan Bennett. Reception theory is also significant to literature and cultural theorists such as Stanley Fish and Stuart Hall.

In 'Is There a Text on This Stage?', Gerald Rabkin questions the authority of an author over meaning, which has already been examined in this chapter as well as in the theory of Roland Barthes. Barthes regards theatre as a relationship between read and written texts and he responds to the complexity of communication in theatre. Marvin Carlson is

an American researcher of dramatic theory who published *Speaking in Tongues: Language at Play in the Theatre* in 2006, *Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* in 2001 and *Theories of the Theatre: A Historical and Critical Survey from the Greeks to the Present* in 1984. In *Theatre Semiotics: Signs of Life*, Carlson engages with reader-response theory and semiotics in theatre. Following Derrida, Carlson writes that text and performance cannot be original, as they involve a reflection of social, political and cultural context. He argues that the social, political and historical context of a theatrical performance is as significant as its textual analysis.

Another researcher who looks at cultural connotations of context is Susan Bennett. In *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception* (1997) and 'Making Up the Audience, Spectatorship in Historical Contexts' (2012), Bennett explores reception theories about the role of the audience in production and reception of meaning in theatre. She argues that cultural connotations and personal expectations have a great impact on the production of meaning. Bennett's work is a discourse on 'theatre audiences as cultural phenomenon ... productive and emancipated spectator is my subject' (*Theatre Audiences* 1). In her work, performance and cultural expectations are connected and have an influence on each other: 'Cultural assumptions affect performances, and performances rewrite cultural assumptions' (*Theatre Audiences* 2). Hence, reception theory in theatre, according to Bennett, is both public and individual, simultaneously.

Another aspect of Derrida's philosophy and reception theory can be found in the work of Stanley Fish, especially in *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* from 1980. In this book, Fish aims to answer some responses to his theory of interpretation of meanings and the notion of text with no origin associated with Derrida's philosophy. 'The charge is that literal or normative meanings are overridden by the actions of willful interpreters' (Fish 305). To answer that claim, Fish constructed an argument that 'challenged the self-sufficiency of the text by pointing out that its (apparently) spatial form belied the temporal dimension in which its meanings were actualized, and I argued that it was the developing shape of that actualization, rather than the static shape of the printed page, that should be the object of critical description' (Fish 2). Hence, the reader is not only limited to one interpretation of the author but also, the reader's interpretations matter to the creation of meaning. 'In practice, this resulted in the replacing of one question—what does this mean?—by another—what does this do?' (Fish 3) He writes that the relationship between the text and the reader is in a constant process of negotiation and interpretation. For Fish, the reader makes the meaning rather than responding to it, and he is aware that the readers as well as the authors 'are products of social and cultural patterns of thought' (332).

Interpretations are influenced by certain contexts and perhaps by similar socio-political circumstances that made the spectator engage



with a particular work. Fish develops a concept of 'interpretative communities', which supports his view that the position of authority as an institution (rather than individual readers) makes meaning. His notion of the institution is 'a bundle of interests, of particular purposes and goals' (14). Therefore, the institution might be connected with the authority that dictates what meaning is preferred.

The theory of preferred meaning was developed by Stuart Hall, who was a cultural theorist and a prominent figure in British Cultural Studies. He looked at the role of the audience in selecting interpretations. He divides the way of making interpretations into three subcategories. One is the dominant reading, when the audience will follow and accept author's interpretation. The second is the negotiated reading, which is when the audience partly accepts the author's interpretation and partly modifies the author's message in accordance with its own experiences. The third way is the oppositional reading, where the readers make their own interpretation, despite the author's intention. Hall was interested in the role of media in shaping dominant positions in ideologies. He looked at social media and its power to create desirable social values through audience positioning.

Except for those sub-categories, his theory of communication has four separate stages: production, circulation, consumption and reproduction. Each of the four stages has its own interpretation limits, and therefore polysemy is different than pluralism. Not every interpretation is equal to another: 'Any society/culture tends, with

varying degrees of closure, to impose its classifications of the social and cultural and political world. These constitute a dominant cultural order, though it is neither univocal nor uncontested' (Hall, 'Encoding, Decoding' 98). In every stage in the process of making and interpreting meaning, there is a set of open-ended associations. A message will not evoke any possible meaning, as each stage of coding will limit the possibility of interpretation of the next stage. In this theory, encoding does control decoding of a message in a particular culture, political system or society. Hall calls this control over encoding a 'complex structure in dominance' ('Encoding, Decoding' 91). The system of domination embedded in the message depends on the context in which it is made or read. However, the structure is dominant, as there is the 'preferred reading', but there are more possibilities of interpretation. He writes that decoding has certain limits by which encoding operates. Otherwise, there would be no communicative exchange, as anything could mean anything.

Hall realised that the linear model of a process of communication does not present the subject in its complexity. The straight-line model of sender-message-receiver does not provide an answer to the process of interpretation. He analyses the system of communication in media where an event has to become a narrative or a story before it is broadcast. In this process, a message gains its form and appearance. A message is formed in the production phase.

The production process is not without its 'discursive' aspect:

it, too, is framed throughout by meanings and ideas: knowledge-in-use concerning the routines of production, historically defined technical skills, professional ideologies, institutional knowledge, definitions and assumptions, assumptions about the audience and so on frame the constitution of the programme through this production structure. (Hall, 'Encoding, Decoding' 92)

In accordance to Hall, the process of production and reception are related because they are moments made by social relations in the communicative process ('Encoding, Decoding' 93). Encoding and decoding meaning are divided into two categories, as they can be asymmetrical either in source or on the receiver's side. Hall calls the asymmetry in meaning 'distortions' or 'misunderstandings', as they do not balance the paradigm of conversation.

Every sign is coded. Any visual codes are specific to a particular culture. Hall differentiates aural and visual types of discourse. He applies Peirce's terminology to his findings with a reminder that the three-dimensional world will never be fully represented by two-dimensional things. 'Reality exists outside of language, but it is constantly mediated by and through language: and what we can know and say has to be produced in and through discourse' (Hall, 'Encoding, Decoding' 95). Hall writes that knowledge is not the product of the representation but communication in real conditions, as there is no meaningful conversation without the language code. Codes vary in the degree of habitation.

Those that appear natural are used for a long time. Hall explains this problem of representation with an example of a word and an image.

This leads us to think that the visual sign for 'cow' actually is (rather than represents) the animal, cow. But if we think of the visual representation of a cow in a manual on animal husbandry – and, even more, of the linguistic sign 'cow' – we can see that both, in different degrees, are arbitrary with respect to the concept of the animal they represent. (Hall, 'Encoding, Decoding' 96)

Visual and linguistic representations are similar in the sense that they both stand for the constructed ways of presenting a message. Inscription in any form of communication, such as text as performance, is always interpreted. Meaning is constructed through cultural contexts and the relationship with the reader. Hence, the meaning of a text depends on multiple factors, such as the politics of place and society.

The distinction between absence and presence in Hall's theory is expressed in his example of the difference between 'denotation' and 'connotation' in linguistic theory. He writes that the terms are differentiated in accordance with a degree of literal transcription of reality. This distinction is based on the apparent difference between natural signs and language signs. Visual signs are identified as having some attributes of the represented things, so they are defined as natural signs without the use of language codes, whereas the changeable meanings that can be different from one interpretation to another are

codified. Hall does not define the distinction between signs in the linguistic way. In his theory, the difference between denotation and connotation is analytic and depends on the extent of universality in its use. According to Hall, the majority of signs will have both aspects. ‘The terms “denotation” and “connotation”, then, are merely useful analytic tools for distinguishing, in particular contexts, between not the presence/absence of ideology in language but the different levels at which ideologies and discourses intersect’ (Hall, ‘Encoding, Decoding’ 97). Hall writes that meaning and the linguistic system is formed by culture, knowledge, history and the reality of environment. What is the most significant in Hall’s theory for this thesis is his argument that the relation of power is both established and unsettled. Present absence as an implement of change can work through performance and visual art to find limits of the politics of established relations. Present absence as a theory is a lens to examine how ideals of presence display themselves in contexts of art, society and politics. The theory functions through questioning the coherency and plausibility of plural concepts of presence in visual culture.

#### LOCAL CONTEXTS IN ART AND THEATRE

Creating a narrative from a particular set of signifiers in a specific context may have a metaphorical response as well as a physical action. The selected pieces of installation art and one piece of theatre include

both of those components. The audience can literally choose their own frame of reference in spectating by moving from place to place, and metaphorically by assigning signifiers to received information. In the installation art pieces, the spectator is also a performer, without whom there would be no spectacle. In *Under Scan*, the frame of performance is the person’s shadow and the attention one is paying to the installation. In *Ghostwriter* it is the association of a history and a space. But what if someone could wander away from the ‘performance space’? How would this affect the installation? In *Microphones*, one’s selection of sounds, articulated into a system of language or just noise, is the frame one adds to the installation. However, in the piece of theatre, the spectator has the opposite function from that referred to in the installation art pieces. The spectator is de-performing the play. This complex-sounding quality involves the simple action of leaving the play, either for a break or never to come back again. This is one possibility of framing the piece of theatre proposed in this chapter, that is, *Einstein on the Beach*. The lack of coherence of this performance is also another opportunity to conduct a playful interpretation.

Theatre and art can also be analysed according to the linguistic theory of present absence, which is not idealistic and exposes the structure that plays with intertextuality. The installation arts events discussed here are *Ghostwriter*, by Blast Theory, and *Under Scan* and *Microphones*, by Rafael Lozano-Hemmer. The following section is devoted to *Einstein on the Beach*, by Robert Wilson. All the works are

interactive and balanced on the borderline between art and performance. The first work examined is *Under Scan*, a visual piece based on a street that is designed precisely to interact with the audience's attention; fragments of recordings appear when passers-by pay attention to their shadows. The narrative is given but is dependent on the audience and their interaction and play with videos that portray recorded volunteers. The next piece is an example of an aural narrative that happened at some point in the past and in the same location the spectator is listening to the story. The only thing that connects the audience to the performer is the voice and set containing objects about which the person speaks. Therefore, all the movement and variants of the play are happening through the audience. *Microphones* links the visual and aural aspects of installation art. This is a piece where members speak into old microphones\*\* and find a voice that belongs, not to them, but to another person who has spoken into a microphone *immediately* before them or at some point in the past. This delay of the notion of presence in a visual form can be experienced in all the pieces examined here. The last analysed piece is Robert Wilson and Philip Glass's opera *Einstein on the Beach*, reviewed in May 2012 in London. The narrative of this play is a network without constant entity, which is in relation to time and space of performance, and made in reference to Einstein's idea of relativity. The play has

\*\* If the speaker's voice is not audible instantly when a person speaks, then a speaker does not talk through the microphone but to an object.

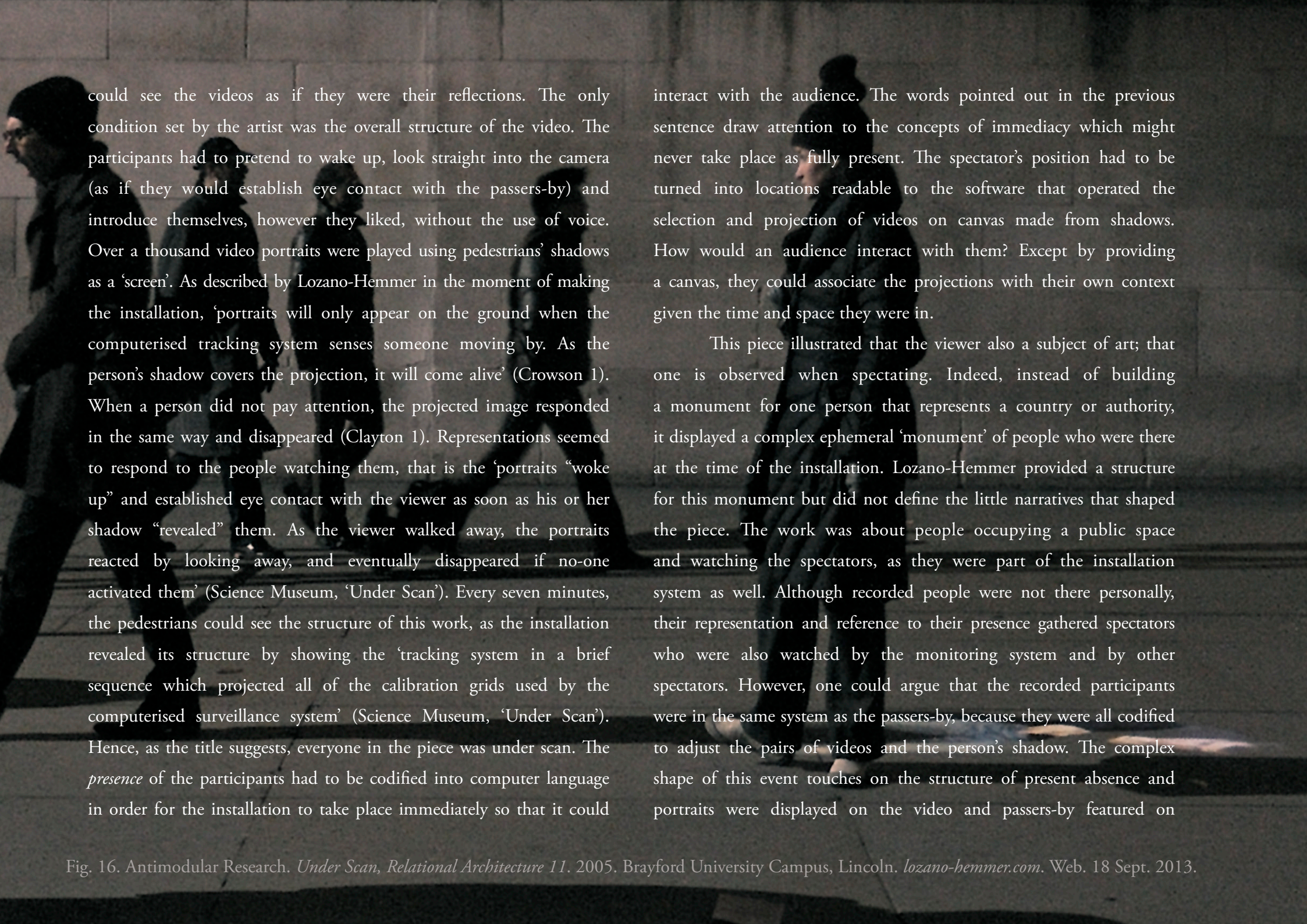
a pattern of repetitive actions that gives the feeling that time passes with varying tempos. Unspecified intervals of time and duration make the experience of this play even more personal. The play itself, although it is entitled *Einstein on the Beach*, is not drawn from Einstein's biography. Perhaps this play represents an imagining of the scientist in multiple representations, ranging from his theories about velocity and dimensions to his physical characteristics as a man in a white shirt and trousers with braces. This performance questions borderlines between the genres of opera, theatre, art, and its structure is decentred, therefore it is analysed in this chapter as an event that sums up elements of art, installations, theatre and opera in accordance to spectators' interpretation.

#### *Under Scan*

The first artwork in this chapter is *Under Scan* by Rafael Lozano-Hemmer. The piece was commissioned by the East Midlands Development Agency, and the installation was produced in London. Lozano-Hemmer is an electronic artist who makes large-scale installations and interventions using new technology. He makes ephemeral 'anti-monuments' that use the art of interaction rather than a solid physical object. *Under Scan* is an interactive video installation that took place in November 2008 in Trafalgar Square, London. This piece proposed to present a portrait of British society in its full complexity, through multiple short self-presentations where every participant could represent themselves. Shots were made from above, so the passers-by



Fig. 15. Antimodular Research. *Under Scan, Relational Architecture 11*.  
2006. Humberstone Gate West, Leicester. [lozann-hemmer.com](http://lozann-hemmer.com). Web. 18  
Sept. 2013.



could see the videos as if they were their reflections. The only condition set by the artist was the overall structure of the video. The participants had to pretend to wake up, look straight into the camera (as if they would establish eye contact with the passers-by) and introduce themselves, however they liked, without the use of voice. Over a thousand video portraits were played using pedestrians' shadows as a 'screen'. As described by Lozano-Hemmer in the moment of making the installation, 'portraits will only appear on the ground when the computerised tracking system senses someone moving by. As the person's shadow covers the projection, it will come alive' (Crowson 1). When a person did not pay attention, the projected image responded in the same way and disappeared (Clayton 1). Representations seemed to respond to the people watching them, that is the 'portraits "woke up" and established eye contact with the viewer as soon as his or her shadow "revealed" them. As the viewer walked away, the portraits reacted by looking away, and eventually disappeared if no-one activated them' (Science Museum, 'Under Scan'). Every seven minutes, the pedestrians could see the structure of this work, as the installation revealed its structure by showing the 'tracking system in a brief sequence which projected all of the calibration grids used by the computerised surveillance system' (Science Museum, 'Under Scan'). Hence, as the title suggests, everyone in the piece was under scan. The *presence* of the participants had to be codified into computer language in order for the installation to take place immediately so that it could

interact with the audience. The words pointed out in the previous sentence draw attention to the concepts of immediacy which might never take place as fully present. The spectator's position had to be turned into locations readable to the software that operated the selection and projection of videos on canvas made from shadows. How would an audience interact with them? Except by providing a canvas, they could associate the projections with their own context given the time and space they were in.

This piece illustrated that the viewer also a subject of art; that one is observed when spectating. Indeed, instead of building a monument for one person that represents a country or authority, it displayed a complex ephemeral 'monument' of people who were there at the time of the installation. Lozano-Hemmer provided a structure for this monument but did not define the little narratives that shaped the piece. The work was about people occupying a public space and watching the spectators, as they were part of the installation system as well. Although recorded people were not there personally, their representation and reference to their presence gathered spectators who were also watched by the monitoring system and by other spectators. However, one could argue that the recorded participants were in the same system as the passers-by, because they were all codified to adjust the pairs of videos and the person's shadow. The complex shape of this event touches on the structure of present absence and portraits were displayed on the video and passers-by featured on

the computer tracking them. In this installation they were always supplemented after another exchange of numbers associated with the location or time of recording. The spectators were equally observers and observed. All of the characters in the installation had to be structured in an algorithm in order to synchronise the *utterance* of the installation, but the spectator had a choice of interpretation as well as involvement.



Fig. 17. Antimodular Research. *Under Scan, Relational Architecture 11*. 2008. Trafalgar Square, London. [lozano-hemmer.com](http://lozano-hemmer.com). Web. 13 Sept. 2013.

*Ghostwriter*

Interaction was also a key feature of the piece called *Ghostwriter*, commissioned for the Royal Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter. This installation consisted of a 'million objects giving rise to a million thoughts' (Blast Theory, 'Ghostwriter'). This was an aural piece, accessible via mobile phone, presenting a narrative based on dwelling in the past, and this past was combined with the viewer's present through referred objects. Here, the audience could choose a selection of paths that were available around the museum but, in fact, would not change the story. The audience could relate to the story presented in a woman's voice, through sharing the space of narration. The narrative was a mosaic of personal stories represented in precisely designed moments taken from the spectator's tour. Those stories were represented through a spoken narrative and connected to the place of the viewer through the presence of physical objects, thus anchoring the narrative within a place.

Visitors ring in and hear a woman whose voice gently draws you into the museum. She describes her surroundings, and they seem to match yours. She describes an object in front of her and talks about its role in her life. However, this line between her surroundings and yours is unstable. At times she says things that suggest she is somewhere else looking at a different object. And you can interact with her, jumping in time and space or even making a recording of your own

about an object that resonates in your life. (Blast Theory, 'Ghostwriter')

This work refers to something that is always missing, elements of intention and thought in the representation of an object or story. Although the piece differs from earlier works of Blast Theory, and reminds one of typical museum audio tours, they work with the traditional sense of lost presence of thought in the representation of a narrative. Blast Theory is a group of artists lead by Matt Adams, Ju Row Farr and Nick Tandavanitj. They make performances questioning the relationship of technology, society and the politics. The group uses interactive media to create a narrative that is open to the user to participate and adapt. They use the medium of the Internet as well as site-specific spaces to create their performances and interactions. They have performed since the early 1990s, and they gained international exposure after *Can You See Me Now?* (2001), which merged digital and real environments by playing online and on the streets simultaneously. After that success, their later works included *Uncle Roy All Around You* (2003) and *I Like Frank* (2004), which also explored the role of the audience in the simultaneity of digital environments and the physical world.

Although the spectator was in the surrounding environment of the narrative, it does not provide the author's intention that is the signified and context of meaning. The spectator could only alter the sense of missed presence with their own interpretation. In the piece,



a woman was leading the spectator through her memories and, at the end, she encouraged the audience members to leave behind an object that had a particular meaning to them – the story of the object will never be revealed to any other spectator. This object left another untold account, which might draw on the imagination of future audience members. Another work that explored the aural representation of the concept of absence without textual narrative was Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's *Microphones*. The work was also constructed on the basis of interaction with the audience.



Fig. 18. Blast Theory. *Ghostwriter*. 2011. The Royal Albert Memorial Museum. [flickr.com](https://www.flickr.com/photos/blasttheory/). Web. 12 June 2013.



Fig. 19. Antimodular Research. *Microphones, Subsculpture 10*. 2008. [lozano-hemmer.com](http://lozano-hemmer.com). Web. 12 June 2013.

*Microphones*

Microphones onstage indicate that the performance is 'live'. Auslander, in *Liveness*, analysed the position of microphones on a stage. In music performances they are the focus and centre of choreography, as 'the very presence of the microphone and the performers' manipulation of it are paradoxical markers of the performance's status as live and immediate' (Auslander, *Liveness* 53). Lozano-Hemmer played with the association of this particular instrument in relation to the sense of presence, and he questions this link through the installation. *Microphones* was a piece that allowed the public to interact with the sense of the past. This installation featured old microphones (1939-vintage Shure): 'Each microphone has been modified so that inside its head is a tiny loudspeaker and a circuit board connected to a network of hidden control computers. When a public member speaks into a microphone, it records his or her voice and immediately plays back the voice of a previous participant, as an echo from the past' (Lozano-Hemmer, 'Project Microphones'). There was a shift in the sense of immediacy and presence combined with the notion of play, as it was unknown whether the recording is from a person who was just speaking or if it was an older recording. This is because '[h]alf the time the microphones play back the voice that was just recorded, while the other half they reproduce a recording at random from up to 600,000 that each microphone can store. This distribution allows the participant to understand the interaction but it also creates an

experience that is out of his or her control. Ultimately, the piece's content is entirely generated by the participation of the public' (Lozano-Hemmer, 'Project Microphones'). Therefore, there was a sense of contribution to the bigger picture of the piece.

As mentioned already, there were particular microphones used in this piece, including the famous Model 55 Unidyne made by Shure Incorporated, which are 'the most recognised microphone in the world' (Shure, 'Shure History'). This American company produced radio parts from 1925 onward, and their later product range expanded to include microphones. 'Historic figures like Franklin D. Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy or Martin Luther King use the microphone to proclaim their messages, and the 55 Unidyne becomes an integral accessory for performers like Groucho Marx and Elvis Presley' (Shure, 'Shure History'). The microphone type is iconic, used by singers and politicians, and featured on many posters and pictures. The choice of the object was a visual hint at the relation to the past and its associations with public speech. Lozano-Hemmer, in this piece, played with the traditional sense of immediacy and presence that is usually associated with the speaking person and spoken utterance in general. In his installation, the sense of immediacy was questioned through the lack of reliability between what is said and heard. Each participant could leave a trace of their voice and this play was compared with the surrealist game of 'exquisite corpse' (Lozano-Hemmer, 'Project 'Microphones'), where the process means

## *Ontology of Absence*

that a given piece of recording becomes part of a previous and unknown recording. The installation allowed a certain space for interaction and the content was constructed by the audience. In the next piece, a spectator could interact by choosing a personalised gap in performance.

### *Einstein on the Beach*

In *Einstein on the Beach* by Robert Wilson the theory of relativity is included through multiple frames of reference. In this performance one can choose the position of the frame of absence as well as a gap in the performance as already mentioned. Wilson is an artist and architect who strongly influenced contemporary theatre. He has his own kind of theatre that is widely recognised around the world. Before *Einstein on the Beach* (1976), he directed *King of Spain* (1969), *Deafman Glance* (1970), *The Life and Times of Joseph Stalin* (1973) and *A Letter for Queen Victoria* (1974). All of the productions were had his particular stylistic approach. *Einstein on the Beach* was one of the biggest and most costly productions that Wilson created. After this production, which brought him international recognition, he presented his work in European cities and collaborated with multiple writers and performers. The work with Marina Abramović discussed in the previous chapter is an example of such a collaboration. In recent years his most recognised works played in the world's capitals include *The Black Rider*, *The Temptation of St. Anthony*, *Madama Butterfly*, and *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. *Einstein on the*

*Beach* is an unconventional, abstract opera, first developed in collaboration between Robert Wilson and Philip Glass in 1976, and it was inspired by the habits and achievements of the historical figure Albert Einstein. This play established Robert Wilson's career in the 1970s and it is a classic example of his theatre.

In 2012, this performance was played again, almost forty years after the first production. In '*Einstein on the Beach: The Primacy of Metaphor*', Craig Owen writes that despite the lack of meaning, Wilson and Glass's performance focuses on Einstein and his physical and mental character, as a human being and a great mind whose theories led to the splitting of the atom:

They centered on the figure of Einstein. Habits of his dress and personality; mathematical and scientific models and instruments; the products of technological progress, such as trains, space-ships, and atomic explosions, coalesced to form a complex portrait by association. From scene to scene, the spectator's sense of both scale and duration was altered, perhaps in demonstration of the central hypothesis of Einstein's thinking (that dimension and velocity are interdependent). Because of the frequent arbitrariness of the selection of the images, no detail being too insignificant for inclusion, as well as the freedom with which associations were made-organization was neither chronological nor thematic – Wilson's work has been compared with dreams. (Owens 24)



Fig. 20. Jansch, Lucie. *Einstein on the Beach*. 2012. The Telegraph. [telegraph.co.uk](http://telegraph.co.uk). Web. 12 June 2012.

Wilson and Glass's version of relativity of time and space was demonstrated in this (almost five-hour long) performance which itself appeared to run on an altered sense of time. Prior to making the performance, the collaborators agreed on the overall time frame according to which they would make the performance components. Each scene is approximately twenty minutes long and they are connected with 'knee plays' (Glass, 'Einstein on the Beach'). They are elements typical of Wilson's aesthetics in theatre – he explains this aspect as an element (a kind of joint) that connects two similar pieces. Once Wilson visually designed the scenes, Glass began composing the music from the images and in this way developed the construction of this performance. Wilson believes that this particular performance is different from traditional theatre because it is not dependent on literature and it begins similar to a construction site rather than a drama. In an interview, Wilson states that '[I]n the past, theater has always been bound by literature. *Einstein on the Beach* is not. There is no plot, although there are many references to Einstein, and the visual book can stand on its own. We put together the opera the way an architect would build a building. The structure of the music was completely interwoven with the stage action and with the lighting. Everything was all of a piece' (Glass, 'Einstein on the Beach'). The wide context to Wilson's form of theatre can be found in Lehmann's theory of postdramatic theatre.

The division between theatre and drama is associated with the

distinction between speech and writing, whereby drama is a form of writing and theatre happens on stage through utterance. However, when both drama and theatre are studied as forms of writing, as arche-writing, then the distinction are not as apparent. This is a paradox for theatre studies. To test this theory in the context of contemporary research, the next part of the chapter will analyse conceptions of drama and theatre. Lehmann defines contemporary theatre as not having an association with drama, while he also emphasises theatricality and theatre signs as textuality. This argument dividing dramatic and theatrical art is not a new one, and has been argued for over 200 years. The discourse on this subject is reflected in Fried's theory of art and his reading of Diderot's division of theatricality and dramatic art. Therefore, this point of discussion appears to be analogous to Fried's argument on the distinction between art and objecthood. To compare these theories, there is the object as drama, and objecthood as theatre art. This division that separates language from speech and writing is also responsible for assigning the value of presence and authenticity to speech, and this is the element that I find particular to Lehmann's work. The subject of authenticity is linked to the immediate experience of theatre, and it is characteristic of Lehmann's postdramatic theatre. As I argue throughout the thesis, this notion might not be possible and therefore postdramatic theatre can be dramatic, as it responds to language and references signifiers to other signifiers, rather than the signified of *the presence itself*.

The theatre that he defines as postdramatic is characterised as *present* and is based on the assumption that there is a sense of immediacy and *presence* through technology. This is another element that I argue against in this thesis, and the discussion over immediacy and liveness in theatre in the context of technology can be found in Chapter 4. Nonetheless, it is not only immediacy that decides on the division between theatre and drama, but also the hierarchy built on the premise of the superiority of presence in general. To reason his theory, Lehmann analysed diverse forms of contemporary performance art where text and drama became secondary. Peculiarly, he constructed his theory on the assumption that the process of reading has changed during the last few decades. According to Lehmann, technologies are replacing written text and books, and this is the reason to define a different mode of perception and, as a consequence, divide theatre and drama. He identifies this process as ‘a simultaneous and multi-perspectival form of perceiving is replacing the linear-successive’ (16). Lehmann compares two processes of reading, one is slow and centred, while the other is a ‘more profitable circulation of moving images’. Given this assumption, he makes a distinction between literature and theatre, and applies features of this distinction to the majority of contemporary experimental spectacles.

One could question the firmaments of Lehmann’s theory, such as the identification of only two ways of reading or assuming that textuality in a book is approached differently from textuality in

other media, without conducting any scientific study on the issue. However, in the same paragraph in which he identifies these two ways of reading that depend on ‘the release of active energies of imagination’ (Lehmann 16) he also indicates that literature and theatre are systems of signifiers. ‘Neither theatre nor literature is essentially characterized by reproduction but rather organized as a complex system of signifiers’ (Lehmann 16): this is one sentence that seems to provide an apparent connection between this thesis and Lehmann’s work. As in a subsequent part of the book, through this definition he characterises theatre and literature as textures that point at something else, a concept or imagination, which could not be further from the theory of this thesis. Lehmann identifies the system of signifiers in the dualistic perspective that further assists him in producing a division between drama and theatre.

Another element that provides arguments for Lehmann’s distinction between theatre and drama involves the physicality of the human body, not only from the perspective that focuses on a performer, but also a spectator. Lehmann studies theatre, not only as bodies on stage, but also as a place of gathering: ‘Theatre means the collectively spent and used up lifetime in the collectively breathed air of that space in which the performing and the spectating take place’ (Lehmann 17). These two ways of engaging with performance, as a performer and spectator, are identified by Lehmann as ‘total text’ (Lehmann 17).

Nevertheless, there appear to be two different ways of defining text in theatre in his book. From one position there is theatre as text, and from the other, a text is an element of theatre, as well as other parts of theatre that are visual, audible etc. According to Lehmann, this is the 'profoundly changed mode of theatrical sign usage' and he therefore names 'the new theatre as "postdramatic"' (17). Lehmann identifies the notion of textuality in theatre, as well as on stage and in the audience, as 'the new theatre text' (17) that is no longer dramatic. However, he points out that text is secondary in theatre. Therefore, for Lehmann, theatre is still a dualistic association of text and stage, but it is not dramatic; by the word 'dramatic' he refers to the literary category of composition and, in his theory, contemporary theatre is beyond the genre of drama:

Dramatic theatre is subordinated to the primacy of the text. In the theatre of modern times, the staging largely consisted of the declamation and illustration of written drama. [...] through the non-verbal repertoire of gesture, movement and psychologically expressive mime, the human figure [...] was still centrally defined through speech. [...] dramatic theatre was the formation of illusion [...] dramatic theatre proclaims wholeness as the model of the real. Dramatic theatre ends when these elements are no longer the regulating principle but merely one possible variant of theatrical art. (22)

He defines the form of aesthetic in theatre that he terms postdramatic

through negative boundaries, that is identifying what is not theatrical, with one affirming exception, that theatre art is beyond drama, and also that 'theatre without drama does exist' (Lehmann 30). Lehmann describes the notion of dramatic theatre as an illusion of a wholeness of narrative, whereas theatrical is the present of narrative. Postdramatic theatre is characterised as textuality that happens in the moment of spectating, in *presence*. In finding an origin in the division between theatre and drama, Lehmann turns to Aristotle's *Poetics*, where theatre is a site of illusion and drama, which is the logic behind the stage presentation. However, in his argument against drama and in favour of theatre 'beyond drama,' Lehmann makes assumptions that are not apparent. There are many questions for his reasons to detach the analysis of contemporary theatre from drama. For this research, one of the primary concerns would be the preservation of the association of signifier and signified in the context of theatre and, equally, excluding it from the text of literature. Therefore, how is the textuality as exchange of signifiers on stage present, as it points to an idea of something else? How different is it from drama? Why assume that spectators think about theatre as a site of illusion, whereas drama is the truth behind it?

*Einstein on the Beach* was not traditional theatre, but despite the different way of making this performance it is still accomplished by all kinds of structures that are associated with language. Hence, the discourse about the division between dramatic art and the theatrical



act in this chapter as a dimension of the structurality of a play. Although the narrative is not representation of drama, it is a representation of certain codes, and they are displayed with the use of language structures.

Almost unconnected scenes and abstract sounds, as well as visuals, are characteristic to Wilson's theatre. Context, in this performance, is relative. This function reflects the theme of the performance – the character of Einstein and his theories. The performance played with representations of the scientist, represented by performers. The concept of multiple frames is associated with Wilson's theatrical aesthetics. He designed the performance space using layers of presentation, such as individual images made with lighting or sound overlaying, disconnected to the images created on stage. Multiple frames of visual or aural images are layered on top of each other to create a scene.

Where is Einstein? In Wilson's spectacle, multiple representations of the scientist create an image of Einstein that does not present one perspective. Multiple positions on the one subject can be mentally assembled and form a singular representation. That happens even if certain elements are missing from the perspective. An example of the freely chosen element is the break in performance of *Einstein on the Beach*. Wilson presents images that refer to Einstein, but do not represent the person. There is no Albert Einstein as a physical person in the world anymore. After his death, his name became a play of references. Different versions of Einstein never point to one person.

Wilson does not explain references to Einstein's life. Their interpretation depends on spectators' knowledge of the scientist. Therefore, each fragment of the performance is affirming that there is no presence of the thinker and there is no singular presence of Einstein.

#### *Frame of Einstein*

In his book *The Truth in Painting* Derrida questioned the concept of framing as a part of the art piece. This is a concept of *parerga* that indicates things about the work of art and remains outside of it, such as frame to a picture or theatre to spectacle. This has been developed via Kant's aesthetics, and the division of the inside/outside of an artwork still remains a firmament of contemporary art theory. 'The parergon is a form [...] not that it stands out but that it disappears, buries itself, effaces itself, melts away at the moment it deploys its greatest energy. The frame is in no way a background....but neither is its thickness as margin a figure. Or at least it is a figure which comes away of its own accord' (Derrida, *The Truth in Painting* 61). Therefore, Derrida argues that frame is a complement. It is compared to non-phonetic parts of the written language or typography in text. It is ambiguous, as it simultaneously occupies the artwork it frames and also acts as an administrative part of the painting. The frame of the theatre event is the theatre building, but it is usually excluded from the narrative. The frame of Einstein is also a part of the structure of the spectacle.



Fig. 21. Jansch, Lucie. *Einstein on the Beach*. 2012. [eyemagazine.com](http://eyemagazine.com). Web. 18 Sept. 2013.

There was no formal interval. Therefore, the audience provided another dimension of performance, as people trying to find their place looked like sleepwalkers. Michael White in the review for *The Telegraph* wrote that the scene was even more interesting than the situation happening onstage. At certain moments, this picture is composed simultaneously as the images on stage and seemed as if Wilson designed it. I chose not to have an interval and that was my 'frameless' frame. It was not a planned decision but provided the perspective of a lack of absent moments in the structure of the play that it is apparently designed with. After the performance finished, I asked two of the audience members about the interval experience, and I received similar responses. They had a feeling of not losing a plot, if there was any. It seemed that there was no plot, so it was theoretically possible to enter and exit the performance and still feel either involved or not significant, as the spectator's absence did not change anything other than one's interpretation. Perhaps a moment of respite from this intense performance gives a second view, but being there in the audience for the whole event gave the satisfaction of achievement similar to running a marathon. The moment of the interval, freely chosen or not by the spectator, gave a personalised frame to the structure of *Einstein on the Beach*.

This performance invited the audience to have an interval at any moment of the play. Perhaps the moment of a break is an absent frame that is dependent on the spectator. If so, there is also a question of

belonging. Is it a part of *Einstein on the Beach* or is it a break out of it? One is still in the theatre when the play is on stage and perhaps this is another, personal scene from de-*Einstein on the Beach*. This absence of the play could be another dimension of representing Einstein to the spectator, as someone who thinks for oneself and chooses one's own, relative to personal circumstances, decisions and actions. Making an interval is an act suggested and planned by Wilson, but there was no indication of the duration of the interval. How long should the break take? What if it lasts a few hours? Would it be appropriate then to say that one attended this performance? What if one leaves after a few minutes never to come back? Would one still be in the frame of reference of *Einstein on the Beach* until the performance ends? This is a question regarding the boundaries of the presence of a spectacle. Perhaps the boundary is not in the performance, but in the right to occupy the space in one. This is a rather curious subject that also involves discussion of the monetary value of art. The logical argument would be that if one pays a great deal of money to see something, one would not want to miss any part of it. Or, the person can have the luxury of deciding for themselves how to use this ticket. Maybe the spectator's time is worth more than the ticket price? How is that measured? There is nothing *wrong* in leaving a performance, as one can decide in one's own time and there is nothing *correct* in remaining in the seat either. But where is Einstein? In this particular play, Einstein became a play of decisions taken personally, such as the relativity of using one's time in any space one desired.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter looked at dimensions of *aporia* in notions of structure and context. They seem to be components of every piece of spectacle, despite their respective genre. However, in this work they were not studied as unified notions, but as elements that take different forms in theory as well as practice, depending on each example. After applying the theory to the study objects in Chapter 3 and the presence of human beings in Chapter 4, this chapter on structures and context was the final component of theatre and art to be assessed in the thesis.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that the scope of the study does not intend to produce a comprehensive account of all of the possibilities of philosophy of *différance* outside traditional literature, or even to disclose all of its potential aspects regarding theatre studies. That does not seem to be possible. Concepts of wholeness or entirety do not seem to enclose a philosophy that celebrates differences. Therefore, the notion of finiteness as having limits or boundaries of subject is open for further interpretation.

The frame of reference to visual presentation is associated with socially and politically determined context. Communication is always in progress and it is always incomplete as it needs context to be recognised and validated. Hence its condition of being depends on external support, its presence depends on absence. The examples of theory, installation art, and a performance play with the traditional

opposition of presence and absence through interpretations made by readers and spectators, not only involuntarily involve intertextuality to make metaphors but also create pieces through taking part in them. The installation art pieces, such as *Under Scan*, *Ghostwriter*, and *Microphones* interact with the audience in order to be performed, whereas in *Einstein on the Beach* spectators can choose the part of the performance they will exclude themselves from attending. Hence, the pieces of installation art and the particular performance invite the spectators to read them in different ways.

One of the elements of a written sign is the break with the context of a moment of writing, as well as the author as the ultimate signified. A written sign breaks with the context of writing, and this is already within the structure of the written text as it involves the ability to be repeated and understood. In the form of writing in a wider sense, such as theatre as a horizon of experience, the intention of the author is as significant as the intention of the reader. Therefore, the question of intentionality discloses the complex subject of ethics, politics in traditional hierarchy and boundaries between author and reader. The intention of a person in a given moment of inscription might not be as readable as it seems, as writing can be readable even if one does not know or take into consideration the intention of the writer, director, performer, artist or spectator. In 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', Derrida points out that difference and irreducibility are features of contemporary times, where information

is easily accessible and authority is questioned.

This chapter has studied present absence and the notion of context and intentionality of meaning. Performance as well as a written sign, 'carries with it a force that breaks with its context' (Derrida, *Limited Inc* 9), and it seems as if the code of language is never 'structurally secret' (*Limited Inc* 8), as it has to be repeatable, that is, communicable in a network of signification in the absence of the author. 'To write is to produce a mark that will constitute a sort of machine which is productive in turn' (Derrida, *Limited Inc* 8). Based on Derrida's theory of writing, one can read assembling an installation, or creating a performance. All of these forms produce marks that can be further productive in reading a spectacle and making additional interpretations. Writing is not only communication that transfers concepts of truths or presence but also the potential for what it will become.

# ONTOLOGY OF ABSENCE

A PLAN OF THE PHD THESIS

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1  
PRESENT ABSENCE IN PHILOSOPHY

CHAPTER 2  
DERRIDA IN THEATRE

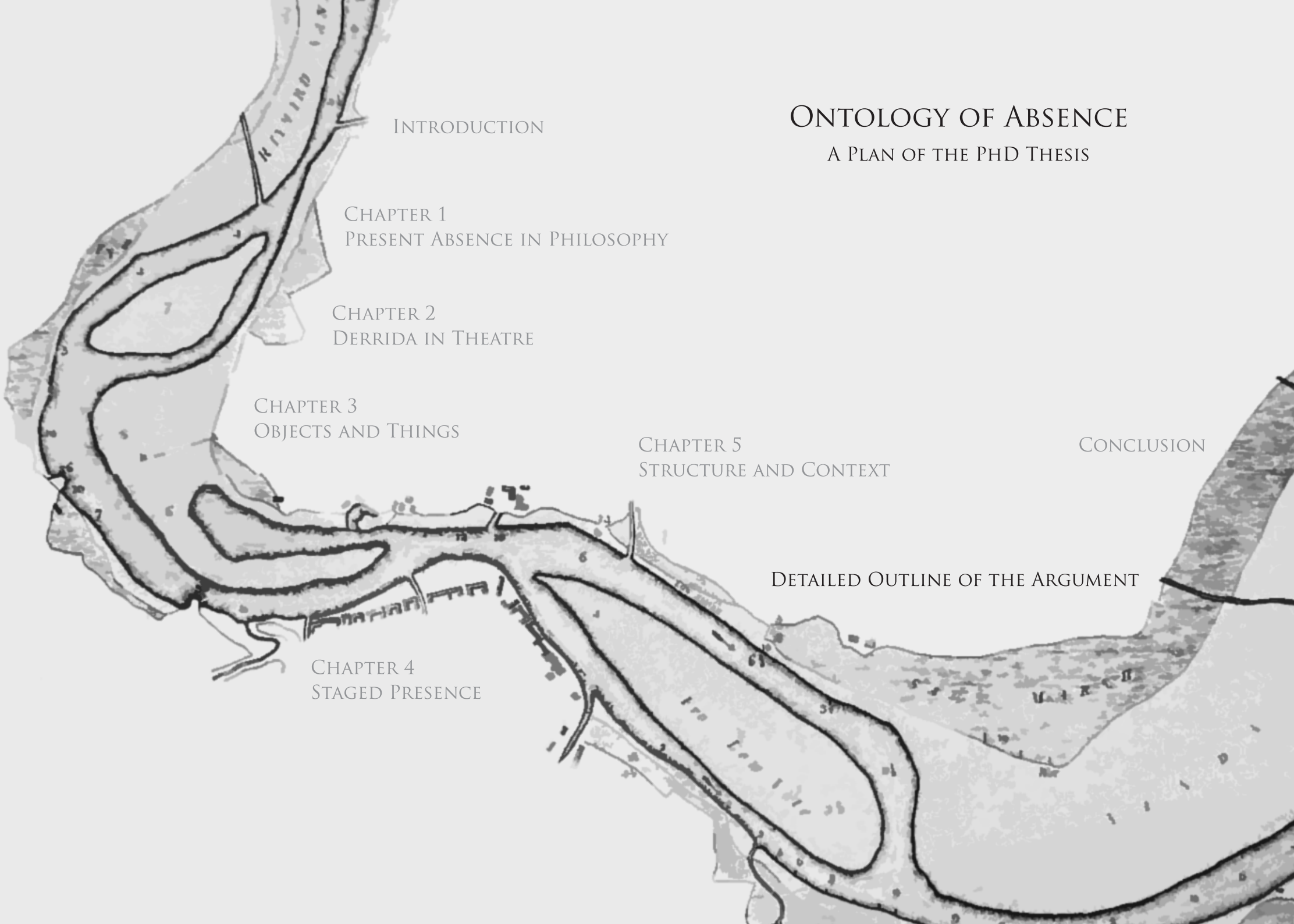
CHAPTER 3  
OBJECTS AND THINGS

CHAPTER 5  
STRUCTURE AND CONTEXT

CONCLUSION

DETAILED OUTLINE OF THE ARGUMENT

CHAPTER 4  
STAGED PRESENCE



# DETAILED OUTLINE OF THE ARGUMENT

To help orientate the reader through the thesis, I offer here a summary of the key stages of the argument, divided into chapters.

## INTRODUCTION

### INTRODUCTION

My research begins with questions about absence. I seek answers through applying Derrida's theory to three-dimensional space of performance. I discuss the subject of absence without referring to an idea *beyond* language. I read absence and presence as representations. They are signifiers that refer to other signifiers and can be discussed as a form of writing. I propose Derrida's 'arche-writing' as a term with which to discuss absence as a signifier. Throughout the thesis I test different dimensions of this theory.



## CHAPTER 1

### PRESENT ABSENCE IN PHILOSOPHY

I begin my thesis by providing a wider perspective on the concept of present absence. I situate the theory in the context of the recent history of philosophy and performance. The division between presence and absence has echoed in philosophy for many decades, and it has influenced the division between performance and theatre. Hence, the concept of difference can be also examined from the perspective of presence with reference to performance studies. I look at Laura Cull's theory of differential presence that draws on philosophy of Gilles Deleuze.

The chapter outlines the significance of Derrida's philosophy on theatre studies in recent decades while providing information on the relationship between theatre, performance and philosophy. I refer to the new and promising field of Performance Philosophy, and I look at the problem of applying one discipline to another. Merging one field of research with another requires consideration of the politics of the new structure. The disciplines are seen as representations of binary opposites of mind and the body, of theory and practice and as they seem contradictory. There are still undefined politics of joining two established disciplines of research in order to create a structure for a new, open-ended field of knowledge.

I look at the use-value of Derrida's political thought that works through apparent contradictions. Deconstruction as political notion is

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### PRESENT ABSENCE IN PHILOSOPHY

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examined by Richard Beardsworth in *Deconstruction and the Political*. He finds aporia as an tool of creativity, as there is always the notion of the undefined in the definition of the future. Absence and aporia is a site of creativity rather than negative presence. I examined what the implementation of deconstruction as a political force does to theatre studies in the article ‘Theatrical Allegory to Political Commitment’ by Alison Ross. Ross argues that deconstruction can mean finding the limits of logic, and that is a reason to act. Ross refers to theatre in Derrida’s texts as a discourse as well as an institution, and as such, it is the stage for political engagement.

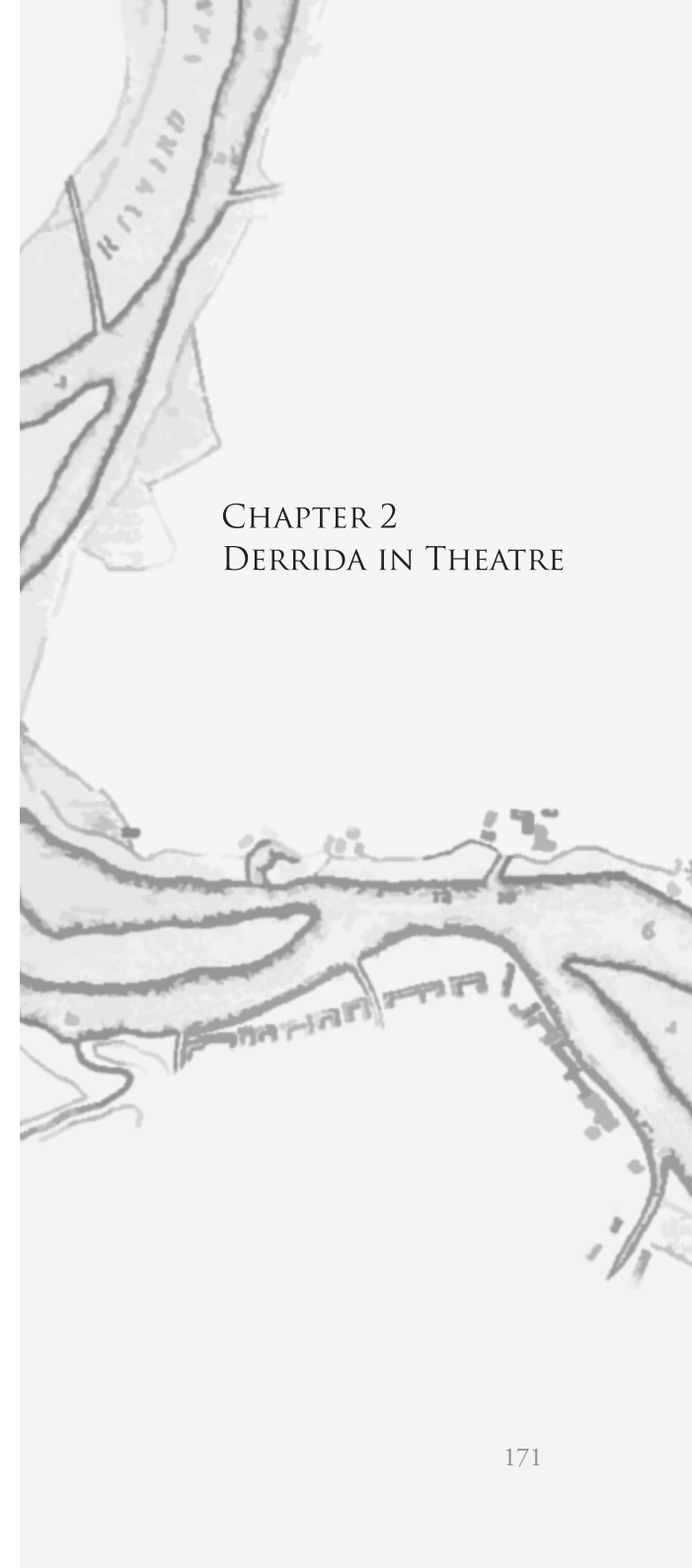
This chapter involves a broad perspective on the issue of binary oppositions in the history of philosophy as well as in theatre studies. To find the limits of logic of the division, I looked at Cull’s concept of differential presence that draws on similar premises as present absence, but the key feature is the argument for presence and corporeality rather than absence and signification. This chapter sets the theoretical background for the rest of the thesis.

## CHAPTER 2

### DERRIDA IN THEATRE

This chapter introduces the subject of Derrida's philosophy and its potential in theatre studies. I survey Derrida's texts on theatre, linguistics, and the metaphysics of presence. All the theories outlined here provide numerous perspectives on the study of absence and presence in art and theatre. Derrida's 'The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation' is concerned with Antonin Artaud's theatre and the subjects of presence, representation, authenticity and hierarchy. Derrida writes about theatre as an ephemeral form that is composed of supplements. This perspective could be used in many different ways, and there is a body of work in theatre studies – the work of Herbert Blau, Peggy Phelan and Jane Goodall, for example – that explores theatre as a ghost of writing and places presence beyond a present object. I argue that theatre can also be thought of as disappearance. I study disappearance as an exchange and play of meanings, which does not presuppose any presence beyond signifiers. An utterance has no origin, as it has to be *understood* in order to signify, and does not end in any transcendental idea, as it is always in the motion of supplementation.

In the text regarding Artaud's theatre, Derrida embraces the subject of disappearance, not as closure of representation; rather, he questions boundaries between imitation and reality. He examines the structure of theatre and the traditional construction of representation. Derrida describes



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the traditional stage as theological, where the author of a play text or director of a production is in the centre of the play, and the only correct source for meaning. In this thesis, I argue against this form of reading theatre, using some of Derrida's terms and arguments. Another key text for this research is Derrida's *Of Grammatology*. This has a complex position in my argument, but the way Derrida reads texts on presence and representation and questions linguistic theory, as well as metaphysics, has been influential on my research.

One of the chapters from *Of Grammatology*, 'The Theorem and the Theater', studies the association between theory and theatre, as the name suggests. In this text, theatre is seen as an element that brings together 'spectacle and discourse' (Derrida 304). This is one of the parts where Derrida writes about the lack of distinction between speech and writing from the perspective of deconstruction. He notices that many dimensions of presence in theatre are questionable, such as the concept of the self-presence of a performer or in the intentionality of one's words.

Another dimension of theatre and theory is the link between signifiers and the body. In this chapter, the theory of presence is briefly introduced using ideas from Derrida and Blau, but the topic is considered in more detail in Chapter 4 where it is discussed in the context of theories of stage presence and liveness. However, in Chapter 2, I introduce Blau's concept that human thought is conducted in language: as he argues, 'we are as much spoken as speaking, inhabited by our language as we speak' (Blau, *Take Up the Bodies* 458). He recognises that the body is 'coded', that

parts of the body respond to signifiers that might differ from one spectator to another. Moreover, for Blau, absence is a powerful signifier, as it points to a concept, which Derrida refers to as the transcendental signified.

Blau also discusses another aspect proposed as one of the key elements that divides theatre and art. Blau writes about this responsibility to truthfulness as another ideology that is embraced in theatre as a criteria for quality. If it is an ideology then the distinction between natural and artificial, as well as between theatrical and dramatic, do not have clear borderlines. This discourse is similar to Derrida's argument in *Of Grammatology* about the lack of distinction between nature and culture. In Blau's theory, the construction of all theatre is ideological, from the theatre building to spectators' norms of behaviour and the frames of performance. Interpretation is also ideological, as the author or director is often considered to be *the* authority on a play or production's meaning. I offer a critique of all of these functions, using Blau's argument to show how they are linked to a metaphysics of presence.

In his analysis of theatre as ideology, Blau comes to the conclusion that theatre could be a form of thought. He calls this kind of theatre 'anti-theatre' and gives as an example theatre that is read from the page, without being staged anywhere else other than in one's mind. Blau writes about theatre that is present through thought. However, if thought is language then how far is it a performative utterance? To address this question introduces the debate between Derrida and Austin about intentionality and language. However, if one uses Blau's theory in the



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context of Derrida's theory, then a stage could be read as a page. Although Blau's theory on absence might differ from Derrida's, his concept of stage as a page provides a point of reference throughout this thesis, such as in Chapter 4.

The next part of Chapter 2 introduces Derrida's texts that survey the question of absence as well as presence, and the process behind the in-between-ness of defined entities. I apply this argument to theoretical and practical examples from theatre studies, theatre, and art. Selected terms from Derrida's philosophy provide different dimensions to the question of present absence. In Chapter 2 I discuss several terms: *grapheme*, *aporia* and *trace*. All of these names do not contain, or frame, entire concepts, but they are elements that are useful in embracing definition of absence in the context of intentionality. I consider Derrida's argument in *Of Grammatology* that states, 'there is no experience of pure presence, but only chains of different marks' (318) as it is always exchanged with another signifier. Derrida expresses his opinion about traces in many texts, and in each one he uses different words to give a name to the subject he studies. Through not giving a proper name, he joins a discourse with other philosophers within their texts and their terminology. Derrida does not provide only one name as a linguistic frame to his theory on difference and exchange and this inconsistency is coherent with his argument.

One of the terms that Derrida uses in his discourse on boundaries is *aporia*. Questioning the boundaries of an entity provides another perspective on the concept of present absence. Another example of a word that was used

to question purity of presence and absence is trace. Traces are referred to by Derrida as signifiers of the present from the past and can be read as graphemes of absence. Trace is introduced to provide a connection between writing in the wider sense. In Derrida's philosophy terms are not enclosed in a word, but they are a process of exchange. The same is true of play and *différance* which donates a plurality of presence as a supplementation of signifiers. The chapter also addresses Derrida's choice of the word *différance* in the context of his philosophy. The notion of play in this philosophy is a process that acts on differences, rather than a hierarchy and a traditional set of values, such that absence and presence are not equivalent to negative and positive meaning. A trace of something to come, such as an ellipsis, is an invitation to create different associations of words and meanings.



## CHAPTER 2 DERRIDA IN THEATRE

CHAPTER 3  
OBJECTS AND THINGS

CHAPTER 3  
OBJECTS AND THINGS

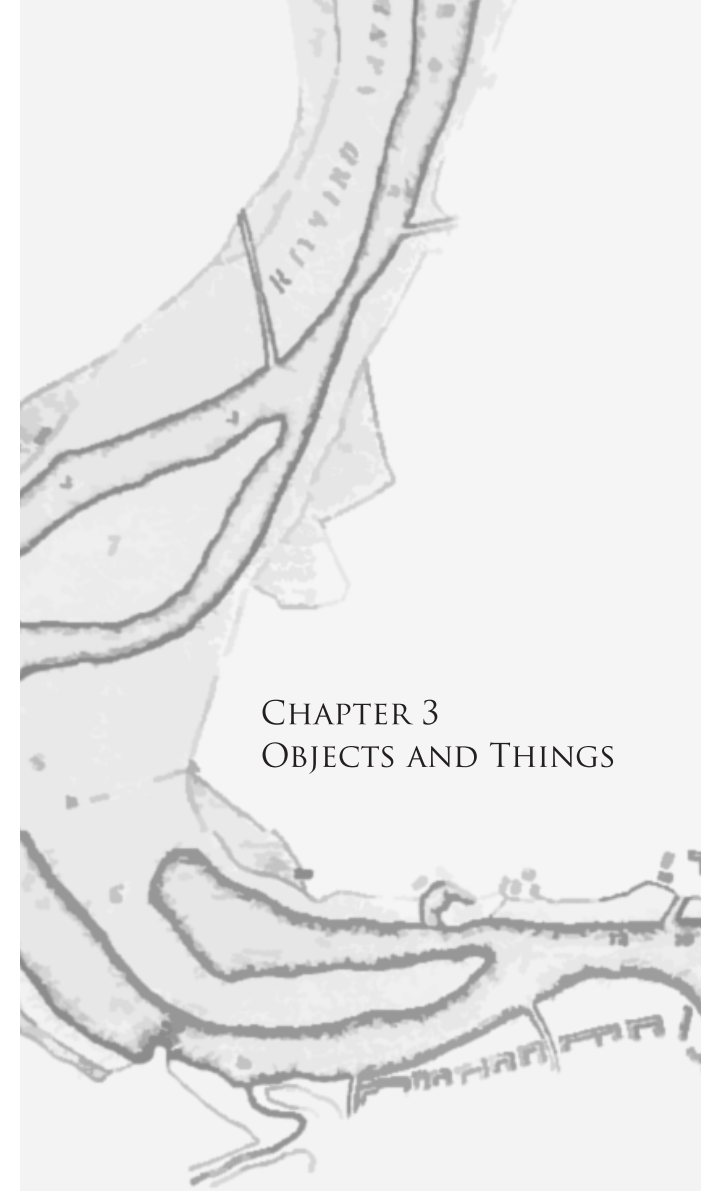
The chapter on 'Objects and Things' tests the application of Derrida's philosophy in those theories of theatre that define presence and absence through objects. In this chapter, I write about *objects*, which are tangible elements of performance and art; and *things*, which are non-tangible parts of performance, or at least their tangibility is questionable. The division may also be under discussion, as objects are often identified with the word things and *vice versa*, but the distinction helps to organise multiple theories of representation into those that define being as constant or process. Theories studied in this particular chapter include the theory of objecthood by Fried, as well as Heidegger's theory on thingness, represented in Brown's writing on design. In this chapter, the notion of absence is mimicked through my non-attendance at the pieces of art and theatre. They are studied through texts only. This is an observation I conduct to find out if my attendance at the performance would aid its analysis. In contrast with this chapter, the next, on 'Staged Presence', includes spectacles that I have seen and participated in. As it occurred, I could conduct the studies by relying on reviews and/or by attending performances. Analyses of spectacles are different every time, despite the fact that I attended the event myself. I preferred to use as many methods as possible to study absence and presence in visual culture.

The first part of the chapter focuses on Fried's distinction between



art and objecthood. He made the distinction with the notion of presentness. In the following part, I study Brown's Thing Theory, regarding codification of objects and their function as signifiers. Fried's texts are studied because he argues for a distinction between art and objecthood in relation to their qualities, which he divides into the dramatic and the theatrical. His work is a discourse on the relationship between art, its beholder and its authenticity. Through exclusion of the element that he calls theatrical, Fried measures virtuosity in art. Intentionality and absorption in making an action are the criteria he uses. For Fried, the word *theatrical* is associated with pretended action and the word *dramatic* was something intended. He characterises theatre with an absence of naturalness and art with absorption that for him has the quality of presence. This subject responds to Blau's question of naturalness in theatre and the firmaments of distinction between naturalness and artificiality are questioned in the context of Derrida's philosophy.

Fried characterises objecthood in the activity of spectating. His theory develops from Diderot's writing on art and theatre. Therefore, Fried's concept of quality is associated with being as presence and can be read as a legacy of enlightenment. In accordance with Diderot, presence is associated with intentionality, authority and truth in art and literature, whereas absence is linked with pretence and theatricality. Fried identifies presence in art in accordance to Diderot's criteria. Art is defined as *good* (in terms of its quality of presence) only when the beholder is not *incorporated* in art, in other words, when characters in a painting are completely



### CHAPTER 3 OBJECTS AND THINGS

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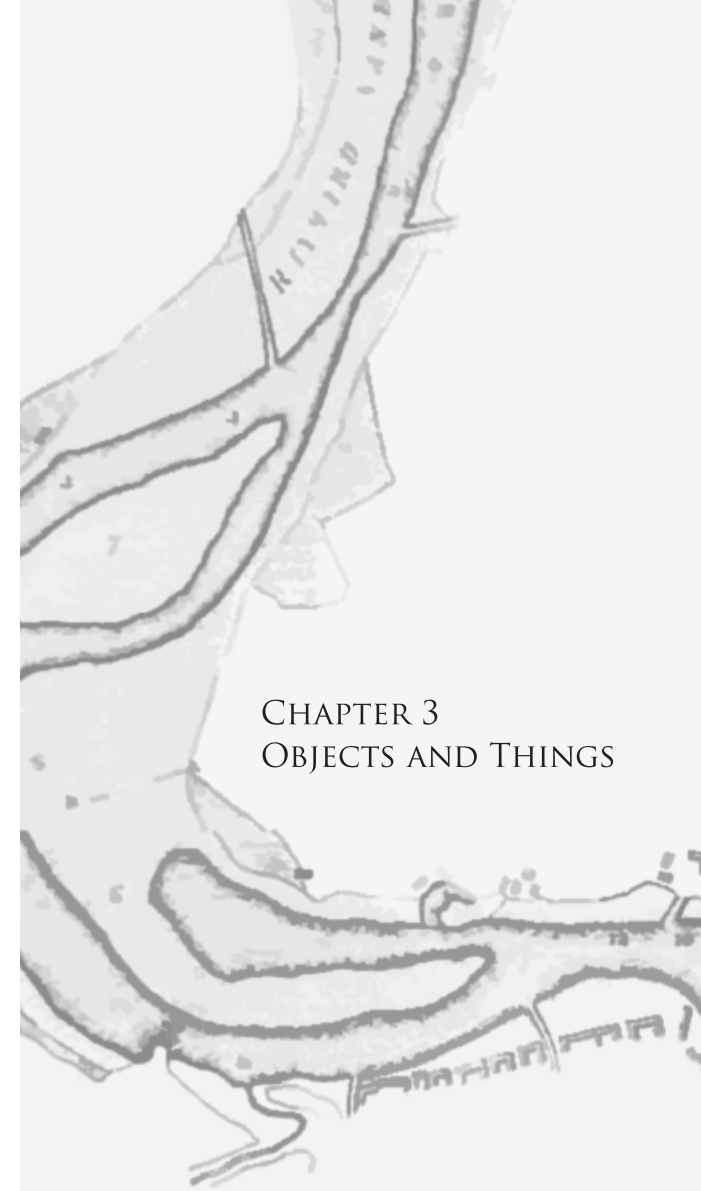
absorbed in their action. I find that a controversial line of demarcation. Fried judges the absorption of the characters on their appearance, for example, whether or not a character are depicted as looking at the spectator. The theory relating *truthfulness* to the action one is making appears to be inconsistent. Fried refers to paintings, and since they take some time to create, it is hardly possible that a person, for one's own purpose, remains still in front of a painter for hours. Fried also refers to the state of mind of the characters and he judges the value of presence in terms of their mental absorption. This remains impossible to decide, as one is giving a statement on their appearance, rather than thought. Was *posing* the activity that one was absorbed in, which one intended to do and was depicted doing? Posing is synonymous with pretending, and that is a quality of absence.

The notion of time provides another argument for a division of art forms in accordance with presence and all associated with its qualities. For Fried, theatre lacks consistency in time and this determines its non-presence as an entity. Fried characterises theatre as literalist art that belongs to a concept, rather than an object in itself, and for him it is a representation of presence, and therefore non-authentic. Fried defines quality of art through its presence, which he assigns to authenticity. Contrary to a theatre piece that is ideological, an art object has no duration and is constant in time. The condition of time in art, either as an object or an ideology, is termed 'presentness' in Fried's writing. Therefore, in accordance with Fried, time in art is unchanged and does not matter to the art object, and therefore has the quality of presentness (Fried, *Art and Objecthood* 167), whereas for

theatre, time is changeable and this is *also* defined as the quality of presentness (Fried, *Art and Objecthood* 45), rather than presence. One can notice that time could be equally included and excluded from the discourse and there was a certain form of presence identified, although it possessed the same qualities as Fried assigns to it.

The characteristic of absorption is, in accordance with Fried's 'dramatic', as present and authentic, whereas 'theatricality' is been displayed when one is aware of being watched. This is Fried's distinction between drama and theatre. Assigning features to this opposition, drama is a positive quality and theatricality a negative quality. This division has been applied to the opposition between speech and writing, which was deconstructed by Derrida. In accordance with Fried's theory, drama is assigned to the quality of presence, whereas theatricality is characterised by reference to absence, but when Lehmann draws a distinction between drama and theatre he links drama with absence, as it is usually pre-written, and links theatre to presence as he defines it as immediate. Lehmann's distinction between theatre and drama is studied in Chapter 5 on 'Structure and Context' by the analysis of Wilson's *Einstein on the Beach*.

Deconstruction in Fried's theory aids reference to objects in art and theatre as a form of writing. If time is unrelated to objects presence or absence, but a process of presentness, then this process can also be read as a process of exchange of metaphors, despite the authority assigned to its being. However, Fried argues that it is an object that has to be in the centre of art and not a spectator, and an exchange of signifiers does not happen in



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the object itself, but through spectating and *reading* a performance and art. In this chapter, I study Fried's theory using examples of art objects from a performance, *Zero Degrees*, and ephemeral objects and objecthood in pieces of installation art that use light in contrasting ways, as well as clarity of vision and blindness through light in works by Gormley and Turrell.

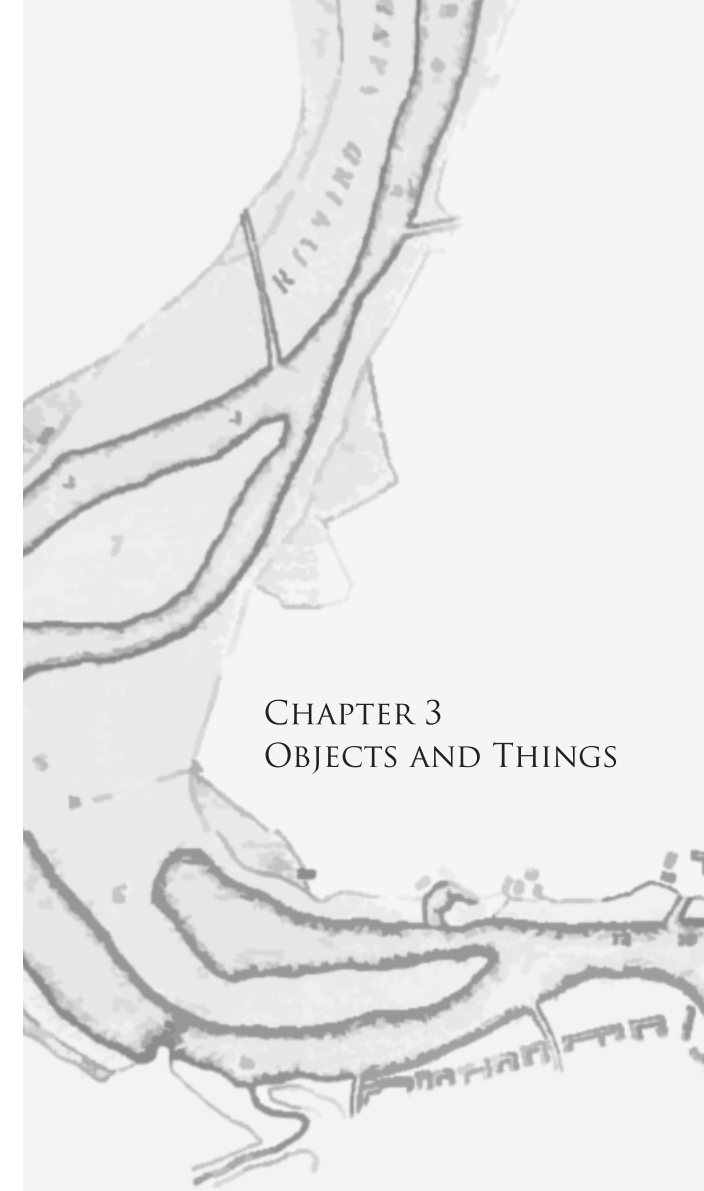
The part of Chapter 3 regarding objects in *Zero Degrees* concerns graphemes. In this performance, the sculptures were made to represent the performers. However, the representation was not only made in one direction, as the performers were also representing the sculptures. They complement each other. The performance was about being in between entities, from the aesthetic part of it, to the narrative. The title suggests the geographical reference of London being located at degree zero and an interpretation of the performance could also emphasise the metaphorical question of belonging to a particular place. The definition of one's identity in accordance with culture and the notion of aporia, the impossible passage between entities when there was no boundary. The performance itself is studied as an example of hybridity between genres, in accordance with what Royona Mitra argues, a researcher who locates Khan's art in interdisciplinarity (Mitra 34).

Antony Gormley made the sculptures for Khan's performance and they are a characteristic example of his art. He usually enquires about the human body as a place of passage, and the limits of boundaries of presence and solitude. Gormley's work is often defined as a signifier of a transcendental signified, that is the *presence of being*. Therefore, his work as

used in the context of grapheme is not its usual interpretation. The figures made for *Zero Degrees* were defined by reviewers as present and absent. They were constantly on stage, but associated with the transcendental signified. The analysis of their presence had been conducted dually, (1) the statues had been identified as present, but representing an ideology that is absent, and (2) the statues were absent because of the lack of motion and represented ideology that is about the essence of present. If the statues had been read as grapheme, they would be as present and absent as a word in a play.

In the following part, I study things in theory and practice. This is another dimension of the distinction between objects and things, which was made at the beginning of the chapter. I am aware that the division between objects and things could be read as questionable, but it is built on a similar premise as the linguistic opposites that are also questioned in this thesis. The division assists in surveying theories on absence and presence. However, as has been mentioned in the earlier part of the conclusion, things can be read as objects in process. Categorising objects as constant and in process becomes useful only for the analysis of theatre theories. However, when they are studied as grapheme, they can be read as metaphors, as they do not depend on any frame of physicality. Studies on present absence in the example of things happen through surveyed concept of presence usually associated with the notion of light.

Light can be used to illuminate, but also to blind. Those opposite qualities are discussed in two examples of installation art. Some could argue that light is an object of art, as well as only a reflection of the surface of



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artistic material. I apply Brown's theory to this part of the study, as he points at thing-ness as thinking and creating meaning from language codes and the play of signification. Brown's theory on thingness is applied to the notion of light. Traditionally, light is assigned with the quality of presence. I question this relationship. Applying Fried's theory tests his notion of absorption in the *Blind Light*. There, the installation incorporated the spectator who was not a subject of spectating unless one did not reveal oneself to the other viewers and came closer to the glass wall. Absorption in that piece is referred to here as 'self-presence'. Therefore, in the example in which one was simultaneously a narrator, performer and spectator, it is difficult to imagine a form of art that could be more absorbing. Yet, for Fried this is a form of literalist art, so it was theatrical. However, Fried's distinction was not necessarily the only one to agree with. *Blind Light* referred to presence, not only through light that results in disorientation and blinding of spectators, but also in the play of metaphors, which could be another dimension of present absence. In the following part, I studied light in contrasting context, as a medium of appearance in the installation art piece entitled *Ganzfeld* by Turrell. In this example, light was exhibited as a reflection of a surface that shaped its volume and colour. Light in the context of the theory studied here is an element of writing in a wider sense. Light was a case of a *thing*, present in reflection and in the process of reading.

## CHAPTER 4

### STAGED PRESENCE

This chapter, 'Staged Presence', is concerned with the human quality of presence and absence, and I survey qualities of immediacy, stage presence and liveness. In relation to the human being, presence is often viewed in the context of a character that embraces authority and hierarchy. Therefore, the notion of character can be an ideology, as well as a mark in textuality. It can equally be a person and a letter. Both of those forms of presence are studied in this chapter through the theory and practice of theatre. In Chapter 4, I also test the distinction between live and recorded action, especially when these two acts can be read in the division between speech and writing. Another word that suggests this link between text and physicality is *act*.

The practical examples of spectacles study multiple forms of presence in association with the human body. *The Life and Death of Marina Abramović* played on liveness from performance art, stage presence from theatre and presentation from design, whereas *Lecture Notes on a Death Scene* was about self-presence, or rather the possibility of self-absence and of aporia. In this chapter I test lack of hierarchy between graphemes in whichever forms they were displayed, as speech, designs, or spectators' thoughts. In the first part I survey theory on stage presence, liveness, and in the second part I analyse performances.

Arguments on stage presence are considered through texts written



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by Fuchs, Blau, Roach, Power, Goodall and Auslander. All of the theatre theorists write about presence and absence in contrasting ways. Power, who studies presence in theatre, points at the plurality of presence, Fuchs argues for theatre of absence, where the signified is the meaning for theatre. Blau refers to thought as a stage for theatre, as a play of mind and a mode of dreaming. For Blau, theatre is a present illusion, whereas absence is the unspoken presence. For Goodall, absence is a reference to the transcendental signified, a kind of presence. She writes about two types of presence, one expressed by words and referring to a concept, and the other is not expressed by words, but still refers to a concept. In this example, absence of a word is still a signifier for a concept of signified. The example of the presence or absence of a signifier that still points at a meaning of presence is another example that even nothing signifies in theatre and art. However, this signification is a part of an exchange of signifiers, as there is no fundamental meaning to no-thing. That provides another example of how absence can be present.

A concept of stage presence defined through the formation of a character on stage is also discussed in Auslander's work. Presence is identified through intentionality, but it is almost impossible to define criteria for the borders between the authentic and inauthentic. Auslander studies models of intentionality using examples of three kinds of character-making aesthetics by Stanislavsky, Brecht and Grotowski. The first is a method for pretending intentionality through recalling similar experiences from an actor's past. Brecht's theatre is based on a double pretending of intention,



one of the characters is the actor on the stage, and the other forms the character on a page of play text. Grotowski's pretending intentionality is embedded in a belief in the transcendental signified. His theatre is based on the need to make a *communion* (share) of the presence of a character that is also beyond the stage.

Liveness is another name for the concept of presence, and with this word one would usually name unmediated and immediate action. This section refers to multiple theories on liveness, including Auslander's theory of liveness as mystification and lack of presence, Phelan's theory of ontology of performance in ephemerality of liveness, and Power's distinction between presence in theatre that includes illusion and liveness in a solely technological context. All of the notions of presence and the human being, although different from Derrida's perspective on presence, become productive in studies of performance.

The section about the performer as a character is studied in a work directed by Robert Wilson, *The Life and Death of Marina Abramović*. This performance is chosen as it involves questions of multiple forms of presence, stage presence, liveness and presentation of set and costume design. Each form of presence is a contribution of the collaborating artists, such as Abramović, Dafoe, Hegarty and Wilson. Abramović is a performance artist and an activist who preserves and documents this genre. Abramović is usually identified with the notion of liveness, rather than stage presence, as she argues for the lack of *pretending* in her performances. I argue that there cannot be either pretending or intentionality in a performance, as these



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notions are not transferable in language. Wilson's performance included reference to Abramović's art and personal life, so she was presented as an artist and a human being. It was a play with theatre aesthetics that Abramović defined as inauthentic. I argue that live art, theatre and performance can function without prioritising their intentionality or authority. In this example, I compare liveness and stage presence to the distinction that I study in previous chapters, which divide theatricality and dramatic art, as well as speech and writing. When those two forms are read as marks and grapheme, there could be no hierarchy over presence attached to them, just differences between words.

I discuss a situation in which the spectator was a character in a play. The performance analysed was the *Lecture Notes on a Death Scene* by Analogue and directed by Jarvis. The performance questioned pureness of presence through studying possible consequences of actions that could have happened if one chose differently. It was a complex performance that based its narrative on a 'what if'. The structure was shaped by something that cannot be identifiable – the spectators' thoughts. The personal aspect of this performance was its advantage over Wilson's representation of Abramović, to whom I cannot relate in any measure. In Analogue's production, one decision led to another, with the consequence being the character's death. The performance played on a multitude of possible decisions, and the possibility that there is always that one which finds its consequences in the ultimate non-presence of a human being. The use of a mirror in this performance highlighted the metaphor of reflection upon oneself. This performance

played with borderlines of definitions, as the main character was simultaneously the only spectator. It raised questions regarding certainty of presence and absence that lasted much longer than the performance itself.

I examine the human being and its conditions of presence in theatre. In all of the discussed theories here, presence has the same value as absence and present absence is read as a metaphor. Alteration of meanings does not depend on the authority of the presenters or spectators, but on their play of difference. Text acts as presence when it is read and this connection is displayed in this chapter through multiple associations of the word 'character', which could equally be a mark in a text and a person in a performance. The character in a performance could simultaneously be a performer and a spectator. This division presented the examples of visual culture, which were analysed in this particular chapter. However, both of these provide different dimensions of the theories of presence that I refer to in the theoretical section, as well as the notion of present absence that I survey throughout the thesis.



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In 'Structure and Context' I look at relationships between the construction of a text and meaning, and also question textuality and authorship. The subject of intentionality appears in multiple contexts throughout the thesis. It is associated with presence of meaning, which cannot be transferred in writing. I study semiotic theories on presence of sign and signification, Derrida's theory on metaphysics of absence and theories on interpretation and textuality in theatre. The scope of this chapter does not include the history of semiotics in theatre, as many positions have been taken on this subject, and I do not provide all the applications of semiotics to theatre. I study the use of semiology in theories of textuality and interpretation. I discuss Derrida's theory of a structure with an absent centre as well as the reception theory in the works by Marvin Carlson, Susan Bennett, Stanley Fish and Stuart Hall. The examples of installation art and theatre display multiple types of structures that question fullness of presence and absence. All of the pieces of installation art are made with spectators as well as the theatre piece that is also framed through participation. Two of the installations discussed here are examples of works made by Raphael Lozano-Hemmer, *Under Scan* and *Microphones*. One installation is based on aural reception, *Ghostwriter*, made by *Blast Theory*, and one is a performance, *Einstein on the Beach*, by Robert Wilson.

In the first theoretical section of this chapter, I analyse the subject

of present absence in semiotics. In metaphysical philosophy, the concept of absence is a reference point that functions in the same way as the concept of presence – it is a signified, an idea and the meaning. Therefore, the sign stands for presence in its absence. Sign is a suspended presence. Moreover, in accordance with Peirce, ideas are signs and the mind has its structure as a sign process. Barthes also researches this theory on semiotics and the mind. He points at the role of interpreter in the structure of a culture. Barthes's early work argues that narrative is somehow embedded in the human mind, as the logic of a sentence (or word) and is almost inseparable from its name. This is a frame of reference that appeared to depend on intentionality and interpretation. There are multiple theories on the structurality of context. Often referred to as a narrative, it can also be studied as a structure. The structurality of interpretation is researched through Derrida's text on the structure of signifiers with an absent centre of meaning. He finds the paradox of centre was that it was a significant part of the structure, while simultaneously being outside of it. Derrida suggests that all structure could be without centre, as a process of exchange rather than pointing at something constant that is not there. Therefore, presence is not fully present, and it is not absent either. Both could be read as a part of a play of signifiers, where is not a transcendental being outside their system. Not restricting the identification of presence or absence to their categories of entities provided an opportunity for the redefinition of things taken for granted. This is also an opportunity for hybridity between interpretations. Present absence is a metaphor and the detachment of

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a signifier from its multiple contexts and interpretations. Another subject of Derrida's discourse was intentionality. He argues that this could not be transferred through the text itself, as meaning depends on context and interpretation. However, no context could provide the entire meaning.

I survey semiotics in theatre studies and assess local structures of interpretations, focusing especially on the work by Rabkin and the later works of Barthes. Rabkin notices that the notion of immediacy makes textuality controversial in theatre studies, but he refers to performance as textuality. This thesis extends from this point, and adds to it the nonverbal signification as a form of a trace, which has iterability and could be grapheme. I discuss intentionality and grapheme on Barthes' division between text and work. In accordance with Barthes, the meaning of a text does not belong to the author. Text is not original, as it must be iterable to be understood, but only an author's work belongs to the author. He writes about text being an activity of production, rather than a product. Rabkin also refers to text as a methodical field and a process, and work as an object. After I studied the theories used in this research, I can agree that an exchange of signifiers happens in the process of reading.

Misreading is also a subject of this chapter. This has been a topic of academic research since the 1970s, from when the theory has been concerned with discovering the opportunity for multiple forms of interpretation. However, if there is no authority over a text then it cannot be misinterpreted, which suggested that there was the interpretation to find otherwise the interpretation is *missed*. Rabkin argues that even 'the playwright misreads



his own text because he is trapped in prison-house of language' ('The Play of Misreading' 60). Consciously or not, directors misread the texts and the audience misreads representations of misread text. However, in accordance with Miller, not every interpretation is equal. He argues for local interpretations, but the ones that find a pattern in an artwork, such as the word *boat*, suggest a certain set of signifiers, rather than completely random associations.

The theory from this chapter is tested on selected pieces of installation art and a performance. All of the practical pieces have a characteristic structure and their performance relied on the contexts of spectators. In *Under Scan*, the installation depended on the shadows and attention of the passers-by. *Ghostwriter* told a story that an audience member had to rediscover through being in the described spaces. *Microphones* was a play of sounds and words in exchange for spectators' voices from the past and present. Their response made and unmade performances in installation art and in theatre. To perform, the installations studied in this chapter required the participation of spectators, whereas in the performance, the moment of participation was when spectators chose their individual intervals and included a fragment of the theatre foyer or bar to the structure of *Einstein on the Beach*, so the piece played with the concept of relativity.

*Under Scan* was the first piece of work studied in this chapter. The installation embraced human interactions, rather than a physical object, as to display all the pre-recorded videos the audience had to pay attention to them and provide sufficient shadow. A pattern to find in this work was

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the portrait of a social construct, a nation, with its diversity and multiple contexts. Scanning of the public with the system used occurred in the installation site and in the moment of recording videos, so places under scan were never in the 'here-and-now' time, traditionally described as presence. The title *Under Scan* not only described the moment of displaying the visuals to passers-by, but also suggested surveillance of the public by the public, which happens every day. The exchange of numbers in a computer system in order to display videos in the right place and time did not belong to the concept of immediacy or interaction that one could expect. This is yet another example where the presence of small contexts and encounters displays present absence through its difference and deferral.

Another piece of installation art that I discuss in this chapter was *Ghostwriter* by Blast Theory. The name usually stands for a person who provides written material to another person who is designated as the author. The installation also appeared to happen in a similar manner. The narrator provided a story that one could listen to through the phone and the references to the narrative had to be exposed by the spectators, who walked through the exhibition (or performance) space. Through this piece I studied the construction of interaction that happens without the traditional sense of presence. The performance of installation happened through the past of the voice belonging to a remote person and through the future discovery of another spectator who would encounter an object that the previous viewer left behind.

Play with the past, present and future also happened in another





performance by Lozano-Hemmer, *Microphones*. In this installation, he used an old type of microphone that featured in many historical events, so they became a symbol for certain qualities of presence, and, despite their function, their appearance made another set of associations, depending on the viewers' level of historical awareness. The use of the microphone and spotlight usually suggests an event that happens at the time of spectating. This is not necessarily immediate; as the voice goes through the system that the microphone provides and can be heard coming out of the speakers, rather than the person who is speaking. This distortion is dismissed and the voice in the speakers is linked with the person standing in front of the microphone. Lozano-Hemmer played with the general acceptance of this situation, and in the microphones displayed in his installation he built in a system that allowed the recording of a participant voice, but he did not necessarily display it straight after speech. It happened that one could hear one's voice as if they were simple microphones, but more often spectators could hear a voice that had been recorded previously. After giving a speech, the spectator could hear a message from the past. The uncanny thing about this work was that the system worked in the same way as it usually did, but changing the output of the information spoken revealed how it works and the fact that is not as immediate and present as it seems.

The gap in the system that reveals belief placed in ideology of presence also displays another performance discussed in Chapter 5, the work by Wilson, *Einstein on the Beach*. The gap mentioned is the interval time that the audience can choose for themselves. This choice is unsettling,

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as who can decide how much of the performance is enough to see? If the performance is a cluster of images not related to any plot or narration, then which fragment is the one that must be seen? I have noticed that the majority of the audience left after the scene with vertical and horizontal lifts. Was it because it is the most famous scene for them, as it has been depicted in many positions with the title of the play? Or perhaps it was time to catch the last train home? One could choose the interval(s) in accordance with one's need. Once the seat become more present to the viewer than the performance, one could leave the spectacle space and incorporate the theatre foyer or bar into the setting of the play. There was no element of loss involved, as the only thing that remained the same was the seat number, which has been faithfully waiting for the owner to come back to. There was almost a sense that a person purchasing the ticket for *Einstein on the Beach* was buying the right to sit in one particular place. Even as it occurs, one could pay for the right to have the seat empty. Therefore, does the traditional sense of presence leave together with the spectator when during a break? The structure of this performance was relative, and context depended on the spectator. In a sense, everyone was a part of the *representation* of atoms moving with their own centre of gravity (whatever needs gravity involves), and the audience could also be a representation of Einstein's science. Since few people engage with Einstein's mathematical findings, it is a much closer association of popular culture's representation of what he found in general than what his mathematical statements were in detail. Context is associated with



intentionality and that is not to be included in an utterance. However, it is always already a play of meanings, whether they come from cultural or scientific associations. *Mis-seeing* the play *Einstein on the Beach* was another reference to the subject of the play itself. Therefore, through the lack of authority over a meaning, or essence, of the play, this work tested another dimension of presence that referred to present absence.

I examine theories and practical examples that study the subject of wholeness of presence and absence in visual culture. I discuss objects in their tangible and intangible forms, the human being and the structure and context of an event. These are not boundaries that embraced the subject, but fields that assisted in examination and testing of the theory. The discourse around Derrida and application of his theory to theatre studies has already been the subject of research for a few decades, but never from this particular perspective.

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# ONTOLOGY OF ABSENCE

## A PLAN OF THE PHD THESIS

### CONCLUSION

#### INTRODUCTION

#### CHAPTER 1 PRESENT ABSENCE IN PHILOSOPHY

#### CHAPTER 2 DERRIDA IN THEATRE

#### CHAPTER 3 OBJECTS AND THINGS

#### CHAPTER 5 STRUCTURE AND CONTEXT

#### CONCLUSION

#### CHAPTER 4 STAGED PRESENCE

#### DETAILED OUTLINE OF THE ARGUMENT

In this thesis I have studied how absence becomes present. I examine the materiality and the boundaries between presence and absence in the visual arts and in the theatre. I explore different instances and kinds of present absence in visual culture. I explore the apparent opposition between absence and presence showing how they depend on absence. Drawing on Derrida's philosophy of *différance*, I question metaphysical philosophy's claims at absence and presence as representations of a transcendental reality. I provide examples of absence, performance and materiality in art, and in the theatre. To make this case, I provide a history of grapheme, trace, aporia and deconstruction (also known as de-sedimentation), as well as *plai* and *différance*. All of these interlinked concepts come to form the notion of what I call present absence and I apply them to theoretical and practical examples of theatre and art which, I suggest, offer different notions of present absence.

In the introduction, first and second chapter, I develop my

own perspective on deconstruction. In his letter to Professor Toshihiko Izutsu, Derrida writes that deconstruction is not a method, nor is it an act or operation to apply to an object, text or narrative (Derrida, 'Letter to a Japanese Friend' 3). I argue that in theatre, deconstruction is already those things as they are representations and they can be read as graphemes, as such one can construct an alternative 'method' by following deconstruction's constructive logic of objects themselves.

I examine arguments that support the perspective that absence is present in the moment of spectating and theatre presence is never present in itself. It is a process without a structural centre in a constant state of reference. I aim not to explore absence as a category of presence but as a force that questions presence and absence and, as pure supplement, without a transcendental signified, relates to *différance*. My thesis examines theatre and art which, I suggest, are defined as the meaning of presence, a human being, or the narrative itself. Absence and presence in theatre are referred to as processes of *plai* and *différance*. My title 'Ontology of Absence' denotes an action of *plai* *ontologizing* both absence and presence. This process is

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In this thesis, I have studied how absence becomes present. I examine the materiality of absence and the boundaries between presence and absence in theatre, performance, and visual art through surveying of different instances and kinds of present absence in visual culture. I discuss the apparent opposition between absence and presence showing how definitions of presence depend on absence, drawing on Derrida's philosophy of *différance*. I question metaphysical philosophy that looks at absence and presence as representations of a transcendental signified. I develop my argument with reference to examples of theatre, performance and installation art, analysed as forms of grapheme that can, in turn, be read as arche-writing. To make this case, I present Derrida's theory of grapheme, trace, aporia and deconstruction (also known as de-sedimentation), as well as play and *différance*. All of these interlinked concepts come to form the notion of what I call present absence and I apply them to theoretical and practical examples of theatre and art which, I suggest, offer different notions of present absence.

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I examine arguments that support the perspective that absence is present in the moment of spectating and theatre presence is never present in itself. It is a process without a structural centre in a constant play of reference. I aim not to explore absence as a category of presence, but as a force that questions presence and absence and, as pure supplement, without a transcendental signified to refer to. Therefore, my thesis examines theatre and art, whether it is defined as the meaning of an object, a human being, or the narrative itself. Absence and presence in theatre are referred to as processes of signifying play. My title, 'Ontology of Absence', denotes an action of moving *onto reasoning* about absence and presence. This process is

explained in detail in the second chapter, which looks at ‘Derrida in Theatre.’ I offer a perspective that contrasts with the accepted standard of meaning associated with ontology. In this thesis it is a network of signifiers that may point towards the process of interpretation, but never towards *the essence of a thing itself*. Signifiers possess neither presence as such, nor absence.

Moreover, text is recognised here as *always already* intertextualised. Text must be iterable, and therefore is not primary; it is always-already repeated. In accordance with Barthes, the text is never original. And what applies to text applies also to objects, human beings, and narrative; all are prey to iterability and the deferral of meaning-as-presence.

The journey through the thesis ends here (but where is here?). Absence does not reveal its whole potential in theatre, but absence can never be fully present anywhere. I have examined numerous theories of presence in visual culture and tested Derrida’s philosophy of the metaphysics of absence in relation to theatre and performance. But absence can never be fully present, any more than presence can ever quite take its leave. This research is therefore, necessarily, categorically, limited, as it considers a wide field of theatre and art with selected examples, and when we select we always over-select. I believe that a pursuit of absence might have much wider application than is presented in this particular work.

Present absence can be found in the discourse on political aspects of hybridised identity. I refer to this in detail in the first chapter,

which examines philosophy as/and/in performance. Absence in the centre of any ideology is a creative force. The lack of essence of any structure means that the relationship between contrasting entities can be redefined in accordance to the subjective judgement. The very absence provides the conditions to emancipate the thinker to decide what presence is. The notion of absence is a creative force that allows redefinitions to be credible, despite one’s relation to the dominant meaning. Throughout the thesis, I referred to visual art as a form of utterance that functions as language. Performance and theatre can serve as a means to express the relationship to the dominant meaning. Visual art can express the importance of or redefine the status quo. Therefore, the awareness of absence in the centre of ideology can be a liberating factor that prompts action.

This concept of politics as a network of relation is a product of contemporary times that is globally tested in the digital environment, where there is no centre of authority in any government. Absence as an open-ended possibility could define the aspects of the undefined in Performance Philosophy. The new field would remain open-ended by involving the element of possibility and plurality in its definition.

Another example of a hybridised genre that finds its definition in a possibility to interact with plurality of practitioners is Physical Theatre. Apart from the apparent differences between Performance Philosophy and Physical Theatre as conceptual and physical, both fields of knowledge are interdisciplinary in practical and theoretical senses.



Hybridised forms find their potential in the lack of dogmatic norms and definitions. They are the future of visual culture because they welcome new forms of exploration. This thesis is a response to the traditionally defined borders between oppositions. The format and content alike involve the hybridity between theory and practice as well as between physical and conceptual aspects of visual culture. Present absence is a theory that unsettles the norms of presence and presentation. Absence is this space of potential growth.

An analysis of the desedimenting effects of present absence might be traced much more widely in visual art, in culture, in society, in history. I have tried to show that attention to absence has a valuable and unsettling role in a few examples of theatre, performance, and visual art. They provided multiple dimensions of the application of my theory in theatre and art analysis. Through them I have tried to present an alternative mode of analysing visual culture. After conducting my research it remains to employ the theory of arche-writing, not only to find numerous conditions that present absence, but also to find its further potential in creating a methodology for studying visual culture. However, this is outside the scope of this thesis. Exploration of this theory will, I hope, be an opportunity for further study.

Present absence is developed from linguistic theory; it might be relevant to researchers who discuss technologies in connection with theatre, though it also has a social aspect. Over the last decade the issue of representation and authority have become even more apparent

than ever before, because the Internet has changed the way one might be considered as present or absent in the traditional sense, since at the same time one can be 'present' online in multiple profiles beyond the singular physical presence one might manifest in front of a device with an Internet connection. The forms of participation in multiple online profiles are not traditionally-defined kinds of presence, but it would not be true to say one is absent in those platforms either. The most vivid dimension of the Internet that directly refers to theatre studies and visual culture is the way it lays bare and extends the experience of body codification and the way that complicates presence. In digital environment one performs self-representation with the use of code as language, as even images and sounds are codified. All the dimensions of present absence discussed in this thesis could be represented in the example of performance of self, as a narrative, object of reference or a human being.

Usually, the human body is codified through society and culture. In the absence of the body there is no one thing that refers to the signifier 'you'. In its place could be an exchange of multiple signifiers that refer further to the textuality of one's name, username etc. This is a play of signifiers that have a chance to 'codify' one's identity through the use of things other than physical appearance. Hence, language might be the device of implementation of one's presence in the physical absence of the body. A 'Username' can have multiple 'appearances' in profiles and one may perform/codify oneself

differently for different audiences. This process of making one's presence in digital space seems to manifest itself through selection of signifiers that reflect information about the user.\* To define one's digital presence is similar to making a set of representations that cannot be referred to as present or absent in a traditional sense. In metaphysical philosophy presence refers to *truth* and *essence* and in digital space such logic might not make sense, as there are multiple possibilities of *truths* with no essence as everyone has equal authority to claim a *truth*. Moreover, if there might be no essence of oneself then the play of signification can continue to be 'present' long after death of an author. A name can become a decentralised play of signifiers and before the Internet this was only accessible to authors that were published, such as Derrida, whose proper name was cited, re-cited, codified and exchanges in numerous complicated ways before the advent of the Worldwide Web. Hence, representation of self-presence might be discussed as a constant play of signifiers that is never present in itself. This is another environment that displays definitions of presence as dependent on absence.

\* I discuss the issue of representation and absence of physical presence in digital space in 'Immortal "Brand-Me" Identity Immersion in a Digital Space' (Dobkowska et al. 2010).

Present absence could provide a perspective that reveals the paradoxical logic of representation outside visual arts or the Internet,

in concepts that logic of representation outside visual arts or the Internet, in concepts that divide and unite societies. National identity is one of such concepts. It could be discussed as an ideology that draws boundaries between social inclusion and exclusion based on *origin* and *boundaries*. But where is the *origin* of one's national identity? Is it the place of one's birth? Or perhaps one's parental origin? If so, it seems to be beyond the new human being. However, one can choose nationality in adulthood with a change of passport. With this small item the problem of nationality becomes even more complex. A small book seems to hold the authority to define one's nationality. Of course, this is just a token of authority. The properties are not in the book itself but in the authority that issues passports. The authority manifests its absent presence in this signifier for nationality. Something that is defined as *authority* is beyond the passport, but without this item one cannot officially prove nationality on the border of a country. Perhaps nationality belongs to a country, a place that one inhabits and its demarcation is the political borderline. However, how long one has to live in a place to call it home? Is it enough to call a place home to be included in a concept of nation?

Having in mind that the borderline or *essence* of this concept is not definable, the logic of the ideology reaches the point where it faces aporia. If the origin of my nationality is in my place of birth, then everyone else who is not born within the same country, place, mother, in fact other than me, is excluded. If the essence of my nationality is

my passport, then the case is complex as, in my case, I can have two passports from two recognised countries. Hence, where is *the essence* of my national identity or should I say identities? There seem to be many *origins* of this concept of nationality and its transcendental presence seems to be indefinable. When looking at boundaries of the concept of nationality the political border of a country seems to be the most graphic. It is the edge of a country that metaphorically might also act as a frame to national identity. Passing the border is linked with the segregation dictated by the need for *national security*, which is another ideology that is undermined by attending to the play of present absence. In the airport, a border is not a line indicating the edge of the country; airports are places where ideologies manifest themselves in the physical actions of the travellers and security. The imposed system becomes ideological by not questioning the need for particular behaviour. The politics of airport is another area where present absence could be explored.\*\*

\*\* Derrida referred to the paradox of borderlines on airports in *Aporias*. Or Marc Augé and John Howe in *Non-Places*.

National identity is an ideology that divides people and seems to gain authority by manifesting as presence. But what is the *authority*? What if another dimension of absence is defined as presence? *The authority* in the concept of nationality might be the belief in present essence of the ideology. In other words, the concept

of nationality refers to presence in values such as *truth*, *patriotism*, *origin*, etc. They are all ideas and their signifiers do not seem to converge on one ideal of nationality.

Belief in the concept of nationality as presence might be threatening as it acts as a reason for action, such as a dislike of others just because they display different set of signifiers of presence (nationality). Present absence reveals the faultlines in ideologies that have a very practical impact on people's lives. Authorities that define what is 'unquestionably' *true* and *correct* use it as an argument to justify wars. Such as the belief that Iraq had chemical weapons justified the attack on the country, even though these weapons of mass destruction were absent. Contrasting example would be the recent situation on Eastern Ukraine, where Russian authorities deny that they are engaged in any form of military intervention when the opposite is constantly proved. They are physically present force but officially absent. Another

example is the 'War on Terror' that began after 9/11. War with one ideology (terrorism) resulted into attack on another country in the name of another ideology (freedom). It leads to the logic that belief in the *present centre* of an ideology establishes *the right* to kill others. However, definition of the *signified* of an ideology seems to depend

on the authority. What one country names *freedom* another country may define as *terrorism*. Despite the scale of the event, if the authority is a country or is within oneself, the belief signified in the structure of ideology can be dangerous. Hence, it seems significant to point to the play of absence and presence in ideologies to rethink the values that are taken for granted.

In this thesis, I have worked to find a way to analyse absence in visual culture without reference to the notion of a transcendental signified. Throughout my research I found that not only absence but also presence is traditionally displayed as a representation of such signified. I applied Derrida's arguments about language to visual culture. In many cases, absence refers to presence that, in turn, points to absence which seems illogical at first, but makes sense if we think about them as graphemes. My theory of present absence points at deconstructive logic of representations, which are, of course, not only in art, theatre, performance, etc., but pervade everyday life. They can be found in every ideology I can think of. A concept of identity could be analysed as a set of ideologies that point at the transcendental signified of 'perfect self' in whichever way one would define it. Present absence is a *pharmakon* to this logic. I have touched on self-representation in digital space without the physical anchor of the body, as well as the concept of national identity. The theory of present absence is, ultimately, political and an attention to the play of absence and presents in theatre, performance, and visual culture may

be regarded as a tool to help us recognise how these things manifest themselves in politics, power, ideology, society, and indeed the self.



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