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# Theatrical Ideology: Toward a Rhetoric Theatricality

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**Theatrical Ideography: Towards a Rhetoric of Theatricality**

by

Jacob Levi Robertson

A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Brigham Young University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of English

Brigham Young University

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

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This thesis has been read by each member of the following graduate committee and by majority vote has been found to be satisfactory.

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As chair of the candidate's graduate committee, I have read the thesis of Jacob Levi Robertson in its final form and have found that (1) its format, citations, and bibliographical style are consistent and acceptable and fulfill university and department style requirements, (2) its illustrative materials including figures, tables and charts are in place; and (3) the final manuscript is satisfactory to the graduate committee and is ready for submission to the university library.

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## ABSTRACT

### **Theatrical Ideography: Towards a Rhetoric of Theatricality**

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Master of Arts

When used in common vernacular, the terminology of the medium of theatre—“theatricality,” “drama,” “performance,” “acting,” “scene,” etc.—form a vocabulary of “ideographs” as defined by Michael Calvin McGee. My analysis reveals that common usage of theatrical terms is more than merely metaphorical; the “theatre,” rather, is a fundamental orienting concept for defining lived experience—it is ideology. By viewing the use of theatrical language as ideological, and analyzing how such terms define situations rhetorically, we begin to reveal the underlying ideology upon which the medium of theatre operates, and which it unconsciously conveys. I demonstrate this claim by analyzing the argument made by the stage image (an example, I argue, of a theatrical ideograph) in a cinematic context. I examine the filmed record of John Gielgud’s 1964 Broadway production of *Hamlet*, released theatrically as *Richard Burton’s Hamlet*, and Kenneth Branagh’s 1996 cinematic adaptation of *Hamlet*. I conclude by discussing how theatrical ideology should inform a re-evaluation of spectacle generally, as well as discussions in mass media, politics, and the public sphere.

## INTRODUCTION

If, as semiotics-influenced film theorists have suggested, the visual elements of film can be considered (even if only through analogy) as elements of a cinematic vocabulary, then what communicative purpose does the use of any one particular piece of this visual vocabulary serve? The study of rhetoric, of course, serves to examine and elucidate exactly these kinds of questions in regards to the persuasive nature of words and images. However, in order to answer questions concerning the argument made by the use of any one element of a language in a communicative event requires that we first anchor our investigation theoretically by examining the rhetoric of that language system as a whole in order to reveal the underlying ideological principles of that language as it is used in common vernacular.

The “metaphoric” use of theatrical language in common discourse, I believe, represents just such a language system, and it is the language system which I intend to investigate herein.

In engaging the theatrical language ideographically, I am not adopting the strictly pejorative and Marxist sense of the term “ideology,”<sup>1</sup> although my understanding of ideology is naturally informed by Marxist criticism: ideology, even broadly defined, is, by its very nature, hidden to those who adhere to it. Yet hidden does not necessarily equal bad, merely not conscious. So it is a neutral understanding of “ideology” that tethers my current theoretical discussion and, in doing this, I am following the example of Michael Calvin McGee, who, in “The ‘Ideograph’: A Link Between Rhetoric and Ideology,” suggested the use of the term “ideology” as simply an underlying explanation of human

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<sup>1</sup> My use of the term ideology is informed by Tony Bennett’s encyclopedic discussion of the history of the term in *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society*.

motives, an explanation for why “Human beings in collectivity behave and think differently than human beings in isolation” (452).<sup>2</sup> Therefore, when I refer to the “ideology” and “ideography” of theatre, I simply refer to a group of underlying concepts that determine how—and therefore reveal why—members of a particular group will understand and respond to the use of those terms in pre-determined ways. Ideology, in this respect, is largely synonymous with the term “worldview”: an underlying conceptualization that defines reality for a given society.

At any one time, there may be a multitude of competing and complementary ideological scaffolds upon which individuals organize their understanding of reality and through which they define their situations and relationships. According to McGee, such ideologies are revealed through an analysis of the use of that ideology’s “ideographs”—the ideological vocabularies—in the common vernacular, or everyday language, of the individuals who pertain to the group.

McGee’s ideographic analysis of language suggests that by examining the rhetoric of a particular ideology, the terminology through which an ideological perspective is conveyed, we come to understand the fundamental beliefs, assumptions, and values of a group, culture, or society. The questions I intend to explore, by applying McGee’s strategies, are: what do we understand by “theatre” and what do we mean—or what are we trying to accomplish—when we employ theatrical language in common vernacular?<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Space doesn’t allow for a significant discussion of the relationship between McGee’s idea of “ideology” and Kenneth Burke’s discussion of “motives.” Both of these theoretical discussions resonate significantly with my current project, and their connection deserves further investigation.

<sup>3</sup> Clearly Kenneth Burke has addressed this idea of the theatrical, and theatrical language, as a means to understand the real; but instead of beginning with the “ideology” of the dramatic (“dramatism”), as Burke does, I want work backwards, in the manner of



How does theatrical language contextualize situations? What are the fundamental principles that allow us to define and understand situations in theatrical terms, and what significance is connected to the fact that we do this?

In order to explore these questions, I must first demonstrate that theatrical terminology is, indeed, an example of the ideographic language McGee discussed, and that an analysis of theatrical ideographs reveals an unconscious “theatrical ideology” at work in human communication patterns. I find support for such an argument in the ideas presented by William Egginton in his book *How the World Became a Stage: Presence, Theatricality, and the Question of Modernity*. Egginton claims that the definitive “mode of being” of the modern age is “theatricality” (68); he argues that “from the turn of the sixteenth century, theatricality begins to play an ever larger role in the mediation of experience” (60) and eventually becomes the primary mode of experiencing reality—at least in the West. My analysis of theatrical ideography substantiates this claim, and even suggests that “theatricality” as a mode of experience has roots that reach much further back than the beginnings of the modern age (indeed, my discussion of the connection between democracy and theatricality, when coupled with Egginton’s discussion of “presence” as the definitive mode of being in the pre-Renaissance age, suggests the possibility that humanity has vacillated between periods of theatricality and other modes of experiencing reality, an assertion which, unfortunately, space does not allow me to delve into at any length). By analyzing the uses of theatrical language, broadly defined, my thesis substantiates the claim that theatricality is a fundamental mode of being, an

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McGee, beginning with terms and images as representative forms of ideology, in order to show how dramatic language in use reveals the very “ideology” that Kenneth Burke’s dramatisitic analyses uses to explain human motivation.

ideological orientation that helps define perceptions of reality. It suggests that the language and imagery of theatre forms a “rhetoric” of terms, a vocabulary used to make arguments which unconsciously—ideographically—define relationships to lived experience.

I will focus my discussion on the validity of engaging theatrical language as a rhetoric and an ideography, first by discussing the use of theatrical language in common vernacular, and then by examining the use of a typical theatrical ideograph in popular culture. The ideograph I intend to focus on in the second half of my thesis is the stage image, which I will argue is a visual ideograph, or representative form, following the argument of Janis L. Edwards and Carol K. Winkler.<sup>4</sup>

Understanding theatrical language as ideographic provides an important theoretical tool for both rhetorical theory and performance studies. If, indeed, the world is seen as a stage—especially if it is only seen as such ideographically—then the conventions of the stage, as they have developed in the West over the past few centuries particularly, are themselves merely the tools of ideology conventionalized and put to use through a medium that is, itself, a microcosm of the larger “stage” and “theatre,” and all staged entertainment becomes initially “metatheatrical.” Human response to the medium of theatre, then, in cultures where theatrical ideography is apparent, must be examined from this perspective, and in such cultures the stage itself becomes a kind of nexus for human interpretations of reality, a kind of “master trope” whose relationship to the larger world can be understood to be at once metaphoric, synecdochic, metonymic, and ironic;<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See Edwards and Winkler’s discussion in “Representative Form and the Visual Ideograph: The Iwo Jima Image In Editorial Cartoons.”

<sup>5</sup> Kenneth Burke names and defines the “master tropes” in his *A Grammar of Rhetoric*.

viewed in this way, the stage's role as a nexus for human experience—an argument long embraced by theatrical artists—is substantiated through an appeal to theatre as an ideology, as revealed through a study of theatrical rhetoric, and the “conventions” of theatre, themselves, when they are employed, become inherently rhetorical, patterns of persuasion that function on the level of argument.

Theatrical rhetoric, then, will not only help us to understand, on a fundamental level, philosophical and artistic “movements” as they relate to perceptions of reality (e.g., “Realism” as a reaction to the theatrical mode of being Eggington describes<sup>6</sup>), but the fact that there is a theatrical rhetoric that reveals an underlying theatrical ideology elicits and provides a research direction for other artistic and philosophical questions: What does theatrical ideology suggest about Burkian “dramatistic” criticism? What is theatrical ideology's relationship to the development of the “Public Sphere” and how does it inform—or, perhaps, critique—the Habermasian notions of the public sphere? What does the use of theatrical ideography in warfare or religion suggest about these human events, or the political implications of defining such events in theatrical terms? Clearly artists have known for millennia that theatricality serves to make powerful arguments, but knowing that theatrical imagery makes an argument is not the same thing as knowing *how* theatrical imagery makes an argument. That its argument is based on an ideology inherent in the medium itself, one that forms the foundation of audience reception, can, I

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<sup>6</sup> Anne-Britt Gran's assertion that “modern theatre,” after the advent of Realism, is effectively “devoid of theatricality” and the long list of authorities she channels to support that assertion, including Nicolas Evreinov, Edward Gordon Craig, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Antonin Artaud, and Bertold Brecht, suggest to me that this question has substance; “Realism” as a theatrical movement was clearly reacting to a perceived falseness in modern culture, which the “theatrical” mode of being (what Eggington argues is the dominant mode of being in modernity) certainly substantiates.

believe, lead to a more conscious and intentional composition of artistic events which resonate significantly with audiences.

Of course, the nature of this question is so expansive that my argument will naturally result in more questions than answers, with many tangential lines of inquiry impossible to address, considering the scope and space of this paper, questions concerning the relationship between democracy and theatre, or theatrical ideology's influence on modern ideas of the public and the private, or the connection between rhetoric and theatre as separate, but related, media of communication. This paper, however, is not an attempt to investigate the phenomenon of theatrical ideology exhaustively; rather, it proposes that we, as academics, consider theatre in terms of ideology, and to take seriously the pervasive influence of this theatrical worldview on the experience and interpretation of reality.

## THE IDEOLOGY OF THE THEATRE AND THE “THEATRE” AS IDEOGRAPH

In this essay, I will examine theatrical language as an ideographic vocabulary—that is, as a “rhetoric.” It might go without saying that the use of theatrical language in vernacular discourse defines a situation in “theatrical” terms, but I will argue that the ability to transform the “world” into a “stage” by employing theatrical language to describe and define events is possible only because there is an underlying ideological orientation that “theatricality” represents, an ideology which must be fundamental to the understanding of lived experience—to the worldview—of the culture that uses theatrical vocabulary as a rhetoric. I intend to discover this “theatrical ideology” by analyzing this theatrical rhetoric and examining the use of theatrical language as “ideographic.” I believe that this analysis of theatrical ideographs will substantiate the claim that “theatre,” as it is understood in a modern sense (and particularly in the Western paradigm), is more than just an art form or a medium of artistic communication, and the use of theatrical terms in common vernacular is more than merely metaphoric or poetic; rather, the use of this language relies on an underlying ideological framework which defines a particular perception of experience, making “theatre” a fundamental ideological orientation, or worldview, which defines the experience of reality for that culture which employs its terms as a rhetoric.

## The Ideograph

Michael Calvin McGee’s essay “The Ideograph: A Link Between Rhetoric and Ideology” offers a theory explaining the “brute, undeniable phenomenon” that “human beings in collectivity behave and think differently than human beings in isolation” (452); that is, we humans have one set of behaviors for social, or “public” (in its broadest sense)

activity, situations in which we are not “I” but “we,” and this is different from the behaviors that we might display when not with others. The ways in which we “behave and think” in “collectivity,” moreover, are not necessarily innate, but taught: “Human beings,” he argues, are not “conditioned” into “belief and behavior” exactly, “but into a vocabulary of concepts that function as guides, warrants, reasons, or excuses for behavior and belief” (455). In order to act in a manner that is acceptable to the “collective” to which we belong, we must be trained—*persuaded*—to act properly as members of that collective, to behave ourselves in “public.”

This vocabulary, McGee argues, is the collective’s “ideographs,” words he describes as “one-term sums of an [ideological] orientation” (455), clusters of words and phrases which, for a particular group, have “an obvious meaning, a behaviorally directive self-evidence” which form a vocabulary of “the basic structural elements, the building blocks, of [that group’s] ideology” (455). From this perspective, “ideology” does not necessarily carry the negative overtones that Marxist criticism has conferred upon the term, but an “ideology” becomes analogous to a “world-view,” a scaffold upon which individuals who pertain to a certain group unconsciously organize their interpretations and perceptions of reality.

McGee draws examples of these “ideographs” from the democratic vocabulary of the United States in order to illustrate this claim. He considers words familiar to Western-style democracy—“liberty,” “religion,” and “equality,” and phrases like “freedom of speech” and “the rule of law” (455)—that provide, he claims, “the clearest access to persuasion” in U.S. political culture, “and hence” provide insight into the underlying “ideology” of that political system (454). Whether we are using these terms in their

denotative or connotative sense, what is ideographic about them is their ability to define a situation, to orient a situation according to a specific belief system, and to act as encapsulated arguments concerning the course of action we should take (or not take) in a given situation.

It is for this reason that ideographs can be points of contention between different groups. In other cultures—McGee uses the example of the former Soviet Union, for which the word “equality” was as ideologically fundamental as it is in the United States, but for whom the word was “not the same word in its meaning or its usage” (457)—the same terms, even the same concepts, can be used to scaffold an entirely different ideological orientation, and even within a particular culture “are special interests [. . .] separated one from the other precisely by disagreements regarding the identity, legitimacy, or definition of ideographs” (457). To state this another way, what is “proper” community (that is “public”) behavior (and, therefore, belief), varies from society to society, from collective to collective, from belief system to belief system, and ideographs, then, are the “arguments” by which a group defines itself, its “reality,” its relation to the world, and the relations of the members of the group (and groups within and without that group) to each other. They are “the discourse used to produce” the behavior and belief of the group (454), and which simultaneously unites those within the group, and separates the group from other groups. Ideographs, it could be said, define ideological parameters, and if one does not fall within those parameters, he or she does not belong.

The situational nature of collective thinking and behavior, then, is based on a consideration of the collective itself viewed as an Other who is at all times and in all places watching and judging individuals within the collective, and behavior is motivated

by the persistent omni-presence of the collective's "gaze"<sup>7</sup> whose approval is deemed absolutely necessary. Based on this perspective, I would argue that ideographs can be considered performative; they are "ideology in practice" and have "the capacity to dictate decision and control public belief and behavior" (454) because they define, rhetorically, the parameters of proper performance; though ideographs are "words only (and not claims)," McGee states, they "are more pregnant" with ideological perspectives "than propositions ever could be" (455) because a culture's ideographs "signify and 'contain' a unique, ideological commitment;" each one represents "the series of propositions [. . .] that could be manufactured to justify" the ideology itself (455), and, within the group, one is not "permitted to question the fundamental logic" of them (456).

Since ideographs are the "definitive terms of the society we have inherited" and they both express and define the "*conditions* of the society into which each of us is born, material ideas which we must accept to 'belong'" to that society (457), then ideographic vocabularies provide a lens through which we can understand a culture's "worldview" because they are the vocabularies through which the members of that culture express their worldview, the means by which they understand and interpret reality and their relation to it. Ideographs, then, are the "link" between "rhetoric"—the way one expresses

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<sup>7</sup> I trace both my uses of the terms "Other" and "gaze" here, genealogically, through Lacan to Sartre and Hegel; I use these ideas in the same sense Eggington does: "I claim that the active ingredient in the performative imposition of bodily forms on an individual is the gaze of a disembodied audience" (Eggington 6); this "gaze" is that of a general "Other" acting as spectator, an abstract principle of which the individual is constantly aware. While I am aware of the feminist discussions (Simone De Beauvoir, Laura Mulvey, etc.) of the feminine as Other, the male gaze, and power relationships in patriarchal societies, and am aware of the obvious links between these theoretical discussions, and their possible implications for my thesis, the immediate discussion does not allow for a thorough investigation of these intersections. I am immediately interested only in "the Other" as a gazing, abstracted, omnipresent, and gender-neutral element of the modern mode of being, and of the theatrical in general.



the world *in* the world—and “ideology”—the understanding *of* the world which one adopts while in the world. To put this more simply: rhetorics are ideographic, and rhetoric reveals ideology, or worldview.

It is my desire to investigate these relational, definitional, and performative components of ideography that have prompted the current discussion.

*Theatrum Mundi*: Merely a Metaphor?

According to Christian Metz, there was nothing inevitable in the appropriation of cinema for narrative uses (44); however, his claim that film’s potency as an art lies in its “*impression of reality*” (4) suggests that this appropriation of the medium for narrative purposes was related to the development of theatre as both a medium and a frame of mind. Humans are predisposed to view the world according to a narrative paradigm,<sup>8</sup> and specifically, in the case of Western culture, to interpret reality according to a theatrical or “dramatistic” narratology.

William Egginton traces this theatrical “mode of being” to the beginnings of the modern era, and the verisimilar movement’s late medieval/early modern theatre.

According to Richard Bernheimer, the first use of the *theatrum mundi* or “stage of the world” metaphor was by the now-forgotten Renaissance thinker Giulio Camillo, who, sometime in the early 1500s, began what he considered to be his life’s work:

development of the theoretical relationship between heaven, earth, stage, and audience (225-26). I would suggest, however, that evidence of a theatrical mode of experience, of a

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<sup>8</sup> I borrow this term from Walter R. Fisher’s discussion of “the narrative paradigm” in “Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm: The Case of the Public Moral Argument” (*Readings in Rhetorical Criticism*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Ed. Carl R. Burghardt. State College, PA: Strata, 2005. 240-262) and from Fisher’s discussions of narrative generally.

theoretical relationship between the theatre and the world, far predates either Camillo or the modern age.

Stephen Greenblatt, in *Renaissance Self-fashioning*, argues that a central component of Renaissance culture was the idea that “there were both selves and a sense that they could be fashioned” (1), and he points out that this idea far predates the Renaissance. The early Christian thinker Augustine, according to Greenblatt, counseled Christians against the pitfalls of self-fashioning, suggesting that, even in the fifth century, there was this sense “of man’s power to shape identity” (2), that personalities were rhetorical performances, characterizations of a dramatic—or, I would argue, a “dramatistic”—sort<sup>9</sup>. Greenblatt offers a sense of the connection between the world-as-stage and the fashioning of the self as a character or performance—a theatrical exercise. Greenblatt writes: “identity is a mask to be fashioned and manipulated” (157) in much the same way that the actors in Greek drama would switch masks to change characters. Added to this is the fact that, as Edith Hall, in her preface to Colin Teevan’s recent translation of Euripides’s play *The Bacchae*, explains, “the word for ‘mask’ (*prosopon*) in ancient Greek [. . .] was the regular word for ‘face’ or ‘countenance,’ with particular emphasis on the features” (11).

In order for a concept as theatrical as self-fashioning to become general, however, there must first be a worldview that allows for the belief that theatre-like performances can occur outside of a theatre-specific context; that is, there must be a world-view that

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<sup>9</sup> Kenneth Burke coined the term “dramatism” in *A Grammar of Motives*, in which he uses theatre as a framework for critical analysis of human motivation. His theories eventually influenced Erving Goffman, whose seminal work, *The Performance of Self in Everyday Life*, describes interpersonal relations in the work place as a kind of theatrical performance. Goffman’s work would go on to be a central text in the development of contemporary performance studies.

considers the world in terms of the theatre, one in which *theatrum mundi* becomes much more than merely a metaphor, but takes on the force of a world-view, or ideology. Edith Hall seems to suggest that a type of this *theatrum mundi* ideological perspective is “at the heart” of Euripides’s play: “one of the most astonishing events in world theatre,” Hall argues, occurs in *The Bacchae* when “Dionysus, the god of theatre, becomes a stage director” while disguised as a mortal (10). Astonishing for just this very reason, that Euripides’s *theatrum mundi* is much more than merely a metaphor for lived experience, because “King Pentheus,” Hall argues, “is *symbolic* of the experience of every actor and every audience who has ever renounced ‘reality’ and participated in the mimetic journey into dramatic illusion” (10), a journey that is not limited merely to the *theatron* alone, as evidenced by the fact that Dionysus “is the god who presides over the various delusions associated” with life both in and out of the theatre, including “wine” and “madness” (10).

*The Bacchae* is much more than the first instance of “metatheatre;” this moment, rather, demonstrates that a complex, reciprocal relationship already existed between the *idea* of the world and the *idea* of the stage as far back as ancient Greece, as evidenced further by Hall’s discussion of the mask alluded to earlier. In ancient Greece, the word mask (*prosopon*) carried “none of its connotations in modern English of concealment or dissimulation” but, as the word for face, merely “marked the identity of an individual as he or she existed in relation to others” (11), suggesting that the complex relationship between mimetic stage and reality was a fundamental component of ancient Greek culture.

In *The Bacchae*, Dionysus convinces King Pentheus to dress as a woman so that the king can sneak in among the god’s female devotees in order to witness the Bacchanal

(10), the act ultimately leading to Pentheus's death. In this moment, Euripides clearly draws a connection between the world and the stage that is not merely metaphorical, but also *synecdochical* (the part standing in as a representation of the whole) of the world itself. Just as humans on the stage perform for an audience dramatic events that are directed and scripted by some unseen force, so, too, humans in the world perform for the gods, who are the unseen directors and scriptors of the events of lived experience, events which are known before hand to the invisible audience, but are unknown to the characters themselves. We see, then, that for the Greeks, both "reality" and "theatre" were also dramatically *ironic*.<sup>10</sup> In *The Bacchae*, what makes the descent of Dionysus—the "god of dramatic rites/ God of the transformation from humdrum/ To the wild abandon of the play" (17; 67-68)—into mortal form so important, so "astonishing" (to use Hall's word), is the fact that Dionysus the God, the divine spectator—who, in this case, is also director, writer, and dramaturge—has taken the stage as an actor, as well. By staging this upset of the order of things, Euripides suggests the upsetting potential for each human member of his theatrical audience, not only spiritually and artistically, but politically, and in that moment, he reveals to his audience the fundamental ideological orientation of the theatre as a medium, the "argument" that the very medium itself makes, an argument that, I believe, made Plato so distrusting of theatre's potential and led to his critique of the medium as leading to lawlessness and chaos (I will discuss this critique in more detail in Part 2 below).

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<sup>10</sup> Burke argues that, within each of the "master tropes" (metaphor, synecdoche, metonymy, and irony) are others already and necessarily represented. My analysis of this scene from *The Bacchae* seems not only to bear this out, but to suggest that the stage itself, from antiquity, has been a nexus for exploring human experience by an appeal to these "master tropes."

However, far from theatrical ideology being a lawless, chaotic development as had been suggested by Plato's nameless Athenian in Book 3 of *Laws*<sup>11</sup>, this scene from *The Bacchae* clearly illustrates that a theatrical experience of reality is governed by very specific rules and by an ideological framework that determines what can or cannot (or, at least, should or should not) transpire. The interaction between Pentheus and Dionysus suggests that there are clear boundaries established by theatrical ideology that should not be transgressed; indeed, *The Bacchae* argues that the "rule of law" is fundamental to theatre. These laws, however, are nowhere written down, and are legally binding only insofar as they seem self-evident, derived from the form of the theatrical event itself. Such laws work on a purely sub-conscious level and are, for the participants in a theatrical event, so self-evident that neither audience nor actors would consider them at all, except in cases where these laws are broken.

It is these laws of theatrical ideology that Pentheus transgresses in *Bacchae*, and Pentheus's "sin"—at least, the transgression that the Greek audience recognizes as sin—is ultimately his lack of reverence for these apparently "self-evident" laws, laws which Euripides' Greek audience seems to take for granted: Pentheus ridicules the beautiful theatre god and seeks to evict both him and his "rites," his rules, from the city, not only in the action of the play and Pentheus's stated goal to evict Dionysus himself and his followers from the city, but in his willingness to selfishly—that is, self-servingly—invoke the doctrines of theatre—disguise and spectatorship—deceptively, profanely, blasphemously. In disguising himself as a woman, Pentheus invokes the power of the god

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<sup>11</sup> In *Theatricality as Medium*, Samuel Weber suggests that while democracy is "not the political form of choice for the Athenian" it is preferable to "theatrocracy"—the Athenian's pejorative term for a "sovereignty of the audience" or absolute rule by the people—because teatrocracy "appears to respect no [. . .] limits" (33).

he seeks to evict. Though he seeks to prevent others from participating conspicuously in the rites that will bind them together as a community, he will selfishly use those same rites profanely outside of the sacred space of theatre in order to voyeuristically witness a performance not meant for his participation. In doing this, he seeks to become like the god he seeks to supplant by performing the role of both actor and spectator simultaneously. This is contrary to the principles underlying the theatrical event, which, far from being tyrannical, totalitarian, and dictatorial, as Pentheus has demonstrated himself to be, are democratic in the extreme. From this ideological perspective, not only is Pentheus's punishment recognized as just, but Dionysus's seeming capricious complicity in Pentheus's deception and death is also just, a complicity that reveals Pentheus's (for lack of a better word) hypocrisy.

Pentheus's act of disguising himself, while clearly played for comedic effect, is not itself questioned by the text at all; it is only in his deception and "hypocrisy" (in the modern, negative sense)<sup>12</sup> that he is guilty of sin. Clearly the concept of disguiseability outside of the theatre proper, the sense that one is able to create, in "real" life, alternate personae by means of costuming, self-presentation, or self-definition, does not appear to be a problem, or even a novel concept, for Euripides's original Greek audience. Rather, theatricality was a basic mode of lived experience. Moreover, theatricality was not necessarily about deception, because it is Pentheus's use of theatricality to deceive that results in his ultimate punishment.

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<sup>12</sup> We continue to use Greek theatrical terms in common vernacular without even realizing where they come from: "hypocrisy," from the Greek for an actor, and "obscene," from the Greek word for off-stage, are only two examples, and evidence, I think, of a possibly longer history for the theatrical mode of experience than Eggington suggests.

While Euripides suggests that theatre—like all sacred things—does operate according to law, he does not reveal to us what those laws are. I would argue that this is because the “laws” of theatre are Euripides’s fundamental operating ideology, that underlying group of ordering principles that helps to define the world for a particular group. Neither he nor his audience suggests that there is anything “astonishing” about disguising, and being punished for doing so impiously, because that such can be done is an essential component of the Athenian world-view: it is simply how things are.

In order to discover what these theatrical “laws” are—to discover the essentials of the theatrical world-view, or ideology—I will analyze the language of theatre used in common vernacular to see how we apply theatrical terminology to define the world. Since it is through the language of common vernacular that communities communicate their ideological orientations, then, as McGee has suggested, it is through an analysis of language, particularly the ideographic components of language, that we will reveal the assumptions, the “laws,” at work in a particular ideology. Indeed, as Greenblatt has argued, “the chief intellectual and linguistic tool in this creation” of the world stage was and is “rhetoric,” which “was the common ground of poetry, history and oratory” (162). “Rhetoric”—the art of language, the art of persuasion and expression, the art of communicating ideas—“served to theatricalize culture,” Greenblatt argues, because language, word choice, serves as the primary medium through which the self is presented to the world. Moreover, language is the medium through which an individual’s interpretation of the world is revealed, an interpretation that, according to McGee, must be founded upon principles derived from the underlying group ideology. Rhetoric can “theatricalize culture,” Greenblatt argues, because “it [is] the instrument of a society that

[is] already deeply theatrical” (162). So it is to the rhetoric of theatricality—that is, the vocabulary of theatrical terms used as more than a reference to the medium of theatre, as a way of describing the “real” world and defining situations in common vernacular—that I intend to look in order to discover the underlying, innate “laws”—the ideology—of the theatrical medium itself.

### The Ideographic Vocabulary of Theatre

While theatrical terms themselves do have their specific, denotative qualities—to talk of “the theatre” is certainly to speak of a place where audiences go to see and hear dramatic works performed—theatrical terms also function, to use McGee’s words, “in real discourse [. . .] clearly and evidently as agents of” a particular frame of mind or “consciousness” (456). By an appeal to these terms, speakers define their situations and articulate their motives (McGee 456), and these theatrical terms can be used in common vernacular to define situations and articulate motives—in effect, to present complex arguments—because these terms are loaded with more than the mere weight of metaphor; they carry with them the force of an entire ideological orientation, and their use as ideographs re-orient the particular situation and motives to present the situations and motives thus articulated according to that ideological perspective—a theatrical perspective. Parents, for example, might suggest, when they suddenly discover that their children are listening attentively to something that they would rather keep quiet, that they have “an audience”; we might label as “dramatic” a person who tends to over-react, creating a spectacle; we speak fondly of an automobile’s ability to “perform.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> I have chosen my example here based on its relative neutrality. Jonas Barish, in his study of *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*, noted that “with infrequent exceptions,” the uses of theatrical terminology in common vernacular “tend to be hostile or belittling” and



Let me expound somewhat on one of the examples above: suppose the parents of young children, engaged in a rather unimportant conversation, begin to stand closer to each other, maybe gently touch one another; soon they are kissing, and begin to kiss more passionately, until they notice that their amorous interlude is being watched closely by their young children. Now, whether or not it is “right” for this couple to continue this behavior in front of their “audience” of young children is debatable, but the decision that the parents make to continue or to stop does not merely depend upon the parents themselves, but upon their inherited, and largely unconscious, ideas of right and wrong in terms of sex and proper parenting—that is, it depends upon their worldview. This worldview will define the situation for them, influencing their response based on ideas about whether what is happening should be a “public” act in which the children can participate, or a “private” act in which this particular ancillary group of others should not be allowed to participate. The determination of what belongs in the public sphere and what belongs in the private sphere, however, is ideological in nature: ideology will act as a kind of nexus for many arguments about child rearing and parental behavior, and, based upon this ideology, the parents will employ those ideographs that will best define the situation to make the most persuasive argument concerning the course of action that should follow. If one of this couple chooses to employ a phrase such as “Sweetheart, we appear to have an audience,” it is the use of this term “audience” that will determine the course of action—that is to say, the term “audience” will act ideographically to define the

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“embody [. . .] the vestiges of a prejudice against the theatre” which is too unique to Western culture (1-2). Barish makes no attempt to “explain the antitheatrical prejudice” (3), but I think that the apparent universality of antagonism to theatricality suggests an important future discussion which might further inform ideological considerations of theatricality as a mode of being.

situation and, by defining it in this way, argue for the future course of action based on the ideological implications of the term itself. It will, as McGee said, act as condensed form of argument whose logic is self-evident.

The word “audience,” in this situation, is a condensed argument concerning the specific, ideologically defined distinctions between public and private behavior, distinctions based on concepts associated with spectacular events. If these parents ideological inclinations suggest to them that their children ought not to be made spectators of such behavior, or if they simply prefer to keep such matters “private,” then by employing the term “audience,” they have rhetorically oriented their situation in such a way that the amorous moment has become a theatrical event, something that they did not intend, and it suggests to the parties that they should stop the behavior specifically because they did not want their affection to be a theatrical event.<sup>14</sup>

Now, in contemporary Western culture, to continue with the sort of a theatrical event discussed above with the audience suggested is considered inappropriate, a violation of cultural norms. Just as Euripides’s Dionysus was used to demonstrate the inappropriateness of Pentheus’s actions by situating him in a theatrical event that was transgressive of cultural norms, the parents, in this situation, might use the ideographic

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<sup>14</sup> In connection with this discussion, the question could be asked: “Is all observation spectatorship?” I would argue that all observation is not necessarily spectatorship, but for those organizing their experience of reality on a scaffold of theatrical ideology, observation cannot help but become spectatorship. This inevitably leads to questions about the innateness of theatricality as a mode of being for humans generally, and not just Westerners, a much more expansive philosophical question that cannot be addressed in this paper, and that, I fear, may be impossible to answer in our contemporary global culture which, due to a complex of influences ranging from centuries old colonization by “Westerners” to modern modes of mass media, is rapidly homogenizing, possibly generalizing a theatrical mode of experience even for cultures not ideologically theatrical originally.

language of theatre to reaffirm cultural norms as well: that is, this moment is not meant to be theatre for this group and so the situation needs to be redefined.<sup>15</sup> In fact, if the parents were to continue, perhaps become even more explicit in their affection while the children watched, we might term such actions to be “obscene,” a word which literally means “off stage.” The use of this ancient Greek term, taken directly from theatre, not only suggests how ancient the theatrical mode of thinking is, but how fundamental to our way of thinking theatrical language has become: it is used to define the separation between the “public” and the “private.”

Two important ideological associations with theatre as a medium are highlighted by the above discussion: theatricality’s emphasis on audience, and the centrality of choice in considerations of theatrical events. I believe that these two points begin to lead us towards discovering what, essentially, theatrical ideology is. A closer, rhetorical analysis of the usage of this term “audience,” especially in something like the situation just described, will begin to reveal more fully the underlying ideological orientation that theatrical language presupposes.

As I mentioned before, the initial delineation drawn by the use of this term is a distinction between the “public” and the “private.” To put this another way: the use of the term “audience” suggests that there are certain events which spectators should be allowed to witness, and certain things that they should not events considered “obscene.” This

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<sup>15</sup> Notice that what we have in the example of the parents’ situation a complimentary transgression to Pentheus’s transgression: in the parents, we have actors who are did not mean to be actors performing for an audience who ought not to be an audience; in Pentheus, we have an audience who ought not to have been an audience. In each instance, the transgression is not merely conventional, but ideological: the transgression is of deeper considerations of choice and participation, of right and wrong, and not merely toying with accepted dramatic convention.

particular use of the word “audience” suggests that such public “spectacles” should be determined, on some level, by consensus, a consensus arrived at by appealing to the sensibilities of those being watched and those watching. Each group must agree that the “spectacle” is, in fact, meant to be a public spectacle, or one that has been designed for viewing by an audience, as opposed to something private, which does not invite the participation of spectators. This determination, of course, has nothing to do with absolute values of truth and error; rather, it is based upon the culturally accepted norms for such activity. Likewise, the use of the theatrical term, in this instance “audience,” does not immediately transform the event into theatre or spectacle; rather, in this instance, it is used antithetically, to keep the event from being transformed into a spectacle.

The use of any ideographic terms by definition delineates the parameters of a particular situation, but notice that, in the use of the term “audience” by the couple above, the parameters for proper behavior are *not* determined by an underlying ideological structure determining the rightness or wrongness of a particular activity—in this case, sexual activity—but it is determined by considerations of whether or not such activity should be placed on display *for a specific group*; that is to say: should this activity be made into a spectacle? This question is an appeal to an ideology of theatricality, and it is the application of that theatrical ideography that now defines the situation and which causes the participants to re-examine the situation based on both their cultural mores of behavior considered through the lens of the ideographic language of theatricality.

This analysis of a specific application of a theatrical term’s ideographic sense begins to point us in the direction of determining the ideological orientation of theatre itself. In the same way that many Westerners are “conditioned to believe that ‘liberty’

and ‘property’ have an obvious meaning” (McGee 455), we have also been conditioned to believe that the vocabulary of theatre—“theatricality,” “audience,” “dramatic,” “performance”—has obvious meaning when used outside of a strictly theatrical context.

These terms build their ideological orientation by analogy to the spectacle of dramatic performance, and the term “audience,” specifically, refers to those who choose to participate in a spectacle as observers. The course of action taken by the passionate couple upon discovering they have “an audience” will depend entirely on whether or not they want that audience for the event, whether or not they not want to make this moment “theatrical”—that is to say, participatory.

So merely through the application and analysis of the theatrical ideograph “audience” to a situation which is clearly *not* intended to be theatrical, we discover two very important points about the ideology upon which our understanding of a theatrical situation is built: first, theatrical situations involve participation of a party of observers and a party of (for lack of a better word) “performers;” second, there is an element of intentionality manifest as a sort of common consent between all parties participating that the event or spectacle presented will, in fact, be theatrical—that is, meant for viewing. In this sense, the application of the ideograph (de)limits the situation it is employed to describe. In the case of the term “audience,” the situation is defined (in this case critically) according to the limits which theatre seems “self-evidently” (to use McGee’s term) to set for itself in an ideal theatrical situation.

In any theatrical “spectacle” or event, there are at least two kinds of participants: those who participate as performers, and those who participate as spectators. In the ideal theatrical event—that is to say, the event as it was *self-evidently* intended to be—both

parties—performers and spectators—understand the rules of their participation and willingly accept the roles they inhabit: the performers *choose* to put on a spectacle, and the audience *chooses* to watch it. To put it another way: the theatrical agreement requires a conscious exercise of will. Indeed, quoting Baz Kershaw, Tracy C. Davis makes the point “that audience members always have a *choice* as to whether or not the [theatrical] performance may be efficacious for them,” and argues that “a person must decide to be a spectator, not merely a witness, engaged and conscious of the transaction of display and reception” that occur in a theatrical situation (*Theatricality* 129). This emphasizes what I believe is the essential nature of theatrical ideology: a democratic<sup>16</sup>, participatory ideology that infuses the medium of theatre itself. It is this ideological perspective we appeal to when we define situations through an application of theatrical language, and it is this ideological perspective that is re-emphasized when theatrical language is employed ideographically.

Looking again at the case of the amorous couple, they could very well decide that they want an audience for their “event,” in which case the moment they notice they are being observed and continue the event, the event is transformed from a moment of private intimacy into a moment of public—that is, theatrical—spectacle. On the other hand, a couple may (as some couples do), decide before hand that they want an audience for their amorous adventure—a situation which would require some planning on their

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<sup>16</sup> My use of the term “democracy” is informed primarily by Paul Woodruff’s *First Democracy*. While Woodruff defines the popular understanding of democracy as “government by the people and for the people,” he argues that theoretically, democracy can be broken down into seven essential ideas: “freedom from tyranny, harmony, the rule of law, natural equality, citizen wisdom, and reasoning without knowledge, and general education” which, Woodruff writes, is not only “what the ancient defenders of democracy meant by the word” but is “pretty close to our usage, as well” (15).

part and for which, I am sure, they would be more than able to procure spectators by an appeal to theatrical means, (the Internet is replete with couples willingly theatricalizing their “obscene”—off-stage, private—interactions). Of course, depending on where they decide to put on this spectacle, they might find themselves rejected by the audience, in which case, the spectacle does not become a theatrical event but a public nuisance—unless, in cases where such behavior is against the law, someone calls the police; the spectacle of arrest, in this case, may very well turn theatrical.

Again, as we saw in the cases of Pentheus and, later, the amorous couple with children, audience rights and considerations become a central concern of theatrical ideology. Moreover, this seems to suggest that the conventions of theatre as a medium are, themselves, ideographic in nature, revealing a democratic ideological orientation which is essentially *the* ideology of theatre. This ideology defines the theatrical situation whether we are participating in a *staged* theatrical event, or defining an event vernacularly in theatrical terms. This “ideology” is an ideology of participation by choice, an ideology that, as I have stated, is best be termed “democratic” because theatrical participation requires not only participation, but conscious, informed participation in the spectacle.

#### Democracy and Theatrical Ideology

According to Paul Woodruff in *First Democracy: The Challenge of an Ancient Idea*, the “tragic poets” like “Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides” are the earliest defenders of democracy we have on record. They wrote plays in contests whose victors were chosen essentially “by popular opinion” and, he states, “it should be no surprise that the poets who won the prizes were champions of democratic ideas” (29). With this in

mind, it becomes much more clear what the laws—the theatrical laws—are which Pentheus transgresses, and which Dionysus embodies: rules regulating communal participation in spectacle, he is transgressing the central tenets of democracy, tenets which, I believe, the *Bacchai* argues are not only the central tenets of Athenian government, but the central tenets of theatre, as well. Pentheus is defined as a tyrant because he transgresses these fundamental principles of the democratic order, the principles upon which the Athenian culture—of which the Athenian stage is a synecdochical representation—is based.

Euripides' theatre, then, not only comments on the world, but by staging that world, it projects its ideology onto the world, as well. Theatricality, then, is more than merely an entertaining medium to communicate to the world; it is a medium through which one actually interprets the world from a particular ideological perspective, a perspective that seems to be located not only within particular productions but at the very foundation of the art form itself. A closer, more specific analysis of theatrical ideography—the vocabulary of the theatre—reveals this ideological foundation more precisely.

In Book III of his *Laws*, Plato presents us with an unnamed Athenian who uses the history of music to “trace the growth of the excess of freedom from the beginning” (676), or to illustrate “how liberty can degenerate into license and bring about the collapse of a state of law” (Weber 32). Ancient music, according to the Athenian, was composed according to very strict laws which later poets corrupted by “mingling lamentations with hymns, and paeans with dithyrambs; imitating the sounds of the flute on the lyre, and making one general confusion; ignorantly affirming that music has no



truth” (Plato 676). If, the Athenian argues, the masses are given too much freedom, civilization itself will come crashing down because there will be no hierarchy to control and counsel the masses who will “come to the same point as the Titans when they rebelled against God, leading a life of endless evils” (Plato 676).

The Athenian defines this sort of a licentious society as a “theatrocracy,” or a “sovereignty of the audience” (Weber 33), in which “men, fancying that they knew what they did not know,” think that they are able to “judge for themselves” and practice “insolent refusal to regard the opinion” of their betters (Plato 676).

The Athenian’s critique of “theatrocracy” is clearly based on a dislike of democracy, which is “obviously not the political form of choice for the Athenian” (Weber 33), the latter merely being, in some sense, a prelude to the latter because “A democracy [. . .] would at least have respected” certain limitations, such as confining its liberties only to “free men” (Weber 33). Theatrocracy, on the other hand, gives the “once silent audiences”—that is, the masses of whom democracy is at least aware—a “voice” (Weber 33). In theatrocracy, *anyone* can participate, no matter the level of expertise; it is unlimited democracy.

The fear of this “audience,” or the heretofore unheard masses of the “uneducated public,” continues to be *the* central critique of democracy, and it is a chief critique of theatre and spectacle, as well. The uneducated masses are too easily divorced from their rational faculties, and are, therefore, easily manipulated by a skilled, and immoral, orator. At the core of this critique of the masses is the realization of what McGee termed the “brute, undeniable phenomenon” that “Human beings in collectivity behave and think differently than human beings in isolation” (452). However, while we know that this

phenomenon is a fact, a solid understanding of the reason for this behavior remains elusive, and so group behavior is easily feared. How and why do humans think in groups? Can such a “public mind” be easily swayed? The assumption upon which Plato’s Athenian bases his fears of a public practicing unrestrained liberty is the same assumption upon which Marx founded his critique ideology in general: the idea that when the uneducated masses act as a collective, this “public mind” has been “tricked” into behaving collectively instead of thinking as individuals (McGee 452). Indeed, as Samuel Weber explains, Plato’s chief complaint against the theatrocracy is that “the noise of the audience overwhelms the voices of reason and competence” (36). The assumption seems to be that in order to get people to think as a unit requires that individuals stop being individuals, stop thinking for themselves, giving themselves over to some other mind of which they become merely extensions, mindless pawns of some ingenious, diabolical Other.

It is easy to draw a connection between an ignorant mass of mindless individuals acting as a unit and the theatrical audience enthralled by the spectacular because the primary characteristics of both appear to be an emotional response to a situation and a loss of individuality; both of these situations seem to depend upon the audience’s (or the masses’) *passivity*. In fact, one could argue that this is the defining characteristic of the masses for most critics of this phenomenon: the uncritical *passivity* in the midst an event.

Woodruff, however, takes issue with the idea that an “uneducated mass” is an easily manipulated one because “Any government,” he insists, “is government by ignorance” if for no other reason than that “no one knows what the future will bring.” While a degree of knowledge may be important, and the counsel of experts in any field

invaluable, no one is an expert on everything, least of all what is best for everyone, so what is needed to make wise decisions is what the Greeks referred to as *phronesis*: “good judgment” (153). Woodruff suggests that, far from being less rational in groups, humans actually are more likely to make wise decisions as a group—a phenomenon he names “citizen wisdom”—because “expert knowledge can lead to hubris, the outrageous behavior that comes from pride in success” (155). What Plato’s Athenian criticizes as the desecration and collapse of musical law—a similitude of the “natural” societal “laws”—involves the humiliation of the aesthetic experts—a similitude of the “elites” who rule society. Viewed from a different perspective, of course, this scenario is simply revolution, the overturning of the hierarchical and hegemonic structures which had (one might say “hubristically”) dominated and defined the rules of both music and culture until, through experimentation, others discovered the possibility of something different. What is revealed from this perspective is that the rules which have governed both and culture are not “rules” after all, only guidelines, and that by altering those guidelines, a new music, a new culture, could be discovered.

The ability to accomplish such a task represents an empowerment of the masses, and is empowerment of the masses—of the audience—is the essence of teatrocracy. Ironically, however, what this analysis of the Athenian’s critique of teatrocracy reveals is the critique’s central flaw: the accusation of the audience’s passivity. While there is an implicit covenant between audience and performers in any theatrical event, that implicit agreement has nothing to do with passivity; quite the contrary: the implicit covenant between “audience” and “performers” is analogous to the agreement between “speaker” and “hearer,” or between any two individuals entering into a conversation—the

difference being one of degrees and not of kind. Audiences, spectators, come to a theatrical event to “hear” and to “see,” to participate in the event not passively, but *impassively* rather than expressively (Weber 15). Without the audience, there can be no theatrical event; in the same respect, there is no government without the governed.

In a conversation, one does not expect a passive “audience” which will simply respond “yes, dear” to everything that is said without really paying attention (anyone who has tried to pull this on a significant other knows how irritating it can be for the “performer” when the audience is not actively engaged in listening and processing the information presented!). The theatrical ideology, far from being a complete breakdown in rules, has very specific rules which define the roles of the parties participating in the theatrical “conversation:” if we are entering as “listeners,” as “audience/spectators,” we are expected to remain politely<sup>17</sup> *impassive* for the duration of the speaker’s, or performer’s—the expressive party in the exchange—recitation of the argument; we are to consider the argument presented, and to continue the conversation as “publics” after the event is over. Just because we act as a collective in this behavior, though, does not mean that the “audience” has lost its rational faculties, and “it is demeaning to the intelligence of people” (Woodruff 160) to suggest, as Gorgias does in *The Encomium of Helen*, that clever speaking is such “a powerful lord” that it can make individuals act “against [their] will” (45). Moreover, the criticism which suggests that the theatrical has a dangerous tendency to evoke an emotional, rather than a rational response, underestimates the rationality of emotional responses, which “are neither obstacles to an uncorrupted reasoning nor instances of irrationality that need to be brought under the control of

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<sup>17</sup> Notice that the term “polite” and “political” come from the same Greek root: *polis*, the term for the ancient Greek city-state (Woodruff 139)

reason” but “form part of a complex liminal mode of human response that plays a crucial role in how we understand and in the world” (Kastely 224). Indeed, it is often through emotionally charged discussion and reasoning that human beings, as collectives, interact—either as individuals who, through discussion approach consensus, or through an appeal to ideographs, which “symbolize the line of argument the meanest sort of individual *would* pursue, if that individual had the dialectical skills of the philosophers, as a defense of a personal stake in and commitment to the society” (McGee 456)—and it this form of *holistic* form of reasoning that, I would argue, is evoked by theatre at its best

Theatre, then, provides us with an ideological orientation suggesting how humans might best behave in collectivity—as participants in a critical examination of the experience in the world as a spectacle. The vocabulary of theatre, applied to experience in the world, tends to organize that experience ideographically by defining events according to the participatory ideology which theatre presents, identifying the parts each will play, and delineating the expectations of the participating parties.

Far from expressing contempt for rules, theatrical ideology seems to respect everyone’s right to participate by defining these roles and insisting that the theatrical event be defined by the common consent of the parties involved. One might say that it is an invitational ideology that invites all to participate, but which will not force them to do so.

This, I believe, affirms what I alluded to earlier: the ideology of theatre is, in essence, democratic.

We can see clearly, now, what the ideology of theatre entails; “theatrical ideology” necessarily defines the relationships between groups based on the expectations

for how each group will participate in a particular event, making participation the central element of theatrical ideology. Participation defines each of the primary groups in the event, and this definition is analogous to the conversational paradigm of any vernacular or rhetorical exchange: there are “performers” who participate “*expressively*”—these take the stage and present the argument, and there are spectators—the audience—who agree to participate “*impassively*” (as opposed to “*passively*”), engaging the argument expressed by the “performers.” These events are governed by rules that are malleable, and which are based on common consent, or common assent, that all parties must agree that a spectacle is to be “theatrical” for it so to be. Finally, the ideology of the theatre is primarily a cultural phenomenon, and as such, it is both defined and delineated by the vocabulary used to discuss it—it literally becomes a way to see the world, and the application of the theatrical vocabulary to define a situation acts ideographically to orient that event according to the perspective of theatrical ideology.

Mine is not the first investigation into the rhetoric of theatre, but I am unaware of any studies that have undertaken to explore, from a rhetorical perspective, the use of theatrical language in common use as a means to determine an underlying theoretical foundation to theatre as a medium. To further substantiate this investigation, however, will require an analysis of theatrical ideography within a theatrical context. Such an analysis will of necessity be inclusive, examining not only theatrical “language,” but other elements of the theatrical “vocabulary” broadly defined, including visual elements of theatre used for rhetorical effect, since the efficacy of such imagery would also be dependent upon theatrical ideology and would reveal another layer of theatrical ideography through the medium of representative form.

I believe the discovery of a clear theatrical ideology which underlies the very medium of theatre and which is revealed by an analysis of theatrical rhetoric has potentially far reaching effects not only as a focus in rhetorical studies, but for any scholar engaging in research in theatricality as a mode of thought, in audience studies, in the study of cinema, new media, and popular culture, as well as the study of historiography and theatrical movements and strategies (from those as complex as Antonin Artaud's "theatre of cruelty" to the seemingly simplistic "surprise ending" or even "cliffhanger" of popular entertainment). Perhaps most interesting is the potential connection between democratic theory and theatre: which gave rise to which? The only authority we have on either is mythology, but it is clear that there is a connection, perhaps generational, between the two.

If the theatrical vocabulary, as I have claimed, does act ideographically to define situations, then further investigation of this persistently utilized sub-genre of Western thought is warranted, particularly as this ideography exerts influence over our cognitive, emotional, and aesthetic experiences, and especially in the context of a world that is increasingly mediated by theatrical media such as television, cinema, and the Internet, and which is, therefore, an increasingly theatricalized space. I believe that this can be best accomplished through an analysis of theatrical language and imagery in use.

### Conclusion

I have suggested that the application of theatrical terminology to define a situation—applying these *ideas* as an interpretation of the world—suggests that those employing the terminology are operating under a theatrical worldview—or, rather, that a theatrical worldview underpins the use of such terminology in common vernacular. We

see that the employment of these terms not only suggests that the self, others, and events *can* be defined theatrically, but that theatrical ideology imposes a perspective by which to define them, or how we should consider, or “see,” the things so defined.<sup>18</sup>

Though I have only dealt directly with the term “audience” above, I believe that if one were to apply this analysis to any theatrical term used to define a situation in the “real” world, the logic behind my assertions would hold, particularly since, by defining spectators as “audiences,” we see that one is simultaneously defining the other participants in an event as “actors” in a theatrical sense, and the place of the event as a “stage” or theatre. Consider, for a moment, the application of the term “theatre” to the war zone—“The Theatre of War”—and the ideological implications derived from that definition. The term suggests not only the spectacle of war, and those operating within that spectacle as “actors,” but it also suggests that, somewhere, there is an “audience” meant to observe this “spectacle.” Who is that audience? Are “the eyes of the world” watching? Is the world the audience? Is there a particular nation meant to watch? And if what is the message that the “show of force” is sending to that particular audience? What argument is being conveyed? And, more importantly, will that argument be convincing?

Notice that even the application of theatrical ideographs to war necessarily defines the situation from an ideological perspective that is comparable to the way the term “audience” defined the amorous situation discussed earlier. The scene of the spectacle becomes a stage, where actors “perform” for a particular “audience” in order to

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<sup>18</sup> “The term *theatre* has the same etymology as the term *theory*, from the Greek word *thea*, designating a place from which to observe or to see” (Weber 3). Clearly, an ideology is a “theory,” offering not only a suggestion concerning how to see the world, but determining how the world *should* be understood correctly; theory—ideology—therefore, could be considered the *theatron* from which observers in the world operate.



accomplish a certain rhetorical task. There is also the supposition of common participation—if there is something to be watched, there is someone watching—and there is even the insinuation of common consent—if we are at war we have both consented (either consciously or unconsciously) to the situation, and if you do *not* want to participate in this war (either as performer or as spectator), then you must do something to change this event from the theatrical spectacle that it has been defined as into something else. Of course, as in any theatrical event, the audience (or even the other actors) may not react the way that the script suggests (which could feasibly explain why the wars of the last century have gotten so out of hand). Indeed, the rhetorical use of theatrical terms in a given communicative situation defines that situation for the participants by appealing to the ideology underlying the terms employed, and determines the reactions of the participants to the situation so defined.

Clearly, a specific ideological perspective is imposed upon events and people we choose to label in theatrical terms, a perspective which defines the event or person according to theatrical ideology. This is because the medium of theatre itself—as all media—carries with it certain ideological assertions that become central components of any argument made through the use of that medium. As Marshall McLuhan argued in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*: “the medium is the message.” Despite the fact that “many would be disposed to say” that a medium of communication is not itself a message but only a means of transmission, McLuhan argues that the “ ‘content’ of any medium is always another medium” from the medium used to transmit that content (7-8). This relationship of content to medium is the same relationship McGee argued exists between ideology and ideography and that I have argued exists between theatre,

theatricality as an ideology, and theatrical ideographs employed in common vernacular. The interplay between language, ideology, media, and the elements of media work together to form a kind of ever-receding *mise en abyme*, the investigation of which leads us to ever deeper levels of ideological scaffolding upon which we organize our experience of reality and through which we define the entire communicative experience.

In the highly multi-mediated reality of contemporary civilization, this interplay is bound to have profound effects on our experience of reality, and of the media through which that reality is so often conveyed.

In the next chapter, I will begin an investigation of how this interplay between media and ideology plays out through a critical analysis of theatrical ideography's influence on the reception of mediated content in a cinematic context.

## THE STAGE IS THE THING: STAGE IMAGE AS REPRESENTATIVE FORM

## Introduction

As I have discussed, central to a conception of the world as a stage is the vocabulary of theatre used as a rhetoric in common discourse, and the use of theatrical terminology—that is, the collection of ideas and concepts (whether visual or linguistic) which are used to make or discuss the theatre—to define one’s experience of the world. Where these ideographs appear, they define experience by an appeal to an underlying ideological orientation that is “theatrical” in nature, structuring the communication of ideas upon the scaffold of “theatre” as a concept. They are, in essence, representative forms of the theatrical mode of thinking and being.

I now intend to add another perspective to the discussion of theatrical ideology by examining an example of theatrical ideology at work in a specifically theatrical context. Here, I will examine the relationship between the live and mediated theatrical event as an example of theatrical ideography at work beyond the merely linguistic. This discussion engages the study of visual rhetoric.

In revealing that theatrical language used in common vernacular, forms a vocabulary of ideographs, I believe that I have located the rhetorical mechanism that defines the relationship between a theatrical event and the audience of that event. I will focus my discussion on the image of the theatrical stage in a cinematic context, a context in which the image of the stage becomes a visual “term” that I believe corresponds to a “visual ideograph” or “representative form” as defined by Janis L. Edwards and Carol K. Winkler.

I intend to argue that the stage image is a visual “term” in the ideographic vocabulary of theatrical ideology. As a visual “term,” the stage image, when it appears in a cinematic frame, defines the cinematic experience for the audience, *not* through the audience’s experience of the stage as a phenomenon, but through the audience’s experience of “theatre” as a defining ideology—a mode of experience. This visual ideograph builds upon the ideological principles underpinning the use of theatrical terms in common vernacular, presenting a visual argument that helps to define the cinematic experience for the audience.

I will examine and support this assertion with a close, comparative analysis of two cinematic translations of *Hamlet*: the 1964 filmed record of John Gielgud’s hugely popular Broadway production, which subsequently released cinematically as *Richard Burton’s Hamlet* to lackluster reviews and poor box office, and Kenneth Branagh’s comparatively successful 1996 adaptation. I will specifically be looking at the presentation of the play-within-a-play, in which the image of the stage *as a stage* is most pronounced, but I will also discuss the “staginess” of the presentation in other areas because, in each of these productions, the visual presence or the visual impression of the stage is very pronounced, and the theatrical stage is used as the fundamental visual reference upon which the productions’ visual arguments are made, whether those arguments are intentional or not. In fact, arguments in film generally, I suggest, are conveyed by the rules regulating the use of theatrical language in common vernacular to define a situation. In each case, the stage image, whether diegetically embedded<sup>19</sup> or extra-diegetically present, serves “not to provide a theme, in the manner of a motif, but [.

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<sup>19</sup> I have borrowed my use of the term “embedded” from Viveca Furedy.

. .] as a reference point for other themes” (Edwards and Winkler 487-88) which build on this theatrical ideology to define the experience of the event for the audience. I will propose that the impression each production conveys is directly connected to the presence of stage as a visual referent, which builds ideographically upon what I will call “theatrical ideology” or the ideological perspective conveyed by the use of theatrical language in common vernacular to define a situation.

#### Staging “Richard Burton” on Film

Ideographs are “the basic structural elements, the building blocks, of ideology” (McGee 455), a condensed form of ideology that is “paramorphic” in nature (Edwards and Winkler 458); in other words, ideographs are both what they are denotatively, and are able to change contexts and meanings over time because their significance is “not in their alleged idea content” but “in their concrete history as usages” (458). While Michael Calvin McGee, in his development of the ideograph as a rhetorical concept, limited his definition of the ideograph to words only (455), Edwards and Winkler demonstrate how visuals, such as the photograph of American soldiers raising the flag on the island of Iwo Jima during World War II, can take on ideographic resonance as visual “terms.”<sup>20</sup> The ideography of a visual becomes apparent in its appropriation, as it’s “meaning develops through its usages and applications, operating as an abstraction and a fragment within the larger rhetorical environment” (Edwards and Winkler 495). As McGee stated, “by

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<sup>20</sup> Edwards and Winkler use the appropriation of the Iwo Jima flag-raising image by editorial cartoonists as an example of the way that images can carry ideographic resonance. Editorial cartoonists use the Iwo Jima image’s understood rhetorical meaning to ironically critique government actions that contradict the accepted ideals the image is usually designed to convey.

comparisons over time, we establish an analog for the proposed present usage of the term” (McGee 458).

As I have argued earlier, theatrical language is ideographic. Its use in common vernacular presents a way of defining the world based on the ideology of the theatre. The employment of theatrical language to describe an event *defines* the event and the roles of the participants in that event theatrically, and determines how those participants will react to the situation so defined. The course of action that participants take by defining an event theatrically will be determined by this particular orientation of the event and their willingness or unwillingness to participate in a theatrical spectacle.

The filmed record of the 1964 Broadway production *Richard Burton's Hamlet*, directed by John Gielgud, is an interesting instance of the effects of theatrical ideography at work because what we actually have in this production is two productions: the first is the live event presented for the live audience in 1964, and the recorded event intended to be presented to a cinematic audience. Each of these events is dominated visually by the persistent image of the theatrical stage presented unapologetically as a theatrical stage. Spectators—whether the actual audience in attendance at the Broadway production or the cinematic audience watching the filmed record of the event—are never asked to believe that they are peering through some imaginary “fourth wall” upon some real event. The action transpires on a bare set of undecorated platforms erected on a stage designed to appear as nothing more than a stage; there is no attempt to suggest the castle at Elsinore, or Denmark, or any other place; the actors are not dressed in period clothing, but perform in “street-clothes.” This bareness conveys to the audience a sense that they have been invited to a rehearsal rather than a final production.

Contrary to what one might expect, however, in a live production, this lack of “staginess” and disconnection from what might be termed traditional Shakespearian theatre paradoxically facilitates the spectacle’s believability—for the theatrical audience, at least—because “reality” for the live theatrical audience is never really in question, not only because the theatrical audience are not so obtuse as to think that what they see represented on the stage is “real,” but, more importantly, because those who are in attendance at the recorded version of this Broadway production of William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* are not there to see a “realistic” rendering of the kingdom of Denmark, but are there to see, as the production’s title suggests, *Richard Burton’s Hamlet*; they have come to see Richard Burton—who at the time was the biggest box-office draw in cinema—in a production of *Hamlet*; they have come to experience “Richard Burton,” the “Star,” as a physical, living being, to be a part of “stargazing at its most intense” (Redfield 236)<sup>21</sup>. The unpretentious stage, the street clothes, the limited props—that is to say, the visual image of the stage *as a stage* and not as a space which pretends to portray the impression of some fictional world—all allow a foregrounding of the celebrated actor and lend to the physical impression of experiencing “Richard Burton,” who is there, physically, performing before the audience. He may be speaking words that are known to be Hamlet’s, but, as staged, Burton presents himself as more Burton than Hamlet: he is dressed as “Burton,” he speaks as “Burton,” and he interacts with other actors who also

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<sup>21</sup> Redfield writes that everyone involved in the production—including “the Burtons”—was “astonished” by the “forbearance” of the crowds who nightly attended the production. “I never saw one of them desert the vigil until Burton’s departure” Redfield writes; “It was as though they were democratically agreed to keep the watch [. . .] Put to other uses, such mass determination could rule the world” (236). The ideological undertones of Redfield’s observation, though employed for “dramatic” effect, are encouraging for my assertion.

“dress” and “move” and “act” as “real people” and not as Shakespearean actors in a fictionally constructed diegesis that the attendant audience is asked to “believe.”

Of course, it almost goes without saying that, in a live theatrical event, or any staged spectacle, the stage design, the imagery, makes an argument and is designed to convey a particular sense, and Gielgud’s production is no exception. This particular presentation of the stage constitutes the production’s visual argument, and conveying the impression of experiencing “Richard Burton” depends entirely upon the socio-culturally constructed response of the audience when they confronted with the visuality of the stage as an image. Experiencing “Richard Burton” instead of “Hamlet” requires that the audience not be asked to imagine “Elsinore” on the stage, as they might be asked to do in a traditional “Shakespearean” production. The non-staginess of the stage, then, is actually emphasized by emphasizing the stage itself, both through lack of decoration and the refusal to play *Hamlet* as a period piece.

The argument of the bare stage, this sense of what the audience is intended to experience, is only further emphasized by the staging of the play-within-a-play. The actors performing *The Murder of Gonzago* are elegantly, what might be called “conventionally,” costumed, as well as masked, and they perform “their” production situated stage-left—the lowest part of the actual stage—segregated from the rest of the performers by a substantial space. Moreover, the play-within-a-play is staged with the “actors” directly facing their audience-within-the-play and *not* facing the actual audience, a staging which serves to de-emphasize the players’ importance while simultaneously re-emphasizing the importance of the “real” cast. Moreover, the costuming of the “players” visually emphasizes their strangeness within the “diegesis” of the staged event and the



“realness” of the “Richard Burton” experience for the attendant audience. Above all, Richard Burton as “Star” is once again emphasized: he paces back and forth upon the stage between the players and the court, dominating the stage and the action.

I cannot be certain that the above visual argument was Gielgud’s intended argument for the production. It may or may not have been.<sup>22</sup> What I am arguing, however, is that this is the impression that the rhetoric of the bare stage conveys, and I argue that it does this through an appeal (conscious or not) to a rhetorical mechanism that is fundamentally ideographic, and which is inherent in the use of theatrical terminology as vernacular.

As the visual presentation of the stage in *Richard Burton’s Hamlet* demonstrates, the rhetorical use of the stage as an image is “defined [. . .] by the abstracted qualities of the image as symbol” (Edwards and Winkler 488), and the visual argument of the production depends upon presenting the stage in a way that builds upon the audience’s expectations of the stage as a visual referent. It is likely that few, if any, of the attendant audience would have considered *Richard Burton’s Hamlet* an “unsuccessful” production of the play due to its failure to be classically staged as a Shakespearean production because the visual argument of the production, from its inception, was not to produce an authentic Shakespearean experience. Rather, the lack of “staginess” was the basis of another, equally persuasive visual argument, based itself upon the ability of the stage to

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<sup>22</sup> According to Redfield, this production was mounted as a “ ‘rehearsal’ production” of *Hamlet* because “so often a final run-through,” according to director John Gielgud, “had a drive and simplicity and. . .oh, an ease somehow. . .which the actor never got back” once the sets and costumes appear (26-27). A “contemporary” setting was likewise avoided because “It makes the audience uneasy when they have come to see Shakespeare” (27). The “rehearsal” production was designed merely to be “a neat trick” (27).

function “ideographically” as a “visual topos,” as a representative form (Edwards and Winkler 488), and one that I think is, to a large degree, responsible for the success of the live production, but is also responsible for the lackluster reception of the cinematic production in movie theatres (Redfield 240). For the audience in attendance at the time of the production, the presence of a widely respected “star” pacing about as a visual representation of himself upon a stage that had no intention of impressing the audience with the reality of “Denmark” or of “Hamlet,” but only of himself upon the Broadway stage itself, served to persuade the audience to believe in the reality of the event of experiencing Richard Burton, a tactic that works in a live event; however, due the nature of theatrical ideology, this exact same mechanism works against the production once it is transferred to the cinematic experience.

Of course, the above argument about the experience of the live event can really come from educated guesses based on my own experiences of staged theatrical events. I had not yet been born when *Richard Burtons Hamlet* became the longest running production of that play in Broadway history (Redfield 235). Now this production can only be experienced through the forced remove of the cinematic record of the event, and the appearance of the stage image in a cinematic event makes a completely different argument than a stage experienced as a stage during a theatrical event, because the stage presented in the cinematic frame is no longer *the* stage—the medium by which the event is transmitted, the “screen” though which the spectacle is presented.<sup>23</sup> Rather, the stage of

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<sup>23</sup> The transformation of Western European theatre, characterized by Robert Surtz as a move from medieval “dramatic ritual” to Renaissance “illusionistic theatre” (Egginton 61) is reflected in the transformation of the actual stage into “the picture-frame stage” that seemed to be an oil-painting come to life (Wickham 103), creating a space with an

the cinematic event is *wherever* (not whatever) happens to be framed by the proscenium of the cinematic frame, a frame which becomes, through the technology of film, a moving proscenium-like frame that can, ideographically, make anyplace in the world a potential “stage” for theatrical exploitation.<sup>24</sup>

The stage presented as an image within the cinematic frame, then, merely becomes another element—a prop, a part of the set—viewed *on* that cinematic “stage,” but it is no longer the medium for transmitting the event. Rather, it has become a “term” in the vocabulary of the visual message, and, as such, serves to convey the cinematic argument. In *Richard Burton’s Hamlet*, the prominence of the unapologetically bare stage image becomes a powerful ideographic visual dominating the visual argument by setting the tone of that argument through the message it conveys to the audience. Unlike the argument made by the bare stage for the “live” audience that they are actually experiencing Richard Burton, the stage image which dominates the cinematic image, because it is not the medium of communication but an element within it, serves only to remind the cinematic audience that they are *not* experiencing Richard Burton; however, neither are they truly experiencing Shakespeare. They are experiencing someone else’s experience of Richard Burton performing Shakespeare, and this argument is an ultimately alienating one to make.

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“abstract, interchangeable nature” (Egginton 88) that is the prototype for the theatrical cinematic proscenium.

<sup>24</sup> This simultaneously suggests that Christian Metz’s claim that film’s ability to convey an “impression of reality” (4) is accomplished not merely through its “movement” (7) but through the ideography of visual theatrical language, while at the same time explaining why cinema seems so easily adapted to the idea of narrative, though “There was nothing unavoidable, or particularly natural, in this” (44)

The reason that argument made by the image of the bare stage presented as an image within the cinematic proscenium shifts is in part because the o of the event shifts, but the cinematic audience is aware of this diegetic shift through the theatrical ideography upon which the stage image's argument operates. Because the "stage" of action within the cinematic frame is wherever the camera is framing, much like the experience of the unadorned stage for the theatrical audience, the diegesis of the cinematic production of *Richard Burton's Hamlet* can never simply be the fictional world of Shakespeare's Denmark, where a play happens to take place, but must be, for the cinematic audience, Broadway, in New York City, where a stage production of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* had been staged and was recorded. This is great if you are part of that theatrical event, but as a spectator in the cinematic event, we are constantly aware that we are not among the select few allowed to experience Richard Burton live. Rather, we are separated from the event, viewing a "stage production" of *Hamlet* which has been filmed for us to observe. In this production, the diegetic stage is the stage framed by the cinematic proscenium, making the stage upon which the actors perform *Hamlet* a "stage"-within-a-"stage," while the "play-within-a-play" has become, quite literally, a "play"-within-a-"play"-within-a-play.

There are many clues within this "play" of the recording of a Broadway production of *Hamlet* to support the ideographic argument of the Broadway stage's convincing argument: within the diegesis of *that* production—a completely alternate diegesis to that experienced by the theatrical audience—we hear the recorded response of an actual audience in attendance, not an audience of actors portraying an attendant audience, but the audience for whom the performance was originally intended. Despite

Geilgud's uses of "cinematic language" such as framing, close-ups, and panning—visual cues which, while they mimic the impression of a spectator's focus at a staged event, are themselves impossible for the naked eye—the acting, the blocking, the staging, the absence of non-diegetic soundtrack, as well as the ever-present "non-diegetic" ambient noises of the attendant audience all serve to remind the film viewers that they are outsiders, that they are not a part of this world, unlike those present in the physical audience. We were not allowed to witness this performance "live;" this production was not conceived for us: we are merely voyeurs of someone else's privileged moment, a moment long-since finished. The ever-present stage visual that becomes the foundation of that production's visual argument, reminding the theatrical audience that they are watching, not the story of *Hamlet*, but Richard Burton in *Hamlet*, becomes a liability to the cinematic audience because it serves as a constant reminder that, unlike the physically present theatrical audience, this production is not for us. Nor can the play-within-a-play serve, for the cinematic audience, as a device to paradoxically extend the illusion of a diegesis that suggests we are experiencing something special, as it does for the theatrical audience, but only to emphasize the very thing from which it distracts the live audience: the "staginess" of the stage.

The different response of the cinematic audience and the theatrical audience cannot be attributed solely to the difference of medium, for the "languages" of these different media—the "language" of a live production and the "language" of cinema—since language is not, in and of itself, ideological, but is rather a medium for ideologies. Words and phrases and images and behaviors become infused with ideology as they are used in certain contexts, and the languages in which those words and phrases, images and

behaviors originated *as ways of thinking* come to serve as tools for the exposition, transmission, and eventually (as in the case of our current exercise) the analysis of the ideologies that define the cultures in which the arguments originate. As McGee argued, language generates “a series of ‘usages’ which unite us [. . .] but, more significantly” separates us from those who do not “accept our meanings, our intentions” (456). This uniting and separating is based in interpretation of the ideographs used and the ideological orientation those ideographs communicate.

It is not necessarily so that an audience *must* respond in a certain way to any cinematic rhetoric, including audience response that I have just argued for concerning the post-cinematic response to the filmed record of *Richard Burton’s Hamlet*; there is no inherently “true” visual presentation of a stage, either within the cinematic frame or outside it, because the visual presentation of the stage is, itself, a rhetorical construct. However, filmmakers are bound by how the audience will respond to those ideographs used due to the way in which those visual cues have come to be understood in the development of the cinematic and theatrical “languages,” and the theatrical ideology is quite clear when it defines a theatrical event: there must be a stage where the event or spectacle is presented, and those who participate in the event must be either “performers” or “audience.” If I am playing the part of the spectator or the audience in/to a particular event, and there is an “audience” visually present upon the “stage” where the event is taking place, then that audience must be part of the diegesis of the event in which I am participating in order for the experience to seem in any way “real.”

This ideology of the theatre does not merely define the rules of the theatre (or even metatheatre), but, rather, the rules of the theatre suggest a foundational ideological

orientation that defines the ideal interaction between groups; central to that ideology of the theatre is the concept of participation. Theatrical ideology defines groups and their roles in any given interaction. This underlying ideology of the theatre, which persists as an ideological paradigm—according to William Eggington *the* definitive ideological paradigm of modernity (2)—orients the participants in a theatrical event to understand their participatory role in that event, and their relation to the other participants in the event—for lack of a better phrase, their place in the world.

If the persistent image of a stage upon which a story takes place was a fundamental part of the cinematic experience, the cinematic audience would not be at all bothered by its presence in the Burton *Hamlet*, but because we have been trained to consider the stage differently when experiencing it within the diegesis of a filmed narrative, it conveys a different impression, and, therefore, makes a different argument, than it would were we to experience it as a physical space. This has nothing to do with any inherent qualities in the medium of transmission, but, rather, is due to what might be termed the “ideography” of the stage image itself.<sup>25</sup>

While it is nothing new to suggest the important fundamental difference between experiencing a live event and a mediated one (Metz, 9-15), what I am suggesting is that the audience’s *experience* of this difference is not only spatial but rhetorical, and that the experience of the one is dependent upon the experience of the other. What changes in these different mediated experiences of the stage is a change in the audience experience of the stage as a physical presence or as merely an image, and this experiential change

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<sup>25</sup> I would suggest that this is why the sitcom developed the production standard that it did—“filmed before a live, studio audience”—yet consistently refrained from showing the stage image as a stage; the production built on the ideography of stage imagery in an attempt to replicate an authentic theatrical experience.

alters the audience's interpretation of the argument presented by those images, and this interpretive alteration is based upon the theatrical ideography which defines the reception of the stage image. We expect, because we have been trained to expect, the impression of a "believable" diegesis—or, at least, a diegesis in which we have been trained to suspend our disbelief—within the constructed frame of the theatrical proscenium, a diegesis in which all the elements we see on the "stage" work together to convince us of the existence of an "other" dimension of verisimilar reality.<sup>26</sup> Based upon this same ideological orientation, which defines our roles and how we are to participate in the theatrical event, we expect a believable diegesis within the frame of the cinematic image, as well, and the message presented on that "stage," based on the ideography of those elements on the stage, define what constitutes the argument on the stage, which defines our role as observers, and how we are to relate to the spectacle we are participating in.

Christian Metz argues that film's potency as an art lies in this "*impression of reality* that is experienced by the spectator" when watching a film. "Films give us the feeling that we are witnessing an almost real spectacle [. . .]. They speak to us with the accents of true evidence, using the argument that 'It is so' " (4). He claims that this experience is impossible for a theatrical production because, in theatre, "the spectator is summoned to take a position in relation to these very real actors" whose "bodily presence contradicts the temptation [. . .] to perceive him as a protagonist in a fictional universe"

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<sup>26</sup> The experience of verisimilitude in theatre is, of course, not a necessary, or even a fundamental, component of the theatrical experience, as post-cinematic and pre-modern theatre both attest; however, beginning with Robertello's 1548 commentaries on Aristotle's *Poetics*, verisimilitude slowly became a definitive feature of Western theatre (Eggington 89-91). Film, then, can be considered the climax of the verisimilar tradition since the spatial separation of the cinematic experience finally makes the theatrical experience wholly other, and the theatrical experience becomes—at least impressionistically—"real."



that is in any way believable as an entirely separate diegesis to our own physical reality because the action on the stage is taking place within our physical reality: “it is itself a part of life, and too visibly so” (9-10). I would agree with this in principle, but I would also argue that the cinema only makes a physical “reality” what had already developed as an important part of the pre-cinematic theatrical experience in the West: the imaginary “fourth wall,” the impression that the spectator is experiencing something wholly other, an impression which is, itself, a rhetorical convention of the Western stage. Because the spectator of the cinematic event expects a wholly self-contained and believable diegesis, the presence of the stage image in *Richard Burton’s Hamlet* makes this believability impossible. At the same time, the physical disconnect makes it impossible for the cinematic audience to feel the same sense of Richard Burton’s physical presence that facilitated experiencing Burton live.

I would argue that this is why the production was so successful on Broadway—it was a huge financial success and received the longest run of that play in Broadway history, seeing a Tony award nomination for Burton and a Tony award win for Hume Cronyn as Polonius—while it performed poorly in its cinematic release and received less-than-favorable reviews.<sup>27</sup> The performances didn’t change, the production didn’t change, but the medium did and, therefore, so did the rhetorical situation. With this rhetorical shift, the ideographic significance of the stage’s presence *as an image* to the audience was altered. Audience response to this experiential difference is the result of the long history of transformation in the socio-culturally accepted understanding of the stage, an

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<sup>27</sup> William Redfield, who played Guildenstern in the Burton production, wrote his memoir, *Letters from an Actor*, about the Burton production, commenting on both the theatrical and cinematic versions.

understanding that is not conceptual, but visual. The stage as an image draws, first and foremost, upon the culturally understood denotation of what a stage is as a physical thing, which is, itself, a cultural construct, conventionally understood though it is not necessarily generally experienced. The connotations of the stage are based upon the presentation of the stage as a visual reference, and the impressions which that visual reference conveys are dependent upon the representative form appearance. Changing the visual presentation of a stage makes an argument because the stage as a visual thing is an ideograph.

Examining Gielgud's translation of *Hamlet* from the liveness, the immediacy, of a straight theatrical performance to the displacement, the physical distance, of a filmed diegesis, helps to reveal the ideological orientation of the theatre as a form, which orientation appears to be an agreement to participation, and the ideography of the stage image as a representative form, from this perspective, represents nothing less than the audience's expectation of participation, an expectation frustrated by the nature of the cinematic medium.

But what happens when we consider a production originally intended not for a theatrical audience, but filmed as a cinematic "theatrical" event, one in which the stage, as an image, only appears diegetically as a stage for the play-within-a-play, and is not a visual referent for the production as a whole? When the "where" of the filmed event becomes the stage by framing it in the portable proscenium of the cinematic frame?

#### Staging *Hamlet* on Film

Kenneth Branagh's 1996 production of *Hamlet* is a very stagy cinematic translation of the famous play (although when compared to earlier versions, such as the

1948 Laurence Olivier translation, this may seem to be a counter-intuitive reading of Branagh's text). However, despite the cinematic strategies employed in the film aimed to argue for a believable or verisimilar cinematic diegesis—including on-location filming, "period" costuming which is vaguely recognizable as pertaining to a specific place and time (Victorian? Edwardian?), and the conscious avoidance of a recognizably "Shakespearian" feel (no men in tights, for example)—Branagh's direction consistently conveys the distinct impression of a theatrical stage: his camera frames images spaciouly, using the wide, rectangular frame of the 70 mm "widescreen" image and employing long, natural (or unedited) shots which rely heavily on the actor's ability to do a scene in one take rather than splicing together a perfect performance in the editing room. Often, his actors deliver their lines cheating-out and arranged in tableau-like images, the actors appearing spatially and in reference to the audience as they might were they on an actual stage playing for a physically present theatrical audience. These "stagings" convey a clear sense of theatrical space and time, presenting the cinematic audience with a film that, impressionistically, could be considered a montage of very theatrical moments, lending to an overall impression that the audience is participating in a staged, theatrical event—or, perhaps more appropriately, a theatrical event that takes place on numerous "stages."

Prior to the play-within-a-play, for example, while Branagh's Hamlet ironically instructs a player in the art of acting, the camera frames Hamlet and a player as they walk together along a balcony. The camera follows the characters backstage—behind the curtains—where they are joined by the other players. The moving camera captures this entire progression in a single, naturalistic shot which climaxes in a perfectly "staged"

tableau, framing the action as it might look on an actual stage: Hamlet stands center stage, instructing the players, who sit around him. Staring at him attentively, their bodies “cheating” outward for the benefit of the viewing audience.

This impression of experiencing a theatrical event, like the impression of experiencing (or not experiencing) Richard Burton, is based on the visual ideography of the stage image. In Branagh’s *Hamlet*, however, it is, ironically, the visual absence of a definitive “theatrical” stage as the space of the action that allows Branagh to simultaneously convey the verisimilar impression of a lived experience and a theatrical event, a sense of the stage that becomes especially emphatic when the stage as a visual referent finally appears, during the play-within-a-play sequence, in which the cinematic audience has a theatrical stage as a visual reference positioning the various “stages” framed by the cinematic frame, where actions taking place behind the scenes, in the audience, and on the intra-diegetic stage of the stage-within-the-stage of the cinematic frame all become spaces of theatrical experience.

Earlier, I called the cinematic frame a type of moving theatrical proscenium that works on the audience through the machinery of a “theatrical” ideology, or worldview, which allows anywhere that proscenium frames to become a “stage” by building on the audience’s ideographic association between the framed cinematic image, the framing proscenium of the stage, and the audience’s lived experience of theatricality as a mode of being. The ideography of the stage image presents the argument that the cinematic audience should “identify” themselves as *the* audience. While the stage in the cinematic production of *Richard Burton’s Hamlet* conveys an argument that identifies “the audience” as that audience present within the cinematic proscenium frame, a situation

which prevents the cinematic audience from identifying themselves as “the audience” in that particular theatrical event,<sup>28</sup> the staginess of Branagh’s suggests to the audience the association between the framed cinematic image and the framing of a stage. The action within the cinematic frame and the “staging” of that action specifically evokes the stage visually, and, therefore, defines the cinematic audience’s relationship to that event. But because there is no “stage” to be seen, the frame of the cinematic image takes on the qualities of the stage as a visual experience (if not the qualities of the stage as a physical experience).

Adding to the believability of this diegesis is the fact that we are specifically instructed visually that this moment takes place “backstage,” reinforcing the impression that the “stage” as a physical thing is a part of the story, and not the thing upon which the story is being performed. The non-immediacy of the “stage” as a visual referent, as well as the placement of a stage’s physical presence elsewhere within the narrative universe, combined with the overall theatricality of the production, work together to impress upon the audience the “theatricality” of the event, despite the absence of a physical experience, and even if members of the cinematic audience might register the unnatural positioning of the actors. This is in stark contrast to the alienating argument of the persistent image of the stage as the space of the theatrical event in *Richard Burton’s Hamlet*; in Branagh’s version, the audience knows that this event is meant for them; according to the theatrical ideology which defines the roles of the participants in a theatrical event, as well as those

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<sup>28</sup> According to Kenneth Burke, “You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, *identifying* your ways as his ways” seeking to “display the appropriate ‘signs’ of character needed to earn the audience’s goodwill” (*Rhetoric of Motives* 55-56). In this respect, Gielgud, while he may have gotten his theatrical audience’s goodwill, failed in that respect, rhetorically, with his cinematic audience.

participants relationship to the event itself, the audience is able to define themselves as *the audience*, and to participate in the event according to the rules of that role. To put this another way, the ideography of the stage presents the argument that the cinematic audience should “identify” themselves as *the audience*; the stage in *Richard Burton’s Hamlet*, on the other hand, conveys an argument that identifies *the audience* as the audience within the cinematic “stage,” which prevents the cinematic audience from identifying themselves as *the audience*.

As I argued above, the physical separation of cinema is only the real counterpart to the impression of separation lent by the concept of “the fourth wall,” a fundamental element of theatrical ideography as that ideography evolved in “Western” society. Branagh’s collapsing of the cinematic and theatrical invokes this principle to convey the impression of a “staged” production. While film provides the physical reality of separation from action, and theatre only the illusion of physical separation, the pre-cinematic theatrical experience evolved culturally in Europe to depend upon the imaginary fourth wall was fundamental to a true theatrical experience (an ideology which was, itself, only an out growth of theatrical ideology that had become a fundamental worldview in modernity, as discussed by Eggington). All cinema has done is make real what was once merely impressionistic in the theatre, and by so doing, has heightened the spectator experience by emphasizing the verisimilarity of the fictional diegesis.

I am well aware that this “fourth wall” was not always fundamental to the theatrical experience, nor does it necessarily persist. However, the post-cinematic theatrical experimentation, particularly within the avant-garde tradition, which has increasingly toyed with the fourth wall and the physical potential for “experience” that

live theatre affords by taking advantage of the physical proximity of audience and performer, suggests how fundamental the concept of the imaginary fourth wall has become to the ideography of the visual experience of the stage. I would argue that the experiments of artists like Bertold Brecht, Antonin Artaud, Jerzy Grotowski, Richard Schechner, Peter Brooks, and others, challenging audience preconceptions of the limits of theatre by breaking the fourth wall, would not have been possible—or, at least, would not have been interesting—were the fourth wall not so central to the perceptual experience of the theatre in Western societies. The cultural preconditioning of this imaginary wall, conceptually, had first to be in place as an accepted theatrical “truth” in order for that preconception to be challenged.

Branagh, however, plays with this conception in reverse. He is able to provide the impression of a theatrical experience in cinema through his use of cinematic rhetoric and stage ideography. He builds his visual world according to the accepted ideologies of both the theatrical and cinematic experiences, and he uses these visual doctrines to persuade his audience that they are experiencing theatre, by way of the cinematic medium.

Let us develop our concept of this ideography of the stage image as a representative form of theatrical ideology further by examining the arguments made by the presentation of the staged event of the play-within-a-play. Branagh, in his cinematic translation of *Hamlet*, Act 3, scene 2, creates the impression of a theatrical event gone wrong by collapsing the various understandings of the “stage” as a term in the ideography of “theatricality” as a mode of being, or lived experience, but also by appealing—consciously or unconsciously—to his cinematic audience’s situation of theatricality as lived experience. Relying heavily on montage in this scene—a cinematic technique he

has employs rarely in this film—Branagh not only encourages the cinematic audience to identify with the “audience” of the play-within-a-play, and with the “actors” playing their “parts” within the cinematic diegesis (each of whom is playing some sort of public role within that diegesis), in order to not only create a sense of confusion, but a sense of inter-diegetic collapse. Within the cinematic diegesis, *The Murder of Gonzago* is staged as a very public event, which Branagh’s Hamlet has produced in order to “stage” a political challenge to the legitimacy of Claudius’s regime. Branagh’s Hamlet accomplishes this by identifying the roles played by “The Players” with the roles portrayed by the public “hypocrites” of the diegetic royal family. Branagh, as director, can only make this argument if the audience he engages already exists in a believably “theatricalized” world, a world which they can identify with the world they are witnessing on the “stage”—or, rather, the “stages” conveyed through Branagh’s cinematic editing. This sense of disorientation is accomplished through toying with the ideography of theatre; the audience no longer knows what group they should identify with: should we consider ourselves spectators? Performers? Both? While this desire to convey a sense of confusion suggests Branagh’s interpretation of his source material, for our discussion, it is an opportunity to further substantiate our argument that “theatre,” as a medium, presents a specific, rules-based, ideological orientation, and that its elements—including visual elements such as the image of the stage itself—when they are used, appeal to and reinforce this ideology whenever and wherever they are presented.

In this scene, then, the visual image of the stage becomes a reference for this visual argument, a focus around which the multiple stages Branagh argues exist within the original text can be explicated and revealed. Once the stage as a stage is formally



introduced as a visual referent, the scene is ripe for using the ideography of the stage image “as a reference point for [these] other themes” (Edwards and Winkler 88), because a new dimension has been added to the visual setting of the film’s fictional diegesis. The stage is presented in its denotative form—that is, as a space which carries the specific, socially acceptable understanding of a place for entertainment—so that its connotations, which have s already been played with impressionistically throughout the film, can be more fully explored. The physical manifestation of the stage within the film’s diegesis becomes a potent context for the exposition of other thematic and ideological contextualizations.

The scene of the play-within-a-play begins by panning down over the stage—the stage far below, framed in the center, with an applauding audience looking up at the king and queen, the opening point-of-view being Claudius and Gertrude’s high above the audience, suggesting that the play is especially for them. Yet the shot is a kind of visual double-entendre: the play is for the king and queen in the sense that they are, socially, the most important people in the audience, but also because Branagh’s Hamlet designed the rhetorical situation of the moment to reveal their guilt in the murder of his father. So, I this cinematic framing of the scene, Claudius and Gertrude are presented as both the most important members of the audience rhetorically, and themselves actors to be observed, as suggested by the applauding audience gazing up at them, and emphasized by a quick shot of Horatio peeking out from behind some curtains to one side of the audience, the camera panning slightly to show his vantage point for observing the king and queen (through opera glasses, no less), who sit “framed” in a stage-like balcony. So as “The Mousetrap” scene opens, we, the cinematic audience, are meant to understand that there are two

“stages” to be observed: the drama to be “played” on stage, and what it serves to reveal in the “real-life” drama of the king and queen’s relationship as well as the central story, which involves the cinematic audience watching Hamlet watch the revelatory performance of the king and queen.

Moreover, because prior to the introduction of the stage as a space for the performance of the play-within-a-play, the visual image of the stage has not been visually presented as a performance space for the main action of the intended diegesis, as it was in Gielgud’s production, but only alluded to as a kind of impressionistic referent—“the play’s the thing/ Wherein I’ll catch the conscience of the King” and the visual of Hamlet interacting with a recognizable model of a stage, closing out Act 2 with Hamlet’s face framed by a miniature proscenium—there is no reason to suggest that the “stage” as such is a concept we ought to consciously consider. Indeed, up to this point, the theatrical stage’s absence visually has facilitated the audience’s disconnection from the stage as a physical space, allowing theatrical ideography—the idea of the “stage” as a definitional concept—to create the impression of “staginess” in Branagh’s camerawork and to successfully convey the impression of a theatrical event. The fourth wall remains both physically and impressionistically intact, and helps to foreshadow what is to come: the inverting and collapsing of the various potential understandings of the stage image’s ideography—including the concept of the fourth wall—in order to expound upon a central theme in the Shakespeare’s original text: the *theatrum mundi* metaphor.

It is during the presentation of the play-within-a-play, when the visual presence of the stage becomes a revelatory component concerning the “theatrical” themes the production has developed up to this point. This visual argument relies on a multi-

dimensional understanding of the ideological possibilities of the term “stage” in order to redefine the entire theme of the production as “theatrical”—not only in the sense of a theatrical event, but in the ideological sense of “theatre” as an orientation from which we can define our world. The cinematic audience must not only accept the cultural denotation of the stage as a place for entertainment, but also accept the attendant culturally-constructed rules—the “conventions”<sup>29</sup>—of the typical theatrical event as they are applied to that event *and* as they apply to the “real world,” in order to identify with the discomfort that the diegetic audience experiences and identify Hamlet’s transgression of those rules. The discomfort of the diegetic audience is communicated to the cinematic audience through a montage of close-ups on various members of the court, who respond to Hamlet’s transgressive behavior by looking uncomfortable. They “look” at Hamlet, moving between the “stage” and the “audience” and are shocked. They then look above them and behind them, at Gertrude and Claudius in the balcony, which, thanks to the ideology of the theatre applied through the development of the *theatrum mundi* metaphor, has now become a “stage,” as well.

The cinematic audience must accept as simply natural the unacceptability of Hamlet’s behavior, the ideological perspective that it is transgressive to disrupt a theatrical event according to the manner in which Hamlet disrupts *The Murder of Gonzago*.” The cinematic audience must accept it as a principle of faith that breaking the imaginary “fourth wall,” as Hamlet does, is transgression—not only the imaginary fourth

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<sup>29</sup> Marshall McLuhan’s argument that media of communication are, themselves, ideological messages (*Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*), it can be argued that even those elements of theatre that would be dismissed as merely “conventional” are, essentially, ideographic, and convey an ideological argument inherent in the medium itself.

wall of the theatrical event, but the imaginary walls that we place around ourselves to separate the public from the private. In order to do these things, however, the must also accept that the elements of “theatre” bleed over, definitionally, into the “real world,” just as surely as the filmmakers must accept this same principle as a given for their audience in order to be able to take this rhetorical stance.

To put this another way: just as Euripides and his audience had to accept a theatrical mode of experience for the argument of Pentheus’s transgression to work, so, too, must Branagh and his audience accept a similar set of theatrical “laws” in order for the argument of Hamlet more heroic transgression to be conveyed.

In order for this scene to work, the ideology of “theatre”—both of the theatre as a medium and of “theatricality” as a mode of being—must be so ingrained in the audience that the governing “rules” of the both the theatrical and the “theatrical” experiences are accepted unconsciously and without question. The ideological orientation which defines the roles of the participants in the theatrical event—the idea that a performer has the “stage” and while he does the audience is bound by common consent to “participate” with him in the role of the impassive spectator, “hearing” and “seeing” what the performer has to say—must be a given in order for the sense Hamlet’s transgression of that ideology to be viable. For an audience member to break the fourth wall and take center stage is simply unacceptable; for him then to use that stage to break another wall, that which stands between the public performance of person and the private reality, is equally transgressive. Branagh’s Hamlet is able to do both, but only through this scene’s transgression of theatrical ideology as it applies to both the theatre and the theatre of the world: the stage image is used or its rhetorical salience as a representative form of both,

and the “theatricality” of the Denmark’s royal family is finally revealed *as* theatricality. It is by an appeal to the ideology of the stage image that the audience comes to understand that the strength and influence of Claudius is a “play” as opposed to “real.”

Unfortunately, we do not have the space to go into the political, moral, or metaphysical questions that this interpretation of the play raises, not only for the play, but for theatrical ideology’s application in the real world, as well as the limits of ideology in general. However, I think that the ideography of the theatrical elements becomes quite clear through this analysis. The audience must accept the culturally constructed belief that theatre’s principal purpose is entertainment, while being simultaneously aware that theatrical ideology can and is used as a means of interpreting the “real” world. In fact, the cinematic audience must do more than understand these various possibilities of the application of theatrical ideology, but this ideological orientation must be innate: they must not be required to access this ideology consciously, but it must come to them naturally. They must not think, “Oh, Branagh is employing the ancient *theatrum mundi* metaphor” but rather accept unconsciously that theatrical ideology is a viable means of defining the “real” world. The political stage, the public stage, the world stage; and the presentation of these multiple connotations requires the visual reference of a stage as a representative form in order to access that innate ideological faculty; without it, Branagh’s argument would fail.

This broader ideographic exposition of the connotations of the stage begins with the appearance of Hamlet suddenly upon the stage, to the applause of the gathered audience. We, the cinematic audience, already know that Hamlet is not a “player”—at least, not as the diegesis of the film has established—and yet he takes center stage on a

stage that is not only the impression of the a stage but an actually recognizable stage multiplies his centrality, as does “the Mousetrap” scene generally.

Hamlet’s placement center stage, both within the frame of the cinematic image, and the frame of the diegetically presented stage, begins the visual development of the *theatrum mundi* metaphor. Montage editing that dominates the play-within-a-play scene—a shift from Branagh’s reliance on long, natural shots—allowing us to view multiple points-of-view, and, therefore, multiple “stages” with the impression of simultaneity. The impression of multiple “stages” and multiple “audiences” emphasizes the “staginess” of the drama of the aristocracy, and of human interactions generally. But in order to make the argument of the world-as-stage metaphor, the visual referent of an actual stage is absolutely necessary, and the audience in attendance—the diegetic audience in attendance at the play-within-a-play—can never be relegated to an afterthought; rather, its visual presence is absolutely necessary for the transition of the dramatic focus: Hamlet’s public challenge to Claudius can only be “public” if there is a public there to witness it (Dewey 15-16). The spectator—that is, the non-diegetic, cinematic audience—understands this. If that public were missing, Branagh’s argument that *The Murder of Gonzago* is a public challenge to the legitimacy of Claudius’s reign would lose its potency. The publicness of a theatrical entertainment experience, then, is recontextualized based on the cinematic audience’s understanding of what a stage is and can be—it can be a space or entertainment or a space for politics. Branagh collapses these two understandings of stage, and, in so doing, exploits an argument implicit in the Shakespearean text: that entertainment has a rhetorical component; however lightly we may esteem it, there is a “meaning” to it.

“What means this, my lord?” Ophelia asks, inquiring about the “argument” of the play. Hamlet’s answers leave her disappointed, and she decides to attend to the play. Claudius also asks concerning the play’s “argument” and if there is any “offence in’t.” Hamlet’s answer: “No offence at all!” But the extra-diegetic audience, the spectator, you and I, we know better, and it could be argued that Shakespeare suggests we, the audience, should *always* know better than to take entertainment at face value.

Later, as the play-within-a-play moves towards its climax, Branagh’s Hamlet again takes the stage, stealing the “stage”—both literally and figuratively—from the Players, re-contextualizing the image of the stage from a space for dramatic presentation to a space for political presentation in the process. Unlike the physical stage in the Burton version, where the presence of the physical stage serves to remind the cinematic audience that we are watching Burton playing Hamlet, Hamlet’s appearances on the stage in Branagh’s production does not serve to remind us that Branagh is playing Hamlet, but serves visually to further convince us that of the “reality” of Hamlet within the film’s diegesis: he speaks to the audience-within-the-play, emphasizing not their separation, but their spatial connection: they both belong to that otherworld framed by the cinematic frame, which frame could just as easily frame our own world, because “all the world’s” always already “a stage” (*As You Like It*, 2.7.139). Moreover, there is no fourth wall standing between Branagh’s Hamlet and his “audience;” he is not there to be “watched” or to “entertain,” but plays the part of a special member of the audience. He is one of them, not an actor—he does not “seem” but “is.”

As the play-within-a-play progresses, Hamlet slowly takes the stage, stealing the “stage”—both literally and figuratively—from the actors, re-contextualizing the image of

the stage from a space for dramatic presentation to a space for political presentation in the process. While Branagh has utilized montage occasionally in this production, he has relied heavily on long, naturalistic shots and tableaux to convey the impression of staged scenes. However, montage is necessary for this scene to accomplish its rhetorical purpose, for the cinematic audience must be constantly reminded that the stage's nature has been compromised by the action. Repeated visual references to the audience, to the players, to Hamlet standing upon the players' stage, and all of these looking up at the new "stage" of the balcony, where the new drama of the royal family is unfolding are necessary not only for the cinematic to participate in the discomfort of having their denotative understanding of a "stage" challenged, but for the scene to be persuasive as a re-contextualization of the stage. Drama is a "staged" event, and an event can only appear convincingly "dramatic" in any public way if there is a diegetic audience with which the cinematic audience can identify.<sup>30</sup>

### Conclusion

The presentation of multiple "stages" within the "stage" of the cinematic proscenium is clearly not the product of the original Shakespearian text of *Hamlet*; there was no cinematic proscenium to allude to when Shakespeare wrote that text. However, such concepts are easily read into the source text because of the already theatrical predispositions of both Shakespeare's intended audience, and of the cinematic audience

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<sup>30</sup> Jurgen Habermas presents the definitive discussion of the development of the public sphere in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. My discussion of theatrical ideology's influence upon the definition of "public" and "private" has potentially profound ramifications for Habermas's assertion that the "public" sphere developed out of bourgeois rationalism since my analysis of theatrical rhetoric reveals what I think is an important component to the study of the public sphere, with a theatrical ideology standing at the nexus of our understandings of the difference between the public and the private, and possibly an alternate theory for the development of public spheres generally.



for whom such cinematic theatrical events are made. For persons, who already see reality through the lens of theatricality as a mode of being, the cinematic proscenium merely becomes a realization of the theatrical lens of their own gaze, a gaze which Shakespeare and his contemporaries definitely shared, despite the fact that they had no metaphorical language that would have described such an experience of reality in terms of “lenses.”

The above discussion of the stage image is, I believe, merely emblematic of how theatrical ideology affects theatrical experiences generally. However, of the visual ideographs in the theatrical mode, I believe the stage image is particularly susceptible to rhetorical appropriation because of its potency as a representative form of theatrical ideology. Because of the ideological underpinnings of the medium of theatre, the stage, even in its purely denotative sense, carries ideographic connotations that have developed into a way of thinking about the world and human experiences in it. When presented as an image—and particularly within the proscenium-like frame of the cinematic image, where the stage image becomes metatheatrical—the stage argues rhetorically on the foundation of “theatre” as ideology. One could say that the stage, then, is both the source of ideology, or a way of interpreting the world, and a tool of ideology. Just as stages serve, phenomenologically, not as themes themselves but as spaces for the experimentation of themes and motifs, the embedded stage image in *Hamlet*—both the play and its various cinematic translations—serves as a focal point for ideological exposition, as both the commonplace upon which the argument is based, and as the argument itself.

## CONCLUSION

If theatrical language and theatrical concepts do function ideographically, as I have argued in this paper, then the presentation of elements that can be even remotely described as “theatrical”—from the obviously theatrical, such as mediated representation of the visual elements of the theatre, like the use of a stage image in film; to spectacles that merely utilize some conventions of the theatre, such as a political rally; to seemingly non-theatrical events, such as observing the “private” behavior of another—can never be ideologically neutral. Indeed, my argument suggests that even the classic critiques of “spectacle” and the pejorative use of theatrical idioms in common vernacular<sup>31</sup> must now be re-evaluated in terms of theatricality as a fundamental ideological perspective rather than a mere rhetorical tool. Theatrical ideographs—whether visual or verbal—are, as Michael McGee has suggested

the species of “God” or “Ultimate” term that will be used to symbolize the line of arguments the meanest sort of individual *would* pursue, if that individual had the dialectical skills of philosophers, as a defense of a personal stake in and commitment to the society. (455-56)

and so the reaction of audiences to the power of spectacle generally, and theatrical spectacle specifically, cannot be merely dismissed as a simplistic, manipulative, irrational sensory experience, nor can spectacular arguments any longer be considered inferior to the power of “rational” language. If the elements of theatre work ideographically for those operating within a theatrical worldview, then the responses to spectacular arguments—particularly those arguments that are built on theatrical ideology—is

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<sup>31</sup> Again, I refer the reader to Barish’s discussion in *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*.

rational, presenting an argument that works on an unconsciously accepted basis of logic. Spectacle in general, then, must be reconsidered, from the perspective of theatrical ideology, as a complex experience in which spectators impassively participate, and not by which they are passively victimized. An understanding of theatricality as ideological suggests that spectator response to spectacle is perfectly rational because spectacle makes its arguments according to unconsciously accepted ideological rules, engaging audiences' rational, as well as emotional, dimensions.

Moreover, there is an added level of complexity when these events transpire on a theatrical stage. Such stages, when experienced through a theatrical worldview, are inherently fraught with ideological implication because, for humans experiencing reality in a theatrical mode, a "stage" is never merely an ideologically neutral "empty space" designed merely for the presentation and communication of other ideas.<sup>32</sup> To those persons who experience "reality" in a theatrical mode of being, every empty space is always already "a bare stage" (Brook 9). This creates a rhetorical situation in which calling such a theatrical-space-within-a-theatrical-space a "stage" is, itself, an ideological move—indeed, all metatheatre, it could be argued, relies on this same rhetorical and ideological mechanism to function; that is, the development of a metatheatrical convention requires first an ideological scaffold of theatricality—a world of theatre in which there are theatres that represent the world—upon which such a concept as "metatheatre" can be hung.

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<sup>32</sup> Marshall McLuhan first introduced the phrase "the medium is the message" in his book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. Despite the fact, he claims, that "many would be disposed to say" that a medium of communication is not itself a message but only a means of transmission, McLuhan argues that the " 'content' of any medium is always another medium" from the medium used to transmit that content (7-8).

This reading of the *theatrum mundi* concept reveals this idea to be something more complex than merely metaphorical, because the use of theatrical language in common vernacular does more than merely reference the theatrical stage conceptually as a means to communicate understanding, and is more complex than merely bringing out “the thisness of a that” (*A Grammar of Motives* 503). Rather, the theatre-world concept references the experience of theatricality as a perception of lived experience—that is, it depends upon theatricality as an ideological orientation. Indeed, theatrical stages (which, for our purposes, include any “stage” framed by the cinematic proscenium), as evidenced by my discussion of Pentheus in *The Bacchae*, merely constitute a component of a world already theatricalized, in a reality already viewed as theatrical. The “empty space” that we define denotatively as a stage, from this perspective, stands-in synecdochically as a representation of the whole of the world: those things that apply to the presentation of reality on the stage also apply to the presentation of reality in the “real” world. Moreover, the concept of the stage-world is not only at once metaphoric and synecdochic, but it constitutes a reduction of the lived experience of the audience to a small part of that experience as emblematic of the whole of lived experience through the substitution of the one for the other, making a space defined denotatively as a stage simultaneously metaphoric, synecdochic, and metonymic, as well. Finally, because the theatrical moment is meant to be a cooperative, participatory moment (an element which, as I argued above, seems central to the theatre as a medium and so central to theatrical ideology) “there can be relatively few rhetorical situations”—particularly those of a theatrical nature—“where the target of persuasion is utterly ignorant of the designs” of the performer (who can now essentially be considered a rhetor, as well). Indeed, “the relationship of persuader and

persuaded”—or, in this case, of performer and audience—“is almost always”—or, at least, should be—“self-conscious to some degree” (Lanham 92), making the experience of things purposefully “staged,” in a denotative sense, completely ironic. Because theatrical staging “tends towards the simplification of literalness,” the stage acts as the “summarizing vessel” of the theatrical mode of being, it’s understanding of lived experience “based upon a sense of fundamental kinship with” the Other (Burke 514-515).

The theatrical stage, then, from a theatrical-ideological point-of-view, is a rhetorical nexus for these “master tropes” Kenneth Burke speaks of, just as the world itself is the nexus of human experience.<sup>33</sup> From this perspective, “theatre,” broadly defined, is a central orienting principle for human experience. This principle, as I have argued, is not determined by the use of theatrical ideology in common vernacular, but it is merely revealed by analyzing that rhetoric’s usage. Moreover, I believe it is this ideography that provides the “context for the use of metaphor and the understanding of theatricality” (Gran 254).

In the Western world, at least, we have been conditioned to think of reality in quasi-theatrical terms, and the *theatrum mundi* metaphor is both an example and the result of what William Egginton has termed a theatrical “mode of being.” This theatrical mode of being becomes clear, as demonstrated earlier, by analyzing theatrical rhetoric in

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<sup>33</sup>Burke uses the “master tropes as a guiding foundation for the development of his “dramatistic” method of critical theory. His five terms—*Act, Scene, Agent, Agency, Purpose*—form “the generating principle” of his “investigation” into motives (xv). “Irony arises,” Burke argues, “when one tries, by the interaction of terms upon one another, to produce a development which uses all of them” (512). Such a development is theatre (giving rise, I would argue, to the principle of dramatic irony), but such a development, one could argue, is, from a metaphysical perspective, descriptive of lived experience. This is the mechanism upon which theatrical ideology works.

vernacular contexts, and by applying theatrical ideographic analysis to the arguments made by representative visual forms of theatrical ideology during “theatrical” events.

Understanding that we experience reality as theatre has significant implications for orienting discussion and study of phenomena beyond the theatre. We must now ask how universal is this sense of reality as theatricality. What other cultures function in a theatrical mode of being? Is this mode unique to the West? What are the permutations of this ideological perspective, or might it manifest itself in different ways and yet still be “theatrical?” How has the theatrical worldview affected the development of such things as antitheatrical rhetoric, general understanding of the line between the public and private spheres, or philosophical and artistic movements that seek to discover (or reveal) “the Truth?” How might this new reading of democracy and theatre in antiquity inform study of the ancient discord between rhetoric and philosophy? The way that we use theatrical terminology in common vernacular—particularly the pejorative tendency of such rhetoric pointed out by Barish—demonstrates an almost universal acknowledgement of a “true” existence beyond the “theatre of the world,” of some really-real “reality” that we, as performers and audiences, strutting and fretting our way upon this world stage, could discover if we could only see beyond the theatrical representations we experience daily. How might an ideological understanding of theatricality inform our understanding of this need to know and experience something profound and “real”?

These questions, I believe, indicate the direction that future inquiry into theatrical ideology might take, and suggest that demonstrating the ideological essence of theatricality provides a new and important perspective to inform investigation into some of our most challenging questions.

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