

## The director's conception: turning the written drama into performance

**Abstract:** This article focuses on the dialectical relation between the dramatic text and the theatrical staging of it, as well as the role taken by the director in the transposition of the written text to the scene. For this reason, a distinction is made between the concepts of drama, theatre and performance. Concerning the theatre director, the article establishes a comparison between him and the reader of a dramatic text, since both – each in his proper way – perform the tasks of reading and interpreting the text.

**Keywords:** Theatre, drama, reader-response theories, theatre director.

**Resumo:** Este artigo aborda a relação dialética entre texto dramático e encenação teatral, e o papel desempenhado pelo diretor teatral na transposição do texto escrito para a cena. Para tanto, é apresentada a distinção entre os conceitos de drama, teatro e performance. No que tange ao encenador, o artigo estabelece uma comparação entre este e o leitor do texto dramático, na medida em que ambos, cada um à sua maneira específica, realizam uma leitura e interpretação do texto.

**Palavras-chave:** Teatro, drama, teorias da leitura, diretor teatral.

### Introduction

The main purpose of this work is to present in a technical, yet simple way, the role of the director in the staging of written drama. Among the several categories of artists that tackle with the problems of narration, the creative activity of somebody who stages plays that were not written by himself is a rather peculiar one: he will not set the plot; as for the dialogues, they have already been written. Thus, his artistic work does not start from ground zero. This does not mean, however, that his task will be an easy one: staging a play that has been written a long time before, and has probably been performed before, always means providing a new glance to it.

The work of the theatre director bears many similarities to the task of the (good) reader. Very often we have spectators who leave the the-

atre saying that they preferred reading the play than watching it. This shows us that the staging of a play should not be banal (let alone bad) – the lack of an interesting, personal angle to the production of a written play will definitely make the reading experience of it feel a lot better. The reason is that, as any reader-response critic would say, the reader will have his own private experience of the text (in this case, a play), and, as a possible consequence, a view of the play that is his own.

Why would then anybody watch a production, if not to get in touch with a new, fresh view that could enrich one's own perceptions and findings?

No matter how hard I try to depict the relevance of the director's role in the theatrical art, it is important to state that, as opposed to other functions in the theatre (the actor, the playwright, the set designer, the composer, the costume designer and – why not? – the spectator), the director is a brand new profession. If we start from the Greek theatre, this art is two-millennia-and-a-half old. The director, however, first showed up in the late nineteenth century.

The main reason for that is a radical change which took place in the work of the actor. Up to the late 1870s, acting – the centre of the theatrical art – had a basically declamatory nature. The traveling companies that existed all over Europe presented performances that were not orientated around a conception (which is a very 20<sup>th</sup>-century notion itself). The settings would not vary from play to play – so, a setting that was used for *Romeo and Juliet* would show up again in *The Taming of the Shrew*, for instance. The actors would not rehearse together – each one would know just his character's lines until the day of the dress rehearsal, when everything and everybody was to be put together.

However, the same social changes that generated the coming up of the realistic and naturalistic schools in literature, have also brought new demands in the theatre of the late nineteenth-century. Declamatory acting would not be so readily accepted by the audiences. In a way, it would look and sound a bit too shoddy – and wooden. The actors should provide an abundance of realistic details, as well as show the ever-changing dynamics of the character's inner motivations. Acting, by then, has grown a lot more complex. Therefore, the actors would need somebody to orientate their work – and so, enters the theatre director.

There was also another task for which he would be responsible: that was unifying the aesthetic language of the play. Up to the emer-

gence of the director, the performance of a play was a haphazard collection of elements which would not communicate with each other: the settings would go one way, while the costumes were made up in a completely different style, and, to top that, we would have actors which would perform in a manner that would contradict the other elements. The audiences of the 1880s-1890s demanded that somebody should unify these elements, so as to create something that would be perceived as a single work of art: a play where the different aesthetic elements would relate to each other in an organic way; and, due to this, a play that would look different from other plays. Again we have the director to do such a job.

Up to this moment, I have not done much more than generalizing about the work of the theatre director. It is the moment now to see in a more concrete and specific way how he performs the task of staging the written drama.

### **Trying to define what theatre is**

Before dealing with the specific work of the theatre director, it would be useful to try a definition of what theatre is. This task is not as easy as it may first seem, for the word “theatre” appears to be some sort of umbrella that covers an enormous variety of performances and shows, each one completely different from the other. Besides, there are certain manifestations of art which one sometimes might call “theatre”, due to their resemblance of it, but are not. In order to arrive to this definition, I will make use of some concepts which were taught by the Argentinean theatre director Rubén Szuchmacher in a workshop I attended some years ago.

A complex definition might require more than one approach in order to be obtained. That seems to be the case here. The first way of defining “theatre” is the analytical one – defining something through its constituting elements. An analytical definition would go like this:

Theatre is a fictional situation composed of three elements:

- a) *the literary one;*
- b) *the visual one;*
- c) *the musical one.*

It is not that obvious to stress its fictional nature: one might walk on the street and come across a gang of hard-drinking punks, or a pro-

cession of Franciscan monks, and, seeing those weirdly dressed people, utter: “*How theatrical!*”. It is not, though. Theatre is a fiction, an illusion – and those are not actors pretending to be punks or monks, they are the real thing. It is true that we have this branch of theory called New Historicism, which does not separate fiction and reality, and calls the rites of the English monarchy, for instance, “theatre”. However, I do not think like this, and will call “theatre” those performances which are unequivocally fictional.

Let us see then what the elements of this fiction are. The *literary element* is, of course, the narrative. Nowadays we have many plays which stem not from the pen of a playwright, but instead, are created by the theatre group itself, through improvisations of the actors. Since this kind of play was not printed on paper, one might ask whether there is a literary element in it at all. And the answer is: definitely. Even a play that was created through improvisations contains a narrative.

The second is the *visual element*. This is most evident in avant-garde plays like Beckett’s or Bob Wilson’s, or in the Broadway musicals, for instance. It is present, though, in any kind of theatre. Even the plainest “kitchen-sink play” has got a visual organization to it. If it is staged by a good director, he will try to organize those extremely everyday elements, such as the chairs, the table, the TV set, in a way that is visually appealing, and the same goes for the blocking of the actors. If it is not done this way, the visual element will still be there, even if the visual information receives a sloppy treatment.

Finally, the *musical element*. This is also present in any sort of play. Even if there is no soundtrack, the musical organization will be there. The lines delivered by the actors contain all musical factors: rhythm, tempo, volume, pitch, etc. As we know, silence is also an extremely important musical element, and it is just obvious to state the powerful effect it has in such plays as Beckett’s or Pinter’s. Now what if we have an absolutely silent play, with no music and no dialogues at all? The musical element is still there: any sort of art that evolves around time deals with musicality, and the theatre is an example of this. The action of the play, any play, is absolutely musical – the pace will be fast or slow, or still, more commonly, alternate between these two poles; there will be moments of higher or lower emotional intensity; the atmosphere will be happy, or somber, or hectic. What is this, if not music?

In order to say an artistic manifestation is theatrical, we must have the presence of the three elements. If we have only two of them, there is no theatre. For instance, comics have got the visual and literary element, but lack the musical one, and so do the stained glass windows of a church portraying the *via crucis*. These manifestations of art do not evolve around time. It is up to the viewer, or reader, to appreciate them in five minutes or two hours. We might have the coupling of the literary element with the musical one – one might listen to a song album and appreciate the lyrics; even read them, if they are available on print. (The same does not go for the opera, which is definitely a kind of theatre. An opera CD, though, is another thing, distinct from the opera itself, and we are going to discuss this further on.) And, of course, we can have just the visual and musical elements, as in an abstract gallery installation.

This answers much of our question, but not all of it. Both cinema and video have got these three elements as well. What distinguishes them from the theatre is the lack of an *audience*. This is not just a detail. If nobody goes to the movie theatre to watch a film, this film still exists. If the film is shot but not distributed, it also exists. It is just a matter of keeping this movie in a safe place and, if nobody wants to watch it now, there is still the possibility that somebody will be interested in it within fifty years.

Such a thing does not happen to the theatre at all, for it is a *performatic* art, that is, an art that needs to take place before an audience in order to exist. Unlike the movie, a theatrical performance cannot be kept in a can for fifty years. And if somebody films or records this performance, this will not be theatre – it will be cinema or video. The opposite is also true: if a theatre company performs a play and there is absolutely nobody watching it, we do not have theatre. At best, we might have a rehearsal.

Peter Brook, the renowned English director, has said that in order to have theatre, we need at least two persons: an actor and a spectator. There is no need of a light operator, or a sound operator, or a playwright, not even a director – but the spectator needs to be there. One might add that the word “theatre” comes from the Greek *theatron*: the place where things are to be seen.

The analytical approach that I applied above explains many things, but there still might be something left. It is time to apply a comparative-contrastive approach in order to differentiate *theatre*

from two other concepts it tends to be mixed with: *drama* and *performance*.

*Drama* is a literary composition centered on a certain conflict, to be presented before an audience. It might be presented (performed) or not; as a literary work, it exists independently of this circumstance. The concept of (dramatic) action is central to it: a character faces a challenge (conflict), and the outcome of this struggle will be a change, either in the character, or his opponent, or the environment. Let us not forget that the Greek word *drama* comes from *drao* (I do).

*Performance* is a presentation before an audience. Theatre, circus, opera and dance are the performatic arts *par excellence*, even though there are also musical performances, as well as performances that are not artistic at all (for instance, a football game). I count the opera as a scenic art, or even as theatre, due to its use of all the three elements discussed above, in order to create a fictional situation. For sure, this is not the same situation of a jazz concert, for instance. This is not even the situation of the concerts performed by *Kiss*, the famous rock band from the late seventies. The bass player would sport that crazy hairdo and Kabuki make-up, stick his tongue out and spit fire – however spectacular that might have been, it was still Gene Simmons the bass player, and not somebody acting, pretending to be a rock musician.

*Theatre*, besides being a building for the presentation of dramatic performances, is well defined as a dramatic performance. It differs from the concept of “drama” in that it is performed before an audience. It is also a less generic concept than “performance”, due to the fact that only the performance of dramatic fiction can be called “theatre”.

I hope not to have been tautological with the comparison of these concepts. Such comparisons and contrasts tend to remind us of the real meaning of words that have been frequently misused.

### **Turning a literary text into a living performance**

Turning *Hamlet*, the text, into *Hamlet*, the performed play, includes a lot of scenic elements besides the acting: the setting, the lighting, the costumes, the sound score, the props, the make-up, etc. For any of these scenic elements, there is a wide variety of choices to be made by the director who is staging the play. Let us take the setting as an example. The director might want a setting that reproduces as accurately as possible a royal castle from King Amled’s Denmark, because he wishes

his staging to have a very naturalistic-historical feeling, so that the spectator feels he was sent to Middle Age Denmark.

Another director, though, could see *Hamlet* not as a historical reproduction, but rather as a ghost story. The setting I referred to above would definitely be inadequate to this second production. This second director would probably prefer a setting that provides a darker feeling. And we still could have a third director who wants a bare stage for some purpose that differs very much from the first two ones.

Of course there are also several choices to be made regarding the acting, concerning the concrete score of physical actions to be performed by the actors, the pace of the acting in the different moments of the various scenes, the style of acting, etc.

As we can see, the director is somebody who has to make choices concerning all elements of the staging in just each and every moment of the play. In a way, we can see the director very much as a reader (the actors are also readers, but this is a subject for another study). Just as it happens with the reader, the director has a response to the text he has read, and comes up with an interpretation of his own. (When I say “of his own”, I do not mean an absolutely original interpretation – this is sheer nonsense –, but rather an interpretation that he feels adequate to his own universe of knowledge, beliefs, as well as personal and class necessities.) Consequently, one can say that, whenever we watch a staging of *Hamlet*, for instance, by a certain director, we are getting in touch with an interpretation of this text by a specific reader – the director.

At this stage, two questions arise: a) Why should the audience get in touch with the interpretation of one specific reader, instead of reading the dramatic text by themselves?; b) Can one say that the theatrical staging of a text is a more authoritarian form of art, since it already gives the spectator, not “the text itself”, but an interpretation of it? Such questions lead us to a necessary comparison between these two forms of art: literature and theatre. Probably, the best way of comparing these different media is by viewing the possibilities and limitations of each of them.

The fact that books can always be re-read, and thus, acquire new meanings for the reader, and consequently, be interpreted in different ways through several generations, is probably the greatest possibility in literature. Its greatest drawback is that, although books can be read

aloud (and they sometimes are), this is an art that seeks basically an individual fruition – it is not fit to be a communal activity. Another aspect of literature is that it can certainly raise emotional responses from the readers, but always in a more detached manner than in other forms of art. This is not necessarily a disadvantage, since emotional manipulation can go a long road from maudlin sentimentality to political manipulation – from melodrama to Hitler’s Nuremberg rallies. However, there can also be some positive aspects in a more immediate emotional response.

The theatrical performance of a play, unlike the written drama (that is, literature), cannot be subject to many different interpretations, and that is possibly the major hindrance of the theatre. It is never enough to remind the vanishing condition of the dramatic performance: once it is over, it ceases existing. Each performance in the theatre is unique, and that is why this art is called “the writing on the water”. Thus, for technical reasons, among many different possibilities of interpretation, the director must choose only one. Let us take *Hamlet* again as an example. Our theatre director can choose a psychoanalytical interpretation, which focuses on the relationship that the Danish prince has with his parents, especially with his mother. Another choice could be a political interpretation. In this production of *Hamlet*, the director will focus on the struggle for the control of the reign. More attention will be given to Claudius and especially to Fortinbras. This director could still choose an existential interpretation: his focus will be on the inner conflict of a young man who has just come from Wittenberg, one of the best German universities – the lad is a “University wit”, no less –, and suddenly sees himself stuck in the medieval conflicts of his primitive land. (Of course he does not know what to do. The Renaissance values he learned in Wittenberg do not apply to the code of private revenge that a prince of Denmark must apply.)

Of course there could be more interpretations, but three are quite enough. The point is: the director must choose only *one* interpretation, he cannot stick to all of them. As we have just seen, each interpretation will make the director focus on some aspects of the play, while giving little attention or even leaving aside others. The technical reason is that two hours is a very short time and, if he tries to mix the three interpretations, the play will go unfocused – that is, confusing.



One could very possibly raise the objection that a reader has an advantage over the theatre-buff: he can read *Hamlet* as many times as he wishes, and come across new interpretations each time that he picks from the shelf his issue on paperback. The theatergoer, on the other hand, is subject to the interpretation of the production he has seen. This is quite true. Let me say, however, that the theatergoer is likely to watch other productions of *Hamlet*, and each one will bring something new to him – even when they are bad.

What makes the art of theatre unique is that, from the ancient Greeks on, it is a kind of arena or forum where the spectator will see the main conflicts of his time performed through the actions of the actors on stage. Unlike the cinema, the actors there are real people, even if their apparent behaviour is nothing but a fictional situation. This makes the experience of the theatre incredibly more intense than that of the cinema – for good and for bad. (I believe that a bad play – due to its intensity – is likely to cause a worse impression than a bad movie. Fortunately, the opposite is also true.) Any person who is used to go to the theatre and has already seen a good number of productions will say that the theatre is a lot more intense, even if he has seen more good movies than good plays these days<sup>1</sup>.

The other factor that makes the theatrical experience unique is its communal nature. In a movie theatre, the lights go out and you forget there are other people with you (unless you hear somebody munching French fries in the seat right behind you). This is just impossible in the theatre. It does not need to be a theatre-in-the-round or one of those shows where the actors sit on your lap or throw flour on your navy blue suit – even in the most common buildings and shows you never forget there are other people with you. For one or two hours, the actors and the audience constitute one big family<sup>2</sup>. The few theatre-addicted people may not be aware, but this is one of the reasons why the theatre is so dear to them, besides the fiction and the good acting.

After this long digression, it is high time to come back to the questions in the previous page. As for the first one (*Why should the audience get in touch with the interpretation of one specific reader, instead of reading the dramatic text by themselves?*), the answer is the communal nature of the theatre. Also when it is not political in a straightforward way, it always deals with the main conflicts of the present society, which are enacted before an audience. This also happens when the classics are staged. Af-

ter all, they are classics and not just historical documents because they were able to symbolize the conflicts of their time in a way that these works could talk to other societies in the future that faced analogous situations.

I must state that, although the theatrical representations always address a specific problem of the time they happen, the director might not be aware of the reasons of his choice. He may think it is just a matter of taste and aesthetics. However, whether he is conscious or not, he will always be part of his society (especially if he is unaware of this inescapable fact). And, most important of all is what was said before, the play is a forum about a specific problem of this society (or an arena where the two opposing forces of this conflict meet). *Going to the theatre, then, is taking part of a one-hour community, a gathering of people (the audience and the actors) that are concerned about a specific question (even if it is the audience of "Cats"). This is something which a literary (that is, individual) appreciation of the text cannot give at all.*

All great thinkers of the art of theatre agree about this. What they actually disagree about, is the nature of this communal experience. Aristotle said that the greatest purpose of the tragedy was to let the spectators identify with the actions of the characters in the plays. Such tragedies would arouse in the audience strong feelings such as "compassion" and "terror". (Needless to say, there has been an enormous controversy in the history of literary and theatrical criticism about what these two words actually mean.) Because the spectator experiences such strong feelings in a vicarious way, through the characters he identifies with, he will be purged of such feelings and go home as a more conscious citizen. This is what he called *catharsis*. Since we are talking of communal rituals, one cannot miss the analogy that the relation character-spectator in the Aristotelian view bears to the sacrificial victim (usually an animal) of so many religious rites around the world.

In the twentieth century a very different view of this "theatrical community" was proposed by the great German director and playwright Bertolt Brecht. He did not miss the relationship that the theatre has to an arena, since this art always displays the clash of two opposing positions. (This is not always crystal-clear, especially in the contemporary theatre. However, when one examines each performance or written play more carefully, this fact can be verified.) As a Marxist revolutionary, he proposed that the coming theatre should present the

class struggle in a way that would make it possible for the audience to understand the mechanisms of capitalism and, as a consequence, feel the need to fight it in order to build a socialist society. (The word “communal” does not really apply to Brecht’s view, since the word “community” implies an equal status among the people who are part of it, whereas the word “society” always implies the separation of its members in different groups, being that the most usual way – but not the only one – to trace divisions in a society, is according to class lines.) In other words, he believed it was the duty of the coming theatre to further the class struggle in order to overcome the stage of capitalism. Since he connected the conflict of the play to the actual class conflict in the capitalistic society, he felt it was worthwhile to have members of different classes in the audience. If the upper-class or bourgeois spectators felt uneasy or angry about the play, and if there was fight and discussion among the audience, this would be a signal that the work was going in the right direction. It is important to state that this should apply not only to the staging of his writings, but of any play, especially the classics. When working upon a classic, a good director should feel its potential to talk about the class struggle in his present society.

A third view was proposed by the French poet, actor and director Antonin Artaud. He believed the theatre should make it possible for the audience to liberate itself from the behaviour and moral constraints of our present society, by connecting it to primitive long-lost impulses. In his poetic language, he said the theatre should bring the plague to the audience, making them feel uneasy about themselves.

There are other views about this question, but I believe I have presented the three most famous and relevant ones.

As for the second question (*Can one say that the theatrical staging of a text is a more authoritarian form of art, since it already gives the spectator not “the text itself”, but an interpretation of it?*), the answer is that a good interpretation of a work of art by a critic, for instance, does not intend to give the final answer to all questions. That goes especially for the director – he is not just an interpreter, but mainly a creative artist. If he is a good artist, he will use his interpretation as a platform to raise more questions, which hopefully should be multiplied by the people who watch the play.

## The director's conception

I have previously discussed about the several possibilities of interpretation that are open for a director that wishes to stage *Hamlet* (psychoanalytical, political, existential, etc.). I have also stated that, when he chooses the path to tackle with this or any other play, this decision does not have to do only with his personal preferences. He is not isolated in space and time, he is part of his society. Even if he wants to fight the prevailing tendencies in his space and time, or just ignore them, he is still related to them. His comprehension of the play will guide all the aesthetic choices concerning the scenic elements of the staging he is about to do. This is what the directors call a *conception*, and now it is time to talk about it.

Although I have talked previously of a *Hamlet* to be staged according to such views as the psychoanalytical and the political ones, this was done rather for didactic purposes. Usually a director does not think: "*I am going to stage a psychoanalytical 'Hamlet'*", since most theatre people are very practical-minded, and thus, are actually reluctant about Theory. The other reason is that words such as "political" and "existential" are too general. They can help somebody who is writing a paper and needs to refer to certain specific stagings or critical works that might be described by such labels. Nevertheless, the task of the director who stages a text that was previously written, and which has many different possibilities, is to actually *orientate it to a specific direction*. This means that he needs to be very precise and concrete about his definitions. As the great Russian director Stanislavski, the forefather of all theatre that was made in the twentieth century, has said: "*In art, there is no 'in general'*". One might think that this could work as a straightjacket, and curb creativity. Actually, it is just the opposite. Directors and actors need a firm, solid platform in order to let their creativity, like a rocket, fly to whatever heights it might be able to reach. This solid platform is reached when the director tries to get to a conclusion concerning *what the story is about*.

"*What is the story about?*" Answering this question is not as simple as it may seem, when one is analyzing a play. Let us take *Romeo and Juliet* as an example. When we are asked that question about this play, our usual tendency is to say the play is about *love*. (Short, laconic answers tend to be the best ones when we are performing such a task. If

one wants a longer answer, we could say it is about love trying to overcome all obstacles.)

Notwithstanding, we have very good criticism about that play, which says it actually is about *civil war*. (For a wordier answer, one can say it is about the destructive interference of a civil war in the most intimate aspects of our private lives – even love.) What was said before about the different possibilities when staging *Hamlet* comes back here. If the director who is staging *Romeo and Juliet* wants to tell a story about love, he will privilege certain aspects of the play: If his goal is to talk about the disgrace of having a civil war, he will focus on other moments and characters.

I believe the example above is an excellent one, because many times, like here, we take the answer for granted, when it is absolutely not. By doing this, a director might lose the possibility of reaching deeper levels in his work. It is also important to state that the greatest masterpieces in the history of drama will not have a single answer (or “*the right answer*”) for that question. *King Lear* and *Hamlet* are the first ones that come to my mind. If one stages *King Lear* in 2005, the best answer for that question will be one; in 2020, the question will most probably require a different answer. This also applies to space coordinates – “*the*” subject in *Lear* is one in Brazil, and probably a different one in Holland.

Of course, this does not apply only to Shakespeare<sup>3</sup>.

I guess by this moment things can get to be more technical. Defining what the play is about means dealing with the word “*conflict*”. As we know, conflict is the quintessence of any sort of theatre. Each and every play is about somebody who is in trouble. In a rather simplistic but not false way of defining it, one could say that, if the playwright deals with the conflict in a funny way, we have a comedy; if it is done in a serious manner, we have drama.

In order to define the subject of the play, the director must first understand what kind of conflict is presented there. There are basically four kinds of conflict:

- 1) MAN x MAN – This is the most basic kind of conflict. The protagonist of the play tries to win his antagonist.
- 2) MAN x SOCIETY – The protagonist is not fighting another person, but the whole society he is living in. His behaviour and his points of view are in clash with the beliefs of the society he lives

in. Henrik Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* is perhaps the most famous example.

- 3) MAN x HIMSELF – In this case, the opponent lies within the character himself. This is what we usually call “inner conflict”: the character wants to do one thing, but is forced by the circumstances to do another; or, even worse, he has two different and strong wishes, which contradict one another.
- 4) MAN x GOD – In this case, the character's conflict is with the whole cosmos – the universe is against him. This conflict can be put in a more personalized way, as in the Greek tragedies, where the protagonist has actually got the gods against him, or in a more abstract way, as in the Theatre of the Absurd. It might sound surprising, but most slapstick comedy is a good example of it, even if it may look primitive. When television's Mister Bean has things going wrong all the time with any object he is dealing with, so that things get worse and worse (he starts frying an egg, and the story evolves to a point where his house explodes), this is a humorous example of the universe conspiring against the character. Samuel Beckett has perceived this marvelously well when he wrote *Waiting for Godot*. In this play we have a series of small and ridiculous conflicts between the characters, as well as their troubles with the objects they are dealing with. In a masterful way, Beckett manages to make this collection of ridiculous incidents lead the spectator to a poignant inquiry into the meaning of existence.

Most plays do not deal exclusively with one kind of conflict. Instead, they are built upon a blend of them. *Hamlet* again, is the best example one can have of a play where the four kinds of conflict overlap. We have *man x man* (Hamlet versus Claudius), *man x society* (Hamlet's character, as well as the education he received in Wittenberg, do not adjust to the Danish court intrigues, as well as to the prevailing medieval mentality of solving conflicts), *man x himself* (the most famous and exploited facet of this play), as well as *man x god*. Possibly, the way Shakespeare has woven all these conflicts together is one of the reasons of both why we are fascinated by it, and why the theatre directors find it so difficult to stage. If this play, or any other, is to come living and meaningful on stage, it is the task of the director to define which con-

flict is the most relevant, and which one is secondary. This is a difficult thing to do, and, as I have said before, the answer may change from time to time, and from country to country. Dealing with this problem may be a source of headaches and frustration, but it is also the reason that makes the art of theatre such a fascinating way of both expressing oneself and trying to resonate and come to grips with the troubles and anxieties of our society.

## Notes

1. Another factor that makes the theatre more intense is the concentration of time. The financial resources of the theatre are amazingly poorer than those of the cinema – no special effects, no montage, no outdoor scenes, fewer actors than in any product of the movie industry. There is not so much to see there – in terms of variety – as in the films. (The variation is up to the artistic skills of the director and the actors.)
2. In this age of global hipercapitalism, where nobody has any spare time to get together with other people, theatre seems definitely “out” as a leisure option for the average people. On the other hand, it is, if not subversive, at least a sane option to this state of things.
3. Around 1998, many plays of Chekhov were staged at the same time in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. One could not talk of a fad – the premieres of these plays happened almost simultaneously. Actually, this is not so mysterious. Probably, many artists felt, either consciously or intuitively, that his plays had to do with the main conflicts of the Brazilian society of that time.

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