

Deconstructing Turning Points

A postscript on the canonization of the avant-garde 1900

WILLMAR SAUTER

ABSTRACT

Deconstructing Turning Points is an attempt to understand why and how the period around the turn of the nineteenth century has been described as a “break-through of modern theatre”. Texts by Gösta M. Bergman, Christopher Innes and Erika Fischer-Lichte about this period are examined in order to see how these authors construct periodization. Leaning towards Thomas Postlewait’s concept of periods and Jacques Derrida’s deconstructive approach to discourse, the article points out some paradigmatic assumptions in the discussed texts. The three authors are not compared – writing in different languages and for different purposes – but some of the underlying paradigms become visible, namely their relation to historical development and their view of theatre as the work of the director. As an alternative, the article turns to archival possibilities. New concepts of what an archive is and can do, as Derrida sees them, open up for a living and challenging relation to archival sources, not just as evidence of prefabricated hypotheses, but as inspiring traces of the past.

KEYWORDS

Historiography, periodization, modernism, avant-garde, development, archive, sources, Postlewait, Derrida.

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The period around the turn of the nineteenth century has been given many names in theatre history. Most frequently the term 'avant-garde' is used in various combinations: 'Theatres of the avant-garde',¹ 'Avant Garde Theatre',² or, more precisely, the first avant-garde.³ In stylistic terms, the period is named 'Hyper-realism and Anti-realism',⁴ or 'Alternatives to Realism'.⁵ The transgression from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries is seen as the end of idealism⁶ or the beginning of 'Performance Art'.⁷ Other labels that are regularly attached to this time contain the word 'modern'⁸ or modernism or speak, more radically, of 'The Breakthrough of Modern Theatre'.⁹ Furthermore, the time slots that are thought to constitute this period vary slightly, beginning in 1875, 1890, 1892, 1896, or simply 1900, and accordingly, the end of the period is set to 1914, 1925, 1935, 1940, and, in rare cases, even later.

Through all these various labels and time brackets speaks the wish to distinguish this period from what was before and, though less distinctly, from what came after it. Thomas Postlewait offers a description of what the naming of a period implies:

The concept of periodization, in its normative if somewhat misleading usage, delineates one aspect of history, the condition of stability (or identity), in relation to another aspect, the process of change (or difference). These two aspects of human events – stability and change – though dynamically interrelated and mutually defining, are organized into a system of classification that allows us to give order and sequence to historical time. Period concepts thus define time as a series of

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1. *Theatre Histories* 2008, 354.
 2. Innes 1993.
 3. Fischer-Lichte 1995.
 4. Wickham 1985, 202.
 5. Brockett 2003, 409.
 6. Here referring to Raymond Williams' terminology.
 7. Goldberg 1979.
 8. Gascoign 1968, 256.
 9. Bergman 1966.

synchronic identities rather than as a diachronic process. The continuous flow of time is organized into heuristic categories. As episodes of our creation, periods are interpretative ideas of order that regulate meaning.¹⁰

Postlewait points out a dichotomy between stability, which could also be termed as continuity, and change, i.e. turning points, as two basic attitudes towards theatre historiography. In the following, I will take a closer look at these 'interpretative ideas of order' that authors offer in their attempts to characterize the time around 1900 as a new and crucial era in theatre history. The question arises of how such a distinction between continuity and turning points can be made fruitful and productive. I will focus on books that are entirely or in part devoted to this period, namely those by Christopher Innes, Erika Fischer-Lichte and Gösta M. Bergman. While I am well aware that these three texts are incommensurable, I considered them because they represent a broad variety of aspects: Bergman writes a whole book about this period, Innes uses the early avant-garde as a backdrop for the second avant-garde, and Fischer-Lichte's text is only a short introduction to an anthology. Thus, they have different aims, are written in three different languages and address different readerships. For exactly these reasons I want those books to answer some questions.

Why did these authors transform this period into a period? What were the paradigms of theatre historiography when these books were written? How did they select their archival materials from the mass of historical information? The priorities given to certain periods and aspects, the choices that the authors have made, the areas they have privileged, and, consequently, the implicit omissions must be analysed. This also includes a closer look at the motives and aims which these authors – mostly tacitly – presume and teleologically apply in their texts. The three authors' use of terms such as modernism and avant-garde are here of interest, not my own ideas of these concepts. I will examine their approach to the origin and significance of modernism and modernity in the light of Thomas Postlewait's methodological considerations of the criteria of periodization in theatre histories.¹¹ This includes, to begin with, a critical analysis of these texts, and secondly an investigation of the paradigms that these historiographers were subjected to; in a third section the three authors' relationship to archival work will be traced in order to see whether new ways of approaching the archive are possible or even necessary. Postlewait and Derrida will be my learned guides, although I will not always follow their advice literally. My aim is not to establish a 'new' theory of modernism, or the avant-garde; rather my contribution seeks the theoretical frames in which these terms or labels have been established and applied.

10. Postlewait 2009, 157.

11. Postlewait 2009, 155-195.

GÖSTA M. BERGMAN

Let me begin with Gösta M. Bergman who, as early as 1966, published a study of some 500 pages on innovations in European theatre between 1890 and 1925.¹² He entitled his book, 'The Breakthrough of Modern Theatre', and this is exactly what he aimed to show. In his first chapter, he brings up the discussions about the conventions of theatre seen over the centuries since the Middle Ages. "Theatre always contains a certain measure of enchantment, a suggestive power that makes the spectator believe, accept, and experience the illusion of the stage as photographic reality or unreal beauty," states Bergman.¹³ However, this enchantment is broken at some point and audiences demand new ways of being involved in the actions on stage. He finds three such turning points in the history of theatre: the Italian Renaissance with its perspectival illusion, the mid-eighteenth century when the Baroque era is substituted with the (pre-)romantic demands of exactitude concerning history, geography and nature, and a third turning point occurs around 1900 when we see "the reactions against illusionistic theatre, and when theatre reformers in holy rage swiped the stage clean from the rubbish of illusionism to erect new scaffolds of fantasy."¹⁴

This crucial period around 1900 is metaphorically described as a three-stage rocket. The launching pad is the symbolist theatre in Paris in the 1890s. The second step occurs around 1910, when re-theatricalization is called for all around Europe. The third phase comes in the 1920s when the breakthrough is completed by "Copeau, Jouvet, Dullin, Pitoëff, Baty in Paris – expressionism, political theatre, and the Bauhaus group in Germany – the new theatre of the Soviet Union – Per Lindberg, Knut Ström, Olof Molander, and the modernist stage designers in Sweden."¹⁵ This tripartite structure is not visible in the table of contents of the book, but it indicates a view that privileges transitions rather than abrupt breaks. Bergman starts from Antonin Antoine's *Théâtre Libre* and proceeds through all major countries of Europe, step by step bringing up all the today well-known directors, stage designers, and playwrights of the period. A dominant place in the book is reserved to Gordon Craig, who Bergman knew personally and therefore had access to many unpublished sketches and notes of his *mise-en-scène*. The book ends with the magnificent, colourful productions at the Stockholm Opera in the early 1920s. Bergman's particular 'interpretative ideas of order' avoid pinpointing one exact turning point that caused radical change, but as his metaphor of the three-stage rocket illustrates, modernism gradually grew out of the changing traditions of the foregoing period.

According to Gösta M. Bergman, the changes were facilitated by the technical innovations of the time, such as the electric lighting systems, the revolving stage, projections, and photography as well as other devices that improved the three-dimensional perception of the stage. He published his book at a point

12. Bergman 1966.

13. Bergman 1966, 11.

14. *Ibid.*

15. Bergman 1966, 9.

in time when the aesthetic dominance of the innovative advances of the turn of the century were still very much present on the stages of Europe. Being a former theatre practitioner,¹⁶ Bergman was aware of these links: “Much of what happened then, as well as many of the ideas and experiments, have again become of immediate interest for the inquiring theatre of today.”¹⁷ In the mid-1960s, the free group-movement was only about to begin; Performance Art was not yet a term in theatre circles; post-modernism lay ahead of time. Despite some Happenings in the fringes, the stages of the European metropolises mirrored, to a large extent, the aesthetics that emanated from the transitions of staging practices around 1900 that Bergman portrays in his book.

Historiographically speaking, Bergman’s book is deeply rooted in his contemporary discourse of the aesthetic and technical precursors of what, at the time, was perceived as modernity, both in respect of the arts and of society at large. Bergman saw the innovations of stage technologies as a condition for a number of brilliant artists to take decisive steps towards a modern aesthetics.

CHRISTOPHER INNES

In contrast to Bergman, Christopher Innes’ book, *Avant Garde Theatre 1892 – 1992*, offers an explicit turning point.¹⁸ He states that “[p]erhaps paradoxically, what defines this avant garde movement is not overtly modern qualities, such as the 1920s romance of technology [...] but primitivism.”¹⁹ Thus, his definition of the avant-garde emanates not from the analysis of the works themselves, but from his bird-eye’s view of the period. Innes constructs a paradigmatic common denominator, which is primitivism. He is not unaware of the complexity of this term, deriving from colonial imperialism and almost always seen “through a western, contemporary prism.”²⁰ But primitivism represents two crucial features of the avant-garde:

This [primitivism] has two complementary facets: the exploration of dream states or the instinctive and subconscious levels of the psyche; and the quasi-religious focus on myth and magic, which in the theatre leads to experiments with ritual and ritualistic patterns of performance. These are integrated not only by the Jungian concept that all figures of myth are contained in the unconscious as expressions of psychological archetypes, but also by the idea that symbolic or mythopoetic thinking precedes language and discursive reason, revealing fun-

16. Bergman had been the executive director of Sweden’s largest theatre company for 25 years prior to his return to the academic field in 1958. Cf *Changing Perspectives*. 2016, 21-30.

17. Bergman 1966, 9.

18. Innes 1993. An earlier version of this book had been published under the title *Holy Theatre* by Cambridge University Press in 1981.

19. Innes 1993, 3.

20. Ibid.

damental aspects of reality that are unknowable by any other means. Both are variations of the same aim: to return to man's 'roots', whether in the psyche or prehistory.²¹

This is Innes' basic assumption, which he theoretically relates to Michail Bakunin and his short-lived, anarchist journal, *L'Avant-Garde* from 1878, and to Michail Bakhtin's work on Medieval carnivals and, in particular, on Rabelais. This assumption also includes a strong 'anti' towards art traditions as well as against the (bourgeois) society, which, nevertheless, to a large extent, constituted the avant-garde's audience. In Innes' concept of the avant-garde, its innovative aesthetics always carry an anti-establishment sentiment, giving it a pointed political meaning.

For Innes, the avant-garde movement is divided into two parts. The core of his book concerns the theatre laboratories of the 1960s and 1970s – Grotowski, Brook – whereas the early avant-garde is seen as a forerunner: a more 'primitive' stadium of the adoption of the primitive, which only covers one fourth of the book's text. Antonin Artaud and his theatre of cruelty constructed the bridge that leads from the first to the second avant-garde.

While Gösta M. Bergman describes the advent of modernity as a gradual transition – his three-stage-rocket – Christopher Innes has the ambition to isolate certain theatrical activities around the turn of the nineteenth century as an absolute turning point. In order to place the roots of the later avant-garde in the late nineteenth century, he needs a definitive historical turn. Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* provides the date and place of an origin that appears as anti-modern, anti-rationalist, anti-social. The concept of primitivism turns the avant-garde movement away from modernism. Primitivism, which, at the time when the book was written, dominated the agenda of art historians interested in naïvism, cubism, etc., constitutes for Innes a total break with the conventions of the nineteenth century. In his analyses, Innes uses formalist criteria that were applicable to the artworks and their creators. Thomas Postlewait characterizes this approach in the following way:

To the extent that a formalist analysis of artworks attends to any historical information, the period concepts in drama, theatre, opera, and dance are derived usually in one of three ways: (1) they are developed out of direct formal analysis of recurring as well as changing stylistic traits [...], (2) they are identified with a dominant artist of the time [...], or (3) they are borrowed and adapted from another field of study, such as general history, art history or musical history [...].²²

These categories apply directly to Innes' account of the origin of the avant-garde. Postlewait's second category on leading names are frequent in both Bergman's and Innes' books. Despite their different attitudes towards continuity and breaks, I realize that they share a common interest in singling out

21. Ibid.

22. Postlewait 2009, 177.

this particular epoch from the late nineteenth century to the first quarter of the twentieth century as a distinct, identifiable, and important period of innovation and change in theatre history.

ERIKA FISCHER-LICHTE

This aim is shared by Erika Fischer-Lichte in her introduction to the anthology *TheaterAvantgarde* from 1995, although she argues it from a social point of view.²³ The title of her opening chapter is programmatic: “Perception – Body – Language: Cultural Change and Theatre Avant-garde.”²⁴ She states:

During the first decades of the twentieth century, a radical cultural change took place in Europe, which permanently shattered traditional perception, patterns of thinking and acting in quotidian domestic life as well as in employment, leisure, science and art, which lead to completely new ways of behaviour. These changes concerned in particular perception, body and language.²⁵

Referring to the technical innovations of the nineteenth century such as steam engines, telegraphy, photography, phonography, film, and automobiles, Fischer-Lichte observes radical changes in everyday life, especially in the big cities, that have provoked new modes of sensory perception. Speed, simultaneity, and Einstein’s observations on relativity in science had become dominant factors in Western civilization, which eventually also affected the liberation of the body from the tight corsets of fashions and an opening of the narrow living quarters of industrialization. Hygiene, sports, hiking tours, naked swimming, social dancing such as Charleston and Shimmy were propagated and practiced. Fischer-Lichte also relates to a crisis of language, predicted already by Friedrich Nietzsche and emphasized by competing means of communication such as film, pictures, gramophones, even the body, and, later on, the spoken language of radio. All these changes have deeply affected both society at large and the arts in particular. She gives a number of examples from various art forms including impressionist painting, atonal music, rhythmic body exercises, and sound poetry.

The triadic relationship between perception, body, and language is, according to Fischer-Lichte, also constitutive for theatre: spectator, actor, and dramatic text, a tripartite scheme that her colleague Helmar Schramm had argued for earlier.²⁶ Therefore it is obvious that the changes in civil society also affected the art of theatre. On the following pages, Fischer-Lichte argues for her hypothesis:

23. Fischer-Lichte, 1995, 1-14.

24. ‘Wahrnehmung – Körper – Sprache. Kultureller Wandel und Theateravantgarde’. All translations from German are mine. Wandel is here translated as ‘change’, but the term could also be referred to as ‘mutation’.

25. Fischer-Lichte 1995, 1.

26. Schramm, 1996. Later in her text, Fischer-Lichte refers to Schramm, albeit to one of his earlier texts.

When the changes in theatre are analysed from changing perspectives and problems, it should be possible to sketch – implicitly and explicitly – models of cultural changes. Our hypothesis is, accordingly, that theatre history can be understood and described as cultural history, provided that we choose the intertwining relationship of perception, body, and language.²⁷

This approach brings Fischer-Lichte close to what Thomas Postlewait calls a social or cultural history of theatre. In her introduction, Fischer-Lichte avoids the pitfall that Postlewait has frequently observed, i.e. a dichotomy between the “formal history of artistic and philosophical cultures and their social condition”.²⁸ Furthermore, Fischer-Lichte has no claims that the following chapters would represent the period (specified as 1900-1935) in its entirety. On the contrary, she states that “partiality [is] a condition of suchlike theatre histories.”²⁹ However, the authors have been animated to, and have also followed up on, the basic concept of exemplifying the hypothesis by emphasising at least one of the key terms perception, body, and language.³⁰

The crucial question in this context concerns the argumentative relationship between the social and cultural conditions of the time, on the one side, and the innovative artistic practices of the period, on the other side. Are these simultaneous changes – mutations – merely to be understood as coincidental or is there a strictly causal pattern? Are the new concepts of perception, body, and language the cause of avant-garde theatre? If they are not the immediate cause – in a logical sense – are they at least the necessary preconditions that made possible the radical changes the avant-garde presented during those decades? If this is so, it would imply that the avant-garde, despite its variety of artistic expressions, can be reduced to a common denominator, an overarching definition that applies to the avant-garde as such. As the title of Fischer-Lichte’s introduction indicates, the common basis of the early avant-garde can be found in the artists’ relation to perception/spectator, body/actor and language/drama, which, in turn, are highly dependent on the social changes in society.

POSTLEWAIT PLUS DERRIDA

Why are historical periods established in historiography? Who establishes them and for what purposes? These questions have to be addressed here. Thomas Postlewait discusses various answers in his chapter on ‘The criteria

27. Fischer-Lichte 1995, 12: “Unsere Hypothese lautet entsprechend, dass Theatergeschichte sich als Kulturgeschichte verstehen und beschreiben lässt, wenn als Bezugspunkt das Wechselverhältnis von Wahrnehmung, Körper und Sprache gewählt wird.“

28. Postlewait 2009, 165.

29. Fischer-Lichte 1995, 13.

30. I have myself contributed a chapter to this volume, so any critical remarks here include my own writings.

for periodization in theatre history: definitive categories for events,' which provides an exemplary overview of the problems involved in all kinds of period concepts.³¹ His distinction between formal studies and cultural/societal approaches is fully applicable to the histories of the avant-garde that have been presented here. Causal explanations, or accidental circumstances, or mere sketches of a 'background' are thought to serve as possible frames of what constitutes a period. It has also become obvious that 'synchronic' processes are only of interest when they describe parallel events in various countries, but are neglected in relation to popular theatrical activities that attracted large audiences next door to avant-garde experiments. Every theatre historian is of necessity part of a larger discourse, which points towards preferred modes of thinking and arguing.

As mentioned above, the doubling of historiographic practice must be taken into consideration, i.e. the ideas that the authors promote in their own writings versus the world of ideas they write about. The congruence between the 'now' of the historiographer and the 'then' of the topic has to be questioned. Jacques Derrida has proposed ways of analysing the doublings of such discourses when he suggests a deconstruction of the discourses:

The quality and the fecundity of a discourse are perhaps measured by the critical rigor with which this relation to the history of metaphysics and to inherited concepts is thought. Here it is a question both of a critical relation to the language of the social sciences and a critical responsibility of the discourse itself. It is a question of explicitly and systematically posing the problem of the status of a discourse which borrows the resources necessary for the de-construction of that heritage itself.³²

According to Derrida, it is not enough to get a grip on the historical parameters of the past, but also the period of the writing itself has to be considered. In this brief study of some books about modernism and the avant-garde, this implies a closer look into at least some historiographical premises of the periods in which these writings were established. For instance: we are still so familiar with the stage director as the maker of theatre that we neglect that the dominance of the director during the 'time of writing' deeply steered the scholars' attention towards this profession (irrespective of its actual significance around 1900). More details will follow later.

Derrida mentions the 'relation to the history of metaphysics' in order to underline that historiography represents a world of meanings in which historical traces are easily reduced to indications of a past. In an interview from 1971, Derrida deals explicitly with historiographical issues and its meaning-making metaphysics, and he states the following:

The metaphysical character of the concept of history is not only linked to linear-

31. Postlewait 2009, 157-195.

32. Derrida 1978, 282.

ity, but to an entire *system* of implications (teleology, eschatology, elevating and interiorizing accumulation of meaning, a certain type of traditionality, a certain concept of continuity, of truth, etc.). [...] It has happened that I have spoken very quickly of a “metaphysical concept.” But I have never believed that there were *metaphysical concepts in and of themselves*. No concept is by itself, and consequently in and of itself, metaphysical, outside all the textual work in which it is inscribed. This explains why, although I have formulated many reservations about the “metaphysical” concept of history, I very *often* use the word “history” in order to reinscribe its force and in order to produce another concept or conceptual chain of “history”: in effect a “monumental, stratified, contradictory” history; a history that also implies a new logic of *repetition* and the *trace*, for it is difficult to see how there could be a history without it.³³

What Derrida points out here are some concepts with far-reaching consequences for historiographic writing, namely linearity and repetition. These concepts represent nothing less than belief systems for historians (and others): do they believe in progress and development, or does history consist of basically repetitive processes? This is why the ‘metaphysical character’ places historiographers in the discourses of their time.³⁴ Derrida seems to favour a writing of history that breaks away from linear time concepts and reflects upon historical traces of repetitions. Derrida encourages me to take a deeper look into the discourses that influenced historical accounts of past periods. His logic requires me to point out at least some of the tropes of paradigmatic significance that steered the view of the avant-garde in the time range between Bergman’s book from 1966 and Fischer-Lichte’s introductory chapter from 1995. What were the leading principles of historiography during these three decades of the twentieth century?

THE PARADIGMS OF PERIODIZATION

I will briefly touch upon some prevalent paradigms of theatre historiography that can be detected in the writings of Bergman, Innes, and Fischer-Lichte – as well as in many other histories of theatre – which I consider as being significant of theatre and performance research during the late twentieth century. These paradigms concern the idea of ‘development’ in terms of decay and renewal, the enthusiasm about the ‘new’ profession of the director, and last, but not the least, the personal interests in contemporary theatre that propelled the writings of the authors discussed here.

Since the time when Charles Darwin published his seminal work, *On the Origin of Species*, in 1859,³⁵ theories of evolutionary development have spread out over all disciplines of academic research. The idea that superior species

33. Derrida 1981, 57. Italics and quotation marks in original.

34. The relation between linear and cyclic time has been discussed in my contribution “Cyclic Perseverance and Linear Mobility” (Sauter 2010).

35. Darwin, 1859.

would survive whereas inferior plants, animals, and 'races' were deemed to vanish, was rapidly adopted and applied to the politics of colonialism, to the explanation of ruthless capitalism, to comparative studies of human 'races', and eventually, also to so-called cultural development. The evolutionary perspective on changes in cultural history as a progression from the simple 'organism' to more advanced forms of culture became a dominating explanatory force in the interpretation of past phenomena of the arts. These ideas seem to be contradictory to the parallel historical paradigms of positivism, according to which, historical research should describe the past 'wie es eigentlich gewesen ist', as Leopold Ranke proclaimed early in the nineteenth century – to account for history as it really happened. Although many historians accepted August Comte's, in 1830, published axioms of rigorous reliance on verifiable sources, the ideas of a cultural evolution were pursued by means of a drastic selection of source material that suited the overall aims of displaying culture as an evolutionary force in human history.

The discourse of development as an evolutionary progression from one period to the next has triggered a one-sided interest in innovations and novelties. In order to highlight, for instance, the Renaissance, the preceding period of the Middle Ages had to be darkened, emphasizing Feudalism, the Plague, the Witch Hunt, religious intolerance, etc. – phenomena that actually dominated the seventeenth century, long after than before the time of Shakespeare. This selective strategy also applies to the authors discussed in this essay. The theatre of the nineteenth century is described as a dull, preparatory period, slowly advancing towards the 'Breakthrough of Modern Theatre'. Bergman at least deals with some instances of the period before this breakthrough could take place; Fischer-Lichte is fascinated by the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century that facilitated the new experiences of perception, body and language. Innes insists on the 'anti'-movement of the avant-garde that turned not only against previously appreciated forms of theatre, but also against parallel, 'less-innovative' phenomena that Bergman very well accepts as expressions of modernism. However, all of them see the period around 1900 exclusively from the vantage point of innovations, renewal, and progress.

The selective processes that the authors follow rely largely on the particular discourse of the time in which these studies were published. An interesting case could be made in relation to the Austrian dramatist Arthur Schnitzler, who wrote a series of controversial plays between 1893 and 1924, in which contemporary tensions between social classes, the military and civilians, men and women, Jews and gentiles, etc. were displayed in sophisticated, modern manners. While Gösta M. Bergman very well sees the innovative power of Schnitzler's dramatic interventions and frequently relates his plays to the impressionist sensibility of the *fin de siècle* sentiments, Schnitzler is only mentioned in passing by two contributors in Fischer-Lichte's anthology, Gabrielle Brandstetter and Hans-Peter Bayerdörfer,³⁶ whereas Innes perspective of 'primitivism'

36. Fischer-Lichte 1995, 140 and 256.

has no place for Schnitzler. Selection on the one hand, and preferences on the other, decide whether certain names will be discussed, mentioned or omitted. As this case shows, the inclusion or exclusion of various names, phenomena or circumstances are not a matter of chronology, but depend invariably upon the choices an individual author makes within the dominating discourses.

Another significant example is provided by a book not mentioned so far, but which is also a prominent example of the historiography of modernism in theatre and performance. I am referring to RoseLee Goldberg's important book, *Performance Art*, with the subtitle, 'From Futurism to the Present'³⁷. This book was originally published in 1979 and reprinted in 1988 and 2001, so the 'present' of the subtitle refers to various additions that Goldberg has edited accordingly. Interesting, from my perspective, are the arguments that Goldberg poses as the origin of Performance Art. Futurism as a movement can be said to begin with the manifesto by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, published in *Le Figaro* on 20 February 1909. But Goldberg is eager to point out that Marinetti lived in Paris between 1893 and 1896, in close contact with Alfred Jarry, among others. When Jarry's *Ubu Roi* was presented in Paris under spectacular circumstances in December 1896, Marinetti had already returned to Italy, but the influence of Jarry's circle around the magazine *Le Plume* was lasting. Soon after the publication of Marinetti's scandalous manifesto in 1909, he succeeded in staging his own *Roi Bombance* at the same theatre in Paris in which Jarry's famous piece was performed thirteen years earlier. Thus, Goldberg shows how tightly interwoven the futurists were with the one overshadowing occasion that for many scholars indicates the beginning of the avant-garde: *Ubu Roi* by Alfred Jarry. The need to find a beginning seems fundamental to developmental approaches to history, contrary to Derrida's claim that a beginning is only a 'difference' in relation to a previous history.

Exclusions as well as inclusions follow programmatic preferences, although the authors do not explicitly refer to them. A particular role is attributed to directors. These made their appearance much earlier in the nineteenth century, but then, around 1900, a few great names attracted the attention of the theatre researchers of the late twentieth century. In books that focus on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the primary interest is partly the dramatists of the period – from Lessing and Diderot to Hauptmann and Zola – and partly the great actors and actresses of the time. There is no doubt that performers were the leading role on stage: dramatists were writing plays and operas for distinguished actors and, not least, actresses such as Sarah Bernhardt or Eleonora Duse, and audiences went to the theatre to experience these big, international stars as well as their local counterparts. With the emergence of naturalism and an aesthetics of the fourth wall, the celebrated performer was not fashionable any longer in the eyes of the critics, but still beloved by other spectators. This struggle between the advocates of the creative stage director, on the one side, and the stardom of the divas, on the other, was also adopted by theatre re-

37. Goldberg 1979 (later editions 1988 and 2001).

search. In books on modernism and the avant-garde, the lists of directors are endless – Bergman seems not to have forgotten a single one of Europe's new directors – whereas performers are hardly ever mentioned.

Of course, this priority given to the stage director reflects the theatrical practices of the time when the research was carried out. Except for a few outstanding examples, such as Max Reinhardt, Konstantin Stanislavski, or Jacques Copeau, directors were not the talk of town before the 1930s. Before this period, the relationship between directors and actors was rather tense insofar as the performers still considered the role on stage as their property, something they were in charge of and would execute according to their own understanding of the part. However, when Bergman, for example, describes the theatre between 1890 and 1925 from his perspective from 1966, the director had already 'won' the struggle and was generally accepted as the creator of a theatrical performance. The performers had to give in to the wishes of a director who was made responsible also for the interpretation of the fictional characters. In the writings of the late twentieth century, the dominant position of the stage director is retrospectively applied to the theatre of an earlier period.

This privileging of the director goes hand in hand with the selective processes mentioned above. Only productions by prolific directors came into the focus of research, whereas the 'regular' shows were loved by the audiences, but not by the contemporary critics, and thus not by later scholars. In addition, entire genres of theatrical events were omitted. Few are the comedies that are written about, not to speak of operettas, cabarets and such-like 'simple' entertainments. A closer look into the archives reveals, however, that many of the productions of these genres employed just as advanced technologies and designs as any of the avant-gardist directors. In this way, a particular canon has been developed which very much equals Postlewait's criteria of periodization, namely the identification of periods with certain names.

While the scholars under discussion here obviously are deeply rooted in the discourses of the time of their writings, they also seem to have had personal attitudes and reasons for the choices they have made. Regarding Gösta M. Bergman, I have already mentioned his career as managing director of Sweden's largest theatre enterprise, Riksteatern, which, at its height, had 30 ensembles that were travelling around Sweden at the same time. During the 25 years of his engagement with Riksteatern, from its inception in 1933 to his promotion as professor of theatre history at Stockholm University in 1958, he also experienced the move of the stage director to the centre of production. In the mid-1960s, when his book about the breakthrough of modern theatre was written, stage design and technology were also greatly indebted to the advances of the turn of the century. In a sense, Bergman was analysing the becoming of the theatre that he himself had experienced in his career as practitioner.

In the case of Christopher Innes, it is worthwhile to remember that a first version of his book was published as early as 1981 under the title of *Holy Theatre*. At this point, a number of avant-garde groups had reached the zenith of

their activities, often with a ritualistic touch inspired by Jerzy Grotowski's theatre laboratory. Teaching in Toronto, Canada, he also includes the productions of student performances, which certainly stimulated research into the 'origin' of avant-garde movements. It seemed to be reasonable to transfer the inspiration from African art to the ritualistic elements of the avant-garde theatre.³⁸ Thus, a personal interest coincided with an existing discourse and resulted in a particular perspective of theatre history.

Erika Fischer-Lichte has, in many of her articles and books, focused on the theatre of the late twentieth century, from the so-called Second Avant-garde and Happenings to Performance Art, installations, post-dramatic performances, Robert Wilson's experimental rendering of classical plays, and so forth. Of course, the tremendous repertoire of the many theatres and other sites of performance in Berlin offer a rich palette of contemporary theatre and performance that Fischer-Lichte could take advantage of. These contemporary theatre experiences have, in turn, inspired research into the 'origins' of the avant-garde as well as productions of Max Reinhardt and guest performances from Asia that, in turn, inspired artists in the West around 1900.³⁹

All the authors discussed here have written books that are related to other periods than the ones scrutinized in this article. All of them are open and very knowledgeable theatre scholars, acclaimed members of the discipline of theatre and performance studies. Nevertheless, when they turn their attention to the theatrical events of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the discourses of their own time, their fascination with the numerous creators – i.e. stage directors – in the history of these years, and their personal interests in contemporary theatre and performance, become the guiding lines of their research. As a result, they created one-sided, selective, and exclusive histories called modernism and/or avant-garde. The synchronic side-view into other genres, the continuity of traditional practices, the conventions of audience behaviour, and the artistic advances in popular theatre – all this is sorted out in order to distil a clean and sparkling past of the theatre of their own interest. Of course, this was the aim of their respective books, and there was certainly no intention to hide other historical traces, but in effect, the books have created a canonical iconography of the period that overshadows other views of the recent past.

TOWARDS THE ARCHIVE

Are other views of European theatre history around 1900 possible? One could say that if these authors had paid more attention to the archives, they would have seen other phenomena and events. But before such claims are made, a quick follow-up of the three authors' references to archival work is appropriate.

In the case of Gösta M. Bergman, the archival approach is quite straight forward: he has built his descriptions on frequent visits to all the archives he

38. See for example Gillian 1993.

39. Her contribution to the volume under discussion is entitled: *Inszenierung des Fremden*, i.e. Staging the other.

could reach physically – in the 1960s there were no digital platforms to inquire about the material traces of past performances. Of course, he also used editions of letters and reviews, published memoirs, and other printed sources that were available in the libraries of Stockholm. He went to southern France to interview Gordon Craig, he went to Moscow to get access to original sketches of stage and costume designs, and so forth. Nevertheless, his aim was to describe the novelties of the time, so whatever seemed to be traditional was omitted. This selection is particularly obvious when it comes to the Swedish archives, where the sources are abundant. Here, particular genres and renowned personalities – mainly writers and dramatists – were privileged at the expense of those genres and personalities that did not fit into Bergman's concept of modernity.

Christopher Innes' primary concerns in his book on the avant-garde are the experiments and theatre laboratories beginning with Artaud. The first chapters about primitivism and the early avant-garde serve as a background to the following discussions of myth and ritual in the theatre of the middle of the twentieth century. In terms of references and footnotes, this means that the chapter on those beginnings only number 29 footnotes, while the chapter on Artaud contains 92 footnotes. The sources of the early years are the edited plays by and some scholarly publications about the forerunners of avant-garde theatre, represented mainly by Alfred Jarry and August Strindberg, with a few additional reviews of performances. Innes seems to have trusted the evidence of other scholars in order to follow his own theoretical approach via primitivism. A useful comparison can be found in Postlewait's analysis of the circumstances of Jarry's *Ubu Roi* in his book on Theatre Historiography, in which he studies the evidence of this mystified performance in detail.⁴⁰ Innes is not interested in the exact context of the Ubu-production, but utilizes the traditional rendering of Jarry's significance in other publications as a suitable starting point for his own approach to the avant-garde.

In Erika Fischer-Lichte's introduction to *TheaterAvantgarde*, the fourteen-page text sets the framework for this collective anthology. Although she refers to a number of theatrical events, she felt no need to go into archival details. Her ambition to show the connection between perception, body and language as significant changing concepts between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries represents a free-standing, personal outlook of this period. Some general references to books about the body, Nietzsche's and Hoffmannthal's collected works as well as her own earlier writings suffice to build her argument. Most of her statements about the social conditions of the time are assumed to be general knowledge. That makes this introduction an inspiring text, but not the result of thorough research in the archives. However, I have to add, that her own contribution to this volume about the influence of Asian concepts of theatricality on the productions of Max Reinhardt and other theatre avant-gardists contains extensive references to both archival evidence and prior scholarly publications. Nevertheless, her selection of these references keeps strictly to

40. Postlewait 2009, 60-85.

the avant-garde genres, while traditional productions – even by Reinhardt – are left out.

In summary: Bergman went to the archives himself, Innes trusted his colleagues and Fischer-Lichte refers to her other texts. There are archival traces, but the histories told remained utterly selective and exclusive. In other words, going to the archives is not enough. At this point I would like to once more return to Jacques Derrida and his view of historical research geared towards the archives. As we know, the past has left many traces for us. But they are not so easily accessible as we might think. In his famous essay, 'Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression', Derrida makes numerous attempts to distinguish between accessibility in the physical and in the mental sense.⁴¹ Discussing, among many other things, Freud's death drive, which, in relation to the archive becomes archiviolithic, a petrified archive, Derrida explains the unintended effects:

As inheritance, it leaves only its erotic simulacrum, its pseudonym in painting, its sexual idols, its masks of seduction: lovely impressions. These impressions are perhaps the very origin of what is so obscurely called the beauty of the beautiful. As memoirs of death.⁴²

What Derrida describes here, with reference to the Freudian archive, can very well be interpreted as a metaphor for the petrifying labelling of periods, genres, and styles – also with regard to theatre archives. Those archives can become 'memoirs of death' unless they are kept alive through ongoing interrogations of the traces of the past. This questioning concerns not only the subject who is asking, but also the moment in which these questions are raised. There is a profound difference between the scholar approaching the archive with fully developed hypotheses and thus searching for confirmation in available evidence – or whether the scholar is prepared to explore the archival sources without predetermined ideas of what the outcome might be. This is why Derrida speaks of spectres that haunt the archive – everything is already embedded in a history of its own, a history that is equally important to the understanding of each archival item.

In the first place because the structure of the archive is spectral. It is spectral a priori: neither present nor absent "in the flesh", neither visible nor invisible, a trace always referring to another whose eyes can never be met, no more than those of Hamlet's father, thanks to the possibility of a visor. Also, the spectral motif stages this disseminating fission from which the archontic principle, and the concept of the archive, and the concept in general suffer, from the principle on.⁴³

Each item that we find in an archive leads to another item. Liz Stanley elabo-

41. Derrida 1995.

42. Derrida 1995, 14.

43. Derrida 1995, 54.

rates on Derrida's approach to the archive from a broad perspective, including both his earlier and later writings on this topic, and concludes that "placed in its intellectual context, *Archive Fever* contributes importantly to the Derridian intellectual toolkit, which is as much methodological as theoretical and provides the means for close interrogation of memory, the trace and inscription."⁴⁴ Our approach to the archive needs to become explorative rather than confirmative. To consult the archives just in order to evidence prefabricated views is absolutely counterproductive in terms of a broad understanding of cultural phenomena of a certain time. Through questions to the material traces of the past, the archives can be opened and reveal unknown treasures. The narratives of history then become multiple and complementary instead of the master narrative of an epoch or period, decorated with big labels and impressive terms.

ADDITIONS, COMPLETIONS, SUPPLEMENTS

I think the series of articles in this volume of *Nordic Theatre Studies* demonstrates what a more dynamic and less selective study of archival evidence can achieve in order to gain a more complete picture of the theatre during the period around 1900. First of all, a number of genres have been included that traditionally are left out in surveys of modernism, namely dance, operettas, female playwrights, and private theatre enterprises. Some categories of theatrical agents have been included such as celebrated actresses and dominating theatre entrepreneurs. Moreover, audiences have become visible, both in their collective experiences of the repertoire of the time and as individuals, mainly represented by the writing reviewers whose documentation of their interpretations of theatrical events can mainly be found in the archives.

The archival evidence of reviews has hitherto mainly been utilized as complementary sources of the productions as such. In several studies of this volume, the authors have discussed the writings of male and female reviewers as documents of spectating, i.e. as the spectators' struggle to understand and evaluate what they have seen. This approach opens a new spectrum of theatre historiography, a view of theatre as communication. Communication of a very different kind is represented in the study of the contracts that were established between employer and employee, creating the conditions under which theatrical productions could be achieved. How these conditions influenced the private lives of artists is shown in the correspondence between Sweden's monarch and a baroness, worrying about the social transgression of an actress from the public stage to a noble family. Memoires and letters are related to archival documents to prove their relevance for historiographical accounts; a closer look into the latter category reveals that historians frequently copy statements of earlier historiographers without consulting the archives for relevant evidence.

This group of researchers has re-visited the archives in search of those traces of history that could widen the traditional focus on modernism and the avant-garde. This does not mean that the 'old' books are worthless, on the

44. Stanley, 2016, 147.

contrary: they have collected their materials which, however, proved to be very selective. When one intends, as we did, to draw a broader picture of theatre and dance during those years, new questions and new sources have to be explored. The articles in this volume give a hint of what can be gained when such possibilities are made use of, even though some dust has covered the traces of the past.

Our approach accepts very well the notion that the history of theatre contains turning points such as the emergence of an avant-garde, but these turning points were embedded in a broad stream of continuing aesthetics and enduring conventions. The distinction between stability and change, that Thomas Postlewait suggests, is certainly applicable, but not in a linear sense; on the contrary – stability, tradition, continuity go hand in hand with change, innovation, and turning points. Continuity and turning points are not opposed to each other. The postmodern paradigms of the late twentieth century have suggested a deconstructive view of theatre historiography – not to repeat Ranke's 'wie es eigentlich gewesen ist', but to re-turn to those archival traces that illuminate the parallel movements of historical changes. History is a never-ending story of re-writing the stories of history.

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AUTHOR

Willmar Sauter is professor emeritus of Theatre Studies at Stockholm University. He has written about theatre history from the Bronze Age to digital performance. His latest book in this field is *The Theatre of Drottningholm – Then and Now* (2014, with David Wiles). Based on empirical audience and reception studies (*Teaterögon* 1986, *Shylock* 2010, with Yael Feiler) he has developed a holistic concept of theatre, published in *The Theatrical Event* (2000) and *Eventness* (2008). He has served the International Federation for Theatre Research (IFTR) as president and Stockholm University as Dean. He is presently participating in various historical projects and working groups.