

Betraying the Narrative:

Wrongfooting ideology in theatrical performance

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Abstract

In her thesis *Character, Actor and Anti-character* Louise Soule looks at the relationship between character and actor in dramatic performance, with particular reference to an entity she calls the *anti-character* which embodies the dialectical conflict between the two. Her definitive example of this is the role of Rosalind in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. Here the fictional character (Rosalind) is undermined by the intrusion of the person of the Elizabethan boy actor into the text.

This dissertation builds on many of the points in Soule's thesis as it examines the relationship between narrative, as it occurs in performance, and ideology. It considers character as being one of three primary components of narrative, the other two being specific location and coherent sequence of time, and it looks at how Shakespeare has manipulated all three in order to undermine the ideological certainties implied within the story upon which *As you Like It* purports to be based. While accepting that the function of the anti-character is a very important means to destabilise received truths, particularly in relation to gender roles, this paper explains how dysfunctional representation of location or time by themselves can also have a similar effect. Contemporary examples are used in addition to Shakespeare's text.

Attention is also given to how the conventional "division of labour" between the performers and the audience lends authority to the narrative and, again using *As You Like It* as an example, how bringing the disorder of carnival into the performance can therefore serve to weaken that authority.

Lastly, it considers the extent to which the oppositional relationship to narrative implied in these anti-ideological practices can be avoided and a genuinely non-narrative, non-ideological performance created. It concludes that, while this is possible to some extent, narrative can never be avoid completely, only temporarily weakened in a never-ending battle of wits.

Betraying the Narrative: Wrongfooting Ideology in Theatrical Performance

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Introduction:

The Dysfunctional Narrative of *As You Like It*

Shakespeare's *As You Like It* is on the face of it a yet another comic variant on the old "Boy meets girl; boy loses girl; boy finds girl" story, with the theme of loyalty and betrayal as an undercurrent. Rosalind, daughter of an exiled duke, is banished by the usurper, her father's brother Frederick, and is accompanied in her exile by her loyal friend, Frederick's daughter Celia. Rosalind is in love with Orlando who has also been banished, although she is unaware that this has happened to him. She and Celia assume the disguise of a young shepherd and shepherdess on their journey to find the duke's camp in the Forest of Arden. Eventually the disguises come away, lovers are appropriately united and the play concludes with a number of marriages, including Orlando's to Rosalind.

To this extent, the play follows what Victor Turner saw as the standard model of social drama in the West: breach - crisis - redressive action - resolution.¹ In the early scenes, the breach and the crisis are established. The uneasy relationship between Rosalind and her uncle leads to her exile, as does Oliver's resentment against his brother lead indirectly to Orlando's exile, which in turn causes Rosalind to pine for him in the belief that her love is unrequited. There also appears to be redressive action and resolution, when Orlando saves his brother from a lioness and is thus reconciled with him, and when Rosalind, in removing her disguise, brings about the various marriages, including her own. However these elements of the plot are dealt with in just a few scenes. The rest of the play is essentially just killing time. For instance there is no reason within the plot why Rosalind, disguised as the youth Ganymede, should suddenly forget her love-sickness and play

games with Orlando. Yet she chooses to, and the game she plays, getting Orlando to woo her (Ganymede) as if she were Rosalind while believing (knowing) that she (he) is not, exposes what drama needs to keep hidden, which is that what happens between actors in the roles of fictional characters is a simulation.

In this paper I will be exploring the ways in which Shakespeare undermines the narrative of *As You Like It* by sabotaging the coherence of its essential elements: character, time sequence and location. Considering that fixed ideological positions also depend on a sense of coherence and narrative, I will show how these self-destructive strategies within the text work to undermine the ideological certainties implicit in more clearly representational forms of drama. By "ideological certainties" I am referring to beliefs which sustain existing power relations; these beliefs include assumptions about differences in gender and class or about the human being's relationship with God. I will look at how Shakespeare brings facts which lie outside of the narrative and the text, such as the gender of the body of the actor and the presence of the audience, inside the narrative in order to pull it apart. I shall look at how similar strategies have been used in some more recent theatrical works and to what extent they are effective. Lastly I shall consider whether it is possible to approach the elements of character, time and location in such a way as to create theatre which is genuinely free of ideology, as opposed to one that is anti-ideological. That is to say, I will be asking the question of whether, instead of presenting an ideologically charged narrative structure in order to attack it, which is what Shakespeare does in *As You Like It*, it is possible to avoid ideology by sidestepping representation altogether.

¹ Schechner, p. 188

The Anti-character

In the introduction I have given an example of how Rosalind, in disguise, plays games with Orlando which expose drama's big secret: that what purports to be happening on stage is a fiction. For Rosalind to be able to launch this sort of attack on the system of representation which is producing her she cannot really be Rosalind, but some other entity. Louise Soule, in a thesis which uses Rosalind as its primary example, calls this entity the *anti-character*,¹ the anti-character in *As You Like It* being a figure whom Soule calls "Cocky Ros." Cocky Ros is what Rosalind becomes when she assumes the disguise of Ganymede. He is a semi-fictional image of the person of the boy-actor who would have played Rosalind at the time Shakespeare was writing. If Ganymede is a disguise within a disguise or an illusion within an illusion, then Cocky Ros is the result, as the second illusion, a girl disguising herself as a boy, short-circuits the first illusion, the boy disguising himself as a girl, and we are left with the raw fact of someone in front of an audience doing something. Therefore, rather than saying that Ganymede/Cocky Ros is a disguise put on by Rosalind, it would be fairer to say that Rosalind is an appearance put on by Cocky Ros. In defining her terminology, Soule differentiates between what she calls the *dramatic*, which is what takes place in the fictional time of the narrative, and the *theatrical*, which is the actuality of the performance, of people performing for other people in the present time.² The anti-character is an intrusion of the theatrical into the dramatic. It functions as a loose cannon, undermining the assumptions on which the drama is based.

Soule ascribes to the anti-character five qualities. They are:

- (1) the display of demonic or magical power,
- (2) liminoid disruption of normal social behaviour,
- (3) ironic play with identity and ignorance,
- (4) comic, carnivalesque communication with the audience,
- (5) freedom from the constraints and characteristics of gender.³

Cocky Ros has "Demonic or magical power" in two senses, one fictional and one corporeal. Firstly, within the play, he claims to have trained in magic under a great magician, giving him the power to unite Orlando and Rosalind.⁴ The great magician must be Shakespeare himself, suggesting the power of the author as an illusionist. However the sorcerer's apprentice this time is no Mickey Mouse; he is also a fully fledged magician. The adolescent actor manifests power equal to that of the adult poet to determine the outcome of the action. The outcome that he selects is the happy ending that one would have expected anyway in a comic drama, but by reminding us that the narrative is something that is created or invented, Cocky Ros shows us that there is nothing inevitable about it. Rather than the character being defined by the plot, the plot is in effect contained within this character. The scope and power of the anti-character exceeds the narrative and therefore demonstrates its vulnerability. Ideologically, this is very significant. It amounts to a threat to God insofar as the fixity and predictability of outcome is a kind of image of divine omniscience and omnipotence. In the Middle Ages it was certainly the case that the invariability of character and plot was a function of the inviolability of God's will.⁵ It is also true today if one puts in place of God the principles of reason, psychology and science.⁶ The expected outcome of *As You Like It*, a heterosexual marriage entailing a clear differentiation between the roles of husband and wife, was the one ordained

by God through his representatives on Earth, backed up by the general expectation of society. That Cocky Ros has the power to undermine the playing out of this story in fiction suggests that the real thing can also be renegotiated. The very name "As You Like It" implies a dangerous and subversive freedom.

The second of Cocky Ros's "demonic or magical" powers is in his body. Ours is not the first society to have been afraid of the destructive power of adolescent boys. The natural aggression of the boy player,⁷ liberated by the dissolution of the character role which was intended to contain it, would have been reflected by the many apprentices who were part of the typical sixteenth-century audience.⁸ This would have been doubly frightening to those whose interests are vested in the maintenance of public order. Unfettered testosterone is demonic. By freeing the performer from the restriction of character and granting him the license of a clown, this energy is released. This point is strongly tied in with the issue of how the boy player is gendered, which I shall return to later in this paper.

Soule's second attribute of the anti-character is the "liminoid disruption of normal social behaviour." In *As you Like It* this manifests itself as the clown-like mockery of conventional courtship which runs right through the play.⁹ This type of mockery is the standard fare of carnival. However, by describing it, using Victor Turner's terminology, as "liminoid," rather than just "liminal,"¹⁰ Soule is saying that it is not just harmless fun, but something which undermines those relationships as they operate beyond the safety of the performance in everyday life. This is a bold claim. Today, for example there is a vast amount of transgressive material on the television and in the theatre, but it is doubtful whether much of it makes any serious impact on established views and behaviour. This is largely because it is

possible to dismiss what happens in these circumstances as "entertainment" and "not real."¹¹ There is a big difference, to use an example given by Judith Butler, between the way many people tend to think of a drag artist on a stage and what they think of a transvestite on a bus.¹² For the anti-character to have a liminoid function the context in which he operates must somehow be different from that of contemporary televisual and theatrical entertainment. It must be more "real," more a part of the everyday world. This "reality" derives from the strong presence of the Elizabethan audience. I shall consider this point more closely in the next section.

"Ironic play with identity and ignorance," is Soule's third function of the anti-character. Irony itself does not necessarily undermine narrative. Narrative in one sense is intrinsically ironic because the reader or spectator will nearly always be able to understand the action based on knowledge which the characters do not have.¹³ We know from the beginning, for instance, that Macbeth is doomed. This is irony which serves the story, sparing the audience from even the brief illusion that they might violate the order of nature and get away with it. The character is viewed ironically from the point of view of the narrative as a whole. On the other hand, it has sometimes been argued that there is something intentionally unconvincing about Malcolm's victory and the Macbeths' final defeat. This is irony which works against the moral of the story by weakening the illusion.

The irony of the anti-character is of this destructive sort. It is related to that of the *eiron* of ancient Athenian comedy.¹⁴ He is generally someone who acts like a buffoon in relation to the other characters, but who reveals a sharp wit in his asides to the audience. Thus he, a character, is able to view the drama with a wry smile. However Rosalind/Cocky Ros is much more than an *eiron*. Rather than being a mere commentator from the sidelines,

she/he is right at the centre of what is going on, indispensable to the narrative. What is more, the ironic perspective does not merely come from a separate compartment within the text, an ironic character, but from the body of the boy actor itself. Thus the superiority of the body is asserted over the text.

From this brief elaboration of the first three attributes of the anti-character an important point has started to emerge. This is that even though it is a role which, at least in a play such as *As You Like It*, is scripted like any other, its power derives largely from outside the text: firstly from the social dynamic within the auditorium, and secondly from the actual body of the performer. It is because of these two factors that the remaining two attributes of the anti-character - carnivalesque communication with the audience and freedom from the characteristics and constraints of gender - are particularly important.

¹ Soule, p. 240

² Soule, p. 12

³ Soule, p. 423

⁴ *As You Like It*, V ii 48-68

⁵ Soule, p. 270

⁶ Boal, p. 75

⁷ Soule, p. 243

⁸ Soule, p. 356

⁹ Soule, p. 424

¹⁰ Soule, p. 424

¹¹ Butler (1990), p. 278

¹² Butler (1990), p. 278

¹³ McLeish, p. 16

¹⁴ Soule, p. 245

Theatre and Carnival

To appreciate what "comic, carnivalesque communication with the audience" would have meant in the context in which *As You Like It* was originally performed it would help first of all to understand something of the social dynamic of Elizabethan theatre and how this differs from both theatre and carnival in our own society.

Today, for the most part, what passes for carnival is spectacle. Like the contemporary theatre, this sort of spectacle is (to use Richard Schechner's word) "sclerotic."¹ In other words, the division of labour between performer and spectator has ceased to be negotiable. Augusto Boal has said that when the actors became separated from the spectators theatre became ideological and that when the protagonist became separated from the chorus it became a means of ideological oppression.² True carnival is a participatory activity in which such roles are suspended. It is play.

Victor Turner had this to say about play:

Most definitions of play involve notions of disengagement, of free-wheeling, of being out of mesh with the serious "bread-and-butter," let alone "life-and-death" processes of production, social control, "getting and spending," and raising the next generation. ... Play can be everywhere and nowhere, imitate anything, yet be identified with nothing. ... Yet although "spinning loose" as it were, the wheel of play reveals to us the possibility of changing our goals and, therefore, the restructuring of what our culture states to be reality.³

Although carnival is often full of parodic and satirical imagery, the laughter of carnival, according to Bakhtin, is not the "reduced" laughter of

narrowly focused satire. It is a playful, "open" laughter, not just a reaction to a particular event.⁴ Yet, though this laughter is not summoned for the primary purpose of attacking power or seriousness, it has the effect, in Bakhtin's eyes, of overcoming the fear of power, whether that be of the secular authorities or of God.⁵ A carnival crowd is therefore a dangerous crowd, capable collectively of innovative action, unintimidated by authority.

Elizabethan society had not yet lost the spirit of carnival to the degree that ours has, and this was reflected in its theatre. The stage for which Shakespeare wrote was open to the elements and to daylight. The audiences were not the bourgeois gatherings of theatres in later centuries, individuals sitting on seats. They were largely (but not entirely) plebeian,⁶ more like the crowd at a football match than the customers of the National Theatre. Because the spectators could see each other they were conscious of each other in a way which is not possible in a dark, quiet theatre today, let alone in a living room in front of the television. They were there to see and interact with each other as well as to be told a story.⁷

There were of course some well-to-do people within the sixteenth century theatre audience, who tended to sit separately from the main body of spectators, and for these people the drama, in other words the performance of literature, was the principal reason for coming to the theatre. This was also true to some extent of the main body of spectators, but they also wanted juggling, they wanted songs and they wanted clowning. At that time however, partly because of the commercial pressure to provide entertainment for the richer end of the market, the drama came to increase in status and the "interludes" came to seem increasingly out of place.⁸ This is why, when Shakespeare was writing, the clown was already on the way out. Instead, clown-like figures started to appear within the drama itself.

Many of the characters within *As You Like It* are clowns of one sort or another. Soule describes the play as a contest of different clowning styles.⁹ Touchstone is a character who is a fool, but Jaques also plays the fool and so, of course, does Cockey Ros. The role of the fool is to mock, and the role of the fool who infiltrates the drama is to mock the drama and the characters within it. So, just as the mediaeval festivals brought the derision of carnival into the cathedral cloisters, these actor clowns brought it into the secular cathedral of poetry.

In this sense clowns within the drama all perform the oppositional function of the anti-character in that they work against the narrative, but their principal reason for doing so is to entertain rather than to offer a critique. It is to provoke the open laughter that Bakhtin described. Such laughter is linked very strongly to an earthy consciousness of the body, which Bakhtin sees acting as an antidote to oppressive abstract morality. This consciousness of the body was a strong feature of Elizabethan theatre anyway, where "personation," the cultivation of a powerful stage presence, was valued rather than "impersonation,"¹⁰ in which the actor is reaching for an immaterial Ideal, the "truthful" portrayal of a notional person. The body-consciousness of carnival is characterised, according to Bakhtin, by "grotesque realism,"¹¹ a delight in corporeal excess, particularly in relation to the openings of the body. In the Epilogue to *As You Like It* Cockey Ros, declares "If I were a woman, I would kiss as many of you that have beards that pleas'd me, complexions that lik'd me, and breaths that I defied not." This promiscuous vulgarity is the final and unanswerable disproof of what Orlando calls the "fair, chaste and unexpressive"¹² Rosalind. Orlando's character is also grotesque, even though he himself does not seem to be conscious of this in the way that an anti-character would be. His feats of

wrestling are so absurdly virile, in particular his bout with the lioness, that it becomes impossible to take him seriously as a normal leading male role. We might as well be told that he has a six foot penis.

There is a correlation between the degree of openness of the body and the degree of openness of a society. A community which feels under threat from outside, perhaps due to war or immigration, will tend also to make a virtue of protecting the body from invasion or violation.¹³ This is almost certainly one of the reasons why the people of Britain (at the time of writing this) seem to be inclined to think of foreign asylum seekers as burglars and rapists. This comes from a basic fear about the security of the self. Therefore grotesque realism, the delight in the wide-open orifice, can reduce fear, including the fear which leads people to align themselves with the apparent security of dogmatism and authoritarianism and which discourages them from carrying out actions which those with power are unable to predict.

In short, the carnivalesque in theatre (whether it is associated with an anti-character or not) works against the narrative and the ideology it supports less by straight satire than by encouraging a sense of community and of play among the members of the audience. In play everything can be renegotiated, including the "truths" which they are represented in drama.

¹ Schechner, p. 212

² Auslander, p. 125

³ Jordan, p. 133

⁴ Bakhtin, p. 11

⁵ Bakhtin, p. 82

⁶ Soule, p. 354-5

⁷ Soule, p. 371

⁸ Soule, p. 116

⁹ Soule, p. 377

¹⁰ Soule, p. 118

¹¹ Bakhtin, p. 30

¹² *As You Like It*, III 11 10

¹³Ted Polhemus, speaking at the b10c seminar, Cardiff, November 1999.

Character and Gender

Of the five characteristics of the anti-character which Soule has postulated, it is the fifth, "freedom from the constraints and characteristics of gender," which in my opinion is most dangerous to established modes of representation. To understand why this is, it is first necessary to understand the often self-contradictory nature of the relationship between gender and performance. I shall start once again with the example of Rosalind.

Shakespeare wrote two types of female character. Some of them are, like Lady Macbeth, complex and ambiguous; others are shallow and stereotypical, like Ophelia. The young woman Rosalind is a normative type rather than a particular personality. She is a crude model of how women were expected to be, aspiring to marriage and devoted subservience.¹ Theatrically she is poorly defined. What we know about her is what we learn from other characters (including Cockey Ros himself).² Orlando describes her as "the fair, chaste and unexpressive she," which is certainly not an accurate description of Cockey Ros. So when Orlando is telling Ganymede about his love for Rosalind, he is talking about someone who just does not exist except as his own projection.

In *Unmarked* Peggy Phelan describes how representations of women tend in reality to be representations of men. Because men in our society tend to be marked as having value while women are not, cultural reproduction "remarks" women, the unmarked, but leaves men "unremarked."³ Referring to Lacan, she describes how the feminine is considered as Other, and therefore visible, but the masculine, the Same, is not visible and therefore can only be represented by means of the Other.⁴ She considers all representations which are concerned primarily with outward appearance as

feminising. This means, for instance, that non-white people are feminised within mainstream (white) culture.⁵ Toni Morrison talks of how literary representations of people of colour tend to be a "metaphorical shorthand" for issues that do not really have much to do with the groups so represented.⁶

If we are to take this argument to its logical extreme, then we must conclude that nearly all dramatic or literary representation of character is to some extent feminising. This is because character is usually intended to be read and understood. It is an object to be grasped and used by the spectator to define or affirm beliefs about his own identity.⁷ Where character is less feminising is where it is seen to fail in some way, in other words, where it cannot be completely known or controlled by reason. This occurs when the body of the actor disrupts the straightforwardness of the text, for instance when a Method actor steals a private moment by bringing personal material into his interpretation of the character. The audience will never be able to grasp fully what is going on in such a moment. They will just know that there is something they do not know.

I will now contradict myself and say that character is also masculine. This is because character, at least insofar as it has been understood since the enlightenment, is generally supposed to be a representation of a feeling subject. It is also an entity which takes action, which the Enlightenment took to be the manifestation of a strong will. Will was seen as a masculine quality; women were understood to be weak-willed and "lacking in character."⁸ Character is gendered male if we are to understand it in the very narrow sense that Hamlet is (in the contemporary mind at least) a character, a thinking, feeling and acting subject, but that all the personages who revolve around him, such as Horatio, Claudius and Ophelia, are merely emanations of the single character Hamlet. So Hamlet becomes a model of

male subjectivity, which probably explains the attraction he has for young men who aspire to be great actors. And because he is so often played by these young white men he is doubly phallic. Within the text he represents a unitary viewpoint, and on stage his textual presence coincides and becomes one with the physical presence of the culturally dominant type of body - the white male. In fact he is trebly phallic, because one cannot see Hamlet without seeing simultaneously the great white male poet. In Shakespeare's case, centuries of bardolatry have indeed accorded him the status of a sovereign or God.

Then, again, if we are to consider the relation of character to the body of the actor, we will usually find that the actor is feminised. This happens mainly through the casting system⁹ which is essentially reductive, just like the mainstream labour market. The actor is fitted to the role just like the guests of the innkeeper who was said to amputate their limbs to fit his bed. This metaphor is sometimes uncomfortably appropriate; getting oneself cosmetically mutilated by a surgeon can be a very good way to get on in Hollywood, particularly for a woman. The casting system is feminising because it implies a sovereign, and therefore masculine, power to do the casting. The circumstances where the actor is not feminised so much are in cooperative theatre companies, where no one member can claim control over his or her colleagues,¹⁰ or in the sort of experimental work where the director expects to be surprised and guided by the material the actor produces and thereby gives up any claim to omniscience in the fictional world.

One example of this is the work of Jerzy Grotowski. Another is that of French director François-Michel Pesenti, with whom I have worked. Pesenti employs strategies such as getting his actors to imagine fictional relationships with each other, as if in a normal play, and then to imagine quite different

relationships as if they were in a play within that first play, but without acting them out. Instead they are to carry out completely different sets of actions, with the imagined relationships only being apparent to the audience as a particularly intense presence, which is also a distance. Moreover, the intensity of the mental effort involved in following Pesenti's instructions overwhelms the actors so that they can no longer maintain conscious control over what they are doing. In this way both the actor and the character, to the extent that it exists, largely avoid predictability and commodification, whether by the director, the audience or the actors themselves.

One other situation where the actor is not feminised in this way is where he or she is the sole author of the work. Many stand-up comedians and some performance artists do this kind of character-based performance. The convention in these kinds of performances is that the contributions of other people to the creation of the work remain hidden¹¹ so that the creator-performer tends to appear sovereign in the same way as the Olivier-Henry V-Shakespeare or the Branagh-Hamlet-Shakespeare entities, although the degree to which this happens depends to a large extent on the type of body that the performer-creator is. If a straight white male (at least in Western culture) assumes characters which represent other categories of people, as Eric Bogosian frequently does, then it is hard to see how this can do anything except reinforce the centrality and sovereignty of the performer and his identity at the expense of those represented, who are thereby feminised by being encapsulated as characters.¹² Michael Peterson would say that performer who does this is exercising his "identity privilege."¹³ Because the typical bourgeois audience is likely to share this identity privilege, or at least that part of it which comes from being white,¹⁴ the audience and performer can together also be seen as a single masculine entity bent on consuming

those who exist outside it.

If character and representation are so deeply gendered in these various ways, then any threat to the stability of gender must also be a threat to representation. Judith Butler has noted how severely "bad gender performance" is punished because of the fear it arouses.¹⁵ This means that gender is an insecure attribute and that deep down people know that this is true. The authorities in Shakespeare's time certainly did, which is why the church declared that transvestism on stage (boys dressing up as women) would result in an "adulteration" of gender, as would the fashion among women at the time to dress as men.¹⁶ In other words the self-image of male power was dependent on a definition of woman that was held together by nothing more than clothing. Rosalind/Cocky Ros was for this reason alone a real threat to the self-image of masculinity, at least as it was seen by the church.

Rosalind's being played by a boy actor was not merely a case of cross-dressing, a man assuming a woman's persona. Drag is a means for a man to possess a female.¹⁷ However a boy is someone on the way to being a man, but not a man yet. Physically, he has some feminine characteristics, such as a high voice and lack of facial hair, but these are unstable and he will soon grow out of them. Socially, he is destined to assume a privileged role in society, but adult male society is not willing to trust him with such responsibility yet. Therefore the Elizabethan boy player was not a man trying to possess a woman, but someone who was himself both distinct and not distinct from woman. He was in his body intrinsically liminoid before he even took on the quality of an actor.¹⁸ In *As You Like It* there are many reminders of this, such as this exchange between Touchstone and Celia:

Touchstone: Stand you both forth now: stroke your chins, and swear by your beards that I am a knave.

Celia: By our beards, if we had them, thou art.¹⁹

Not least of these reminders is the choice of "Ganymede" for Rosalind's assumed name, Ganymede being originally the heavenly cup-bearer feminised by Zeus's sexual attentions.

The boy actor did not have identity privilege the way that a man would. He could claim no centrality beyond what was allotted to him structurally within the play. For instance his relationship to the other actors would have been one of an apprentice to skilled craftsmen so that his body would have been perceived as one belonging a long way down society's pecking order. On the other hand he is certainly not "fair, chaste and unexpressive" and he is therefore able to assert (or insert) his presence in spite of the prevailing system of representation. In this he shares something with some present-day female performers such as Jo Brand, the heavily built stand-up comic whose blatantly phallic "Here I am" style of performance is distinctly offensive to anyone who still believes that "fair chaste and unexpressive" is what a woman should be. Dressed quite often in a fairly "unfeminine" way, she can one moment admit to her weakness and vulnerability as a woman and the next make a damning comic attack on the beliefs that our male-dominated society still projects onto women, such as the one about them being passive and incapable. She seems simultaneously to accept her identity as a woman and to refuse it, forcing a persona that is both gendered and ungendered into the patriarchal consciousness. Perhaps in this she has reached the essence of the anti-character: to destroy representation and at the same time live with the fact that representation cannot be destroyed. The successful anti-

ideological project cannot be to cut the ground from under representation in one fell swoop. It must instead be the thankless task of trying to keep it hopping eternally on one leg.

¹Soule, p. 408

²Soule, p. 411-2

³ Phelan, p. 5

⁴ Phelan, p. 5

⁵Phelan, p. 10

⁶ Peterson, p. 154

⁷This does not mean, incidentally, that the consumer of the representation is in reality in a contrasting "masculine" or sovereign position and able to use the representation as a means to make a free choice of identity; character serves the frequently oppressive function of limiting the range of possible ways to be; in Cixous's words it is an "identification circuit."

⁸ Soule, p. 95

⁹Blau, p. 159

¹⁰At the 1999 PS₅ conference in Aberystwyth Michael Peterson told how Richard Schechner came to realise the patriarchal structure of The Performance Group and wanted to arrange a symbolic murder of himself in order for it to become more genuinely cooperative.

¹¹Said by Michael Peterson at PS₅ conference in Aberystwyth, 1999.

¹²This is the central argument of Peterson's *Straight White Male*

¹³Peterson, p. 124

¹⁴ Peterson, p. 187

¹⁵ Butler (1990), p. 17

¹⁶ Herrmann, p. 296

¹⁷Phelan, p. 17

¹⁸Soule, p. 427

¹⁹ *As You Like It*, I ii 65-67

Space, Time and Narrative

The action of *As You Like It* is divided between the house of Oliver, who is Orlando's eldest brother, Frederick's court and the forest. Act One takes place in Oliver's house and the Duke's palace. The rest of the play, with the exception of two scenes in Act Two and the first scene in Act Three, takes place in the forest. In dramatic terms, the house and the court are fairly conventional locations. They are spaces with a clear dramatic, that is to say, narrative function. A house is a place where familial relations take place. A court is where high politics is done. Therefore the occurrence of such spaces in drama is closely associated with the motion of the narrative. In *As You Like It* the events concerned with the establishment of dramatic tension - the falling in love, the rift between the brothers, the banishment - all happen in these two locations.

The forest as a location is quite different. Soule describes it as a Cockayne,¹ a place where social roles become arbitrarily confused and reversed. So not only can a girl become a boy, but class distinctions are dispensed with; peasants can mix with dukes and a young woman can become a priest. What narrative there is fragmented and parodic. In fact the word "location" is not entirely appropriate to describe the Forest of Arden, for it is spatially diffuse. That is to say, the stage directions may indicate "The forest" or "Another part of the forest," but whether a character is actually near one particular group of trees or another is neither here nor there. The characters are, in a sense, free-floating, continually meeting and parting in a kind of brownian motion.

When Rosalind first meets Orlando after her banishment they have the following exchange:

Ros: I pray you, what is't o'clock?

Orl: you should ask me what time o'day; there's no clock in the forest.

Ros: Then there is no true lover in the forest, else sighing every minute and groaning every hour would detect the lazy foot of Time as well as a clock.²

Just as the Forest of Arden is without a locus, it is timeless. When the narrative is suspended the timeframe established within the narrative also dissolves. In the context of a theatre, the timeless means the present, the non-fictional, the "theatrical," to use Louise Soule's terminology, as opposed to the "dramatic."³ Richard Schechner too makes a distinction between the "drama," or what goes on on stage, and the "performance," which includes both the drama and everything which frames it, including the auditorium, the audience and the cafeteria.⁴ Thus there is indeed no true lover in the forest, only an actor on stage surrounded by spectators (or, indeed, an actor and a stage at the edge of a group of spectators who are surrounded by and interacting with each other).

According to Schechner, performances must follow one of three basic temporal formats.⁵ The first is the "triangular" structure of two elements in opposition (*thesis* and *antithesis*), progressing to a resolution (*synthesis*), in other words, a story. The other two, which are closely related, are what he calls circular time and bracketed time. Circular time is where events repeat themselves in a way that is implicitly endless. Bracketed time is where the timeframe repeats itself, but the events within it vary for each repetition. What they have in common is that past and future are lost, so that the structure becomes less of a story and more of a game located in the present as the audience becomes less and less interested in character and psychology.⁶

Schechner gives *Waiting for Godot* as an example of a play organised in bracketed time.⁷ Even though the first and second acts are different, they are framed temporally in the same way. That is, each act is an evening spent by the same tree waiting for Godot. The characters, just as in *As You Like It*, are clowns. Even though an imaginary timeframe is indicated (one evening - the next evening) the action is strongly anchored in the present. It is existential vaudeville.

Godot takes place in a nondescript outdoor space. The single bare tree and the two mounds of earth, for all the obvious differences, are vaguely reminiscent of the forest in *As You Like It* in that they do not indicate functional space as would an artificial location such as a road or a living room. That there is a set would suggest that a single location was being invoked, but actually, just like the forest, it is a non-location. It does not exist in relation to anywhere else, such as a character's home or the place Godot is supposed to come from and so it cannot exert a normalising pressure on the characters, placing them spatially and therefore socially. The only place to which the stage bears a spatial relation is the toilet which is "At the end of the corridor, on the left,"⁸ in other words, backstage, making a fictional spatiality even harder to imagine. The characters may therefore appear to be stereotypical tramps, but without the usual temporal and spatial reassurances which a more concrete set would offer it is hard for the (bourgeois) spectator to see them as a social other, whose experience has nothing to do with his own.

Although I have said that *Godot* is in bracketed time, conventional narrative shows through faintly, like a ghost. When Pozzo is blinded we as spectators feel that something irrevocable has happened, a dramatic event, so that we can move on, get to the end, to the single point at the sharp end of

Schechner's triangle. However there is no point of resolution and there cannot be one. In *As You Like it* the disruption to the narrative alerts us to the many different possibilities which exist in one time, as opposed to the one inevitable outcome of realism. On the other hand *Waiting for Godot* presents us with a failure of narrative where there is no outcome, no way to go and therefore nothing to conform to.

In the television series *The X-Files* F.B.I. agents Scully and Mulder investigate bizarre, supernatural and inexplicable phenomena. The fact that they are F.B.I agents is significant because the F.B.I. was set up to deal with crime which would otherwise escape jurisdiction by crossing state lines; in effect this means that it exists to maintain the spatial order.⁹ The source material for the series is unusual or bizarre stories which at least a few people somewhere believe to be true, but many of these stories are mutually incompatible. Thus UFO's are both extraterrestrial spacecraft and secret American experimental aircraft. Moreover, a good few of them are conspiracy theories which concern the operation and organisation of the policing superstructure within which Mulder and Scully themselves operate. This means that they are constantly trying to map the unmappable, but finding that they cannot even get their bearings within their own organisation, because whatever map they construct will never make sense.

There is one episode which serves as a particularly good illustration of how the *X-Files* disrupts time and space. Mulder's mind is swapped with that of an agent from a very unpleasant branch of the secret service he had not known existed. The cause of the accident is a disruption to space-time brought about by the testing of a new aircraft propulsion technology. In the investigation of what has happened to Mulder, a lizard is found alive with its head embedded in a rock; both occupy the same space simultaneously. In

the course of the programme a "human interest" story takes place. Scully discovers that the person she is working with is an impostor and works to get her partner back in his own body. Mulder and Scully's friendship is strengthened and the impostor even shows signs of remorse and a desire for self-improvement. However what it takes for the exchange of bodies to be corrected is no less than a complete reversal of time and therefore of the characters' memories and of all the action which has taken place. With the drama undone it becomes impossible in any definitive way to say what really happened.

Because the *X-Files* does not simply present a single alternative reality (such as "Aliens come to Earth on a regular basis") to put in place of the existing one (such as "Everything is quite normal"), but uses temporally and spatially illogical stories to suggest many realities at the same time, it serves an anti-ideological function. So, rather than coming away from watching an episode of the *X-Files* having merely substituted one opinion for another, the viewer is more likely to come away with a feeling of unease about what is normally accepted to be true, but with no answers.

Therefore, although disruption of space and time is used in *As You Like It* merely as a device to assist the anti-character in his anti-ideological activities, it has in itself a strong destabilising effect on narrative, character and ideology, even when the character that it destabilises may not in itself have a particular ironic quality. This disruption or dissolution of space and time in the above examples functions in a dialectical opposition to the coherent space and time of narrative which is implied by the existence of dramatic character, as well as by the convention of presenting the performance on a single stage space or a single screen. One could consider it therefore as a kind of "anti-narrative" technique, a subversive device comparable to the anti-

character. Like the anti-character it acts in opposition to coherent narrative and character, deriving its strength and significance from the very thing it seeks to weaken or destroy. Therefore the destruction can never be complete and theatre will always find itself embracing new dogmas in order that some new device of science fiction or another thespian clown should do what is necessary to restore the spirit of misrule.

¹ Soule, p. 387-8

² *As You Like It*, III ii 281-4

³ Soule, p. 377

⁴ Schechner, p. 173

⁵ Schechner, p. 16 &ff.

⁶ Schechner, p. 22

⁷ Schechner, p. 24

⁸ Beckett, p. 33

⁹ Nochimson (p. 25) makes a similar point about Special Agent Dale Cooper in David Lynch's *Twin Peaks*.

Theatre Beyond Ideology

So far I have shown how dogmatic ideology is supported by coherent character as well as by narrative based on clear location and coherent time sequence. I have also shown how, when these are attacked by disruptive forces within the performance, the ideological position which they support is also put into question or undermined. What then are the ideological implications of a theatrical performance where character, or narrative space and time, are absent? Is such a performance possible? In other words, is the dialectical approach to tackling the ideological restrictions which narrative theatre tends to reinforce (the approach which Shakespeare takes in *As You Like It*) the only way of dealing with them?

In the twentieth century there has emerged a tradition, which started with Gertrude Stein, of seeing theatre as landscape.¹ Elinor Fuchs describes this sort of presentation as the "post-anthropocentric stage"² which she says is based on "multivalent spatial relationships." She argues that because there is little "oppositional dynamic" between the human being and the world in such work, character cannot form.³ In the case of one of her principal examples of this kind of dramaturgy, the work of Robert Wilson, this is often largely true (though not always). It does appear to have been true with regard to his collaboration with Christopher Knowles, who was autistic. Wilson built a performance around Knowles without, as Herbert Blau put it, "trying to normalize the fiction,"⁴ that is, without trying to accommodate him to the other elements in the piece. This meant that while one could know in one sense that Knowles was a conscious human being, he was also, because of his particular condition, alien to the audience; they could not imagine his subjectivity and appropriate it as the form of knowledge known

as character. The experience for the spectator was not one of seeing the shortfall between some idea of what Knowles ought to have been and what he actually was. Rather it was, according to Blau, one of seeing a "pure phenomenon,"⁵ to be witnessed and registered, not empathised with or pitied.⁶ Instead of judgment there was just the intervening space, which had no centre and did not demand to be closed. In other words there was no narrative drive, just distributed space, and space, as Robert Smithson wrote, is "the remains, or corpse, of time."⁷

Blau describes Wilson's work as "part of the antioedipal project of undoing the mimetic."⁸ This is an aim it shares with what appear to be quite different philosophies of theatre, from body art to the theories and practice of Artaud and Grotowski. Grotowski has been accused (by people who disapprove of such things) of being a humanist. Josette Feral writes that his exercises "could only consolidate the position of the unitary subject on stage."⁹ It is true that Grotowski believed in the human being. He believed in the inner resources of his actors. However his working method was reductive; it was destructive. In Artaud's sense it was "cruel." Grotowski's starting point would always be a dramatic text, but what the actor drew out of it would be a disappearance as the body evaporated within the impossible precision of the signs it was producing.¹⁰ Therefore Grotowski's theatre is a form of what Feral calls "performance"¹¹ (as opposed to "theatre") which is the very thing that she says it is not. Like body art, it is characterised by the displacement and disruption of the body and its drives.¹² This is, in essence, the same phenomenon as the landscape stage, where character and narrative have receded and spatial relationships are favoured over temporal and causal ones.

The landscape stage, then, might seem to offer an escape from ideology.

But a pure landscape stage, completely free of narrative will always elude us. It is impossible to watch even a Robert Wilson's opera without imagining at some point the motivation of the performer. This is why Blau rightly describes Wilson's work as "the beautifully managed *illusion* of a suspension of value"¹³ (my italics). Even supposedly non-representational forms of self-presentation, such as body art, will suggest stories despite themselves; as Blau says,

While at a certain ideological level, or on ideological grounds, performance was over the last generation differentiated from theater, even the artists now doing performance have had to deal with *what appears to be theater...* for if it doesn't appear, there is no performance.¹⁴

Therefore even within these forms of work it is impossible to escape completely from a dialectical relation between the actuality of what is happening in a space and our need to project on it subjectivity, emotion and meaning.

¹Fuchs, p 92

² Fuchs, p. 107

³ Fuchs, p. 106

⁴ Blau, p. 174

⁵ Blau, p. 175

⁶Blau, p. 175

⁷ Blau, p. 164

⁸ Blau, p. 150

⁹Feral, p. 296-7

¹⁰Blau, p. 116. I myself saw a similar effect produced by a member of Belgrade's Dah Teatar in October 1999.

¹¹ Feral, p. 290

¹²Feral, p. 289

¹³ Blau, p. 158

¹⁴Blau, p. 37

Conclusion

Herbert Blau suggests that the urge to betrayal is at the heart of theatre, or at the heart of things.¹ It was in the spirit of treason that I started to create this text; I was looking for a way cancel out ideology by cancelling the narrative, the illusion of a truth, the myth through which ideology is propagated. But it is impossible. As Blau put it, "At the extremes of demystification we are still suffused with appearance as if demystification itself were producing appearance..."²

Demystification in the theatre is ultimately futile, but it can be partially successful for a time. This is enough. By setting actor against character, now against then, nowhere special against the specified place, one subjectivity against another, or the collective consciousness of the audience against anything and nothing in particular, little disturbances and distances may be produced. These are the little moments in which ideology is caught off guard and unexpected thoughts and beliefs become possibilities.

¹Blau, p. 198

²Blau, p. 196

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