ART, THE MUNDANE, AND THE ART OF THE MUNDANE

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> For if the theatre is a double of life,
> life is a double of true theatre. . . .
> The double of the theatre is the *reality*
> which today's mankind leaves unused.
>
> Antonin Artaud [in Esslin 1977:43]

INTRODUCTION

Art is not synonymous with the mundane. It may occasionally reflect, serve as a model for, and otherwise touch bases with the world of nature or society, but when it is identical with nature or society it ceases to be art.[1] This should not seem a remarkable statement, and yet there are few issues in the area of arts and aesthetics that more quickly polarize both scholars and audiences, as it frequently becomes entangled with the social issues of democracy and elitism. In the field of dance, for example, the 1960s saw the embracing of nondance, or as Arlene Croce describes it, ordinary movement construed as dance (1979:138), as the logical extension of the revolt against story dance. The '70s continued that trend with a twist. Choreographers tried to discover what is elemental in dance, and so we had walking concerts and endless variations on spinning, skipping, and other "ordinary" movements. Yet even here in the heart of minimal dance, in the heart of the revolt against elitist principles, we still had that marking off that separates an art form from the ordinary workaday world. As Douglas Dunn remarked about Trisha Brown's "Walking on the Wall," "it was stylized movement in extraordinary circumstances" (T. Brown and Dunn 1976:82). And as Croce said of Lucinda Childs' baby-step concert:

> Even in minimal, equalizing, white-on-white dances, those dreaded elitist principles, that horrible star quality can't be ironed out. Like [Laura] Dean, . . . Childs doesn't like to smile or look her audience in the eye. I was reminded of [Yvonne] Rainer's mid-sixties manifesto of renunciation: "NO to spectacle no to virtuosity no to transformations and magic and make-believe no to the glamour and transcendency of the star image . . ." [1979:139]

Art is a transformation of the mundane. It is a transformation of the ordinary goal-oriented processes that characterize everyday life. It is a context in which goal-oriented activity is, in fact, inappropriate. Freed of purpose other than to exist in and of itself, art engages in elaborations of form and process. It plays with form. I do not believe it accidental that, in so many languages, we have the same word, "play", used to describe both leisure-time play activity and dramatic performances or other forms of theater, and the word "player" used for those who perform. This transformation and separation that occurs in art is particularly important in dance and mime, where the substance of the art forms is identical to that of which ordinary movement and gesture are made. But cultural codes of aesthetic preference transform the

basic building material into the stylized, restricted forms we recognize as art. The transformation is effected without regard for utilitarian concerns and focuses instead upon mastery of form. In art, we put obstacles in our way, just as children do in play. We do not take the most economical route to a goal because the goal is less important than the getting there.[2]

A few examples will make this notion clear. In the case of mime, we define the form as one that conveys some narrative, but we set ourselves the task of narrative without the help of speech or writing or props. Severin, one of the last of the traditional Pierrots, said of Pierrot's white face: "It is vastly more difficult to express emotion under this mask than with the naked face but does not art thrive on the difficulties which it must surmount?" (in Rolfe n.d.:70).

Similarly, in classical ballet, the illusion of flight is all important in the definition of the form, and yet the rules of the medium dictate that this illusion must be achieved with nothing more than the dancer's own muscle power and a lightly blocked shoe. Before these were feasible, the illusion was created by means of wires and stepladders hidden behind scenery.

Finally, Grotowski speaks directly to the artist's business of creating special situations: "There are qualities of behavior in every country that one must break through in order to create. Creativity does not mean using our daily masks but rather to make exceptional situations where our daily masks do not function" (1968:251).

CHARACTERISTICS OF DANCE AND MIME

Selection, restriction, and limitation are some of the important features that distinguish art from the ordinary. Lionel Grossman makes an astute observation about the difference between theater and the real world that has to do with signs:

> While there is doubtless some redundancy in the theatrical work, as in most systems of communication, there is probably far less of it than in the real world. In general, as it is a simpler organization than nature or society, the art work necessarily includes fewer signs and sets up more limited patterns of relationships among them. [1976:6]

It is impossible, given the constraints of the performance context, to proceed at the leisurely pace of ordinary life or to make use of the multitude of possibilities for movement and gesture that exists in nature. Therefore, dance and mime, like all art forms, are selective of elements. Initially, selection may be arbitrary. Why should classical dance, for example, have chosen turning out of the legs as an important part of its technique? Once elements have been chosen they are subject to a system of rules which makes their relationships and use anything but arbitrary.

The notion of limitation and restriction in art is developed into the idea of purity as opposed to disorder by Etienne Decroux, one of the most influential thinkers and artists in the area of modern mime. "The law of art is not addition but subtraction. To add is to make a mess, to restore the original 'togetherness' or disorder of the world. What is rich in art? Not a mixture: a purity" (in Bentley 1951:28).

Very similar to Decroux' use of the term "purity" is Jean-Louis Barrault's discussion of the classic: "The classic teaches *economy*. It makes use of the minimum of means for the maximum yield, and this is because it lives in depth. Economy is after all less a matter of taste than of concentratedness" (1951:169).

One of the ways that art resolves the messiness of the world is through stylization. Style implies choice, and this is exactly what the artist engages in in creating a work of art. Again, because the performer must convey a message within the constraints of the performance context, he or she must use stylization as a way of highlighting, of conveying a great deal of information in a compressed, dense format. Marcel Marceau, clearly a master of this technique, commented in an interview with me:

> The artist is the man who knows how to select the essence of an idea. . . . In mime you show the reality. It cannot be natural; it has to be stylized, but the public has to recognize the stylization. If it is too stylized, then they will not laugh because they will not identify with it. [April 5, 1981]

Audiences recognize performers and genres by style as well, enabling them to interpret performances. Frequently performers will play with the styles of well-known performers in order to create comic effects or to make inside jokes for sophisticated audience members. The National Theater of the Deaf frequently "plays" in this way. In its production of the *Iliad*, which uses the metaphor of a football game, one of the half-time events is an interview with Menelaus on the subject of the abduction of Helen. In this masterful mimed and signed rendition, Menelaus (played by different actors in different performances), incorporates Marcel-like mime as well as a plagiarized portion of "Swan Lake" in describing Zeus' appearing to Leda in the guise of a swan. For those audience members in on the joke, it is a marvelous bit of quotation.

Discipline and technique are at the core of the distinction between the extraordinary and the ordinary. It is hardly surprising that every artist who has spoken or written about his or her art has said something about technique. Often, these statements appear in the context of the emotive component of art. Henryk Tomaszewsky, the great contemporary Polish mime, for example, comments, "In order to say anything, one must first of all have at one's command an efficient speech apparatus. If this speech is movement—one must have a perfect mastery of the motor apparatus. This is the domain of technique" (1975: no page numbers). Equally unequivocal is Marceau's statement, "Feeling without technique is worth noting" (interview, April 5, 1981). The Polish metteur en scène, Jerszy Grotowski, sees a relationship between increasing emotion and control which takes the form of technique: "The more we become absorbed in what is hidden inside us, in the excess, in the exposure, in the self-penetration, the more rigid must be the external discipline; that is to say, the form, the artificiality, the ideogram, the sign" (1968:29).

It is important that art be different from the ordinary world whatever form it takes. "Dance" and "mime," as they approach the nonselective characteristics of real life, become just as dull and boring and uninteresting as the reality they approach. They become uninteresting precisely because they have cut themselves off from all the contextual cues that, in real life, allow people to make more sense of speech and action than is audible or visible on the surface. It is obvious even on casual reflection that we interpret what goes on around us in ordinary contexts using all the subconscious cultural information that we have spent a long period of socialization acquiring. Put into a "special" context such as a performance where this cultural knowledge is out of place and at the same time deprived of our expectations of performance, we are at a loss to interpret or even enjoy. Dance and mime then lose their ability to function as a special context and a special medium for communication which can say general things about the state of the world. They can no longer deliver their impressions in that condensed and remarkable form that gives them their particular power to move. Chekhov, a playwright noted for his attention to social details, himself objected to a particular kind of "realism" that Stanislavsky had planned for a production of *The Sea Gull*, that is, a recording of dogs barking and frogs croaking. He insisted that such superfluous realism was contrary to the very nature of the theater: "The theatre is art, the theatre reflects the quintessence of life" (cited in Hoover 1974:248). A stage language is crucial. As Madeleine Renaud points out in discussing Jean Genet, he "has recreated a poetic language for the theatre. His genius consists in his sense of dramatic tempo, the alternating tension and relaxation, his perception of the outward gestures and forms which create theatrical characters as distinguished from ordinary people" (cited in Brater 1975:436).

A faithful rendition of reality, in addition to being uninteresting, also limits the capacity of the art form to make any general statements about the nature of the world. It is doomed instead to merely duplicating particular situations. In *Mimesis and Art* (1966), Göran Sörbom speaks about the generalizing quality of mime in Attic Greece and contrasts this with the

capabilities of portraiture. In portraiture, he argues, one particular model is reproduced and the qualities of the portrait are decided by the actual look of the model. In Attic mime, the purpose was rather to present more general phenomena to the audience. The mime may have used some particular person as a model, but he did not do so in order to present a portrait of that person. This rendering of characteristic qualities is different from the realism inherent in being true to nature or to a particular model as in portraiture. In fact, rendering characteristic qualities is precisely the basis for the stock individuals and situations in the commedia dell'arte, and, as we shall see, originated in the portrayal of regional stereotypes—Arlecchino, Brighella, Il Dottore, and Pantalone. While these masques might at some point have been based on a particular individual within the experience of some commedia artist, they stood ultimately for certain general types—the lustful, greedy fool, the sly trickster, the pedant, and the gullible old man. In the process some properties were selected, others were excluded, and what remained was caricatured and exaggerated. By these means, mime acquired the ability to state general ideas and truths.

The fact that we attribute this generalizing ability to mime allows it to be used to make effective statements about the particular. One example is the commentary made by the dumbshow in *Hamlet*, where, because we are given the frame dumbshow, which we equate with allegorical comment, Hamlet may express his particular feelings about the death of his father and the hasty remarriage of his mother and still remain within the bounds of propriety. In the same way, allegorical intermezzi in sixteenth century commedia often presented contemporary political or social situations disguised in the masks of allegory. Athenian comedy in Attic times, while performed to make people laugh, also had a serious side to it in its commentary on the abuses and degeneracy it saw in contemporary social and political life (Seyffert 1956:152).

Artists are those individuals in any society whose business it is to go beyond the ordinary world, to help people formulate the essence of life, to propose unchanging truths. In the ordinary round of activity, we have neither time nor the appropriate setting for this kind of revelation or stocktaking. Furthermore, the theater can compress and go right to the heart of the issue without any of the circumlocutions required by everyday behavior and thought. This is clearly what Barrault meant when he said, "If the mime is born of silence that is because he is essentially present. . . . It is not a question of making oneself understood but of being evident" (in F. Brown 1980:366). Barrault's statement is important because it points to two characteristics of art: first, art does not communicate in the same way as ordinary communication; second, it does not have to have a "message" beyond the mastery of form. This can be both its message and its function—to display mastery so far beyond the capabilities of the masses that it is exhilarating in and of itself. In the early development of corporeal mime, Barrault and Etienne Decroux strove for this mastery and a purity of a form isolated from social context and meaning. Motion itself was the only goal they had in mind: "Walking without advancing, walking but walking nowhere, the silent, faceless mime embodied the gratuitousness of *art pour art* and the innocence of somnambulism" (F. Brown 1980:377).

One indication of the importance of art as a special context is the use that totalitarian regimes often make of it, spawning schools of social realism to speak their messages. In these cases, it is only performances or pieces with "messages" that can be overtly manipulated. Those forms that depend upon sheer mastery of technique still carry their original impact. Of the performing arts, dance and mime are fortunate in this respect. Whatever other purpose may be found for them, they still have their power through form. Mime, in fact, is probably more often employed by anti-government and anti-establishment groups to educate the public than it used by governments. The appearance seemingly out of nowhere of street mime groups in the United States in the 1960s can be linked to the Free Speech Movement, anti-Vietnam sentiment, and reaction against the establishment in general. Even in those countries in which all theater, including mime, is subject to review by censors, mime appears to be able to "say" more and suffer fewer penalties than the spoken theater.

A fitting end to this first discussion of the relationship between art and reality is the Prologue to Apollinaire's *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*, where the Director of the Company of Actors comments:

For if the theatre should not be an imitation of reality
It is right that the dramatist should use
All the illusions at his disposal. . . .
It is right that he should let crowds speak, or inanimate objects
If he so pleases
And that he no longer has to reckon
With time and space
His universe is the play within which he is God the Creator
Who disposes at will
Of sounds gestures movements masses colors
Not merely in order
To photograph what is called a slice of life
But to bring forth life itself and all its truth.

[in Esslin 1968:236]

THE PERFORMANCE CONTEXT

Thus far, we have spoken of art, and particularly dance and mime, as being different from the ordinary because of its special qualities of form developed by limitation, stylization, discipline, and adherence to a system of rules. An equally important factor in separating dance and mime from ordinary movement and gesture is the notion of performance. The performance context is one that is marked off from the ordinary flow of activities. It is a context where special forms of expressive behavior are presented and where we pay attention to them in ways different from the way we observe ordinary activity.

To Western minds, with years of proscenium stages defining performance, this idea seems obvious. Pushkin articulated this separation in an essay on popular theater:

> A resemblance to reality is still supposed to be the chief pre-condition and basis of dramatic art. But what if it could be proved that the very essence of dramatic art is such as to preclude any such resemblance? . . . Where is the resemblance to reality in an auditorium divided in two, one half of which is full of spectators?. [in Hoover 1974:v]

Even if one considers the "theaters" in which French and Italian commedia troupes played in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in Paris—*jeu de paume*, or tennis, courts that were rented for several performances and converted from their daytime sporting function to theaters in the evening—there was still a separation of audience and performer. Street performances by acrobats, clowns, and performing animals were marked off by musicians coming in advance and frequently by an announcer. A description by Leonard Pronko (1974:11) of the performers of Balinese dance-drama shows that, although the setting is not so well demarcated, there is still a clear distinction between performance and non-performance:

> One of the most astounding metamorphoses in all the world of theater takes place when the tense, wide-eyed, heroic warrior who has been dancing the Baris walks out of the playing area and, without removing makeup since he has worn none, becomes a laughing schoolboy or a shy peasant. The Balinese performer is a professional, however, in a sense in which many Western actors are not. He has spent years of discipline and training to learn his technique, sometimes in the use of vocal chords, but more often in a complete mastery of the whole body, a total control of each muscle in legs, arms, torso, head, and face.

Here, the performing space is not an enclosed Western-style theater whose sole purpose is to house performances. It is probably part of a patio of a temple or compound that sees ordinary activities during other times but has been cleared of paraphernalia and set aside for a performance. Spectators are aware of the change of context, although the restrictions on nonperformers' wandering through the performing space are somewhat more lax that Westerners are accustomed to. The other noticeable difference has to do with the role of "performer" in Balinese society as contrasted to most Western instances. In the former, the dancer, while trained from childhood in the technique of this most exacting form, is also integrated fully into village life. He farms or goes to school just like anyone else. In our own Western experience, performers are more often than not segregated from the rest of society so that they are in a sense always performing.

Whether in East or West, marking off performance as a special context is accomplished through several mechanisms. First and probably most important is the sharing and acceptance by performers and potential audience of the notion of a performance. This intention to perform, that is, to step into those modes of behavior appropriate to the performance frame, has to be signaled appropriately to spectators so that they can adopt the corresponding role of audience. Goffman (1974) refers to this process of transcription as "keying." Bateson (1979) and Schwartzmann (1978) speak of it in terms of metacommunicative framing. When either part of the performance equation is out of sync, then there is no performance. I observed one such example several years ago at a performance of the Louisville Ballet Company at which Mikhail Baryishnikov and Patricia McBride were guest soloists. They were to open the program with Jerome Robbins' "Free Dance," choreographed to the music of Chopin. The accompanying pianist sat at a piano on stage. The audience was all in its place waiting expectantly, and the curtain went up—only to reveal McBride and Baryishnikov discussing some point of choreography. After an embarrassing second or two, McBride recovered and made the standard ballerina exit into the wings with as much aplomb as if she had finished a performance. Baryishnikov exited as quickly as possible with no attempt to "cover up" by adopting a performance mode. The stage hands and the audience had keyed into their performance frame; no one had thought to tell the principals.

More often, the audience is guilty of not playing its proper role. In many nations of Europe in the nineteenth century, the theater was the place one went to flirt and pay court or carry on business. The parterre was reserved for men who stood and exchanged greetings, both verbal and nonverbal, with the fair occupants of the loges, while others on the parterre were making business deals.

Street performers, those on the Boulevard du Crime in nineteenth century Paris, for example, had to compete with each other to capture the attention of passerby—in a sense, to make the latter accept the role of audience. Performers themselves sometimes transgress this separation and implicit acceptance of two distinct roles. Ettore Petrolini, an early twentieth century heir to the old commedia dell 'arte, would address members of his audience, bantering with them, embarrassing them. Frederick Lemaitre, the great nineteenth-century French actor, in his role as Robert Macaire continually violated the audience's expectations to the point of sitting in the loge nearest the stage and carrying on his dialogue with the actors on stage as if he were part of the audience. Adriana Lecouvreur took revenge on the rival who had tried to poison her by speaking directly to her the lines of a play that spoke of the same situation when the rival was sitting in a box at a performance. We see this transgression of the spectator-performer separation even in ballet. Robert Joffrey's rock ballet "Astarte" begins with the male soloist rising from his aisle seat in the audience and walking slowly to the stage, where he then removes his "audience member" suit in slow motion and becomes a "performer." For those who have even been raised on happenings and do-it-yourself theater, this crossing of the demarcation line is, of course, not new.

TRANSFORMATION IN THE THEATER

I have spoken of the notion of intent and acceptance of the performance frame by performer and spectator as a way of denoting performance as a marked-off context. Transformation is a second important process that signals a separation from the ordinary. One of the most influential writers on the semiotics of folk theater, Petr Bogatyrev, speaks to the fundamental importance of transformation:

> One of the most important and fundamental features of the theater is *transformation*: the actor changes his appearance, dress, voice, and even the features of his personality into the appearance, costume, voice, and personality of the character whom he represents in the play. [in Matejka and Titunik 1976:51]

As mentioned above, there are several ways of effecting a transformation. Costume and makeup are two such. In some Western theater, ordinary street clothes may be the "costumes" of the actors and actresses. Mime and dance are different in this regard, primarily because one cannot comfortably perform mime or dance in ordinary clothes. Then, of course, the use of white-face in traditional mime serves to mark off even further the performer from the ordinary. Street mimes that I saw in Paris were invariably in white-face, and it served to highlight them as other than part of the ordinary crowd. It was a very effective way of catching people's attention immediately.

Transformation had an even more specific meaning in late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century mime. Although it had appeared earlier in French masques, the visual device of magical transformation became one of the major elements in eighteenth-century English pantomime. David Mayer refers to it as "visual simile," one of the principle methods of satire in pantomime. As Mayer notes:

> The visual simile, a way of disclosing that one thing has a hidden likeness to another, is the result of a transformation: at the appropriate moment, a clap of Harlequin's bat cues the machinist or stagehand to alter an object, a character, or setting to something which, in some hitherto unnoticed way, it resembles. [1969:39]

One of the prime motivating forces behind this rise to importance of transformation in mime was John Rich, manager of Covent Garden and, under the name of "Lun," the most important Harlequin of the first half of the eighteenth century. Rich had to compete for audiences with Drury Lane, and he knew quite well that spectacle on a mammoth scale and well-done pantomime would attract people. He also had talents in the direction of stage machinery. As Harlequin, he was the prime mover in these performances.

> He quickly came to appreciate that . . . in spite of all the rhetoric . . . the pantomime is a kind of stage experiment which will always give more delight to a mixed company than the best farce that can be written. Rich was shrewd enough to recognize that pantomime was one of those areas in which he was equipped to compete successfully with Drury Lane. He had a newer theatre . . . , one capable of handling . . . the scenic effects upon which a good share of the pantomime's appeal depended. [Sawyer 1972:90]

Although the heyday of stage transformations on a large scale came later, Harlequin, from the very first, was the author of transformations and at times even the victim of them, as in *Merlin in Love.*[3] The theme of things not being as they appeared was also carried out in the favorite devices of twins and of men and women dressing in the clothing of the opposite sex. These strategems appeared in written form as early as 1562 in the scenario for the commedia *Gl'inganni.* The play itself was performed first in 1547 in Milan and served as the prototype for Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night.* In the prototype, Fortunato and Gineva are twins who, along with their mother, are captured by corsairs. Gineva is mistaken for a boy, since she is dressed in comfortable clothes for the voyage and maintains this fiction, taking the name of Ruberto. In what is a conventional plot device, Ruberto/Gineva becomes the servant of a young nobleman, Gostanzo, and falls in love with him. At the end, all is revealed, and the appropriate couples

are formed. Some plots went so far as to have two sets of twins.

A different sort of transformation forms the basis for the work of the modern Swiss-Italian mime group, Mummenshanz. The two men and a woman usually work in black leotards and tights and masks. The latter are anything but conventional and sometimes envelop the entire body, as in the scene in which an unseen player in a tube plays with a large beach ball. One of the group's pieces deals more or less straightforwardly with transformations. In it there are two mimes, each wearing a pliable mask. As the piece develops, each molds the mask into different shapes and "faces." One face develops into a more and more "beautiful" and "elegant" face; the other hopelessly moves from one inept and ugly creation to the next. The changes of character and personality are rapid and believable.

Other Mummenshanz pieces play upon different feelings. Again in a piece for two, both performers appear in leotards and tights, with black hoods covering their heads and faces. Affixed to the hoods are toilet paper rolls that become the features of the face—eyes, nose, mouth and ears. In spite of the unrealistic "face" of these two, one immediately identifies them as fellow human beings and, furthermore, identifies them as a couple who are in love. This particular mime becomes even more complicated with puns on language:

> Dans le langage, on utilise beacoup d'images, dont nous faisons usage également dans nos réprésentations. Par example, pour 'jeter un regard,' je tire le papier de toilette de mon oeil et je la jette! Inconsciemment le public comprend. (In language one uses many images, of which we make similar use in our performances. For example, to 'cast a look' I pull paper from the toilet paper roll that is my eye and throw it. Unconsciously the public understands.) [in Bourquin 1975:91]

In fact, in Mummenshanz, one has people with nonhuman masks that still convey human qualities. It is in one sense a double transformation, a playing just like the example of the visual pun cited above.

Finally, on the subject of transformation, I want to discuss the transformation of a character into a person. This is the situation in which the artist creates a character so convincing and appealing that the public attributes a kind of reality to him. On the one hand, this creation, in the past at least, has made for good theater; on the other hand, it has constricted the range of freedom for those particular artists who have become identified with their creations. Both of my examples are drawn from the world of mime.

The first is Jean-Gaspard Deburau, the most eminent nineteenth-century French mime, and his creation, Pierrot. Pierrot was not created by Deburau—he was one of the early figures in the commedia dell'arte—but in Deburau's hands he was transformed. From the imbecilic Pedrolino or Gilles, who were the dupes of everyone, Deburau made Pierrot the author of tricks. Deburau's Pierrot became the central figure usurping the place of Harlequin. His Pierrot was aloof, cynical, prone to fall in love, sometimes foolish, sometimes mischievous. Deburau, who was also a superb acrobat, injected a note of control and sustained movement that had not distinguished the character before. Above all, his Pierrot was one with whom the audience could identify. He was a loner on whom the world frequently played tricks, but he stood his ground and sometimes got his own back.

However, when the pantomime *Marchand d'Habits* was produced in 1842 at the instigation of Cot d'Ordan, the new manager of the Funanbules, it represented a change from the comic to the macabre. This mime has been immortalized in the Marcel Carné film, *Les Enfants de Paradis.* Briefly, the plot has Pierrot fall in love with a beautiful woman. In order to win her affections, he kills an old clothes merchant and steals a suit of clothes. The ghost of the merchant interrupts his conquest of the lady, and Pierrot is eventually killed by the ghost. For one reason or another, Deburau did not play the Pierrot in this mime (he was played by Paul Legrand),[4] and the mime was a failure as far as the public was concerned. They were not happy with the radical change from the old Pierrot with whom they could identify. Tristan Remy argues that the Pierrot of *Marchand d'Habits* was foreign to the character created by Deburau:

> Et puis le jeu de Jean-Gaspard n'était pas dramatique. Jamais la gamme de ses expressions n'allait jusqu'à l'effroi, le désespoir, la honte ou le rémords. La convoitise, l'hypocrisie, la raillerie, la poltronnerie convenaient mieux à son comique habituel (The mime of Jean-Gaspard was not dramatic. The gamut of his expressions did not include terror, despair, shame, or remorse. Lust, hypocrisy, raillery, and cowardice were better suited to his comic role). [1954:174-5]

Deburau had created a Pierrot whom the public took to its heart, and it wouldn't tolerate another.

The second example is, fittingly enough, the character of Bip, who was created by Marcel Marceau in 1947 and quickly became a universal character with whom people could identify. He is humorous, tragic, mischievous, and poignant. As Marceau describes him: "Bip, with his white face, his striped pullover, his tight trousers and his battered hat topped with a trembling flower. Bip, whether as butterfly hunter, lion-tamer, skater, professor of botany or guest at a society party, the silent witness of the lives of all men, struggling against one handicap or another, with joys and sorrows as their daily companions" (Marceau 1979). Marceau commented in an interview on the nature of Bip and the fact that, in the style mimes,[5] he himself is much freer because Bip cannot step out of character.

> Bip can never die. Bip has to remain Bip; he has to remain a character. He can identify with other characters—he can become a fish or a stone, for a moment but he cannot end on an abstract note. There always has to be a human ending because he is going to have another adventure afterwards. It was a big problem for me to make him die in "The Soldier." After, he has to be reborn. This way he does not really die. But in pantomimes of style I do the tree and the tree dies. It's not Marceau. . . . Bip is a part of Marceau; it's the alter-ego. There is a part of Bip in me, like there is a part of Bip in every one of us. [In the style mimes] I am more free to interpret themes that can go to their total destruction, like the death image. . . . It cannot be Bip. Bip cannot do "Youth, maturity, old age and death." . . . Bip has to have a happy ending or a lyrical ending. [interview, April 5, 1981]

In a sense, the public's identification with a particular character is a violation of the separate status of the world of the theater. One might say that the stock commedia characters were similarly constrained by their attributes, but I do not think this is qualitatively the same thing. Deburau's Pierrot and Marceau's Bip became the property of the public as much of their creators and were capable of stirring the deepest emotions. This was not the same response that was generated by the commedia masks. What is going on, in part, is the transference from mask to person. Marcel Mauss (1971) speaks of masking and posits a kind of continuum that at the most removed or theatrical end includes mask and masquerade and at the most ordinary, everyday end is characterized by the notion of role and person. What has happened to Pierrot and Bip is that they have been taken out of their theatrical context and have become real people in the minds of the public. From character they have become person.

In the catalog of transformations that mark off performance, a major item is the use of masks (this includes as well the use of the face as a mask). Masking, whether in Western or non-Western society, means that one becomes something other than oneself; one takes on another role. This kind of transformation at its core involves the manipulation of power. The manipulation can come from one of several parties. The person putting on the mask can do so to frighten, enthrall, command others. The mask itself can command and manipulate both its wearer and the spectators. Masks are by their nature full of mystery, but they can also be dangerous and marked by supernatural power. Dancers among the Yaqui who vow to dance the role of Chapayekas (enemies of Christ) in the Easter ceremonies wear enormous masks, and underneath them each dancer holds a rosary in his mouth to counteract the evil power of the mask.[6] Finally, the wearer of the mask can be manipulated by both the mask and the audience. Some masks carry with them such rigid behaviors and characteristics that no freedom is possible; indeed the performer is subject to severe sanctions if he or she violates the expected performance behavior.

NATURALISTIC ART AND THE THEATER OF THE ABSURD

It is fitting to conclude this discussion of the relationship between art and the mundane by exploring two twentieth-century trends in art that lie at opposite ends of the continuum. I am speaking here of naturalistic art, which has for its purpose the replication of reality, and the theater of the absurd, which rejects any logical representation of reality. Much of the former category could appropriately be called art of the mundane. Undoubtedly there are historical precedents for both these trends, but this discussion will limit itself to more or less contemporary phenomena (see Fig. 1).

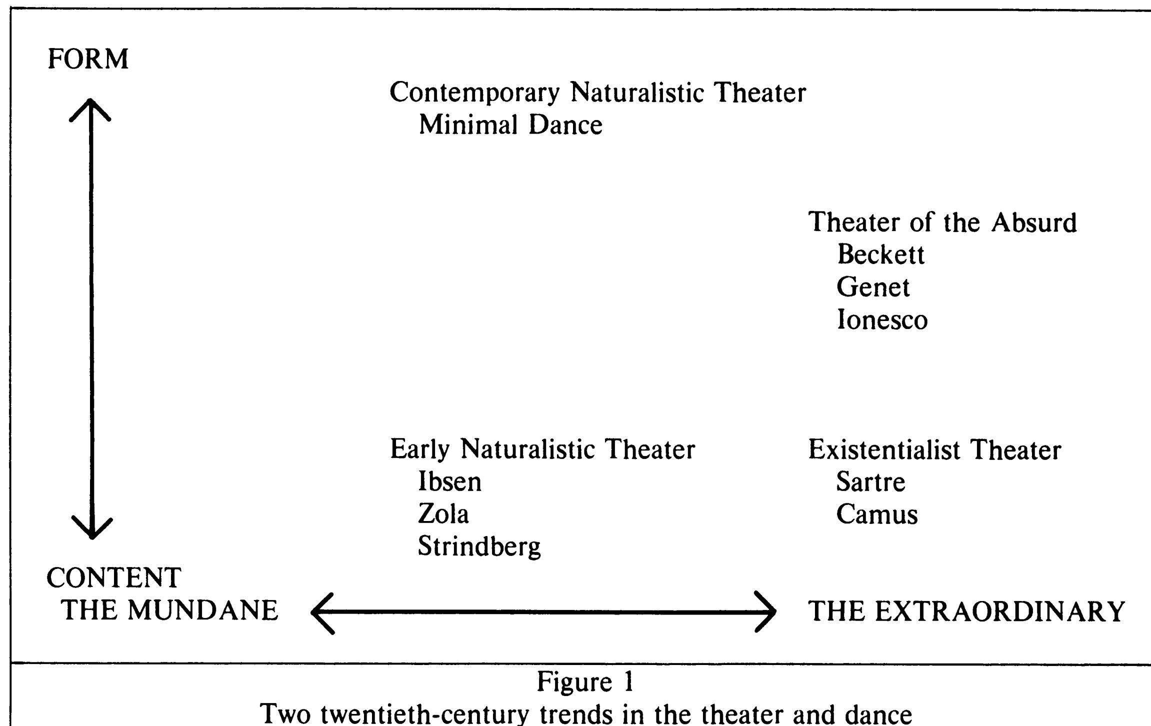

Figure 1
Two twentieth-century trends in the theater and dance

The trend toward naturalism in dance was introduced at the beginning of this paper with the brief comments on happenings in dance in the '60s and '70s. Let us continue with a closer examination of the reflections and works of Trisha Brown and Douglas Dunn, two contemporary American dancers and choreographers. Dunn goes quickly to the basics in his comments (T. Brown and Dunn 1976) on the difficulty of categorizing his particular dance style. In naming the company that he and Brown helped found, Dunn says that they wanted to think of themselves as doing everything; dance was too limiting; drama and theater likewise had too many connotations. What they argue is that Grand Union[7] was a collaboration of individual artists in which people could call themselves dancers or actors depending on the preponderance of various elements in their work (ibid.:82). Both Brown and Dunn tried to avoid the traditional look of trained dancers. Characteristic of the latter is a conformity both of physical shape and size as well as of personality and temperament. Brown says, "In the sixties, a trained dancer was a person with a puffed-out ribcage who was designed to project across the footlights in a proscenium arch stage. He or she couldn't necessarily do a natural kind of movement, even a simple one." She continues talking about the type of dancer and movement that she sought: "So what I looked for was a person with a natural, well-coordinated, instinctive ability to move. At that time the whole dance vocabulary was open. It was no longer selected movement or chosen gestures for telling a story within the formal vocabulary of ballet movement. All movement became available for choreographing" (ibid.:82).

In Dunn's case, soon after he arrived in New York he was selected by Yvonne Rainer as one of the "natural" dancers: "When I came to New York in 1968 and Yvonne Rainer was looking for people fresh off the farm and people who didn't know how to point their feet, I was in the front of the line. It seemed to me the most normal thing possible" (ibid.:82).

Both Dunn and Brown speak in terms of building choreography from functional movement and natural movement. Brown speaks of her work on a new piece: "I've made a section of material which is something like functional movement. Not functional movement, but a logical progression where one movement follows another. . . . No big jumps. I try not to leave anything out" (ibid.:79). And in response to a question from Dunn about emphasis on approach and kind of approach, Brown says: "I think that it comes into the category of naturalness or natural movement. Doing things in a straight way. The human way of doing something is often preferred when I give instructions to my performers to do something" (ibid.:83). If I interpret Brown correctly here, what she is doing is equating "human" with "natural." Dunn uses functional movement as a way of getting at the formal structure of the dance, moving away from a reliance on imagery: "I'm still relatively dedicated to being functional about getting in and out of things unless there's a specific imagistic reason not to do so. The things I do which are specifically awkward are made to be awkward. I don't really say I want to make an image of something. I start to make steps, then I think of the imagistic possibilities" (ibid.:78).

Both choreographers are examples of a trend toward formalism; that is, it is the form and structure of the dance that is of paramount interest to them, rather than the imagery or what it might be saying. As Dunn comments in response to something Brown has said about her repetitive way of building choreography, "there is an interest in dance as an area to experiment with movement problems or performance problems as possibilities—as opposed to a vehicle for expressing what you think about the world. It's like talking—through your dancing—about the kinds of things that interest you about movement" (ibid.:81). This is an intriguing trend to appear at the same time as natural dance or minimal dance—intriguing because there is a tendency to regard form and structure as basic, and from there the connection is made between basic and natural. One might see this as a logical progression from the initial focus on natural movement. In fact, form and structure *are* basic but in the sense of being the basic building blocks of any art, since art is a playing with form. However, the more one devotes oneself to form and structure, the more one is dealing with artistic norms and the further away one gets from natural.

Naturalism in the theater has come in and out of fashion several times in this century. We have already seen Chekhov's response to Stanislavsky's attempt at realism. Another factor has to be considered when talking about naturalism in the theater as opposed to naturalism in dance, however. One has to make a careful distinction between the naturalism of subject matter and the naturalism of the acting. Most early instances of naturalism in the theater—Zola's *Thérèse Raquin*, Chekhov's *The Seagull*, Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*—were depicting natural subject matter. In a concise essay on naturalism in the theater, Martin Esslin (1970:24) gives Zola's views on naturalism:

> Naturalism . . . is the return to nature and to man, direct observation, correct anatomy, the acceptance and the depiction of that which is. The task is the same for the scientist as for the writer. Both have to abandon abstractions for realities, ready made formulas for rigorous analysis. Hence no more abstract characters in our works, no more absolutes, but real people, the true history of everyone, the web and woof of everyday life.

In this attitude, a curious thing happens to form and the relationship between form and content. As Esslin notes:

> The decisive and truly revolutionary element in this attitude . . . was its passionate proclamation of *the primacy of content over form*, the conviction that any subject matter could be treated, and that each subject matter would call for the form most adequate and suitable to express it. Artistic form thus came to be seen as the *organic expression* of its content. [ibid.:27-28]

This, I think, is one of the key features that makes this early experimentation with naturalism different from contemporary manifestations. Lionel Gossman presents this idea when he speaks about the starkness of the naturalistic theater: "The starkness of the naturalistic theatre and the parsimoniousness with which it utilizes the rich repertoire of traditional theatrical means of expression seem to have made it most suited, in fact, to rather small, intimate, and homogeneous—more exclusively bourgeois—audiences" (1976:6). Here it is not necessarily the subject matter that provides the naturalism; rather, it is the acting and the staging that strive for naturalness.

Whether one speaks of subject matter or form of presentation, the theater of the absurd lies at the furthest remove from naturalistic theater. Absurd for the theater of the absurd refers to the notion that life is without purpose, senseless, that it cannot be understood through rational analysis. Furthermore, this essential absurdity of the human condition must be portrayed in the theater by the absence of rational devices and discursive thought. In Esslin's words, "The Theatre of the Absurd has renounced arguing *about* the absurdity of the human condition; it merely *presents* it in being—that is, in terms of concrete stage images" (1973:6). Without the form, there is no theater of the absurd, and there must be a one-to-one relationship of form to content. One must agree with Esslin that without the gradual unfolding of the formal patterns on stage, the performance is incomprehensible. In contrasting the theater of the absurd with naturalistic theater, Esslin begins by saying that one of the major contributions of absurdist theater is that the theater itself is a form of poetry: concretized metaphor, complex imagery on multiple planes of meanings and association. He then comments: "Just as lyrical poetry is far more compressed and economical a form than the realistic novel, a poetic theatre of this kind is far more compressed and economical of time than a naturalistic theatre" (1970:222-223).

And at this point we have come back once more to the whole issue of transformation of reality and relationship to reality in different forms of art. Most theater, most dance, and virtually all mime could be described in terms that Esslin uses for the theater of the absurd—they are compressed and economical forms. Naturalistic theater and minimal or naturalistic dance approach the nonselective nature of the real world. Carried to the logical conclusion of this philosophy of naturalism, both the theatrical and dance forms become problematic because they continue to be presented in a performance context but have none of the requirements of artistic form.

It is useful here to state explicitly the positions of early naturalistic theater and naturalistic dance, and the theater of the absurd with reference to the mundane and to form and content. Early naturalistic theater, as exemplified by Zola, Ibsen, Strindberg, and others, was devoted to presenting the content of ordinary situations. The form in which this was presented was believed to follow naturally from the content itself, although metteurs en scène such as Stanislavsky worked on developing methods for natural acting. Contemporary naturalistic theater concentrates on making the theater just like life itself in terms of form. Naturalistic dance also attempts to reproduce natural movements, but here, where form is all important, this attempt frequently leads to more and more concentration on form alone and the implications of certain ways of stringing together form, so that soon one is back to formalism in dance, with highly elaborated structures and content deriving solely from the structures. The theater of the absurd, as I have just argued, posits the essential senselessness of life, the opposite of the naturalistic view. "In the Theatre of the Absurd, form and content not only match, they are inseparable from each other" (Esslin 1970:226).

SUMMARY

Examination of dance, mime, theater, and, within those genres, the various styles and movements that establish different relationships to the mundane, serves to bring into sharp focus the nature of art. Adherence to a style, selection, condensation, and transformation are all features essential to the definition of art. The performing arts share all those features but, in addition, they have a special relationship to the world by virtue of the fact that they must create themselves anew at each performance. Performers deal with an ever-changing context of communication and face intrinsically different problems of expression from those artists who do not work in the immediacy of performance.

This is the essence of all art: to be at once of the world and separate from it, to be at once trapped by time, yet timeless. Art must distill truth for us, and artists must go beyond the ordinary world to help people formulate the essence of life. The performing arts must do so in the ephemerality and intimacy of performance, where, for a few hours, time and place are suspended, and audience and performers share a special vision of the world.

NOTES

Acknowledgment. An earlier version of this paper was read at the Kroeber Anthropological Society meetings in Berkeley in 1980. The present paper, with some modifications, appears in my book, *Movement and Meaning: Creativity and Interpretation in Ballet and Mime* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1984). The paper, the book, and indeed all my work owe much to the enthusiastic support of new directions and the kindly criticism of Elizabeth Colson. It is an honor to acknowledge my great debt to her.

[1] A particularly good example of this separation comes from Arlene Croce's (1979:15-16) review of the "Deuce Coupe":

> Most of the time in "Deuce Coupe," the dancers appear to be behaving with such realism that we could believe they were making it up as they went along. People who don't often go to the ballet might recognize the validity of these dances at once and wonder why such a fuss was being made over them. People who go more regularly fall into the trap of their expectations, and "Deuce Coupe" looks formless to them—just taken off the street and thrown onto the stage. Actually, no one has put contemporary American popular dancing of quite this intensity and freedom on the stage before, and I am sure that no one but Twyla Tharp would have known how to make these dances legible in the theatre. A hundred kids going berserk at a school prom is a powerful but not necessarily a theatrical spectacle. To be realized on the stage, such potency has to be objectified; the material has to be changed and heightened. In the process, it becomes beautiful, but "beauty" isn't the choreographers object—clarity is. And Twyla Tharp does something that people dancing for recreation don't do: she makes a theatrical translation of the music. In "How She Boogalooed It," she doesn't give us the Boogaloo—she gives us something that looks more like snake dancing at top speed. . . . We do get a long way from the school prom. The spontaneity and naturalness of the dances are a marvelous illusion, a secret of professional style.

[2] Stephen Miller (1973:92) characterizes this process-oriented kind of activity as "galumphing" or "patterned, voluntary elaboration or complication of process, where the pattern is not under the dominant control of goals."

[3] The following scene from Aaron Hill's *Merlin in Love* shows Harlequin as the victim of a transformation:

After the air, she [Columbine] directs him to the easy chair; into which he leaps antickly, up, and reclines himself, in a lolling, extravagant posture. On a sudden, the head of the chair sneezes; and Harlequin beginning to move, as in surprise, is caught fast, by an arm of the chair, about his waist; at which, twisting his face around, with great agony and distortion, the other arm of the chair is raised above his head, which is grasped violently by the hand of it. Harlequin roars out, and struggles to get loose. . . . At length, he breaks free. . . . The easy chair rises, slowly into the figure of a man (the back part falling down, to form the tail of his robe) and appears to be Merlin. [from *Merlin in Love; or, Youth Against Magic: A Pantomime Opera* (1760; written earlier but printed that year)]

[4] There are any number of explanations for why Deburau did not play Pierrot in *Marchand d'Habits.* One, typical of the irresistible urge to merge Deburau with Pierrot, maintains that the killing of the old clothes seller was too similar to Deburau's killing of a young man who persisted in taunting him in the street (a deed for which the mime was exonerated). Another explanation is that Deburau felt that this Pierrot was out of character and he did not want to play him. A third, and most plausible, is that Deburau was ill when it came time to put on the new pantomime and Paul Legrand took the role.

[5] Style mimes, for Marceau, make up one-half of each program. They include "Creation of the World," "The Tree," "Remembrances," "The Trial," "Contrasts," and so forth. The other half of the program is composed of mimes that have Bip as the central character. The style mimes give Marceau much more latitude in terms of content than do the Bip mimes, though the technique is basically the same in both types.

[6] A particularly poignant and frightening example of the power of masks was told to me by a friend whose specialty is Balinese dance. When she first went to Bali, she studied under Kakul, one of the great masters. Later, returning for a visit, she found her teacher paralyzed and unable to speak. The story told by his son was that Kakul had been importuned to perform one of the masked dances important in maintaining relations with the spirits. He did not wish to do so because the spirit of the mask he would be wearing was a particularly dangerous one. Finally, he agreed, went through all the preparatory purification rituals, and did the performance. The next day he lost his power of speech. After the condition had gone on for several days, his family finally took him to the hospital. The doctors could find nothing organically wrong, although they said it might have been a stroke. While in the hospital Kakul became totally paralyzed. Everyone believes it was the spirit of the mask that caused the paralysis, and his son says that he himself will never perform with that mask.

[7] Grand Union was a cooperative of choreographers that was started in 1970. It was disbanded in 1976.

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