

The Aesthetics of a Contemporary Chinese Shadow Theater

By

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INTRODUCTION

The shadow theater, *pi-ying* 皮影 (“leather shadows”), was optimally situated to last through the turmoils of early 20th century China. It always was a popular entertainment, carrying the plots sumptuously presented on the urban stage to peasants in the countryside or to women sequestered in their courtyards. Familiar stories from history and literature were acted out by translucent leather figures, dexterously manipulated to music and song behind a thin cloth screen. The theater flourishes today where it always was well received, in the provinces. Permanent theaters, with seating capacities as high as 1000, have replaced the makeshift arrangement of earlier performances; new plots have come into the repertory and an official aesthetics governs the presentation. A Communist ideology has been assimilated to this traditional theater without altering it completely: more evidence that change in contemporary China is a complex interaction of persistence and revision.

A glimpse into the life of the shadow theater today was afforded me by a brief (10 day-session) seminar conducted by Mr. Qi Yong-heng at the Institut International de la Marionnette, Charleville-Mézières, France, Summer, 1982. Since Qi's audience was composed mainly of professional shadow puppeteers from many different traditions, he concentrated upon the most readily communicated technical usages of his theater. It was necessary, however, for him to specify at each stage of his exposition the audience response for which an effect was designed. His own position as master and director of a large (15+ performer) shadow theater requires an awareness of this response, hence his discussion of figures and movements paralleled a discussion of the

aesthetics addressed by his performances. This told much about popular theatrical expression in present-day China, about what audiences expect and what notions of their expectations govern the performers' activities. The analysis of the aesthetics given here draws heavily upon Qi's lectures—delivered in Chinese with summary French translation—and upon separate conversations with the master, but it is essentially my own conceptualization of the values being stressed.

This amounts to a protracted reflection upon Qi's version of the contemporary shadow theater, aimed at understanding the aesthetics shared by the manipulator and his audience under the aegis of officialdom. I have examined my own knowledge and experience to find a crossing into another way of knowing and experiencing. If my gropings go awry and my generalizations seem idiosyncratic I, and not Qi, am responsible. It is all an experiment in understanding across language and theater to feeling.

Whether the feelings I describe and the means employed to arouse them actually can be shared by Americans and Chinese is the central, but not obsessive, concern of this experiment. A claim has been made that puppetry is a universal language. That may be so, but it can only be universal with a sincere effort to appreciate the particulars. In holding close to Qi and his audience, then, I envision a far greater audience for his artistry.

THE FIGURES AND THEIR ARTICULATION;

The shadow theater takes a number of different forms in China. Theaters differ among themselves in the size and shape of the figures, the practices of manipulation and to some extent in the repertory. Though no concerted effort has been made to create a "Chinese" shadow theater the present-day concept of performance dictates a relatively narrow set of possible plots. The "traditional" character of each puppet theater is increasingly an ornament, and the initiative of local troupes in mounting new productions aims at conformity to generally known principles. Qi has been a practitioner of his *Hebei* 河北 tradition for more than thirty five years, and uses the skills he learned as a child in today's performances. The technique of puppetry has never seemed to clash with the content.

The potential of the figures is phrased in terms of live drama: they can do everything a live actor can do except display facial emotion. Emotion is conveyed through the entire movement of the figure, for example grief by throwing up the arms and covering the face with the hands with a jerking motion of the torso. The animal figures, which are generically different from the human ones, introduce a realm of

action impossible on the stage. The construction of the figures is to the manipulator's mind the first term in the theater aesthetics. The construction permits desired virtuosity.

The figures' design is frankly similar to Chinese paper cuts. They may even be executed as paper cuts for purely decorative purposes. But paper is too frail a material to withstand the workout the figures must endure. Animal hide—sheep, cow, or in Hebei donkey hide—is the material of choice. The pattern is drawn upon paper and transferred to the cured and rubbed hide, then cut out with a sharp knife. A punch may be used to finish some areas, though never very much; the line of a hand cut is greatly appreciated. Color is applied by another transfer process and the entire figure is assembled from the pieces.

Human figures are articulated with loops of strong string in the arms and legs, some only in the arms. The articulations are controlled by long rods attached at the extremities of the joints. The attachment can be a permanent fixture or a clip secured to the limb. The neck is not articulated freely but in human figures is the locus of two very important features. First it has a slot into which one head or another can be fixed; second it is attached to a control rod hinged perpendicular to its surface. This permits the manipulator to hold the figure erect and move it fluidly with that rod alone while he works the other limbs through their own rods. Because the fastening of the neck control is loose yet durable, it enables the manipulator to flip the figure and have it end upright facing in the opposite direction, to bend and twist it in various ways and in general to give it wild agitations not possible with the rigid controls at the extremities. The human figures are directed from this center of energy outward to the limbs, which respond to the character motion established at the center. A young girl shyly casting her eyes down is one motion of the manipulator's wrist; a warrior leaping and somersaulting in battle is another. The human figures are keyed to a taste for centrifugal motion that decomposes their static material into striking action.

Animals, the most remarkable set of animals in any traditional shadow theater, form another population of figures set off against the humans. Animals are articulated each in its own way. Dragonflies and small birds are single figures on the end of a control rod moved to evoke their flight. Butterflies have two control rods, one at the end of each wing; larger fish also have two. Frogs are governed by a triangular tension system that allows the legs to flex and bend as if swimming or hopping. Large animals, the turtle, the crane and most especially the horse, have very complex articulations of head, neck and limbs that permit a very free response to the manipulator's control. Some

animals also sport moving eyes and mouths, features not typically found in human figures.

While the articulations of the human figures arise from the conventionalized movements of the stage, the animal figures satisfy a separate aesthetics. They are a reflection of nature and an appeal to the audience's delight in seeing the behavior of real animals mimicked on the shadow screen.

A manipulator must observe and copy the movements of animals in nature. The figures themselves are engineered to permit successful replication and even presuppose the importance of certain movements in their construction. The handling of the figure to give the audience the relished sense of a flat figures moving as a real animal moves is the result of the manipulator's careful study of creatures in the wild. Members of the audience know that the real animal is not behind the screen, and they do not suspend disbelief. Their pleasure in seeing the figure comes from the realization that this is how a familiar animal actually does move. The life of the animal is communicated to a dead figure by the skill of the performer. The manipulator is free to improvise, but within the limits set by the audience's wish to see the figures animated, "living" as an expression of pure skill.

The crane, for instance, is a large figure with a long neck formed of a row of leather discs articulated to one with the next, long articulated legs and a moveable eye and beak. The pleasures of this figure come in the elegant arching and bending (craning) of the neck in the hands of a dextrous manipulator. These actions are accompanied by raising the legs, lifting the wing, shifting the eye, opening the beak, even calls made on a swazzle, to lend substance to the main neck motion. The construction of the figure plays so perfectly into an artful handling that it seems the picture of a crane. Whether this is the way a crane actually behaves or not, it must look as if it were observed that way.

The human figures offer the histrionic elements; the animal figures offer the atmosphere. Both provide spectacle. Normally the two aesthetic standards work in tandem. Keeping them separate gives their interplay great potential for rousing special feelings, as in the battle between a man and a tiger. Having established the division between human and animal worlds the theater can then play upon that division. The monkey king Sun Wukong 孫悟空 of *Shi You Ji* 西遊記, the popular novel *Journey to the West*, is one of the favored characters of all the shadow theaters. He is human, animal and supernatural. The normal barriers are breached. Magic is in the air. Likewise the transformation of humans into animals and the other way around projects strange sensations just by showing an important division at once dissolved.

MANIPULATION IN COMBINATION

It is easy to be charmed by the individual figures and lavish great attention upon their shape, style and construction. But they are just cutouts if they do not move. And they move conjointly on the screen. The combinations of the figures on the screen are subject to deliberate rules consistently obeyed to create the space of the screen. These are not so much artificial regulations as they are principles for fashioning the kind of space expected by the audience.

The figures are held flat against the screen at all times. A slack screen, dull focus or poor contact are all considered bad form. It is a denial of the figure's shape. This principle qualifies the title "shadow theater." The figures do not cast shadows on the screen as in other forms of shadow theater. The screen is a uniform forward presentation of the figures. Space is not open and free around the figures. It is consciously two-dimensional. In this the Chinese *pi-ying* are different from the Malay *wayang*, who seem to occupy a world behind the screen.

The milieu of the screen gives the figures a physics of their own which mimes the world's other physics. Figures can never be superimposed one over the other or over props. At most they can enter from behind scenery that will obscure them entirely. This restriction limits the action of the figures to the surface of the screen, and confirms their flatness, their thinness, their complete involvement in the surface of the screen. It also limits their movement: they cannot pass each other in real space. If a figure moves toward another and then reappears on the other side it is a supernatural act. The passing figure has violated the normal order of space by passing into and then out of contact. The prohibition on superimposing is not just for the benefit of the audience. A manipulator would have great difficulty in moving one figure over the surface of another all in two dimensions, evading the control rods and joints of the figure passed. The practical requirements of manipulation and the aesthetics are suited to each other.

The ensemble of figures is governed by spatial orientation. Figures must always face one another. Naturally, combinations are possible. A group can face a single figure or several individuals can face the same individual, and thus each other, from opposite sides. The only major exception is a line of march, where figures are entering or leaving the stage together, as in the progress of the pilgrims that begins and ends scenes from *Journey to the West*.

The insistence on opposition is related to the theater's emphasis on conflict plots, and the great love of battle scenes. Antagonism among characters builds scene after faced-out scene until the active culmination of the fight and the final judgment delivered by an official

seated high upon his chair.

This orientation is not solely a matter of plot. Its main purpose is to qualify the screen's space by giving it a center around which the main action can revolve, much like the motion established in the construction of the figures themselves. No matter how crowded and active the screen becomes, the empty center created by opposition always remains intact. This shapes audience attention by providing a signal of ongoing drama. The movements most appreciated by the audience are leaps and whirls, which maintain the center while constantly varying the orientation. The center of opposition acquires a reality of its own in motion which constantly threatens and yet heightens face-opposed orientation. The most powerful movements in the theater come when the characters' antagonisms whirl them nearly out of the space they usually occupy.

The surging flight of battles is so effective because another principle it defies—isolinearity—is so strong. Figures are expected to stand on a common ground line and hold that stance in all their dealings with one another. This is the theater's equivalent of the law of gravity. Anyone out of this orientation is either leaping or flying. Again a contravention of conventional space signifies supernatural abilities.

The conventions of forward, side-to-side and up and down orientation make the screen into an intelligible world where there is always a general order amid all the action. The theater is built out of figures with singular properties moving in a space.

The movement of individual figures within this space has its own set of standards. Movements are never uncertain or jittery, even when they are intended to portray those emotional states in humans. They are always definite and decisive. The movements are always judged by the audience apart from their function in the plot. They are evaluated in terms of their smoothness and deftness of execution. They form a level of theatrical abstraction to which the audience is always sensitive. When a warrior is fighting his hands move away from his head in a series of stop and start poses that pass evenly from one to the next. Comparison to the aesthetic of the fighters in "kung fu" movies is not wholly inappropriate. A villainous character, the *jiang mian* 絳面 or "red face," strokes his long beard with both hands drawing themselves slowly, strongly along the full length of the beard. The movement alone is a distinct tactile addition to the character's traits.

Uninterrupted rapidity of movement is the theater's hallmark. An adept manipulator is known by the unbothered assurance of his figure's travel across the screen. A figure jerked across the screen is even used to demonstrate an infelicitous performance. This is the most

blatant violation of good movement, even of good manners, known in the theater.

TECHNIQUES OF MANIPULATION

The favored movements in any figure are divided into two major categories: broad, swinging strokes and shimmering vibrations. These general movements are opposed to each other on the most abstract level. Special care is bestowed upon giving them refinement and decision. A poor manipulator is known by his inability to obtain or sustain them in the figures. These two movements are never distinct from character or joint movement but rise to the surface of the theater's effects as the most general criterion of expression. The ability to arrive at these movements comes only with long experience in the theater. It is not consciously acquired, but is at the culmination of all the manipulator's skill. The movements ride on the surface of his accomplishment like a flourish that is the essence of the whole.

The manipulator's hand is, for technical purposes, divided into two sections. Thumb and index finger are one, middle, ring and small finger are another. The thumb and index finger hold a rod between them while another is tucked between the two fingers and the ring finger of the triad. The grasp is similar to holding the two chopsticks in eating. A manipulator's basic training is in his lifelong study of handling chopsticks. Using an eating gesture to manipulate puppets is poignant in a people often under threat of famine.

The two halves of the hand play a counterpoint as if each were a separate limb moving in complete complementarity. The movement does not originate in the hand. The wrist, the arm, the shoulder, the entire body contributes to the action of the figure. The manipulator's body is a stage for putting together different movements into a harmonious whole. Some complex figures are moved by the separate parts of the hand, taking separate roles which must be coordinated in the figure to give the impression of a unified being in motion. In the crane figure the individual fingers of the left hand control the eye and beak, the two halves of the left hand maneuver the head against the neck, the right hand controls the wings by finger movements, the legs by the hand's two halves and the position of the entire body by the entire hand. The two arms of the manipulator, proceeding from the same body, form the figure's impression of the whole crane in flight, landing, shaking its wings, starting to walk. This whole motion starts in the whole body, branches out into arms, hands, parts of hands and fingers before being assembled again into the crane's whole.

This apportionment of limbs and digits in the manipulator is not

just technique. Though his hands and arms are not visible to the audience the manipulator will only be satisfied if all is well-formed and faultlessly executed. A behind-the-screen aesthetics of his own guides the manipulator more stringently than apprehensiveness of the audience's judgment ever could.

The screen does not preclude a critique of manipulators' actions. Unlike the Javanese, Malay, Turkish or Greek shadow theaters, this is a show in which several men are gliding behind the screen. Their movements, especially in those highly prized battle scenes, must be perfectly coordinated. Sloppiness, inconsistency, or unpredictability are disruptive to a group whose turns and rushes have to be as well paced as a corps de ballet. The manipulators' own aesthetics grows out of the need to maintain standards of composite movement. Swift-ness and economy are most valued, but a penchant for elegance shows itself. The manipulators strive to be worthy of the effects they produce on the screen.

The rapid crossing of hands that develops in a character substitution is rated for its artistry outside the image on the screen. The passing of two manipulators making a battle scene is subject to a similar judgment. They must duck and dodge each other as swiftly as the figures they control. The order among the performers ideally has the same harmony as the different parts of the single manipulator's body. These harmonies fit together into the whole expression of the spectacle like the progressive integration of relationships in the Confucian world-view. A world is made on the screen because a world is made behind it very much like the world which the audience members inhabit. The screen is entertaining not just because it is a display of figures, plots and skill—it is the confirmation of social symmetry in the human and natural realms through the co-participation of manipulators with audience in the show. The aesthetics of both sides is a measure of the success of this common venture.

Manipulators are fond of holding their figures in static displays to demonstrate how they are handled behind the screen. Photographs of some finger twisting arrangements are icons of the theater. One shows a single manipulator holding four separate human figures in an order that makes them seem to rise up to the sky. These static poses are single exquisite moments of what both the audience and the manipulator see in the theater.

MAJOR CHARACTERISTICS OF ACTION

Both sides of the screen, for independent and common reasons, pivot their attention on certain great movements, difficult to execute, dramatic

to behold. These great movements are all composites of simple movements, but all seem to be units of the theater's effect.

Maneuvering with spear, halbard and staff are favorites on both sides of the screen. The spear is a long, slender rod fixed to a control at one end and movable through an eyelet held by another control. To dart the spear a manipulator just thrusts the rear control while holding the front one steady. This is unimpressive until it is performed in the screen with a figure holding the spear in both hands and thrusting it into a crowd of attacking enemies. The manipulator holds the hand control rods for each figure and for each end of the spear in the same part of his own hand, uniting position and action closely enough to give the illusion that the figure is holding the spear. In motion the figure presents a dazzling display of leaping and twirling, fully within the canons of the martial arts, though often close to the fantasies of martial arts films.

The halbard, a long staff with a knife blade at the end, exhibits a wholly different movement. It is swung in arcs over the head of the figure to challenge and ward the enemy. It has two fixed controls; its movement is developed out of a simultaneous juggling of both hands. The figure's body moves through a succession of stopped poses in each of which the halbard is brandished threateningly. Like the halbard itself, the body is involved in a game of shifting balance. The quality of the weapon determines the entire character of the movement.

The staff is a bar fixed on a single rod around which it spins. Its visible action is a magical leaping from one hand to another, from hand to heel behind, over the head and back again, whirling as it goes. Sun Wukong, the Monkey King, is a master of the staff. Its extraordinary movement is inexplicable by mere juggling skill; the character has to have supernatural powers. The movements of spear, staff and halbard are the fundamentals of the warrior's activity. Out of these elements the interlaced battle scenes are built.

Another kind of fundamental coordination comes with the matching of a human figure with a horse. The large horse figure alone is very demanding. One hand holds a thick central control rod while the fingers of that hand manage an elaborate string system that actuates the legs. The other hand is involved with controls for the head, tail and for the figure mounted on the back of the horse. The appearance of the large horse figure with its rider is preceded by a sequence of smaller figures which, by a system of size perspective, suggest the rider's approach from a distance. Thus the first horse seen crosses high up on the screen. It is a small unit of rider and horse whose legs all move in a unit. The second, lower on the screen and larger in size, carries

a rider whose arms are articulated. The third, the large fully articulated horse, bears an independent warrior figure on its back. The succession of horses is crafted to replicate the increase in size of the rearing warrior, but it also anticipates the audience's attention to details revealing themselves with nearness. The first horse is emphatically a moving figure in the distance; the second, moving a bit faster because it is nearer, discloses the nature of the rider; and the third, which halts low at center screen ready to do battle, is ready to display the coordination of horse and rider.

Seating the rider upon the horse is another of those simple movements that seems simpler the more skillfully it is performed. The figure leaps over the horse's back and lands directly in the saddle, his legs positioned to give in two dimensions the effect of being astride in three. The rider is more often seated off the screen than on, but must be seated well no matter where it is done. Armed with one of the three main weapons, the rider goes through all the warlike motions on horseback. The manipulator must coordinate action within the seated figure and between figure and mount. This is not just the total of all the independent movements of the two, but that total set up to give the impression of a warrior perfectly in tune with his mount.

The warrior also exhibits behavior unnecessary on foot, such as turning in the saddle to look behind him or raising himself up to see into the distance. Naturally there is an antagonist, mounted or on foot, so the battle involves three levels of coordinate movement managed by at least two manipulators. When one of the figures is wounded, a whole separate train of motion supervenes. The spear or arrow appears lodged in the figure through a substitution. The transfixed warrior reels on his horse attempting to dislodge the weapon. The verisimilitude of the theater even dictates movements for the struck weapon as the warrior struggles.

Substitution is a third major category of action, the most decisive of all. It is the rapid removal of one figure from the screen followed by an immediate replacement with another figure. Emphasis is on the "immediate": the replacement must seem to be the same figure positioned exactly where it was before the substitution. A warrior shown wounded is the sudden substitution with an identical figure pierced with the weapon; an old hag is shown transformed into a young girl by rapid replacement with the new figure. The expert timing of the switch is seconded by an unbroken continuation of the figure's action from the original into the new form. Audiences are aware of the device and are quite critical of its execution. A visually indiscernible transition will be met with loud acclamation.

All of these great movements are more complex in verbal description than they appear to be on the screen. The audience expect a simplicity of action which frees them from consciousness of the apparatus and technique they know to be at work behind the screen. The manipulators are in accord that their performance is without visible striving, and is only practiced for the deft completion of a difficult move. The aesthetic judgments of both sides are modulated by ignoring the ordinary course of technique yet being very much attuned to mistakes, which are breaks in the usual, and to triumphs, which have a special glamor.

TRANSCENDING TECHNIQUE: THE RHYTHM OF THE THEATER

The theater is not entirely techniques, and is not experienced entirely according to the standards they suggest. The pyramid raised from manual activity all the way to the apex of ensemble coordination is not shaped just by measurement in timeless space. A pace extraneous to the requirements of manipulation gives the theater its time. A rhythm animates each character, and gives special life to the theater as a whole.

Each figure is a signature of sound and movement. A small orchestra consisting of plucked and bowed strings, a wind instrument and drums makes a music that varies for each figure yet maintains a steady beat. The figure's construction and characteristic manipulation are realized and given melodious life in the space of the screen. The fish flexing across the screen-become-water lives in a level, mild rhythm; the frog swimming and then hopping on land has a stertorous rhythm. Maintaining the figure's physical movement in the pattern required by the music imposes upon the manipulator the task of bringing it all together. It is either a calligraphic whole, like the individual strokes forming a character, or it fails utterly. A manipulator can be an expert at producing movements but fail to satisfy the rhythm of the figure, much as a pianist can play his instrument well but without music. The orchestra does not induce, rather, it explains a rhythm already there. A good manipulator attains the rhythm of a figure even when demonstrating its movement without the accompaniment of an orchestra. With the orchestra playing, the music's union with the figure's movement is a distinct, palpable delight.

The rhythm is the basis of character. Human figures are divided into types by sex, age and temperament. An iconography of ornament and coloring allow these to be stated in the figure's physical appearance. But each figure has its own body configuration, walk and gestures as well. A young girl walks in tiny steps, her eyes downcast. An older woman marches boldly forward with her hands on her hips and her head facing straight foreard. A female clown is all shakes and jumbles.

The human figures in motion form a collection of personality types that corresponds to a theory of temperaments.

The humans' movements in rhythm seem to emerge from thoughts and feelings inevitable in this type of person. A young girl's modesty is as natural as the swimming of a fish. The fish figure has nothing but its own movement and rhythm; the young girl figure tends toward an abstraction, modesty, which must be read from its movement in rhythm. The fish may be lovely to behold when handled with care; the young girl can be profound as its performance approaches the abstraction of modesty.

The human figures have voices, too. A singer who is distinct from the manipulator intones texts from behind the screen. This extra element must also converge with the movement and music.

Manipulators themselves give voice to their human figures in a sequence of nonsense syllables. This verbalization of the figure's character rhythm is not audible in performance. It is for timing, and for presenting a figure's unique quality to apprentices and student audiences. The syllables are the inner voice which follows the rhythm always going on when the character is presented.

One of the major male characters, the "red face," a villainous plotter quite familiar to audiences of the Peking opera, displays a gestural sequence of stroking his beard as he ruminates over his plans. His hands are drawn slowly around his face palm inward from the back down the full length of the beard to a strong, unhurried halt and a repetition of the entire sequence. He paces across the screen as he completes the deliberative strokes. The manipulator's inner voice recites this action as a set of slightly hastening sounds—da-da-da-da-da-da-da—and at the end of a stroke, when the hands meet, an "ah" of satisfaction. It is rhythmic convention for one kind of reflective movement. The old man figure also strokes his short, gray beard, but his strokes are less decisive, less sequenced and protracted, ending in a single "oh" that implies the innocent preoccupations of age.

Humans also differ from animals in having emotions. Seven chief emotions are recognized in the shadow theater: sadness, joy, anger, surprise, chagrin, fear, and indifference. They are displayed in patterns, not in isolation, and can be combined to satisfy the requirements of a character. There are alternate ways of expressing their presence in each character. A young girl's grief is expressed through weeping, head lowered into hands burying the face, audible sobs; a mature woman's grief is more extravagant, face buried in hands but arms occasionally thrown up. Because gestures and character are standardized, emotion comes across easily but depth and fullness are only achieved by matching

gestures to rhythm most carefully.

Emotions follow sequences. An animal shows a sequence of activities. The activity sequences of humans develop a passing flow of moods, all refracted through the character type. Both the villain and the mature woman can become angry, but the villain's anger comes from chagrin at being foiled in a plot, while the woman's anger follows sadness. Drama arises as the realization of a text develops from the rhythmic presentation of passing moods among characters.

A young woman seated bent over her work is preoccupied, perhaps museful. Suddenly a knock comes at the door. She rises in surprise, her body straightens, her arms fall to her sides. She rushes to the door. Her mood passes to fear. She leans against the door, listening intently. She calls out, asking who is there. Or she rushes to the door and flings it open joyously, greeting the visitor. Or she remains silent, cowering against the door frame. The audience experiences the passage of these feelings one into the other as the drama of beings formed out of figure, manipulation, sound and rhythm. Only at the high level of the movement of emotions is the drama formed and felt.

Observing the elements which enter into the presentation of the theater provides an imaginative link with the aesthetics of performance, in performance. The aesthetics which joins the audience with the manipulators depends upon skillful action to create not an illusion but an artistic convergence of elements. The audience, the performers and the student of both appreciate the theater in the surprise of everything rising together when everything is so different—pieces of leather, snatches of melody, light, hand gestures, voices, music, a silk screen. The form of this convergence, at the shared apex of aesthetics and technique of performance, is not apparent from any single aspect. An account of the theater is an experiment in its aesthetics, moving from one aspect to the next, never treating any as a unit, making the theater live as a written thing in the mind of a reader.