Introduction: "real sets," geography, and race

Geography, we have learned, is no less constructed than history. In 1885 Sanger's Amphitheatre depicted the British army's successful relief of Khartoum, which had been under siege by Sudanese rebels throughout the previous year. In fact, Sanger's revision of the Sudanese War, *Khartoum! or, The Star of the Desert*, came one month after papers reported the fall of Khartoum and the death of its British commander. In order to convincingly stage this fantasy, Sanger's – which specialized in military spectacle and equestrian drama – populated its recreation of Khartoum with "a large herd of Camels and Dromedaries" and actual "Soudanese Natives."[1] Britain's entertainment industry had long enlisted fragments of the "real" to support what were actually fanciful depictions of the East; however, in few cases were the contradictions of this project so glaringly evident. If we take the playbill at face value, *Khartoum* had recourse to the very people who had won independence from British Egypt in order to provide a compelling and realistic depiction of Britain's unshakable dominion.

Not to be outdone by a minor theatre, that same year Drury Lane's *Human Nature* similarly transformed the failed Sudanese Relief Expedition into a British victory. Despite its disregard for the historical record, *Human Nature* was widely praised for its realism; in its review, the *Truth* asserted that "the accuracy displayed in the scenes illustrative of Egyptian warfare are beyond praise."[2] Drury Lane did not try to pass off the supernumeraries in *Human Nature* as Sudanese natives (though the production did feature "real police officers" in its most stirring scene, the return of the troops to cheering crowds in Trafalgar Square). Instead, Drury Lane augmented its production's aura of authenticity with a Sudanese exhibition in the theatre's Grand Saloon. The exhibition featured maps and sketches of the region, "interesting articles illustrative of African life and warfare," as described by the *Era*, and a recreation of Ahmad Urabi's Cairo cell, designed from on-the-spot sketches and featuring the actual carpet and furniture used

by the Egyptian nationalist leader during his confinement.[3] The depiction of widely reported events followed by fictional victories in *Khartoum* and *Human Nature* would seem to be entirely in keeping with the elaborate mix of the "real" and the "represented" featured on stage and in exhibitions. In such a context, it is not entirely surprising to see that one review for *Human Nature* marveled at the "skill that gives us real sets of rural villages."[4]

How are we to read the oxymoron, "real sets"? It could be seen as a mere slip, though the fact that the quote was later reproduced in playbills for *Human Nature* would suggest that the phrase did not strike nineteenth-century readers as strange. Instead I would suggest that the phrase be read as evidence of the nineteenth-century need to find new terms to describe staging innovations and the confusion generated by the increasingly common juxtaposition of the "real" and the "represented." Audiences that had been accustomed to settings composed of painted sliding flats with limited numbers of three-dimensional properties now witnessed fully built-out and molded settings that featured objects taken from everyday life and people who could claim to be the things they represented. Sanger's "natives" and Drury Lane's "real police officers" are examples of a theatre that increasingly had recourse to the "real" at the same time that this theatre attempted to recreate known settings, not simply by copying details onto flat surfaces, but by reproducing the shape and arrangement of objects.

In this book, I read these staging innovations and use of the "real" as the culmination of a slow transformation in how Europeans understood and interpreted space, a transformation that is also evident in the emergence of new academic disciplines such as geography and anthropology. In productions such as *Human Nature*, the theatre replaced wings on a raked stage with three-dimensional environments that purportedly reproduced Eastern architecture and geography. At roughly the same time, the emerging science of geography was arguing that geographic conditions determined the physical and mental characteristics of its native races, and anthropology's focus on material culture and the anatomical characteristics of different races eclipsed ethnology's interest in philology. In *Human Nature* and *Khartoum*, the behavior and temperament of Arab characters was described as the product of desert conditions, in language that was more literal than metaphorical. Careful attention was given to the weapons and procedures of desert warfare. On stage and in the academy, topography and material culture became keys to non-visible drives and processes that defined racial difference. In this sense, race was not simply depicted

in face-paint, but in built-out sand dunes, huts, and "articles illustrative of African life and warfare."

This new understanding of context enabled nineteenth-century Europeans to interpret the surface of objects and people as manifestations of internal laws and organic processes. It is for this reason that exhibitions and museums began to create elaborate sets in which to stage fragments of the "real." When a theatre in the late-nineteenth century recreated objects displayed in museums and exhibitions (or displayed in its own Grand Saloon) and when various entertainment forms placed supposed native people in exotic reconstructions, the entertainment industry was similarly attempting to draw the "real" and the "set" into the closest proximity possible.

This book argues that nineteenth-century British theatre and entertainment, like the new disciplines they emulated – such as ethnology, anthropology, biblical archeology, and, most significantly, geography – both reflected and helped constitute the modern British colonial imaginary. Throughout the nineteenth century, British audiences marveled at depictions of desert storms and harem dances as well as Nile steamers and colonial armies at theatres, panoramas, and exhibition rooms. The features of this theatrical East attained a remarkable currency throughout British culture as a wide population became versed in an emerging pictorial vocabulary that organized and interpreted the regions east of Europe. I argue that the entertainment industry, as a primary site for the dissemination of visual information, was central in the creation of Europe's image of the East as well as in popularizing and shaping the new vocabularies employed in defining and managing Eastern bodies.

In the process, both popular and elite forms of orientalism engaged a new spatial logic. Attention was no longer focused solely on the object in itself – be it an actor on an apron or an artifact in a case – but instead on the relation between that object and the surrounding space. Theatres, museums, and monographs discovered meaning in the interaction of objects and people with a larger environment, whether scenery or text represented that environment. I hope in this book to illuminate how *Khartoum* and *Human Nature* function within a tradition of orientalist entertainment, and to examine how this tradition developed in conjunction with those disciplines that emerged in colonialism's shadow throughout the nineteenth century. I turn to the entertainment industry, not simply because it is a rich archive of orientalist imagery, but because in the space of orientalist performance one can trace the changing parameters of what could be known and said about the East.

MAKING SPACE EXOTIC

This project began as a desire to understand the phenomenology of the stage space in orientalist plays. It was prompted by the impression that changes in the use of the stage space paralleled changes in the use of the museum space. I was struck by the fact that period rooms, in situ displays, and native villages at exhibitions were first employed at about the same time that theatre practitioners were flattening the stage floor and relying more heavily on built-out scenery. It seemed that there had been a fundamental shift in how space functioned in both the theatre and the museum: meaning did not naturally emerge from the presented object but was instead generated in the relation of the object to its display or acting environment.

The point has already been made that realism elevated the stage space to the status of dramatic character. As Bert States has written, when Hedda Gabler complains in the opening scene of the play, "Good heavens – what a nuisance! That maid's opened the window and let in a whole flood of sunshine," it suggests "a speaker who is in her world in a certain way; she is, in fact, imbedded in it, surrounded by actuality. One might say that the speech is centripetal, the product of a world in which speech is conditioned by the persistence of environment and the passage of clock time."[5] I would suggest that the shift evident in the emergence of theatrical realism was in no way confined to the stage. A year before Hedda's entrance, George Brown Goode, director of the Smithsonian Institution (then the US National Museum), announced that the cathedrals of Europe should be considered "national or civic museums." According to this logic, spaces are meaningful in that they tell us about the people who reside within, whether that meaning is the result of centripetal force (environment shapes behavior) or centrifugal force (behavior shapes environment). Goode's transformation of sacred space into museum space might not strike the modern reader as innovative, any more so than the choice to have a dramatic character comment on her surroundings. However, Goode's importance in museology lies in part in his ability to explain how the manipulation and delineation of space – through the arrangement of objects and construction of descriptive labels – could generate information. Goode, no less than Ibsen, is evidence of a new modern sense of how space makes meaning.

It is important to note that individual societies determine in advance what kinds of meanings potentially reside in specific spaces and that these meanings are delineated by such conceptions as race and national identity. For most audience members, Hedda's response to her surroundings is evidence of a distinct and idiosyncratic personality, not a racial

essence. By contrast, nineteenth-century visitors to a "national museum" like Westminister Abbey might read their surroundings as a manifestation of the "Anglo-Saxon" and visitors to the Alhambra Court at Sydenham's Crystal Palace were specifically instructed to read their surroundings as evidence of the "Oriental spirit." One cannot bracket off this spatial discourse from racial and colonial discourses, nor can one address these other discourses without first making sense of the changes in the ways space produced meaning. As Foucault has noted, "the tactics and strategies of power" are invariably deployed through spatial formations, through "implantations, distributions, demarcations, control of territories and organizations of domains which could well make up a sort of geopolitics."[6] Not only is power articulated through spatial formations, spatial formations are themselves the product of power structures and their supporting ideologies. Richard Peet has argued that geography only became a respected discipline once it became a means of explaining how and why the separate races developed; as he states, "environmental determinism was geography's entry into modern science."[7]

My interest in how performance space changed during the nineteenth century took me into the vast area of "imaginative geography," a phrase coined by Edward Said to describe how regions become poetically endowed in such a way that the Orient could come to mean "more than what was empirically known about it."[8] Said introduces the term while discussing Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*. The reference is significant, for as much as Said presents orientalism as a discourse that is instantiated in individual texts but in no way original to an individual consciousness, he also shares Bachelard's desire to trace the variations of an image as it emerges in each individual consciousness. As Johannes Fabian has written in reference to Said and himself, "I believe we both struggle to restore past experiences, which were buried under layers of 'enculturation' in other societies and languages, to a kind of presence that makes them critically fruitful."[9] One almost discerns a phenomenologist's stance in Said's assertion that "imaginative geography and history help the mind to intensify its own sense of itself by *dramatizing* the distance and difference between what is close to it and what is far away" (my italics). Said's debt to Bachelard – and the implication that exoticism is inherently a process by which space itself is dramatized – is an important, if sometimes overlooked, feature of Said's work and one that is central to my own analysis. Basically, I am arguing that the idea that space could function as a dramatic character emerged both on and off the stage at about the same time and that new orientalist disciplines show as great a debt to the theatre as the theatre shows to these

disciplines. In the process of making this argument, I too demonstrate the influence of phenomenology, for like Said I am attempting to recapture orientalism as a recreation of self and other in the consciousness of a reader or spectator.

Said has primarily examined this process of dramatization and the marking of difference within the human sciences (most notably in *Orientalism*) and literature (most notably in *Culture and Imperialism*), and most scholars of orientalism have followed Said's lead and focused on elite texts.[10] Nonetheless, popular entertainment is possibly the most important area in which to examine transformations within orientalism. This is not simply because, as John MacKenzie has stated, "a full understanding of Orientalism requires some comprehension of the extensive range of artistic vehicles through which representations of the Orient were projected,"[11] but because the history of the theatre in the century of orientalism's accelerated development is a history of radical transformation in the strategies by which distant spaces were dramatized within the familiar space of the stage, the panorama, and the exhibition. Theatre and related venues allow us to examine both the dissemination of specific images of the East and how an evolving poetics of Eastern spaces was generated within evolving strategies of spatial representation.

In examining this popular orientalism, it is important to remember that these venues were frequented by both men and women. To argue, as I do later, that in many entertainments the East was imagined as a space of female indolence and sensuality is not to assume a uniformly male audience. Rather, it is more accurate to assert that orientalism was partially structured by and helped structure emerging definitions of the female, and that these definitions were consumed by both men and women. Presumably male audience members would experience a staged-harem dance differently from female audience members. However, for both men and women such a harem dance articulated power relations between East and West and between women and men, helping to define these terms.

RACIAL INTERIORS

In this book I hope to show that changes in nineteenth-century stage aesthetics were closely related to wider conceptual shifts that underlay the emergence of orientalist study. In doing so, I read strategies of spatial representation in orientalist entertainments as evidence of the epistemological shift described in Foucault's *The Order of Things: An Archeology of*

the Human Sciences. Foucault argues that a modern *episteme* arose in the nineteenth century, which organized existence according to "transcendentals" (such as the force of labor, the power of speech, and the energy of life) outside the realm of the visible. In doing so, this modern *episteme* replaced the classical order in which existence was organized in a table governed by resemblance. According to Foucault, at the end of the eighteenth century this table essentially broke under the weight of the increasing documentation of dissimilarity, throwing the authority of the visual and the place of humanity into question. The rise of this modern *episteme* marked a movement from knowledge as the nomination of the visible to knowledge as the apprehension of the independent historicity of form. It was no longer sufficient to record and compare external form. Instead meaning was generated in the organic nature of forms, in the patterns and transformations that give rise to forms and can only be glimpsed in activities and relations that exist in time. Whereas classical science focused on the similarity of form, the human sciences employ concepts such as succession and analogy. The classical botanist measured pistils; the modern biologist, however, examines the function of the organs, the movement of the blood, the invisible force known as life.

As suggested in the subtitle, *An Archeology of the Human Sciences*, Foucault presents this vocabulary of invisibility so as to describe the human sciences within the parameters of a historically constituted discourse. His argument has an obvious relevance to the series of "sciences" prompted by the greater accessibility of once remote regions and people in the nineteenth century. Like the sciences discussed by Foucault, ethnology, anthropology, biblical archeology, and geography similarly made succession and analogy markers of knowledge. Within these sciences, exotic topography and culture were shown to reveal a litany of historical, social, and economic forces evident in the concentration of resources, the lie of trade routes, the traces of historical change, even the conditions of human evolution. Moreover, these sciences also "discovered" a single animating force within existence – race. Throughout this book, I rely on the work of writers such as George W. Stocking, Jr., Johannes Fabian, and Felix Driver who examine ethnology, anthropology, and geography within the context of an emerging racial ideology.[12]

Taken together, the history of these disciplines can help us to trace out the epistemic principles that gave racism its modern form. As Ann Laura Stoler has explained, the resonance between Foucault's "great hidden forces" and nineteenth-century theories of race are striking. Stoler writes:

Racism is not only a "visual ideology" where the visible and somatic confirms the "truth" of the self. Euro-American racial thinking related the visual markers of race to the protean hidden properties of different human kinds. Nineteenth-century bourgeois orders were predicated on these forms of knowledge that linked the visible, physiological attributes of national, class, and sexual Others to what was secreted in their depths – and none of these could be known without also designating the psychological dispositions and sensibilities that defined who and what was *echte* European.[13]

The authentic European was not only defined by external difference from a racial other, but by internal differences – drives, proclivities, temperaments, evolutionary history – that accounted for the perceived low level of culture and technology outside of Europe as well as an emerging colonial power structure. As Stoler points out, this hierarchy of the human species informed the entirety of the bourgeois order and similarly allowed for the creation of internal others. It is no wonder that the idea of homosexuality emerged at this same time, according to Foucault, as "a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphrodism of the soul."[14] Modern racism was generated from within the same epistemological field as the human sciences and the one cannot be understood without analysis of the other.

The ways of knowing that circumscribed the object of study in the above-mentioned disciplines can be related to the ways of knowing offered to audiences of new popular entertainment forms in the nineteenth century, as particularly evidenced in a new spatial aesthetics. Implicit in Foucault's argument is the idea that space took on a new role in the generation of meaning, and it is here that the study of the entertainment industry can lend important insight into these new structures of meaning. Even Focuault's image of disciplinary society as a vast panopticon suggests radically new technologies of space. As Timothy Mitchell has shown us, these new technologies of space were central to Europe's construction of a totalizing view of the East in the nineteenth century. In examining the spatial aesthetics of nineteenth-century entertainment in relation to structures of knowledge and processes of social control, I ally my work with that of theorists such as Timothy Mitchell, Edward Soja, and Tony Bennett, who have reexamined the idea of space in Foucault's writing.[15]

A GENEALOGY OF THE PERFORMANCE SPACE

In focusing on an emerging spatial logic uniting popular entertainment with new orientalist disciplines, I hope to produce a genealogy of performance that acknowledges the competing interests and structures of power

that shape this epistemological field. This is not to deny causal relations or the contributions of specific practitioners. In the nineteenth century, playbills noted specific Eastern authorities; scene painters copied images from scholarly folios; and story lines sometimes made reference to theories emerging from the human sciences. This has been documented elsewhere and will be further documented here. Nor do I overlook those changes in the conditions of production that made it possible to dramatize space in new ways, such as improvements in lighting and scenic technology, the enlargement of auditoriums and stages, and the lengthening of production runs. However, I would argue that to simply cite these developments as evidence of the "natural progress" of the theatre without examining their place within discursive formations is to side-step the more important question of what made these developments possible. We should not tell the story backwards, to decide in advance that realism is the inevitable summit in the evolution of the arts and then discover the harbingers of realist stage practice in every document we uncover.

There are obvious reasons for asserting that the story of nineteenth-century theatre represents a march towards realism. Traditional histories of nineteenth-century theatre depict a huge accumulation of specific and finely crafted detail. Settings were transformed from simple "backings to a stage, apt for almost any occasion" to an ultimately "excessive realism and display."[16] Attention in acting switched from the "dignified stance and graceful pose" of eighteenth-century actors like Barton Booth to the "kaleidoscope of business" and minutely organized gestures of a Henry Irving.[17] From romantic theatre's early interest in character and picturesque settings to naturalism's laboratory of human behavior and carefully reproduced settings, the stage has displayed a voracious appetite for ever more gesture, business, set pieces, properties, supernumeraries, and above all else, significance. Every space is filled and every detail made meaningful. In the midst of this accumulation, the director is said to have emerged. Macready's insistence that his actors act when they rehearsed is seen as harbinger of Beerbohm Tree's ensemble acting and well-drilled crowds all tastefully incorporated into a massive stage architecture. The evolution is sufficiently clear, the contributions of specific theatre practitioners so obviously important, that few theatre historians have felt compelled to ask, "Why?" Why all this stuff? I believe that until theatre historians ask such questions, theatre history will remain a marginal discipline rather than becoming a central tool for articulating genealogies of the human consciousness.

My answer to the question of proliferating "stuff" is simply stated if not simply explained: the accumulation on stage was a response to the

tremendous dispossession that accompanied the loss of the classical order. The realization that forms have their own historicity that is neither subordinate to nor homogeneous with humanity ultimately became the means, according to Foucault, of reconstituting the human subject from the fractured space of the classical order. At this point, the human being "now realizes that he not only 'has history' all around him but is himself, in his own historicity, that by means of which a history of human life, a history of economics, and a history of languages are given their form."[18] The search for internal processes and transcendental laws through scrupulous examination and surveillance was the means by which a history and meaning of the human being could be written as the foundation for all other histories and meanings. According to this line of argument, the human sciences (as well as such modern institutions as the clinic and the prison) were driven by the need to create the human subject, and it is this same need, I argue, that organized the nineteenth-century stage.

It is in this context that one begins to understand the tremendous outpouring of orientalist entertainments in the nineteenth century. Panoramas, dioramas, and other optical entertainments depicted the regions east of the Mediterranean in such tremendous detail that reviews compared them to actual journeys east. When images alone lost their power to transport an audience, live performance and native peoples were incorporated into shows. An equally extensive range of exhibitions presented a wealth of Eastern objects, architectural recreations, and oriental peoples. The theatre was no less prolific in its orientalism: melodrama, pantomime, ballet, and opera all depicted Oriental people and places with increasingly spectacular detail. In doing so, the entertainment industry followed the lead of the human sciences, disseminating popularized versions of the theories emerging in disciplines such as geography, ethnology, and archeology, shaping public perception of these disciplines, and ultimately influencing their methods. While I note several instances in which later scholars first found employment or inspiration in the entertainment industry, I do not wish to limit the influence of the entertainment industry to such moments of direct contact. As Richard Peet has pointed out: "Society structures the direction theory takes by posing great issues in a certain way . . . The need to be socially and politically functional directs inquiry in directions productive of ideology but not necessarily productive of scientific principles."[19] I have taken the entertainment industry both as an arena in which society poses questions, ultimately "structuring the direction theory takes," and as a vehicle for popularizing those lines of inquiry "productive of ideology."