INTRODUCTION

Bodies of Knowledge
Shock, Sensation, Performance, Aesthetics, Epistemology

In an 1879 production of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, the esteemed British actor Henry Irving offered a new interpretation of Shylock, sparking a debate that roiled the London press.[1] Instead of portraying the Jewish miser as a comic scapegoat as had been tradition, Irving lent dignity and pathos to the misunderstood figure, soliciting an unexpected sympathy from many in the audience.[2] By all accounts, the scene that created the most striking effect was one of Irving's own invention. It followed Act II, scene vi, after Jessica elopes with Lorenzo. As they disappeared into a crowd of masked revelers, a gondola floated under the bridge, and, as it passed offstage, the festive noises of the merrymakers diminished into silence. After a pause, the faint tapping of a cane could be heard as Shylock made his way home. Over the bridge, the old man appeared, moving slowly with fatigue. Upon reaching his front door, he knocked, and, receiving no answer, knocked again. Then, "raising his lantern to search the darkened upper windows," the father now dispossessed of his daughter came to understand his loss. According to one eyewitness, Irving turned to the audience, and "across his features came a look of dumb and complete despair" (anonymous, quoted in Bulman, 38). Communicating such pathos in this scene, Irving primed his audiences to sympathize with the hated Jew, even and especially during the Trial Scene toward the end of the play. There, when Shylock's punishment is announced, Irving's posture collapsed. As his despised character prepared to leave the court, he raised himself up with a wounded dignity that,

[1] See Jeffrey Richards for an in-depth account of these debates.
[2] Irving had been inspired to take up the role after a yachting trip to Tunis earlier that summer, during which he encountered a Levantine Jew, "who was old, but erect, even stately, and full of resource" (Irving, quoted in Richards, 425). Explaining his decision to produce the play to his assistant Bram Stoker, Irving noted that, "When I saw the Jew in what seemed his own land and in his own dress, Shylock became a different creature. I began to understand him" (Stoker, 84).

according to the *Saturday Review*, "seemed the true expression of his belief in his nation and himself" (quoted in Bulman, 46).

Among those seated in the audience was Karl Marx, the exiled German political theorist who was an ardent fan of the theatre and who knew his Shakespeare by heart. Unlike the critic John Ruskin, who felt that Irving's sympathetic portrayal contravened the overall design of Shakespeare's play (Richards, 435), the supposedly self-loathing author of "The Jewish Question" was deeply moved, reversing his critical assessment in that 1844 essay to recast the Jew as a member of an oppressed class in a late revision of a passage in *Capital* (Prawer, 328).[3] In a footnote to his discussion of how industrial capitalism devalues the laborer's artisanal skills, Marx cites the lines that Irving intoned with such pathos in Act IV, scene i: "You take my life/When you do take the means whereby I live." Evidently, the character that Irving created prepared Marx to hear a new meaning in these familiar lines in Shakespeare's play.

This experience at London's Lyceum Theatre was not a singular event in Marx's life. Intellectual historian S. S. Prawer identifies the "state as theatre" as one of the major topoi in Marx's writings (59), tracing his skills in cultural critique back to his doctoral thesis in which he analyzed Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound* (65). Marx's son-in-law Paul Lafargue notes that Aeschylus, Goethe, and Shakespeare were among the political economist's favorite authors, adding that "there was a veritable Shakespeare cult in the Marx family" (10). Biographer Francis Wheen reports that, "[d]uring the long years of exile in London, Marx's only forays into English culture were occasional outings to watch the leading Shakespearean actors Salvini and Irving. It is no coincidence that one of the Marx children, Eleanor, went on the stage and another, little Jenny, yearned to do likewise" (20). In treating dramatic literature – and its realization in theatrical production – as occasions for philosophical reflection, Marx was not unusual among nineteenth-century thinkers. Drawing on his aesthetic education in Friedrich Schiller's *Letters* and G. W. F. Hegel's *Phenomenology*, he was simply responding to the most popular art form of his day, extrapolating from its material production what Schiller describes as the "semblance" of form that gives shape and meaning to our lives. Even as a boy, Marx recognized the power of the aesthetic experience to help us understand and adapt to a changing world, writing in a letter to his father that, "At such moments[,] . . . an individual becomes

[3] Vol. I of *Capital* was first published in 1867. Vols. II and III were published posthumously, with Vol. II appearing in 1885 and Vol. III in 1894.

lyrical, for every metamorphosis is partly a swansong, partly the overture of a great new poem that is trying to find its right proportions amid brilliant colors that are not yet distinct" (quoted in Prawer, 4). Although he attempted to create works of art himself as a young man, wooing Jenny von Westphalen with surprisingly good verses and trying his hand at playwriting with his drama *Oulanem*, Marx proved to be a better cultural critic sitting in the audience, identifying the semblance of forms enacted on stage and adding them to our conceptual vocabulary. Schiller's theory that material life forms give rise to our conceptualizations about them would indelibly stamp his thinking.

But in identifying the theatre as a site of aesthetic engagement for Marx, my interest is less in the speculative origins of his ideas than in the spectatorial phenomenon I posit here. Specifically, I want to suggest that the theatre not only gives material form to ideas that appear in the *language* of the dramatic text, but also bodies forth new experiences, feelings, thoughts, and concepts that have yet to be named. Such ideas emerge into the semblance of form in performance. Which is to say that performance is not simply a medium through which other art forms communicate their meanings, but an art form in its own right. As such, it generates for its audience its own kind of aesthetic experience in which an emerging conceptual gestalt forms around the kinesthetic shapes that appear on stage.

In performance, I argue, the process of thought itself takes shape as intuitions and insights are pressed into bodily forms that pass by way of metaphor into consciousness and language. Although this epistemological function is likely constitutive of performance in general, and can be seen at work in a range of performances across time, it becomes especially visible in the modern era, when modernizing processes begin to transform the texture of everyday life at an unprecedented rate, necessitating new strategies for understanding and adapting to the changes in our world. When those changes multiply quickly over a relatively short period of time, modernity itself comes into view as a historical epoch marked by modernizing processes that cascade in waves of unrelenting force. In such a moment, new artworks – including new styles of performance – appear, giving modernist form to the experience of change and expression to its cultural meanings.

After all, if the historical period of modernity is marked by an accelerated rate of change that radically alters the experience of everyday life, then what better way to understand it than through a processual art form that likewise unfolds as movement in time? In new styles of

performance – including stage acting, pageantry, dance, music, avant-garde provocations, film acting, and digital media – this book finds fresh evidence for how modernity has been understood and lived, both by artists, who, in modeling new habits, give conceptual form to emerging experiences, and by their audiences, who, in borrowing the strategies that performers enact, learn to adapt to a modernizing world.

Stretching from 1800 to the present day, this book takes an expansive historical view of both modernity and modernism, understanding the significance of the economic, industrial, political, social, and psychological changes associated with the historical period to have been registered first in the unexpected – often experimental – forms of expression associated with the artistic movement.[4] Conventional periodizations typically date modernism from the 1890s to 1945, with recent scholarship pushing that end date later to include modernist works produced in non-Western (often postcolonial) contexts. This elastic end date is meant to acknowledge a stylistic continuity that links so-called classic works of Anglo-American and European modernism to those produced under late capitalism in other parts of the world to expand our definition of modernism, while accounting for comparative differences in the movement's global expressions. This book honors the inclusivity of that flexible end date, but also rolls modernism's start date back from the 1890s to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, contending that conventional periodizations are based primarily on evidence in literary and visual modes of art that have long dominated Western aesthetics. If we look to performance, however, we can find evidence for a modernism that not only predates the literary and visual record, but also complicates the distinction between art and artifact that is often mapped onto Western and non-Western cultures, respectively. Indeed, a broader artistic palette may help us dismantle the persistent center–periphery bias in modernist scholarship that privileges the West above "the rest".

Susan Stanford Friedman has recently proposed to correct for this bias with a comparative model of what she calls "planetary" modernisms, setting various manifestations in relation to each other and mapping changes across "deep time" (78). I admire her objectives and aspire to the global scope of her comparative method, but differ from her in three

[4] The interlaced terms of "modernity," "modernization," and "modernism" have undergone significant scholarly revision over the past twenty-five years. See Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz's well-known assessment of the "New Modernist Studies," whose field transformation they map.

fundamental ways. First, I focus on performance rather than the visual arts and literature, believing that this movement-oriented art form better captures the fluidity of exchange in what are often described in modernist scholarship as networks, circuits, and flows. Second, I posit a "singular modernity" rather than the alternative modernities proposed by Dilip Gaonkar and others, maintaining with Fredric Jameson that changes in the historical epoch are propelled by the singular logic of instrumental capitalism, the transformational energies of which endlessly erupt in different cultures at different times in different ways to produce multiple modernisms that may indeed be put in comparative relation. Third, I focus on the dialectical relationship between such formations and the heuristics used to study them, understanding that cultures and their artistic expressions are as metamorphic as the material forces that act upon them, and that any nominalization or periodization used to situate them as an object of analysis is both necessarily provisional and provisionally necessary.[5] As Friedman points out, for example, the term "modernism" is a Western construct that embeds culturally specific assumptions in what appears to be an unmarked universal, and even specifications of "the West" enact a critical orientalism in acknowledging the geographical center of a perspective that pretends to disavow its own centrality (121). While we should be attentive to how these categories are constructed, as she insists, we should also recognize that nominalizations and periodizations are also useful tools for thinking, and that the histories of the categories we use (however problematic) are part of the story we tell.[6] Dipesh Chakrabarty has it right when he says that we should distinguish between our judgments and methods, "consciously recognizing our judgments as such" (262), even as we acknowledge that both have shaped the discipline and the object of its study. Insofar as modernism tells the story of how the "now" has been experienced, of how it has been felt, thought, and lived, then we must understand the field to have been produced through a meta-critical process of its own self-naming as Ástráður Eysteinsson pointed out more than thirty years ago. "Modernism," in other words, does not exist outside its own discursive history.

Drawing its case studies primarily from the Global North and West, this book extends its reach into the East and Global South, recognizing that

[5] For a more detailed explanation of this dialectical method, see Walker and Glenn Odom.

[6] See, for example, Ástráður Eysteinsson's *The Concept of Modernism* for a discussion of the category's history. While a comparative method demands that we look to other languages for formulations of the experience we call "modernity" and cultural expressions that we identify as "modernist," such research not only enlarges the focus of our study but also shapes the unfolding history of the field.

styles of performance are as multiple and uneven as the global experiences of modernization that find expression in them. Taking a comparative approach to its subject, each chapter sets two or more performances in relation to each other, noting differences in style that manifest under the pressures of the same modernizing impulse, even as they are also brought into alignment by homogenizing forces that constitute them as a collective "style." While the first chapter begins in the well-trod territory of the United Kingdom and the United States, subsequent chapters move from Europe into Egypt, Algeria, China, and Brazil to show how the center–periphery model of modernism has begun to wobble off course. Metacritically, then, this book demonstrates that, as rival points of geographical influence exert their gravitational effects upon scholarly consensus in the West, our understanding of modernism expands its revolutionary orbit into a globalizing ellipse.

Challenging conventional periodization, this book historicizes two of modernism's definitive features – its historical self-consciousness and its self-reflexive strategies of representation – to show how they first come into view on the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century stage to lay the foundations for the canonical works of the 1890s and beyond. Modernism's historical self-consciousness, for example, was first aroused in the Romantic vogue for history plays such as Schiller's *Don Carlos* (1787), his *Wallenstein* trilogy (1799), *Mary Stuart* (1800), *The Maid of Orleans* (1801), and *William Tell* (1804). Staging history as political allegory and advancing dramatic action through the dialectical scene structure he developed in his earlier play *The Robbers* (1781; 1782), Schiller's history plays invite audiences to imagine themselves as witnesses to an unfolding historical process. At least one particularly attentive fan – Karl Marx – appears to have gleaned an important insight from his influential *The Robbers*. A loose revision of the biblical story of Jacob and Esau, the play alternates dialectically between scenes of brothers Franz and Karl Moor to stage an allegorical conflict between the historical forces of capitalism and anarchism, represented as the natural descendants of a weakened feudal state. Although we cannot know with any certainty whether a specific *material* production of Schiller's play inspired Marx to turn Hegel's idealist model of history on its head, we do know that *The Robbers* is an important intertext in Marx's early work. In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, for example, he makes a sly allusion to the play when describing how capitalism makes "brothers of impossibilities" when equating moral and economic values that are in contradiction (104). That he illustrates this and other theoretical insights throughout his life's

work with references to plays such as Goethe's *Faust* and Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens* establishes strong evidence that the theatre was more than just an entertaining diversion for the Karl who was nick-named "Moor."

If, indeed, the theatre played some small role in shaping Marx's insights into his theory of dialectical materialism, it may have been because its conditions of production radically changed over the course of his lifetime. The exquisitely painted backdrops that appeared on the Romantic stage in his birth year of 1818 increasingly gave way to the three-dimensional box sets of naturalism, in which actors mirrored the bourgeois relationship to commodity culture that Marx diagnosed in the cultural critiques that would be published soon after his death in 1883. As the fourth wall gradually lowered into place, the social relationship that had long obtained between actors and their audiences became reified, objectifying what had been a dynamic process of exchange into a fetishized image of the actor's body within the mise-en-scène. The sumptuous material details of the naturalist stage dazzled audiences, making the fictional world of the play look very much like their own, beginning – not insignificantly – with those Romantic history plays, whose lavish costumes and illusionistic scenery boasted a fidelity to history never before seen on stage. In making their mimetic strategy of representation visible, then, such productions revealed the theatre's potential for self-reflexivity when something real (e.g., a side of beef, a smoking stove) appeared as both that thing and a representation of it. Naturalism – as rendered by the technologies of stage realism – does not merely precede modernism, then; it actively produces it, bringing the act of representation into full view for the contemplation of audiences that included some of those literary and visual artists who would go on to create "classic" modernist works beginning in the 1890s and beyond.

If modernist scholars have failed to acknowledge the historical self-consciousness and self-reflexive strategies of representation evident in these Romantic history plays and their realistic stage productions, it may be due to the fact that they were quickly eclipsed by the revolutionary music-dramas of Richard Wagner. Recasting history as myth (well in advance of James Joyce and T. S. Eliot), the German composer flattened its temporality in favor of spatial and sonic dimensions that overwhelmed audiences with his music-drama's visual and aural appeals. Even so, the seeds of historical self-consciousness had been sown, allowing for another particularly attentive fan of the nineteenth-century theatre – Henrik Ibsen – to make what was implicit for Marx explicit in his own prose play cycle that is foundational to modern – or, as Toril Moi properly insists, modern*ist* – drama. As I demonstrate in Chapter 2, Ibsen's plays not only represent

history in the dialectical structure of their narrative action (following Schiller), but also inscribe patterns of stage movement that directly implicate his audiences in world-historical time. Those patterns of bodily movement – introduced by the ensemble players of the Saxe-Meiningen court theatre, under their patron, Georg II – constituted a new style of performance on the late nineteenth-century stage.

Theatre scholars typically attribute new styles of performance to the creative genius of individual actors, those seen to imbue their art with the mysterious force of their own charisma. Joseph Roach calls this quality "It," and has analyzed its elusive energies through the play of contradictory meanings that momentarily ionize on surface features of the actor's body to materialize cultural desire. Sharon Marcus identifies celebrity likewise with the production of cultural desire, demonstrating how stars such as Sarah Bernhardt carefully cultivated relationships with their publics through the modern mass media. Indeed, the history of the stage is often narrated as a long list of exceptional performers whose singularity is at once a property held in the public trust yet uniquely the performer's alone. Taking a macrohistorical perspective on this phenomenon, *Performance and Modernity* pulls back its focus to offer a panoramic view, identifying *clusters* of charismatic performers who collectively define a series of period styles. The analysis in Chapter 1 of Fanny Kemble's performance in Henry Milman's *Fazio* (1815), for example, treats her as representative of the Romantic style essayed by other Anglo-American actors of her day, including her famous father (Charles Kemble), uncle (John Philip Kemble), and aunt (Sarah Siddons), as well as Edmund Kean, Edwin Forrest, Charlotte Cushman, and – before all of them – David Garrick, who is often credited with originating this style.

Considered as macrohistorical phenomena, such styles invite us to identify the cultural pressures – not only desires, but also fears, anxieties, and ambivalences – that shaped their internal logic and aesthetic appeal, especially as they came to define a specific historical period. To do so, I turn to the written record of reception history, examining each chapter's distinct style of performance in terms of the formal properties that contemporary critics and audiences identified as remarkable or "new." As rhetorical shifts in the historical record reveal, such novelty was often expressed through metaphors that reveal other – especially salient – preoccupations of the moment. The Romantic style of acting addressed in Chapter 1, for example, was typically discussed in terms of literary, theatrical, and cultural "value." I thus examine the signature point technique of Romantic actors and actresses in relation to anxieties provoked by

the consolidation of modern banking practices, showing how, in a moment when gold and silver specie was being replaced by a paper currency backed by the modern nation-state, the dynamic exchange between actor and audience facilitated even as it figured an exchange of a representation for the real.

Subsequent chapters likewise examine a constellated performance style in relation to a specific impact of modernization and the metaphors through which it was grasped. Chapter 2 considers the late nineteenth-century vogue for stage naturalism in relation to a deepened sense of space and an accelerated experience of time introduced by railroad travel, noting Dion Boucicault's anxieties about "social mobility" and Konstantin Stanislavsky's plotting of motivational "throughlines." Chapter 3 explores eurhythmics, the influential early twentieth-century mass movement exercises of Swiss music educator Émile Jaques-Dalcroze that provided a visual and aural map of "social harmony" for enacting consensus – or difference – within a nationalizing body politic. Chapter 4 reads the provocative strategies of the historical avant-garde in relation to the performance repertoire of early twentieth-century advertising, showing how artists such as Alfred Jarry, F. T. Marinetti, Aristide Bruant, and Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven made multi-sensory assaults on the "good taste" of their bourgeois audiences to expose the emerging capitalist formation of "consumer" culture and its manipulable "appetites." Chapter 5 examines the psychological realism of mid-twentieth-century film acting in relation to air conditioning, finding the "cool" style of gestural restraint practiced by actors such as Marlon Brando or Marpessa Dawn to promote a new kind of intersubjective identification that invited audiences to cross the racial divide. In an epilogue that examines the current shift from human to animatronic performers, the book concludes with a meditation on the contemporary ambition to "go viral," suggesting that the pixelated form of computer-generated imaging technology presages an emerging concept of self for the twenty-first century. Inscribed in this new performance form, I suggest, is yet more evidence for the ways we seek to comprehend and adapt to changes in our ever-modernizing world.

Once highly charged ideas such as "cool" or "going viral" enter into language and take semantic form, they often assume the force of instant recognition, reifying – and thus obscuring – the embodied experiences that structure the root metaphors of their conceptualization. The history of modern performance, however, can reveal a formative moment in this process, when an idea is given material form through the act of grasping or enacting the metaphorical vehicle by which the tenor is made known.

Bruce McConachie was the first in theatre and performance studies to recognize the importance of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's groundbreaking *Metaphors We Live By* (1980) for explaining how this process works. As he observes, in identifying the experiential orientation and bodily movements that are foundational to language – up/down, in/out, center/around, source/path/goal, for example – Lakoff and Johnson implicitly recognize the epistemological power of performance in giving expressive form to our thoughts. But by "thought," neither they nor I mean the bloodless abstraction of the Cartesian cogito. Rather, as Johnson insists in his more recent *The Meaning of the Body* (2007), what we call *reason* is "tied to structures of our perceptual and motor capacities and . . . is inextricably linked to feeling" (13). This book draws from this non-dualistic model of embodied meaning to demonstrate how new styles of performance reveal the emerging epistemological contours by which we "make sense" of a changing world.[7]

As McConachie points out, the brain's mirror neuron system facilitates the mimetic process of identification which allows audiences to imaginatively align themselves with characters on stage.[8] But this only explains what happens when the action performed is "citational" and recognized as already imbued with meaning. What happens when new movement formations appear? According to literary theorist Mark Turner, aesthetic cognition can be anticipated in the future-oriented narrative form of parable. Reversing Schiller's act of extrapolating semblance from a present experience of material life forms, Turner understands parable to project a narrative pattern onto a possible future event, providing a provisional gestalt to make that event meaningful, while leaving its interpretation open to accommodate unknown variables as it unfolds. This implies a meta-critical dimension to narrative cognition, suggesting that existing

[7] By "epistemological," I follow Johnson in understanding reason and emotion and proprioception to be integrally connected. While I find his notion of "image schema" to over-emphasize the visual register of sense, I am persuaded by his overall argument that, from our sensory engagement with the world, we form "neural maps" that can then be integrated into higher forms of cognition to produce abstract patterns of thought.

[8] Although I cite cognitive research here to ground my understanding of the body's aesthetic response, I maintain strong reservations about the field's over-investment in empirical models of brain processing that reduce "thought" or "knowledge" to pure functionality, especially when certain behaviors – such as art-making and aesthetic engagement – are explained unthinkingly in terms of "reproductive advantage." Perhaps. But evidence of meta-cognition suggests that, in being able to objectify its own thought patterns for further processing, the embodied brain may find the delight of self-understanding to be its own reward. Which is to say that, rather than dispense with humanistic insights into metaphor, symbol, language, and meaning, cognitive scientists may benefit from actively working to mend the divide between the so-called two cultures.