

3. Aesthetic Historicity

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At a workshop at the Drottningholm theatre, a group of scholars and practitioners had the opportunity to test various peculiarities of a stage built according to the technologies of Baroque theatres. One of the obvious points we discovered were those spots on stage, from which the vocal delivery was more effective. We observed differences between the speaking and singing voices of female and male performers. These acoustically preferential spots also indicated sightlines that drew the attention of the audience by bringing the performers more clearly into focus.¹

Our workshop exercises became intensive learning processes for both the research group and the singers. Although every performing artist should search for these particular spots in every theatre, the Baroque construction of the stage made special demands and offered particular effects. Provided that the performer finds the perfect spot for the delivery, the large proscenium arch will function as an amplifier for the voice, and the raked floor will enhance visibility. From other positions, the six pairs of flat wings will tend to swallow the sound.

In the following, I will use our practical experiences at Drottningholm as a stepping stone to theorise about the correlations between a historic theatre, the classical repertoire, and today's practitioners. My ambition is to find a position between the two extremes of HIP advocates and the *Regietheater*.² Too often the HIP movement aims to reconstruct past practices which neglect the physical, material presence of performers and spectators, whereas the directors of the *Regietheater* tradition are anxious to move as far away from history as possible in order to be original, thereby missing the significance

1. See chapter 2, 'On a Praxeology of Theatre Historiography', in which Meike Wagner deals with the same workshop.

2. HIP stands for Historically Informed Performance, and *Regietheater* summarises the idea that the director's reading of a drama has priority over the author's textual concepts.

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of the historical environment. I will argue for a theory of Aesthetic Historicity as a historiographical model to connect time periods in a productive way. Finally I will show how it can be both a practical and an analytical method. But let me first return to our workshop at Drottningholm.

In order to locate and demonstrate the ideal positioning on stage in a ‘live’ situation, we chose a scene from Mozart’s *Le nozze di Figaro* as the test case. The artists selected the recitative and duet between the Count and Susanna in act 3, scenes 1–2. João Luís Paixão performed the Count and Laila Cathleen Neuman played the part of Susanna. The singers found their own positions, as they would do in a rehearsal room. Together with Magnus Tessing Schneider, they then developed a blocking that seemed appropriate to the relationship between the two fictional characters, and which factored in the previously discovered ‘sound spots’ to maximise the effect of the vocal delivery. Some members of the scholarly audience noticed a slight contradiction between the behaviour of the characters of the opera and the projection of their voices. When the Count and Susanna interacted with each other as they do in many opera houses today, their dialogue in the recitatives tended to get lost in the flat wings. When they positioned their characters slightly upstage, the dialogue also tended to disappear: the Count and Susanna spoke to each other, but not to the audience; the relationship between the two characters remained intimate, almost private.

In the coffee break that followed we suggested a new strategy. What if we tried to make use of the so-called semicircle for a blocking that echoed the practices of the eighteenth century? Although there were doubts as to whether we would be able to construct such positions, we decided to give it a go. We chose to apply a few basic rules: the socially higher-ranking Count had to occupy the centre of the stage; the two characters would not touch each other during the recitative; the performers would use only the space between the

footlights and the second pair of wings; and individual bodily movements would be reduced to a minimum. Although these principles sound simple, it took a number of attempts before the artists felt reasonably comfortable in this eighteenth-century-inspired performance style. Once the scene worked satisfactorily, though, those who watched saw something revelatory.

First of all, the effect of positioning the Count centre-stage was stunning. Centre-stage in the Drottningholm theatre means the exact middle point between the first pair of movable flat wings; it is both one of the best ‘sound spots’ and the point from which the figure dominates the entire stage. This became even more obvious as soon as Susanna appeared on the so-called ‘queen’s side’, i.e. seen to the left from the auditorium.³ Standing near the curtain line, slightly closer to the footlights than the Count, Susanna was immediately understood to be a socially inferior character. The Count speaks to her from his hierarchically superior position. The centre of the stage reinforced his status. This position could be maintained without any further movements throughout the entire recitative. Moreover, we asked Susanna not to turn around to address her responses directly to the Count, but to deliver her lines in the direction of the audience. In fictional terms, this had the effect of emphasising Susanna’s social inferiority – she did not even dare to look at her master. Overriding the social tension between the two characters, there was an erotic tension indicated by the rhythm of their voices, the Count’s gaze, and Susanna’s smile – both the Count’s desire and Susanna’s temptation – and this was clear without the characters moving towards each other, let alone touching each other.

The visual conditions of the Baroque-type of stage had a strong impact on the relationship between the two characters. The position in the middle of the two perspectival rows of flat wings provided a kind of ‘natural’ authority, commanding the entire stage. Visually, and even acoustically, Susanna’s position was marginalised

3. Stage right is the term that producers use, addressing the performers on stage. Opposite the queen’s side is of course the king’s side, according to the location of the royal balconies.

from the very moment she entered the stage. This was also strongly experienced by the performer, Laila Cathleen Neuman, who felt quite uncomfortable and marginalised in this inferior stage position. Things changed, however, at the beginning of the duet, ‘Crudel, perché finora’, when the Count moved slightly to the king’s side and thus gave Susanna more space on stage (Fig. 1). Immediately, the hierarchical relationship between the characters was modified. When the Count moved one step forward and Susanna took half a step backward, they were all of a sudden on the same level, not only physically on stage but also potentially in their erotic attraction. While Susanna had more room on stage, she could also manipulate the situation: the Count had to reduce his social superiority in order to get closer to the object of his desire. When the Count finally took Susanna’s hand, she occupied centre stage while he approached her from the king’s side.

This experiment was indeed illuminating for all who participated – the artists on stage, the musician in the orchestra pit, and the scholars in the auditorium. It became obvious that the stage itself did something to the scene. We realised that the perspectival flight of wings promoted a particular relationship between characters on the condition that the positioning on stage takes advantage of the given prerequisites of the scenic tradition. Something essential happened in this encounter between the historic theatre and today’s performers: the eighteenth-century stage had the power to express relationships in a way that is not immediately obvious to modern singers. Through this experiment, we all gained insights into the expressiveness of a historic place. *Nota bene*: our experiment was not an attempt to imitate eighteenth-century acting, nor was it aimed to prove that this was the correct way of interpreting this scene from Mozart’s opera. Rather, one could say that inspiration from a classical acting tradition produced insights into the functioning of a Baroque-type stage that only practising in a historic theatre could provide. There was an important bond between the



Figure 1. Workshop of Performing Premodernity: Laila Cathleen Neuman (Susanna) and João Luís Paixão (the Count) rehearsing a scene from *Le nozze di Figaro* by W. A. Mozart. Drottningholm Palace Theatre, 2015. Photo: Maria Gullstam ©. License: CC BY-NC.

historic building (an artefact), the classical opera *Figaro* (from an archive), and the contemporary staging in the workshop (with artists). The theory of this connectivity will be discussed as part of Aesthetic Historicity.

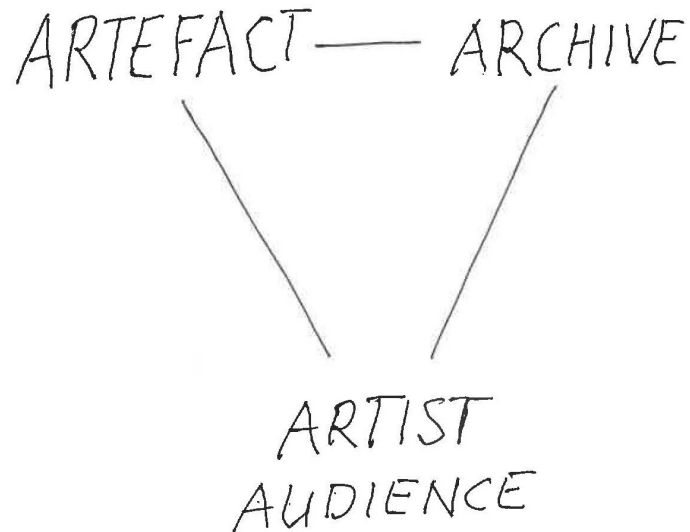


Figure 2. The triangular relation of artefact, archive, and artist/audience. Graphics: Willmar Sauter ©. License: CC BY-NC.

Artefacts, Archives, and Artists

It is easy to envision the basic conditions of the workshop as a triangular relation between artefacts, archives, and artists: the historic theatre, in this case at Drottningholm, Mozart's work from 1786, and the artists who patiently carried out whatever the researchers had in mind. In a simplified scheme, this can be represented as follows (see Fig. 2):

Figure 2 also indicates the obvious fact that artefact and archive belong to a different time period (t_1) than the artists in the workshop (t_2). While we can study the boards and mechanics of the historic theatre, and the libretto and score of Mozart's opera, our knowledge about historical acting and singing is only approximate. What we saw during the workshop was today's artists. Whatever they had learned about historical movements, voice production, phrasing, etc. could only be demonstrated in the here-and-now of the performative event. However, the material they were working with in the demonstration derives from the late eighteenth century, more than two hundred

years ago. The tension between *then* – meaning the late eighteenth century – and the *now* that we experience in the twenty-first century, can be bridged in a constructive way. The historical artefacts, as well as the documents in historical archives, are accessible as historical monuments, in which sense they were available to the performers and spectators of the workshop.

Why is such a transfer interesting? Because we are in the privileged situation of having access to several well-preserved historic theatres in Sweden and elsewhere in Europe.⁴ We can still perform in these spaces, bring together artists and audiences, and enjoy new productions of historical works in historic theatres. Artists, of course, have a relationship to the work, whether old or new, and to whatever category of artists they might belong: conductor, director, singer, dancer, costume designer, set designer, etc. But in the case of Drottningholm or other historic theatres, the historical artefact is added. While the relationship between the work and the artist is influenced by the presence of the artefact, the relationship between the artefact and the artist is influenced by the work from the archive – this is why only works from the period are produced on the unique historic stage of Drottningholm, a World Heritage Site. Finally, the relationship between the artefact and the work depends altogether on the view the artists take of the interaction between an opera or drama and the historic stage on which it is presented.

The object of this analysis is focused particularly on the relationship between artefact and archive on the one hand, and the artists on the other. This relationship can be described as the tension between t_1 , which means the time of the origin of the artefact and the work, and t_2 , today's performance by the artists. That tension became crystal clear for those who participated in the Drottningholm workshop. More broadly, though, the relationship affects performances in all historic spaces. Whether concerts are given in the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza from 1585, or modern productions are mounted in Wagner's Festspielhaus in Bayreuth from 1876, the intersection between then and now will

4. See the database of Perspectiv: Association of Historic Theatres in Europe: <https://www.perspectiv-online.org/pages/en/about-us.php?lang=EN> (accessed 21 March 2023).

always play a part in the theatrical events.⁵ For this reason I will consider some principles of theatrical communication in the next section.

Towards Aesthetic Historicity

Movement and voice are the means through which a performer can act; sight and sound are what the spectator experiences. Performance is as simple as that. The way in which these visual and audial elements of expression are presented is regulated in every time period by its particular aesthetic norms. An artistic style is established through repetition, which the artists emulate, embody with their skills, and eventually change. The audience appreciates it when the rules are recognisably displayed, although they also expect novelties that, to a limited extent, break the rules. These rules, conventions, and variations on expressive means can be summarised as a historical aesthetic.

The visual and audial components of stage art in the late eighteenth century were studied long before our workshop. When Agne Beijer rediscovered the Drottningholm theatre in 1921, he demonstrated that the workings of a Baroque stage and its preserved machinery could be a direct source for the study of eighteenth-century theatre practices. Although the Drottningholm theatre was meant to remain as a museum, Beijer could not resist the temptation to experiment on its stage to learn more about historical practices. His knowledge of late eighteenth-century aesthetics encountered artists of the early twentieth century on a stage that is a historical artefact. How can this meeting between such distant time periods best be described?

It is clear that the theatre itself played the leading role in the visual and auditory features of Beijer's so-called 'divertissements'.⁶ The historical artefact did not remain a mere detail in these events; it constituted the very environment in which they took place. The original materiality of the Drottningholm theatre still contributes to the overall experience of both artists and spectators. The invisible machinery, which produces the dynamic visual effects, becomes part of the experience, as do

5. See David Wiles' argument in chapter 5 of Willmar Sauter and David Wiles, *The Theatre of Drottningholm – Then and Now: Performance between the 18th and 21st Centuries* (Stockholm: Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis, 2014): <http://su.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:756254/FULLTEXT01.pdf> (accessed 23 March 2023).

6. These divertissements are described in Sauter and Wiles, *The Theatre of Drottningholm*, 143–148.

certain immaterial characteristics that complement the material visibility of the stage and auditorium. As we saw in our workshop, there are certain positions on stage that produce particular effects, such as the power relationship between the Count and Susanna described above. This shows that the stage *does* something to the actions that are performed on it. All this is inscribed in the historical artefact.

Our workshop also demonstrated the audial features of this theatre. There are some original (although not fully authentic) devices that produce sound. The wind machine makes the storm howl, and the thunder box, with its rolling rocks, has scared more than one visitor. More noticeable, however, is the fine acoustics of this place: the previously mentioned sound spots on stage, and the way in which the voices and the music of the orchestra are carried into the auditorium. These acoustics are appreciated by specialists and the general public alike, but now and then conductors encourage the orchestra to play too loudly, which harms the balance of sound and sight.⁷ To prevent such disturbances, the Drottningholm orchestra uses historical instruments (or skilfully rebuilt copies) in order to take full advantage of the acoustic conditions of the house.

This description naturally needs further qualification. There is, of course, one thing that cannot be ignored. The positioning of singers on stage and the finely-tuned sounds produced by the orchestra can only be realised today by live artists. Even the most authentic eighteenth-century violin remains silent until played by a contemporary musician. Similarly, the scores and libretti of the works of the period cannot be heard unless they are performed today. This means that certain visual and audial characteristics of the historical artefact can be demonstrated only through its use in our own time. The theatre had these capacities in the *past* – they are not later additions or today's inventions – but these traits of the past can only become manifest in the *here-and-now* of performance. This delicate balance between the 'there-and-then' and the 'here-and-now' constitutes the initial step for my theory of Aesthetic Historicity.

7. Such an occasion is described in chapter 11, 'An Aesthetics of Absence', in which I analyse the 2016 *Don Giovanni* production conducted by Marc Minkowski.

To expand on the relationship between the then and the now, I will describe Aesthetic Historicity firstly in terms of its theoretical frames, then as a two-dimensional model, and finally as a practical method. As a *theory*, it starts from the assumption that the present is a continuation of the past, and therefore it makes sense to try to clarify our relationship to historical phenomena. Aesthetic Historicity is a relational theory, that is, it deals with the relationship between two periods of time. As a *model*, Aesthetic Historicity displays the components and parameters that influence this relationship. Last but not least, Aesthetic Historicity is a *method* for researching the similarities and differences between two periods of time. The method is geared towards the enquiry of how the aesthetics of past periods can be applied to today's practices.

A relational theory

I will argue for Aesthetic Historicity as a relational theory by framing its approach with references to six scholars, deliberately picking up their relational perspectives while neglecting their overall oeuvre. I will systematically present arguments that show the feasibility of a model of Aesthetic Historicity. I will draw on the work of Hannah Arendt, Thomas Postlewait, Jacques Derrida, David Wiles, Fredric Jameson, and finally Bertolt Brecht, in this order.

'The Gap Between Past and Future' is the title of Hannah Arendt's preface to her book *Between Past and Future* from 1961. She opens her argument by quoting an aphorism by the French poet René Char:

Notre héritage n'est prédécédé d'aucun testament.

This is translated by Arendt as: 'our inheritance was left to us by no testament'.⁸ What does it mean that our heritage has come down to us without any instructions of how to handle it? Hannah Arendt explains:

Without testament or, to resolve the metaphor, without tradition – which selects and names, which hands down and preserves, which

8. Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin Press, 1954/1968), 3.

indicates where the treasures are and what their worth is – there seems to be no willed continuity in time and hence, humanly speaking, neither past nor future, only sempiternal change of the world and the biological cycle of living creatures in it. Thus, the treasure was lost not because of historical circumstances and the adversity of reality but because no tradition had foreseen its appearance or its reality, because no testament had willed it for the future. The loss, at any rate, perhaps inevitable in terms of political reality was consummated by oblivion, by a failure of memory, which befell not only the heirs but, as it were, the actors, the witnesses, those who for a fleeting moment had held the treasure in the palm of their hands, in short, the living themselves. For remembrance, which is only one, though one of the most important, modes of thought, is helpless outside a pre-established framework of references, and the human mind is only on the rarest occasions capable of retaining something which is altogether unconnected.⁹

Traditions are lost and replaced by new fashions which create a gap between history and the present. The treasures of the past are not remembered, but sometimes they are there, hidden away in the archives. But, Arendt writes, ‘remembrance is helpless outside a pre-established framework of references’, and it is a scholarly task to re-establish these references. There is also another gap that has to be addressed, namely, ‘that thought and reality have parted company’, meaning that our thoughts about history have lost relevance for the reality around us.¹⁰ In Arendt’s terms, this implies that ‘[t]he task of the mind is to understand what happened, and this understanding, according to Hegel, is man’s way of reconciling himself with reality’.¹¹ Arendt is hinting here at a close relationship between theoretical consideration and a particular practice, to which I will return below. In summary, Hannah Arendt insists on the possibility, even the necessity, of dealing with past events in order to understand the present, in order to prepare for the future. We have treasures of the past right in front of us – the artefacts, the archives – so we are obliged to deal with them, to collect knowledge about them in order to preserve and use them. This raises a twofold historiographical problem: the

9. Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 5.

10. Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 6.

11. Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 7.

status of historical knowledge and the understanding of historical events *per se*.

What does the awareness of historical treasures contribute to our conception of the past? This knowledge might remain as a backdrop to what constitutes the perception of history, a jewel that we might enjoy and appreciate, similar to objects exhibited in historical museums. Or, they might serve, according to various historical arguments, as the cause of a logical chain of so-called developments: because this happened, the course of history changed, and the consequences can be observed, etc. Still, another variation of historical concepts might point to historical events, occasions, or artefacts as the root of traditions and conventions, such as folklore and festivals, that have been transmitted down to our own times. However, if we want to understand our present condition as the continuation of history, we need to investigate the treasures of the past in their own context in order to grasp their significance for the generations to come.

How historical events – or in our case: artefacts – are embedded in the context of their time, is discussed thoroughly in Thomas Postlewait's *Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Historiography*, in which he elaborates on the relationship between event and context. He rejects the 'all-inclusive' background, and he argues against logic causality in the field of cultural history, offering instead an analytical model of theatrical events that takes account of the agents/artists and the reception/spectators, as well as of the artistic heritage and its implied worldview.¹² Complex patterns of shifting contexts appear at the intersection of these parameters, although the question remains whether such an interpretation fully covers the historical significance of the event. Postlewait comments on this problem:

There is one crucial aspect of the event that such a chart fails to take into sufficient consideration: the diachronic factor. The model does not guide us to the ways that events in time, one after another, may be connected in a sequence of possible developments and causes. And of major concern, the model does not close the distance between the event and the historian. The event thus occurs at

12. Thomas Postlewait, *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Historiography* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 18.

one moment, but the historian, in a different time and place, is a displaced ‘observer’.¹³

Jacques Derrida further elaborates on the distance between historical events and today’s ‘displaced observer’. Like Postlewait, he focuses on the relationship between the singular event – or the interpretation of an event or statement – and its historical frame, which the historian constructs. In his article ‘Cogito and the History of Madness’, Derrida discusses a short passage about René Descartes in Michel Foucault’s book *Madness and Civilisation* (1964). Derrida writes:

What I here call interpretation is a certain passage, a certain semantic relationship proposed by Foucault between, *on the one hand*, what Descartes said – or what he is believed to have said or meant – and *on the other hand*, let us say, with intentional vagueness for the moment, a certain ‘historical structure’, as it is called, a certain meaningful historical totality, a total historical project through which we think what Descartes said – or what he is believed to have said or meant – can *particularly* be demonstrated.¹⁴

Here, Derrida describes the meaning-making process of historical interpretation in a dialectic manner which has to consider both the singular instance in question and the more general frame the historian is attributing to it. Concerning Descartes’ Cogito (ergo sum), he asks: ‘does it have the *historical* meaning assigned to it? Is this meaning exhausted by its historicity?’¹⁵ Derrida’s reference to the historicity of a statement (or event) touches on an essential aspect of historical interpretation.

In a later interview, Derrida elaborates more on the historicity of history as a history of essence, rather than as an essence of history.¹⁶ Derrida contests history as a metaphysical concept, as the construction of meaning, and while essence might have a history, history cannot be reduced to essence or quiddity. What we can find are traces. This term has been thoroughly discussed by Derrida in his *Of Grammatology* (1967). Here, it might suffice to remind ourselves that history should never depart too far from the archive, that the archive eventually is the basis on which all historical interpretation should be built.

13. Postlewait, *The Cambridge Introduction*, 19.

14. Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, tr. and ed. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1978/1995), 32. Italics in original. See also Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* [*Folie et Dérison: Histoire de la folie à l’âge Classique*, 1961], tr. Richard Howard (London: Routledge, 1964/2009).

15. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 33.

16. Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, tr. and ed. Alan Bass (University of Chicago Press, 1981), 58–59.

If the trace, arch-phenomenon of ‘memory’, which must be thought before the opposition of nature and culture, animality and humanity, etc. belongs to the very movement of signification, then signification is *a priori* written, whether inscribed or not, in one form or another, in a ‘sensible’ and ‘spatial’ element that is called ‘exterior’.¹⁷

What is the exterior that Derrida is referring to here? Literally, the ‘outside, “spatial” and “objective” exteriority, which we believe we know as the most familiar thing in the world’.¹⁸ In our context perhaps this is the theatre at Drottningholm; a well-preserved historic theatre as an ‘arch-phenomenon of “memory”’, as a trace of the past. In my understanding of Derrida, the trace comes close to Arendt’s treasure that we are obliged to take care of and interpret. But Derrida’s trace leads us further in the direction of experience, i.e. how can the traces of the past be experienced?

We do not have a last will and testament that tells us how to administer the treasures of the past. In our search for these treasures, Derrida’s concepts of trace and historicity will prove to be helpful pointers. They allow us to distinguish between the historicity of past events, embedded in the structural context of a time, and the traces that indicate change that occurred between then and now. However, there are problems of continuity to be considered. What can be directly related to past conditions, and which traditions have been broken? How can the historical treasures be found in the artefacts and archives of the past, and how can they be interpreted in light of the impulses that have influenced history between then and now?

The continuity between the past and the present has a double face. I claim that the present is the continuation of historical experiences, and yet we know that societies – including their intellectual and aesthetic discourses – continuously change, that one period is followed by the next in a never-ending succession. One way of resolving this seeming contradiction is to distinguish between two concepts of time: linear time that mirrors changes, and cyclic time that reflects the repetitive processes of life. The fact that the world changes needs no argument,

17. Derrida, *De la grammatologie*, quoted from Peggy Kamuf, *Between the Blinds: A Derrida Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 42. Italics and quotation marks in original.

18. Kamuf, *Between the Blinds*, 42.

but how these changes can be described constitutes a major problem in historiography: how can we distinguish between one period and another, how can we account for the multiple layers and the overlapping within one and the same period, how can we relate events to contexts, and so on?¹⁹ I will limit my argument here to a reminder of Fernand Braudel's tripartite scheme of duration: 1) the short term of individuals and events, 2) the extended period of economy and social discourses, and 3) the long duration of infrastructures, forms of governance, religious belief systems. At any point in time, these three durations are simultaneously activated.²⁰ We have to be aware also that certain developments and discourses can be both terminated and broken, as well as rediscovered and reanimated.²¹

With respect to the concept of cyclic time, we have to ask ourselves whether there are constants apart from cosmic circles and ellipses, the seasons of the year, and the biological cycle from birth to death. Is human life repetitive? Or, more specifically, are there aspects of theatrical life that do not change over time? Aristotle expounded upon the imitative character of theatre: we – humans – enjoy both the imitator and the imitated when someone presents an impersonation, and I would say that this is still the case. But some people do not appreciate theatrical imitations, and, since Plato, this too has been a constant aspect of the theatre. And as theatrical performances have always belonged to the public domain, concerned society, and carried meanings, this will continue to be debated.

Another kind of continuity is encapsulated in the artefacts of theatrical history. In his book *A Short History of Western Performance Space*, David Wiles has demonstrated how various concepts of theatrical buildings have endured changes over time.²² Theatres like the one in Epidauros, the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza, and the theatre of Drottningholm all bear witness to the past because they have not undergone (profound) changes. Costumes and wigs, musical instruments, technologies of scene change, and lighting equipment have been preserved and can still be used and experienced. In our workshop, we chanced upon treasures of the past that breathed aesthetic beauty.

19. See Postlewait, *The Cambridge Introduction*, especially chapter 5, in which the distinction between periods is discussed further.

20. See Fernand Braudel, *On History*, tr. Sarah Matthews (University of Chicago Press, 1980).

21. See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, tr. Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge, 1972/2001).

22. See David Wiles, *A Short History of Western Performance Space* (Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Is it possible to grasp the aesthetic aspects of historicity – that which history has left to us so we can relate to it in terms of first-hand experiences? In his book *Brecht and Method* from 1998, Fredric Jameson refers to Brecht's struggle with 'the most troublesome feature of the historicity problem, at least from the aesthetic perspective: the historicity of feelings and emotions themselves'. When discussing the colonial-age poets Rudyard Kipling and Arthur Rimbaud, Brecht arrives at the following conclusion:

It is less easy, as Marx already observed, to explain the effects that such poems have on ourselves. [...] Apparently emotions accompanying social progress will long survive in the human mind as emotions linked with interests, and in the case of works of art will do so more strongly than might have been expected, given that in the meantime contrary interests will have made themselves felt. Every progress cancels the previous one, insofar as by definition it moves on further from that one, in other words, it moves across and away from it; at the same time in a way it also uses its predecessors, so that this last is somehow preserved in human consciousness as a form of progress, just as in real life its results live on. We have here a process of generalization of the most interesting kind, an ongoing process of abstraction. Whenever the works of art handed down to us allow us to share the emotions of other people, of people of past ages and of other classes, we must suppose that in doing so we are sharing interests that are actually universally human.²³

Jameson quotes this long passage to show that the Marxist Brecht has built an aesthetic bridge over the gap between poets of the past and readers of the present time. Brecht speaks of progress that divides us from earlier periods, but despite the social and political changes that have occurred, aesthetic phenomena of the past can reach us by way of their aesthetic value. Brecht has found a key to historical treasures, and this key is aesthetic experience.

Brecht speaks of poetry; our interest is theatrical performances with their visual and audial dimensions. In our search for a theory of Aesthetic Historicity, this implies that the findings in the archives –

23. Fredric Jameson, *Brecht and Method* (London: Verso, 2010), 177. John Willett's translation.

texts, pictures – are relevant because these artefacts have reached our time. Since theatre performances are a live art form, historical documents and artefacts reclaim their direct function in their encounter with today's artists and audiences, allowing a direct, sensory, aesthetic experience.

Hannah Arendt's insistence on the intellectual understanding of the past is paramount also for the theory of Aesthetic Historicity, particularly since we have the treasures of the late eighteenth century right before our eyes. We are obliged to fathom their significance because these artefacts still play a role today. Following Jacques Derrida's strategy, we need to establish a reasonable relationship between the singular event – or the artefact – and its historical context, which have been exposed in interim periods to impulses and changes, due to the mobility of the structural elements. Despite the discontinuity of historical discourses, the artefacts can be experienced in the here-and-now of performance. Fredric Jameson adds an aesthetic dimension: we are able to experience the aesthetics of past periods emotionally.

Aesthetic Historicity is a relational theory that ties together a number of elements and parameters. We have access to monuments of the past in the form of historical artefacts and artistic works preserved in the archives. These represent a part of the aesthetic of a certain epoch, embedded in the wider historical context of their time. Both the aesthetics and the context change as a result of the impulses that every new period brings. These impulses affect the artistic, intellectual, and societal conditions, then as well as now. Therefore, the character and the functions of historical artefacts and works have to be subjected to historiographical (re)construction. When we use them in today's performances, their connection to our time has to be determined anew to facilitate direct, aesthetic experiences. It is exactly this relationship that Aesthetic Historicity describes and theorises. It relates the historical moment to the present experience, described above as the timespan between t_1 and t_2 . At the same time, it also relates the works from t_1

and their interpretation in t_2 to the artefacts of t_1 . Another relationship concerns the historical practices, studied through historiography, and their aesthetic relevance for today. Finally – and in spite of the discontinuity of periods and centuries – Aesthetic Historicity theorises the presence of the past.

A model of Aesthetic Historicity

I will now present a model that attempts to transfer the theoretical considerations concerning Aesthetic Historicity into a general scheme. Like all models, this will represent a reduction of the fine web that we must imagine as links between past and present. The model is a practical tool that translates the historian's assumptions into an applicable methodology. The theory relates Aesthetic Historicity to the world, the methodology ties it to lived experience (See Fig. 3)

Before considering the methodological consequences of the model, I will first explain the terms to be used in this scheme. Some of the terms might have an obvious meaning while others are more complex. Although the model is intended to cover the relationship between all kinds of historical periods, I will mainly illustrate its implications with examples from the time of Gustav III in Sweden (t_1 , i.e. 1771–1792) and today (t_2). However, it might be equally interesting to investigate the relationship between the Gustavian period and classical Antiquity, e.g. how the Greek gods were perceived in the late eighteenth century, and what the discoveries of ancient Pompeii meant for the view of Antiquity in the Gustavian period. Such questions will be touched upon only marginally, but my point is that the model in no way is limited to the periods to which I refer in the following.

Context is a useful but also a misused term in scholarly research. As Thomas Postlewait has explained, contexts are sometimes understood as 'all-inclusive' and thus remain only loosely relevant for the phenomenon in question; occasionally, only certain features of a context are

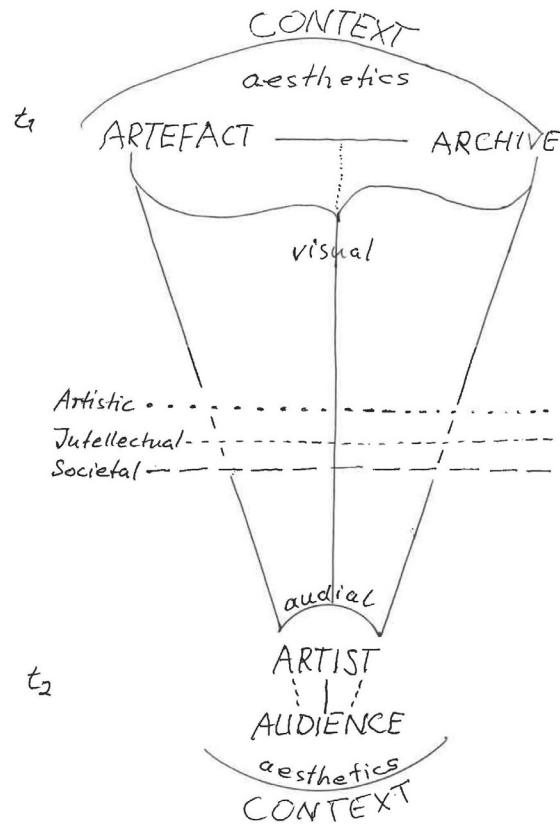


Figure 3. A model of Aesthetic Historicity. Graphics: Willmar Sauter ©. License: CC BY-NC.

singled out as causal explanations; most frequently, context is mentioned as the unspecified ‘background’ to occurrences, an approximate, general picture of a period without any explanatory value.²⁴ To avoid these pitfalls, I propose making a distinction between the circumstances of an event and the content of an event. By circumstances, I mean the specific conditions that were influential at the time and place under consideration, be it a particular event, a series of events, a tradition, or maybe even an entire period (neglecting here for the moment the question of what constitutes a period). In the case of

24. For further discussion of this topic, see Postlewait, *The Cambridge Introduction*, chapter 6: ‘The Idea of the Political: Causal Contexts for Events’, 196–222.

the model, it seems fruitful to consider contexts in a comparative way, i.e. contexts that are relevant both for t₁ and for t₂. And to ask which conditions prove to contain a great measure of similarities, and which other conditions have changed significantly over time.

As our workshop at the Drottningholm theatre showed, the acoustics of the stage obviously work in the same way today as they did two hundred and fifty years ago. The delivery of the voices of singers and actors are governed by the same circumstances implied by the architecture of the theatrical space. However, the audience that the performers address is not the same. In Gustavian times, Drottningholm was a theatre for the royal court, whereas today it is part of the public domain. This major difference has a significant impact, because today's general audience expect other things from a performance at Drottningholm than the nobles whom King Gustav III invited, or forced, to attend the operas and plays of his choice. The historical context has changed due to the artistic, intellectual, and societal impulses that will be discussed later. In a wider frame of contexts, it is necessary to relate the Gustavian era to one of the dominant discourses of the time: the Enlightenment. To what extent had these European ideas been incorporated into the thinking and writings of leading social circles in Sweden? Distinctions are necessary: are we thinking of the Enlightenment in terms of the equality of men, or of the new attitude towards nature, or of the rationality of human beings? The answers will vary according to our critical thinking and understanding of history. Discussions of this kind move the concept of contexts towards contents seen as a complement to circumstances.

What were the themes that dominated the discourses of the time? One can observe that the myths and histories of Antiquity that were central to the Baroque era were still present during the late eighteenth century. They appeared, for instance, in Gluck's operas. Gustav III loved Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice*. However, there were hardly any pieces that dealt with these ancient myths in the repertoire of Monvel's French theatre company that performed frequently at Drottningholm.

Who were the new heroes? The context turns to the circumstances and the content that the archives have preserved and made available to our time. The artistic and dramaturgical reading of the works of a past period requires both a broad understanding of the discourses of the time and an understanding of its principal aesthetics. This brings me to a supremely complex term – aesthetics.

Aesthetics as a conceptual term was revived as a philosophical aspect of the arts in the eighteenth century. Two important books about aesthetics were published during the lifetime of Gustav III: Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten's *Aesthetica* in 1750 and Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgement* in 1790. The focus of both of these is on the sensitive perception of 'the beautiful' in art and nature, experiences without specific purpose, which nevertheless can give the beholder a sense of elevation. Moses Mendelssohn observed in his *Letters on the Sentiments* from 1755 that we can experience at the same time the mixed feelings of beauty and disgust. Distinctions between various art forms and their specific ways of affecting the beholder or reader were discussed by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing in his famous *Laocoon* from 1766. This was a turning point in the aesthetic debate of the eighteenth century. Lessing revised the traditional order of the arts – in which painting was the noblest art form – and he pointed to the effects that particular pieces of art or poetry have on a beholder or listener.²⁵ Thus, aesthetics became the platform for discussions of the ideal work of art and how it might achieve an ideal effect. In his *Hamburg Dramaturgy* (written 1767–1769), Lessing emphasised the relationship between expressions on stage and their effects in the auditorium. It is therefore useful to distinguish between a normative aesthetics of production and an experiential aesthetics of perception. In the model of Aesthetic Historicity both the norms and the experiences are included.

Although we can describe characteristics of a period, it is not possible to imagine a comprehensive aesthetics of an entire century. It is not even possible to summarise the so-called 'Gustavian epoch' under one label. Rococo, Neoclassicism, and Romanticism

25. For a more extensive discussion of the aesthetic discourses of the late eighteenth century, see Willmar Sauter, *Aesthetics of Presence: Philosophical and Practical Reconsiderations* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2021), especially Part One.

overlapped – even in the theatre of Drottningholm! And while Gustav III praised the Enlightenment, he introduced strict censorship in Sweden. He was the first monarch in Europe to recognise the independence of the United States of America while only a few years earlier in Sweden he had seized absolute power in his coup d'état. Choices have to be made. In the following, I will limit my discussion to the theatrical field, i.e. performed and perceived aesthetic expressions. Of course, these expressions are also related to other art forms such as architecture, painting, poetry, and music. Referring to my argument that theatrical actions consist of movement and voice, sight and sound, it seems appropriate now to distinguish between visual and audial expressions.

Visual expressions first and foremost include the performer, the physical body on stage. The actors wear costumes – in the theatre, even nakedness would be a costume – and they are surrounded by a set design. The architecture of a theatre building or an open-air stage also constitutes the visual universe that the spectator becomes part of. This picture should not, however, be thought of as being static; on the contrary: the performers move, the sets change, and even the spectators seek new positions in their seats. It becomes especially obvious that we are dealing with historical artefacts when we consider visual expressions. Visiting an absolutely new theatre building is rare: most of the time we are in an auditorium from an age other than our own. And most theatre buildings have become palimpsests of various time layers through reconstructions and renovations. Only in exceptional cases – such as the theatre of Drottningholm – has the historical artefact been untouched by changes. This means that the characteristics of the space that were established at t_1 still exist at t_2 . The stage machinery allows us to experience the set in a *changement à vue* just as it appeared to the court of King Gustav. The movements of the performer, however, can only be roughly (re)constructed through historical research: they can no longer be experienced in their original form, but they can be experimented with from a t_2 perspective.

Audial expressions are always temporal and therefore bound to t_2 . We can never hear the sound of yesterday, let alone the sound of the eighteenth century which was long before recording devices were invented. Instead, we can attempt to approximate the sounds of the past. There is no reason to believe that the Drottningholm thunder and wind machines made different noises a few hundred years ago. Some historical instruments have survived that can be played, but these require special skills that have to be learned. Here too historical knowledge can give access to the (re)construction of the sounds of the past, although we will never fully know how far today's interpretations of historical scores coincide with a composer's original intentions. As the number of unaltered historical instruments is limited, historically informed orchestras are dependent upon carefully built copies of authentic instruments, which attempt to produce sounds of the past as far as this is possible. While instruments can be copied, the human voice cannot, as it is always inside a living body; nonetheless, singers, like the instrumentalists, can learn vocal techniques of the past, adjust the volume to historical buildings, and develop the skill of projecting sound according to the score and the space. For musicians and performers alike, the techniques of the past have to be acquired through learning and training, because today's techniques are the result of several hundred years of development, or rather the result of changes of style, technology and taste, thinking and habits, and a 'modern' worldview.

As we saw in our workshop, the purpose of these visual and audial expressions is to create a fictional story that is presented by performers who play the characters in the plot. Interpreting the characters in historical dramas and libretti is a complex matter. We know that the singers and actors of the eighteenth century were still indebted to the rhetorical practices of the Baroque, and that several stylistic changes occurred between 1700 and 1800. We can turn to the writings of Lessing and Denis Diderot to learn about the extent to which acting was discussed at the time; costumes were reformed again and

again;²⁶ new dramaturgical ideas competed with classical ideals, and so on. To reconstruct these acting practices is an unsurmountable task, but even if this were possible it would only solve a fraction of the problem. The real problem consists in the acting practices of today, which are built on a very different view of the individual. Since the late nineteenth century, the findings of psychology have had and still have a deep impact on how a personality, whether fictional or in real life, is perceived. Add to this realism and naturalism, which developed in parallel in the late nineteenth century, and you get permanently altered acting techniques. Since Konstantin Stanislavski's experiments with psychological realism as a base for the believable stage character, hardly any performers today can free themselves from this artistic attitude. Moreover, this has also changed the audience's attitude. Any performance today needs, to a certain extent, to negotiate between the practices that informed the creators of a historical work and the demands that today's artists and audiences make. The impulses, influences, events, or trends that brought about such dilemmas will be discussed next as impulses of history.

Impulses that cause changes are often referred to as 'development', in a positive, progressive sense. This is exactly why I speak of impulses rather than development. While few would question the importance of electricity, the invention of the spotlight does not automatically mean that the theatre of the twentieth century was superior to the eighteenth-century stage with its dangerous open flames behind the wings. There is no development from 'primitive' to 'advanced' forms of artistic presentation, especially within the arts, but they certainly change due to the impulses that every period is exposed to.

I would like to start by differentiating between material impulses, such as a country's infrastructure, buildings, transportations, telephones, schools, etc., and discursive impulses that change our ways of thinking, wishing, imagining, and talking. These impulses stand between t_1 and t_2 and tend to blur our understanding of the past. The historian's task consists, in great measure, of recognising the impulses that shade our view of historical conditions. I hope a

26. See Petra Dotlačilová, 'Materiality in Action' (chapter 6) and 'Costume in the Age of Rousseau and the Case of *Pygmalion*' (chapter 8).

more truthful picture of the past will appear as a result of careful analyses of the changes that such impulses have caused. In order to give an overview of the major changes that affect the theatrical field, I will distinguish between three kinds of impulses; namely artistic, intellectual, and societal parameters. Other parameters might also be relevant depending upon the purpose and field of examination.

Artistic impulses refer to the never-ending succession of different styles that the arts have experienced throughout recorded human history. In abstract terms, this stylistic ‘development’ is best described as a pendulum between representative, realistic depictions, and stylised, decorative ornamentations.²⁷ Distinctions can be made between period styles, the styles of certain genres, and personal styles that have influenced other artists, for example those of actresses such as Sarah Bernhardt or Eleonora Duse. Stylistic features can be named traditions, trends, conventions, or fashions. Some are short-lived, while others stretch over long periods of time. Some trends dominate all artistic expressions, for instance symbolism in painting, poetry, and plays, whereas others survive through media changes, such as melodramas that meandered from theatre through film to television series and then screen games. An example of an artistic impulse that had a great influence on stage performances is the advent of naturalism in the late nineteenth century. This became a basic principle for acting, even though the fourth wall has occasionally been removed. Material changes should also be added to this list. These include the location of theatres in the urban landscape, the means of transportation to get there, the stage equipment that is available, including the spotlights mentioned above.

Intellectual impulses include the content of the spectacles that are performed. The intellectual discourse of a period (for example Marxism or existentialism) has many points of reference and eventually influences the worldview of generations. These philosophical systems are easily recognisable in the plays of, say, Bertolt Brecht and Jean-Paul Sartre. Again, some of these patterns of thought are short-lived, while others are slow to take effect; the Enlightenment is

27. Arnold Hauser gives numerous examples of the stylistic shifts in art history. See his *The Social History of Art*, 4 vols. (London: Routledge, 1953/2011).

a good example of the latter. The democratic ideas that once ignited the French Revolution took more than a hundred years to be implemented in European politics and in a number of countries today are still being questioned. This parameter also has its material aspects. Books need to be printed, distributed, translated, and read. The aforementioned book *Aesthetica* by Baumgarten was written in Latin and in this form only accessible to well-educated intellectuals of the eighteenth century. It was not translated into German until 1907, and into English until 1974. There is no doubt that it is a document that characterises the aesthetic discourse around 1750, but how well was it distributed at the time? When was Baumgarten rediscovered, and why is there an interest in his writings two hundred and fifty years after the publication of his book? These kinds of historiographical questions have to be taken into account when we speak of intellectual impulses that have significance for understanding the past.

Societal impulses are so multifarious over a long period of time that a general enumeration of them seems meaningless. The historian has to ask what kind of social impulses were relevant in a certain context. It certainly matters and makes a difference if we are living in a democratic society with laws of equality implemented as human rights, or if we are the subjects of an absolute monarchy with strict class barriers. Is today's democratic society the fulfilment of the dream of the Enlightenment philosophers, or has Karl Marx spoiled that dream forever? What exactly are the implications of such differences? What kinds of dissimilarities became significant? Do the experiences of fascism in the twentieth century affect our understanding of society in Gustavian times? To be able to argue about crucial societal changes, it is necessary to specify the impact that they have had in the particular field of study.

The extent to which these impulses or layers influence each other was clearly demonstrated in our Drottningholm workshop. On the aesthetic level there was the positioning on the perspectival stage, which propelled the Count into the very centre of aesthetic attention. Here the aesthetic position immediately reflected the societal status of

the fictional characters: the Count spoke from his superior position to the inferior servant, Susanna. The successive movements brought the two stage figures onto the same level, not necessarily socially, but as human beings, as potential lovers, etc. The intellectual impulse can be seen in the equality between woman and man, master and servant, which sprang out of the Enlightenment and which was widely recognised in the late eighteenth century although not widely practiced. Thus, our little scene from Mozart's *Figaro* was a very good illustration of some of the parameters of Aesthetic Historicity.

The model and the method

The methodological procedures that the model of Aesthetic Historicity provides need to be specified in terms of the purpose of the investigation. I can see two different applications of the model: an analytical approach to existing performances, and a practical approach to the creation of a performance. In both cases the focus lies on the relationship between the historically given conditions and today's practices. However, the direction of the methodological procedure will lead to different kinds of results.

Let us assume that we are dealing with an eighteenth-century opera that has been or will be produced in historic theatres such as Drottningholm or Český Krumlov. According to the analytical approach, the existing production, as it appears on stage in front of an audience, is the point of departure. To begin with, the procedure might not be so different from a regular performance analysis with its hermeneutical and semiotic aspects.²⁸ The presence of the historical environment however has to be accounted for. This is the point when specific questions have to be asked: How does the theatrical space influence the visual and audial expressions? Is there a correspondence between the movements, the vocal delivery, the musical interpretation, etc., and the aesthetic environment in which all this takes place? Has the conductor adapted the volume of the orchestra to the acoustics of the building?

28. See Jacqueline Martin and Willmar Sauter, *Understanding Theatre: Performance Analysis in Theory and Practice* (Stockholm: Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis, 1995).

Of course, there can never be a complete concordance between the artistic practices of the eighteenth century and what is performed on the same stage today. The many artistic, intellectual, and societal impulses, through which history has been filtered, have changed our perception of historical practices. However, through an analysis of specific impulses some light can be shed on aesthetic choices about the past. The lighting and illumination of the stage is a good example. The original practice of using candles with naked flames is not usually allowed nowadays in historic theatres. Various kinds of electrical substitutes have been installed, which are more or less successful when it comes to the brightness of the overall lighting. And this points to another physical change: today's spectators are used to bright light in their daily lives as well as in the theatre. Therefore, today the historic stages are usually illuminated with a brighter light than they were originally. The intensity of this light also brings with it the risk of overexposing the flat wings so that the brush technique of the painting becomes visible, which of course was not the original intention. The visibility that today's audiences (and artists) demand easily destroys the illusion that was key to the Baroque stage techniques. Furthermore it is worth remembering that in the eighteenth century the visual effects were enhanced through the reflective materials of the costumes and the whitish makeup of the performer. These means of expression may still be used in today's performances, provided that directors and singers are interested in practices of the past.

By contrast the practical approach would start with the artefact and the sources in the archive. What possibilities are available when an opera is staged in a historic theatre? Which sets of flat wings can illustrate the fictional places of the opera? How many musicians can be placed in the orchestra pit, and what is a reasonable size for the orchestra with the given score? The material conditions and limitations of the space are important, but the decisive questions are raised by the study of the work. The dramaturgical analysis of the libretto and the music can be more or less informed by the historical knowledge that is available. An excellent example of such an analysis is the

study of the original production of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, written by Magnus Tessing Schneider.²⁹ Through a minute study of archival sources, Schneider concludes that the ending of the opera was a grotesque and parodic spectacle, invented by Lorenzo Da Ponte and enlarged by Mozart's music, that had very little to do with the moralistic punishment that is often seen on today's opera stages. The German Romantics distorted the story, turning it into a religious revenge drama. The examination of the opera's original meaning opens up interpretations that are more truthful to the work today, whether performed in regular opera houses or in a theatre from the time when the opera was written.³⁰

Methods cannot solve scholarly or artistic problems, but they may help us find the relevant questions to ask. The answers, however, depend on the sources that are consulted, the purpose of the investigation, and on the person who asks the questions. The methodological procedure organises the process and serves as a checklist of the variety of aspects that should be considered. In this sense, Aesthetic Historicity provides a methodological model for the analysis of the interaction of artefacts, archives, and artists.

Concluding examples

A specific example of the analytical approach can be found in the production of operas at Drottningholm in the twentieth century, in *The Theatre of Drottningholm – Then and Now*. In an attempt to summarise the dominant aesthetic norms of these productions, the lens of Aesthetic Historicity facilitated the identification of dominant features. Two parameters were decisive. The first concerned awareness of the historic space: to what extent did the artists relate to the stage as a historical artefact with its own visual and audial conditions? The second parameter concerned the archive and the production's familiarity with eighteenth-century norms of acting, vocal delivery, costume design. How did these (now historical) productions use the historic stage and its well-preserved equipment? Some were eager to

29. Magnus Tessing Schneider, *The Original Portrayal of Mozart's Don Giovanni* (London: Routledge, 2021): <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429281709> (accessed 23 March 2023).

30. Productions of *Don Giovanni* are further discussed in chapter 11, 'An Aesthetics of Absence'.

recapture the traces of the Rococo while others distanced themselves from everything that might be judged museum-like. It all started with Agne Beijer's *demonstrations* of the stage. In 1922, a year after he rediscovered the theatre, he invited a select audience and showed them what the stage machinery could accomplish. Four so-called *change-ments à vue* were executed by the stage hands, with no performers on stage. Even in later divertissements arranged by Beijer, the changing of the stage sets always had a demonstrative function. Because the performer always represents the present, Beijer sought to bridge the gap between then and now by excluding the human figure.

From the 1940s onward, the Royal Opera in Stockholm performed at Drottningholm during the summer. They took early operas from their regular repertoire and adjusted them to the Drottningholm stage. This *transference* of productions seemed to function very well because the non-naturalistic style of the Stockholm Opera was sufficiently traditional not to interfere with the historic space. The stage of Drottningholm was respected as an artefact, whereas the knowledge from the eighteenth-century archive was only applied in exceptional cases. One such example was the choreographer Mary Skeaping who took her *inspiration* both from the Drottningholm stage and from the libretti and descriptions of historical dances. Her combination of the artefact and the archive circumvented the classical ballet and her Preromantic ballet *Cupido* from 1956 remained in the repertoire for several decades.

A period of *playfulness* dominated Drottningholm in the 1980s, when a Mozart cycle was created by director Göran Järvefelt and conductor Arnold Östman. The original flat wings (or rather: authentic copies) were still used, not only as a backdrop but as a part of the stage actions: the performers were playing *with* the wings (see Fig. 4). Östman introduced historical instruments in order to recreate the original sound of the theatre. Thus, the performances related to the playfulness of the Rococo and at the same time appealed to the taste of contemporary audiences. The characters were psychologically credible but avoided realism in their actions and vocal delivery. For



Figure 4. Håkan Hagegård (Don Giovanni), Erik Saedén (Leporello), and Birgit Nordin (Donna Anna) in *Don Giovanni* by W. A. Mozart. Drottningholm Palace Theatre, 1979. Photo: Beata Bergström. Musik- och teaterbiblioteket, Stockholm. © Daniel Bergström. License: CC BY-NC.

many who saw these performances in the 1980s, this was as close to eighteenth-century standards as one could get.

Since the turn of the millennium, the use of the Drottningholm stage has oscillated between two extreme attitudes. There were a number of directors representing the *Regietheater* approach who explicitly announced their *neglect* of the historical stage conditions, anxious not to be caught up in 'reconstruction'. Instead of bridging the gap between the work and the performance, they treated the stage as if it were no artefact. An extreme case of such anti-museal staging is discussed in chapter 11 in this book, in which I deal with the 2016 production of *Don Giovanni*, 'An Aesthetics of Absence'. However, for some years, directors were invited to Drottningholm because they were known to work within the tradition of HIP. They were striving to create the same *harmony* on stage that characterised the orchestra in the pit. Although these attempts to recapture the sensibility of the place were appreciated, these productions also showed that much more research and training are required if the necessary balance between then and now is to be found.

Aesthetic Historicity allows for an analysis of these productions with respect to their relationship to the historical artefacts and archives. Impulses from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have, to some extent, been taken into consideration. The relative impact of historical preferences and trends is not the same as measuring the value of a production, but it certainly demonstrates the performance's relation to the historic space and to the original concepts of the work that is presented. Aesthetic Historicity as an *analytical approach* is, however, not to be understood as a normative critique. The value judgements must be left to the artists, the critics, and to the audience.

* * *

Our workshop at Drottningholm was described at the beginning of this chapter. It serves as an example of the *practical approach* of the methodology inspired by Aesthetic Historicity. We wanted to avoid the pitfalls of HIP productions which, in their ambition to come as

close as possible to the original staging practices, tend to get stuck in imitation, in particular as far as the movements are concerned. As in dance, where the choreography has to be enlivened by the dancer, the ‘historical’ movement patterns are difficult to reconstruct, and rhetoric is an altogether marginalised knowledge, both for artists and audiences, so the result of such movement and voice training can easily become lifeless reproductions.³¹ The *Regietheater* attitude, which I also mentioned in this chapter, frequently moves in the opposite direction. The delicate stage of Drottningholm is used as if it were a black-box theatre, with respect paid neither to its material nor to its aesthetic qualities. An analysis based on Aesthetic Historicity might be able to create a balance between the extremes of HIP and *Regietheater*.

In the preparatory phase of the workshop, we deliberately allowed ourselves to neglect the libretto of *Le nozze di Figaro*. Detaching the duet from its dramatic context, one can imagine that the erotic tension between the Count and Susanna is mutual. At the same time, the scene can be interpreted as an expression of the Count’s social power, and thus his attack on Susanna would appear as a molesting encroachment rather than as an erotic invitation. Is Susanna loyal to the Countess, thus only pretending to be interested in the Count’s advances? This kind of interpretative questions have to be solved on the basis of the archive, i.e. the libretto. What do we know, or what can we assume about the intentions of the librettist, what does Mozart’s music ‘say’ at this point, how does the choice of actions affect the characters and the overall plot of the opera? Once the encounter between Susanna and the Count has established Susanna’s pretence, the staging needs to bring out this tension in an adequate way. I have already described how we experimented with various positions and movements on stage. It turned out that the stage itself contributed crucially to the outcome of this scene.

Authority emanating from the Count’s appearance was possible because of the visual harmony of the stage that was offered by the deep perspective of the wings. The strict symmetry of the flat wings prompts

31. See chapter 1, Jette Barnholdt Hansen, ‘Adequate Rhetorical Delivery when Staging Premodernity’.

this central point. Such a focal spot would hardly be observable in a modern stage setting, even if it happened to be symmetrical. It is a fundamental characteristic of Baroque illusion, painted on perspectival wings, that provides this central position. Another observation that we made was of great interest. The dramaturgical analysis opened up various interpretations of the relationship between the Count and Susanna in this situation. The tension between them activates psychological emotions, and these emotions have to be displayed in the performers' actions. In applying a traditional positioning of the two characters that followed the practice of the eighteenth century, the psychological impact of the scene did not disappear; on the contrary: the subtlety of their emotions became as strong as it would have been with a psychologically realistic acting style. The impulses that the model of Aesthetic Historicity points to bring to contemporary productions an awareness that the relation between the artefact, the archive, and the artist can be appropriated or avoided. Either way, they absolutely make a difference.

Therefore, our research group was immensely lucky in having the opportunity to arrange workshops at Drottningholm, far away from the business of regular performances. In our workshops we had ideal conditions for studying Aesthetic Historicity in practice. It was possible to isolate certain components of eighteenth-century aesthetics, to single out some visual or audial elements, and to study their effects. The workshops allowed us to alternate between the position of the artists and that of the spectator, to apply Aesthetic Historicity both as a practical and as an analytical tool, to repeat, vary, and alter a phrase, a movement, or a position. Thereby, we discovered that Aesthetic Historicity is not only a model and a method; it is also an effective scheme of learning. We are grateful for the insights we gained, and wish that others, too, may discover the beauties of Aesthetic Historicity.