

Theatrical photography, photographic theatre and the still: the  
photography of Sophie Moscoso at the Théâtre du Soleil

The archivization produces as much as it records the event. (Derrida, 1996)

The space mobilised by the *décor*, music, light, and the voices, gestures and movements of the actors, all set up a historical writing, above all what Mnouchkine calls an *écriture corporelle*; a writing with the body, a gestic vocabulary of signs that reappear throughout the plays, not just delineating a style or illustrating the text but haunting the ongoing action so that there can never be the sense of a pure present. (Bryant-Bertail 1999, 181)

The still is back, where it always was. In her recent book, Laura Mulvey (2006) suggests that new ways of viewing film have prompted a shift of the individual frame, once hidden in the sequential flow, into prominence. Mulvey examines the tension between the still and the moving in cinema, and traces cinema's inherent stillness. Although theatre is not materially composed of twenty-four stills per second, like cinema, I wish to suggest that it is constituted of stills as much as of movement. Theatre and performance photography do not so much 'freeze', 'capture', or 'still' performance, as bring the still back into circulation. Rather than emphasising, as others have done, photography of performance in terms of relics, traces or indeed 'documentation,' I will consider the possibility that it impacts upon

how performance is seen and done, just as performance impacts upon photography.

As Rebecca Schneider has recently written, we think of performance as “that which eludes capture because it is (re)composed in living time,” and the performance document as “a record of the live, but not itself the performance, nor itself live” (Schneider 2005, 61). Emphasising an understanding of photography as ‘documentation’ ignores how a performance to camera calls on the photograph’s capacity to perform (and calls on the photograph to perform); and suggests a temporality that is at odds with theatricality. What is more, in focusing on the relationship between the object photographed and the photograph, we turn away from the relationship between photograph and viewer. The pose, the gesture, held for the camera, is held for the viewer of the photograph to behold.

Philip Auslander has suggested that performance documentation tends towards the mode of the reproduction of works (like the photographic copying of a painting) rather than that the capturing of events (Auslander 2006, 6). Much theatre photography is shot in rehearsal, but most tends to be framed as reproducing something akin to what a spectator might see if watching a show. Photographs are

taken in rehearsal because it is not usually possible or desirable to photograph a live show. One important reason for this is clearly to do with practical considerations: photographs are often required before a show is running, for promotional purposes; also, for the purposes of most kinds of performance, the noise of a camera's shutter is unwelcome, and a photographer would be unlikely to be able to move around during a performance without distracting the audience or performers.<sup>1</sup> As Auslander (2006, 6) observes: performance documentation has been characterised by a concern with the artwork, and – with a few exceptions – a disregard for the audience of performance. As such, rehearsal effectively functions as an opportunity to photograph performance without the audience, from a position approximating that of the audience.

Although there are photographs that seek to capture rehearsal as an event *in itself*, the images I wish to focus upon are distinct from this. The photography of Sophie Moscoso at the Théâtre du Soleil is atypical theatre photography, and is a very distinct from other photography taken in rehearsal, both visually and in terms of how it is used and diffused. I will explain the particularity of the spectacle it

---

<sup>1</sup> There is a tradition, mainly in companies in continental Europe, and in particular in Spain, of a photographer being part of a company, and participating from the very beginning of rehearsals. However, for the most part, as Chantal Meyer-Plantureux (1992) has shown financial constraints mean that photographers are rarely part of the creative process.

offers, examine distribution of the photograph, look at the notion of an 'integral' photography, and make a comparison with other such uses of photography. I will then examine the images alongside accounts of the working methods of the company in order to gain insights into how theatre and performance photography interrelate with what they record, even challenging the very notion of recording. The term 'documentation', which posits the existence of a lost live occurrence, will emerge as problematic, and an early (1793) definition of a 'document': "Teaching, instruction, warning" (The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, 1933, 546), will perhaps return.

The Théâtre du Soleil is probably the contemporary theatre company most associated with photography: the company was co-founded by a photographer, Martine Franck, and many people experience the company's work through photographs, which are often reproduced in theatre books. The company, which undoubtedly owes much of its fame as well as its mythic status to the circulation and displacement of visual images, is often associated with distance and the exotic: the theatre marks its remoteness in being located outside Paris, and spectators must take a special shuttle bus from the Metro station at the end of a line, or drive into the Bois de Vincennes, to get there (Bradby 2002, 113). The company is known for the persistent

emphasis it places on the 'orient'<sup>2</sup>. Colourful photographs diffuse the company's work, while also suggesting its remoteness. The function of such images recalls the dynamic whereby travel and photography are linked and how, as Edward Cadava, (1997, xxv-xxvi) drawing on Walter Benjamin, has suggested, photographs both bring things closer and also distance them (by making them into an object). The aptly named Soleil (the name was originally a reference to cinema) has a very strong relationship with photography.

In spite of this, or perhaps as a consequence of it, there are only two official photographers at the theatre, Martine Franck (a member of the Magnum Photo agency, and a co-founder of the Soleil) and Michèle Laurent, and the company does not traditionally hold press photo calls. The photographs I wish to focus upon, however, are not the output of either of these photographers, nor are they in circulation beyond the theatre<sup>3</sup>.

From 1970 (Thomasseau 2000, 102), up until her leaving the company around the time of the production *Et Soudain des nuits*

---

<sup>2</sup> For an exploration of this, see Ariane Mnouchkine's (Mnouchkine 1996) article.

<sup>3</sup> By this I mean that they are not seen on the company website, in books and playtexts, as is the case for the 'official' photographs. Of course, this study evidences that they are in some, limited, circulation, and indeed, some of the images by Moscoso have been reproduced in specialised critical works including those by Féral (2001), which looks at working methods at the Soleil and Meyer-Plantureux's book (1992), which examines Moscoso's photographic work, and to which the present study owes a great deal.

*d'éveil* in 1997 (Dusigne, 2002, 137) Sophie Moscoso, as director Ariane Mnouchkine's assistant, would have the task of documenting rehearsals, making detailed written notes, a record of events<sup>4</sup>. Moscoso would also take black and white photographs on a Rolleiflex camera (Meyer-Plantureux, 1992, 158). Photographing the occurrences in the rehearsal room soon became part of her job<sup>5</sup> and part of the system of rehearsal at the Soleil: she would both write notes and photograph. As Jean-François Dusigne has suggested, Moscoso's was a role characterised by a need for meticulousness: "the assistant director would take photographs and note down in minute detail the progress of each improvisation" (Dusigne, 2002, 137); it appears that the choice of what to photograph would be made by Moscoso, who was well aware that she couldn't photograph everything.<sup>6</sup> Although not one of the official photographers at the theatre, Moscoso took photographs of rehearsals on a daily basis, producing a very large volume of images, which are now held in her private archive. These images differ greatly from the work of the

---

<sup>4</sup> The written notes have given rise to research, although without focus on the photographs: an extract from Moscoso's working book makes up a chapter in David Williams's (Moscoso in Williams 1999) sourcebook on the Soleil; Jean-Marie Thomasseau (2000) has written about these notes. Jean-François Dusigne (2002) mentions both the written notes and the photographs, and Chantal Meyer-Plantureux (1992) interviews Moscoso, and reproduces several of her images.

<sup>5</sup> Sophie Moscoso, at a private seminar with Jean-Marie Thomasseau, Université Paris VIII, 02/04/2002.

<sup>6</sup> Sophie Moscoso, at a private seminar with Jean-Marie Thomasseau, Université Paris VIII, 02/04/2002.

other photographers in the company, both in terms of their production and their distribution.

Moscoso states that she would operate from one spot, and would be seated at a table throughout rehearsals (Meyer-Plantureux, 1992). The photographs produced (amounts would vary) would be developed, and then images would be selected by Mnouchkine and Moscoso. These prints would be stuck into albums, which would be consulted at various points thereafter. Although Moscoso has described her photography as “simply a different way of taking notes” (Moscoso, 2002), her photography, bringing into play revelation, remembering, forgetting, capture and construction has a relationship with the rehearsal that is quite distinct from the transcription of written notes.

Moscoso’s photographs are a strange spectacle. As images of events in the rehearsal room, a great many of them contain elements that might normally not be present in theatre and performance photographs, especially in the case of shots intended to in some way represent a show. In some photographs we see actors holding scripts, or actors who are clearly only partially in costume. Scripts are particularly prevalent, evidencing Mnouchkine’s creative process: the director encourages actors to read from the script until the final

rehearsals: actors may often change roles, or text may be modified close to the first show (for these same reasons, or according to this same methodology, actors do not necessarily 'learn lines' in a traditional sense, but rather work with the script-in-hand until the last moment, and thereby know the lines). In Moscoso's photographs, the scripts – usually printed on sheets of paper – are initially disconcerting to the viewer and are intrusive (perhaps an equivalent of the boom microphones that occasionally accidentally find their way into the frame in a film). When the photographs include such foreign objects, we are faced with an unusual sight, recalling Walter Benjamin's ([1935] 1999, 226) description of the unique spectacle of a film set, seen from a perspective other than that of the camera<sup>7</sup>: these images offer a similarly complex view of things that one might expect would be excluded from the frame.

The fact that the images are odd aesthetically, distinct from most theatre and performance images, should not be surprising given that they were not *a priori* supposed to be either aesthetic photographs or indeed 'theatre photographs' in any conventional

---

<sup>7</sup> "It presents a process in which it is impossible to assign to a spectator a viewpoint which could exclude from the actual scene such extraneous accessories as camera equipment, lighting machinery, staff assistants, etc. – unless his eye were on a line parallel with the lens. This circumstance, more than any other, renders superficial and insignificant any possible similarity between a scene in the studio and one on the stage." Benjamin's concern for the frame indicates a way in which theatre and photography are perhaps linked, if: "[i]n the theatre one is well aware of the place from which the play cannot immediately be detected as illusory." (Benjamin [1935] 1999, 226)



sense; that kind of photography was already taken care of by the Soleil's official photographers. Unlike promotional or press photographs (which prophesy a production) or conventional archival or documentary images (which remember it), Moscoso's photographs have a purpose in and during the working process. If they are documentation, they do not correspond to typical theatre or performance documentation. These are utilitarian photographs, which produce and convey information that is required in rehearsal. Such documents are ripe for study, as evidence, but cannot be treated in the same manner as more conventional images. Jean-Marie Thomasseau (2001) has written about Moscoso's notepads, which are an example of what he calls 'manuscrits de la mise en scène'. If we consider such images performance documentation, we must consider how they come to have that status; to separate these images, which document rehearsal, from conventional theatre photography qua documentation, it is useful to draw on a distinction.

Baz Kershaw (in PARIP 2001) has delineated two kinds of performance documentation: 'integral' and 'external'. For Kershaw, *integral* documentation is made up of "the mass of heterogeneous trace materials that the practice process creates" (Kershaw in PARIP 2001), usually meaning notes and other written material, or sketches

and plans. *External* documentation, on the other hand, is about the recording of performance<sup>8</sup>. Although theatre and performance photographs are normally to be found on the side of external documentation, being associated with mediatization and camera technologies, Moscoso's photographs seem to be a form of *integral* documentation; a rare example of photography as remains of the "practice process" (Kershaw in PARIP 2001).

Moscoso's photographs are reference points for the aesthetic and technical choices of the production. This is most clear as regards costume. Although the photographs are all taken in the rehearsal room, rather than onstage, the actors are almost always at least partially in costume, even in images from the early stages of the creative process. This shows the experimental approach to costume at the Soleil, where actors dress their own characters, and where costume, rather than being introduced late in the rehearsal run, is incorporated from the beginning. The Soleil possesses a great deal of costumes, and actors try out numerous combinations before settling on a way of dressing a character. This is also the case with make up and with the masks for which the Soleil is well known. Moscoso has said that this way of working would be impossible, were it not for the

---

<sup>8</sup> And it is this documentation, for Kershaw (in PARIP 2001), that runs the risk of "standing in" for live performance.

“help of photography”<sup>9</sup> (in Meyer-Plantureux, 1992, 157). With Moscoso’s images for reference points, costumes, make up and masks can be tried out, and a particular configuration can be recreated even after time has passed (and the company routinely rehearses a piece for many months), or even very quickly after the photograph is taken. Here photography’s capacity to capture is exploited.

In a very straightforward way, these photographs are used as a kind of ‘mirror with a memory’<sup>10</sup>. But the capacity to mirror, and the notion of a photographic memory, are exploited further at the Soleil. The photographs constitute a technique of memory at the theatre. However, unlike archival photographs, this is not a question of long term memory, of preservation, but of a kind of *short term* memory, with the possibility of latent images being retroactivated. Like continuity photographs, these images hold onto particular information, retaining it for a particular purpose.

In the commercial cinema, a script supervisor, is “in charge of all details of *continuity* from shot to shot” (Bordwell & Thompson 1997, 15), and photography is usually one of the tools employed. Continuity photographs are taken during the shooting of a film, and exist to

---

<sup>9</sup> “l’aide de la photographie” (my translation)

<sup>10</sup> Oliver Wendell Holmes ([1859] 1980, 74) famously said this of the stereograph.

establish and maintain coherence, and to prevent problems of costume, make up, styling or indeed of scenery and lighting. Films are normally shot non-sequentially; scenes are set up and shot in an order that corresponds to practical and logistical requirements, rather than to narrative sequence of the film, and it is only at the editing stage that scenes are placed in order. Thus, there is great potential for elements of scenes to clash where two scenes are placed one after the other when the film is edited.<sup>11</sup> This narrative discontinuity is, according to Walter Benjamin, what differentiates cinema performance from theatre performance in terms of the task of the actor: the film actor, unlike the theatre actor, is engaged in a discontinuous performance (Benjamin [1936] 1999, 222). Moscoso's photographs are a reminder that the actor's performance in rehearsal is also discontinuous: despite the linearity of theatre performance, in rehearsal, scenes are typically performed in a jumbled order, one that does not necessarily correspond to the play's narrative progression.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> For example, two scenes may well be shot some time apart, and in different places, for example an interior scene may be shot at a studio, but be cut with a scene shot on location several months earlier.

<sup>12</sup> Moscoso states that this use of the camera to create reference points is only used with regard to the actors, and not for things like blocking or scenography. "Par contre, la photographie ne sert jamais de repère à la mise en espace, ni aux essais de lumière. Les photographies ont en fait un rôle très modeste" [However, photography never serves as a reference for the placement, nor for trying out lighting. Photographs in fact have a very modest role] (my translation) (Meyer-Plantureux, 1992, 157).

This idea of photographs being used for verification and comparison is reminiscent of the role of photographs for Bertolt Brecht,<sup>13</sup> in whose Epic theatre Walter Benjamin observed a filmic procedure of “fits and starts” (Benjamin [1939] 1998, 21). Ruth Berlau (who, like Moscoso, was not officially employed to take pictures) is the photographer most associated with Brecht’s stage work. Brecht installed a darkroom at the Berliner Ensemble, which suggests that images were required quickly: with that facility on site, photographs could be developed and printed continually. The function of these photographs resembles that of Moscoso’s.

In his workbook (Brecht 1976, 474), Brecht comments that one of Berlau’s photographs reveals a staging detail that had been missed in rehearsal. Elsewhere Berlau confirms this idea, stating that “[w]hat really happens on stage can be checked only with the help of photographs” (Brelau in Carmody 1990, 33), echoing Moscoso’s very similar claim about the ‘help’ provided by photography (Moscoso in Meyer-Plantureux 1992, 157): this evaluative and corrective role of photography appears to be employed at the Soleil as well. The director states: “from the photographs, we study the errors of

---

<sup>13</sup> ) [It is well known that Brecht considered photography to be important, perhaps despite and perhaps because of his prudence regarding the medium of photography (he was troubled by photography’s capacity to show subjects in a state of removed-ness). Brecht did engage with photography elsewhere, most significantly in one consciously didactic attempt\* to encourage intelligent ‘reading’ of photographs.

expression, clothing, useless bodily tension<sup>14</sup>” (Mnouchkine in Meyer-Plantureux 1992, 155); Mnouchkine suggests that the photographs help to rectify things; and, as noted by Moscoso (in Thomasseau 2000, 110) in her notebooks, she calls on her actors to “[w]ork by way of erased errors.”<sup>15</sup> Thus the photographs do not simply retain things that would be forgotten, in the manner of continuity shots, but also highlight errors and so constitute a method of forgetting.

The photographs from Brecht’s theatre were a constituent of the celebrated ‘modelbücher’ or modelbooks<sup>16</sup> made for each production, showing the elements of the show in great detail. The modelbooks are distinct from the work of Moscoso, in that they attempt to ‘cover’ all aspect of the production, and aim for a completeness that is very different from Moscoso’s rather aleatory photography and highly selective albums. For Brecht, photographs would do two things: they would play a role in the creative work of the company, allowing unnoticed details to be spotted or checked, and also - in modelbooks - would be sent to producers and theatre programmers (the modelbooks would be so detailed and exhaustive as to allow for a show to be recreated anew).

---

<sup>14</sup> “A partir de photos, on étudie les erreurs dans les expressions, la tenue des corps, les tensions inutiles” (my translation)

<sup>15</sup> “Travailler par erreurs supprimées” (my translation)

<sup>16</sup> These were books of photographs and commentary created for each production. Some, such as the modelbook for *Mother Courage* were published.

Jim Carmody makes a link between the photographic culture at Brecht's Berliner Ensemble and the use of tableau and image (and *gestus*) in Brechtian theatre, suggesting that Brecht's theatre might be particularly suited to being photographed, and Brecht particularly attuned to the potential of photography as an aid in the creation of stage images. Carmody also suggests that photographs of Brecht's work have informed the work of those seeking to do Brechtian theatre. In discussing the relationship of the photograph to context, Carmody draws on John Berger's distinction between 'private' and 'public' photographs, with reference to the photographs from Brecht's theatre. These terms are useful in looking at Moscoso's work. The *private* photograph is "appreciated and read in a context *which is continuous with that from which the camera removed it*" (Berger 1980, 55), whereas a *public* photograph "is torn from its context, and becomes a dead object which, exactly because it is dead, lends itself to any arbitrary use." (Berger, in Carmody 1990, 35). The notion of use in a "context that is continuous" seems appropriate to the images of both Berlau and Moscoso, which are taken in the rehearsal room or at least the theatre where the photographs end up. As Carmody suggests, Berlau's photographs would be in limited circulation, within the company, but would also circulate more widely, bringing about an

ontological shift.<sup>17</sup> The difference between the use of Berlau's photographs and that of Moscoso's is that, while both sets of images correspond to Berger's notion of the *private* photograph'; Berlau's – when made a constituent of the modelbook – become *public*.

Moscoso's prints are a small selection from a larger body of shots taken. Although there is no equivalent to the modelbook at the Soleil, the selection of images to print, and the mounting of the prints in books is worth examining. On the pages of Moscoso's notebooks, the prints are arranged in various configurations, constituting a montage.

Often the juxtapositions of images are revelatory of rehearsal and devising at the Soleil. For example, there are arrangements where two different actors are shown playing the same role, identifiable by their costume or masks. This evidences the customary changes of actor at the Soleil: during the long rehearsal periods, numerous actors will try out a role, and eventually Mnouchkine will decide who will play it in the show<sup>18</sup>. In some cases, there are four photographs pasted onto a page, effectively showing a rotation of roles, where two actors are shown playing each of the roles.

---

<sup>17</sup> In examining this shift, it is worth here invoking Benjamin's distinction between "cult value" and "exhibition value" of a work (Benjamin [1936] 1999, 218-19)

<sup>18</sup> This practice is described in Féral (2001).



As with the images used to record the experiments in costume etc., it is easy to see the utility of the arrangement of images as reference points. The photographic image is used to make comparisons; the image can be held up and compared with what is happening in the rehearsal room at a particular moment, but can also be placed alongside another image. There is a *haptic* quality to this: the *handling* of the print, and then the photographic album, is part of how photography functions at the Soleil: photographs magnify and displace, and objectify. Perhaps the best comparison that can be made with Moscoso's photographs and their function is uses of photography where photographs capture what the eye cannot, for instance where photographs are used to magnify in forensic photography, or where they are used to check that machines are working correctly (by freezing movement) in industrial photography.

The arrangement of images on a page, the montage, also introduces image temporality; some images are mounted chronologically, creating progressive sequences. The sequential arrangement of photographs in Moscoso's notebooks is reminiscent of various scientific modes of photography, and in particular of the chronophotography of the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, as practiced by Etienne

Jules Marey or Edward Muybridge. This iconographic reference suggests links both with cinema and with notions of epistemology and the body.

Much theatre and performance photography seems to resemble, or to reference, stop motion photography: chronological sequences presenting the possibility of decomposing and recomposing movement from stills. However, in both the appropriation of this kind of sequence in early actors' portraits (which date from the same period as the most familiar chronophotographic images) and the appropriation of this in Moscoso's photographs, the technology and the conditions in which a photograph is made are not those of chronophotography. The scientific procedure of capturing stills from movement is quite distinct from what theatre photographers, including Moscoso, are doing: in chronophotography, by way of a fast shutter, or a flash, movement becomes a series of stills. However, in the case of the early actors' portraits I have mentioned, the shutter speeds would not be sufficient to 'still' movement and sequences would be created by way of a series of held poses. Likewise, Moscoso's photographs, are not produced with any regularity or rhythm: she states that she would take photographs punctually (Moscoso in Meyer-Plantureux 1992, 157), and in some cases, the sequences in Moscoso's

books clearly span several minutes. Chronological sequences are in fact stagings made up of stills.

But even much 'scientific' chronophotography has been shown to be rather approximative, and perhaps more concerned with appropriating a particular discourse on the body and epistemology than the scientific fractioning of time. Marta Braun has demonstrated that Muybridge's works, which (unlike the work of other chronophotographers such as Marey, offer very clear and coherent figures) merely "look scientific" (Braun 2002, 152); the images by Muybridge, which were once considered the result of scientific enquiry into the body in motion are now considered to be "ultimately artistic" (Pultz 1995, 31). Chronophotography's revelation of that which *would have been hidden* in the flow of movement is therefore revealed to be – at least in part – a construction of stills, akin perhaps to theatrical poses, gestures and stillness.

François Albera (2002), writing about chronophotography, defines two categories of stillness. One is the 'instant' (the mechanical, captured still), the other is the 'moment' (the voluntary, representational still). Photography deals in both of these: on the one hand the instant, seized from the flow of movement and on the other,

the moment (or the pose). The moment (the representational, as opposed to the chronological, still) is what we might associate with performance and staging. Moscoso's photographs at the Soleil might offer a possibility of exploring how these stills coexist; how the representational still enters the mechanical, and how the captured still enters the body.

The notion of 'intermediality' (Müller 1996; Pavis 2004, 48-9) is useful in identifying and characterizing the complex interplay of image and body. We can posit a relationship of *intermediality* between the photographs and the theatrical practice that uses and produces them. The term intermediality here refers to "the integration of aesthetic concepts from different media into a new context" (Müller in Pavis 2004, 49) (which should be distinct from any notions of 'multimedia' the influence here appears to be an integration of the photographic in the actors' bodies): a literal incorporation, concerning the bodies, the gestures, and the acting, which are described by Mnouchkine as the "first, constant, permanent, concern" of the company<sup>19</sup> (in Féral 2001, 11). The intermedial influence at the Théâtre du Soleil concerns the actors and the physical and gestural work and seems to posit a *photographic technology of the body*: just

---

<sup>19</sup> "le souci premier, constant, permanent" (my translation)

as certain images are selected from contact sheets, printed and stuck into Moscoso's albums, so it is appropriate to pick out some quotations, mainly from Ariane Mnouchkine, given in interviews, to explore this idea. In the quotations that follow, Mnouchkine is *never talking about photography, but uses numerous photographic metaphors and analogies used in describing the work of the troupe*. Such metaphors seem to evidence a relationship between photography and theatre which is not merely a question of simple influence, but of an dynamic whereby the two fuse; such confusion, it would seem, is not merely specific to the work of the Soleil, but rather has implications for photography, theatre and performance.

*The notion of the image at the Soleil is a photographic one.* Mnouchkine often talks about the *image*, and, as I have suggested, the Soleil is a particularly visual theatre, in terms of its use of colour, and the care that is taken in creating complex and intricate stage pictures. But the *image* is not only something crafted as part of a production; at various points, Mnouchkine describes *image* as the raw material of creation, saying that images must be collected (Mnouchkine in Féral 2001, 17). As well as the notion of the image as a discrete unit, this also perhaps draws on the haptic quality of photographs, suggesting that the image has a close affinity with the

photographic print which is both a surface and an object, and as such can be arranged and manipulated, placed in a chain, attached, detached, moved. Here, *image* can be mapped onto photography, and seems to be about *gesture*.

*The photographic image is copiable.* The photographic image is perhaps defined by its capacity to be copied. Benjamin ([1936] 1999) famously writes about the implications of photography as being capable of producing multiple (and potentially infinite) copies. These copies have the potential to disrupt notions of presence; and as Benjamin shows, what is most significant in this is not reproductions themselves, but rather reproducibility<sup>20</sup>.

Mnouchkine warns actors against being “original” (Féral 1989, 84). As is perhaps shown in the *rotation of roles*, as described above, a gesture can shift position, and be adopted a different actor. Indeed, the idea of authorship or ownership of the gesture becomes problematic. As such, the actor can be seen to be subservient to the gesture (it is perhaps this photographic notion of gesture that enables roles to be distributed like stage costumes). The haptic relationship here is clear again: the director is able to pick and choose, and to

---

<sup>20</sup> Although the title of Benjamin’s best known essay is often translated as reproduction, it is more properly ‘reproducibility’ (Benjamin [1936] 1999)

discard at will. This has been an observation (and indeed a criticism) of Mnouchkine's style as a director: she is said to switch actors quite suddenly, and make rapid and radical casting choices.

*The photographic image is copiable and is thus pedagogical.*

Inherent in Mnouchkine's notion of copying is the idea that copying is a means of apprenticeship. Observation is the important thing here, reinforcing what we have learned about the use of Moscoso's photographs. If the photographs function as a mirror (with a memory) on the work taking place in rehearsals, it is worth noting that Mnouchkine is very careful about the circulation of images, and that here, as elsewhere, mirrors seem to be a concern for theatre.<sup>21</sup> Actors are rarely allowed to see rehearsal images of themselves (for fear that it might alter their performance), and generally only when they are having difficulty in recovering a gesture or attitude in a particular role (Moscoso in Meyer-Plantureux 1992, 157).

Mnouchkine states that she believes in the pedagogy of copying, and that "to copy is to copy from the inside"<sup>22</sup> (in Féral, 2001, 72). But, far from being about reflecting something "inside", in

---

<sup>21</sup> This is reminiscent of the practice of mask teachers, who typically forbid students to use a mirror while performing with the full mask and allow the use of fleeting gazes at the mirror in half-mask work; it also of course recalls a passage in Stanislavski about the dangers of performing in front of the mirror.

<sup>22</sup> "copier, c'est copier de l'intérieur" (my translation)

binding together observation and learning, Mnouckine suggests a method of *imitation*. The director defends “the necessity of apprenticeship by observation”; it is a “vision that teaches, listens and recalls” (Féral 1989, 87). This idea implies both learning and shaping (‘formation’ in French), and seems to correspond to Brecht’s notion of copying: “We must realise that copying is not so despicable as people think. It isn’t ‘the easy way out’. It is no disgrace, but an art” (Brecht [1949] 1964, 224).

Central to these pedagogical ideas about the image and the body is the notion of *immobility*, part of the photographic conception of theatre at the Soleil: images inform practice by being embodied as stillness.

At the Soleil, the fixed ‘attitude’ is the raw ingredient of theatrical work with the actors. To avoid “diluting the action”, “[k]ey gestures” are used as “turning points” and “reference points” (Dusigne, 2001, 138). Mnouchkine claims that the actor must “accept immobility”<sup>23</sup> (in Féral, 2001, 16). This emphasis on stillness is often seen as illustrating the influence of ‘oriental’ or ‘non-western’ theatre

---

<sup>23</sup> “accepter l’immobilité” (my translation)



on the Soleil<sup>24</sup>, but, in the light of what we have seen of the company's relationship with photography, photographers and photographs, surely also indicates the adoption of a photographic technology of the body; photography teaches a way of seeing and of doing.

This is a feature of the pedagogy of Mnouchkine's former teacher, Jacques Lecoq, who, like Mnouchkine, was a collector of images, and especially photographs.<sup>25</sup> Lecoq's teaching presupposes an interdependency between stillness and movement; stillness creates movement, movement creates stillness. But stillness is also part of movement, supporting it, and animating it (and vice versa): as Mnouchkine puts it, "the stops give movement" (Mnouchkine in Féral 1989, 85). As such, movement can be stilled, and that stillness can become the basis of learning movement, which also corresponds to Lecoq's pedagogy, where movement is taught by way of still 'attitudes' and everyday and stage actions are analysed by way their decomposition into such attitudes.<sup>26</sup> The link here with 19<sup>th</sup> Century ideas about corporeal training are clear; Lecoq seems to appropriate a

---

<sup>24</sup> Didier Alexandre (1994) explores the question of stillness in European 'oriental' theatre practice, an account which takes into account the dangers of ethnocentrism.

<sup>25</sup> His book, *Le Théâtre du Geste* (Lecoq, 1987) demonstrates this by virtue of the number and variety of photographs used.

<sup>26</sup> For example, where a sporting action is learned by way of a series of fixed attitudes.

discourse whereby the analysis of movement informs training, and shapes the body.<sup>27</sup>

Carmody (1990) writes about links between photography and 'écriture scénique' ('scenic writing') in Brecht's theatre. What is most important in the dynamic of photography of theatre at the Soleil is quite Brechtian. Firstly – stillness and displacement attain resolution in gesture, as is suggested in the quotation above from Sarah Bryant-Bertail, who identifies a 'corporal writing' at the Soleil. And to draw again on Benjamin's famous description of Epic theatre, gestures can be *cited*. Gestures, like the photographs in Moscoso's books, can be moved around, passed around, while also being still. The still can be moved, discarded, replaced, and copied.

This idea of displacement and circulation returns us to the idea of travel: it is perhaps displacement that characterises the interplay of image and performance at the Soleil, rather than notions of recording or of influence; the gesture is neither captured by the camera nor copied from the photograph, but rather, in a circulatory system, the

---

<sup>27</sup> Lecoq was a sports physiotherapist before working in the theatre and, appropriately enough, the Ecole Internationale Jacques Lecoq is located in a former gymnasium, previously used to train civilians for war. The work of mime and physical theatre practitioners like Lecoq is linked in myriad ways to the advent in the 19th Century of the body as site of control and of epistemological concern, a history in which photography is particularly implicated.

two are constantly mapping onto one another, by way of repetition, which is the modality of rehearsal.

Dusigne (2002) describes a shift in the working practices of the Soleil. Coinciding with the departure of Moscoso from the troupe, rehearsals began to be recorded on video. This video, as described by Dusigne, has a role very similar to that of Moscoso's photographs; like the photographs I have described, video recordings are used as part of the process of rehearsal, and are reviewed as the show takes shape. Dusigne claims that "video has become systematically built into the company's work" (137). But the tension between still and moving that video represents appears to have always been integral to the work. And the use of video can be seen as a restaging of the link and shift between stillness and movement, between photography and cinema. It is significant that video is being employed at the Soleil just as dynamic ways of viewing video have changed the viewer's relationship to the still. The still emerges from the moving, once again.

- Alexandre, Didier. 1994. "Dullin, Kabuki, Nô." , Michel Autrand (ed.) *Statisme et mouvement au théâtre* (Hors série – colloques I, UFR Langues Littératures). Poitiers: Publications de la Licorne: 25-34
- Auslander, Philip. 2006. "The Performativity of Performance Documentation." *Performing Arts Journal* 84: 1-10.
- Benjamin, Walter. [1936] 1999. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." *Illuminations*. London: Random House.
- Benjamin, Walter. [1939] 1998. "What is Epic Theatre? [Second version]" *Understanding Brecht*. London & New York: Verso.
- Berger, John. 1980. 'Uses of Photography.' *About Looking*, New York, Vintage International.
- Bordwell, David & Thompson, Kristin. 1997. *Film Art: An Introduction*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Bradby, David. 2002. "Cultural politics and theatrical practice in the history of the Théâtre du Soleil." *The Paris Jigsaw: Internationalism and the City's Stages*. David Bradby & Maria M. Delgado(eds.). Manchester: Manchester University Press: 113-131.
- Braun, Marta. 1999. "Fragmentation as Narration: The Case of Animal Locomotion" in Arrêt sur image, fragmentation du temps./ Stop Motion, Fragmentation of Time. François Albera, Marta Braun, André Gaudreault (eds.). Lausanne: Editions Payot: 151-69.
- Brecht, Bertolt & Winds, E. A. [1949] 1964 "Does Use of the Model Restrict the Artist's Freedom?" in John Willett (ed.) *Brecht on Theatre*. New York & London: Hill and Wang & Methuen. 222-226.
- Brecht, Bertolt. 1976. *Journal de travail: 1938-1955*. Paris: L'Arche.
- Bryant-Bertail, Sarah. 1999. "Ecriture Corporelle and the Body Politic: Les Atrides." *Collaborative Theatre: the Théâtre du Soleil Sourcebook*. D. Williams (ed.). London and New York: Routledge: 179-185.
- Cadava, Eduardo. 1997. *Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Carmody, Jim. 1990. "Reading Scenic Writing: Barthes, Brecht, and Theatre Photography." *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 5(1): 25-38.

Derrida, Jacques. 1996. *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Dusigne, Jean-François. 2002. "Travels with the Soleil." *The Paris Jigsaw: Internationalism and the City's Stages*. David Bradby & Maria M. Delgado(eds.). Manchester: Manchester University Press: 131-145

Féral, Josette. 1989. "Mnouchkine's Workshop at the Soleil: A Lesson in Theatre." *TDR* 33(4)/T124, Winter 1989: 79-87.

Féral, Josette. 2001. *Dresser un monument a l'éphémère: rencontres avec Ariane Mnouchkine*. Paris: Théâtrales.

Holmes, Oliver Wendell. [1859] 1980. "The Stereoscope and the Stereograph." Alan Trachtenberg (ed.) *Classic Essays on Photography*. New Haven: Leete's Island Books.

Lecoq, Jacques. (1987) *Le Théâtre du Geste: mimes et acteurs*. Paris: Bordas.

Lemasson (Moscoso), S. 1999. "Devising Through Improvisation: The Construction Site." *Collaborative Theatre: The Théâtre du Soleil Sourcebook*. D. Williams (ed.). London and New York: Routledge: 65-69.

Meyer-Plantureux, Chantal. 1992. *La Photographie de Théâtre ou la mémoire de l'éphémère*. Paris: Paris Audiovisuel.

Mnouchkine, Ariane. 1996. "The Theatre is Oriental." Patrice Pavis (ed.) *The Intercultural Performance Reader*. London & New York: Routledge.

Müller, Jürgen E. 1996. *Intermedialität: Formen moderner kultureller Kommunikation*. Münster: Nodus Publikationen.

Mulvey, Laura. 2006. *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*. London: Reaktion Books.

PARIP/Practice as Research in Performance. 2001. 'Frequently Asked Questions.' <http://www.bris.ac.uk/parip/faq.htm> (accessed 20.10.2007)

Pavis, Patrice. 2003. *Analyzing Performance: Theatre, Dance, and Film*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Pultz, John. 1995. *Photography and the Body*. London: Calmann and King Ltd.

Schneider, Rebecca. 2005. "Still Living: Performance, Photography, and Tableaux Vivants." *Point and Shoot: Performance and Photography*. Montréal: Dazibao: 61-71.

*The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary: on Historic Principles* (1933). Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Thomasseau, Jean-Marie. 2000. "Les manuscrits de la mise en scène." *L'Annuaire théâtral* 29: 101-122.