

# TAKE THE STAGE

A stage is not only a thing, but also a duration in which things happen, plateaux in which changes are marked and representation occurs.

This is obvious, but that doesn't mean it doesn't bear repeating. Indeed, the familiarity of the obvious often has the effect of blinding us to its super-positions of meaning and significance; their dependence on position and context, which is after all, a mode of the staging action that makes reference. One might as well say that all things happen in successive stages, as well as on them, supports of different capacity for the unfolding of the action, which may itself be the unfolding of the, or a- stage, depending on where you stand, and the movements of linguistic fashion that have supplanted the *theatrum mundi* of the Renaissance mind with the arguably less prosaic 'world-stage' of contemporary news-casting and political consequence.

It was Lacan's innovation to formally re-combine the partitioned interior self through the topology of this *theatrum mundi*, characterising his Mirror-Stage with the formal qualities of both its hyphenated components, which had previously to be invoked in circuitous analogue of one another. His mirror is no less dark or enigmatic than that of St. Paul, and though the optical technologies and screens by which its metaphorical surface are gleaned are much improved, the rejoinder remains fundamentally epistolary: to "know as I also am known". It is perhaps the duration of Lacan's mirroring, that it is a stage, rather than a divine and instantaneous revelation, which supports its characterisation as essentially empathetic, an ontology of coming to know subjectivity through recognition of one's own subject status, previously conferred only onto others.

Though still semi-mystical, the dead religion of psychoanalysis - clinical for the mind, ritual for the spirit - is still far removed, for instance, from the theological theatre of the Greeks, for whom the actor sacrificed their individual self on the stage as a vessel for the literal incarnation of the represented god, protean Daniel Day-Lewis all; or that of the Romans, already suspicious of mimesis, whose piety directed itself through the references of the actor and onwards to the represented god, but which actor himself was dishonoured for having conducted himself by manners not allowable to mortals. Glad of art, but wary of artifice, an icy mirror in which images of the sun could be glimpsed with no harm to the viewer, though its surface melted with the act.

Flexibility is metaphor's greatest gift to the spatial. Only when we build a stage of our own can we conceive of the world as one, its representations, which diminish what is fully and unfathomably complex also reduce them into a form palatable for consumption. A heightened form - since to reduce is also sometimes to make more potent - the parameters we set for our world through and on the stage aestheticize experience, instigating an awareness of like- but less identifiable forms in the day-to-day. Like action but apparent dissimilarity, through which dissonances the mirroring action is recognised, the refraction of representation, be it stage, screen or limpid pool.

Here the parameters shrink once more, or else encircle all. The interior world of the actor staged bare for all the audience is also the action of the theatre entire; two facing mirrors are as good as a Versailles hall in their reflective chatter. In their mutual abyss Narcissus faces his doom forever, canonical victim, uninitiated into the secrets of representation until its revelation becomes a fatal one. Narcissus would look unkindly at St. Paul's exhortation, had he the wherewithal to do so, the avoidance of his suitors so long slandered as pridefulness is really an old intuition of what we now know, and on which theme Sartre riffed in *No Exit*, with his climax that 'Hell is - other people!', that even in a glassless, opaque world, we are each mirrors unto each other.