own. In 1979 spectators visiting the former luxury Hotel Esplanade in Berlin found an environment of voices, projections and individual scenes connected by a reading from the 1933 novella *Rudi* by Bernhard von Brentano, a text about a proletarian child in Berlin. Grüber's action at the Weimar cemetery in the autumn of 1985 represented yet another form of scenic and spatial 'memory work': among the graves he realized Jorge Semprún's *Bleiche Mutter, zarte Schwester* (*Pale Mother, Fragile Sister*), a multi-layered text that shifts between Goethe, Buchenwald, Léon Blum, political persecution under Stalin, Brecht, Caroloa Neher and ethnic cleansing in Bosnia. Again the director left the sphere of staged drama in favour of the creation of a theatre situation (for which the unusual site was arranged by the painter and set designer Eduardo Arroyo).[32]

Wilson or the landscape

According to Richard Schechner,[33] the plot of a drama can easily be summed up by compiling a list of the changes that occur to the dramatis personae between the beginning and the end of the dramatic process. Transformations can be produced through magical procedures, disguises or masques, they can occur through new knowledge (anagnorisis) or physical processes; they can be recurring metamorphoses analogous to natural processes or belong to a temporal form that is symbolic and cyclical. At the heart of acting is perhaps not so much the transmission of meanings but the archaic *pleasure/fear* (*Angstlust*) *of play*, of metamorphosis as such. Children enjoy dressing up. The pleasure in dissimulating oneself under the mask is paired with another, no less uncanny pleasure: how the world changes under one's gaze looking out of the mask, how it suddenly becomes strange when seen from 'elsewhere'. Whoever looks through the eyes of a mask changes his gaze into that of an animal, a camera, a being unknown to itself and the world. Theatre is transformation at all levels, *metamorphosis*, and it is worth taking to heart the insight of theatre anthropology that under the conventional scheme of *action* there is the more general structure of *transformation*. This explains why abandoning the model of 'mimesis of action' by no means leads to the end of theatre. Conversely, an attention to the processes of metamorphosis leads to another mode of theatrical perception in which seeing as recognition is continually outdone by a play of surprises that can never be arrested by an order of perception. 'The crab walk of repetitive vision is perforated by a *different kind of seeing* that lurks in the recognizing way of seeing and continuously throws it off its habitual course.'[34]

Over the last thirty years hardly any theatre practitioner has changed the theatre and the scope of its means and at the same time influenced the possibilities of reimagining theatre as much as Robert Wilson. Certainly, he has not been spared the common fate whereby in his later works the theatrical means that had once, in their freshness, revealed an epochal theatre dream lose much of their magic, as they become predictable and are employed, at times, in a merely craftsman-like, slightly mannerist fashion. But this does not detract from the fact that it was Wilson who in many ways invented the most far-reaching

'response' to the question of theatre in the age of media and who simultaneously radically broadened the scope for changed conceptions of what theatre can be. In the meantime the subterraneous as well as the obvious influence of his aesthetic has filtered through everywhere, and one can say that theatre at the turn of the century owes him more than any other individual theatre practitioner.

Wilson's theatre is a theatre of metamorphoses. He leads the viewer into the dreamland of transitions, ambiguities, and correspondences: a column of smoke may be the image of a continent; trees turn first into Corinthian columns, then columns turn into factory smoke-stacks. Triangles mutate into sails, then tents or mountains. Anything can change its size, as in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, of which Wilson's theatre is often reminiscent. His motto could be: *from action to metamorphosis*. Like the Deleuzian machine, metamorphosis connects heterogeneous realities, a thousand plateaux and energy flows. In particular, the actors' movement in slow motion always produces an absolutely peculiar experience in Wilson's aesthetic, an experience that undermines the idea of action. We are talking here of the impression that the human actors on stage do not act of their own volition and agency. When Büchner wrote that humans are like puppets moved on invisible wires by invisible forces and Artaud spoke of 'automate personnel', then these motifs correspond with the impression that in Wilson's theatre there are mysterious forces at work who seem to be moving the figures magically without any visible motivation, objectives or connections. These figures remain solitarily spun into a cosmos, into a web of lines of forces and – quite concretely through the lighting design – 'prescribed' paths. The figures (or figurines) inhabit a magical phantasm that imitates the ancient heroes' enigmatic path of fate drawn by oracles. As in Grüber's muteness, as in Kantor's eternal tango rounds, thus also in Wilson's lines of light: the dramatic theatre, tied to human autonomy as a question and a problem, falls apart into a *postdramatic energetics*, in the sense in which Lyotard speaks of an 'energetic' instead of a representational theatre. It prescribes enigmatic patterns of movement, processes and stories of light, but hardly any action/plot.

Although one needs to distinguish between painterly and theatrical forms and to take their respective laws and rules into account, the peculiar *transformation from stage space into landscape* – Wilson calls his auditive environments 'audio landscapes' – recalls an inverse process in the nineteenth century when painting approximated a theatrical event. I am talking here of the panorama and the diorama, the gigantic transparent pictures by Daguerre, in which different kinds of lighting seemed to move sceneries, architectural structures and landscapes. For example, the interior of a church would at first seem empty but through a change in lighting one would suddenly notice visitors in it; music would be heard and finally there would be darkness again.[35] Such occurrences are reminiscent of the metamorphosis in Wilson. One can see in them an anticipation of cinema, the satisfaction of scopophilia in a manner that was felt to be sensational at the time. For our context it is important to confirm that the *theatrical* need is obviously not fixated on action alone. The artificially illuminated landscape, the 'action' of daybreak and the change of lighting equally belong to it.

In the context of Karl Friedrich Schinkel's effective transparent paintings the term 'theatre without literary text' has been used by Birgit Verwiebe.[36] And Stephan Oettermann comments that it was precisely the arresting of time in this fascinating simulation of reality in panoramas that evoked the desire for movement and narration (which would later be satisfied by cinema).[37] This comment can also be read in the sense that this was a point of departure for a theatrical experience dominated by the *effects of diorama (image) and parallel language.*

In Wilson's work we find a *de-hierarchization* of theatrical means connected to the absence of dramatic action in his theatre. Mostly there are neither psychologically elaborated, nor even individuated figures within a coherent scenic context (as in Kantor's work), but instead figures who seem to be incomprehensible emblems.The ostentatious mode of their appearance poses the question as to their meaning without this interrogation finding an answer. The actors 'sharing' the stage often do not even enter into the context of an interaction of any kind. And the space of this theatre, too, is discontinuous: light and colours, disparate signs and objects create a stage that no longer signifies a homogeneous space: frequently Wilson's space is divided 'into stripes' parallel to the apron of the stage, so that actions taking place in different depths of the stage can either be synthesized by the spectator or be read as 'parallelograms', so to speak. It is thus already left to the constructing imagination of the viewer whether s/he considers the different figures on stages as existing within a shared context at all, or only as synchronically presented. It is obvious that the interpretability of the whole texture for this reason is close to zero. Through the montage of juxtaposed or imbricated virtual spaces, which – this is the crucial point – remain independent from one another so that no synthesis is offered, a poetic sphere of *connotations* comes into being.

What is missing here is a dramatic orientation through the lines of a story, which in painting corresponds to the ordering of the visible through perspective. The point about perspective is that it makes totality possible precisely because the position of the viewer, the point of view, is excluded from the visible world of the picture, so that the constitutive act of representation is missing in the represented. This corresponds to the form of dramatic narration – even where it integrates an epic narrator. In Wilson's work it is superseded by a kind of universal history that appears as a multicultural, ethnological, archaeological *kaleidoscope.* Without restraint his theatre tableaux mix times, cultures and spaces. In *The Forest* (1988) nineteenth-century industrial history is mirrored in Babylonian myth; at the end of *Ka Mountain and Guardenia Terrace: A Story about a Family and Some People Changing* (1972) a scale model of the New York skyline goes up in flames, behind it appear the outline of a pagoda, a great white ape as a statue whose face is burning, the three wise men from the East, an apocalyptic fire and a dinosaur: history and prehistory not in the sense of a historical-dialectic understanding but as a dance of images. Numerous images in Wilson's work directly or indirectly conjure up old myth in an overwhelming plethora of newer historical, religious, literary motifs and figures. For Wilson they all belong to the imaginary cosmos and are all in the widest sense mythological: Freud, Einstein,

Edison and Stalin; Queen Victoria and Lohengrin; Parsifal, Salome, Faust, the brothers from the Gilgamesh epic, Tankred Dorst's version of Parsifal in Hamburg, the Saint Sebastian in Bobigny, King Lear in Frankfurt am Main . . . An incomplete list of mythical, quasi- and pseudo-mythical elements of his theatre may at the same time give an indication of the playful delight he takes in quoting from the human store of images, a playfulness that is not going to allow any limits imposed on it by centripetal logic. Appearing on stage are: Noah's ark, the book of Jonas, Leviathan, ancient and modern Indian texts, a Viking ship, African cult objects, Atlantis, the white whale, Stonehenge, Mycenae, the Pyramids, the man with the Egyptian crocodile mask, enigmatic beings like Mother Earth, Bird Woman and the white bird of death, Saint Joan, Don Quixote, Tarzan, Captain Nemo, Goethe's Erl-king, Hopi Indians, Florence Nightingale, Mata Hari, Madame Curie, etc.

Wilson's theatre is *neo-mythical*, but with the myths as images, carrying action only as virtual fantasies. Prometheus and Heracles, Phaedra and Medea, the Sphinx and the dragon as the protagonists of the artistic imagination continue to live on through the centuries as narratives with a profound allegorical meaning. But at the same time they exist as mere images, familiar also to those without an 'education'. As unconsciously operating figures of cultural discourse everyone 'knows' (knowingly or unknowingly) Heracles and the Hydra, Medea and her children, the rebellious Prometheus, and the enemy brothers Polyneices and Eteocles. The same is true for postantiquity mythical figures such as Don Juan, Faust or Parsifal. In an epoch when 'normally' arranged narration hardly attains the density of the mythical any more, Wilson's theatre is trying to approach the prerational logic of a mythical world of images. If one should hesitate to accept a serious connection between Wilson's artistry and ancient myth, however, this doubt would certainly be justified: mythical imagery here takes the place of action, satisfying a 'postmodern' pleasure in the quotation of imaginary worlds whose time has passed. (On the other hand, a look back into theatre history teaches that in former epochs myth and entertainment did not have to exclude one another, either.) Wilson is part of a long tradition, from the baroque theatre of effects, the 'machines' of the seventeenth century, Jacobean masques, Victorian spectacle theatre down to the variety show and circus in modern times, all of which have always irreverently and effectively incorporated the depth of myth as much as the attraction of mythical clichés into their repertoire.

In Wilson's work the phenomenon has priority over the narrative, the effect of the image precedence over the individual actor, and contemplation over interpretation. Therefore, his theatre creates a time of the gaze. This theatre is without tragic sentiment or pity, but it does speak of the experience of time, it does testify to *mourning* (*Trauer*). In addition, Wilson's painting with light reinforces the idea of a unity of natural processes and human occurrences. It is also for this reason that whatever the players do, say and manifest in their movements loses the character of intentional actions. Their undertakings seem to be occurring as in a dream and thus 'lose the name of action', as Hamlet says. They change into an occurrence. Human beings turn into *gestic sculptures*.

The association with three-dimensional painting lets things appear as *nature morte* and players as mobile whole-figure portraits. Wilson explicitly compared his theatre to natural processes. The idea of a scenic landscape therefore also takes on the meaning attached to it in Heiner Müller's phrase of the 'landscape waiting for the gradual disappearance of man'. It is about the insertion of human actions into the context of *natural history*. As in myth, life appears as a moment of the cosmos. The human being is not separated from landscape, animal and stone. A rock may fall in slow motion, animals and plants are just as much agents of the events as the human figures. If in this way the concept of action dissolves in favour of occurrences, of continual metamorphosis, the space of action appears as a landscape continually changed by different states of light, appearing and disappearing objects and figures.

At Heiner Müller's funeral, Wilson introduced his contribution – a reading of a passage from Gertrude Stein's *The Making of Americans* in lieu of a personal text – by remarking that after reading this book he had known that he could make theatre. Indeed the elective affinity between Wilson's theatre and Gertrude Stein's texts, her notion of 'Landscape Play', is immediately evident. In both there is minimal progression, the 'continuous present', no identifiable identities, a peculiar rhythm that wins out over all semantics and in which anything fixable passes into variations and shadings. Elinor Fuchs comments in Another Version of the Pastoral':

> I experimentally suggest that a performance genre has emerged that encourages and relies on the faculty of landscape surveyal. Its structures are arranged not in lines of conflict and resolution but on the multivalent spatial relationships, 'the trees to the hills to the fields . . . any piece of it to any sky' as Stein said, 'any detail to any other detail'.[38]

Even if the coupling of new pastoral and theatre is perhaps only due to a specifically American perspective (the experience of the grandiose landscapes of the USA), it makes sense if Fuchs states about the postdramatic theatre of the Texan Robert Wilson: 'He creates within advanced culture a fragile memory bank of imagery from nature. In this way, and in a variety of others, postmodern theatre artists hint at the possibility of a post-anthropocentric stage.'[39] *Post-anthropocentric theatre* would be a suitable name for an important (though not the only) form that postdramatic theatre can take. Under this heading one could assemble the theatre of objects entirely without human actors, theatre of technology and machinery (e.g. in the mechanized presentations by Survival Research Laboratories), and theatre that integrates the human form mostly as an element in landscape-like spatial structures. They are aesthetic figurations that point utopically towards an alternative to the anthropocentric ideal of the subjection of nature. When human bodies join with objects, animals and energy lines into a single reality (as also seems to be the case in circus – thus the depth of the pleasure it causes), theatre makes it possible to imagine a reality other than that of man dominating nature.