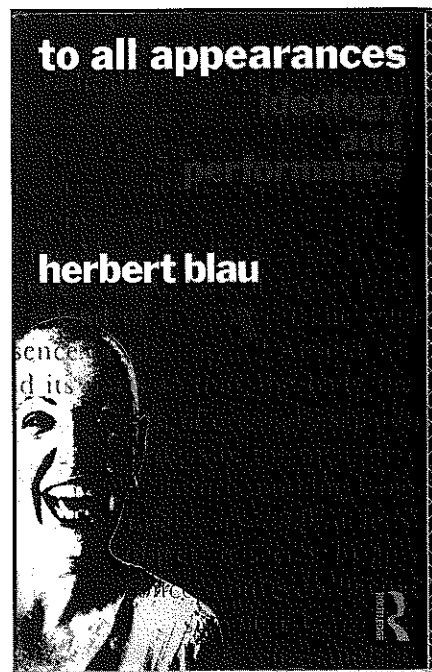


Optical Unconscious appears as a logical extension of Krauss's earlier work. Notwithstanding this, the employment of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis is for the most part well articulated. The tapestry of narratives is refreshing and cleverly employed because while undermining the authority of the author, it covertly supports the author's point of view. Moreover, these various fictive moments strategically offer the reader a breather from a heavy dose of theory. But her colourful, repetitive use of anecdotes from Michael Fried and Clement Greenberg in and out of the text (they have appeared time and again elsewhere in her writings and public talks) seems strangely and suspiciously therapeutic for Krauss.

For many students of art history, Greenberg's story has always been problematic. Devoid of context and 'other' considerations, the narrative is still strongly contested as well as militantly defended. Krauss's re-working of it (especially with the theme of visuality, which has become extremely popular since the 1980s) — not rejection of it — provides an alternative that one has always envisioned, but been afraid to see.

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The Future of Illusion

BY Julie Adam

Herbert Blau, *To All Appearances: Ideology and Performance*. New York and London: Routledge, 1992.

Ideology permeates everything: the more we protest this ideological truism — insisting on neutrality, universality and other forms of political (ideological) blandness — the more ideology controls us, shapes us, is us. *To All Appearances* attempts to evade the shadow of ideology while trying to capture it, for "all performance occurs in an ideological blur," says Herbert Blau.

Blau, known for his work with the experimental KRAKEN group and his seminal books on theatre (*The Impossible Theater; Take Up the Bodies; The Eye of Prey; The Audience*), uses 'ideology' to mean both consciously and unconsciously biased structures of belief, with hidden or open partisan objectives, and 'performance' to cover theatrical practices from the proscenium to the street, and even the stages of politics. Not only do ideologies perform on the boards of history, but performance, itself an ideological act,

"involves questions of property ownership, hierarchy, authority, force, and what may be the source of ideology according to Nietzsche: the will to power."

While tracing the ideology of performance and the performance of ideology in the twentieth century, Blau distances himself from both Marxism and feminism (considering the latter "one of the more threatening discourses of recent years to those with any investment in...inherited systems and conventions, habits and reflexes"), but admits to having "been stimulated by...[Marxists'] revisionist discourse" and the critical insights of some feminist theorists and academic Marxists.

Blau sees ideology as a series of disguises and believes that, rather than "ideological analysis," he is engaging in "a kind of speculative double take on aspects of performance, with attention to the particular circumstances or variable conditions that put them into question." Specifically, what interests him is

the instance of emergence or transformative moment at which any practice, in the theater or elsewhere, becomes like ideology itself, something other than what it appeared to be, like theater itself before it identified itself; that is, before it could be distinguished for better or worse from whatever it is it was not. It is here...that theater blends with ideology at the most disturbing level of demystifying thought, for when we think twice about the question of priority, whatever it *was* appears to be theater.

His disjointed, untamed investigation of theatrical practice ranges widely and wildly over territory from Shakespeare to Kathakali, Meyerhold to Robert Wilson, Marx to Jameson, Nietzsche to Baudrillard, Aristotle to Brecht, rushing breathlessly over Tadashi Suzuki and Pina Bausch, Bunraku and Annie Sprinkle, the ANC and E.T. ... It is post-modern criticism that is guaranteed to enchant some, infuriate others and put to sleep a few more.

In exploring the constantly changing ideology of illusion in a decentred post-

modern world, Blau must consider the illusion of ideology as well as everything else a skeptical approach to both ideology and performance (as concepts and practices) entails. As he says in the Foreword:

...if [the book's] partial subject is ideology, it is a book without a thesis. It has, rather, a sense of things, derived (I think) from years of working in the theater, a form which more than any other is both nurtured and disturbed by, or subject to, the contingencies of appearance.

Certainly it is a book with a rich sense of many 'things,' to use Blau's own modest term, but it is questionable whether it is successful in its double address, both to people in the theatre, possibly unaware of theory, possibly hostile to it, and to those interested in theory but having little knowledge of theatre. The latter will not have it easy keeping up with Blau's casual, aphoristic forays into the theatrical world, where he is no doubt comfortably at home, in spite of some intellectualized protestations to the contrary; conversely, I doubt that too many theatre practitioners, with the exception of theoreticians/academicians like Blau himself, will be at ease with Blau's viewing the stage through (unfocused/refocused; here fogged-up, there smudged; once rose-coloured, then blackened) ideological lenses of his theatrical binoculars.

However, *To All Appearances* raises a number of important questions, for both theatrical practice and cultural theory. If in theatre all is appearance and all is illusion (representation; character, mask and costume; imaginary time and space), and at the same time all is concrete material and organic reality (presentation; actor/body; real time and space), what does performance reveal? What does it conceal? And what is its relationship to reality? How do we perform reality? (Is reality the performance or the performed? If both, where is illusion?) And what is the illusive and elusive nature of ideology? The perceptual process itself, Blau believes, is an appearance based on ideology, an appearance that determines

our reality, itself an illusion.

Appropriately, Blau explores various dramatic representations of perceptual processes (realism and a number of counter movements, including expressionism, epic theatre, agit prop, happenings, performance art, imagistic theatre), and several prominent European theories and techniques of acting (especially Stanislavski's, Meyerhold's, Brecht's, Grotowski's). He also discusses, as well as specific (ideological) issues of performance, for instance, in the section 'The Surpassing Body,' historical concerns with the body and the 'body politic,' and in 'Distressed Emotion,' theatre's changing relationship to the emotional life of texts, characters, actors, audiences. His analyses are both diachronic and synchronic, often in one phrase.

To All Appearances has special significance for those practitioners of theatre who think of themselves as politicized, for it both describes and embodies (through its own ironic doubting, bracketing, double-taking) the complexity of ideology and its shadowing in performance. Blau traces the legacy of early twentieth-century ideology (in the theatres of Stanislavski and Meyerhold) through Brecht and leftist American theatrical practice in the thirties to happenings in the sixties, and postmodernist performance in the eighties, with shifts in focus from class to gender to race to body to language and back again, always with an eye to the problematic of illusion.

Unlike many commentators, not to mention practitioners, Blau brings his erudite historical perspective and shrewd skepticism to postmodern performance. He is well acquainted with the emperor and has seen his new clothes. Earlier powers, it seems, were more potent:

...the verbal content and incipient dramaturgy of many performance pieces seem to me, with whatever avant-garde, postmodern, or political claims, retrograde in comparison to various segments of Pinter's drama that, like Beckett's, are virtual models of solo performance or other aspects of performance art.

This is no news to those of us who long for something innovative but know that so many 'innovations' are themselves, illusory. Newness, like everything else, of course, is ideologically construed. And whose avant-garde is it anyway?

There is much to enjoy in Blau's at times theoretically dense, at others casually anecdotal, adventure in ideology and performance, that is, if one can rise above (wade through?) the logorrhea, the frequent self-conscious and self-satisfied cleverness, the forty-something-line sentence (I prefer Molly Bloom's) ... the unevenness of ideas and styles. In places *To All Appearances* reads like an unedited journal, in others like a turgid lecture. But some of Blau's statements on modern and postmodern theatre are memorable in their crystalline simplicity, as for instance the following observation:

So far as the theater is concerned, it has always seemed to me as if Beckett's practice occurred, with a certain virtuosity, in the space left empty, the precipitous silences, of the drama of Chekov.

The sentence forces one back into/onto the early stages of modern drama to consider 'realism,' that most complex of simplicities in theatrical practice. In the silences of a world on the edge of disaster we discern the murmurs of a fragmenting universe. (Perhaps now when students ask what the breaking string in *The Cherry Orchard* signifies — yes, they are still asking and we are still answering — we can say 'the hopelessness of Vladimir and Estragon.')

To All Appearances reminds us that everything is ideology; everything is illusion; illusion is ideology; ideology is illusion; ideology is reality; reality is illusion; illusion is reality; reality is ideology; ideology is illusion.

We perform ourselves on the shifting sands of ideology ... to all appearances.

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