

Chapter 2

Where's the Theater?

Between State and Civil Society

Broadway, the capital of theater, has no heart. It is all edges. No sooner do you step into the district than you have passed it by. If you enter the theater, you are sure to have your pocket picked. This of course is possible if you don't enter the theater, but in the former case you may not notice for several weeks, until the bills arrive. So much fantasy out of such faded memory. Extended repetition as a model of success. Only after the lighting cues have burnt marks on the stage does the money begin to flow. The hit musical takes the capitalization of performance to the nadir of competition. The longer a few lights have glowed, the darker the neighborhood has gotten.

In some ten years of living within reach of Broadway, and studying sociology and acting on its eastern and western edges, I'd never been to a Broadway musical. It took the stay of a Cuban friend to occasion a visit. *Cats* in Cuba at the time had assumed mythological proportions. So we went. It is difficult to see how the audience actually gathers for the performance. People appear to materialize spontaneously without ever having passed by the adjacent fast-food outlets and porn shops. Most of them acquired their entrance from a considerable distance in time and space, by phone, mail, or some other intervening agency.

Seven years of success did not seem to have been kind to the show. The set, intended to represent the discarded artifacts of a back alley, was chipped and cracked, revealing the artifice of its representation. The Tuesday night cast, many of whom seemed compelled by

a stridency that suggested that they were still being made to audition for their parts, played in the shadows of so many who had come before them. The strain of representing what was in fact immediately behind them—the side streets off Broadway heaped with urban detritus—and what the audience was assembled to escape momentarily, as something quaint, benign, and anthropomorphically feline, narrativized what was supposed to be an abstractly modern spectacle.

The abstraction that the performance as pure entertainment was intended to provide from its immediate surroundings turned out to be an abstraction of its own site. It became something sanitized that could be comfortably gazed upon rather than furtively glanced in looks of mutual suspicion common to urban settings. The audience was addressed through several devices—balletic and noncaustic pyrotechnics, dancers entering from the audience, and singers swooning from the stage. None evoked the reciprocity of mistrust the disassembled public might encounter outside the theater that would have enabled the performance to serve as a means of reflection on the affinities of sight and situation. Hence the abstraction offered at the Winter Garden Theater is one that aspires to deny context.

Surely all theater achieves representation by some calculus of abstraction and denial of context. The question *Cats* raises is what the mathematics of this calculus entails. Cries of decline on Broadway, with their nostalgic ring of precinematic hegemony, are commonly heard. Yet the possibility of the ongoing success of *Cats*, and other like species, needs to be explained in terms of a larger mechanism of reproduction than the sustainability of the show's production values.

That Broadway's torch continues to be lit by such contrasting elements asks us to look beyond its immediate topography for an explanation. *Cats*'s success can be offered as an allegory of the unimpeded market, a medium of exchange that steps deftly out of the way to deliver its use values to an available desire. That a play about non-human beings in an antihuman environment could gain such sustained circulation says something about the Broadway genre, which ignores content in favor of the uniformities of serialized song and dance numbers. That such direct political statements as *Sarafina!* (although Dario Fo's *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* was killed in its preview infancy) appear as a coequal choice with *Guys and Dolls* reflects the manifest thematic diversity of Broadway. It also epitomizes

the radical separation of circulation and production that characterizes capitalist exchange and accomplishes the ideologically effective conflation of market with democracy. Broadway does not simply display all the features of commodified culture, it also presents a most pristine image of the commodity itself, the untranslatable rift between exchange and use.

All this may seem somewhat silly as a way of analyzing *Cats*, which, after all, does not claim to be meeting people's insatiable need to know the habits of wayward pets. The musical aims precisely to alleviate its public from the burdens of their own mundane content, to serve as pure entertainment. Is not art after all about form? This was supposedly the equation for the modernist avant-garde, and not for popular idioms like Broadway, thus saying something about the theory of that opposition. The two are joined by a common context for the apparently self-circulating and self-consuming artifact; in this regard, Broadway is an allegory for circulation regulated only by desire. Its very existence vindicates a claim for the viability of the market in its purest form.

This purity speaks to the possibility of an economy that operates without the intervention of polity. If there are politics to be found on Broadway, they are only the politics of capital, the powers of selection and choice that attend to the commodity. The power lies exclusively in who decides what in an apparent encounter between two free citizens. The first is the producer, here the person with control over theatrical capital (and decidedly not those who produce the theatrical commodity). The second is the consumer, here one whose diversion rests on a diversion of funds. It might be said that the difference in power is considerable but nonetheless a private matter between the two parties of the exchange.

The intimacy of the encounter is quickly broken up, however, as soon as we consider the materiality that makes the exchange possible. The myriad zoning, tax, and investment laws that sustain the industry beyond what the rapacity of the market would allow belie the fable of the self-harmonizing market as the absence of the intervention of political externalities.¹ As part of the ideology of exchange we are well accustomed to the state's peering from behind the smokestacks and food bins to assure that capital adheres to some ill-defined conception of the social contract. But the right has made a vocation out of the exceptionalism of the arts, claiming that unlike every other

instance of circulation and production, industries of art can operate in the absence of the state.²

The exceptionalism of the arts serves well as a fabulation of the equation of market with democracy. Those same noble protectors of public decency would never accede to a populist line item veto on the military budget (a move that by all measures of popular taste would have left nuclear weapons off of the pallet), which is effectively the same stance they take with the arts. As far as these arts are concerned, there is a genuine principle of selectivity. Certainly not all of the artists whose work would offend the aestheticians of morality have received federal funding. It needs to be pointed out that the funding in question never actually covers the costs of production—unlike, say, military contracts, which also assure the realization of profit. In the case of Broadway theater, the write-offs and exemptions, the provision of infrastructure and services that keep the jagged blocks around Times Square safer and cleaner than the market would bear, apply to every production irrespective of content. Government grants, selective as they are, are meant to legitimate an artist's work to other sources of funding, and this is more likely why senators and members of Congress are involved. They are defending the state's prerogative to define its own terms of legitimation. It might be insisted at this point that the crucial difference of state intervention into the two circuits of cultural production lies in the commodification of theater itself.

Many of the uncountable performance venues that are scattered twoscore blocks (and much, much farther) from the heartless center of national theater are, by choice or by default, noncommercial. Although money changes hands in these theaters in much the same way as it does in their rich uptown cousins, who theoretically but seldom practically are only too happy to relieve their poor relatives of their noncommercial successes, theater away from Broadway smacks of extraeconomic exchange.³ Paradoxically, it is in this exchange, where presumably producer and consumer have gathered sheerly for the ecstasies of communication, that the state is entitled to show its face. Those in attendance are reminded by the presence of state that they should be suspicious of pleasure where there is no profit. Whatever separates commercial from noncommercial theater in this country, and admittedly the line may not always be so easy to draw, it is clearly not the presence or absence of the state in their affairs.

What may be decisive in the differentiation of the two forms, however, is the recognition or invisibility of the state in the way a given theater constitutes itself. In this regard, the distinction is as much ideological as economic.

In both theatrical idioms (between which, incidentally, could probably be described the political economy of the whole range of institutions under capitalism, including those with a socialist inclination), theater lies between state and economy on the one hand, and the public, variously constituted, on the other. This intricate mediation has been theorized by Jürgen Habermas as defining the public sphere. For him, it is the material means for the formation of “public opinion . . . the functions of criticism and control of organized state authority that the public exercises informally, as well as formally through periodic elections.” A public is formed when citizens have influence over and address matters of “general interest” (which he defines as neither instrumentally economic nor political) and “without being subject to coercion.”⁴ Until mass media came to prevail as a means of communication, the public sphere rested on assembly, as a capacity and a right.

The more highly mediated space of the public now assembled electronically would seem to be a feature of the scale introduced by modernity. Yet despite the dissipation of the capacity for assembly introduced by mass media, certain events and locations continue to provide the opportunity for people to mobilize their critical energies at a public site. Such occasions as demonstrations and public bars are still with us, even if their relation to institutional politics is more difficult to gauge, especially in an environment of postparty politics. This would suggest that theater may remain a privileged institution of the public sphere long after it has lost its generalized social significance as a means of communication. Part of this has to do with the problem of locating the presence of the state. If the state is difficult to recognize in the theater, it is all the more illusive in the home, in the local watering hole, or at the bus stop.

Certainly the state can be known in these sites through its effects, what Louis Althusser termed the ideological state apparatuses that are interpellated (the “hailing” or address that finds its mark in a particular audience or subject) across the Habermasian divide of public and private.⁵ Yet neither the solidity of that divide nor its total ab-

sence is theoretically satisfying for a conception of how the state gets insinuated in public life under capitalism.

An ambiguity of the terms public and private is partially responsible. On the one hand, public and private refer to a juridical distinction with respect to property relations that in a strong application would distinguish production for use from that of exchange, and in a weaker sense would apply to state ownership no matter what the benefits—or to whom. Sectoral analyses such as those associated with economics thus have less precision than their application would imply; the military-industrial complex serves as just one instance where the state actually reproduces capital and not simply its relations of production. When the fullness of the state's presence in the circulation of capital is expressed, its autonomy from the mastery of economy appears relatively minute.⁶ On the other hand, public and private refer to an articulation of interest. Public is assembled in response to what the state would address, hence a general will. Private stands as a particularization of interest either as a confinement of need, domesticity, or a location with respect to relations of production (class).⁷ Interest, however, is always a function of a particular representation of outcomes that have not yet come to pass, although they are represented as if they already had, as if what was good for capital or labor could always be projected from a given situation.

Habermas claims that the public is assembled out of the private: "Public power became consolidated as something tangible confronting those who were subject to it and who at first found themselves only negatively defined by it."⁸ This would seem to suggest that not all forms of assembly address the state equally because not all of them can be traced to a particular displacement from within the state. In Habermas's historical imagery the court is replaced by the newspaper. The audience with the king or pope whose private person inscribes the body politic is what subsequently becomes mediated.

Here there appears to be some slippage in the analogy. The person who gained an audience with the embodiment of state authority did so by engaging in communicative action, but the owner of mass media seeks to constitute a hold over a distinctive means of communication. In the former case, audience assembles by and before the state; in the latter, the state is replaced by a private ownership of the means of communicative action.

In practical terms, the material conditions for public assembly or social intercourse cannot be separated from the production of the means of communication. The sites for articulating critical opinion should sensibly extend from the domestic sphere of the family, to scenes of voluntary association, to the workplace. For this reason Marx, in *The German Ideology*, identifies civil society, in which he sees the "whole material intercourse of individuals" as "the theatre of all history."⁹

But what is the history of theater if not a narrative of the formation of audience and the techniques of assembly before the state? In the West, the disarticulation of theater from the state is essential to the formation of the institutional apparatuses of the latter (absolutism) and the commodifying mediation of the market mechanism of the former (professionalization). Yet as writers such as Stephen Greenblatt and Walter Cohen inform us, this disarticulation was precisely what theatrical performances like Shakespearean drama "negotiated."¹⁰ This is a vital agnate in the lineage of the public sphere, one represented as a passage (conceptual, not historical) between the Athenian amphitheater as an instrument of the polis and the apparent autonomy from the state, politically and aesthetically, of Broadway.¹¹

Literally carved out of the state apparatus, theater displays what is historically significant about the mechanisms of assembly that constitute a public sphere.¹² Never fully shedding its legacy, no matter how fully the market intervenes in the state's own powers of intervention, theater is situated institutionally between state and civil society, addressing the former as the audience of the latter. Further, theater is a conjugation of the multiple meanings of public and private, in the affinities between property and interest, production and reproduction.¹³ Hence, theater's institutional peculiarities are useful in crossing the theoretical divide between a temptation to reduce the public, even if ultimately, to an instance of the economic, as consumers, or to a mere instrumentality of communication, as rational actors. An attention to the specificities of theater confuses any such formalism of means and ends.

Theater in Socialism

The sketch of Broadway's *Cats* at the beginning of this chapter, per-

haps unforgivably terse, was simply meant to point out several features of how theater mediates state and civil society within a context where capitalism prevails. The members of the audience assemble for purposes of exchange by the circulation of the theatrical commodity, and as such have little use for each other as a mobilization of public address. Such cultural commodities tend toward the consumption of their own social product, insofar as the audience's further desire for itself is contained within the spatial and temporal relations of performance. Certainly this is one of the frailties of a particularization of audience that is disjoined from the larger context for audience, as declining total ticket sales might affirm. This is also one differentiating aspect of avant-garde and political theaters within the capitalist context: they presuppose a generative relation between the audience particularized by performance and that generalized by the theatrical project.

Broadway theater presents a relatively strong version of a decontextualized and desocialized audience. This expresses something of the wider affinities between theater and other commodified activities that assemble without a political mobilization, and is also typical of the culture of capital that denies the politics and history of its own socializing capacity. This self-denial of theater's own politics of place isolates the experience of performance from anything systematically political and contributes to the effacement of state in the domain of culture. To the extent that Broadway, like other formations of capital, succeeds in masking its own relations of political exteriority, even as it draws a public to witness the fruits of those relations, theater's mediations between civil society and the state become wholly invisible, as does the presence of the state. In this form theater both epitomizes and helps to generate the myth of civil society's absolute autonomy from the state—even while the state makes this autonomy possible. Without any recognizable presence of the state, theater's publicization appears as a purely private matter. Hence it is not that commodified culture denies critical faculties to those subjected to it, a perspective associated with the Frankfurt school;¹⁴ it is now apparent from the growth industry of cultural studies that people do all kinds of things with the cultural artifacts they encounter.¹⁵ Instead, what is denied is the immediate context for reception that might join socialized means of communication with socialized ends.

Even in the most minimal socialist context that treats theater as a public rather than a private good, its insertion in and its display of the relations of state and civil society are quite different. Capitalist government funding of the arts may be aimed at legitimating the ideal of a creative and autonomous individuality too extreme for survival on the market. The capacity for self-reflection that culture embodies, however, is not seen as a substantive right in the eyes of state support. To make such acknowledgment public would surely affront the ideology of the self-organizing profit-taking market. The state is to serve as a gracious and silent benefactor, simulating the absent presence of the invisible hand. As the state has followed capital into the organization of private life, we have seen just how frail this net of absent presence has been for support in the arts.

Because it begins where productive context and social goods are joined, the socialist state's cultural policy effects a mediation very different from the one just described. State is part of the self-acknowledged context for all production (even private property), so its presence is not effaced in the delivery of public goods, whether health and education or media and the arts. Let me take one example each from Cuba and Nicaragua to illustrate these connections.

Havana is as much a national theatrical center as is New York, but, unlike New York, there is no theater district in the city. Prodigious stages, like the Carlos Marx and the García Lorca, can be found at opposite ends of town, as can smaller venues. In the center of Havana stands the National Theater complex. Lined by broad avenues and the expansive Plaza of the Revolution, it has little local traffic, pedestrian or otherwise, to draw from. Once there, the authority of the edifice defines its immediate context: one can do no more or less than go to the theater. This uniformity of purpose—and the fact that, except for the national library that it faces across the Plaza, its neighboring structures are military centers—does little to mediate its positionality vis-à-vis the apparatuses of state. When the public enters the larger of the two theaters of the complex, they literally turn their backs on the political sphere where Fidel Castro enacts many of the key performances of state. When the theatrical performance is over, the audience disperses into the nocturnal phase of that political space (one, it should be noted, that is mostly empty), the space that the staged event unavoidably addresses. As will become increasingly apparent, the positionality of the stage, adjacent as it is to the very

place of state power, does not determine in any straightforward manner what is placed upon it.

Among the performances I saw at the National Theater was a production of Cuba's first rock opera, *Violente*, which ran several weekends in the summer of 1988. The scale of the production, the way performers and set spilled from the cavernous stage into the audience, and the appetite for theatrical pyrotechnics make certain comparisons with a Broadway show like *Cats* difficult to resist. But if the marginality that *Cats* presents as its space and conditions of production is rendered as something wholly benign and readily consumable, the futuristic dystopia of *Violente*'s staged environment is more ambivalent. It is as much cynical of the soft hard-rock culture it appropriates as it is celebratory of it. The Cuban rock opera is only slightly more dependent than *Cats* on narrative devices and is equally evocative of a general ambience.

In *Violente*, two singers are trapped on a distant planet (or future) by automaton break dancers and a sinister musician cloaked in black. Stage left is an elaborate sculpture of metallic junk, rusted and displaced. A half-dozen oil drums serve as platforms and objects of contact in an incessant aggressivity to which the dancers are condemned. The dancers oscillate between jazzified versions of martial arts and atomized break dancing. Because the only theme of the choreography is combat, all of the call and response, chain or telephonic aspects of break dance that suggest harmonized linkages between dancers' bodies are absent, replaced with a kind of tensely mimed locomotion.

Upstage of the litter of oil drums, a multitiered scaffolding allows the singers to give their practically indistinguishable songs in different locales. The male singer is dressed soft punk and has a skunk stripe mohawk of curls and a red dyed beard. He wears black tights and belted strips of leather on his torso, which resembles melted butter, as do many of his gesticulations of hard rockers of the 1970s. The female singer's voice is somewhat improved over his but she has similar problems projecting strength through her body in choreography that consistently demands it. The musician seems no less a parody of the pitfalls of poor reception for northern exposure. He is engulfed by synthesizers on the highest platform. As most of the music is preprogrammed, he plays rather histrionically, the simplest musical lines in the rock collage. Occasionally he leaves his pulpit, armed

with a guitar that he mimes playing, and descends to the stage to further the musical assault of the singers themselves.

The numbers are differentiated mainly by lighting or stage effects. In one, a video of a man's face and a pistol is projected. The singer flees the robotic dancers he initially fights. He is captured and incarcerated and finally eludes them by penetrating the interstices of their mechanic motion. Just after he has taken some strength from his flight, the video projection places him under surveillance. The gun on the video screen follows him and kills him videomatically. He falls, pulls out some bloody intestines, and continues to sing. Earlier in the chase scene, the audience has been invited to sympathize with the singer as a victim by his absence and the presence of the break dancers, who are only slightly more aggressive. Two dancers come out with guns and fire blanks into the audience. Another shines a very bright stage light in our eyes in the process of looking for their prey.

Lest the audience be confused by all of this violence, they are given a tag happy ending. The singer, reunited with his mate, comes back to life. The sinister musician is expunged from the set and the dancers peel off their black costume skins, scale a fence that has been put in their path, and flee to rehumanized freedom. It would be tempting to take *Violente* as a farce if it gave more clues as to its object. It is unclear whether the oppression emanates from the production or from what it represents. If the latter contains the source of horror, is it the repressiveness of some unnamed power or terrain, or of the simulacra of rock itself? The audience appeared both passive and stunned throughout the performance—a response I had never observed in a Cuban audience. On the contrary, I had been struck by publics that would cheer after a grand jeté at the ballet, scream with delight at broad send-ups of bureaucratic machinations, gaze intently at environmental theater, and stomp enthusiastically for Latin American rock stars. Surely, young Cubans were as capable as any other audience of being bored by a spectacle that was immersed in its own visuality.

As an initial foray into a genre known only indirectly, whatever its appeal to the conventions of that genre (a foible not uncommon to first attempts), *Violente's* ambition both as a showcase for emerging talent and for a developing audience makes it exceptional to the calculus of risk that commercial theater is willing to assume. The ambi-

guity as to the object of authority that confounds a foreign culture with the house of the state is matched by the strict adherence to a quite conventional narrative of revolutionary liberation one might expect from an artifact of Cuban culture.

I cite this example precisely because it displayed the greatest affinity to something like Broadway theater. Yet even when the form and content of theater in Cuba can be located in relation to familiar conventions, aspects of context impede upon the aesthetic to resituate it for an audience. Principal in that situation is the way in which the theater is insinuated in a dialogue with the state to the point of being poised to confront it critically. This aspect of an internal confrontation is missed when the analysis of theater begins and ends with its sources of funding.

If *Violente* raises the question of what can be mobilized beyond the state through an initiating impulse of state power to address it critically, the Cuban musical also displays one end point of the positionality of theater between state and civil society that could be associated with socialism. In Nicaragua, the development of the state was compromised before such affinities could be tested. In open space adjacent to the National Theater of Nicaragua, completed like Cuba's within the decade prior to the revolution, cows can often be seen grazing, without any signs of humans in attendance. Buildings of state are not far but are less obviously proximate than in Havana, and the space between is interrupted by these bovine indications of the actual agrarian heartland of Nicaragua.

The Sandinista state was also present for its citizens in the geographically marginal centers of production in the countryside, most visibly in the form of state farms and cooperatives. Those who picked coffee on the state-run farms could hardly be expected to show up in Managua for an evening of theater, but, at various times during the 1980s, it would not be uncommon for theater to show up where they were. The coffee harvest at Santa María del Tuma in the mountains above the town of Matagalpa involves approximately eighty workers. Actors from the theater group Nixtayolero, themselves based on a farm several valleys away, arrive by truck to give a performance of their sketch *El carnicero* (The butcher). They set up as the workers come in from the field and finish the performance as the sun goes down, then return home.

The play is a brusque send-up of two aspects of sexism, occupational role typing and marital obligations. A mother, Señora Cheche, is a frustrated housewife who dreamed of becoming a ballerina and now wants her daughter to get married instead of pursuing a career. Her daughter Rosita wants to enroll in a mechanics' school, and her mother considers it more proper and less vulgar for her to become a seamstress. Rosita sabotages her mother's intentions by tricking a dumb and horny butcher (*carnicero* also refers to a man with little more on his mind than an insatiable appetite for meat) into proposing to her and coming home to ask her father's permission. When the ultra-macho father meets the suitor he is appalled, and sends the caller running. Rosita proves that love is not just a slab of meat. The story is based on a situation familiar to the audience both publically (recalling the female tractor drivers of Jinotepa) and privately.

Nixtayolero will be the focus of chapter 4, but suffice to say now that this group explored the limits of a critical political distance and economic autonomy from the Sandinista government while dependent nonetheless on the existence of its state project. Similarly, while the group's style of performance has deep historical roots, in terms of the conventions of contemporary theater it is as much an exploratory mode as that of any noncommercial theater in the United States. If groups like Teatro Campesino in California could have difficulties gaining access to their intended audiences because the state upheld their proscription from certain spaces of private property, Nixtayolero met its audience literally on the grounds of the state. The renegotiation of gender and occupational hierarchy would certainly seem consistent with the ideologies of the revolutionary state, although it could certainly introduce complications into the state's particular organizational economy as the audience's employer. The critique of the instrumentalities of marriage is no less complex, for the state remains the arbiter of conjugal bonds and the government sought to harmonize a range of conflicting standards of partnership. Physically and ideologically, then, Nixtayolero is here intervening on the terrain of the state, generating a certain critical distance for its audience that renders its mediating role significant if only transitory. What is critical in that distance depends on the audience's recognition of the state in the course of the theater's mediation.

Like the experimental and leftist theaters of the United States, the state may be an object of critical inquiry. Yet to the extent that the

state is not implicated explicitly in the materiality of performance (although it is invariably there), the politics of performance appears as something artificially autonomous. The state is therefore somewhat magically aestheticized, that is, reflexive only of its own forms. I will attempt to show in the studies of theater that follow that socialist theater is not without its own aesthetics. Rather, the way in which those forms get circulated in an economy of politics is what is fundamentally different about the way theater mediates state and civil society in a socialist context.

Certainly there is no discovery in the identification of theater that is critical of a socialist state,¹⁶ but both the grounds for that critique and the tendency of its projection have been more difficult to appreciate.¹⁷ What has been suggested here anecdotally as a mediating role for theater in a socialist context has scarcely appeared in the literature, at least in part because the possibility of something to mediate has not been recognized by those theorists who have most fruitfully applied the critical analysis of state and of civil society to a socialist environment. When discussions of socialism are formulated in general terms for western audiences, such theorists usually invoke Europe (including here the Soviet Union) as the center of their imaginary.¹⁸ The decentering of that figure to Latin America may have a positive effect on the fixity of those images, but the literature, because it has remained close to European examples, deserves some scrutiny.

In those studies that go furthest in understanding the socialist state as dynamic rather than inert, as changing in the face of new problems rather than assuming a given form, the reduction to a statist analysis becomes most apparent. George Konrád and Ivan Szelényi, whose *Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*, as much as any other single work, reinvigorated the debate on the socialist state, also defined socialism as a fundamentally managerial problem, one of "rational redistribution" whose fate lies with the future of intellectuals' ability to command state power. Yet their map of the organizational contours of the state is taken for that of society as a whole:

Thus a unique Eastern European socialist bureaucracy is developing, characterized by both vertical and horizontal continuity and by a hierarchical structure rising to a single apex. Everyone, from the First Secretary of the party to the engineer employed in the planning office, is an officer in the service of the state. The

Party Secretary is paid to represent the state as a whole, the engineer the planning office alone; but in the last analysis both represent the whole state-society (for state and society are one).¹⁹

Clearly this formulation captures the displacement of capital by the state in the employment of labor power and the potential for rationalizing the coordination of production that this displacement entails. Yet, while the socialist state displaces private ownership, this does not turn it into labor any more than capital actually produces, even though both claim responsibility for production. The problem of administering production, whether it takes a bureaucratic form or not, cannot be confused with production itself, a social principle lodged with those who, as Michael E. Brown has argued, by providing material wealth also make society.²⁰ To collapse state and society, and to call the resulting entity bureaucratic, reduces living human labor to the problem of its administration.

It is difficult to argue with the notion that the socialist state concentrates and centralizes power. But asserting that the socialist state therefore monopolizes all power, that no sources of power exist outside or beyond the parameters of the state, is a considerable leap. The claim that the state embodies tensions between conflicting formations in society, without being reducible to or reducing their politics to the state, is now familiar to both Marxist and non-Marxist analysts of capitalism. Few would assert that the capitalist state exercises power without internal or external tensions, or indeed that all forms of power are concentrated within the state. Recent Marxist theories of the capitalist state have elaborated the internal dynamics of that state and developed an analysis of power beyond it, hence preserving the nonreducibility of state and society.²¹

In his last and most provocative political analysis, Nicos Poulantzas suggests that the contemporary capitalist state too “concentrates the various forms of power to an ever-increasing extent. . . . All the same, class powers—and not just economic ones—still stretch beyond the State. For instance, even if we take into account its ideological apparatuses, the State’s discourse does not exhaust all political discourse; and yet it includes a class power in its structure.”²²

Curiously, the few words that Poulantzas reserves for socialist countries lose this richness. Granted, his book was written in polemic with the French Communist Party of the seventies but the

implication that existing socialisms are aspects of “modern totalitarianism” to be understood alternately as “capitalist survivals in a particular kind of authoritarian socialism, effects of a capitalist environment-encirclement on socialist countries, or rather the arrival of these countries at a new but very real form of state capitalism,” hints at an analytic double standard.²³ The point is not that these conceptions shed no light on the socialist state, but that Poulantzas is willing to let state stand for society under socialism in a way he would never grant for capitalism.

Equally insistent on a turn to nonstatist conceptions of power and socialist transformation in the West, Claus Offe seems to feel that such notions are inapplicable to socialism:

Socialism, according to Max Weber, would not mean something different and progressive but more of the same—that is, more of the same inescapable element of bureaucracy that, according to him, capitalist liberal democracy, at least, is able to curb by institutions securing individual freedom. In view of this almost ubiquitous fear, and amid a perception of the social and political realities of the Soviet Union and other Eastern European states which renders this suspicion highly plausible, socialist and communist parties in Europe have considered it their major task to develop convincing alternatives to the statist models of socialist transformation.²⁴

Here too it is odd that Weber is applied less critically to socialist countries than Offe would admit to any capitalist context. Given that the same questions are not applied to the East as to the West, it is unclear whether the “statist model” exists chiefly in the minds of theorists and politicians in either camp or whether it is an account of social relations under socialism. At the very least, it complicates the investigation of the kinds of questions Offe wants to ask about the Soviet Union:

I once spent a short period of time in Moscow, and the impression I formed was that state socialist regimes are enormously repressive. Two questions were constantly on my mind. Why do people accept the omnipresence of the instruments and symbols of state violence, the enormous privileges of the military, at the expense of virtually everything else in the Soviet Union? And why is this open authoritarianism and militarization necessary? One possible answer to the latter question is that this militarization is a condition of

keeping people at work, especially considering that there is such an explosive amount of discontent. One possible response to the first question, which of course does not apply to Eastern European countries, is that the Soviet populations have not known anything else in their recent history.²⁵

This passage elicits many methodological queries that Offe has posed to mainstream political theory. Why is the Soviet Union considered a regime when on the same page he refers to the corollary Western institutions as governments? How do people both accept omnipresent state violence and display explosive amounts of discontent? How can people continue to work only under the threat of violence (implying a resistance that must constantly be held in check) and at the same time be so inured to that violence that they know and expect nothing else (suggesting that they are incapable of such resistance)? Indeed, Offe's questions make it very difficult to imagine who or what the Soviet people might be. At once entirely docile and volatile they exhibit none of the features of human beings we might know anywhere else.

Offe's impressions are formed not simply by his observations but also by his prior conceptions of what he expected to find. What these impressions warn of are certain conceptual problems in the study of socialism, namely the very statist approach that Offe eschews for the West. The acceptance or rejection of the state by the people cannot be understood simply from the perspective of the state but, as Offe would have it, from that of the people.

Theatrical Mediations in Latin America

Locating where theater joins the popular to illuminate the contours of civil society affords a fundamental revision of the conception of socialism. This revision comes, however, with its own set of complications. The Cuban example mentioned in the previous section left open the question of where the socialism in its aesthetic form could be found, and the Nicaraguan case raised different issues about how the example given departed from traditions of popular spectacles that far antedate the Sandinista government. Precisely what of the theatrical dynamics of Cuba and Nicaragua can be attributed to their respective revolutions is a question whose response will be un-

packed over the next five chapters of this book. The attempts at socialist development that have taken place in both countries provide only one dimension for the context of theatrical expression, however.

The context that the revolutions as well as the theater need to be placed in could be abbreviated as Latin America. That abbreviation above all is historical in a way that it articulates certain geographical, cultural, economic, and political affinities. Recall that Habermas's historical argument for the development of a public sphere privileged the press as an arena formative of public opinion. In selecting this media of assembly he is, of course, also identifying a setting where literacy could be used as a homogenizing force to consolidate a social group. For Latin America the situation was quite different. Colonialism would defer the consolidation of a national bourgeoisie over government for many decades, and its legacy would subvert the appearance of the kind of state Habermas has in mind considerably longer (perhaps indefinitely). The extent to which the press acts as a privileged forum in Latin America depends on who is being privileged and when. Colonialism had a powerful effect on differentiating urban and rural life, defining the latter as the absence of certain forms of culture, literacy prominent among them. That colonialism's contemporary equivalents have generated massive migrations from country to city have certainly not ended the process of differentiation.

Yet what this uneven process has produced is certainly not a mirror of the European model of publicness, which depends on its own differentiation from the space of the private, an articulation associated with modernity. There are, no doubt, sectors of the Latin American population in each of its nations that conform to the Habermasian model. What seems more significant is that many more do not, precisely because of the way modernization (as practice as opposed to theory) has proceeded in the hemisphere. The fullness of the public in the arenas of social reproduction is not some quaint remnant of tradition—there is nothing traditional about shantytowns, *favelas*, or squatters' settlements. Instead, the persistence of certain cultural forms, some of which are dated prior to the conquest, attest to processes of cultural production that were already in motion at the moment of European colonization and whose motion has not been terminated by it.

The persistence of forms, what is often misrecognized as tradition, can only be appreciated as the remainder of opposing trajectories of difference. The colonized also possess a framework for the appropriation of what is other to them, and the whole range of cultural activities—from processions and feasts to carnival and deistic rites, sometimes referred to as paratheatrical, so prevalent in the imagery of Latin America—needs to be understood as an aspect of this framework. Such activities are also manifestations of the development of a public sphere with a historical trajectory that is not reducible to the one that Habermas imagines. The theater in Latin America draws its sustenance from this presence of publicity that is constantly being rearticulated.

But not all of Latin American theater or every instance of it relies on this publicity. The clearest lineage for such contemporary claims would be what has been termed the theater of collective creation. As in other artistic movements in Latin America during this century, the collective creation theaters emerged out of the conjuncture of foreign avant-gardes and domestic experiences.²⁶ The reception of Brecht, Barba, Brook, Grotowski, Bread and Puppet, Living Theater, and Théâtre du Soleil was a vehicle for the global student rebellion of 1968.²⁷ The former constituted an exploration of participation of actors and audience in the creative process of theater and the latter a theatricalization of participation beyond it. The theater of collective creation displayed the susceptibility of art to participation. Identifiable by 1970, with significant antecedents (e.g., Augusto Boal's Teatro Arena founded in 1956 in Brazil), groups like Argentina's Libre Teatro Libre, Esscambray in Cuba, and Candelaria and Teatro Experimental de Cali in Colombia suggested a transnational movement in theater whose appearance lay at the midpoint between the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions.²⁸

Like representation, participation also has its limits, within which theater is produced. Herbert Blau, in his theorization of the audience, appreciates that this relation is a conjunctural one: "whatever the virtues of participation, the virtue of theater remains in the activity of perception, where participation is kept at a distance and—though it has come to be thought a vice—representation has its rites."²⁹ Theater is the being of participation that ceases at the moment it achieves its becoming. The participation available to theater

very often is quickly mobilized elsewhere, as appears to be the case in Latin America.

Hence the ability of theater to serve as a specification of the public in Latin America cannot be assumed as a stable feature of either term of the conjuncture of art and society. The theaters that comprise the focus of this study hint at how that conjuncture is formed. In so doing the burden of this study is to articulate the relations between three registers, at once analytic and objects of analysis, without reducing one to the other: theater, socialism, and Latin America.