

## FORUM

MARTIN PUCHNER

*The drama of ideas. Platonic provocations in theater and philosophy*  
Oxford - New York, Oxford University Press, 2010

Discussants:

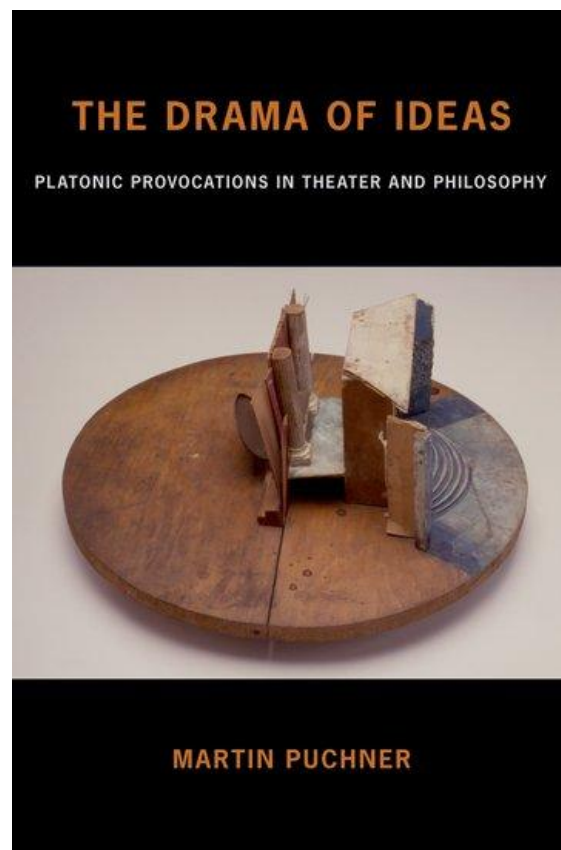
DAVID KORNHABER

LAURA CULL

TOM STERN

MARTIN HARRIES

Ed. by Claudio Rozzoni



DAVID KORNHABER  
(The University of Texas at Austin)

### PHILOSOPHY AS THEATRE

According to Socrates, writing was a medium deeply unsuited to philosophy. «It will introduce forgetfulness into the soul of those who learn it», he explains in the *Phaedrus*. Those who practice it «have not discovered a potion for remembering, but for reminding»<sup>1</sup>. These are not the words of Socrates the philosopher, of course, but Socrates the character as created by Plato, and in Martin Puchner's reading of this passage in *The drama of ideas* it functions not so much as an actual critique of the practice of writing philosophy but rather as a reminder of the uniqueness of Plato's approach to doing so. Writing – as Socrates goes on to explain in a second critique offered slightly later in the dialogue – may appear similar to speech, but it is petrified, unresponsive: «If you question anything that has been said because you want to learn more, it continues to signify just that very same thing forever»<sup>2</sup>. Yet Plato's dialogues, in Puchner's explanation, «model an interactive relation between actor and audience», gesturing toward the act of performance even as they unfold on the page (DOI, p. 29). «The theatrical dimension of Plato's dialogues, their particular type of participatory performance, is activated whether they are actually performed or not», he writes (DOI, p. 29). Plato, in other words, is already responding to Socrates' critique even as he writes it down. Surely this holds true of the moment of Socrates' first criticism of writing, which is itself already inscribed inside a micro-dialogue situated within the greater dialogue. It is not Socrates himself who utters this argument; it is the Egyptian god-king Thamus in a discussion with Theuth, inventor of writing, as told inside a parable that Socrates concocts and deploys. An argument put forth by a character who is embedded inside a story related by another character who is himself engaged in what is ultimately an imagined dialogue can hardly be accused of presenting only a ri-

---

<sup>1</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. by A. Nehamas - P. Woodruff, Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Company, 1995, p. 79.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 80-81.

gid, unbending meaning, of continuing «to signify just that very same thing forever».

Yet, in part because of these very caveats, I want to press further on Socrates' first critique of writing as it applies to Plato's work, even to the very idea of a dramatic Platonism as described by Puchner. I will take my charge in doing so from Socrates himself – which is to say, from Plato – based on his response to Phaedrus when challenged about the veracity of his fantastical tale of Thamus the god-king: «Why, though, don't you just consider whether what he says is right or wrong?»<sup>3</sup>. Is there something that we have forgotten in the long history of written philosophy to which Plato gives rise, something of which only trace reminders remain? If the problem of writing is that it «introduces forgetfulness», what exactly is it that Plato's text asks us to forget? And if writing is a medium best suited not to remembering but to reminding, then what precisely are we to be reminded of?

The answer, I believe, is theatre – a term that is at once vital to Puchner's study and peripheral to it. Though they are often deeply embedded in one another, the theatrical and the dramatic are not to be conflated or confused. Theatre, in Puchner's words, represents «a horizon of the dramatic, a possibility that must be grappled with» (DOI, p. 123). Yet if theatre lies only on the far horizon of the long history of dramatic Platonism that Puchner describes – inclusive of both drama and philosophy – that is in part because it has been specifically and deliberately displaced. The Platonic dialogue, as Puchner records, was profoundly disruptive to the established theatrical forms of ancient Athens: «Plato rejected precisely those forms of theatre that were rooted in orality», he writes, «namely, the performance practices associated with Athenian theatre and the recitation of Homeric rhapsodes» (DOI, p. 29). Yet I would add that it was equally disruptive to the established mode by which philosophy was practiced – which is to say, as a form of theatre. In describing pre-Platonic philosophy as theatre, I mean so in the sense offered by Paul Woodruff in *The necessity of theatre* – as «human action being watched»<sup>4</sup>. Philosophy, like so much else in Athenian life, was part of a far-reaching theatrical culture that

---

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>4</sup> P. Woodruff, *The necessity of theatre: the art of watching and being watched*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 38.

prized public display. Sport, politics, law, dramatic theatre – all of them arenas enumerated by Woodruff as being species of theatre – were integral to the society in which philosophy as we know it arose. Thus philosophy, as it was practiced by Socrates as well as by many of his predecessors and contemporaries, was yet another mode of public performance making up the fabric of Athenian life, a theatre of ideas practiced in the streets. Woodruff calls it «a theatre of presence», one conducted for an audience of «young people who gathered to watch [Socrates] show that their elders [...] could not answer the vital questions he put to them»<sup>5</sup>.

As a form of theatre, philosophy as it was practiced before Plato shared much with what we would now associate with live performance: it was a form of inquiry that was contingent, spontaneous, and improvisatory; grounded in the body and in the immediate material conditions of the world; and, ultimately, evaporative – each discussion and each argument recorded only in the memories of those who were its performers and its audience. And, as with so many forms of performance, at its center stood an actor. This is one of the central points made by Friedrich Nietzsche in his lecture series on the pre-Platonic philosophers delivered while still at the University of Basel, ultimately culminating in the essay *Philosophy in the tragic age of the Greeks*. There he speaks of Socrates not just as a thinker but as a performer, the two sides of philosophy being nearly inseparable in the age before Plato. He speaks not only of Socrates' form of questioning and argumentation but of his «dramatic effects» and «extremely likeable voice», quoting Spintharus as to the sources of Socrates' powers of persuasion in «his voice, his speech, his outward disposition, and, to complement all the things he said, the peculiar quality of his appearance»<sup>6</sup>. Likewise his treatment of Anaximander, who by tradition was the first philosopher to commit his thoughts to writing. Even this precursor to Plato understood his role as a philosopher as being one who must act his philosophy. «He walked the earth clad in an especially dignified garment and displayed a truly tragic pride in his gestures and customs of daily living», Nietzsche writes. «He lived as he wrote; he spoke as

---

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 214.

<sup>6</sup> F. Nietzsche, *The pre-Platonic philosophers*, trans. by G. Whitlock, Champaign, Illinois, University of Illinois Press, 2006, p. 149.

solemnly as he dressed; he lifted his hands and placed his feet as though this existence were a tragic drama into which he had been born to play a hero»<sup>7</sup>. Understood in this way, philosophy can be said to have begun in the person of the philosopher – that is to say, in her actions and her interactions, her performance and her setting. The early texts of philosophy were texts of the body and the voice, akin to how Bruce Henderson describes the thin line between literary text and oratorical body in the tradition of Homeric recitation, an art of performance «that predated our contemporary notions [...] of a text that can be separated in a meaningful way from the moment of performance or from the body of the performer». It was a mode, he writes, «in which the body (which included the voice and, by extension, all that the body could fill, including context, space, and even audience) was the medium for ‘publication’»<sup>8</sup>.

It was in the context of this tradition of philosopher-as-actor and philosophy-as-theatre that Plato introduced his innovations; so it should not be surprising that within Plato’s dialogues are traces of such theatre. What Puchner calls the «material pull» (DOI, p. 19) of Plato’s writing is one of the form’s most distinctive and important conditions, encompassing everything from the exigencies of the dramatic situation to the force of personality at its center to the necessities and indelicacies of the body that intrude on the discussion of ideas. The material concerns represented in Plato’s dialogues powerfully evince the argument that «philosophy [...] is embodied and lived», as Puchner writes (DOI, p. 22), providing a necessary counterweight to Platonism’s potential for pure idealism. Yet ultimately these staged contingencies are only so many gestures toward the material; they stand in roughly the same relationship to the street theatre of Socrates as a comedy of manners does to a fairground entertainment – the former may reference a world of contingencies and exigencies, but the latter actually inhabits it. Plato’s drama may borrow from the philosophical theatre that preceded it (and his work was, in fact, intended for performance within a limited context) but it also irrevocably recasts

---

<sup>7</sup> Id., *Philosophy in the tragic age of the Greeks*, trans. by M. Cowan, Washington, D.C., Regnery Publishing, 1962, p. 49.

<sup>8</sup> B. Henderson, *The strange case of the body in the performance of literature classroom: an enduring mystery*, in D.S. Madison - J. Hamera (eds.), *The SAGE handbook of performance studies*, Thousand Oaks, California, SAGE Publications, 2006, pp. 188-205, here p. 192.

philosophy's relationship to theatre. As Puchner explains, drawing on work by Eric A. Havelock and Walter J. Ong, Plato's brand of drama represented the challenge of a newly expanding literacy to an older, oral culture and was bent on «asserting the superiority of the values implied by the new literacy, such as reason and structured argument» – and, importantly, even abstraction itself (DOI, p. 29). It was a form, in other words, that made gestures toward the theatre even while it insisted on the supremacy of the text. In this sense, Plato can be said to have anticipated what W.B. Worthen describes, in the context of our modern age, as «the historical condition of print and print culture», one wherein «dramatic performance has increasingly come to be understood on the model of print transmission, as a reproduction or reiteration of *writing*, as though performance were merely a new edition of the substantial identity of the script»<sup>9</sup>. It was, charitably, «a hesitant attempt to envision a mode of performance that would coexist with writing», as Puchner writes (DOI, p. 30). Less charitably, it was an attempt to use the textualized form of drama to eclipse philosophy's originary ties to the theatre, leaving only a pale reminder.

Yet Plato asks us to remember. He challenges us in the *Phaedrus* to regard writing as a reminder, a token of «the living, breathing discourse of the man who knows, of which the written one can be fairly called an image»<sup>10</sup>. Philosophy itself – like Plato's dramas in all their contingencies and convolutions, all their evocations of lived conversations – must always hearken back to life. For Plato, writes Puchner, «truth is something that must come as a surprise; it must come out of left field, unexpectedly and suddenly» (DOI, p. 26). It must come, therefore, from a discourse that is embedded in and open to the world. To fully heed this remembrance is to look anew at the concept of a drama of ideas and to recognize a countermode running alongside the trajectory of Plato's twentieth-century inheritors. The drama of ideas as it derives from Plato is ultimately, as Puchner describes it, an anti-theatricalist tradition, marked by «a widespread distrust of the more spectacular forms of theatricality» (DOI, p. 73). Yet hardly can such antitheatricalists lay claim to the only investment in ideas.

---

<sup>9</sup> W.B. Worthen, *Print and the poetics of modern drama*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 8 (emphasis in original).

<sup>10</sup> Plato, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

Though its contours are only articulated within the negative space of Puchner's study, there must exist in counterpoint to this tradition of the «drama of ideas» what we might call a «theatre of ideas». I do not mean the hypothetical theatre of a figure like Antonin Artaud, whose claims to a theatre of ideas – strident as they were – existed largely in the mind. Rather, I speak of a theatre whose embrace of ideas is embodied in practice and performance, an ideation set in action rather than in words – a theatre that lives out the contingency and spontaneity that is only described and depicted by the dramatists here. At its center will stand not the dramatist but the actor, not Plato but Socrates – the actor as thinker. He or she will be a figure whose philosophy is expressed through body and action, marked, like Socrates was, by «his voice, his speech, his outward disposition», forever pointing us toward a vision of philosophy that has always been there but is now only dimly recalled.

LAURA CULL  
(University of Surrey)

### A RESPONSE TO MARTIN PUCHNER'S *THE DRAMA OF IDEAS*

#### 1. Preface

In the short time I have been working as a professional academic researcher, I have sometimes had the impression that Martin Puchner has already done it all. As I began to research a series of topics that attracted my interest – from manifestos to animals – at every turn it seemed as if Puchner had not only got there before me, but had written so knowledgeably and lucidly on such a vast range of ideas, that there was little point in saying anything more. *The drama of ideas* is no exception to this rule insofar as it adds to, and enriches the already ample evidence from across his oeuvre, that Puchner is a vital interlocutor for those of us concerned with the relationship between philosophy and theatre<sup>11</sup>. But just I have discovered so many shared

---

<sup>11</sup> In fact, I would describe my own concerns as pertaining to the relationship between philosophy and *performance*, insofar as I see 'performance' as a broader term, including theatre and drama but also extending to include other modes such as visual art performance, dance, applied theatre and performance in the context of everyday life. For Puchner, it tends to

interests with Martin Puchner over the years, I have also begun to try and articulate what I see as the principle differences in our perspectives, particularly with regards to the theatre-philosophy relation. So – knowing his penchant for friendly debate – I propose the following response to *The drama of ideas*.

## 2. Response

Behind every cave, is there not, must there not be, another deeper cave – a more comprehensive, stranger, richer world beyond the surface, an abysmally deep ground behind every ground, under every attempt to furnish ‘grounds’?<sup>12</sup>

*The drama of ideas* begins, in its *Preface*, with the philosophy-theatre relation which figures not only as a fundamental feature of Puchner’s personal biography but also as a profound source of tension, ambiguity, desire and doubt in his thought. On the one hand, Puchner confides, he spent his own student years unwilling to choose between philosophy and theatre, leading a double life which led him to the conviction that «theatre and philosophy are intimately, if contentiously, related» (DOI, p. vii). This side of Puchner lamented the apparent lack of interest of philosophers in theatre (something that has still been evident until fairly recently<sup>13</sup>) and likewise, the absence of in-depth engagement in philosophy by «theatre people» (something I would argue has changed dramatically over the last ten years<sup>14</sup>). And

---

be an expanded notion of drama, including both the writing, reading and theatrical staging of dramatic literature that is of primary concern.

<sup>12</sup> F. Nietzsche, *Beyond good and evil*, in Id., *Basic writings of Nietzsche*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann, New York, Modern Library, 1968, p. 414.

<sup>13</sup> Recent years have seen the publication of a number of works specifically addressing theatre by philosophers broadly situated in the Anglo-American tradition, whereas theatre and the performing arts often tended to be excluded from the general discourse on philosophical aesthetics. I am thinking of books such as James R. Hamilton’s *The art of theatre* (2007) and Paul Woodruff’s *The necessity of theatre: the art of watching and being watched* (2008). In terms of the work of philosophers more closely affiliated to the Continental tradition, we might note books such as Alain Badiou’s *Handbook of inaesthetics* (2005) and his *Rhapsody for the theatre* (2008) as well as Jacques Rancière’s *The emancipated spectator* (2009) and Samuel Weber’s *Theatricality as medium* (2004).

<sup>14</sup> For a brief account of the ‘philosophical turn’ in Theatre Studies, see my article *Performance as philosophy: responding to the problem of ‘application’*, «Theatre Research International» 37 (2012), 1, pp. 20-27. See also books such as David Krasner and David Saltz’s *Staging*



yet, on the other hand, there is another part of Puchner that questions «whether it will be possible to establish a new relation between theatre and philosophy» beyond this history of mutual disinterest and at times, downright hostility, as Puchner has discussed elsewhere in terms of the so-called anti-theatrical prejudice. «Even now», he confesses, «after having written this book, I am not certain whether my subject matter, a truly philosophical drama and a truly dramatic philosophy, actually exists». He then goes on to add: «The idea of the coincidence of drama and philosophy itself seems to have retreated whenever I thought I was getting close» (DOI, p. viii).

In the end, this elusive nature of the subject is not really a problem for Puchner, so much as a source of philosophical intrigue, a motivating dilemma, which for him amounts to the Platonic question of «how an abstract construct can ever be fully materialized» (*ibid.*). However, I want to linger on these opening pages of *The drama of ideas* a little longer, as they provide an initial mean to unpack the differences – as I see them – between my own and Puchner’s views with regards to the relationship between theatre and philosophy. In the first instance, I want to note Puchner’s use of the term «coincidence»: a concept that implies two different things, or identities, becoming the same as each other – something that Puchner has since parsed as both a problematic elision or homogenization of essential distinctions and as a naïve attempt to ignore power differentials in terms of the relative status of theatre and philosophy in the academy<sup>15</sup>. Here, coincidence is synonymous with «merging» and the desire for a «union of theatre and philosophy».

In contrast, my own view is that theatre and philosophy were never self-same ‘things’ in the first place; neither has a fixed or certain identity that would allow us to maintain the binary logic of sameness/difference that at times seems to underpin Puchner’s approach. Of course, this argument is simply a reflection of my own philosophical sympathies, which are more inclined towards the differential

---

*philosophy* (2006), Freddie Rokem’s *Philosophers and thespians* (2010) and my own *Theatres of immanence* (2012).

<sup>15</sup> I am referring here to Puchner’s ‘Mind the gap’ argument as presented at the inaugural *Performance Philosophy* conference in April 2013. A revised version of this keynote address and a more elaborated account of my counter-position will be published in a forthcoming issue of «Modern Drama», edited by David Kornhaber.

monism of Deleuze and Bergson, than Plato (which is not to deny that there are aspects of Plato that Deleuze was interested to recover – particularly, the notion of the simulacrum or copy without original which he deals with at length in *The logic of sense*, as we shall see). And while Puchner carefully summarizes this ontology in the section on Deleuze in chapter 4, it clearly is not one he particularly subscribes to, at least in terms of his understanding of the theatre-philosophy relationship. To reiterate, according to a Deleuzian view, what there is, fundamentally, is *difference*, which we should not conceive negatively as a difference between already existing ‘things’, but as a primary production of the new, which is the multiplicity of duration or ways of being in time. What we perceive as relatively stable identities – such as ‘theatre’ and ‘philosophy’ – are always in processes of becoming-other, always in the process of differentiating themselves according to their relations with other processes and forces.

Another way of putting it is, in fact, already beautifully introduced by a 2007 article by Puchner on the animal, where he draws from both Agamben and Derrida «to describe the repeated, almost automatic act of drawing the distinction between the human and the animal, an act through which the two categories are produced»<sup>16</sup>, which Agamben calls the anthropological machine. Puchner then goes on to celebrate performances that displace anthropocentrism by demonstrating «the extent to which the very distinction between humans and animals is the product of projection and representation» in a manner that he names «negative mimesis»<sup>17</sup>. Now, of course, a discussion of the human-animal relation cannot be simply mapped on to a discussion of the theatre-philosophy relation; but I do think there might be something of real value for us here in terms of analyzing how the production of conceptual definitions, in general, often tends to operate through a logic of exclusion and petrification that belies the differential and mutually transformative nature of bodies including bodies of ideas. Might some reconfigured version of «the anthropological machine» help us to analyze how Western philosophy began by defining itself through an exclusion of poetry and the

---

<sup>16</sup> M. Puchner, *Performing the open: actors, animals, philosophers*, «TDR: The Drama Review» 51 (2007), 1, pp. 21-32, here p. 23.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

theatre (which simultaneously tells theatre what it is)? Or at the very least, ought we not to take on the pluralist logic that Puchner supports in this earlier piece: namely, that there are philosophies and theatres *plural*, just as there are «plural ‘animals’, which may then also include human animals»<sup>18</sup>?

But ultimately, and regardless of Puchner’s doubts in the *Preface* and his subsequent remarks that reinscribe a fundamental distinction between theatre and philosophy, *The drama of ideas* constitutes an exceptionally rich resource for those of us interested in the ways in which philosophical activity might be undertaken in other than conventional forms, including as drama; or, correlatively, the ways in which theatrical activity, such as the writing and performance of dramatic dialogues and the invention of characters, can be understood as a mode of philosophizing in its own right. Beginning with a fascinating account of Plato’s and Socrates’ absolute immersion in the theatrical culture of ancient Athens, Puchner makes clear that, despite the seeming anti-theatricality of specific parts of the *Republic* and the *Ion*, Plato «was not an enemy of theatre but a radical reformer», one whose critique «seeks to reform its object so radically that it seems to change it beyond recognition». Already, that is, the theatre does not stay the same as itself (in ways that do not end with Plato but continue to be developed, as Puchner shows, from the seventeenth century onward as what he calls «Socrates plays» as well as in what we refer to as ‘modern drama’). The shadowy cave is not «abandoned for good», then, but becomes the philosophers’ (and the playwrights’) ‘field of operations’, the site of metaphysical education (see DOI, pp. 5-7).

And yet, the two-worlds view – of the cave and the blindingly bright reality outside of it – arguably remains a key feature of Plato’s work despite Puchner’s eagerness to recuperate him as a «dramatist» rather than an «idealist» (DOI, p. 8). Those who occupy the cave/actual world as theatre can become more knowledgeable about their condition, but the hierarchization of appearance and reality, the material and Ideal realms, persists, imposing a transcendent judgment which will always find life lacking, limited and deceptive in relation to another world beyond. As Puchner notes, this is a view that is vehemently critiqued by at least two of the philosophers belonging to the

---

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

«theatrical turn» in nineteenth and twentieth century philosophy addressed in the fourth chapter: Nietzsche and Deleuze – who absolutely renounce Plato’s appeal to transcendence, albeit that they might each be willing to recuperate aspects of Platonism on their own terms. The Deleuze of *The logic of sense*, for instance, is only supportive of an inverted or «rejuvenated Platonism»<sup>19</sup> insofar as he sees the concept of the simulacrum as a concept of radical difference or immanent ‘disparateness’ beyond the essence/appearance or model/copy binary. In this sense, Deleuze’s discussion of Plato shifts the debate from a concern with the latter (according to which a reversal of Platonism would be the mere valuation of appearance and the rejection of essence), in favour of a focus on the qualitative difference between copies and simulacra as two forms of image that Plato conceives as rival claimants to participation in the Idea (rivals that might take the form of good/true and bad/false theatre). Characterized by the figure of the Sophist, the simulacrum for Plato is the falsest, most distant image of the Idea: a claimant without foundation. But within this very idea, Deleuze argues – which should help us to differentiate between those most fully immersed in the cave and those who have ventured toward its mouth – Plato in fact discovers «that the simulacrum is not simply a false copy, but that it calls into question the very notion of the copy [...] and of the model»<sup>20</sup>. As Dan Smith summarizes: «Plato does not create the concept of the model or ‘Idea’ in order to oppose it to the world of images, but rather to select the true images, the icons, and to eliminate the false ones, the simulacra»<sup>21</sup>.

To be clear though, this celebration of the simulacrum by Deleuze is by no means equivalent to some generic postmodern evocation of the unreality of the world; he is not saying, for instance, that anything goes because everything is a lie. Rather, when Deleuze suggests in *The logic of sense* that «all things are simulacra»<sup>22</sup>, he is, again, reasserting the priority of difference – rather than the emergence of differences (copies) on the basis of prior identities (models) – in his ontology. Likewise, Deleuze reads Nietzsche as a philosopher of difference in a

---

<sup>19</sup> D.W. Smith, *Essays on Deleuze*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2012, p. 16.

<sup>20</sup> G. Deleuze, *The logic of sense*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1990, p. 294.

<sup>21</sup> D.W. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

manner that provides an alternative account of Nietzsche's notion of the 'eternal return' to the one that Puchner provides. That is, what returns 'for all eternity', for Nietzsche according to Deleuze, is not sameness (as Puchner argues), but difference. It is not that «all that can happen is the endless recycling of the world» (DOI, p. 146) in a manner that prohibits novelty, but on the contrary, that we must find a way to affirm life as the repetition of difference as it presents itself in chance and unpredictability (*amor fati*). In turn, as Deleuze goes on to argue – in his own reading of *On the genealogy of morals* – it is not the operation of the eternal return that prevents something new from appearing in this world, rather it is the 'doctrine of judgment' that renders us oblivious to the novelty that life ceaselessly produces.

Of particular interest in the book's discussion of Nietzsche though, is the pragmatic account of philosophy that is introduced. Drawing from a quotation from Nietzsche, Puchner proposes that, for Nietzsche, Plato and Socrates probably «did not really think that there is a separate realm of ideas» but rather that they «knew that this type of idealized intellectualism was the only adequate philosophy in the face of a culture such as that of Greece, focused on the senses and the body» (DOI, p. 148). Indeed, at this point, Puchner presents one of the most provocative claims of the book: namely, that our present culture is one in which «idealism has been dismissed and materialism put in its place». As such, Puchner implies, whether we believe in idealism or not, we desperately need it and Plato to counter our contemporary «corporealism» (DOI, p. 193). Whilst I am interested in this more performative account of philosophy, I would certainly challenge Puchner's association of Deleuze with any straightforward focus on «the body» as ground, or equally, as might be implied, any crude materialism. That is, in his closing remarks, Puchner supports Dramatic Platonism as a practice that might take Plato's lead in terms of seeking to present the body with something other than itself, «a type of radical [...] alterity» that is associated with the Idea (DOI, p. 194). But corporealism and Dramatic Platonism are not our only two options here – since thinkers like Deleuze (but also Artaud and Nietzsche) locate that radical difference within bodies themselves (insofar as bodies are nothing but ungrounded processes of differentiation). The body without organs – which Puchner takes as evidence of Deleuze's corporealism (see DOI, p. 193) – is not a concept of 'the body' so much as an ontological no-

tion of the vital nature of matter, matter-energy's own ability to form itself, think itself without the hylo-morphic imposition of ideas from without.

The second pragmatic reason for returning to Plato now, Puchner suggests, is because our contemporary moment is one in which thought is «dominated by relativisms of an epistemological, moral, and linguistic kind» (DOI, p. 195), thanks, in particular, to the legacy of poststructuralism. As a result, he argues, «the very invocation of truth has come to be seen not only as hopelessly naïve but also as outright suspect» (DOI, p. 198). In contrast, Puchner would have us engage with Dramatic Platonism as a form that not only exposes «false certainties» but also, and more importantly for Puchner, undoes the «false uncertainties» (DOI, p. 30) of relativism. Puchner argues that «Heraclitus' claim that everything is in motion and always changing» laid the groundwork for relativism insofar as an ontology of flux «also means that nothing can be said with certainty about the world» (*ibid.*). For Puchner, as for Plato, this is a bad thing, which allows clever argument rather than the pursuit of truth to become the goal of philosophy. As Puchner describes, Plato developed philosophy «as the assertion that there must be an absolute point of reference for knowledge, otherwise arguments would be won by the stronger and knowledge would become subject to power. There must be a single idea of the good, otherwise value is at the mercy of willful manipulation» (DOI, p. 195). In turn, Puchner also criticizes what he sees as the culturally and ethically relativistic implications of an ontology of difference, implying that they necessarily lead to a kind of blind tolerance, in which all manner of cultural practices – no matter how seemingly violent or oppressive they might appear from a Western perspective – are protected from critique insofar as they are valued as simply «different». In contrast, Puchner argues that «the ontology of difference has to be called into question by a hypothetical [...] universalism. [...] We have to act as if universalism is possible» (DOI, p. 197).

Again, however, as I hope I have shown, there is no reason to think in terms of an opposition of difference and the universal (given Deleuze's notion of difference as univocal), nor indeed that ontologies of flux from Heraclitus to Deleuze, want to abandon the attempt to produce a «dynamic, changing conception of identity» (*ibid.*). On the con-

trary, how different identities come to emerge given this primacy of difference is a central concern of Deleuze's philosophy – and notably, one which he thinks might be best addressed through what he calls «the method of dramatization». Bodies need not look beyond themselves to find ideas, rather they need to look again and differently – from another point of view – at the difference within themselves and the bodies they encounter. Here, relativism becomes more a question of what Nietzsche called «perspectivism» which asserts «a truth of relativity (and not a relativity of what is true)»<sup>23</sup>. Such philosophies of difference do not call upon us to refuse «evaluative judgments» (DOI, p. 193) or abandon selection as Plato sought to perform it. But they do propose new values to form the basis of evaluation such that better and worse theatres and philosophies are not measured in terms of their proximity or resemblances to a self-identical truth but by the degree to which they affirm a positive difference, which is not the «difference between bodies» (DOI, p. 198) but an ungrounded difference – an outside deep within the cave.

TOM STERN  
(University College London)

#### WAS NIETZSCHE PART OF A «DRAMATIC TURN»?

Martin Puchner's *The drama of ideas* is a book of extraordinary ambition, combining painstaking research with a range of insights into the relationship between philosophy and drama (and theatre) – so it is a pleasure to be invited to make some remarks about it for this forum. I have already had the opportunity to comment on this book, as part of a larger discussion of recent books on philosophy and theatre<sup>24</sup>. I have therefore taken the liberty of narrowing my present discussion to a particular part of *The drama of ideas*, which I did not have the opportunity to engage with.

Chapter 4 – entitled *Dramatic philosophy* – opens with a tentative suggestion that the philosophy of the late eighteenth and nineteenth

---

<sup>23</sup> G. Deleuze, *The fold: Leibniz and the baroque*, London - New York, Continuum, 2006, p. 23.

<sup>24</sup> See T. Stern, *Review article: theatre and philosophy*, «European Journal of Philosophy» 21 (2013), 1, pp. 158-167.

century might be said to exhibit a «'theatrical turn' or 'dramatic turn'». In particular, this is a turn away from the «anti-theatrical prejudice» (in Barish's well-known phrase) towards a more nuanced and creative understanding of the theatre. This is not, as Puchner rightly emphasises, an about-face to a «pro-theatrical prejudice», but rather an umbrella term for a variety of attempts to rethink philosophy and theatre/drama in the light of one another, often – wittingly or unwittingly – making use of the legacy of anti-theatrical writing. What follows is Puchner's attempt at a «new history of philosophy [...] from the point of view of its use as drama» (DOI, p. 122). It is a testament to Puchner's ambitions that such a revisionist history of theatre and philosophy should form merely the *fourth* chapter of his project and it is a testament to his abilities that each section offers such a detailed combination of research and analysis. But it can hardly come as a surprise that the brief sections on each philosopher leave the reader wanting more. What I offer in the present discussion is a closer look at just one of the six philosophers considered in chapter 4.

When Jonas Barish wrote his classic *The anti-theatrical prejudice*, he might have wondered whether some of those he included really deserved to be called «anti-theatrical». Few can have provided him with the assurance he could get from Friedrich Nietzsche: «I am essentially anti-theatrical», wrote Nietzsche<sup>25</sup>. So it is *prima facie* surprising to find Nietzsche at the start of Puchner's «dramatic turn», as a founding figure in the *reconsideration* of the anti-theatrical prejudice. Yet Puchner's claim is not, of course, that Nietzsche was 'pro-theatre'; rather, Puchner suggests that his philosophy, and the style in which it is written, marks the start of a new philosophical approach to theatre and drama. There appear to be three strands to this claim, which, though they are skillfully interwoven in Puchner's prose, we can put loosely under the headings of 'Plato', 'drama' and 'theatre'. My contribution to this forum looks at each in turn; my intention is to subject them to some scrutiny, in some cases to draw out certain implications, in others to indicate where, as it seems to me, matters become significantly more complicated than Puchner has, in his brief treatments, been able to allow. My feeling is that condensed dis-

---

<sup>25</sup> See F. Nietzsche, *The gay science*, section 368, trans. by J. Nauckhoff, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 232.



cussions of the kind offered in *The drama of ideas* must, no matter the skill of the author, leave open these sorts of questions and that, of course, is no reason not to undertake them.

As for Plato, it is, of course, part of Puchner's new historiography not merely to rethink philosophy and drama/theatre, but also to do so in the light of Plato's influence: Nietzsche's emphasis on Plato as a new kind of dramatist, drawing on Diogenes Laertius' story about the pre-Socratic Plato as a dramatic poet, makes him an ideal candidate. The idea that Plato misunderstands and hence artfully miswrites Socrates according to his own needs appears in various places in Nietzsche's work and echoes his account of Paul and Jesus. In both cases, there is a sense that the mute historical characters behind the writings might have something to offer us, which stands apart from their respective traditions. But Puchner seeks evidence of a «more nuanced assessment of Plato» (not merely of Socrates) in *The gay science*, in which Socrates and Plato (so Puchner claims) are collapsed into one abundantly healthy Greek philosopher type, who invents idealism, knowing that it is false, in order to cure the age of its «focus on the senses and the body» (DOI, p. 148). The evidence for this «nuanced assessment» is found in the truncated final sentences of *The gay science* (section 372), when Nietzsche contrasts Spinoza's idealism with that of Plato: both philosophers fear the senses, but Plato fears them as «overpowerful [*übermächtig*]»<sup>26</sup>, rather than fearing them *tout court*. This is indeed a curious passage – in particular, we long to understand better the paradoxical notion of the «dangerous health» that Nietzsche here ascribes to Plato. But to what extent does it achieve what Puchner suggests? First, a minor correction: for Puchner, the passage «collapses» Socrates and Plato, suggesting that *both* exhibited fear of 'overabundant senses' which their philosophy is designed to cure (see DOI, p. 148). Nietzsche is usually very careful to keep Socrates and Plato apart for the reasons just given and I can find no evidence for the collapse of Socrates and Plato here. I would humbly suggest that Puchner's mistranslation of a relevant word lies behind his claim that they are collapsed: he has Nietzsche speak of «the cunning of a cunning *Socrates*», when in fact it is «the cunning of a cunning *Socratic* [presumably Plato] [*die Klugheit eines klugen*

---

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238.

*Sokratikers*<sup>27]</sup>» – i.e. Nietzsche is still talking about Plato here and hasn't mentioned Socrates at all. This makes Puchner's discussion of *Socrates'* robust health beside the point (see DOI, p. 148), but that merely deepens the mystery of the overly sensual, dangerously healthy Plato. All I can say is that this thought remains underdeveloped in Nietzsche and that, when he returns to Socrates and Plato for his final and most extensive treatment, it is to the more familiar line that Socrates has, if not excessive health, then a certain robustness and self-awareness which is lacking in the 'pathological' Socratics, like Plato, who think, mistakenly, that they have taken up his cause<sup>28</sup>. The remarks at the end of *The gay science* (section 372) may allude to a more nuanced understanding of Plato, but it is certainly a short-lived and confusing one which, in the light of Nietzsche's more developed writings on Socrates and Plato, it is difficult to view as authoritative in any lasting sense.

Puchner's account of Nietzsche's role in the «dramatic turn» revolves around Nietzsche's use of dramatic characters who play important philosophical roles. Nietzsche's *Thus spoke Zarathustra* is counted as a «drama», presumably because it fits Puchner's definition: «a form centrally based on character, scene and action [...] that operates within a theatrical horizon» (DOI, p. 125). That *Zarathustra* fits the first part of the definition is clear enough; that it fits the second is argued for with reference to broadly theatrical elements like dancing and tightrope walking (see DOI, p. 144). As such, *Zarathustra* is subjected to a sustained analysis (relative to the space accorded to Nietzsche within the book), the conclusion of which is that Nietzsche, via *Zarathustra*, forges a new dramatic genre suited to the expression of his philosophy.

For Puchner, a central focus for the action is Zarathustra's hunt for a suitable *human* audience which, eventually, he achieves, having transformed himself into what he called for at the start (the *Übermensch*). For the present purposes, I simply note a couple of chal-

---

<sup>27</sup> See Id., *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, section 372, in G. Colli - M. Montinari (eds.), *Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe*, vol. 3, Berlin - New York, de Gruyter, 1980, pp. 343-651, here p. 624.

<sup>28</sup> See the opening chapters of *Twilight of the idols*, especially *Twilight 'Socrates'* 10. I discuss, in detail, *Twilight's* qualifiedly positive treatment of Socrates in T. Stern, *Nietzsche, freedom and writing Lives*, «Arion» 17 (2009), 1, pp. 85-110.

enges to Puchner's interpretation; what links these together is my slightly more pessimistic view of *Zarathustra*. First, I am even less optimistic than Puchner about Zarathustra's hunt for an audience. One preferred audience, Zarathustra's animal companions, is described by Puchner as «seemingly safe from generating misunderstanding. [...] Their primary function seems to be serving as a kind of sympathetic audience, one that will not misunderstand Zarathustra's speech» (DOI, p. 145). Zarathustra's aim, for Puchner, is to find an equivalently sympathetic human audience. But in fact, even here, Zarathustra is not safe: when his animals try to interpret his discoveries, he calls them «buffoons and barrel-organs»<sup>29</sup>. Second, the claim that Zarathustra *becomes* what Puchner calls the «meta-man» (*Übermensch*) is linked, by Puchner, to Zarathustra's experience of Eternal Recurrence, in a plot structure in which «everything returns». It is clear that the Eternal Recurrence is illustrated figuratively in various ways throughout *Zarathustra*, but note that *learning from* the cycles of Eternal Recurrence, as Puchner suggests Zarathustra does (DOI, p. 147), looks *prima facie* impossible if everything returns identically. Finally, for those who take Zarathustra to become that which he heralds, there is the question of just what it is that he says or does once he has achieved this. Puchner does not indicate exactly when in the text he thinks the transformation occurs, but certainly there is no point at which Zarathustra seems free from misunderstanding or confusion, no obviously triumphant final speech or action, no suitable audience. I suspect Nietzsche wanted to forge a new dramatic genre that is suitable to the expression of his philosophy: but, as my remarks may suggest, Nietzsche's philosophy is not ultimately expressed very clearly in *Zarathustra* and so it is hard to tell how, or how well, the two match up. Certainly, he would write nothing like *Zarathustra* again.

Finally, as regards the «theatrical turn», Puchner's «Dramatic Philosophy» takes Nietzsche to be challenging the overall message of the cave myth, in as much as he denies that philosophy should be the search for something beyond or behind the world of appearances: «theatre continues to stand for appearance, only now appearance is no longer dismissed as a realm for the false» (DOI, p. 122). Once

---

<sup>29</sup> F. Nietzsche, *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, transl. by G. Parkes, New York, Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 192.

«appearance» ceased to have the pejorative sense of *mere* appearance or *deceptive, misleading* appearance, that is, «the attention to subjective experiences and life [...] meant that the theatre suddenly become a viable and useful model for capturing aspects of these entities» (*ibid.*). It's clear how a philosopher who proclaimed himself anti-theatrical – literally, against *theatrical performances* – could also be a philosopher who valued «appearance», the everyday world that was scorned by the Platonists. If that lays the foundation for a historical «theatrical turn» in Puchner's sense, then so be it. But to count this as a «theatrical turn» has potentially confusing consequences. What would Puchner make of a philosopher who took the opposite view on both scores – one who held that mere appearances were to be denigrated in favour of a systematic metaphysics of the beyond and that the theatre was an excellent way of doing so? We might say, following Puchner's line, that such a philosopher was «anti-theatrical» or at least not an instance of the «theatrical turn», in that he is against world-as-appearance. Or we might say that such a philosopher was also evidence of the «theatrical turn», since theatre is still a way of addressing the appearance/reality distinction. Neither of these seems quite satisfactory: the first is, at least, a case of misleading labelling; the second makes us wonder what sorts of philosophers *don't* exhibit the theatrical turn, since those who do can be pro or contra theatre and pro or contra world-as-appearance. (Does it suffice to say something, anything, about each? Almost all philosophers compare the way things 'seem' to the way they 'are'; many wrote about theatre). In the present context, it's worth pressing this point, not only because such a philosopher existed (in the form of Arthur Schopenhauer), but also because he was the central philosophical influence on Nietzsche.

So far, so much a matter of labels. But to what extent does Nietzsche *really* ask us to focus on appearance? There can be no doubt, of course, that Nietzsche presents himself as a stringent critic of metaphysical 'beyond-worlds', like those he took to be offered by Christianity, the Plato of the Forms, Kant and Schopenhauer. Doubtless, too, the Eternal Recurrence is meant to block them out: no afterlife, no metempsychosis, no access to a noumenal world and, crucially for Zarathustra, no ahistorical *deus ex machina*. But that still leaves us with two separate questions: first, what, *within* the

(imagined-to-be-eternally-recurring) world of ‘appearance’, should be considered ‘real’? Second, how much should it *matter* what, within this world of appearance, is real and what is not? And here is where matters get confusing for Nietzsche. As to the first: Nietzsche is often at great pains to emphasize that the everyday world is not at all as it seems to be, that everyday appearances *are* deceptive, that those who take the world at face value have paid insufficient attention to scientific and philosophical advances<sup>30</sup>. Obviously, to say the least, this complicates a history according to which Nietzsche simply switches philosophical attention from beyond-worlds to everyday experiences. Specifically, it also complicates just what it is that the affirmer of eternal recurrence or the lover of fate is supposed to *love*. As to the second: while he is happy to mock *some* instances of naïve realism, it is not as though Nietzsche advocates the relentless hunting down of what is real and what is unreal in the world of appearance; often (not merely in his early writings) there is a positive emphasis placed on ignorance, illusion and deception – frequently through his conception of art<sup>31</sup>.

This is the peculiar cocktail of Nietzschean claims which the critic must take into any discussion of the self-proclaimed «essentially anti-theatrical» Nietzsche. What is it about theatre to which he objects? For Puchner, it is the actual experience of theatre-going, as at Bayreuth where the «philosophical category» (DOI, p. 141) rubs up against real, existing Wagnerism. There can be little doubt that this plays a part, though Wagner’s ill-judged and public speculations about Nietzsche’s health and private life probably didn’t improve matters. Little doubt, too, that Nietzsche uses theatricality – especially in the sense of shallow showmanship – as a stick to flog Wagner. (It helped that Wagner thought he was the son of an actor and that Schopenhauer, Wagner’s philosophical idol, traced character traits to the paternal line). But there are more specific criticisms aimed at theatre, which may be divided into those directed at the audience and at the performers. As for the former, we find the surrendering of individuality – a fear of group psychology or group-think, to speak

<sup>30</sup> See, e.g., F. Nietzsche, *The gay science* cit., sections 110-112.

<sup>31</sup> See, e.g., *ibid.*, section 107. For more on both of these points, see T. Stern, *Nietzsche, «Amor fati» and «The gay science»*, «Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society» 1 (2013), XIII, vol. CXIII, pp. 145-162.

anachronistically – in which Nietzsche’s affinity with Plato is certainly clear. As for the latter, though, the case is more complicated and Nietzsche acknowledges his difficulty here<sup>32</sup>. The concern goes back to the complexities in his attitude to appearance and reality, which I mentioned earlier, with the actor a correspondingly ambiguous figure. But they also revolve around his attempts to construct a positive ethics. The remark in *Beyond good and evil* (section 40) – that «everything profound loves masks» – appears to make room for a positive valuation of those mask-lovers who manipulate those around them while giving themselves room to develop. Hence, one might expect praise for the *depth* of actor of *The gay science* (section 361), with his «inner longing for a role and a mask». Yet the conceptual association he draws there between actors and women, Jews and diplomats – all, for Nietzsche, types who must deceive, flatter and change with the winds to make it in the world – puts the actor in (for Nietzsche) at best suspect company: fascinating to be sure, but the opposite of profound<sup>33</sup>. Elsewhere, Nietzsche’s rough division of human types into «actors» (flexible characters who consider themselves capable of trying their hand at anything) and «stones» (professional guild-men, who see themselves as identical with their occupation) hardly condemns actors altogether, since they are both flexible and creative experimenters, but it does subject both types to heavy criticism. In the case of actor-types, it is their lack of durability, their inability to stick to any particular project, again hinting at actors as shallow and changeable, not profound<sup>34</sup>. All in all, then, the switch from beyond-world to this-world is hardly a straight-forward affair and the place for the *theatre* within it is yet harder to pin down.

Despite the varied dramatic and theatrical elements in Nietzsche’s writings, relatively little work has been done to spell out how they might fit together or to give them broader historical context. Puchner’s contribution is therefore extremely welcome, as is the strategy of using Nietzsche’s understanding of Plato and Socrates to frame it. The modest aim of these comments has been to further that discussion.

---

<sup>32</sup> See F. Nietzsche, *The gay science* cit., section 361.

<sup>33</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> See *ibid.*, section 356.

MARTIN HARRIES  
(University of California, Irvine)

**A DIALOGUE ON *THE DRAMA OF IDEAS***

Stressed and behind on several projects, I boarded an early morning flight from Los Angeles to New York on JetBlue: a day late and a dollar short, as the saying goes. In this case I had, however, made my flight on time, and even with sufficient leisure and petty cash to purchase a sandwich so as not to be the prisoner of the vile in-flight 'cuisine' the airlines insist on selling to the weary and hungry traveler these days. I settled into my window seat, looking forward to watching the painted desert slowly give way to the turbulent green of the northeast. Foremost among my worries was an overdue written response to Martin Puchner's 2010 book, *The drama of ideas: Platonic provocations in theatre and philosophy*. I had reread the book, but my thoughts were scattered and I feared missing the deadline entirely. The reader will, then, be able to imagine my surprise when, somewhere over Nevada – the pilot had just announced that those on the other side of the plane might catch a glimpse of the fleshpots of Las Vegas – the large bearded man in the middle seat next to me pulled a book out from his satchel and I quickly spied that the book was none other than Puchner's. (I hadn't realized it was now available in paperback). More surprising still, the tattooed young woman on the aisle began a conversation with the bearded man, and they began a remarkable colloquy about the volume the man had just spread out on the table he had unfolded from the back of the chair in front of him. I saw my chance – and what were the chances? – and surreptitiously hit record on my cell phone. I was heading to New York to interview a philosophically minded playwright, and so I came equipped with a very fine and, as it happens, easily hidden microphone. What follows is a *verbatim* transcript of the conversation. I have redacted only interruptions from the pilot or flight attendants, weeded out 'ums' and 'ahs', and have added a very few notes, not, I hope, too obtrusive. Because I did not begin recording immediately, the conversation begins, like so many valuable dialogues, *in medias res*. I never learned the names of the interlocutors, and so I have identified them by the nicknames I silently bestowed upon them while listening.

TATTOO

[...] philosophy and theatre? You know, that's always been my problem with so much theatre: too damn philosophical, if you know what I mean.

BEARD

No, I'm not sure I do.

TATTOO

So you go to the theatre and it's as though the playwright doesn't trust you to get it: instead of theatre, you get ideas, ideas, ideas.

BEARD

So you don't like ideas...

TATTOO

No I don't mean that at all. I mean, can't a play have ideas without telling me over and over again that it has so many ideas? If it has to *tell* me it has ideas, maybe it doesn't have as many ideas as it thinks it has.

*[Transcript omits announcement about beverage service].*

So why are you reading that anyway?

BEARD

I'm a professor of drama: reading books like this is what I do.

TATTOO

Even on planes? You never stoop to airplane novels? Not enough ideas?

BEARD

*[Pause].* I've got the new Lee Child novel here, too.

TATTOO

Lee Child?



BEARD

You know, Jack Reacher. Tom Cruise played him.

TATTOO

*Pectoral provocations in thrillers and philosophy?*

BEARD

[*Flustered*]. What?  
[*Tattoo points to Puchner's book*].  
Oh, yes, right, the subtitle.

TATTOO

So what is philosophical theatre?

BEARD

Well, first we have to decide what philosophy is, and then what theatre is.

TATTOO

Those are some big decisions. Who makes them? When did they get made?

BEARD

Well, in ancient Greece, when so many things got decided. Plato.

TATTOO

Plato decided?

BEARD

Look, I'm a professor and I like to turn to the text, okay? [*Rifles through pages*]. «The main reason for Plato to have his dialogues revolve around a carefully constructed philosophical protagonist is to show the extent to which philosophy is a matter of character, something that manifests itself in the personality. Philosophy, in other words, is embodied and lived; it cannot be abstracted from the exemplary philosopher» (DOI, p. 22)<sup>35</sup>.

---

<sup>35</sup> I have silently added page number to the dialogue. Pedantic though Beard was at moments, he wasn't so pedantic as to cite page numbers in conversation.

TATTOO

Exactly. So this is why so much philosophical drama is so un-philosophical, right? I mean, Shaw, please, give me a break.  
[Pause].

BEARD

I don't follow.

TATTOO

Well, look, I don't know anything, but here's what I'm thinking. Let's say you put a philosophical character onstage, what does that mean, most of the time? The character starts to spout a lot of philosophy, to be or not to be, blah blah blah, all that jazz. But if – what was the phrase? – «philosophy shows itself...»

BEARD

«Manifests itself», actually.

TATTOO

Manifest, don't tell, isn't that what they say in creative writing classes? Anyway, yes, if «philosophy manifests itself in the personality», then when you make a big noise about being all philosophical you're actually *failing* to be philosophical, right? The second philosophy separates itself from the person, from what someone *does*, it is something else, isn't it? «Philosophical protagonist», was that the phrase? Isn't the point that once this protagonist stops being a body carrying philosophy along with herself and starts to spew words that that protagonist has become something different, becomes Jacqueline Overreacher? That's what Wittgenstein meant, right: of what one cannot speak one should shut the fuck up.

BEARD

You've read Wittgenstein?

TATTOO

Dude, everybody's read Wittgenstein. Do you listen to the Silver Jews?

BEARD

I've never even heard of the Silver Jews.

TATTOO

You should hear of them. They're a band. Were a band. But this is what I'm talking about. The singer, David Berman, sings in this song: «The meaning of the world lies outside the world», right? And, I'm like, no, dude, you're thinking a *whole lot harder* when you're not quoting Wittgenstein. «All my favorite singers couldn't sing» is a hell of a lot more thoughtful – more of a muscly philosophical provocation, okay? – than «The meaning of the world lies outside the world». I mean, inside their songs he is smarter when he isn't being so fucking smart, showing off all the philosophy courses he took with Stephen Malkmus at the University of Virginia. Berman is one of my favorite singers but he can't sing anymore because his father's a fascist or something: I'm thinking maybe philosophy killed him as a singer. I don't really know what I'm talking about, but I know you know what I'm saying, right? But, anyway, back to the topic.

[Pause].

BEARD

Stephen Malkmus?

TATTOO

Dude, so never mind. My point is: won't theatre be more philosophical when it gives us a protagonist who lives philosophy instead of speaking it all the time? You're not going to tell me that *Man and superman* is more philosophical than *The importance of being earnest*, are you?

BEARD

But wait, you're rushing ahead a bit. Puchner acknowledges what you're talking about – the embodiment of philosophy in a protagonist – but he also knows that there is another step. He calls this «depersonalization»: philosophy has to survive the philosopher or else it's not really philosophy. [Turns the page]. Here, this says it well: «The Socratic dialogue brings Socrates back to life; it revives him for the purpose of continuing philosophy. At the same time, this project is successful only if philosophy can in fact take place without him either as an actual person or as a character» (DOI, p. 24).

[Pause].

TATTOO

«Oooo, girl, who's that institution over there?».

BEARD

What? I don't follow.

TATTOO

It's Aretha Franklin and Annie Lennox. There's this great dialogue at the beginning of *Sisters are doin' it for themselves*, and they're just talking trash but it's my favorite part of the song. I love that line and I think it's all about what we're talking about, I mean, making fun of the moment that something announces in a big fat voice that it's an institution, that it is philosophy. It's just a claim to intellectual property rights: I am Philosophy, Hear Me Roar, Numbers to Whatever to be Ignored. Philosophy gets to be the institution that thinks, and it leaves theatre and whatever else, in the dust – literature, all that. As if art doesn't think.

BEARD

You might like a book by Stathis Gourgouris: it's called *Does literature think?*<sup>36</sup> That's the book's point: that literature has a mode of thinking that can't be reduced to what you're calling philosophy.

TATTOO

It sounds like I would like that. But what I'm saying is that theatre might be truer to what we really mean by philosophy – it's a philo-lesbian thing for me, right, lust after Sophia? – by just saying no to de-personalization. That's the gateway drug: once you think you've got that pure unfiltered stuff, it's gone: no Socrates, no body, no thinking. What's left is a ghost, but that ghost is like Casper Weinberger the Unfriendly Ghost: it becomes an institution; it tells lies to congressional committees; it takes meetings with Paul Boghossian and people like that. That drug will make you so high on yourself that you'll believe you know exactly what's philosophy and what's not, what counts as thinking and what doesn't. Do you think it happened that early?

---

<sup>36</sup> S. Gourgouris, *Does literature think? Literature as theory for an antimythical era*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2003.

BEARD

What? When?

TATTOO

I mean, do you really think the Greeks already thought there was philosophy over here and theatre over there? Or maybe that's the wrong way to ask the question. *Which* Greeks thought that Plato was more philosophical than Aeschylus? And when did they think it?

BEARD

Well, of course Plato said there was an ancient quarrel between poetry and philosophy, so it seems that things got sticky pretty early.

TATTOO

It's just like Jack Reacher walking into a bar. He's minding his own business on a dull night in Pittsburgh, a girl flirts with him, and then suddenly out of absolutely nowhere someone wants to take it outside. Does *Aeschylus* ever say there was an ancient quarrel between theatre and philosophy? Does *Sophocles*?

*[Flight attendant makes an announcement about turbulence ahead and the illumination of the fasten seatbelt light].*

I hate this. Not so much because of the turbulence itself, but because it reminds you of what a captive you are, strapped down, looking ahead at your little personal screen.

BEARD

You don't like to be strapped down?

TATTOO

That is so not a question you ask a woman you just met on a plane.

BEARD

O goodness gracious, I didn't mean it like that. I am so, so sorry.

*[Even beneath his beard, a remarkable shade of red is visible].*

What I meant was... What I meant was... Well, it's never occurred to me but there's a connection between something Puchner of course returns to in his book and our situation right now.

TATTOO

[*Almost under her breath*]. «Of course returns to». You *are* a professor.

BEARD

The cave, Plato's cave! Puchner returns again and again to that primal scene. The philosopher, you'll recall, must leave the scene of captivity and head backwards toward the source of the light that produces the puppet show watched by the captives in the cave. The captives, you could say, are always in bad turbulence: they can't remove their seatbelts, they always have to look forward at the screen, however idiotic the movie. Now we have the illusion of choice – cooking shows, CNN, whatever – but it's the same old puppet show. In any case, Puchner wonders whether the cave allegory must be read as a part of the ancient quarrel, as the moment where philosophy must depart from theatre in order to be philosophy.

TATTOO

Advice to philosophers: the nearest exit may be behind you.

BEARD

Exactly!

TATTOO

If they turn off the fasten seatbelts light and I go back to the head to pee, I'll be just exactly like a philosopher. I won't be able to smoke in there, but I will see the light, and I'll bring it back to you poor folks here in economy. «Behold, my wretched brothers and sisters in budget travel, I bring you glad tidings!». [*Pause*].

BEARD

Well, as I said, Puchner returns to the story many times, but maybe the most interesting moment is when he thinks about the allegory as a way to picture the innovations of modern theatre. [*Rifles*]. Here's the passage I had in mind: «In Plato's idiom, one might say that modern theatre makers are keenly aware that they operate within a cave. However, the conclusion they draw from this insight is not to turn around and leave the theatre behind. Rather, they turn around the theatre itself, reorienting it so that it might serve as a vehicle for truth» (DOI, p. 75).

TATTOO

I can't quite picture it. It can't just be a reversal, can it? Is it just a matter of changing the points on the compass, making sure that the theatre faces east instead of west? If you turn everyone around in their seats, then they're just blinded by the light.

BEARD

Cut loose like a deuce, another runner in the night.

TATTOO

Come again?

BEARD

Obscure pop music lyrics: it's a game two can play. But I think you're picturing this too literally. Puchner's point is that the «Dramatic Platonism» he advocates helped to produce a different kind of theatre, a more actively philosophical theatre. [*Rifles*]. «Dramatic Platonism does something to and with bodies: it seeks to detach them from the ground on which they stand and undermine their self-sufficient complacency. In the cave parable, Plato expressed this somewhat melodramatically, as an unchaining and turning around, and also as a shock, an interruption, an encounter with something other than the body (idea or form), a type of radical (and in the metaphoric world of the parable, 'celestial') alterity» (DOI, p. 194).

TATTOO

The bodies I know are not so self-sufficiently complacent.

BEARD

But that's not really the point here: the point is to help us get over our fear of the idea of truth. Check out the last page.

[*BEARD passes the book to TATTOO. She takes it and reads. A flight attendant announces that it is now safe to move about in the cabin*].

TATTOO

Wow. There's a whole lot here. But one sentence jumps out at me: «Truth for Plato was what allowed him to critique the linguistic relativists of his time, the sophists; it was what inaugurated the project of philosophy, and this means a mode of interaction and discourse that would, if not overcome differences

(the difference between bodies, between persons), at least make those differences seem less solid, less set in stone» (DOI, p. 198). I can't decide if this is totally rad or totally old school. I like what he says about truth as a protection against language becoming «a rhetoric of power». But I'm not sure what you get when you overcome the differences between bodies other than a pile of ash. I get it: theatre is part of this... inauguration of philosophy: dialogue makes it possible. But it just seems like a continuation of the idea that for philosophy to be philosophy it's got to leave theatre in the dust. Back to where we began: if it's philosophy, it's got to de-personalize. I'm not sure if that's a betrayal of philosophy. But I am pretty sure it makes theatre something so – what's the word? – «celestial» that only angels without bodies will want to go to that black box. What did Jesus say – pray in the closet?

#### BEARD

You might want to read Puchner's first book, *Stage fright*: it's about closet drama<sup>37</sup>.

#### TATTOO

I don't want to pray at all. But if I'm going to pray, it isn't going to be in the closet, I'll tell you that much.

[Pause].

I've got to use the restroom.

[TATTOO unclasps her seatbelt and heads to the rear of the cabin. When she returns, BEARD has fallen into a quiet slumber. I turn off the recorder and wait in vain, finger near the record button, for further discussion. I eat my sandwich. I pray that BEARD is not one of the contributors to this volume and doesn't read this journal. The conversation doesn't resume].

MARTIN PUCHNER  
(Harvard University)

#### REPLIES

Let me begin by thanking Claudio Rozzoni<sup>38</sup> for having initiated this symposium, and the Italian journal *Lebenswelt* for hosting it. I am

---

<sup>37</sup> M. Puchner, *Stage fright: modernism, anti-theatricality, and drama*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002.

<sup>38</sup> And I do think it would be worthwhile at the end of this Forum to read some comments Claudio sent me once he received my replies: «Dear Martin, on the one hand, it's true that I found in each discussant's text a rich and original way to 'enter' your book, but on the other hand I found in your response a way to reinforce and to link some points that had already



hugely in debt to the four respondents, who have taken significant amounts of time from their busy schedules to offer thoughtful and detailed responses to and critiques of *The drama of ideas*. When I was writing *The drama of ideas*, I kept asking myself what my intended audience might be, but I could never quite come up with a good answer. Now I have met my ideal audience: it consists of Laura Cull, Martin Harries (a.k.a. Tattoo and Beard), David Kornhaber, Tom Stern, and Claudio Rozzoni.

Perhaps a good place to start is the form of this symposium itself. It consists of a book written a number of years ago and of four responses written much later, probably some time this summer. In other words, it is a conversation extended over several years and several continents, hosted by an Italian online journal (whose name means something like Life Environment). It is true, of course, that over the years I have had the pleasure of conversing with all of you in

---

struck me the first time I read *The drama of ideas*. In particular, the very question about the relationship between bodies and ideas, that, just as your replies to the discussants made clear, seems to be the real issue of the Forum. In the very text (E. Husserl, *Hua XXIII*, text no. 18) we talked about at the Lisbon Conference *Drama & Philosophy* in January, Husserl speaks about a particular vision we experience in theatre. It's curious, because this 'other' vision speaks to us exactly when actors' bodies become images, when actors are able to make their body shine with the essence. Poor actors, as Proust would say, cannot get rid of their own ordinary body. This way of thinking doesn't speak against bodies, but it clearly forces us to think about what Merleau-Ponty called the 'reverse side' of our experience: that is, ideas. And along these lines, I think it could be useful to go back to Diderot. He works, as Proust, starting from the body, but the only bodies he loves are the ones which, as it were, disappear to let ideas be. Diderot the 'materialist' during his own life never stopped to put on stage *ideas*. Indeed, your book could be a great starting point for any attempt to show how 'dramatically' Diderot is *philosophe* (it's not by chance that Nietzsche really appreciated him, in particular his *Rameau's nephew*). After all, one might qualify Martin Harries' choice to put Beard and Tattoo on stage in his fictional (it is fictional, isn't it?) dialogue as a very Diderotian way of expressing ideas. All that made particular sense when you pointed out that 'by writing this dialogue, Martin has rescued the drama of ideas and in doing so he has answered his Tattoo much better than you could have done'. And as far as writing is concerned, I remember you explaining very well at the Lisbon Conference how this 'game' (or 'play', we could also say) between bodies and ideas strictly concerns the bodies of the words as well (in reference to your response to David). So, once again, the problem this Forum raises for me is how the body can shine with ideas. The question of how ordinary bodies (and with them the 'Subjects', our 'I') have to work in order to disappear (Husserl writes something like that: in theater I have not to see bodies in order to experience images). On this very ground, perhaps, even from the Deleuzian point of view the body has to be not only without organs, but also without a body itself. It's not useless to remember how Deleuze seems to state in all his life: 'I want to become imperceptible' (and he was indeed particularly attracted to the 'becoming imperceptible' of some characters, I refer here to his long-lasting interest in *Bartleby* and his famous refrain 'I would prefer not to')».

person, but this does not alter the fact that here we are all fully immersed in the domain of writing. More specifically, we are immersed in the particular forms that writing has taken in past two decades, as we go through a transformation every bit as profound as the invention of print. Our symposium would never have happened if it had needed to happen in person, and even if we had all been able to meet and discuss a single topic in person, the results would have been very different. I am not sure it would have been better, though undoubtedly it would have been fun to all meet.

Let me take this initial point as a segue to David's response, which nicely and rightly begins with Plato's own complicated relation to writing: as David explains it, Plato fully profited from this technology, which was then beginning to spread like never before, even as he reserved the right to criticize it. In using writing, as David argues drawing on a theory advanced by his colleague Paul Woodruff, Plato moved a step away from an original form of philosophy that was nothing but a form of theatre, theatre in the sense of «human action being watched». In Plato's hands (or pen) philosophy became a «pale reminder» of a once glorious action-being-watched philosophy, a fall from grace that now merely registers «traces» of that golden age.

David sees a similar shift in my book: he finds that while I do a lot of talking about theatre, deep down I am a drama guy, which means that I evoke theatre, gesture towards it, but ultimately and «deliberately» «displace» it. And it should be added that for David (and he is not alone in this by any means), displacing theatre is not a good thing at all. Rather, it is a sad affair because it leaves us with a «pale reminder», with a kind of desperate form that «references» a world (of theatre) but does not «actually inhabit» it. The Platonic dialogue I side with «only» gestures towards theatre, and this «only» speaks to a value judgment that applauds the «spontaneous», the «improvisatory», the «body», the «immediate material conditions of the world» and has little more than pity for our pale, desperately gesturing dramatic dialogue, forever separated from some exciting «street theatre», desperately gesturing towards a world full of life, full of deliciously contingent and awesome bodies (probably tattooed) from which it is forever separated. This is a version of the established distinction between drama as writing and theatre as live performance, which places drama at a remove from the immediate excitement of theatre, on the side of

calculation rather than spontaneity, a form having to content itself with marks on paper where others may enjoy bodies to their heart's delight (I am parodying David's point here for emphasis. What I really should be doing is invent a character that would do my caricaturing for me).

First let me say that David is absolutely right in his analysis, but I would like to put a different spin on it. To go back to Plato, who is indeed my inspiration here, what I see in his work is less a reduction of theatre than an incredibly powerful, though admittedly restrained use of it, or to put this slightly differently, I admire his readiness to differentiate himself from the theatre and strategically use it at the same time. His dialogues are theatrical in all kinds of ways, for example in the expectation that they would be read aloud, but that reading aloud did not occur in public. In the *Theaetetus*, a written-down conversation involving Socrates is read aloud *to two people*. This is the best, i.e. internal, evidence of how philosophy was practiced in Plato's circle. Even though we tend to privilege mass spectacles, huge theatrical events open to everyone, and street theatre, it would be wrong to dismiss such a controlled and private form of enactment as a lesser one. Writing, speaking, reading of dialogues, all this is every bit as active as running around on a stage throwing body paint at the audience.

Let me elaborate this issue for another moment because I think it goes beyond David's perceptive critique and speaks to a larger issue in theatre studies as it is currently practiced. My attitude towards the distinction between so-called drama and so-called theatre has tended to be twofold: to value the former, devalued part of the equation, namely writing, and at the same time to refuse the distinction, or rather, the value system upholding it. We live in a world of writing (affording us, among many other things, the pleasures of the present symposium), and the absolute enthusiasm for live theatre with its immediate bodies etc. is in the end nothing but nostalgia for a world without the written word – spontaneous, direct, corporal etc. But nostalgia isn't even the worst thing to be said about this attitude. It is also historically wrong. Theatre as we know it, that is, Greek theatre, is precisely an art form that has fully internalized the values of writing. It only looks as if theatre is much more authentically connected to pre-literate, purely oral culture because it uses live

people to do the talking and running around, but in fact, theatre is even more fully part of the regime of writing than, say, Homer (even though Homer, by the time of Greek tragedy, had become a foundational, almost sacred, text). While Homer's epics bear lots of traces of oral literature, drama does not. It has a beginning, middle, and end, and in many ways has embraced the kind of structure that could only happen within the domain of writing. Drama, Walter Ong argued decades ago, is the first fully literary genre, but I think the Ong argument has not yet fully hit home, for its implication, for me anyway, is that theatre studies is simply wrong when it dismisses drama as mere text that will never be able to come close to the raw energy of theatrical bodies that are claimed to form the core of theatre as an art form.

The real consequence of Ong's argument I think is that we should reject the drama=text, theatre=bodies identifications themselves. A good way of doing so is by revising how the terms drama and theatre are currently being used. For most people, «drama» does not mean «text» at all. Drama and the dramatic describe events that are associated with what one may well see on a stage (or on a screen), for example a confrontation between two characters or a sudden reversal. Or else it means a presentational artwork of a certain sophistication (this is how I interpret Netflix's usage). It used to be the case that theatre professionals would use the term drama in the same vein, for example Richard Wagner, who called his over-the-top spectacles «drama». This, of course, nicely dovetails with the etymology of the word, which comes from *dran*, meaning action. It was only in the last decades that theatre studies managed to reduce this wonderfully capacious term to mean «dramatic text», a contraction that occurred precisely at a time when what I describe as a false nostalgia for direct corporal bodies started to dominate the field. This same body-centric attitude within theatre and performance studies has, in my view, hijacked the term drama and I, my friends, have very, very heroically tried to liberate it like some dramatic Jack Reacher, evoked in Martin's dialogue (I just checked *Reacher* on Netflix: predictably, it's listed under «thriller», not «drama», not even «dark drama», a description that Tattoo might well take as confirmation of her argument).

Drama, then, can describe features associated with theatre without having to make the distinction that is so often being forced on

it, namely whether we are talking about effects produced by texts or by theatrical representation. So, in the last analysis, I don't want so much to «displace» theatre as to restore an element of the theatrical to our usage of drama. One way of doing so is through «gestures», a term that captures this whole debate beautifully. Sometimes we speak of gestures as «mere» gestures, as David does at one point. But I think that gestures are rarely «mere»: they are as good as it gets. Gestures are best described as interrupted movements (as Benjamin also called them, with reference to Brecht's *gestus*), motions halfway towards language, connected to bodies, but already detached from them by virtue of forming discrete units, almost like signs. I think Plato's dialogues «gestures» in this strong sense, that is, they are taken from bodies, but translate these bodies into written dialogues. With his gesturing dialogues, Plato found a way of profiting from the immense power of writing, while also channeling the power of oral speech and action.

All this brings me to Laura, for she, too, senses a certain resistance on my part to what I call the body doctrine, a position she captured much more succinctly than I could. For her, the root of the problem is that I obey, or repeat, a «logic of exclusion» by insisting on a difference between theatre and philosophy. She finds that by identifying one set of things as theatre and another as philosophy, I contribute to the «petrification» of these categories, imposing limits on entities that are in truth ever-changing and fluid. For additional support, Laura turns to Gilles Deleuze. Bodies, she says (something that is echoed by Martin's Tattoo), are never just there, never one, but endlessly self-producing and self-differentiating, the prime engine of a world of differences (rather than petrified identities). And this world of happy differences finds its ultimate expression in Deleuze's method of dramatization. Which makes sense, right? Deleuze is the philosopher of bodies, so of course he would find himself drawn to an art form of bodies.

I hear you, Laura, and I see how it all fits, but let me take the fight straight to the lion's den: the Paris of Deleuze and Artaud. First, theatrical bodies: once we take away all the investment in the allegedly differentiating, subversive, spontaneous etc. nature of theatrical bodies, we are actually left with a regime that everywhere seeks to train bodies and that trains them to perform night after night the

same set of acts. This, in any case, describes 95% of real existing theatre practices. Deleuze, I would claim, actually sensed this, which is why he went back and forth about theatre throughout his career. Most theatre he readily (and correctly, in my view) identified as a «theatre of representation», which is about the worst term of abuse in the Deleuzian vocabulary (worse, probably, than «petrification»). Occasionally he would fantasize about an alternative theatre, one that would exemplify his philosophy of differentiation, but the only theatre he could come up with was Artaud's *Theatre of cruelty*, which wasn't a theatre at all, really, but just a bunch of manifestos (did I say, 'just'? I love manifestos!). But soon enough, even this fantasy didn't work for Deleuze, and he started to dismiss all theatre as «Freudian» (which is much worse than petrification), turning to cinema instead. Towards the end of his career he came back to his old interest in theatre, developing a method of dramatization, but what did he want to dramatize? Concepts. He was working on «conceptual personae», on doing philosophy not in the theatre, nor doing philosophical theatre (which he had dismissed early on), but of doing philosophy with conceptual figures.

This brings me to a final point about the evils of «petrification», the petrification of things like philosophy and theatre (a charge echoed by Martin's Tattoo). To the best of my knowledge (and I defer to Laura, who knows Deleuze infinitely better than I do), Deleuze never said anything about «theatre» and «philosophy» being unstable categories, categories we should avoid using for fear of solidifying or even petrifying them. As far as I can see, he used both of these terms quite happily, quite precisely, without qualms and caveats, without hoping to let them bleed into each other. Indeed, his late return to the dramatic method was in a text called *What is philosophy?* – and the answer to this question wasn't: well, we can't really say because philosophy is never itself, because it is always changing, self-differentiating and morphing into other things, like theatre, which is why we can't ever speak of 'theatre' and of 'philosophy' except provisionally, in quotation marks, in a non-petrifying and non-exclusive way so as to keep things open and fluid etc.

Nor should he have. Yes, cultural products, made by humans, are subject to change, but the surprising thing about both theatre and philosophy is how incredibly stable they have been as activities,

traditions, and institutions. Both of them are proud of their long histories and continue to be crucially involved with them. Just as Alfred North Whitehead once said that the history of philosophy is just a series of footnotes to Plato, so theatre could be said to be just a series of footnotes to Aeschylus. There are many genuinely fluid cultural entities around, for example the 'novel', which is so fluid that 'novel' was the best term they could think of for it. This astonishing stability of both theatre and philosophy can also be gleaned from the fact that both theatre people and philosophers like to attack the entire history of their respective enterprises (more than they like to attack each other, even), hence the history of anti-theatrical thespians (Craig, Yeats, Beckett) and anti-philosophical philosophers (Marx, Heidegger, Wittgenstein). Even more impressively, both theatre and philosophy have been able to incorporate these 'haters' and have accorded them privileged places in their respective pantheons. To be sure, cultural inventions like theatre or philosophy are subject to change, but, to adopt Marx's own phrase, we can't change them as we please. So I for one am happy to keep talking about theatre and philosophy, as was Deleuze, as was Nietzsche, who wasn't for dissolving identities, either (after all, he called his eternal return the «eternal return *of the same*» [*ewige Wiederkunft des Gleichen*], not as Deleuze would have it, the eternal return of difference).

Deleuze, I have said, is a good example of a philosopher genuinely struggling with theatre, but he is not the only one. Nietzsche is another. His work is a veritable «cocktail» of attitudes, as Tom aptly puts it. This cocktail is an acquired taste, but I think the different ingredients are actually blended quite nicely. In any case, Nietzsche, like his aforementioned Parisian commentator, goes back and forth about theatre and articulates his philosophy as part of this vacillating process. He famously begins with a fantasy of an original Greek tragic impulse, which is said to have been brought low by philosophy, in particular by Socrates and Plato (or Plato's Socrates). Second story: the original tragic impulse is bound to be revived by Wagner. Third story: no, actually it can't because Wagner is too theatrical, too much of an actor; it was Bizet I meant (David, by the way, has written eloquently about this remarkable shift). So these are the statements about theatre, sometimes very pro theatrical, sometimes (as in the polemic against Wagner), quite anti-theatrical (and Tom adds a very

useful distinction of anti-theatrical missives directed either at the audience or at performers).

But attitudes towards theatre do not manifest themselves only through direct statements. More important is what Nietzsche actually does, that is how he writes philosophy, and how that doing relates to what he says. Nietzsche begins by using figures – Socrates, Plato, Euripides – to populate his philosophy (this is what Deleuze had in mind, I believe, when he envisioned «conceptual personae»). But this was not enough. He wanted to be more dramatic or perhaps I should say, differently dramatic. In any case, what he does is not only to conceive of his most conceptual of personae, *Zarathustra*; he is so taken with the drama of this personae that he starts to write this text as an actual play. A play, Tom, not just something that happens to suit my admittedly vague and abstract definition of the dramatic, but a honest-to-god (I mean the god Dionysius, of course) play. It wasn't the first play that Nietzsche tried to write. He had experimented with an Empedocles play earlier. So my argument about *Zarathustra* is that he conceived of this project as a dramatico-philosophical experiment and only later changed course, preserving some of these dramatic features, but finally deciding on a different final form. I also want to add that I am not invested in the success of *Zarathustra* and in fact share Tom's skepticism overall. What would it mean for *Zarathustra* to achieve a state free from confusion? Is *Zarathustra* learning from the cycles of repetition? I don't know. Different things seem to happen as we proceed; I think there is some kind of trajectory, if not outright progress. I don't think Nietzsche quite knew, either. I don't want to make a claim about the success of the experiment. I'm only invested in the fact that it was a dramatic one.

This is perhaps a good occasion to answer a point about the theatrical turn, a term on which I don't place a lot of emphasis because it became clear to me that I didn't want to describe a turn from an anti-theatrical position to a pro-theatrical one. Rather, what seemed important was to identify the way I envisioned the histories of theatre and philosophy as intertwined histories (intertwined, but not dissolved or indistinguishable). In this connection, I like very much Tom's question about a hypothetical philosopher (an alternative to Nietzsche) who wants to hold on to a true metaphysic of the beyond, but uses, somehow, theatrical means of articulating it. My first answer



is that, yes, absolutely, the analysis of such a philosopher would require precisely the kind of double history of theatre and philosophy, an analysis of how theatre works in or for or against this particular philosopher, that I «hesitantly» called for. Such a hypothetical philosopher would probably be quite anti-theatrical in attitude (much more thoroughly anti-theatrical than Nietzsche), using theatre primarily against itself, that is, as a bunch of appearances that must ultimately be done away with. Come to think of it, isn't this more or less Plato's position, a metaphysician if ever there was one, who couldn't help making references to theatre and even using some dramatic form for articulating his position?

Here we come to Tom's point about the passage from *Gay science*. Tom's right, of course, that the passage should read 'Socratic' rather than 'Socrates', and Nietzsche does therefore not «conflate» the two as I speculate in a parenthesis. The larger point I make about this passage remains the same, however, or is even reinforced by this welcome correction, for what Nietzsche does is to offer a very different and unusual new assessment of Plato and Plato's philosophical idealism (in a manner reminiscent of the way Nietzsche suddenly speaks about the «music-making Socrates» towards the end of the *Birth of tragedy* after having denigrated him for the larger part of that text: it is this similarity that I had in mind, the villain suddenly becoming the savior). No longer simply a sickness (as it usually is for Nietzsche), Plato's idealism now becomes a «cunning» strategy against a culture of health. «Perhaps [...] we are [...] not healthy enough to need Plato's Idealism?» Nietzsche asks (see DOI, p. 148). Tom thinks the passage a «mystery», and it is admittedly surprising, but in the end I find it makes sense when understood this way: idealism, it turns out, is not simply a belief in the theory of forms, it is not simply a theorem, but a cunning (read: strategic) operation, a turn against the body *in a body-centric culture*. Now for Nietzsche, who rails against the pervasive denigration of the body that is the result of Christianity and a Christian-inspired idealism, such a cunning idealism is beside the point for his own time. We, Nietzsche says, don't need it. We already have so much idealism around that we don't need any more, cunning or otherwise. Okay, point taken. But I believe that we in the early twenty-first century do need it; we need it because we (unlike Nietzsche) live in a culture that has elevated the body to a supreme

position, both inside and outside academia. In this respect we are much closer to the gyms of Plato's Greece than to nineteenth-century idealism. Indeed it seems to me that most respondents, in one way or another, pay homage to this Grecian belief in the body, be it theatrical (Kornhaber), tattooed (Harries), Deleuzian (Cull) or otherwise. I say that in this context, we have a need, once again, of a cunning idealism of the kind Plato proposed, not an idealism as doctrine, but idealism as strategy and antidote.

I see such a cunning idealism at work in a particular use of drama (which may or may not include theatrical representation). The good thing about drama and theatre is that the status of characters and bodies, their ontological status if you will, is uncertain, much more uncertain than that of real bodies, even, I would think, for a hard-core monistic Deleuzian. So we have an opportunity here to use drama and theatre as a place where bodies, in our body-centered culture, will seem shot through with something else. Let's call this something else ideas. But we don't need ideas to do this, several respondents will say. «Bodies need not look beyond themselves to find ideas» (Cull), while Kornhaber advocates a return to philosophy to real theatre (not just drama), and Tattoo remarks «The bodies I know are not so self-sufficiently complacent». To which I would respond that we do have a rich vocabulary for uppity bodies, but we have no horizon for talking about anything else. This strikes me as an impoverishment, especially when it comes to theatre, where so much more is at stake than bodies, complacent or otherwise. Which brings me back to the Ong argument about our conception of drama and theatre being part of a culture of writing, whether we like it or not. Our current attempt to think of true theatre as post-dramatic (or pre-dramatic) is not just a misunderstanding of the central role of all kinds of scripts and writes in twentieth century theatre (and cinema), but a misunderstanding of theatre as such. I'm not imagining a body-less theatre, but a theatre that does not rely on bodies to be nothing but bodies. Badiou says somewhere that in the theatre, the body of the actor is eaten by the words of the text. I like that.

And now to Martin's dialogue, which I must confess, put the fear of god into my soul. When Tattoo says «Can't a play have ideas without telling me over and over again that it has so many ideas», I thought: ouch. Because all throughout writing *The drama of ideas*, I had this

nagging suspicion, which I more or less repressed, that there was one obvious problem with my argument, and that was that most actual dramas of ideas were simply bad: they were bad theatre, and they were bad philosophy; they were quite simply bad everything. Our mutual friend Una Chaudhuri is starting a project that goes in the same direction; I think it is actually called *Drama of bad ideas*. What was I doing in coming up with arguments about why they were so great, the dramas of ideas, despite all the evidence to the contrary? Without doubt, I found myself wanting to like most dramas of ideas; I was becoming partial to them, these awful Socrates plays, Shaw – all these nerdy plays for and by bearded men. My defense is that I like the *idea* of the drama of ideas and that I like it much better than most *practices* of it... I know, that's not an especially good argument.

This nagging feeling was a bit like my nagging feeling that it would be neat to have a beard even though I don't like beards, or, even better, that it would be great to have a tattoo even though I think that tattoos are a big mistake. But then again, Annie Lennox didn't have any tattoos, certainly not when I went to a Eurhythmics concert in the early eighties. Anyway, all this makes me wonder who in this forum actually has a tattoo: David, do you have a tattoo? Martin, admit it!? Tom? Laura: I bet, Laura has a tattoo. Claudio...?

By the way, what is Tattoo's tattoo? Martin, it seems, has kept this crucial piece of information to himself. In any case, let us just imagine that the tattoo is a form of writing and that our body culture in its current and perhaps late phase (I am probably overly optimistic here) has produced a pretty unprecedented fad for writing on bodies. Could it be that bodies are tired of just being bodies? That they want to become... texts? That they are, if not eaten by the words of the text, then at least marked by them? Why are tattoos becoming widespread at the precise time when we are experiencing a revolution in writing, a time when «text» has become a verb? Let this texted body, then, stand in, as an allegory, for this whole debate and as a confirmation for my insistence of writing.

Which is not to say that I have answered all or most of the arguments and charges brought against *The drama of philosophy*, some of which have reinforced my nagging feeling of its weaknesses (like the general badness of the drama of ideas). There is, however, one glimmer of hope and that is not Tattoo's implicit complaints, but

her very existence, that is, the fact that she exists in a truly delightful dialogue. By writing this dialogue, Martin, I feel, has rescued the drama of ideas and in doing so he has answered his Tattoo much better than I could have done.

Which leaves me to thank all of you, again, for this vigorous debate, which, I hope will be continued in some form or another in the future.