

Preface

Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular.

—Aristotle, *The Poetics*

This book explores the relationships between the discursive practices of theatre and philosophy by focusing on four concrete and specific encounters between philosophers and thespians. By “thespians,” I mean those who in different ways are connected to or actually create theatre and performance. My previous study, *Performing History: Representations of the Past in Contemporary Theatre* (University of Iowa Press, Iowa City, 2000), focused on post-World War II stage productions depicting historical events. In that work I explored the discursive practices of historiography and theatre performances. In this book I address another discursive interaction, between philosophy and theatre/performance, examining and analyzing a much broader range of texts than only performances as such—except for an analysis of Brecht’s own production of *Mother Courage and Her Children*.

My sources in this book stem from before the Second World War, beginning with an encounter from the Greek classical period and ending with a dialogue in which Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht discuss a short text by Franz Kafka. The direct encounters I present over the course of the book in turn lead, in the latter part of the book, to a series of reflections on the constellations of philosophy of the theatre as seen from Brecht’s perspective and on the performative nature of philosophy as seen from Benjamin’s.

As this preface’s epigraph shows, Aristotle recognized that poetry is aligned both with philosophy and history, reaching out in two directions to the universal and the particular. I say more about this later. I want to begin by situating this book within discursive frameworks in which I have had the privilege to be and to work during its inception and gradual

development. Looking back, it has been an exciting adventure to research and write this book, in particular because of the encouraging remarks and comments from friends, colleagues, and students with whom I have had the opportunity to share my gradually emerging ideas.

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