



Università
Ca' Foscari
Venezia

MASTER'S DEGREE PROGRAM IN EUROPEAN, AMERICAN,
AND POSTCOLONIAL LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Final Thesis

The Rise of The Concept of “The Theatrical” Outside the Performative Arts

Supervisor

Prof.ssa Filomena Mitrano

Assistant Supervisor

Prof. Simone Francescato

Graduand

Costanza Cartocci

Matriculation Number 874046

Academic Year

2022/2023

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Acknowledgments

This thesis would not have been possible without the guidance and the help of several individuals who in one way or another contributed and extended their valuable assistance in the preparation of my research. For my part, it is a pleasure to thank those who made it possible by giving me time and patience.

Words cannot express my gratitude to my supervisor Prof. Mena Mitrano for guiding me and introducing me to this fascinating concept of the *theatrical*. My sincere gratitude goes out to her for her support and assistance during classes and while writing this thesis. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to my co-supervisor Prof. Simone Francescato who generously provided knowledge and expertise throughout my university career. Additionally, many thanks to all the professors I met during my studies at Ca' Foscari University for providing me with knowledge in the literary field.

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my colleagues and friends Andrea and Rebecca. Their constant support and belief kept me motivated and attentive throughout the whole process. They gave me mental and emotional support when I needed it most. My sincere thanks go out to them for placing a smile on my face during the difficult times, the days and nights that we spent writing and editing each other's work.

Lastly, I would be remiss in not mentioning my family, especially my parents, my friends and my colleagues. With them I shared the best and the worst part of this journey. Thank you all.

Introduction

The term *theatrical* in the Cambridge dictionary is described as: “belonging or relating to the theatre, or to the performance or writing of plays, operas, etc.” or “behaving in an extreme way that is intended to attract attention, rather than being sincere.” The two definitions from the Cambridge dictionary point to two distinct fields of research. If the first one is strictly connected with the space itself where the shows are played and the activities related to theater, the second definition opens up to new knowledge, being connected to a person’s behavior, the manner in which a person may act with the aim of catching someone’s attention hints at an action that a person can do in certain contexts only. That is to say that, in order to be noticed, a person may modify his/her own behavior with the purpose of being recognized in a certain way that the person decides. The *theatrical*, hence, can have a wider meaning that comprehends more than one field. Starting from the theater as a space, it may be possible to see how this concept can be expanded. Typically, this term is semantically associated with other theater related terms, such as *dramaturgy*, the verb *to act*, or the noun *performance*. As a matter of fact, this research started with an investigation of all the related terms one could think about. Indeed, a passion for theater combined with an interest in the literature that has been written about this term created an investigation into a possible epistemological trajectory. While brainstorming the possible associations, the use of *theatrical* in written and spoken English became a thought I constantly looked at. Many authors used this word as an adjective to describe a certain kind of scenario. From a simple use of *theatrical* as an adjective to its use with the aim of describing a setting with a precise idea in mind. American literature, in fact, makes great use of this term to create a precise picture in describing things. For instance, Toni Morrison, who is one of the most popular American writers, uses this term metaphorically. She uses the term *theatrical* along with other theater-like vocabulary to set a scene. In a passage of

her novel *Beloved*, which is reported as an example of the use of this term in a literary work, she writes:

In Ohio seasons are theatrical. Each one enters like a prima donna, convinced its performance is the reason the world has people in it. When Paul D had been forced out of 124 into a shed behind it, summer had been hooted offstage and autumn with its bottles of blood and gold had everybody's attention (Morrison 136).

This passage has been selected in order to show that this term may be contextualized and adapted to more contexts. Morrison, in fact, perfectly describes a scene in which the reader is asked to be part of an audience and watching a show, which is the story that is narrated. The vocabulary she uses not only contends with the fact that the *theatrical* is mostly used in the field of theater but also creates an aesthetic. The concept of aesthetics is what may be abstractly connected with the *theatrical*; if the *theatrical* initially seemed to be related to an abstract concept, *acting*¹ and *performing*² seem to be mostly connected with people. The most common association within this aesthetic, in fact, is with the roles of actors. The verb to perform, however, does not necessarily hint at the job of an actor in a theater as its definition may suggest. One of the aims of this dissertation, in fact, is to find other uses and meanings for this term while the main question remains: what can we intend with *theatrical*? The answer, as this thesis will argue, is more complex than one could think. In the following chapters an inquiry that aims to unearth a new meaning of the *theatrical* will be discussed by drawing on the works of Michael Fried, Josette Féral, Susan Sontag, and Judith Butler through an interdisciplinary study. The first chapter investigate the definitions that are commonly given to the *theatrical* and recognizes elements that are usually connected to it. The second chapter discusses Michael

¹ From the Cambridge Dictionary: *noun* “the job of performing in films or plays;” *adjective* “temporarily performing someone else's duties” (“acting”).

² From the Cambridge Dictionary: *verb* “to do an action or piece of work” or “to entertain people by dancing, singing, acting, or playing music” (“perform”).

Fried, who sees the theatricality as a negative value, a name for qualities of exaggeration, inauthenticity, and artifice. The third chapter continues with Josette Féral who claims and defends theatricality as synonymous with artifice, offering the specific example of the performer who, Féral contends, becomes the fictionalized version of himself, an unauthentic individual. Discussion continues in the fourth chapter by drawing on Susan Sontag, particularly her essay on “camp,” where Sontag proposes an idea of theatricality that is a combination of performance and artificiality. Sontag, in fact, is shown to be the first to devise this concept as referring to much more than the theater. Indeed, Sontag’s camp delineates an ampler view of theatricality, applying the term to many social contexts as a cultural construction, and as a metaphor for “life as theater.” Discussion shows that the *theatrical* is a concept that goes beyond the opposition between what is real and what is artificial. To better understand the lasting impact of this sense of the term, the last part of the thesis addresses Judith Butler showing that her notion of performativity – understood a sustained social performance in which the subject acts – is the heir of this American line of thought on theatricality.

Theatrical or Theatricality? An Investigation

1.1 The Definition

Theater and the *theatrical* seem to be two terms that are related to each other. However, the ideas that these two terms may suggest are very much distinct; in fact, theater should be associated with a concrete space. The space in which there is a stage with curtains and seats reserved for the audience. If the theater is considered a physical place, it is obvious that this concept cannot have to do with the concept of the *theatrical* itself. The *theatrical* or *theatricality*, is not a place. Even though one term may seem a variation of the other, it is important to look beyond the habit of associating them. Theater may coexist with the *theatrical*, but the context may also change the common association of these terms. The theatrical context, intended as the space of theater, would associate these two terms as synonyms. The *theatrical*, however, is something that can achieve a variety of meanings that go from the association with the theater to being a medium for other signs or messages. Thomas Postlewait and Tracy C. Davis, scholars of theater history and performing arts, wrote in the introduction of their book *Theatricality* that:

[Theatricality] is a mode of representation or a style of behavior characterized by histrionic actions, manners, and devices, and hence a practice; yet it is also an interpretative model for describing psychological identity, social ceremonies, communal festivities, and public spectacles, and hence a theoretical concept. It has even attained the status of both an aesthetic and a philosophical system (*Theatricality* 1).

The *theatrical*, then, may be considered an umbrella term for a multitude of contexts in which it may be applied. In this thesis, however, the *theatrical* will be analyzed from certain perspectives. If it is considered in this initial context, theater is considered as the space in which

art is made³ and the *theatrical* as something that is strictly related to that world. The difference, therefore, is made once the term *theatrical* is shifted into a cultural context. In this regard, as it is also suggested by Davis and Postlewait, the *theatrical* can be associated with people's identity. People would make their life as a constructed but better version of the life they already have. Naturally, the reasons may vary from one person to another. It may be because of a desire to be better as a person or because of the need to appear in a certain way. This trajectory revolves around the same semantic field of theater, even though it carries with itself unresolved questions. If one assumes that people may try to build a better version of their life, one should consider this desire as an act. In this case, an act is meant as a refined version of one's identity in order to be seen as someone who does not necessarily correspond to their true self. It is a part of the self that a person carefully chooses to show to others. In fact, as George Pefanis, professor of theater studies, suggests in his article: "What blooms onstage under the audience's intense gaze may reveal similar behaviors in similar behavior offstage" (Pefanis). For many authors, as this research will show, life may be theater-like. Psychologists who have discussed the self and its representation talked about how one can transform it into their own narrative. The psychologist Jerome Bruner, for instance, studied this phenomenon and discussed it in his article "Life as Narrative." This article, in fact, mainly focuses on this notion starting from: "ideas about narratives to the analysis of the stories we tell about our lives" (Bruner 11). By selecting the information that one intends to share, a person can decide precisely how to be presented to the world. In fact, it is the process of selection that is interesting for this research. The identity, then, is performed through selected pieces of narrative. Bruner's theory, furthermore, has been applied foremost to narrative. However, he clarifies:

³ According to "Garner's Modern American Usage," the words *theater* is moderately different from the English spelling *theatre*. The theater is intended as the building in which theatre – art – is made. For further information on this distinction see the broadwayword.com article "What's the Difference Between Theatre and Theater?"

[T]he issue I wish to address is not just about the “telling” of life narratives. The heart of my argument is this: eventually the culturally shaped cognitive and linguistic processes that guide the self-telling of life narratives achieve the power to structure perceptual experience, to organize memory, to segment and purpose-build the very “events” of a life (Bruner 15).

In this part of the thesis, the process that guides the self-telling will be used as a device in order to make a clear distinction. Life narratives, in addition, raise the question of what storytelling might have to do with the *theatrical*. In the case in which the *theatrical* is connected with narrative, this latter would need a trajectory in order to find a meaning in what can be told⁴. As a matter of fact, what is told about the person itself can be performed. That is to say that the self is composed of elements which are, as Bruner may suggest, experience, memories, events, etc. By digging into those elements, in the very heart of a person’s identity, there is the true self. Although it must be considered that to find this part, all the narratives should be debunked or considered as true and reliable. Please note that this theory has been mostly used in literature, as it is possible to see in postmodernism. Authors would use it as a psychological device which can give depth to characters. That is because in the case in which a story is told from multiple points of view, the story will acquire more pieces to collect. Therefore, the character itself will gain profundity and tridimensionality, in a certain sense. Nevertheless, this thesis wants to be based on cultural facts that do not necessarily comprehend fictional characters of literature. That is to say that the investigation revolves around scholars who wrote about the society in which they live. Culture, therefore, is the basis of their research. Studies that look at events and culturally relevant trends that changed the view of entire generations. In doing so, it was

⁴ See the essay written by Ihab Hassan, named “Beyond Postmodernism: Toward an Aesthetic of Trust” collected on the Journal *Pages on C.P. Cavafy*. This essay expands on the evolution of postmodernism with an insight on the research of identity within the postmodernism expanded into geopolitical postmodernity and postmodernism as trusty and not suspicious.

necessary to trace a historical timeline that would identify an evolution of the *theatrical* as a concept.

Throughout the years, some scholars have studied the different meanings of *theatrical*, which are mostly related to the sphere of identity. Nevertheless, this is not the only field in which this term has been studied. As a matter of fact, our grasp of cultural history plays a big role since it may be considered the basis of our actions within society. In this regard, popular American scholars such as Michael Fried, Susan Sontag, and Judith Butler are the key to retracing the origin of the term. They all analyzed the term *theatrical* itself or terms that may be related to the concept that this thesis tries to unpack. This term may be connected with the self and identity, as well as the political sphere. It may be related to celebrities and pop culture and at the same time be part of linguistic studies. Despite the fact that the *theatrical* might not be immediately related to storytelling as Bruner would suggest, it may have something in common with self-representation. This thesis proposes that the concept of *theatrical* may expand the notion of self and identity that a person may have of himself/herself in other people's eyes. This is necessary since the term *theatrical* had an evolution of meaning over time. In the past, this concept was unequivocally related to Greek and Latin ideas of *mimes* and *theatrum mundi*, a concept that nowadays misguides the way in which theatricality can be applied in society⁵. This is the reason why an investigation into the recent evolution of this term is to be considered essential. Without research over the most recent turn of these terms and concepts, it would not be possible to recognize the impact that our actions have on the construction of the self. Moreover, this might even help to understand the reasons why and how the concept of theatricality is performed within Western culture.

⁵ These two terms also had an evolution over time. In fact, their meaning has changed in a way in which it may help our understanding of theatricality in Davis and Postlewait's opinions. In order to learn more about this, I recommend reading the introduction of *Theatricality*.

This thesis analyzes important American art critics, thinkers, and scholars who have investigated this term. In order to retrace the origin of *theatrical*, synonyms were analyzed to make a distinction. As a matter of fact, the research moves from the *theatrical*, to *performative*, to other terms that may seem related (see figure 1). One of the first striking discoveries was the possible association with the term *camp*, a definition that was coined by the American writer, philosopher, and political activist Susan Sontag. Even though the term itself seems distant from the trajectory that is going to be traced, *camp* may be the very ancestor of this research. Following a temporal line, in fact, Susan Sontag, in her essay “Notes on ‘Camp’,” is the first one to unpack multiple meanings of this term that seems to be on the same page as the *theatrical*. Her essay was first published in 1964, the year that will be used by this research as a starting point. Sontag applies this term to a wide range of literary, cultural, and artistic productions, mostly related to the American cultural space and the arts. *Camp* is considered a sensibility, which is more than an idea. It is considered in its social impact and power to affect people with a visual and emotional taste. A crucial aspect that Sontag discusses is the question of reality and artificiality. In fact, she sees *camp* as the “love of the unnatural” (Sontag 1), a

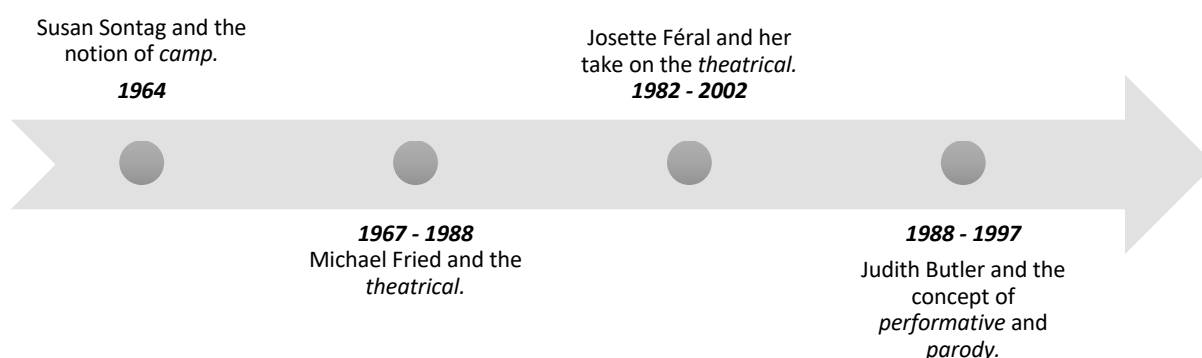


Figure 1 The evolution of the term *theatrical* over time.

taste that can be found within the cultural assets of society. Even though this phenomenon can be found in cultural products such as movies or buildings – as Sontag suggests – *camp* can describe people or objects as well. This is because the idea that she wants to convey is that

people should consider their being as playing a role. As a matter of fact, it is crucial to mention that she uses the metaphor of life as theater to describe the essence of *camp*. The taste for exaggeration, therefore, comes from the superficial idea that people had on this term. As it will be later expanded, *camp* lies between a duality of concepts. *Camp* is either purely naïve or completely conscious, it can be tragic and even comic. In each of its forms, *camp* can be superficial but can also open a deeper self-investigation. Moreover, there is a duplicity that involves the persona and his/her behavior. The sensibility of *camp*, instead, is seen as pure artifice. Therefore, if we continue to investigate the self and the identity, the question will be transformed into research on authenticity. Sontag's ideas, indeed, will be explored in a meticulous way in the chapter dedicated to *camp* – chapter 4. An important aspect that Sontag remarks on is the aestheticism of camp in arts. In fact, she sees this concept in the “aesthetic experience of the world” (Sontag 24). Art is considered an important field of investigation for this thesis as it can be linked to the concept of the *theatrical*. A move into the artistic field, instead, began by the end of the 1960s. To identify the main personalities who discussed theories of the *theatrical*, in fact, this period is taken into consideration as the first turn of this evolution. During these years, the art critic and art historian Michael Fried talked about the term *theatrical* analyzing the artistic period of the Enlightenment and Minimalist art. Fried will be discussed in the second chapter as he was the first scholar who ever talked about the *theatrical* and its values. As a matter of fact, Fried introduced in his early career the term *theatrical* which he used to convey ideas and apply them to the artists he analyzes. His idea of *theatrical* implies the consciousness of the person – or an artist, according to his analysis – of being beheld. To better explain this concept, Fried first talked about this concept evoking a relationship between a work of art and a beholder – in which Minimalist art, which he calls Literalist art, is the currency beheld and taken as an example. Fried connects this artistic movement with the concept of the *theatrical* and says: “Literalist sensibility is theatrical

because, to begin with, it is concerned with the actual circumstances in which the beholder encounters literalist work” (“Art and Objecthood” 153). That is to say that the person who is in a *theatrical* situation would be conscious of being in the presence of an audience. Therefore, the situation created would result as false. All the aspects of social life would be compromised by the falseness resulting from theatricality. Fried sees the *theatrical* as a problem since this concept may have to do with theater, a branch of art that he criticizes. The third chapter, instead, will be dedicated to the French scholar Josette Féral who brought a great contribution to this discussion. She published her works in the 1980s, after collecting many sources from theater studies. Féral was the first one to claim the multidimensionality of the phenomenon she named *theatrical*. Féral recognizes the presence of the *theatrical* within disciplines such as dance, opera, and performative arts. However, she recognizes its presence as well in ordinary life since she defines this term as not an object but a vehicle. That must be because she takes a stance in defining theatricality and says: “[T]heatricality is not to be found in any illusory relationship with reality. Nor is to be linked to a specific aesthetic. Rather, it must be sought in the autonomous discourse that constitutes theater” (Féral 103). Therefore, she seems to eliminate a possible conjunction between theatricality and reality, intended as the real world. This is an important aspect that will be later investigated since is one of the fundamental concepts that is at the basis of this research. The following chapter will dive into Susan Sontag’s take, as she can be considered the pioneer of this argument as *camp* may be associated with the term *theatrical* under many aspects. The most common thread that will be followed is the choice of associating the *theatrical* with something artificial or, as she describes it, unnatural. As a matter of fact, that is the point at which this thesis will take a momentous turn. This turn will highlight the relevance of the concept to our present sensibility, the one we are familiar with. However, we may connect the concept of theatricality with some synonym of this term, for instance, we may know it by the name of *performativity*. The fifth chapter, indeed, will discuss the studies

of Judith Butler. The poststructuralist philosopher and queer and feminist theorist joins the conversation and brings a new perspective on what it has been called theatrical until the early 90s. As I will dive into in this last chapter, Judith Butler builds a theory on the term *performative agency* which is applicable in social contexts of everyday life. Even though she does not openly claim a relationship with the *theatrical* as the concept analyzed by her predecessors, some elements may be connected to arguments brought by previous scholars. This thesis investigates why Butler may overturn the meaning and the associations with the *theatrical*. The reason for this is that Butler poses questions on agency, often figured as a subjective meditation that cannot be modified without taking into account the culture required by the society in which we live. Butler, who is known for her innovative takes on gender studies, claims that the conventions that are established by society can be seen as *theatrical*. Consequently, these theatrical conventions are performed in ordinary life. Doing that, the performance that a person reenacts in life would dismiss any gender performative acts as fictional. That is to say that gender, in Butler's opinion, is something to be performed. It is a constructed concept that derives from society and therefore it is considered artificial, as a fictionalized version of the self. However, it cannot be considered a historical convention that people follow within society. It is an agency which is performed in the everyday life⁶. Moreover, Butler discusses the term *parody* in her book *Gender Trouble*. *Parody*, from her point of view, is the failure to embody what is real and natural. Therefore, the subject of her studies is identity, indeed, that can be considered as a practice, as it will be expanded in the dedicated chapter. Each author has ideas that may or not be connected and supported by each

⁶ The concept of the everyday life is introduced by Butler drawing on Austin's "speech act." Austin chose the word performative to emphasize the binding nature of the speech act. In doing so, he differentiates between what could be called performance of the everyday, performability, and playability in a theatrical or aesthetic context. See the chapter "Restaging the Universal: Hegemony and the Limits of Formalism" by Judith Butler contained in the book *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* to read how she applies the theory of performativity within the social sphere.

other. By creating a timeline, it is possible to investigate an epistemological inquiry over the meaning that connects these scholars' works. This research tries to distinguish the theatrical from its common association with theater. In doing so, the author discussed will be analyzed in order to find elements that will support a common meaning for the *theatrical*.

1.2 Theatricality and its Elements

The *theatrical* is a concept that was discussed by other authors. The authors who have joined the conversation have recognized dichotomies that characterize the very meaning of the term *theatrical*. In this section, I want to discuss the main elements that can be identified in the concept of theatricality. Therefore, the concepts of self and identity, the dichotomy of real and artificial, and the coordinates of time and space to collocate a setting in which a theatrical situation occurs are all elements that forge the concept of the *theatrical*. For this reason, this thesis will move around different fields of study that will be helpful to recognize the various elements that can be grasped from each author. To begin with, the concept of the *theatrical* will be analyzed in relation to identity and self throughout an investigation that moves around sociology. Since most studies regarding this theme belong to theater and performative studies, this first chapter wants to investigate the sociological turn of the term. In order to do that, the sociologist Ervin Goffman provides a great example because he explored the notion of identity in his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* by dividing life and theater as two separate realms. His take is interesting for this research because his take seems to be in opposition to other authoritative views. For instance, in an article written by George Pefanis, Ervin Goffman is compared with the scholar Bruce Wilshire. While in Pefanis' view, Wilshire sees theater as

a metaphor for life⁷, Goffman traces a line that divides the theater realm from the social realm of life. Even though these two views seem to be in contrast, Pefanis clarifies:

Where the theatrical metaphor is transferred from the poetic and rhetoric to a gnoseological dimension, Wilshire will agree with Erving Goffman, who maintains that although the entire “real” world is not a theatre, we cannot easily define their difference ... if the point beyond which we cannot characterize a situation as a theatrical one is indistinct, then the point of distinction between this situation and the theatre is equally indistinct (Pefanis 93).

Therefore, it is possible to claim that the context is crucial to define a situation. In fact, the situation, as it is stated, depends on elements and characterization. Otherwise, the situation may be difficult to recognize as a theatrical situation or a real-life situation. To clarify such a distinction, it is fundamental to define what the *theatrical* metaphor means. In order to do that, it should be considered that authors such as Susan Sontag argue that theater is a metaphor for life. In fact, “Notes on ‘Camp’” (1964) was published before Wilshire’s *Role playing and identity. The limits of theatre as metaphor* (1982), but after Goffman’s *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1956). Commonly, the *theatrical* metaphor seems to be strictly related to theater, as the word might suggest. In the article written by Anton Piatigorsky, named “The Here and Now”, the *theatrical* metaphor is explained and applied to certain contexts. By providing examples, Piatigorsky suggests:

[The Theatrical metaphor] comes to life when the artifice of a play—the characters, plot, or situation—speaks to the audience (and actors) about themselves as they are, here and now, in this room. The technique has long served as the bread and butter of all post-modern performance, which is when actors don’t try so hard to be characters, but rather let themselves be performers for a present audience (Piatigorsky).

⁷ Bruce Wilshire’s theory can be read in “Role playing and identity. The limits of theatre as metaphor.” *Indiana University Press*, Bloomington & Indianapolis. 1991.

Piatigorsky uses the metaphor for life as theater in contexts in which the metaphor can be felt when theatrical plots and performances are combined with human needs and feelings typically belonging to real life. Human feelings such as tension or the exhaustion of waiting for something to happen, are just two examples of uncanny moments that can be lived in theater as well as in life. Theater and life, therefore, may have a connection even though the distinction is made by the roles the people play. In Goffman's opinion, a person can be the actor of their life as much as an actor on a stage, either way there is the presence of an established role. The same thing happens when one is playing the role of the audience. Therefore, the activity or passivity of the role one gets to play is important to understand the degree of awareness the individual has in a certain context. Pefanis additionally recognizes also other metaphors that should be added to the one of theater as life, as the metaphor of roles. He defines the use of this metaphor by saying that: "[C]onsidering that the concept of the role is used metaphorically in relation to the real world, we should accept that a 'companion metaphor' is constantly by its side, that of the general public or of the audience" (Pefanis 94). As he underlines, in theater as well as in life, the actors could not perform without an audience, just like the audience could not see a show if the actors did not play their roles. The audience sees performances in shows that are fictionalized. Therefore, stories that can be inspired by reality but are shown in a place where these stories are just a fictionalized version of reality. A hint at the dichotomy between real and artifice, the second characteristic of the *theatrical* that I recognized. Pefanis, however, suggests in this regard:

The real world constitutes the substrate of every behavior either onstage or offstage. The theatrical stage is basically as equally real as any other social situation, while a social situation can be mapped as theatrical, as long as it is be framed as such, namely, to be found in a specific manner, in a specific place and time, in order to differentiate itself from the rest of real world (Pefanis 94).

The relationship that a person has with the context is needed to analyze the concept of self. On this matter, a distinction among the metaphors already mentioned would be useful to understand the concept of identity as well. For example, talking about the roles, it is possible to see how the roles, in the performative sphere, coincide with the figure of the actor. Please note, in theater, even though the two roles may coincide, the identity always differs. The actor, in fact, plays the role of the character he/she plays but he/she does not necessarily identify with role played. On the other hand, in the social sphere, a person cannot be encapsulated in just one role. As a matter of fact, in real life each person incarnates many roles at once, and yet they will not always coincide with their authentic selves. Even in this case we may categorize the two spheres as the artificial and the authentic. The theatrical sphere, in this view, is considered artificial. The actor plays a role and hides his true self – the one that resides in the social sphere – behind a mask that is the one that belongs to the theater. Instead, the social sphere is considered as belonging to the real. Goffman, however, contends that even the real self may face difficulties in showing the real parts. As Pefanis writes in his essay regarding Goffman's view:

If the real self is hidden behind the roles then we could either never discover it or we will only see an instant and fragmentary image of it, when the role “slips” for a moment, like the mask from the face (Pefanis 97).

Following this direction, the trajectory that this thesis is seeking should take a step back to the initial connections with the semantic field of theater. In fact, the terms *acting* and *appear*⁸ may be suitable to talk about the self. That is also because, as it will be expanded later, scholars such as Judith Butler reject the objective existence of roles. As a matter of fact, she contends that roles are just an artificial construction based on social regulations. Our society tends to be

⁸ The term *appear* in this context is intended as the verb “to seem” (“appear”), from the others' perspective.

fixated by tendencies resulting from the gender binary and societal norms to which people are usually involuntarily subjected.

Since the concept of identity may start with a distinction that signs the second element of the *theatrical*, the distinction between the real and the artificial will be explored. A difference that has been revised and studied by almost everyone who tackled the topic. Theater *per se* is considered in the category of the artificial if we stand with performative and theatrical studies. How it is constructed, the lights, the characters, the plot, and the twists are all well-rehearsed and meticulously planned in each and every detail. The real, instead, is considered genuine because of the authenticity and the simplicity in which actions happen. The scholars that will be discussed in the next chapters, all have an opinion on the opposition between the artificial and the authentic. As it will be soon expanded, it is possible to notice how artificiality makes its way as the most accredited association with the terms each scholar has studied. Starting with Susan Sontag, it is possible to see how she contends that *camp* is the equivalent of exaggeration and artificiality. Posing *camp* as the origin of the term *theatrical*, I claim that the characteristics that Sontag listed may be appropriate and match the characteristics examined in this chapter. The *theatrical* has, for the majority of the scholars here mentioned, an artificial side. Therefore, it has a part that is ruled by the performance. Michael Fried also seems to know in which category the *theatrical* should be classified. Indeed, he considers the *theatrical* as false. That is because, in his view, what matches the exaggeration and the artifice is considered as something that must be created, that does not yet exist. Therefore, its absence can be found in the *naïve*, a quality belonging to *absorption*, the term that Fried describes as the exact opposite of theatricality. Proceeding in chronological order, Josette Féral's opinion is that the *theatrical* must be researched within the autonomous discourse that represents theater. In fact, she writes: "To affirm the 'theatrical' as distinct from life and from reality is the contradiction *sine qua non* of stage-related theatricality" ("Theatricality: The Specificity of Theatrical Language")

103). Féral believes that the concept of *theatrical* is what differs from the quotidian. Lastly, Judith Butler expands on the concept of real in comparison with exaggeration. As Davis and Postlewait highlight, the values that are often connected to theatricality are negative. As a matter of fact, they argue:

In this critique, performance is characterized as illusory, deceptive, exaggerated, artificial, or affected. The theatre, often associated with the acts and practices of role-playing, illusion, false appearance, masquerade, facade, and impersonation, has been condemned by various commentators, from Plato to Allan Bloom. This negative attitude, whether engaged or merely dismissive, has often placed theatre and performers at the margin of Western society (Davis and Postlewait 4).

In the same manner, Butler uses the concept of *parody*. Butler sees the gender binary as a constructed concept that is performed. Therefore, the bodily surface is what performs as real and eventually fails to embody the natural. The parody, which should contain “the original, the authentic, and the real” (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 146), is seen as a negative effect of this practice. It is interesting how this concept can be connected to the concept of performativity that Butler proposes. The theatricality in Butler is in the re-creation of performativity; that is because theatricality is in line with gender studies and therefore the concept of identity, a concept that Butler explores with the concepts of *performative agency* and *parody*. As Davis and Postlewait explain:

These approaches to the construction of identity have tremendous repercussions for the schisms and allegiances between new areas of study, suggesting that the commitment to agency and presence which unifies performance studies and theatre arts is compatible with feminist and gay/lesbian studies, questionable in relation to queer and perhaps inimical to performativity (Davis and Postlewait 38)

In Butler’s view, the loss of gender norms would result in a proliferation of gender configuration. Moreover, *parody*, which is seen as a repetition, would reveal the gender identity as an illusion. Intended, in this thesis, as artificial. As it will be possible to notice,

performability stays in the social sphere. That is because it is easier to divide this concept into a binary. A performative sphere – intended as a sphere that contains the artistic side of the concept of theatricality, the one that is more connected to the semantic part of the *theatrical* - and a social sphere – connected to its application in the quotidian life. Although these authors can be compared to see how this term has changed through time, the next move is to show if different disciplines can be adapted to a definition that brings these theories together.

The concept of identity and artificiality, although different, in the *theatrical* can work together to create roles in particular contexts. Performance and politics researcher Julia Peetz published an article named “Theatricality as an Interdisciplinary Problem,” in which she debates that theatricality can reveal some aspects of a person that are usually hidden in public. Particularly she seeks an answer in the political sphere as she investigates the cases of political distrust. In doing that, Peetz joins the conversation with scholars such as Josette Féral and Judith Butler. Peetz goes through the application of theatricality in the field of politics and claims that this is an interdisciplinary *problem*. When a politician enters the *theatrical*, Peetz claims that he/she steps in a theater-like context. Therefore, these two spheres merge leaving the binary out. In this regard, the audience is taken in consideration by both Peetz and Wilshire as the element of contradistinction between the sphere of theater and the sphere of life. Peetz, however, discusses this topic as problematic because a politician, being a public figure, should act for real-life problems. The politician, then, enacts a performance that causes the distrust of the public. Even though, she tries to find a cause behind this undeniable effect that brings the distrust of the masses: “[disbelief between the performer and its audience] is so because theatricality opens up a split that fictionalizes the performer, abstracting them by selecting certain key features for public performance” (Peetz 65). Through this theory, the elements of space and time are seen as key elements to distinguish the two spheres and, moreover, these two coordinates are fundamental to the concept of the *theatrical*. Returning to the case of the

politician, if he/she is seen by the audience as a parody of himself/herself, the job he/she does is taken seriously. The politician becomes a fictionalized character that should work for a nation. The problem, consequently, is that people who work as politicians will not show any fragmentation of themselves but just a constructed version. Therefore, the role the politician gets to play in front of an audience will not show any bits of reality, just the fictionalized version of it. A person would have many aspects to show in order to display the reality of their being. For this reason, in order to be in the performative sphere, a person should hide more than one aspect of themselves. Peetz argues:

[T]he reduction of a multiplicity of possible dimensions down to two or three features and their development into a coherent public persona on the basis of the resulting persona's anticipated success in public performance is distinctly theatrical (Peetz 65).

It should be considered that when we talk about public figures such as politicians or stars in general, their characters are always constructed with a purpose. In fact, public people act in a pre-scripted way. In the case of a politician, their behavior would be modified depending on the occasion and the goal they have in mind. The same thing happens with movie stars. They would change their answers to interviews or their behavior in front of fans or paparazzi depending on the occasion. As a matter of fact, many celebrities have a team of people who work on their characters. By studying the audience, the team creates the perfect character to launch. Therefore, the politician or the star has to wear a mask and behave according to the pre-fixed role created for the character they are going to play in public.

The importance of the elements of space and time in theatricality remains one of the fundamentals. The setting, in fact, can help to define some of the differences between the performative sphere and the social sphere. This thesis takes up the challenge posed by the term *theatrical* trying to connect what may be considered equivalent terms. In this regard, theatricality has been studied and discussed in relation to an exaggerated display of artificial

connotations⁹. Nevertheless, between the performative sphere and the social sphere, there is room for a sphere that may lie in between. Indeed, the investigation may take two different turns: a total opposition of these two concepts or a possible relation between theater and life can be found in this concept. That is because both takes can be valid, depending on the field of study which is addressed. In fact, if the “theater as life” trajectory is followed, it would be possible to find a new nuance that lies between these two opposite takes. Bruce Wilshire, in 1990 published an essay named “The Concept of Paratheatrical” in which he introduces this new concept that lies between theater and life. In Wilshire’s opinion, the paratheatrical is a concept among the “para,” which is meant as a borderline definition of a concept situated halfway between at least two areas of studies. For these reasons, the paratheatrical might create confusion as it may seem to fit into more than one category. Consequently, more than one or two fields of study are introduced in this conversation in order to find a fitting category. Nevertheless, an important aspect that Wilshire mentions regarding the paratheatrical is that this concept lies in the division that Wilshire himself makes. A division that goes beyond the real and the artificial and also beyond the spheres of theater and life:

For when we extend the idea of the theatrical beyond its traditional confines of artistic performance we are crossing the line which divides fiction from fact and attempting to apply categories of fiction to the domain of fact (Wilshire 169).

As it is understandable, the inquiry that this thesis is following does not have just one right path or discipline to follow. In fact, certain boundaries that until this moment seemed defined might rather be blurred. The concept of the *theatrical* is cross-disciplinary and, depending on which one we focus on, the comparison between the two spheres may lean more to one side than the other. However, following this sociological line of thought, the one clear concept we own is

⁹ See the article “On Theatricality” by Andrew Quick and Richard Rushton to read an overview of authors who explored the artificiality of the term over the traditional meaning.

that the theater is different from human life. One belongs to the artistic and performing world, “fiction,” while, on the other hand, there is the “factual,” the realm that belongs to the real world. At this point, it is important to mention that Wilshire was well aware of Goffman’s theory and, as a matter of fact, he mentions him in his essay. Goffman, as it has been already mentioned, sees theater as a metaphor for human life. A life that is full of roles that people should play in certain “scripted” situations. People, then, act like characters in certain situations, as if they had masks. To this extent, it is important to check the way in which a person behaves in a specific situation. Because of factors such as time, space, and audience, each act will appear different. Elements such as these will be seen in a way in the sphere of performance that differs from the human and social sphere. Even though, the sphere that lies in between, the paratheatrical, may combine the elements of both the *theatrical* and the social sphere. The time, which is limited on a stage, in real life is unlimited. Even though the interactions may be staged. That would mean that, whenever a person performs in real life, the act could go on for some time more than two hours as it happens in shows. Therefore, that might create problems since the performance would stay in the domain of theater even though the space in which it is enacted is not a stage. The space in theater is the stage, as we are all aware of, while in the social sphere, the spaces are all those places in which social events may be enacted. Lastly, the audience represents the third element that creates a distinction between the two spheres. In theater, the audience might be considered passive to the events that are happening on a stage¹⁰, while in real life the audience is made of people who observe and judge, but that can intervene. In the case in which the audience becomes active, the member of the

¹⁰ It must be considered that there are shows in which the audience is actively participating to the play. For instance, interactive theater engages audience in the performances. For further information read the article “Understanding Audience Participation in an Interactive Theater Performance.”

audience in question would become an actor. In this regard, Wilshire tries to explain how the elements of these two spheres might be in conversation:

It is not just that we put some actions on a stage and call them theatrical in some extended sense, but by so doing they are encapsulated in space and time and buffered from the larger ongoing world to a much greater extent than are the theatrelike behaviors of everyday social life. They *are* importantly different ... The trick is to see simultaneously both the similarities and the differences between a staged paratheatrical event and a social function (Wilshire 172).

Paratheatrical, then, has elements inspired by real life situations. Situations that may reach the limits of what is socially acceptable. For example, if during a performance a person is harmed, how can violence be considered a mere performance? Wilshire, on this matter, talks about the limits that belong to the ethical and existential domain. An act that is performed on a stage should carry fictional elements within the *theatrical* world. On a stage, artificiality should be the main element that engages the audience in a performance. On the other hand, an act performed in the real world should respect the rules of the society in which it is enacted. If cruelty is played by someone, the consequences would be also performed in the real world. The actual world does not have a protected area as the stage does. A human action, therefore, would have consequences that are irreversible. On a stage, instead, a cruel action can be repeated millions of times, but nevertheless, would always be fake. The actor has the privilege to switch from the role he/she is playing on stage to other roles. Likewise, the role he/she is playing in the authentic world would be paused when he/she returns on a stage. That is because, in this case, the two spheres are to be separated. In this regard, Wilshire comments:

There is, finally, another way to try to contain the vexing dialectic of the fictional and the factual in human life – the dialectic of “role playing” and identity. It is too deeply realize that, for us, all theatrical and paratheatrical performance is inherently limited, circumscribed within a larger domain of human action and experience. This limitation applies even to the farthest reaches of the paratheatrical, where it fades off into

something essentially different-the hyperextended metaphorical sense of “performance” in the various social situations of life (Wilshire 177).

Acting, then, is just a typical feature of human life, in Wilshire’s opinion. Roles then must be pertinent to time and space. If a person plays a role in real life, he/she cannot look back and ask himself/herself how he/she did. That is a theater like behavior. In real life, a person can just accept the consequences of their action and modify them at their best. It can be said that, socially, the *theatrical* enters the reality of ethical questions. All the parts involved require an answer to the infamous question of “to be or not to be”, is the *theatrical* a concept that lies in between theater and life and has to do with identity? In this sense, each person is always searching their true self. Identity, in fact, is such a personal thing that is usually hard to define with words and even more difficult is to categorize it into a sphere that belongs only to one realm. So is the *theatrical*. Society has an important role in defining one’s identity. In this regard, it is important to expand a little bit on the opposition of artificiality versus reality. If it is followed the trajectory of the roles, it can be said that the *masquerade* of a person is their artificial part. Roles are often seen as a gimmick. In this view, roles are a method through which people mask their true selves. Therefore, the logic would acknowledge the real part as the one that is carefully kept as a secret. In most cases, a part that is only revealed with a few other selected people. It is important to underline that this antithesis is widely discussed, and in fact, it is often associated with the *theatrical* and its facets.

Through each of the authors that will be examined in the next chapters, it will be possible to expand the concept of theatricality and take up the challenges that this term proposes. That is the reason why the beginning of this research would be set in the 60s. Susan Sontag, in fact, is the first to praise the exaggeration and the artificiality she found in the term *camp*. For this reason, as it will be further explored on the chapter dedicated to her, the term that Sontag widely explored in her essay may be linked to the *theatrical*, as it will be done with the other terms proposed. In the following chapters, each author will be explored in aspects

such as time, space, the dichotomy between real and artificial, and inquiries that may be made on identity. These elements will lead this research to connect all these authors together with the purpose of tracing an epistemological trajectory of this term by distinguishing the role of theater in its traditional term from the new meaning of the *theatrical*. Please note that not all the authors who talked about the *theatrical* are here mentioned, even though it is important to make this disclaimer as only the scholars mentioned in figure 1 will be more deeply investigated¹¹. The next chapter looks at the origin of the term *theatrical* coined and used in the visual arts by Michael Fried. I mentioned the fact that the *theatrical* can be seen as an aesthetic concept, and Fried's work addresses that view. The artistic field should be the first explored in order to find connection with the linguistic and cultural concepts that this term may have created over time.

¹¹ Many authors have studied the earlier use of terms such as *theatrical*, *theatricalism* or *theatricality*; although these are terms that hints at the contrary of sincere or natural, these terms carry the judgement of an artificial behavior (idea that also shared by the authors here studied). I suggest consulting the introduction of *Theatricality* to have a bigger picture of the scholars who talked about this topic.

Michael Fried: Between Theatricality and Absorption

2.1 Absorption and Theatricality: The Dichotomy in Art

The *theatrical* – as a set of characteristics that may resemble stage dynamics - is a concept that needs to be expanded on when applied to a certain field of study. In fact, theatricality, as an interdisciplinary concept, can be studied to identify certain characteristics that may function in a specific field. This thesis, hence, wants to find out the various connotations of the term *theatrical* and discover the shared characteristics of each field. By analyzing the five main authors with their own interpretations of theatricality – each applied to their field of study – it will be possible to trace a line that is able to connect the various aspects of this term in an interdisciplinary inquiry. In this chapter, in fact, Michael Fried will be discussed in order to begin our inquiry. By discussing Fried's work, some aspects can be more relevant than others if discussed in comparison with other scholars such as Sontag, Butler, and Féral. Sontag, for example, in this thesis is recognized as the very origin that connects the authors I chose to analyze, all linked by one concept: the *theatrical*. She has been placed first because I believe that the *theatrical* may be illuminated by her work on the term *camp*. Sontag had an original take that had a huge impact on the perception of what Western culture means to people. *Camp*, at the beginning of the 1960s, was an innovative way of reading society. It was something so spread and consequently, it was possible to find anywhere. It was within many forms of art as much as in life that nowadays *camp* can be easily recognized as something excessive and very identifiable. A trend that is able to move masses, and that is why these authors will be compared within this thesis. However, on the other hand, if Fried's ideas are compared with Sontag's, Fried certainly has a more traditional take on the term *theatrical*. Despite the fact that the term *theatrical* can apply to art, Fried definitely has a view that is

comparable to Sontag's. In the homonymous essay contained in *Art and Objecthood*, he uses Minimalist art, which he names Literalist art¹², to expand the meaning of art in history. Both Fried and Sontag consider history as a device to explain how art may be likable or not to the public. Particularly, Fried uses a word that can be easily linked to Sontag's "Notes on 'Camp'" since she sees *camp* as a sensibility:

From its inception, literalist art has amounted to something more than an episode in the history of taste. It belongs rather to the history - almost the natural history - of sensibility, and it is not an isolated episode but the expression of a general and pervasive condition ("Art and Objecthood" 148-149).

As it is comprehensible, art is not only associated with taste or an aesthetic as one may think. It is a concept that does belong to history, and it is a sensibility. A sentiment that is pervasive, as Fried confirms. However, Minimalist art – since it is the art that Fried takes as a case of study – may seem to conflict with its own time. That is because the position of Minimalism seems almost antithetical to its own sensibility. Even though it may seem strange at first, Literalist Art is in between exaggeration and banality. History and time are factors that help the audience to decide the popularity or not of a movement. The negotiation of art – in which it is possible to observe the relationship between object-beholder - gives space to the theatricalization of the whole process. A process that decides which is the current taste. In fact, this theory found its basis in the material objects of art, which are sculptures and paintings. Fried contends that Minimalist art is *theatrical*. In fact, he states that: "Literalist sensibility is *theatrical* because, to begin with, it is concerned with the actual circumstances in which the beholder encounters literalist work" ("Art and Objecthood" 153). The standards, therefore, are set by time and, of course, by the audience of that certain period who can praise or destroy a work. Time is the factor that decides if a work of art is a masterpiece or is already outdated. In

¹² Fried, in his works, uses to call the Minimal art as Literalist Art.

fact, this is also what Sontag contends when talking about *camp*, even though she does not directly address an audience. In this regard, she writes:

Time liberates the work of art from moral relevance, delivering it over the Camp Sensibility... Another effect: time contracts the sphere of banality (Banality is, strictly speaking, always a category of the contemporary.) What was banal can, with the passage of time, become fantastic (*Notes on 'Camp'* 20).

Literalist Art is a general and pervasive condition if the audience of that time agrees. However, it is to consider that Sontag sees art as something that may be temporary and yet it can be turned into something of a timeless value. In fact, Sontag demonstrates that *camp* refers to a strain of exaggeration that can be observed in art as much as in every product of life (i.e., films, public figures, characters, objects, art, etc.). What I want to highlight is Fried's description of the Minimalist turn as belonging to "the natural history - of sensibility, and it is not an isolated episode but the expression of a general and pervasive condition" ("Art and Objecthood" 148-149). Art cannot be considered entirely natural, but rather the opposite. Therefore, when Fried says that this movement is a "plea for a new genre of theater" ("Art and Objecthood" 153), the metaphor becomes clearer. It is a sensibility that may be in the eyes of the beholder; therefore, the perspective of each individual would create the sensibility. When connected to a work of art, the term *theatrical* might suggest the use of certain techniques – for example, the *chiaroscuro*¹³ - to create a theater-like effect. Some features might appear more relevant than others just because of the use of light, exactly as it happens in theaters¹⁴. Therefore, the result

¹³ The *chiaroscuro* is a technique used to create a contrast of lights to create a sense of volume in the subject of the painting – that could be a figure or an object. To know more about this read the article on the website of Virtual Art Academy that will provide a clear definition and some visual examples. www.virtualartacademy.com/chiaroscuro/

¹⁴ Lightening has a special importance on a stage as it helps to reflect the mood of character or of the play in general. To know more about it read *The Art of Light on Stage: Lighting in Contemporary Theatre* by Yaron Abulafia.

would be similar to a theater stage dynamic – the subject is illuminated at the center of the stage while the play goes on all around him/her. A dynamic that it is possible to see in many paintings, Caravaggio's paintings, for example, would come to mind instantly. Nevertheless, paintings, as well as sculptures, may carry the notion of storytelling for whoever stops and looks at these works of art. Fried, in fact, discusses the term *theatrical* in a different way. In order to understand how the *theatrical* can be applied to the artistic field, we should determine the basis of his theory. In fact, at the end of the 60s, Michael Fried became prolific in writing criticism about arts, specific periods, and artistic movements. Fried, an art critic and art historian, focuses on the historical development of art. One of the most important issues that he proposes is the relationship between a painting and its beholder. This focus allows him to affirm that theatricality can be found in art. Before diving into his theory, it is important to properly introduce the relationship that, building on Fried, we might mean with the term *theatrical*. In his book, *Art and Objecthood*, Fried explores the connection between an object and a beholder that is later re-elaborated in *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*. As a matter of fact, Fried expands on the relationships that places objects and beholders in a conversation while providing a context for the issue of theatricality. Fried draws on contemporary writings to establish what theatricality may mean. For this reason, he is the first theorist that I draw on to discuss an eventual inquiry into the *theatrical* within the artistic field. But what does this term mean for the aim of this research?

Michael Fried's connection with the *theatrical* comes from the very contrast between *theatrical* and *absorption* that he discusses in *Absorption and Theatricality*. The *theatrical* in fact is a term that Fried uses and examines in his critiques, a term that Fried applies specifically to art works that are seen as objects. Since theatricality is a concept that is often related to the stage as a space in which a performer is able to play a role in a show, the fact that Fried connects theatricality to objects may seem a hazardous choice at first. However, the concept of

theatricality may change depending on the context that surrounds it, and in the case of Michael Fried's theatricality, this term tends to revolve around the effect that an inanimate object may have before the eyes of those who watch – the beholder. Even though this concept may seem approachable, it is important to understand which movements of art may be associated with the connotation of theatricality. Patricia Smyth in her article "Theatricality, Michael Fried, and Nineteenth-Century Art and Theatre," discusses the application of Fried's definition of *theatrical*. Smyth recognizes that the application of the *theatrical* may change from artist to artist and in fact, she compares Fried's theory with the works of Delaroche¹⁵. She compares the two since Fried's works are based on how the French painter was viewed in his own time:

Fried's definition of theatricality is based on Diderot's negative response to the rhetorical performance style of his own time in which, according to Diderot, the players arranged themselves in a semi-circle and addressed the audience rather than one another. Diderot argued that a figure that acknowledged the beholder – that appeared preoccupied by the aim either to please or to communicate – could not, at the same time, express a given emotion authentically. Hence, in painting, attitudes that were self-consciously graceful or over-blown were deemed 'theatrical' (Smyth 5).

The *theatrical*, as it is possible to read in Smyth's article, is something that applies to those who watch as if the art had a soul. Even though, art is in reality just an object. The point that Fried tries to emphasize is, in fact, that objects can communicate something, and at the same time, they demand a response from the beholders. A connection that is necessary to underline for the purpose of this investigation. As Patricia Smyth claims: "For Fried, theatricality is clearly a negative value, as it was for nineteenth-century critics, for whom it suggested qualities of exaggeration and inauthenticity" (Smyth 5). The term *theatrical* may take a negative value, as it was analyzed in the first chapter, and that is because of its association with qualities such

¹⁵ Paul Delaroche was a French painter and teacher during the period between classicism and romanticism. His style, however, was mostly related to the realist movement. To know more about his early life and his works read Britannica's article "Paul Delaroche".

as exaggeration and artifice. Are these terms, however, negative? Not necessarily. It is important to distinguish between the terms that Fried suggests in order to develop his concept of theatricality. In *Art and Objecthood*, for instance, Fried claimed that theatricality was something to be condemned in paintings. This is exactly the opposite of what can be defined as natural. In order to better understand the concept of *theatrical* evoked by Fried, it is also important to analyze its antithesis: *absorption*. In *Absorption and Theatricality*, Fried explains that in painting, *absorption* means “obliviousness or unconsciousness of the figure or figures in question to everything other than the specific objects of their absorption” (*Absorption and Theatricality* 31). In fact, it can be noticed that in all the works of art he analyzes there is a central character who is doing something, who is absorbed doing something¹⁶. That may have happened since Fried’s work suggests that a *theatrical* turn within the artistic field took place, and it has to do with the presence of a beholder.

In order to simplify the distinction between those two concepts, some visual examples will be provided. Despite the fact that pictures cannot be properly analyzed since this is not my field of study and therefore, I want to demonstrate that just by observing a picture, it is possible to capture the essence of what absorption means for Fried. As can be seen in figure 2, the *absorption* of the main character cannot go unnoticed. In this painting, it is possible to observe how the subject is absorbed in painting or drawing something. At least, this is the first connection one can make by watching the painting. However, scanning through many paintings by French artists¹⁷ in the mid-1700s, it is possible to notice that in this theory there is more to

¹⁶ Fried’s absorption is the same as the Cambridge definition of absorption, which is the: “complete interest in something” (Cambridge Dictionary).

¹⁷ Fried analyzes works of art by artists such as Jean-Baptiste Greuze, Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin, Carle Van Loo, François Boucher, Nicolas Poussin, etc.

be uncovered. In fact, the subject of a painting cannot be considered absorbed just because of the place of the object he/she pays attention to. As a matter of fact, Fried clarifies:

The absorptive activities previously considered involve the faculty of attention, and attention naturally involves consciousness ... involuntary, and unconscious actions were perceived by critics of the early and mid-1750s as signs of intense absorption and for that matter of rapt attention. More generally, we have inferred that for French painters of those years the persuasive representation of absorption characteristically entailed evoking the obliviousness or unconsciousness of the figure or figures in question to everything other than the specific objects of their absorption (*Absorption and Theatricality* 31).



Figure 2 after Chardin, Jean Siméon; *The Draughtsman*, 33 × 20.6 cm, Librairie des Bibliophiles, Paris, 1876, cat. no. 14.III, p. 18; Accessed Aug. 12, 2023, from The Metropolitan Museum of Art database <www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/340283>.

What Fried means by *absorption* is not unrelated to theatricality. It has been made clear that absorption has to do with the relationship between painting and the beholder, in which the painting – that is an object but also the subject in this relationship. The interesting aspect of *absorption* is that the subject of the painting is not aware of being watched by an audience, which is the beholder. That is to say that the presence of the beholder is neutral. Contrary to theatricality, *absorption* does not need to attract the attention of beholders. The figures that can be found in absorptive works of art are not made for an audience. My affirmation may sound puzzling, yet art is made to be looked at. If on the one hand, we have theater that is made for an audience, a real public, works of art, on the other hand, have the possibility to be private. There are private collections of art that contain masterpieces and yet they will not be shown to the public. Their greatness and performativity in the eyes of a beholder would remain private by choice. That is because, with works of art, there is a choice, in theater there is not. Theater has to be watched by an audience. Therefore, it can be said that absorption may be connected to natural things and action, the so-called real. In absorptive painting, the action of the subject seems to be spontaneous. Actions that do not necessarily need an audience who watches. Being absorbed, hence, seems a natural action, and almost mechanic: an action that any person can do in his/her everyday life. Absorption is what we do every day, when we move around and do things naturally, not thinking that someone is observing us. When a person is aware of being watched instead, it is because that person may be playing a role or may be a performer. On a stage the dynamic changes irrevocably, the subject becomes aware of being observed and hence he/she will know he/she stands before an audience. The exact same thing happens with the *theatrical*. In this regard, Fried wrote in *Absorption and Theatricality* that:

But he [Diderot] continued to express his distaste for the theater as he knew it and in his writings on painting used the term *le théâtral*, the theatrical, implying consciousness of being beheld, as synonymous with falseness. The opposite of the grimacing, the mannered, and the theatrical was *le naïf*, the naive (100).

It is important to say that Fried draws a lot on Diderot's work¹⁸ when he talks about theatricality. As a matter of fact, the opposition he creates between the *theatrical* and the *naïve* can be compared to the antithesis made in the previous chapter between real and artificial. A dichotomy that will appear again and again in order to unpack this concept. In the revised version of *Art and Objecthood* (1998), firstly published in 1967, Fried wrote an introduction to his art criticism in which he addresses some of his theories expanding on his own words. On this matter, he clarifies the opposition between absorption and theatricality:

The antithesis of absorption was theatricality, playing to an audience, which quickly emerged as the worst of all artistic faults. Indeed, the issue of theatricality was from the outset defined in the starkest possible terms: either the figure or figures in a painting seemed entirely oblivious to being beheld or they stood condemned as theatrical (*Art and Objecthood* 48).

In *Art and Objecthood*, Fried explores the theatricality of objects. That is important since Fried theorizes that theatricality can be recognized in works of art in the relationship that the beholder has with an object *per se*. In fact, the value of theatricality can be acknowledged because of the relationship between art and beholder. That is because, depending on the period that Fried analyzes, there are currents that get along with the general idea of the beholder of that particular period. For example, in *Absorption and Theatricality*, there are pictures that date back to neoclassicism, a period that had a certain judgment for that period of art that may differ from the beholders of today. Therefore, the beholder is fundamental to understanding the value of art.

In the essay "Art and Objecthood", Fried uses Literalist art to analyze the current of people's thoughts about art and artists. Such a move, moreover, can be considered great since

¹⁸ Denis Diderot was a prominent figure during the period of the Enlightenment. He was a French philosopher, art critic, and writer, who co-founded the *Encyclopédie* of which he was also chief editor, and contributor. See "Denis Diderot and the Aesthetic Point of View" written by David K Holt to know more about his critic thinking.

the Minimalist art movement was spreading at the same time Fried was writing about objecthood. Minimalist Art takes the name of Literalist because of its sort of ubiquitous presence that won't change depending on the positioning of the beholder. To better understand what is meant by Minimalist art, I want to emphasize Fried's thesis on the art displayed at the time. As a matter of fact, Fried wrote some letters that he originally published in *Art International*. Within his publication in which he analyzes the works of art of various artists of the time¹⁹, it's possible to see the art of Gene Davis, a painter who is best known for his acrylic paintings of colorful vertical stripes (see Fig. 3). After expressing his opinion on the work of Davis, Fried goes on explaining Davis's technique. In doing that, Fried underlines a specific important aspect that belongs, not only to the specific example here reported but also to Literalist art:

In Davis's paintings, however, there is no internal logic governing the number or width of the stripes; the painting simply goes on until the artist decides it or he has had enough and breaks it off. Nor are the stripes elements in a primarily visual whole: it seems to me that we are encouraged to read them one at a time, or in small clutches, rather than to take them all in at a single glance-there are too many for that in any case... Finally, there is a dependence in these canvases upon other orders of experience than painting, such as reading and music. But the dependence is not a profound or even an interesting one; on the contrary, what Davis is after is roughly equivalent to the repetition of two or three notes followed by the (virtually random) banging of a dissonant chord ... Davis plays with the notion of a visual counterpart to musical counterpoint by means of his colored stripes. The purely notational, rather than structural or visual, function of the stripes could not be clearer, and it is hard to know how to read the blank canvases other than as the equivalent of completely silent musical voices (*Art and Objecthood* 306-307).

¹⁹ In *Art and Objecthood*, Fried collected various letter in which he analyzes artists and their art. Among the names it's possible to find Oldenburg, Chamberlain, Indiana, Warhol, Johns, Hofmann, Davis, Noland, Thiebaud, Kelly, Poons, Judd, De Kooning, Olitski, Jenkins, Twombly, and Irwin.



Figure 3 Gene Davis; *Apricot Ripple*, Sheet and image 56.2 x 76.2 cm, not on view, 1968; accessed Oct. 10, 2023, from Smithsonian American Art Museum database <www.americanart.si.edu/artwork/apricot-ripple-71506>

The point of Literalist art, therefore, is that the experience that the beholder may have once the work of art is in front of them goes beyond the frontiers of logic. It may happen that the theatricality of this experience may overlap with the absorption since the beholder is responsible for his/her own interpretation of art. Fried, as a beholder, finds faults in Davis's art where others may find a sense of wonder – an absorption. In the relationship between object and beholder, there is intimacy because of the space created where object and subject can communicate. That space is what ensures the situations in which the Literalist work depends on the beholder, and vice versa. The beholder feels addressed and has a natural reaction to the addresser – the object. In the same way, the object is incomplete without the beholder since he/she would create an intimate relationship in which emotional proximity can be unraveled. In this relationship, the object and the beholder may be compared with the actor-audience relationship that can be found in theaters. Fried distinguishes theater from the *theatrical* as he

firmly believes that these two worlds cannot coexist. However, it's the intimacy that can be created the factor that can unearth similitudes between these two words. If the actor or a work of art is created to be watched, the audience or beholder is the one who should use their consciousness, not only to look at what is presented to them but also to look behind the meaning of what they are watching. The beholder has a double role in this relationship since he/she needs to use his/her critical thought to decode the art. That is because a more complex meaning may emerge out of what seems essential and basic on the surface. The performers may transmit to their audience the same vibes in shows with an underlying message. Their role may seem simple and plain at first, but the moral can change depending on who is watching because of the filters each beholder has. For example, the situation can be reenacted by two friends who read the same book for instance. To one of them the book could have seemed simple, with a plain plot and no real moral or meaning between the lines. While on the other hand, the other friend thought that reading the book was a life-changing experience. That same book could touch something that was dear and familiar to that person. It's all about perception. That is just one example, but I think that this can be applied in many contexts. The perception can change from one person to another, and moreover, the perception of a single person may change over time and from situation to situation. That is why the context and the people involved are important when a situation should be analyzed. And if that can be analyzed in any situation, it can be applied to art. Therefore, the perception of the beholder is the only perception that can classify a painting or a sculpture as *theatrical*. That is why the relationship between art and beholder is so strong. The beholder, therefore, seems to have the power to change the perception of the arts. Consequently, the beholder or the audience can be considered as the critic in this situation, a person that can affect the general opinion of something as its role is to witness.

To explain the relation that Literalist art has with the beholder, however, it is necessary to clarify the whole point of Fried's original criticism. The works of Literalist art are objects that encounter situations in which they need to face the beholders, as a need. The relationship between the object and the beholder becomes fundamental to understanding the qualities of theatricality in certain works of art. That is because a distinction between the *theatrical* and the value of theatricality that Fried gives to certain works of art should be made. Fried in his essay discusses the relationship between object and beholder and says: "The largeness of the piece, in conjunction with its nonrelational, unitary character, distances the beholder - not just physically but psychically. It is, one might say, precisely this distancing that makes the beholder a subject and the piece in question . . . an object" ("Art and Objecthood" 154). What does this relationship have to do with the theatricality as a form of art? I suggest that this relationship that sees the beholder as "distant" is comparable with the classic theater-like situation. The beholder can be seen as the audience who observes the art object. The art, in this case, an art object – a painting or a sculpture – can be associated with a show of any theatrical piece that the audience watches. The relationship that Fried creates can be transformed into a theater-like situation. That is a peculiar situation since the objects can acquire the status of *theatrical*. Therefore, the situation becomes the factor that brings a difference. As Fried suggests in the introduction, a Minimalist piece of art can be considered *theatrical* since literalism tends to theatricalize bodies:

My critique of the literalist address to the viewer's body was not that bodiliness as such had no place in art but rather that literalism theatricalized the body, put it endlessly on stage, made it uncanny or opaque to itself, hollowed it out, deadened its expressiveness, denied its finitude and in a sense its humanness, and so on. There is, I might have said, something vaguely monstrous about the body in literalism (*Art and Objecthood* 42).

The objects are seen as bodies on a stage. Bodies that are up there to perform in front of an audience. Theatricality in art is seen as something that seems to be forced and unnatural. As a

matter of fact, I think that Fried wrote this commentary thinking about what he previously said about the situation of the beholder: “The object, not the beholder, must remain the center or focus of the situation, but the situation itself belongs to the beholder - it is his situation” (“Art and Objecthood” 154). Therefore, the beholder remains the heart of the relationship, as the situation seems to be controllable in his view. That is a characteristic that also corresponds to what he intends with theatricality. However, we should keep in mind that Fried believes in the dichotomy theatricality-absorption, dichotomy in which theatricality is always in conflict with absorption. In fact, to better understand his stance, I want to show a work that Fried associates with the *theatrical*. However, I do not really agree with his stance; theatricality has to do with the composition of the work, but the beholder has a major role since the relationship between beholder and objects composes the meaning of the *theatrical*. Fried offers the example of the *Bellaricus Begging for Alms* (fig. 4). Even though I would not dive into a specific description of the painting, it is important to notice how the composition of the painting is built to shift the eyes of the beholder from the center of the scene to few details in the corner:

By this I mean that whereas traditional perspective projects a spatial illusion whose integrity and coherence are independent of the presence of the beholder at a specific position before the painting, perspective and spatial illusion in the *Belisaire* serve on the contrary to *project the beholder* - more precisely, to place the beholder to one side of the painting, away from the figure of Belisarius and almost directly in front of the mediating figure of the soldier (*Absorption and Theatricality* 156).

The position of the beholder, in fact, is what Fried considers the turn from *absorption* to something different – the *theatrical*. Because if the beholder has the power of being the one who decides the value of the work of art, the presence or not of this latter matters. If the same situation is thought in a social context, it would be logical to say that if the subject is aware of being beheld, his/her behavior would be different from the case in which he/she is unaware of being observed. In the same way, the antithesis between absorption and theatricality may result



Figure 4 David, Jaques-Louis; *Belisarius Begging for Alms*, 288 cm × 312 cm, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Lille, 1781; Accessed Aug. 12, 2023, from Wikipedia database <www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belisarius_Begging_for_Alms>.

in a paradox since the two qualities have opposite characteristics in a work of art. In this regard, Fried writes:

This paradox directs attention to the problematic character not only of the painting-beholder relationship but of something still more fundamental - the object-beholder (one is tempted to say object-"subject") relationship which the painting-beholder relationship epitomizes. In Diderot's writings on painting and drama the object-beholder relationship as such, the very condition of spectatordom, stands indicted as theatrical, a medium of dislocation and estrangement rather than of absorption, sympathy, self-transcendence; and the success of both arts, in fact their continued functioning as major expressions of the human spirit, are held to depend upon whether or not painter and dramatist are able to undo that state of affairs, to *de-theatricalize beholding* and so make it once again a mode of access to truth and conviction, albeit a truth and a conviction that cannot be

entirely equated with any known or experienced before (*Absorption and Theatricality* 103-104).

The paradox, therefore, lies in the very relationship between the object and the beholder. Art is a medium to manifest a sentiment. The artist, in fact, vehicles his/her emotion into the art he/she creates. However, art is nothing more than a processed material that has been shaped by the wise hands of the artist. Yet, this object can express emotions acquired by its creator. The sentiment that the object can transmit, however, is different in each beholder. The theatricality of an object seems to require a detachment from the art, but art somehow requires to be looked at. That is why the beholder is called to behold an object and enter into an experiential sphere in which the inanimate object is able to connect with a human being. The power of the artist is to give a soul to something inanimate, as an author gives characterizations to characters that are brought to life through performers. The beholder, as well as the audience, knows the truth and yet decides to believe the sentiments transmitted by art. Art has an audience. And each period of art has its audience. I suggest that theater and theatricality may be more similar than one can expect in this case. In fact, thinking about the relationship between actor-audience or between object-beholder, it can be noticed how the so-called paradox may be not so paradoxical. It all has to do with the roles. Of course, the roles of the actors are different from the roles that the audience has. In theater, the roles are well-distributed. The audience knows that they do not have the same power as the people on a stage. The audience's role is to observe, to watch, while the performers are doing their job. It can be said that the same dynamic might apply to the object and the beholder. In this comparison, the object is the performer, the "subject" to be observed, while the beholder is the audience, even though it can be considered a special one. Normally in a theater, the audience is not required to interpret messages given during the show, a reflection would usually come at the end of the show. In art the situation is different since art, as Fried argues, is in a state of objecthood – the emotions are the pure

interpretation of the beholder. Of course, art can be dynamic, and for this reason, many forms of art exist. However, as Fried argues quoting Diderot, in order to achieve sincerity, painters and dramatists need “to *de-theatricalize beholding* and so make it once again a mode of access to truth and conviction”; even though he sees theatricality as a detachment from the human spirit - since he criticizes the theatrical elements of a more decorative art such as Rococo, for example – the beholder would not necessarily build a wall between the object beheld and human emotions and experiences that he/she may feel. Nevertheless, art is art, an object to be beheld. Art can be spectacularized but that is not a synonym with theatricality, contrary to what one could think. The beholder can look at the work of art and think that he/she just saw a masterpiece, but that is not what renders the art *theatrical*. Fried distinguishes the types of audience and clarifies what kind of audience is the beholder:

Here it should be remarked that literalist art too possesses an audience, though a somewhat special one: that the beholder is confronted by literalist work within a situation that he experiences as his means that there is an important sense in which the work in question exists for him alone, even if he is not actually alone with the work at the time... Someone has merely to enter the room in which a literalist work has been placed to become that beholder, that audience of one almost as though the work in question has been waiting for him. And inasmuch as literalist work depends on the beholder, is incomplete without him, it has been waiting for him (“Art and Objecthood” 163).

It should be recognized that Literalist art, somehow, acknowledges its being an object. Minimalist’s works of art play with forms and abstraction. An abstraction that is up to interpretation. Being an abstract art, certain forms would not recall existing shapes or figures, instead the beholder is the one who has to translate an object into a meaningful message. As it emerges, therefore, the role that the beholder owns is fundamental. Fried's theory of theatricality emphasizes the relationship between an object and its beholder, therefore this relationship will be important to understanding which elements of theatricality Fried discusses.

2.2 The Negotiation Between Objects and Beholders

The relationship between an object and a beholder determines whether an artwork is *theatrical* or not. For this reason, I will now provide a more immersive reading of the homonymous essay contained in *Art and Objecthood* in order to see another lecture on the contraposition that can be found between *Theatricality* and *Absorption*. As Fried defines it, absorption is considered as the unconscious figure or subject of an art piece of the setting but a specific object that takes all his/her attention in a sense of absorption. The position of the work of art should be considered distant from the beholder, a figure that can be associated with the role of the audience. The absorbed subject – the figure in the work of art - is therefore unaware of who observes. That is because the subject is contained in the objecthood that Fried inquires. However, in the presence of a beholder, this changes. In this specific case, the object is brought to life in a way in which the object demands the attention of the beholder. That is the difference. From the moment in which the theatrical subject is aware that someone is looking at them and “acts” for them, the absorbed subject would remain in its state of objecthood somehow. That is because the theatrical subject may vary depending on the audience. The audience’s role however does not change, their role is to observe and value what has been observed. However, can theater and theatricality be related? Even though I contend that they can be compared, Fried has a specific take on the matter:

[T]heater and theatricality are at war today, not simply with modernist painting (or modernist painting and sculpture), but with art as such - and to the extent that the different arts can be described as modernist, with modernist sensibility as such (“Art and Objecthood” 163).

Fried strongly believes that these concepts are united when in relation to Literalist art. Although they may be differentiated as an art and a quality that can be given to art, Fried put these concepts together and divided his thesis in three parts in which he explains the reasons behind his belief. Roles are a huge matter if we think about a comparison between theater and

theatricality in art. For me, it would be natural to compare the beholder with a theater's audience as both of them observe and comment on what they look at. Nevertheless, Fried in his first point of the list called "*The success, even the survival, of the arts has come increasingly to depend on their ability to defeat theater*" ("Art and Objecthood" 163) clarifies the reasons for which he thinks that theater and theatricality are in conflict with art. Fried argues that theater properly exists to have an audience while art – in the specific case, Literalist art – is waiting for an audience. The work of art, however, would not be exposed with the sole purpose of having a beholder. Therefore, even though the work is to be looked at, "the work refuses, obstinately, to let him [the beholder] alone - which is to say, it refuses to stop confronting him, distancing him, isolating him" ("Art and Objecthood" 163-164). That is to say that the beholder is always in conversation with the art object. Art is the subject that requires to be in conversation with the beholder. Similarly, the relationship object-beholder resembles the role of an actor that communicates what his/her character is feeling with the audience. The question therefore is: what kind of communication does art have then? Is modernist sensibility overtaking theater? The paradox presented by Fried that directs attention to the object-beholder relationship, at the end is not a paradox at all. A relationship such as this needs two parts: one who observes and one to be observed. Consequently, Literalist art requires to be confronted by the beholder alone in order to receive an effect from what the beholder shows. However, it should be considered that the audience of a theater is composed of people. Each person has a different opinion on what he/she is watching despite being in an auditorium full of other individuals. It is all about perspective. Like the example of the book, every person would be touched by what is watching depending on his/her personal history. Certainly, individuals can be influenced by other thoughts, but that can happen with art as well. Nevertheless, Fried contends that there is one art that escapes theater completely, and that is cinema:

[M]ovies in general, including frankly appalling ones, are acceptable to modernist sensibility whereas all but the most successful painting, sculpture, music, and poetry is not. Because cinema escapes theater - automatically, as it were - it provides a welcome and absorbing refuge to sensibilities at war with theater and theatricality. At the same time, the automatic, guaranteed character of the refuge - more accurately, the fact that what is provided is a refuge from theater and not a triumph over it, absorption not conviction - means that the cinema, even at its most experimental, is not a modernist art ("Art and Objecthood" 164).

It is not clear how cinema could exclude theater since one is derived from the other. Actors would be actors on a stage as well as behind a camera. Fried assumes that cinema has an absorptive refuge, an effect that could come from theater too. Instead, he defines cinema as not belonging to Modernist art. That could be because cinema loses inevitably the state of objecthood, cinema can be watched and not simply gazed at or observed. Frame by frame, cinema shows something in evolution. A work of art, although it can take on many meanings, does not change or evolve. Without any other explanation, one could think that the role of actors is the same, however there is something that differs. As a matter of fact, Fried clarifies in a note that some characteristics help to separate the two arts:

Exactly how the movies escape theater is a difficult question, and there is no doubt but that a phenomenology of the cinema that concentrated on the similarities and differences between it and stage drama - e.g., that in the movies the actors are not physically present, the film itself is projected away from us, and the screen is not experienced as a kind of object existing in a specific physical relation to us - would be rewarding ("Art and Objecthood" 171).

According to this explanation, time and spatial coordinates are the factors that can change the relationship between the audience and art. Coordinates that I recognized as fundamental for the meaning of the *theatrical*. Elements that will be helpful in understanding Fried's take on cinema and theater. Actors on a stage can modulate their acting according to the reaction of the public, making their show more active and dynamic. On the other hand, a film remains static in the eyes of the audience since movies are finished products that are to be presented to the

masses. As a painting or a sculpture is. Therefore, it could be said that in Fried's opinion, within Literalist art – as much as in movies – the audience is present because the products are made to be beheld, even though their existence does not depend entirely on a live audience, as it happens in theater. Does that imply that works of art or cinema have a passive audience? I would not say that because the result created is just delayed and not as immediate as it is in theater. In both situations, the audience cannot directly intervene on the events. The awareness of the audience is indeed a crucial factor in establishing the theatricality of arts. In this regard I want to compare Fried's ideas with what Josette Féral said about the awareness of the audience; in her essay "Theatricality: The Specificity of Theatrical Language," she writes:

[T]heatricality consists as much in situating the object or the other in a 'framed theatrical space', as it does in transforming a simple event into signs in such a way that it becomes a spectacle. At this stage of our analysis, theatricality appears to be more than a property; in fact, we might call it a process that recognizes subjects in process; it is a process of looking at or being looked at ("Theatricality: the Specificity of Theatrical Language" 98).

From this quotation, it can be said that the relationship created by Fried – the one that sees a beholder and an object being in a sort of conversation – is something that we will need to keep in mind in order to expand his criticism. In other theories, such as Féral's, some of the aspects analyzed in this chapter will return. An example is the recognition of the object – or the art – that is what seems to create awareness in the beholder. The subject is created to be watched and the audience exists to behold. That is why I suppose the pairing would always be in conversation despite the context in which the audience transposes the art. Whenever immediate or posthumous, the audience would always be aware of the artifice of what is watching. It is important to underline that each form of art belongs to the field of fiction as it is something that is created for someone - the audience. Consequently, it is impossible to claim that distance may

change the theatricality of art since the audience would always be aware of being in front of something that is not natural.

The second point Fried makes is the one named “*Art degenerates as it approaches the condition of theater*” (“Art and Objecthood” 164). In this point, Fried argues that, within theater, distinct activities are linked together raising the problem of value and quality. He contends that there is a failure to recognize the difference between these; after providing an example²⁰, he writes:

[T]he real distinctions - between music and theater in the first instance and between painting and theater in the second - are displaced by the illusion that the barriers between the arts are in the process of crumbling ... and that the arts themselves are at last sliding towards some kind of final, implosive, highly desirable synthesis (“Art and Objecthood” 164).

The problem he raises is that arts are prone to be merged despite being very different from one to another. Music²¹, painting, sculpture, cinema, and theater are different things even though these all belong to arts. However, theater is considered a kind of art that lies between the other forms of art. In fact, the third and final concept that Fried explains in the contrast between theater and theatricality is “*The concepts of quality and value*” which is further explained inasmuch as “these are central to art, the concept of art itself - are meaningful, or wholly

²⁰ In the essay “Art and Objecthood”, Fried makes examples to further explain the point of quality by comparing the works of artist. The first example is made in the comparison between Elliott Carter and John Cage. Both modernist composers with two different and recognizable styles. See the documentary *Time Is Music: Elliott Carter and John Cage* if interested in understanding the differences in qualities that Fried hints at. The second example provides the distinction between “the paintings of Louis and those of Robert Rauschenberg” (164). Fried considers Cage and Rauschenberg as similar.

²¹ Music, however, is a form of art that cannot be experienced through the sight as much as the other forms of art can be experienced. However, Vincenzo Caporaletti wrote the “Theory of audiotactile music,” a theory that identifies those musical practices in which, on the one hand, the formativity of the musical text is fused with the musical actions performed by the musician in real time. A musical experience that concerns audiotactile cognitive matrix.

meaningful, only within *the individual arts*” (“Art and Objecthood” 164). Minimalist artists avoided the concept of qualities and values as they questioned the recognition of their own art as art. Therefore, what really mattered was to keep up/preserve the beholder’s interest. That is because Minimalist art is often compared with other forms of art that come from the past, times in which quality was the only thing that mattered. Minimalist art instead is recognizable for one specific characteristic: its inexhaustibility²². As a matter of fact, the factor of time seems to be key when compared to past works of art:

Endlessness, being able to go on and on, even having to go on and on, is central both to the concept of interest and to that of objecthood ... the experience in question *persists in time*, and the presentment of endlessness that, I have been claiming, is central to literalist art and theory is essentially a presentment of endless or indefinite *duration* (“Art and Objecthood” 166).

The sentiment of indefinite duration is what can be felt in a situation in which the audience is not aware of the presence of an audience. Literalist art, in a matter of time, seems to be its own very experience with time and duration:

The literalist preoccupation with time -- more precisely, with the *duration of the experience* is, I suggest, paradigmatically theatrical, as though theater confronts the beholder, and thereby isolates him, with the endlessness not just of objecthood but of *time*; or as though the sense which, at bottom, theater addresses is a sense of temporality of time both passing and to come, *simultaneously approaching and receding*, as if apprehended in an infinite perspective... That preoccupation marks a profound difference between literalist work and modernist painting and sculpture. It is as though one's experience of the latter *has no duration* - not because one in fact experiences a picture by Noland or Olitski or a sculpture by David Smith or Caro in no time at all, but because *at every moment the work itself is wholly manifest* (“Art and Objecthood” 166-167).

²² See figure 4. The repetition of the pattern – in this case the stripes – is a quality that correspond to the inexhaustibility of this type of art.

As it is well-known, *avant-gardes* are considered experimental and aesthetically innovative in their own time. A new art period that challenged what came before in a new visual aesthetic – in the case of paintings and sculptures. Instead, if other forms of arts are considered, such as music, cinema, literature, and theater, the innovation is extended to sounds, forms, and subjects. The whole experience becomes polyhedric since the finished work can be seen from multiple perspectives. A sculpture, for instance, can be seen from multiple angles depending on the point at which the beholder is standing. Therefore, the concept of time applied to the spatial coordinates of the beholder results as an implied temporality:

It is this continuous and entire *presentness*, amounting, as it were, to the perpetual creation of itself, that one experiences as a kind of *instantaneousness*, as though if only one were infinitely more acute, a single infinitely brief instant would be long enough to see everything, to experience the work in all its depth and fullness, to be forever convinced by it (“Art and Objecthood” 167).

That is to say that the interest of the beholder toward the work of art in question is pervasive. The interest of the latter would defeat theater, in Fried’s opinion. That is because theater, as well as music and cinema, has a definite duration. On the other hand, paintings and sculptures have the *presentness*, or more correctly, the concept of time for these forms of art is indefinite. Works of art, belonging to Literalist art or the period of Enlightenment, are destined to be conserved in a space that is available to the masses. Even though Fried says that Minimalist art cannot stop to confront the beholder alone, that beholder would inevitably come from a set of people interested in a specific artist or in a specific currency. That set of people would come from a larger group of people interested in art, and so on to a bigger group. But it is this specific adjective that is demonized by Fried’s theory. As Patricia Smyth also contends: “Theatricality has become associated with a kind of debased popular taste” (Smyth 7). That is constantly confirmed by Fried since he assumes that modernist art has an audience that belongs to the elite, an audience that has a sublime taste. That can be confirmed by the end of his third point:

I want to claim that it is by virtue of their presentness and instantaneousness that modernist painting and sculpture defeat theater. In fact, I am tempted far beyond my knowledge to suggest that, faced with the need to defeat theater, it is above all to the condition of painting and sculpture - the condition, that is, of existing in, indeed of evoking or constituting, a continuous and perpetual present - that the other contemporary modernist arts, most notably poetry and music, aspire ("Art and Objecthood" 167).

Therefore, the theater is defeated by the timelessness of art. His take, however, suggests that modernist audiences were alone able to engage with the complexity of what the artist created while popular art and theater could not. Yet popular art and theatre do not exclude challenges and experimentality. Fried focuses a lot on the differences he notices between what he considers authentic and what he defines as corrupted by theater. In the conclusion of the essay "Art and Objecthood," he writes: "We are all literalists most or all of our lives. Presentness is grace" (167-168). Therefore, that may imply that people may live a part of their whole life in a theatrical way. Yet Literalist art manifests its sense of temporality through the creation of their art, considered in a time of presentness. This implication may give this thesis a lead as F eral, Sontag, and Butler will provide a sociological take that can be transposed onto the cultural environment of arts. However, I want to clarify this concept of *theatrical* in Literalist art; In a note, Fried provides an example in which he better explains how he sees Literalist art. As he claims that theater and theatricality were at war, it is important to underline in which faction Literalist art is. In this regard, he writes:

Both [Literalist art and Surrealist art] employ imagery that is at once holistic and, in a sense, fragmentary, incomplete; both resort to a similar anthropomorphizing of objects or conglomerations of objects (in Surrealism the use of dolls and manikins, makes that explicit); both are capable of achieving remarkable effects of "presence"; and both tend to deploy and isolate objects and persons in "situations" - the dosed room and the abandoned artificial landscape are as important to Surrealism as to literalism ... This affinity can be summed up by saying that Surrealist sensibility, as manifested in the

work of certain artists, and literalist sensibility are both theatrical (“Art and Objecthood” 171).

The concept of theatricality that Fried proposes, then, corresponds to the negative qualities of exaggeration and inauthenticity, qualities that are applied to popular artists. The *theatrical*, to summarize, is opposed to the concept of *absorption*. That is because the *theatrical* is mostly connected to the unnatural, as Fried says quoting Diderot in the notes of *Absorption and Theatricality*: “The gravest fault of a dramatic poem is to have only theatrical passions, passions that are not natural, that are seen only on stage” (“Absorption and Theatricality” 218). Drawing on Diderot’s words, Fried distances his works from the art of theater as much as he can. Moreover, *absorption* is about the past of works of art that helped to maintain the nature of arts, while theatricality is more about contemporary artists and art. However, once one recognizes all the characteristics given to the *theatrical*, adding the important relationship between object and beholder, Fried’s take becomes clearer. In the space of theater, the audience exists in the present space of it as much as it happens in other forms of art such as cinema. Considering that theater has a lot of currency and genres, as it happened in any other forms of art, theater spaces from avant-gardes to more classical genres such as the theaters of ancient Greece and Rome. In this regard, Smyth talks about this contradiction insofar as Fried represents theatricality as a concept strictly connected with art. Theater, however, in his theory isn’t properly embraced as a proper form of art within other arts:

This apparent contradiction is explained by a phenomenon that Fried does not acknowledge: the anti-theatrical movement in the theatre itself. There, too, it was thought that the spectator's emotional engagement depended on the apparent absence of artifice. The strategies used to achieve the effect of authenticity on stage have striking parallels with those used by Delaroche. For a group of actors who began their careers in the melodrama theatres of the boulevard du Temple in the 1820s and 1830s, the 'real' became signified by qualities of awkwardness, incoherence, illegibility and apparent loss of control (Smyth 8).

Theater, as a result, can be as much authentic as any other form of art. Theatricality, as Smyth proves, has movements that seek authenticity. Antitheatricality, in fact, was born for any form of opposition to theater. A sentiment that was expressed by the society and individuals of the time; the government, philosophers, artists, playwrights, and religion were only a few categories that influenced the upturn of this new movement. Theater, as understandable, is the equivalent of fictional, the *theatrical* – being a term that derives from theater –an imitation of reality. Thomas Postlewait analyzes the anti-theater movement in Renaissance London and emphasizes that: “the playwrights often used the concept of theatre as a metaphor for hypocrisy and deceitfulness ... That is, they often used the theatre to attack the theatrical” (*On Theatricality* 103). As it has been remarked, theater and the *theatrical* are two concepts that despite being so connected by their semantic meanings, are different. One belongs to the space of theater and the other one can be applied to a cultural environment such as the artistic field. Postlewait, in fact, differentiates theater and theatricality by employing their qualities:

[T]heatricality functions as a societal ether, having both immaterial and material qualities; it spreads throughout all aspects of Elizabethan life, including the "collective consciousness" of everyone ... This theatrical consciousness (or is it a collective unconsciousness?) is more powerful apparently than ideology, royal power, or popular culture ... apparently all behavior is a theatrical process of self-fashioning ... the *theatrum mundi* metaphor as a comprehensive trope for analyzing the relationship between the theatrical community and the social and political structures of renaissance culture (*On Theatricality* 118-119).

Theatricality, therefore, is a suggestive idea that is pervasive in daily life. Despite the fact that Postlewait provides a clear example to understand this concept, the idea of *theatrum mundi* can analyze the relationship between the theatrical community and the social and political structures of Renaissance culture as much as the relationship between object and beholder²³.

²³ Postlewait explains the concept of *theatrum mundi* saying: “In the renaissance the idea of *theatrum mundi* was quite pervasive - far more commonplace in daily discourse than any antitheatrical attitude. Of course, *theatrum*

That is because the metaphor of *theatrum mundi* carries a referential significance while proposing a view of the world mirroring the dynamics of theater.

In conclusion, Fried argues that theatricality and theater are united at war with art as such even though sensibilities can come from this conflict. Considering that sensibilities are generated by the individual's perspectives of the world, the *theatrical* reflects the output of our society. Therefore, theater may be a fictional product, but it should be considered that art is primarily created for people's enjoyment, and they will perceive a work of art as valuable or not, whether realistic or artificial. Fried, therefore, criticizes works of art that he considers as *theatrical*. In doing so, he recognizes the importance of the beholder who beholds and values, using his/her own critical thoughts to decode the art that he/she is beholding, the object. Moreover, his criticism comprehends the spatial and temporal coordinates, elements that are fundamental to the concept of the *theatrical*. Fried argues that the experience that the beholder has with the object has an indefinite duration since "*at every moment the work [of art] itself is wholly manifest*" ("Art and Objecthood" 167). In the next chapter, it will be possible to understand how theatricality migrates from the artistic field to daily life. Josette Féral's take on theatricality will be discussed in order to see how the elements of theatricality recognized by Fried - such as artificiality and the importance of the beholder, space and time - evolve within the performative field as well as in daily life scenarios.

mundi could be used to express both positive and negative ideas about the relation between theatre and life. And it could be used for both tragic and comic purposes. It might be a metaphysical conceit about the divine drama of existence or a statement about simulation and dissimulation in human behavior" (On Theatricality 110).

Josette Féral: Theatricality Outside the Performative Arts

3.1 The Three Scenarios of Theatricality

Theatricality can be an adaptable term, and the *theatrical* has many applications and uses. The *theatrical* inquiry began with an investigation throughout the artistic field and Michael Fried's theatricality. In this chapter, Josette Féral, professor of drama at the University of Québec, will be analyzed since her research found its basis in theater and performative arts. Although Féral's area of competence is performance studies, she expands the concept of theatricality to spaces that are outside the performative arts. As a matter of fact, while she recognizes three scenarios of the *theatrical* that can be contextualized in a performative space as well as in a quotidian space, she creates a bridge between performative arts and daily matters. Féral conceives temporality within the quotidian – identified in the first chapter of this thesis as the social sphere - and the performative sphere. That would imply that theatricality would be analyzed in the performative sphere that is to be found in theater as well as in a sphere of what is common and near to everyone. A certain performativity that can be found within the everyday life. In order to do that, "Performance and Theatricality: The Subject Demystified," "Theatricality: The Specificity of Theatrical Language," and "From Event to Extreme Reality: The Aesthetic of Shock" are the essays that will be used to clarify the position of Féral toward theatricality. As mentioned before, the *theatrical* can be included in many fields that range from politics to arts, yet Féral explores the various applications in space and time that may concern theatricality. In this thesis, I employ a chronological development of the term *theatrical* as the term evolves and migrates outside the classical connection with theater. As a matter of fact, I employ that the concept of the *theatrical* inaugurated in the 1960s with Susan Sontag's concept of *camp*. Sontag analyzes this concept because of its elements that are attributable to the elements of

theatricality. Nevertheless, Sontag applies this concept to the cultural embedment of Western society. Theatricality is mostly connected to the semantic field of theater and performance, and for this reason, I decided to begin my inquiry within the artistic field. Josette Féral, therefore, is the second author analyzed because of her performative formation. Féral is chronologically the author who is closer in time to us. In fact, her essay was published in 2002, the year in which the *theatrical*, as it may be defined by Féral herself, may have become pervasive in Western culture. Josette Féral began her studies on the notion of theatricality in the 1980s and, in doing so, she provides a new version and vision of theatricality – that was later developed by Judith Butler’s *performative agency*. Moreover, discussing Féral right after Fried seems logical since she quotes Michael Fried in both of her essays. For me, this is an interesting choice from the moment in which he considers theater as an art that is “in between” other forms of art. However, in the conclusions of her essay “Theatricality: The Specificity of Theatrical Language”, she writes:

[T]heatricality is not a sum of enumerable properties or characteristics, but can be discerned through specific manifestations, and deduced from phenomena termed "theatrical." ... [the *theatrical*] can be found in dance, opera, and performance art, as well as in the quotidian. If the notion of theatricality goes beyond the theater, it is because it is not a "property" belonging to the subjects/ things that are its vehicles. It belongs neither to the objects, the space, nor to the actor himself, although each can become its vehicle ... This relationship can be initiated either by the actor who declares his intention to act, or by the spectator who, of his own initiative, transforms the other into a spectacular object. By watching, the spectator creates an "other" space, no longer subject to the laws of the quotidian, and in this space he inscribes what he observes, perceiving it as belonging to a space where he has no place except as external observer. Without this gaze, indispensable for the emergence of theatricality and for its recognition as such, the other would share the spectator's space and remain part of his daily reality ... theatricality is the imbrication of fiction and representation in an "other" space in which the observer and the observed are brought face to face. Of all the arts, the theater is best suited to this sort of experimentation (105).

The concept of theatricality, in Féral's opinion, goes beyond theater because, differently from Michael Fried's opinion, theatricality does not belong to objects. Theatricality is connected with the gaze and the space that is created by it. As a matter of fact, Féral analyzes the concept of theatricality through three scenarios in which elements of theatricality can be detected. However, as the latter quotation suggests, theatricality is to be found within the blurred lines of the real and the imaginary, in a third dimension that Féral calls the "other" space.

Nevertheless, Féral's research into the concept of theatricality wants to be as contemporary as possible, she asserts that in order to theorize theater, history should not be forgotten. In doing that she affirms: "As Roland Barthes has pointed out, the attempt to define a theory of theater is itself the sign of an era fascinated by theory. Recent dissemination of the notion of theatricality can lead us to forget its more distant history" ("Theatricality: The Specificity of Theatrical Language" 95). In this regard, she selected sources that helped her work dated the concept of theatricality only 10 years back. Therefore, in order to create a theory of the theatrical, one should remember what came before and what exists now. Féral reconstructs the idea of theatricality by implying that this idea may be linked to more than one aesthetic. In theater the aesthetic lies in the relationships between the participants – such as the performers and the audience – and the contexts in which they exist. In her essay "Theatricality: The Specificity of Theatrical Language," contained in the special issue of *Theatricality*, and it is co-edited with Ronald P. Bermingham, the concept of theatricality and its definition is expanded. In this essay, she retraces the very beginning of the theories that concern theatricality. As a matter of fact, she claims that the *theatrical* was born with the literary notion of the Prague School²⁴ and by works of authors such as Mercea Marghescou, Charles Bouazis,

²⁴ To know more about it read "The Prague School Theory of Theater," an essay written by Jiří Veltruský.

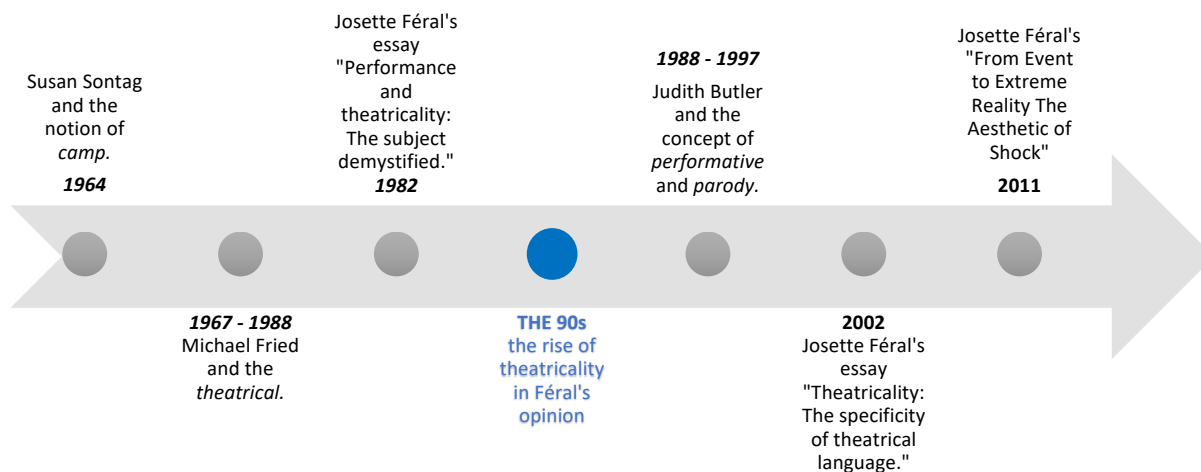


Figure 5 The evolution of the term *theatrical* and the rise of theory of theater.

and Thomas Aron²⁵ (fig. 5). What is really interesting for the purpose of this research is the way she applies to the term *theatrical* to various scenarios, as it will be asserted in this chapter. Féral suggests that theatricality needs spatial and temporal coordinates – a context – to recognize the situation in which the aesthetic belongs. Her aim is to spread the idea that theatricality exists in theater as well as in the quotidian life. Therefore, she contends that theatricality may migrate outside performative arts to other spaces. Her point, indeed, corresponds to the notion of theatricality within everyday life – as she points out, theatricality may correspond to “the property of the quotidian” as she asserts in the title of one of her paragraphs (“Theatricality: The Specificity of Theatrical Language” 95). In order to do that, she offers three different scenarios that set the conditions under which theatricality exists. The first scenario presented by Féral considers a theater stage all set for the show to begin even though the show has not started yet. As a result, the audience perceives the theatricality of the

²⁵ These authors here reported are names that Féral takes as examples for the beginning of the conceptualization of the theatrical. Mercea Marghescu wrote the essay *Le concept de littérature: essai sur les possibilités théoriques d'une science de la littérature*, first published in 1974. Charles Bouazis published in 1972 *Littérature et société: théorie d'un modèle du fonctionnement littéraire*. Thomas Aron published *Littérature et littérature: essai de mise au point* in 1984.

atmosphere even before the performers appear on stage. Based on the example given, Feral can state the following:

[T]he presence of the actor is not a prerequisite of theatricality. In this instance, space is the vehicle of theatricality. The subject perceives certain relations within that space; he perceives the spectacular nature of the stage. Space seems fundamental to theatricality, for the passage from the literary to the theatrical is first and foremost completed through a spatial realization of the text (“Theatricality: The Specificity of Theatrical Language” 96).

This first situation, as it is recognizable, is located in a theater. Space, therefore, is recognized by Féral as an essential element in defining theatricality. The coordinates of space and time are elements considered important since Féral argues that theatricality is to be found in contexts that are outside of the performative. To argue that point, Féral proposes a second situation that instead, takes place in a subway. The protagonists are two people. One is smoking and the other is complaining about it because smoking is against the rules in the subway. The audience is to be recognized by the other passengers who watch the scene. Picturing the scene, it is possible to see that there is a disproportion between the “no smoking” sign and a big billboard promoting cigarettes. The first thing that is noticeable out of this situation is the fact that the situation is not staged, on the contrary, the actions have casually happened provoking an invisible theatrical production²⁶. In such a situation, ordinary people become the performers who add theatricality to the situation. In this regard, in the essay “From Event to Extreme Reality – the Aesthetic of Shock,” which addresses the realness of violence in theatrical contexts, Féral argues that: “theatre, onstage – whether this is in a theatrical venue or a public space – all performative action calls upon theatricality” (“From event to extreme reality” 11). Theatricality can be found

²⁶ The invisible theater was created by the Brazilian theater practitioner Augusto Boal. This form of theater employs spaces where people would not expect to see a performance to invite people to take part of an unstaged event. To learn more about it read the article “Invisible Theater: Liege, Belgium, 1978.”

in a situation of the quotidian. In those situations, the participation of the audience is involuntary. Consequently, one would ask himself/herself if the theatricality of this situation would still be valid. That is because, as it was possible to see with Michael Fried, theatricality is made by a relationship between a performer and an audience. Usually, the audience is conscious of the fictional or artificial factors of what they are watching. But what happens if the audience is not aware of the performance? Féral answers to this question and writes:

[T]heatricality seems to stem from the spectator's awareness of a theatrical intention addressed to him. This awareness altered the way in which he looked at what was taking place; it forced him to see theater where before he saw only a chance occurrence. The spectator thereby transforms into fiction what he thought was a quotidian event. Re-semiotizing the space of the subway car, the spectator was able to displace signs and to interpret them differently, revealing both the fictional nature of the performers' behavior, and the presence of illusion where only commonplace reality had been expected. In this instance, theatricality appears as a result of the performers' affirmed theatrical intention. The spectator must be aware of the performers' secret; without such awareness there is misunderstanding and absence of theatricality ("Theatricality: The Specificity of Theatrical Language" 96-97).

This leads to the second characteristic Féral assigns to theatricality: the awareness of the audience. The theatrical intention, therefore, becomes a minor point when the spectator faces signs that can be displaced. Theatricality appears because of the performer's theatrical intentions, yet the audience must be aware of being in a theatrical situation. But, with any sign to be interpreted, the intentions can be misread. Being in the quotidian space, the performative nature of a person's behavior is not easy to recognize since reality invades the space in which the actions take place. How can a person become a performer in the quotidian sphere? Ideally, that may happen only within the performative sphere, and yet it may happen in daily life. Theatricality can be found in other situations. That is because, as Féral affirms in a note of "From event to extreme reality - the aesthetic of shock":

[T]heatricality comes from three rifts: the rift between eventness and representation, the rift between reality and fiction at the heart of illusion, and the rift between the semiotic and the symbolic at the heart of the actor's play. Theatricality necessarily creates the space of the "other" and can only emerge through the recognition of this otherness. It operates at the level of space and time ("From event to extreme reality" 12).

That does not only recognize three rifts between which theatricality shifts, it also recognizes a space in which the other, which can be a performer or the audience, emerges. And it does emerge with or without an initial intention of theatricality. The third and last scenario poses the example of us – as spectators - watching a person who walks by. The person in question does not have any theatrical intention nor does he/she behave as if showing off and yet he/she is recognized as a theatrical presence in front of our eyes. This attribution comes from our own person who perceives a certain theatricality in his/her figures and in the way he/she moves around the space. Therefore, the semiotic signs of the performer are enough for us to exercise ourselves to assign theatricality to the space that surrounds us. The performer, hence, is an ordinary person and yet his/her being is recognized as theatrical. In this situation, what changes is the perception, which recognizes gestures, or physicality, as theatrical acts. The scenery is set in the real world instead of a stage; therefore, the performative sphere invades the social one:

Things occur differently on reality's stage, a stage that is fixed in the real. Spectators are in the space of the other, linked to the performer in a quasi fusion; they are absorbed, hypnotized by the action taking place. Each micro sequence of events garners their complete attention. Thus they are not in a position of aesthetic distance, judgment, or analysis. They themselves are within the process, within the performativity of the action and the moment. Like the performer, the spectators are at the heart of the action. Any distance evaporates. They are within the intimacy of each micro-action ("From event to extreme reality" 14).

Whatever event the spectator is facing, the action that is taking place captures his/her attention completely. The spectator finds himself/herself in the middle of a theatrical action and cedes

to the events in a space that is not within the performative sphere nor in the quotidian. In doing this, the dichotomy that sees theatricality in the everyday life or in theater, needs another space in which it is able to exist. From such a situation, therefore, the gaze of the audience recognizes a truth, a realness, in fictionalized events. The creation of a third space in this dichotomy creates a brand-new category in which the real and the imagined coexist. And as it is possible to see this third situation, in fact, reports a real situation, with ordinary people in which it is recognized in these acts, as a fictionalized action. This is what leads Féral to an important conclusion:

[T]heatricality has little to do with the nature of the invested object the actor, space, object, or event - nor is it necessarily the result of pretense, illusion, make-believe, or fiction. Were such conditions prerequisites of theatricality, we would have been unable to identify its presence in everyday occurrences ... More than a property with analyzable characteristics, theatricality seems to be a *process* that has to do with a "gaze" that postulates and creates a distinct, virtual space belonging to the other, from which fiction can emerge ("Theatricality: The Specificity of Theatrical Language" 97).

That poses the last important characteristic: theatricality belongs to the domain of sight. As it is seen as a process that has to do with who observes, it can be possible once again to find a connection with the art critic Michael Fried. It's all about a mutual relationship in which one part requires a confrontation with the other, as it happens between the object and the beholder. Even in this case, the visual space created by the gaze of the audience will land on the object or the performer. By doing this, the person who gazes will occupy a space in the quotidian sphere that would usually belong to fiction, a domain that is usually to be found in the performative sphere. The two spheres collide and mix what is real and what is imaginary together. The collision of these two spheres creates a situation that needs a new space to exist. That is because in this last scenario the subject, who represents an otherness since he/she has no intention of entering the performative sphere and yet invades it because of the gazer, creates a fracture. This fracture is precisely caused by the audience or gazer inasmuch as he/she decides

to project the characteristics of theatricality outside of a theatrical space – in everyday life. Such an invasion of the quotidian life on behalf of the observer would also make the actor question his/her own identity. And that is because, in the eyes of the audience, the action of the unaware actor would unconsciously become a performance. Therefore, when the sphere of performance invades the sphere of the quotidian, that interferes with the real and the authentic. Consequently, in cases such as this one, it is necessary to create a third sphere in which the theatricality and the realness coexist. A space in which “theatricality is the imbrication of fiction and representation in an "other" space in which the observer and the observed are brought face to face” (“The Specificity of Theatrical Language” 105). This sphere would hint at Edward Soja's definition of Thirdspace, a space in which there is a logical rejection to choose between two opposing alternatives of a dichotomy. By this rejection, a third possibility emerges and creates a space in which the two alternatives can exist together. Edward Soja was an urbanist and urban theorist who worked on a socio-spatial dialect and justice. In his book *Thirdspace*, he asserts:

everything comes together... subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history (Soja 57).

Since Féral considers space such a fundamental element in which theatricality can be recognized, what I assert is that, in order to create this virtual space of the quotidian life in which fiction can arise, Féral creates a sort of third space. A sphere that is not the performative one nor the quotidian one. It is a sphere that owns the characteristic of both in which artifice and natural traits come together.

As it was possible to read, Féral pointed out three main points in order to recognize theatricality: spatial coordinates, the audience's awareness, and the perception of the gazer who attributes theatricality to situations. Therefore, space is an accomplice in establishing the areas

in which theatricality digresses. In that same space, there are a gazer and an audience, both able to enact a theater-like situation in theater as well as in a space that belongs to the quotidian. The gaze of who watches – a person that could be compared to Michael Fried's beholder – is the element that can assign theatricality to any situation. The gazer is able, hence, to assign roles to ordinary people just by fictionalizing ordinary situations. If a person who observes a scene decides that a person who walks by owns a certain theatricality, that same ordinary person would own a role in the play that the gazer pictured in his/her mind. Considering the case in which the unaware person suddenly understands to be playing a role in someone else's mind. If the performance was not intentional, the whole process of being in the space of another person would cause nothing but confusion in himself/herself. The 'otherness' is involuntarily invaded by the unaware performer. That happens since the space in which the performer is functioning as a vehicle for the performance as he/she moves around the space that functions as a stage in the gazer's mind. Theatricality, therefore, may have something in common with the performative as the space of this latter verges on everyday life into a third space. In this regard, the sociologist Erving Goffman who wrote *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, projects the imaginary of theater on the human life and its social interactions. Since theatricality can be found in the space of everyday life, as Féral also suggests, the space of theatricality is to be recognized in spatial and temporal coordinates that are different from the ones that are usually attributed to theater, marking in this way a big difference. If on the one hand, Féral contends that theatricality is a process initiated by the gazers, Goffman, similarly, writes: "We have been using the term 'performance' to refer to all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers" (Goffman 13). The individual, therefore, would always be in the presence of an audience in order to perform, otherwise, the performance would probably lose its value and initial intentions. That is because a performance is usually

intentional. In these kinds of contexts – particularly in the third scenario presented in Féral’s essay – it is important to consider what she suggests. In the first scenario, the theatrical space was created by the intentionality of the performer and what surrounded him/her. Differently, in the third scenario, the audience, who also is who gazes, creates a space from which illusion can emerge. That is why the theatrical may have a transcendent nature²⁷. Performers act spontaneously to the extent that the illusion is based on their actions, behaviors, physicality, objects, and the environment itself, regardless of whether the performance is fictional or real. Therefore, it is possible to observe a certain theatricality in/of life. That is because, just by observing life, people may or not be able to induce theatricality in their everyday life and yet they can move unintentionally around a theatrical space. Usually, people are used to finding theatricality within artistic contexts but, thanks to transcendental elements²⁸ theatricality is possible to be found through the observation of what is around us, elements belonging to their quotidian life. Therefore, the audience creates a narrative based on what they see by shaping events and stories in a way in which a person’s identity is involved in the whole process. It should be presumed that a person during his/her day acts while speaking, moving, interacting with others, and in his/her way of being presented to the world. There will always be elements that stay out of one’s control. A dynamic that will be possible to see in the fifth chapter of this thesis as Judith Butler discusses the acquisition of gender through performative acts and agency. These acts can institute one’s identity, “a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief” (“Performative Acts and Gender Constitution” 520). Dynamics in which the person is called to be confronted with the others and with

²⁷ This inquiry starts because of the Kantian philosophy of the transcendental. In this regard, Féral contends that stage-related theatricality may be an extension of a transcendental phenomenon.

²⁸ In this vision, theatricality appears as a property of Kant’s idealism which includes every form of reality – that can involve cultural and artistic aspects of life as well as political and economic aspects.

himself/herself. In this regard, the concept of identity that Féral provides should be expanded. In Féral's opinion, when one's identity is investigated within the theatrical meanings, it must be kept in mind that the self is composed of elements that, as it will be possible to see in the next section, enable the distinction between the actor and his/her true self.

3.2 Roles and Identity in the performative and daily contexts

Féral in her works, especially in "Performance and theatricality: The Subject Demystified," explores the various aspects of an actor's theatricality by recognizing elements that compose the self of an individual. Elements such as experience, memories, events, behaviors, and his/her exterior appearance, that were employed by Bruner. This investigation begins investigating the role of an actor when he/she is impersonating a character and when he/she is showing his/her true self. Since the actor in question still is an ordinary person, Féral studies his/her role as a sort of detachment from the real self of the individual when he/she is playing a role. Féral asserts: "Thus, we may situate the actor's theatricality in a process of displacement in which his very self is at stake in a dynamic whose symbolic structures are riddled with static moments during which the actor must confront the ever-present menace of the return of the self" ("Theatricality: The Specificity of Theatrical Language" 100). The actor is the result of a symbolic structure built by theater, as Féral asserts, that creates a pattern that may be repeated. Féral also conceives of theater as a structure and representational which inscribes the subject in the symbolic means of codes created in the theatrical space. Through the repetition of these codes, people may institute their identity, similarly to what Judith Butler argues. As I will expand in the fifth chapter, Butler claims that through a repetition of acts, a person may institute their gender identity. However, by considering an actor, whose job is to interpret another person, it is important to distinguish his/her job from his/her private life. That is one of the reasons why I contend that is important to distinguish theatricality in two spheres:

the performance-related one and the quotidian reality. The performance-related theatricality is based on the acting self of an actor who is able to manipulate the reality that surrounds him in order to transform it into a staged illusion. A manipulation is possible since the audience will paradoxically believe in him without believing in him completely since the audience will be aware of being in a theatrical space. Despite the fact that these two spheres might interact because of someone's gaze— as it was possible to see in the third scenario proposed by Féral - the performative sphere must be considered as a theater-related space only since the actor necessarily must detach his/her acting self – the character – from the self. A discussion that has been widely discussed by the Italian writer Luigi Pirandello before. Pirandello in fact spent a portion of his life to theater and theater theories. While he was writing some of his most famous pieces – i.e., *Sei Personaggi in Cerca d'Autore* (Six Characters in Search of an Author) – he questioned himself on the dramatic identity of characters. During his experience in theater, hence, he started to delineate the dichotomy between character and author. This dichotomy, in Pirandello's opinion, becomes a problematic relationship since behind the character there is an actor who follows directions and the script handed by the author. The actor is therefore the link that connects the author and the character. Nevertheless, Pirandello wrote metatheatrical pieces about the relationship among authors, characters, and theatre practitioners. In the example of *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, particularly, the characters gain their own agency and pretend to tell their story on their own, without the interpretation of actors. Considering his take on the relationship between author, actors, and characters, Féral's essay "Performance and Theatricality: The Subject Demystified," will be useful to see how she deals with the division between actor and character.

Féral suggests an interesting take on the way theatrical phenomenon is constructed. In this phenomenon, she recognizes a certain duality depending on the director:

[T]he way theatrical space is constructed attempts to make tangible and apparent the whole play of the imaginary as it sets subjects (and not a subject) on stage. The processes whereby the theatrical phenomenon is constructed as well as the foundation of that phenomenon - an extensive play of doubling and permutation that is more or less obvious and more or less differentiated depending upon the specific director and aims - thus become apparent: the division between actor and character (a subject that Pirandello dealt with very well); the doubling of the actor (insofar as he survives after the death of the text) and the character; the doubling of the author and the director (cf. Ariane Mnouchkine); and lastly, the doubling of the director and the actor (cf. Schechner in *Clothes*). As a group, these permutations form different projection spaces, representing different positions of desire by setting down subjects in process (“Performance and Theatricality” 176).

Féral claims that the division between actor and character is apparent through a dynamic doubling and permutation that may be by and large obvious. As Féral contends, Pirandello was one of the main critics that dealt with this relationship as well as he argued about the self and the character. To be more specific, between character and author, and between author and audience. In his book *Arte e Scienze*, Pirandello analyzes the figure of the actor in his role as an intermediary. In fact, he believes that the actor is the element that interferes with the author and his art. Therefore, recognizing a third part that has a lot to do with a person’s act, he says:

Now, what does the actor do? He does the exact opposite of what the poet did. Namely, he makes the character that the poet created more real and yet less true, taking that ideal, superior truth as far as possible from him the more he gives him a material, common reality; and he makes him less real also because he translates him into the fictitious and conventional materiality of the scene. The actor, therefore, gives an artificial consistency, in a false, illusory environment, to people and actions that have already had an expression of life that is superior to the material contingencies, and which already exists in the essential and characteristic ideality of the poem, that is to say, in a superior reality (Pirandello, my translation 9).

The character is in charge of the role he/she plays. Even though the actor has the duty to translate the character into the scene, the author always gives directions. In doing so, the actor takes some decision in order to make his/her acts accessible to the public despite the fact that,

in Pirandello's opinion, the actor gives an artificial consistency in an artificial environment, to an audience. The dichotomy that Pirandello proposes, hence, is nothing more than a relationship that is interrupted by a third person – in this case, an actor. Even though the actor has the job to portray the character, this latter would not be correctly portrayed by the actor. The relationship between actor and character is complicated in his opinion. On the one hand, there is the actor who has to play a character entering the performative sphere. On the other hand, there is the character that tends to overwhelm the actor's self in order to stand out in the theatrical context. This is one of the reasons why the concept of the theatrical emerges following spatial and temporal coordinates. Those coordinates, as it was possible to see in the section that analyzed the three scenarios that Féral presented, are fundamental along with the gaze to locate the concept of the *theatrical*. As she argues: “the way theatrical space is constructed attempts to make tangible and apparent the whole play of the imaginary as it sets subjects ... on stage” (“Performance and Theatricality” 176). Therefore, the main difference that I want to highlight is that the space can change the whole process of theatricalization and that can compromise the actor's identity. What emerges is that the identity of an actor or an artist would not have the same resonance depending on the sphere in which the subject is located – whether in theater, in the quotidian, or in a blurred space in between these two spheres of action. Such a supposition comes from scenarios in which the performer's role is not scripted nor intentional – as in the scenarios suggested by Féral herself.

In each of the scenarios considered by Féral in “Theatricality: The Specificity of Theatrical Language,” the actor is confirmed to be the gateway to the performance. The link is able to connect the author with the play and the character in an imaginary space used by the performer to create an illusion of reality. Therefore, the audience would live in a liminal space and in a time that is specific since they enter the theatrical sphere. In the case in which the actor is too immersed in his/her character, any form of acting would be defeated and, consequently,

the actor's true self would be defeated too. In this specific case, the actor and the character would be seen as one single human being. A human being that is collocated in a non-existent space or time since the actor would be denied of his/her true self. Even in this case, the actor who is struggling to find himself/herself because he/she is overwhelmed by the role he/she is playing would find a place in a transitory third space where the fiction and the real can emerge. However, Féral, who considers spatial coordinates as the basis of theatricality would argue that: "acting is the result of a performer's decision (as actor, director, designer, or playwright) to consciously occupy the here-and-now of a space different from the quotidian, to become involved in activity outside of daily life" ("Theatricality: The Specificity of Theatrical Language" 101). This statement would thereby exclude any scenario in which the performer would not be conscious of his acting. Yet, there is the case in which the theatricality of a subject is seen only by the gaze of the audience. A case in which the performer is not conscious of his/her act. The performer in such a case would wear a sort of gimmick in a quotidian context. Or else, in the other case, the performer would respect his/her role, a role that was not necessarily given to him/her by an author or a director. However, a sort of consciousness should exist. Perhaps is the consciousness of doing something following other people's direction, or maybe it is the consciousness of being in front of an audience. In the essay she published in 1982, the relations between actor and space or artist and spectator, or again between artist and work of art, are central to expanding on her main theme: the difference between theater and performance. In doing that, Féral recognizes some dominant characteristics of performance²⁹. As she suggests that the performative rejects the theatrical illusion of the body – which is one of the characteristics belonging to the performative - she implies that the basic element that one

²⁹ in "Performance and Theatricality: The Subject Demystified," Féral recognized in the performance qualities such as: the manipulation of the body, the manipulation of the space and the performer who becomes a source of production and displacement (Performance and Theatricality 171-174)

would notice in a performer's body would be meticulously analyzed by the gaze of the audience. Consequently, the performer builds an imaginary space in which he/she performs for the audience's sake. However, the body, as well as the space become part of the performance. The imaginary and the real co-exist somehow; that is because the identity of the character is created by the identity of the performer. The stage is a place in which theater takes place as well as an imaginary place created by performers. Consequently, the question of identity may be confusing as that may exist and at the same time may be suppressed by one of the parts. On a stage, the character's identity prevails while behind the curtains the performer's identity is the one that will dominate over the role. The space would likewise present the same challenge. However, the performer can effectively manipulate these characteristics in his/her favor, and as Féral writes: "[T]he performer never settles within these simultaneously physical and imaginary spaces, but instead traverses, explores, and measures them, effecting displacements and minute variations within them" ("Performance and Theatricality" 172). Therefore, the performer takes advantage of this duality to create a blurred space in which the performance can take place. However, in doing so the performer tries to emerge from this blurred juncture between reality and fiction. The performer, who becomes the subject has to find a way to coexist in both spheres: "Performance conscripts this subject both as a constituted subject and as a social subject in order to dislocate and demystify it" ("Performance and Theatricality" 173). The fracture in which reality and fiction are blurred becomes the reason why we can apply different scenarios and aesthetics to the concept of the theatrical.

The scenarios in which the quotidian takes the lead are the exemplification of a performative theory that takes a sociological turn - as it will be possible to see in the chapter dedicated to Butler's *performative agency*. The *theatrical*, therefore, can be found outside the performative sphere in daily contexts. For actors, instead the two contexts can collide because of their work. As a matter of fact, many methods of acting are famous among actors who want

to become the characters they are going to play. One of the most famous is the Stanislavski method³⁰. A method that mobilizes the actor's conscious thought and will to activate a psychological process. The actor embodies the character and searches for inner motives to justify the character's actions at any given moment. Nowadays, many actors are known to have stayed in their roles for months or years because of their chosen method acting. The actor is immersed in their role and creates, during a limited time a character, which is not really a character, but rather a gimmick. In this time lapse, the person (the actor) would act according to what their role character would do. It is not a complete dissonance with themselves, but it is rather an act that follows the "what he/she would do in this situation?". Their action depends on the level of immersion in the specific role. Josette Féral discusses method acting by drawing on Vsevolod Meyerhold's take³¹. In doing so, Féral discusses this matter along the dichotomy of the real and the artificial:

Meyerhold believes that theater must aim at a kind of grotesque realism, but one quite different from the realism described by the naturalists. Theatricality is the process by which the actor and the director continually remind the spectator that he is in the theater, face-to-face with a consummate actor who is playing a role. To affirm the "theatrical" as distinct from life and from reality is the condition *sine qua non* of stage-related theatricality. The stage must speak its own language and impose its own laws. For Meyerhold, there is no equivalence between representation and reality. On the contrary, theatricality is not to be found in any illusory relationship with reality. Nor is it to be

³⁰ The Stanislavski's system or method is a systematic approach for actors in order to be trained at acting. This method was assessed by Russian theatre practitioner Konstantin Stanislavski who developed it in the first half of the twentieth century. The actor is required to use his/her emotional memory for the role in order to empathize with the character and act for the sake of him/her. Moreover: "The actor has trained his concentration and his senses so that he may respond freely to the total stage environment. Through empathic observation of people in many different situations, he attempts to develop a wide emotional range so that his onstage actions and reactions appear as if they were a part of the real world rather than a make-believe one" ("Stanislavsky system").

³¹ Vsevolod Emilyevich Meyerhold was a Russian theater director famous for his provocative experiments dealing with physical being and symbolism in an unconventional theater setting. To know more about his career, read Britannica article "Vsevolod Yemilyevich Meyerhold".

linked to a specific aesthetic. Rather, it must be sought in the autonomous discourse that constitutes theater. Meyerhold insists on a truly theatrical specificity (“Theatricality: The Specify of Theatrical Language” 103).

The main point that Meyerhold contends, therefore, is that the theatrical, as a form of theater, can only belong to the performative sphere. The audience will be reminded of the fiction of the stage. Meyerhold, in fact, argues that theatricality cannot be associated with any illusory relationship with reality. Theatricality is connected to the value of the artificial, a value that has been connected to the *theatrical* by many. However, if the audience is not aware of being in a theatrical context, that person would not be able to recognize the authentic from the artificial. In theater, therefore, there are the laws of the stage, reality and representation are seen as two different things. Consequently, even though method acting may seem a naturalization of theatricality to daily life, it should be remembered that the job of an actor must be sought in the autonomous discourse that constitutes theater. Even though method acting requires a certain connection between the actor and the character that does not mean that reality and fiction will coexist in such a case. That is because the actor works in the performative sphere. Nevertheless, this is not the only way to read theatricality and as a matter of fact, Féral demonstrates that theatricality can be found outside the performative arts and can be read as a positive view of the *theatrical*, in opposition to all the negative values that have been connected to this term antecedently. There is a context that belongs to the performative, another context that takes place in daily life, and a third dimension that sees the real and the artificial coexist in a newfound space. Being aware of the characteristics that came from the performative side of the theatrical and from a daily context, it is necessary to take a step back – temporally speaking – to the beginning of what is implied with the term *theatrical*. That would be done by returning to Sontag’s concept of *camp*. A concept that I employ as *theatrical*, and which is located in a context that is not the one of performative arts.

Susan Sontag: The Theatrical *Camp*

4.1 The Theatricality of *Camp*

So far, the origin of the term “theatricality” seems to be associated with certain fields. Art and performance studies are just two of the areas that have been discussed while talking about the very essence of the *theatrical*. In the previous chapters, it was possible to see how Michael Fried and Josette Féral dealt with this term. Fried’s critical works re-defined the meaning of theatricality by applying it within the artistic field. His vision is based on the relationship that can arise from the condition, on the one hand of being beheld and, on the other hand, of being a beholder. Moreover, this condition arises a sensibility that is defined as an “expression of a general and pervasive condition” (“Art and Objecthood” 149). Fried creates a pattern when he writes about sensibility and the dichotomy of artifice-authentic. A pattern that may link his theory with Féral’s, Sontag’s, and Butler’s by recalling elements that can be analyzed in each author’s theory. The association with artificiality is just one of the characteristics that stands out when we talk about the theatrical, and that can be found within the artistic field as well as in performative studies or sociology. As a matter of fact, the dichotomy of artificial and authentic or real is a key element that connects all the authors I discuss in this dissertation. The *theatrical* is, in fact, a term that can be adaptable to various contexts and fields of studies because of elements that are repeated in each definition of this term. Even though the definitions may come from different disciplines, there is a strong belief of mine that the term *theatrical* can be found in other terms that are synonyms of theatricality. *Camp*, for instance, is considered to be the outset of the *theatrical* because of the elements that are common to the definitions drafted by the other authors. The term *theatrical* itself may be composed of certain characteristics borrowed by each of these authors. Josette Féral, for

example, thinks that theatricality often comes with artificiality. Her takes comprehend various scenarios in which theatricality may take place, however, she argues that: “Theatricality seems to be a *process* that has to do with a ‘gaze’ that postulates and creates a distinct, visual space belonging to the other, from which fiction can emerge” (“Theatricality: The Specificity of Theatrical Language” 97). Since the concept of theatricality has to do with the play of the gaze, a process that may create a space in which fiction can emerge, the very concept of artifice may emerge from the visual space of the person who beholds it. The artifice that comes out of theatricality is one of the elements that make it possible for me to trace the first connection with the American writer, philosopher, director, and political activist Susan Sontag. Susan Sontag is now well known for her works related to the concept of photography images in contexts of pain and human experiences³². Moreover, being an activist, she used to participate in many demonstrations against the Vietnam War – to mention one. At the beginning of her career, however, while she was teaching subjects such as philosophy at Sarah Lawrence College and the City University of New York and philosophy of religions at Columbia University, Sontag published her first major work. In fact, in 1964 “Notes on ‘Camp’” was published³³. Not only did she acquire notoriety because of this essay, but she also spreads the concept of *camp* through art and human experiences. In this chapter, in fact, I will analyze her essay in order to connect Sontag’s concept of camp to the idea of the *theatrical*. The first connection with Josette Féral and Michael Fried is to be found in the dichotomy between artifice and natural. This dichotomy is what brought me to connect these authors together. The theatrical is often connected to the concept of artifice. A component that turns the term theatricality into a negative value. The same qualities of artifice or exaggeration are to be found

³² See *On Photography* and *Regarding the Pain of Others*.

³³ In 1966 Sontag republished the essay “Notes on ‘Camp’” in the collection named *Against Interpretation*.

in Sontag's *camp*. In fact, in this essay Sontag uses some dichotomies – including the one of artifice and nature – to unpack her meaning of *camp*.

Sontag collects thoughts on *camp* by putting on paper fifty-eight points that contain the ambivalence of this term, as Sontag proposes. After a quote by Oscar Wilde³⁴, Sontag starts to talk about this term generically. In fact, within the first points, Sontag introduces *camp* in terms of artifice or stylization³⁵. However, she quickly clarifies a point: *camp* can be applied to more than one thing. She says that it can be a vision, a way of looking at things, a quality to be found in objects or people, and yet not everything can be transformed into *camp*. As she clarifies “it's not *all* in the eye of the beholder” (*Notes on 'Camp'* 5). With this claim, it is possible to say that Sontag, therefore, has a different idea about the role of the beholder. If Fried argues that the beholder has a fundamental role when a work of art is valued, Sontag contends that the evaluation of a work of art depends on the taste of each beholder. Works of art, therefore, have an affinity with *camp*. And that is because camp is related to specific forms of art, such as the *theatrical*. The *theatrical* is connected to the arts and if Fried's take on the *theatrical* is considered – through the example of Minimalist art, it is possible to see how an artistic movement is independent compared with others. At the same time, however, the theatricality in forms of art lies in the negotiation of art and beholders. If Minimalism, hence, deals with the abstract idea that art should have its own reality and meaning that can be defined by a beholder, *camp*, instead, seems to be related to other unpretentious ideas that are aesthetically pleasing for the beholders. Ideas that don't seek specific meanings:

³⁴ Sontag quotes the note: “one should either be a work of art or wear a work of art” (Wilde qtd. in *Notes on 'Camp'* 4).

³⁵ Style is an important matter for Sontag as she writes “to speak of style is one way of speaking about the totality of a work of art” (“On Style” 17). That quotation is relevant from a cultural point of view, and consequently from the point of view of Camp.

Clothes, furniture, all the elements of visual décor, for instance, make up a large part of Camp. For Camp art is often decorative art, emphasizing texture, sensuous surface and style at the expense of content. Concert music, though, because it is contentless, is rarely Camp. It offers no opportunity, say, for a contrast between silly or extravagant content and rich form ... Sometimes whole art forms become saturated with Camp. Classical ballet, opera, movies have seemed so for a long time. In the last two years, popular music (post rock'n'roll, what the French call *yé yé*) has been annexed. And movie criticism (like lists of "The 10 Best Bad Movies I Have Seen") is probably the greatest popularizer of Camp taste today, because most people still go to the movies in a high-spirited and unpretentious way ("Notes on 'Camp'" 6-7)

Not only does Sontag clarify that *camp* tends to have a superficial form rather than contents. Beauty becomes more valuable than a meaningful message. In this regard, she often uses examples to help the readers to understand what *camp* is in practice. For instance, she mentions women's clothes of the twenties, like feather boas, fringed and beaded dresses. The flapper style. A way of dressing that nowadays would be probably connected to the costume of *The Great Gatsby* or *Chicago*, but as it would any film product that is set during the Roaring Twenties. This style can be considered *camp* as the concept of this look wanted to reveal the freedom to make bold choices in these women's appearance and behavior. A similar concept can be taken from cinema. As Sontag says, film criticism "is probably the greatest popularizer of Camp taste today" (7). The film industry, in fact, does not necessarily search for meaningful content when a film is to be produced. The American scholar David Scott Diffrient, Professor of Film and Media Studies, specializing in American film history, in an article named "'Hard to Handle': Camp Criticism, Trash-Film Reception, and the Transgressive Pleasures of 'Myra Breckinridge'," reflects on *camp* and its criticism and the language that is used to review films. While he reflects on the film *Myra Breckinridge*, he finds the contradictory material that this film produces. According to contemporary taste, in such a product, *camp* is to be found:

Camp, whether naive or deliberate, is an established sensibility on the verge of institutionalization, a manner of address and mode of reception that allows one to

experience the flamboyant films of "hammy" performers (such as Timothy Carey and William Shatner) and widely ridiculed directors (such as Dwain Esper and Edward D. Wood Jr.) from an ironically detached point of view. Still, for all of its irony, and despite the fact that many critics have employed it in less-than-affectionate ways, camp is capable of transforming even the most "vulgar" manifestations of American culture into recuperative moments of radical jouissance (67).

What Diffrient argues is that *camp* cannot be associated with disgust or some other unpleasant sentiment. In this regard, Sontag highlights how *camp* is not bad art but instead some examples of *camp* needs and merits to be studied and admired as all the campy things are either man-made or artificial. From this very point, the first dichotomy is presented: the duality between artifice and nature, the dichotomy that is common for all the authors so far discussed. Sontag works a lot on the dichotomy of opposition throughout this essay. The one that sees artifice and nature is the perfect duality to identify what can be considered *camp* and what it is not. *Camp* is a particular vision of the world that follows a style that is represented by the love of the "exaggerated, the 'off', if the things-being-what-they-are-not" (*Notes on 'Camp'* 8). Exaggeration is an adjective to be reconducted to the artificial side of this term. *Camp* is artificial as much as the *theatrical* is. That, as a matter of fact, was one of the first characteristics that made me connect *camp* with the *theatrical*. However, *camp* taste is to be found also in the markedly attenuated things and not only in the exaggerated ones. Therefore, the forms of art considered campy are not imitations of some other thing. *Camp* moreover is to be found in a person's sexual attractiveness that, in Sontag's opinion, is supposed to be attracted to all the attributes that are not supposed to fall into one gender. Attributes that make a man feminine or a woman masculine. And that is explicable with the fact that *camp* is to be considered a sensibility. To better explain this concept, the attraction lies in the deconstruction of the gender binary. Stereotypically, in our society men and women have physical characteristics and behaviors that fall into one of the binaries of gender norms. A simple example would be the one in which society wants men to be strong and women to be more fragile. Certainly, this

example is quite basic and projects a vision of a patriarchal society. However, this example may be useful to understand the concept of gender binary within society. Icons usually help to spread behaviors and trends that are followed by people, and mostly by young people. That may happen with attitudes or habits as well as physical characteristics. These trends are often launched by celebrities thanks to the media that put them under the spotlight and idolize them. People, therefore, would be influenced by them in a fascinating way. Sontag before providing examples of movie stars to understand to whom people were attracted to, explains this phenomenon as an overrun in the pre-established gender norms:

What is most beautiful in virile men is something feminine; what is most beautiful in feminine women is something masculine ... Allied to the Camp taste for the androgynous is something that seems quite different but isn't: a relish for the exaggeration of sexual characteristics and personality mannerisms (*Notes on 'Camp'* 9).

Nowadays, for example, these characteristics are reinforced by celebrities because of social media that emphasizes their life. Of course, their being in the spotlight promotes their images and causes a fascinating effect on new generations. Nowadays, it is usual to see male actors wearing skirts and make-up in photographs as well as women in suits. In these cases, gender collapses and becomes more appealing than the stereotypical gender binary, probably because it is more innovative and bolder³⁶. This is often used to promote a brand-new image of models or actors to stand for inclusiveness and diversity. The stereotypical idea of gender that media used to reproduce needed to change in order to provide room for who was different, and celebrities helped to undo some retrograde standards that were rooted in society. That,

³⁶ In a chapter of the book *Celebrity and Mediated Social Connections*, written by Neil M. Alperstein, celebrities' images are discussed in order to examine how celebrities construct their identities on social medias. In this regard he says: "Celebrity images may be offered up in the media as two dimensional, but through the elaborations in our own minds, we inflate those images, imbuing them with a greater life, one that is perhaps intertwined with our own. In other words, in an age of digital media, we become active participants in the process of creating mediated social connections" (Alperstein).

however, reconducts us to the following point of “Notes on ‘Camp’,” and the fact that Sontag wrote this essay to undo the belief in queer and drag community. It is all about the person and the choices they make, however exaggerated or ordinary. That brings this research to the second hint that made me think of a link between *camp* and *theatrical*.

Sontag writes: “To perceive Camp in objects and persons is to understand Being-as-Playing-a-Role. It is the farthest extension, in sensibility, of the metaphor of life as theater” (10). By stating this, Sontag questions the term *camp* as a “flavor” to acquire in theatricality. Therefore, she enters the sphere of the *theatrical* while she extends the meaning of the term she studies. As a matter of fact, the duality of factors that she discovers while studying this term are various. The meaning of *camp*, for instance, is believed to be divided between literal meaning and “the thing as pure artifice” (*Notes on ‘Camp’* 12). *Camp* is believed to be interpretable as duplicity, as “mannerisms susceptible of a double interpretation” (*Notes on ‘Camp’* 13). In people, therefore, the duplicity may hint at playing a role or wearing a mask, but only in the case in which we consider the metaphor of life as theater as a fundamental concept. The concept of being as playing a role. I would like to consider this metaphor as fundamental since Sontag was clearly aware of the current shows and theatrical performances of her time. It is possible to say that by reading her essay “Going to Theater, etc.,” contained in *Against Interpretation*. In this essay, she analyzes some contemporary plays under the light of theater as a public art and therefore its inclination to deal with social problems. This essay is interesting if compared to “Notes on ‘Camp’” since the two essays compare two contrasting ways of building characters and making theater or films. In campy products, for example, Sontag argues that there is a delicate balance between the spontaneous camp and the forced and heavy-handed camp – a type of *camp* that fails in its intentions. That may be because *camp* is “either completely naïve or else wholly conscious” (*Notes on ‘Camp’* 16). This concept may be connected to the devices of theater, the one used for plays. By playing a role, a person needs

devices that enable him/her to have a result on the audience. If the actors want to obtain a campy result, the essential element that he/she may need is the failure of his/her seriousness. The piece of art is not bad but is considered overall exaggerated. The exaggeration is rather translated into something dramatic, therefore connected to these qualities that can also be found in some types of theater. The failure of seriousness hence may be considered a wise element to create this new sensibility. In order to categorize something as *camp*, however, it's not that simple. In fact, Sontag contends that *camp* can change since taste can change:

This is why so many of the objects prized by Camp taste are old-fashioned, out-of-date, démodé. It's not a love of the old as such. It's simply that the process of aging or deterioration provides the necessary detachment - or arouses a necessary sympathy. When the theme is important, and contemporary, the failure of a work of art may make us indignant. Time can change that. Time liberates the work of art from moral relevance, delivering it over to the Camp sensibility ... Another effect: time contracts the sphere of banality. (Banality is, strictly speaking, always a category of the contemporary.) What was banal can, with the passage of time, become fantastic (*Notes on 'Camp'* 20).

One person's taste can change in time and so does *camp* taste since the process of deterioration of art cannot stop. That is the reason why art can gain or lose relevance in time. That, however, would not mean that an attempt would forever be a failure since people did not enjoy it when it first came out. Nevertheless, it can become great. In "Going to Theater, etc.," Sontag writes about American and English theaters by comparing some plays of that time. In doing that she talks about values that are presented in some genres of theater as dramas and comedies. Sontag also questions the adequacy of tones and taste in serious matters. When she writes about the current theater, she takes into consideration the characters and the roles that actors play, and by observing their roles, she says that:

The currency of exchange for most social and moral attitudes is that ancient device of the drama: personifications, masks. Both for play and for edification, the mind sets up these figures, simple and definite, whose identity is easily stated, who arouse quick loves

and hates. Masks are a peculiarly effective, shorthand way of defining virtue and vice (*Against Interpretation* 150).

Theater, therefore, in Sontag's "Going to Theater, etc.," uses masks and creates, in this way, the "cliché of character" (157). Characters nevertheless are important to define boundaries between forms of sensibilities in art. That is because the character is the one that communicates with the audience, that transmits and conveys art. And therefore, in the negotiation of art, the character is the element that translates the acting directed by a writer to the general public. If it is supposed that theater is a form of pure entertainment, the character should thereby simply play a role that is easily identifiable by the audience. Additionally, the actor may be forced to wear a mask for his role, putting him in a position where he may need to apply one. In the same way, but contrary to what she says for theater, Sontag shows how *camp* contends the "glorification of 'character'" (*Notes on 'Camp'* 21). To be Campy, therefore, the role played by actors is static. In American theater, instead, Sontag recognizes in recent and past shows the fact that characters hold virtues because of their masks. The result therefore aims to play that shows a character's development and that is full of morality. *Camp* does not. *Camp* glorifies the character that has no development or profound meaning. Characters, therefore, to be campy should be understood as "a state of continual incandescence - a person being one, very intense thing. This attitude toward character is a key element of the theatricalization of experience embodied in the Camp sensibility" (*Notes on 'Camp'* 21). Therefore, *camp* characters are intense, and they create an aesthetic that sets new standards that differ from the ordinary seriousness that can be found in high art.

To understand the aesthetic that comes from the new set of standards that *camp* provides, it is necessary to keep in mind that there is a distinction between high and low culture, art, and style. To the same degree, there is also a distinction between what was mainstream and what was not. *Camp*, because of its extravagance, is against what popular culture may idolize. In high culture, qualities such as "truth, beauty and seriousness" (*Notes on 'Camp'* 23) are the

standard to praise works of art such as *The Divine Comedy* or *The Iliad*, pieces of literature that are now considered classics and timeless because of what they transmit to their readers. The scholar Steven M. Kates – who explores the context of the meaning of *camp* through the homosexual subculture and the dominant, mainstream culture through experimentation of lived *camp* that he made during the end of the 90s– contends that *camp*: “is generally only recognized, understood, or appreciated by someone outside the cultural mainstream” (“Sense Vs. Sensibility: An Exploration of the Lived Experience of Camp”). Sensibility, hence, creates the standards that a work of art needs to reach. Nevertheless, as Sontag specifies, there is a blurry line between intention and performance. This concept is quite essential. Not all the works of art that belong to high culture possess the seriousness that characterizes them. That is because of the relationship between intention and performance. Sontag affirms that this art stays in this blurry line to create a new type of sensibility. A sensibility that goes beyond the standard already set by popular and mainstream culture. A new taste that differs from the replicas proposed by mass culture:

I am speaking, obviously, of a style of personal existence as well as of a style in art; but the examples had best come from art. Think of Bosch, Sade, Rimbaud, Jarry, Kafka, Artaud, think of most of the important works of art of the 20th century, that is, art whose goal is not that of creating harmonies but of overstraining the medium and introducing more and more violent, and unresolvable, subject-matter. This sensibility also insists on the principle that an oeuvre in the old sense (again, in art, but also in life) is not possible. Only "fragments" are possible ... Clearly, different standards apply here than to traditional high culture. Something is good not because it is achieved, but because another kind of truth about the human situation, another experience of what it is to be human - in short, another valid sensibility - is being revealed (*Notes on 'Camp'* 23-24).

Camp art, hence, can be popular even though it lacks these qualities that belong to traditional sensibilities. It has to be considered that *camp* is mainly manifested “in goods or practices which are highly stylish but not substantial” (Kates). In doing that, this sensibility is stretched to its extreme, becoming in this way a theatricalized version of the experience of *camp*. That

is because between the two identifiable sensibilities – that are the moralistic sensibility of high culture contraposed to the extreme state of feeling represented by *avant-garde* – there is *camp* that is considered “wholly aesthetic” (*Notes on ‘Camp’* 24). An aesthetic that would always prioritize characteristics style and irony over the content or the tragic. As Kates argues: “Camp is the aesthetic taste which might prompt someone to exclaim, ‘It’s so dreadful! It’s wonderful!’ The juxtaposition of the two opposite sentiments in this statement should be noted carefully.” The sentiment that *camp* proposes is different from the standard. It promotes the ideal of artifice, the same ideal that theatricality proposes. Moreover, it is important to distinguish theater and theatricality. Theater remains an interpretation of life in a space in which a fictional version of it is played. Theatricality, instead, tends to be a way of living, adding values to life in order to have a new vision of the world. It is as much an experience as *camp* is. The people who want to experience *camp*, nevertheless, stand out for being “continually amused, delighted” (*Notes on ‘Camp’* 28). Such qualities are poles apart from the characteristics that are used for the old style. *Camp* is an innovative style that appreciates excesses and vulgarity eventually. Interesting are the observations that Sontag makes about the development of *camp* within society. As a matter of fact, *camp* is associated with affluent societies³⁷ that are able to experiment with “the psychopathology of affluences” (*Notes on ‘Camp’* 29). A more elective portion of the population, thus, experiences a particular taste that differs from the canon. Society should be considered altogether as full of opportunities and benefits. The occasions that this latter offer would provide people a wide range of art, and people tend to appreciate the sensibility offered by art. Each artistic movement offers a specific taste to its audience. Taste is what enriches art in the eyes of the beholders. *Camp* would not exist without people threatened by boredom just as Literalist art would not exist if people did not search for an

³⁷ Collins Dictionary defines an affluent society as: *noun* “a society in which the material benefits of prosperity are widely available” (“affluent society”).

extreme form of abstract art in shapes and materials. Taste, hence, is inevitably affected by affluence. This is the reason why it is possible to affirm that within society tastes are easily influenceable. Culture and society go hand in hand when the main topic is taste. In the specific case of *camp* taste, as Sontag observes, Homosexuals – more generally, queer community – define themselves as “aristocrats of taste” (*Notes on ‘Camp’* 29).

In the last part of the essay, indeed, Sontag analyzes the relationship that exists between Queer people and *camp* taste. Homosexual taste and *camp* taste are not the same even though they may be similar. As a minority, Queer people are considered outstanding for being trend makers because of their sensibility. Their creativeness shapes contemporary society because of their irony and sense of aesthetics. Moreover, Sontag compares their minority with Jewish minority because both are: “pioneering forces of modern sensibility” (*Notes on ‘Camp’* 30). The concept of *camp* was brought to light thanks to the queer community indeed. Sontag is connected to this minority by being part of the queer community herself. Nevertheless, she distinguishes the *camp* taste from the homosexual one. That is because the tendencies that *camp* possesses have probably been established by the queer community, or at least they have successfully increased the fame of *camp*:

Nevertheless, even though homosexuals have been its vanguard, Camp taste is much more than homosexual taste. Obviously, its metaphor of life as theater is peculiarly suited as a justification and projection of a certain aspect of the situation of homosexuals. (The Camp insistence on not being 'serious', on playing, also connects with the homosexual's desire to remain youthful.) Yet one feels that if homosexuals hadn't more or less invented Camp, someone else would. For the aristocratic posture with relation to culture cannot die, though it may persist only in increasingly arbitrary and ingenious ways. (*Notes on ‘Camp’* 31).

The metaphor of life as theater is presented in this passage as a justification for certain aspects that may emerge in certain situations toward queer people. It is important to keep in mind the time in which this essay was published. In fact, the 60s were a time in which the homosexual

and queer community had to fight for their rights through the struggles that society posed to them. In fact, there were hard times for this minority, in the USA as well as in Europe. *Camp* taste, therefore, was a refuge where people could express themselves without being judged. And such an expressivity takes a little bit of theatricality. By being exaggerated, extreme, and never boring, *camp* taste was undeniably associated with the queer community. Queer people, in fact, made divas and film their muses. Hence, certain types of art, mostly art such as cinema and music had a successful involvement in the development of certain tastes and sensibilities such as the one previously mentioned. Celebrities have been models to queer people over the years and the outstanding aspect that connects the two sensibilities is the fact that most of the icons loved by the community own *camp* qualities. As Daniel Harries, a scholar that observed the evolution of Camp taste within the gay community wrote “The Death of Camp: Gay Men and Hollywood Diva Worship, from Reverence to Ridicule”. Being part of the queer community, after he analyzed icons that he esteems and that have been praised by other queer people, Harries concludes that *camp* sensibility and Homosexual sensibility, even though connected cannot coexist:

The forces of social stigma and oppression dissipate and the factors that contributed to the making of the gay sensibility disappear, homosexuals most significant contribution to American culture, camp, begins to lose its shape. The grain of sand, our oppression, that irritated the gay imagination to produce the pearl of camp has been rinsed away, and with it, there has been a profound dilution of the once concentrated gay sensibility. Camp cannot survive our ultimate and inevitable release from the social burden of our homosexuality. Oppression and camp are inextricably linked, and the waning of the one necessitates the death of the other (Harries 191).

Harries not only argues Sontag’s opinion that is based on the fact that *camp* sensibility is similar but not the same as homosexuals’ sensibilities. Harries, instead, provides a differentiation between the two sensibilities by contending that one needs the death of the other. In fact, Harries contends that Gay sensibility was made by Camp and diva worship that provided the

community with “a repository of subcultural narratives” (Harries 178), that helped them to create a proper language that shaped their own sensibility. Therefore, the extremeness of *camp*, compared to the other sensibility uses popular culture as an inspiration for the gay sensibility itself. Since homosexuals use divas as models, *camp* sensibility and Queer sensibility easily become two different concepts:

As Susan Sontag makes clear in "Notes on Camp," however, the sensibility of the over-bred dandy, with *Les Fleurs du Mal* in one hand and *Au Rebours* in the other, is a "snob" sensibility, one that reviles the very medium that fueled the lower-middle-class homosexual's fiction of superiority. The gay sensibility is thus at war with itself, on the one hand feeding on the accessible glamor of Hollywood and, on the other, afraid of debasing itself through its obsessive contact with Tinsel Town's cheapness. The same cinematic images that sustain the homosexual's aestheticism are tainted with the chintziness and mediocrity he is seeking to escape (Harries 185).

In this regard, Harries agrees with Sontag who argues that homosexuals are part of a self-elected class in which they “constitute themselves as aristocrats of taste” (*Notes on ‘Camp’* 29). In this way, their sensibility is constituted by a more refined taste although *camp* taste and sensibility are considered cheap and mediocre. *Camp*, regardless of this latter consideration, is not based on good or bad taste. Indeed, *camp* should be considered a liberating feeling of pleasure that does not restrict the enjoyment of a person toward objects or other people. Namely, *camp* is ultimately described as a mode of appreciation and not judgment (*Notes on ‘Camp’* 32). In the last three points of “Notes on ‘Camp’,” Sontag focuses her arguments on the positive connotation that this term can have. As a matter of fact, Sontag argues that *camp* is based on love, “love for human nature” (32). If the case of theatricality is compared to *camp*, it is possible to notice how theatricality is mostly assigned as a negative term. Even though that is not the case in many situations. As we saw with Féral, theatricality may be contained in many aesthetics and contexts creating a space in which theatricality can exist beyond the common dichotomy of natural and artificial. Sontag, instead, is prone to believe that *camp*: “It's good

because it's awful ... Of course, one can't always say that. Only under certain conditions, those which I've tried to sketch in these notes" (32). *Camp*, in conclusion, is a sensibility that affects the artificial side of the dichotomy. The side that is able to influence a whole part of the contemporary culture through products of the pop culture. A whole cultural phenomenon that influences lives from the wide spaces that surround us to one's personal identity. A wide area that is covered – in all the fields of interest - by the concept of the *theatrical* as well.

4.2 The Sensibility That Led to The Concept of Theatricality

In this essay, however, her style also differs. Being a philosopher, Sontag claims her position as well as a thinker. Professor Mena Mitrano, who worked on Sontag's critical thought, argues that her method is rather similar to the one of a critical thinker³⁸. From this perspective, seeing Sontag as a thinker would be useful to understand the structure of "Notes on 'Camp'." This essay set a new way of being a critic within a larger critical space. Moreover, her writings would not conform to the traditional ideas of critics of the time. For Instance, Fried, who's a contemporary of Sontag, has a more traditional style. Despite the fact that Sontag wrote her essay some years before Fried's *Art and Objecthood*, Sontag situates herself ahead of her time because of her revolutionary reading of a concept that was already discussed over and over. In fact, if on the one hand, Fried's style is based on a traditional critique –albeit regarding contemporary forms of art – Sontag has a thus defined epigrammatic style. Sontag tries to interpret the contemporary cultural environment of the period. Epigrammatic form, which is characterized by being short and witty, represents a new and contemporary way to analyze society perfectly. As the cultural environment of the 1960s was willing to change, this form is similar to the slogans of that time. As it was said at the beginning of this chapter, Susan Sontag

³⁸ See *La critica sconfinata – Introduzione al pensiero di Susan Sontag* by Professor Mena Mitrano.

was an activist who wanted to raise awareness about injustices. As a result, this form mirrors the society of that time for its revolutionary force. The same force that people owned when advocating for their rights. In doing that, she participates in the recognition of a new sensibility that until that moment was often connected to the queer community. Her intent is indeed to extend this term through every available means of communication. In doing that, it should be considered that her ideas are detached from the traditional view of art and criticism. In fact, if the critic is traditionally used to judge works of art for the art's sake, Sontag recognizes a sensibility in the new forms of art that were circulating in that period. That is the main characteristic that may distinguish the critic of Sontag from Fried's. Fried critical work is based on the studies and art history seminars he attended during his years at Princeton University. He mostly wrote long critical-historical essays and his role as a critic recalls the words he wrote in the essay "Introduction to my Art Critic" contained in the book *Art and Objecthood*. In Fried's opinion: "the task of the critic is, first, not to flinch from making such judgments, which are nothing less than the lifeblood of his enterprise, and second, to try to come up with the most telling observations and arguments on their behalf" (Fried 18). Consequently, Fried invokes objectivity in a subjective critic. That is because he strongly believes that every evaluation of a piece of art will be judged by the framed experience of art. In the very moment in which the art and the beholder are one in front of the other. Therefore, that is the difference between the two: as it was possible to see in the chapter dedicated to Michael Fried, the beginning of the 60s was a period in which new forms of art were realized. That was the period of the *avant-gardes*, a type of art that required a new sensibility and a detachment from the traditional ways of criticism. In Sontag's essay "On Style," for example, she gives an overview of her vision of works of art and the distance she claims that exists between art and reality. In fact, she writes: "In the final analysis, 'style' is art. And art is nothing more or less than various modes of stylized, dehumanized representation" (*Against Interpretation and Other Essays* 30). Sontag

attributes a different meaning to art, and therefore if art loses the human part that awakens a sensibility in the beholder, art is just art. To better explain this concept, Sontag's opinion is opposed to Fried's since art, in Fried's opinion, is the "expressions of the human spirit" (*Absorption and Theatricality* 104). Fried's idea of objecthood is therefore in contrast with Sontag's vision since Fried implies the new sensibility of contemporary art, of modernism, is a sensibility that is transmitted by the beholder to an object in the *instantaneousness* of the moment. That is because, as Fried says: "Literalist sensibility was preoccupied with experiences that persist in time, and more broadly that the 'presentment' of duration, of 'time itself as though it were some sort of object,' was central to the new esthetic" (*Art and Objecthood* 45). The art that Fried criticizes is an art with a definite duration, an art that is subject to criticism and interpretations because of human taste. Art that is capable of entering in conversation with the beholder. However, also in Sontag's essays, sensibility is a concept that is capable of entering in conversation with the work of art. Since the work of art requires a person – a beholder – in order to be discussed. From such a discussion a sensibility can arise³⁹. Sontag in her essay "On Style" defines sensibility as a theory that governs art and its production. That is because that sensibility represents a new way of thinking that goes "against interpretation":

Often, the sensibility (the theory, at a certain level of discourse) which governs certain works of art is formulated before there exist substantial works to embody that sensibility. Or, the theory may apply to works other than those for which they are developed ("On Style" 172).

³⁹ It should be reminded that the relationship that Fried builds between object-beholder sees its full progress in what he defines theatricality in works of art. The negotiation of art that lies in this relationship is what poses the basis for the theatricalization of the whole process. In doing that, the responses that results of the relationship between object-beholder is a new taste and a new sensibility toward art's hermeneutic approach. See chapter two to expand Fried's concept of theatricality and sensibility.

As Professor Mena Mitrano underlines, Sontag starts as a philosopher and then takes the role of critic. That is probably the reason why her thought on art comprehends and considers the whole cultural set that surrounds the work of art rather than the work of art in itself. The theories that are behind the work of a critic such as Fried's, for example, are transposed in a larger structure of ideas. To this extent, I cannot start examining the concept of *camp* without having clarified the concept of sensibility.

From the very first page of "Notes on 'Camp'," Sontag explains the connection between *camp* and sensibility, and says:

Many things in the world have not been named; and many things, even if they have been named, have never been described. One of these is the sensibility - unmistakably modern, a variant of sophistication but hardly identical with it - that goes by the cult name of 'Camp.' A sensibility (as distinct from an idea) is one of the hardest things to talk about; but there are special reasons why Camp, in particular, has never been discussed. It is not a natural mode of sensibility, if there be any such (*Notes on 'Camp'* 1).

The concept of *camp* is a concept that was discussed since the first decade of the 1900s. However, *camp* was defined for the first time in 1909 by the Oxford dictionary which defined *camp*, as it is reported in the *Art Matters podcast* hosted by Ferren Gipson, as: "'ostentatious, exaggerated, affected' with an additional meaning of 'theatrical, effeminate or homosexual'" ("camp"). This term was connected initially with the aesthetic of kitsch, gay culture, and homosexuality. However, this term continues its evolution even nowadays. Even though the modern dictionary still connects this term to the queer community⁴⁰, Sontag in the 60s takes a step back and thinks of a wider context in which *camp* is to be found. That is because – as it

⁴⁰ From the Cambridge Dictionary: adjective "(of a man) behaving and dressing in a way that some people think is typical of a gay man" ("camp"). The same term, from the Oxford Dictionary: "deliberately behaving in an exaggerated way that some people think is typical of a gay man" or "having a style that is exaggerated and not in good taste, especially in a deliberately humorous way." ("camp," *Oxford Dictionary*).

will be possible to see through the numbered list she makes – *camp* is to be found in many cultural contexts of the time. In fact, once she highlights the essence of *camp*, which is “its love of the unnatural, of artifice and exaggeration” (*Notes on ‘Camp’* 1), it is not difficult to connect the concept of *camp* to works of art, pieces of literature or films that are coming out even in 2023. That is not hard to imagine if one considers the development of popular culture. As a matter of fact, *camp* become widespread thanks to pop culture as well. This may be the result of an increasingly functional means that was able to spread information. An advantage that helped a whole process of evolution; an evolution that continues to have an impact today. That is probably why pop culture is still a significant matter. To give a better contextualization of the development of *camp*, Ania Malinowska – Professor in Media and Cultural Studies at the University of Silesia – worked on the uses of camp in some popular contexts. In her contribution that was published in the book *Redefining Kitsch and Camp in Literature and Culture*, Malinowska believes that: “Camp sensibility has been increasingly recognized in the products of popular industry. This might result from the dynamic expansion of pop and its growing domination over other artistic forms and aesthetics” (10). Malinowska recognizes that people tend to naturally connect the concept of pop with the concept of *camp* despite having differences. *Camp* changed its meaning once new forms of artistic experimentation – such as postmodernism⁴¹ – became a way to distance itself from a sophisticated vision of art. The experimentation of art began, and the form and the technique were different and unique in comparison with older movements of art. However, Malinowska argues that the first

⁴¹ Postmodernism is a culture in which the aesthetics of kitsch and camp have become fundamental for analysis of contemporary times. Since these two terms undergo a constant evolution and redefinition, these two terms become synonym of one another in a cultural context. As Malinowska contends, kitsch and camp were seen as the antithesis of fine art due to the acceleration of mass culture trends, and therefore pop culture. However, as Justyna Stępień writes on the introduction of *Redefining Kitsch and Camp in Literature and Culture*: “kitsch and camp transformed the cultural landscape, enriching visual and linguistic spheres with what was formerly only acclaimed as marginal and tasteless” (Stępień 1).

characteristics of camp were recognized by Christopher Isherwood in his novel *The World in the Evening*. In 1954, therefore, Isherwood divides the notion of *camp* in low camp – associated with cross-dressing and drag queens’ practices and performances – and high camp – part of a cultural heritage such as ballet or baroque art. That is why it is said that Sontag in her essay expands “Isherwood’s idea of the two-dimensional character of camping” (Malinowska 11). Even for Malinowska, the main problem that *camp* has to face is with the dichotomies - for example, between homosexual and queer. In fact, she lists a number of characteristics that limit how this term is viewed in a cultural context that constantly deals with pop culture⁴². Between pop and *camp*, there is a difference that can be seen through the products that those two concepts generate. That is one of the points that Susan Sontag emphasizes when she had to face the already-existing material on *camp*. In this respect, she writes:

For myself, I plead the goal of self-edification, and the goad of a sharp conflict in my own sensibility. I am strongly drawn to Camp, and almost as strongly offended by it. That is why I want to talk about it, and why I can. For no one who wholeheartedly shares in a given sensibility can analyze it; he [Christopher Isherwood] can only, whatever his intention, exhibit it. To name a sensibility, to draw its contours and to recount its history, requires a deep sympathy modified by revulsion (*Notes on ‘Camp’* 1-2).

Sontag, therefore, has the means to talk about sensibility, particularly because it is sensibility that can transform “the serious into frivolous” (*Notes on ‘Camp’* 2). Sensibility, moreover, seems to be connected to taste as a reaction or a preference to the work of art or person that is

⁴² Malinowska draws the differences between pop and camp by quoting Mark Booth’s *Camp*. In his book, Booth reports a table in which he lists the main differences between these two concepts. As a matter of fact, under the “pop” column it is possible to find characteristics such as: Popular, Transient, Low cost, Mass-produced, Young, Witty, Sexy, Gimmicky, Glamorous, and Big Business. Those characteristics are sided by the “camp’s” column that lists: Easily accessible, determinedly facile, trashy, Mass-produced, Youth worshipping, Witty, Mock sexy [pornographic], Willfully hackneyed [seemingly familiar], Mock glamorous [Divine], BIG BUSINESS. Even though some of the characteristics that Booth recognizes are the same for both of the terms, it is important to recognize that the result of these two terms would generate different products. To read more about this read Mark Booth’s *Camp* (1983).

in front of us as beholders – as Fried would argue. Taste, in fact, is what Sontag considers decisive toward what is to be watched. Taste can be found in every human response since it can be considered as natural. That is why Sontag says that “there is taste in acts, taste in morality” (3), an argument that would open the floor to my thesis that sees *camp* connected with the concept of theatricality. Sontag implies a correction of taste in the beholder when he says sensibility “requires a deep sympathy modified by revulsion.” For as much as the *theatrical* belongs to the artificial, so does *camp*. *Camp* challenges your sense of taste and makes you question yourself. Before Sontag defined *camp*, it was a thing to exhibit. *Camp* was considered vulgar and exaggerated. Therefore, one needs sympathy to describe the sensibility of the *camp*. Revulsion, however, may modify the taste of someone who tries to understand it. The definitions given to camp before Sontag wrote “Notes on ‘Camp’” isolated all the things that were involved with it because *camp* was associated with these negative values. Similarly, the *theatrical* was always considered negatively because of the unfavorable association given to it by critics. Since the same qualities of artifice or exaggeration are to be found in Sontag’s *camp*, I argue that the *theatrical* is akin to *camp* for its definition and its evolution. *Camp*, therefore, can be considered the fundamental pillar of the inquiry into the *theatrical*.

Judith Butler: From Theatricality to Performativity

5.1 Performative Agency: The Object of Belief That Constitutes a Theatrical Identity

In this last chapter, Judith Butler's definition of *performative agency* will be examined in order to conclude our inquiry into the *theatrical*. Theatricality, as it has been possible to see, can be found in various scenarios. A situation, whether on the theater stage or in real life, can be *theatrical*, with space and time being two defining factors. This thesis started off with the most common use of theatricality, referring to the medium of the theatre; then, the term *theatrical* has been examined from other perspectives: Art, performance, culture, and daily life. Judith Butler started off as a philosopher and a scholar of gender studies. Moreover, she is the author of several works in which our inquiry has the possibility to be continued. A political and social connection between the concept of theatricality and Butler's take on the performative may be possible thanks to the performative theory she discusses in her book *Gender Trouble* (1990). The connection between the *theatrical* and the performative may not be immediate, however, these two terms are more connected than one may think. Performative is a term that recalls performance, an act that is usually performed in theaters. And yet, what does the *theatrical* and the performative have in common? The performative is a concept that was theorized during the 1990s. As the concept of the performative is examined, it must be considered that Butler's theories are affected by her philosophical background, as her works have influenced contemporary political philosophy and ethics, in addition to queer and literary theories. Judith Butler, therefore, is the last author that will be discussed in this thesis in order to define a linear path along which the term *theatrical* develops. One of the first elements that made me connect Butler's performative agency with theatricality, in the more extended meaning that the term takes on in my inquiry, was her liaison with dramaturgy. As it has been

mentioned in the previous chapters, even though the environment of theater should be distinct from the very notion of theatricality, it is not easy to fully separate the *theatrical* as a concept that can exist outside the performative arts. Such an element is not so superficial in some of Butler's works. Just by reflecting on the term performative, it is inevitable to connect this term with something that has to do with theater. Nevertheless, to concretely define a connection between these two concepts, there is the need to analyze what Butler suggests with *performative agency*. A contextualization of what a performance is, however, is needed before proceeding with the reading of the most important passages written by Butler on the performativity. Butler wrote in 1988 "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," an essay in which she unpacks the most common connection that associates a performance with an act. Being a philosopher, Butler clarifies that: "Philosophers rarely think about acting in the *theatrical* sense, but they do have a discourse of 'acts' that maintains associative semantic meanings with theories of performance and acting" (519). While claiming an association between "acting" and performance, Butler opens the debate with a view on a social dynamic that is very common to humans. She can integrate the theater-related semantic meaning of performance with a social dynamic through John Searle's work: "For example, John Searle's 'speech acts,' those verbal assurances and promises which seem not only to refer to a speaking relationship but to constitute a moral bond between speakers, illustrate one of the illocutionary gestures that constitutes the stage of the analytic philosophy of language" ("Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" 519). What can be inferred from the initial part of this essay is that the performative, as much as the theatrical, has to do with a semantic field that originates in traditional associations with the theater. Moreover, an important factor that Butler highlights is the importance of language in a relationship created – or to use her words, a "moral bond" - between a speaker and his/her illocutionary gestures. As she mentions John Searle as an example, she claims a connection of the performative with

speech acts as defined by Searle. With the concept of a speech act, Searle refers to an individual who performs an action while presenting a piece of information⁴³. For instance, a simple question like “Could you hand me that book?” can be considered a speech act as it expresses the speaker's desire to be handed that book, as well as presenting a request that someone hand the book to the speaker. Therefore, speech acts serve their function once the action is also said or communicated. As she argues in the preface of *Gender Trouble* written in 1999, Butler understands the notion of performativity using linguistics. In doing so she draws attention to the connection that exists between a speech act and the dimension of theatricality:

my theory sometimes waffles between understanding performativity as linguistic and casting it as theatrical. I have come to think that the two are invariably related, chiasmically so, and that a reconsideration of the speech act as an instance of power invariably draws attention to both its theatrical and linguistic dimensions. In *Excitable Speech*, I sought to show that the speech act is at once performed (and thus theatrical, presented to an audience, subject to interpretation), and linguistic, inducing a set of effects through its implied relation to linguistic conventions. If one wonders how a linguistic theory of the speech act relates to bodily gestures, one need only consider that speech itself is a bodily act with specific linguistic consequences (*Gender Trouble* xxv).

Since the performance is subject to interpretation and it is presented to an audience, as Butler says, this theory might take the connotation of the *theatrical*. Moreover, a speech is related to a bodily gesture because of the moral bond that exists between the speaker and his/her illocutionary gestures. As it is possible to deduce, the body is the means through which a person acts. Eventually, the speech act, through the illocutionary component, will have a theatrical effect. Prior to connecting the notions of theatricality and performative agency, it is necessary to understand their linguistic implications. In fact, Butler draws on the philosopher J. L. Austin,

⁴³ To know more about the theory of speech acts, I recommend the book *Speech Acts: An Essay in The Philosophy of Language* by John Searle.

who introduced into linguistics the notion of the *illocutionary act*⁴⁴. J. L. Austin, in fact, was the first to introduce the notion of speech acts by investigating its various aspects. Consequently, his study brought to the development of performative utterances and the theories on the locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts that were then refined by Searle. Those acts are considered by Judith Butler to be the domain of the philosophical theory of acts:

a domain of moral philosophy, seeks to understand what it is 'to do' prior to any claim of what one ought to do. Finally, the phenomenological theory of 'acts,' espoused by Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and George Herbert Mead, among others, seeks to explain the mundane way in which social agents constitute social reality through language, gesture, and all manner of symbolic social sign ("Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" 519).

Acts, therefore, are a way of determining the signs, or actions, that constitute a social reality. And the social reality is performed through these acts. Since speech acts can be enacted by a person simultaneously, the performer, or actor, would display his/her identity through their performance. That is because, as Butler claims, through a repetition of acts a person may institute their gender. Butler affirms that: "if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the *appearance of substance* is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief" ("Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" 520). Butler, hence, connects the question of gender and identity with a performative accomplishment. The question of identity, therefore, is to be found in the arbitrary relation between speech acts and the possibilities of gender transformation. The identity of a person is performed through speech acts to others. Since the performance may change depending on the audience that a person has in front of him/her, it can be said that

⁴⁴ J. L. Austin, in 1962, released for the first time the book *How to Do Things with Words*, which is a collection of lectures he gave at Harvard University during 1955. With his lecture, the notion of locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts began to be investigated within linguistics and philosophy of language.

identity is constantly evolving. Moreover, the question of repetition is quite important to Butler since she draws from J.L. Austin. Butler says in her book *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, that: “the speech act is a bodily act means that the act is redoubled in the moment of speech: there is what is said, and then there is a kind of saying that the bodily “instrument” of the utterance performs” (*Excitable Speech* 11). Thus, an utterance is performed through the body that serves as an instrument to convey a speech that may be efficacious or not since it is possible to comprehend how the performance is conveyed only through a speaking body. The performance, since it is conveyed by the speaker as a linguistic act, produces an effect on the interlocutor. As defined by Austin, performative utterances “do not ‘describe’ or ‘report’ or constate anything at all, are not ‘true or false,’ and the uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action, which again would not normally be described as, or as ‘just,’ saying something” (Austin 5-6). A performance that acts linguistically, therefore, is an utterance that at the same time includes an action. Acts that may be ritualized by repetition. One of the most common examples can be the “I do” said in the course of a marriage ceremony. This formula includes the action of lawfully taking the partner as a wife or a husband and she insists on the setting that must be right for the context of the performance. Therefore, this utterance not only reports something but also performs an action. However, it must be considered that not all the acts are as effective as the example I proposed. As Butler explains:

If a performative provisionally succeeds (and I will suggest that “success” is always and only provisional), then it is not because an intention successfully governs the action of speech, but only because that action echoes prior actions, and *accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of prior and authoritative set of practices*. It is not simply that the speech act takes place *within* a practice, but that the act is itself ritualized practice. What this means, then, is that a performative “works” to the extent that *it draws on and covers over* the constitutive conventions by which it is mobilized. In this sense, no term or statement can function performatively without the accumulating and dissimulating historicity of force (*Excitable Speech* 51).

Butler's main point here is the issue of the ritualization of an act. Repetition is what would transform a simple practice into performative agency, into a practice that acknowledges the weight of acts that took place prior to the present time. Therefore, a performance is ritualized when prior practices have worked out previously.

The question of gender, hence, is important in order to understand the function of the performative in Butler since gender studies are part of her area of research. The function of gender relates to acts; therefore, she recognizes a certain performativity in gender – a sort of theatricality. That can be said since Butler herself declares that she draws on the *theatrical* in order to find the performative accomplishment that generates gender identity:

I will try to show some ways in which reified and naturalized conceptions of gender might be understood as constituted and, hence, capable of being constituted differently. In opposition to theatrical or phenomenological models which take the gendered self to be prior to its acts, I will understand constituting acts not only as constituting the identity of the actor, but as constituting that identity as a compelling illusion, an object of belief. In the course of making my argument, I will draw from theatrical, anthropological, and philosophical discourses, but mainly phenomenology, to show that what is called gender identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo. In its very character as performative resides the possibility of contesting its reified status (“Performative Acts and Gender Constitution” 520).

In her research, Butler analyzes performative acts within various contexts, including the *theatrical* context. In doing so, Butler elaborates on the main connection between *performative agency* and the *theatrical*: the fact that the identity of a performer is nothing more than an *object of belief*. Butler argues the ways in which the gendered self can respond to corporeal acts to constitute the identity of a person. The body therefore is the object that carries out the action. A performance, indeed. Yet, the acts create an illusion of the self. The actor's identity, consequently, will be an illusion that results as convincing. Through the body, an ordinary person is able to externalize his/her identity, and consequently, it is possible for him/her to perform his/her gender. The role of an actor, instead, is more difficult. The actor should deal

with a double identity – his/her character’s identity and his/her own. An actor, therefore, constitutes his/her identity through the illusion dictated by the rules of society and its taboo as much as an ordinary person does. His/her performance satisfies the gender norms constrained by society. However, the question of gender is more complex than the simple formulation of a performance. As a matter of fact, Butler considers the question of gender “as a *corporeal style*, an 'act,' as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where 'performative' itself carries the double-meaning of 'dramatic' and 'non-referential’” (“Performative Acts and Gender Constitution” 521-522). There is a substantial disparity when the question of gender is brought into the field of performativity. The fact is that in the eye of society, each body is recognized as a specific gender and that could become an indication of one’s identity. Women and men have different bodily characteristics that lead to the differences between the two genders. Therefore, the body is recognized by its gendered biological appearance. That is an interesting point since in society, acts – which may be of every nature, from cultural to political – are mediated by gender. Butler, in this regard, suggests that: “the body becomes its gender through a series of acts that are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time” (“Performative Acts and Gender Constitution” 523). Society affects gender and the social norms imposed by it result in “tacit conventions that structure the way the body is culturally perceived” (“Performative Acts and Gender Constitution” 524). Those norms, moreover, exist through genders that are in a binary relation. The gender binary, with the help of the norms created by society, forges the so-called “natural way” of acting. One gender, therefore, would act on behalf of the norms established for it. Certain acts, nevertheless, seem to be scripted, since, as we can observe even nowadays, there are no certain actions that are recognizable entirely as integral neither to one gender nor the other. Most of the acts that are linked to a certain gender behavior are foremost affected by family or social norms, that is to say, tacit norms that suggest the “right” way of acting on behalf of the gender assigned at birth. However, the gender question is too wide and

complex to be treated in a few pages. That is why I will focus on the *theatrical* reference in a gender act.

As it has been said already, there are terms that are associated with the *theatrical* because of the same semantic field. That is the case of the term performance and the verb to act. Yet, that should be associated with the way in which the genders act; Butler in this regard observes:

But the theatrical sense of an "act" forces a revision of the individualist assumptions underlying the more restricted view of constituting acts within phenomenological discourse. As a given temporal duration within the entire performance, "acts" are a shared experience and 'collective action.' Just as within feminist theory the very category of the personal is expanded to include political structures, so is there a theatrically-based and, indeed, less individually-oriented view of acts that goes some of the way in defusing the criticism of act theory as 'too existentialist.' The act that gender is, the act that embodied agents are inasmuch as they dramatically and actively embody and, indeed, wear certain cultural significations, is clearly not one's act alone. Surely, there are nuanced and individual ways of doing one's gender, but that one does it, and that one does it in accord with certain sanctions and proscriptions, is clearly not a fully individual matter ("Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" 525).

Even though the gender act models one's identity, Butler confirms that society is very much indeed responsible for the shared experience of gender, calling this latter a "collective action." Consequently, the shared experience includes the *theatrical* elements, which are deemed to be "collective," within the individual gender act. Therefore, when a person acts his/her gender, as to say he/she embodies the style of their gender, the individual makes choices and actions that are public. That is caused, as Butler further explains, by the fact that: "social action requires a performance which is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established" ("Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" 526; my emphasis). Cultural conventions establish the terms of the performance; Butler's notion of performance needs repetition in the same way that performance on a stage needs it.

That is because, as a play requires both text and interpretation, the individual acts his/her role in a certain corporeal space where he/she can enact interpretations within the confines of already existing gender binary and norms. The performativity of gender, however, should be differentiated from the *theatrical* by the dichotomy of real and artificial. Butler, by using the term performative, enters a liminal space. Since a performance – the artistic performance that can be located in what I call the performative sphere – presents different characteristics when compared with theater. That is one of the reasons why there is a need to unpack the term *performative agency*. In order to fully understand in which terms Butler's performative agency may be linked to the definition of theatricality, the term "performative" and the term "agency" also need to be investigated separately. As it was possible to see in the chapter dedicated to Josette Féral, theatricality applies to situations of the quotidian as well as stage performances. Thus, it applies both to a real and a fictional situation. Since these two variables are affected by the factor of time and space, our reflection on the performativity of gender should consider these elements in which the body that is performing moves around space and time. Butler, indeed, considers these factors and distinguishes these two situations:

In the theatre, one can say, 'this is just an act,' and de-realize the act, make acting into something quite distinct from what is real. Because of this distinction, one can maintain one's sense of reality in the face of this temporary challenge to our existing ontological assumptions about gender arrangements; the various conventions which announce that 'this is only a play' allows strict lines to be drawn between the performance and life ("Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" 527).

The distinction between reality and performance, therefore, traces a line between the performative acts that one can play on a stage and the acts that a person can do in real life. This discourse recalls Goffman's theory on roles that sees people as playing roles to fulfill social expectations despite the risk of losing their real selves behind the masks that the person puts

on⁴⁵. By doing this, people would somehow lose their perception of what is real and what is not. That is because the performativity of gender displays a cultural meaning since the body is inevitably affected by the cultural environment. That is to consider performative since a prefixed identity cannot exist without a repetition of acts. Thanks to repetition, a gender identity can be postulated in Butler's opinion. Therefore, gender is created through social performances, and that is why she does not agree with Goffman's theory of roles. In this regard, she says:

[G]ender cannot be understood as a role which either expresses or disguises an interior 'self,' whether that 'self' is conceived as sexed or not. As performance which is performative, gender is an 'act,' broadly construed, which constructs the social fiction of its own psychological interiority. As opposed to a view such as Erving Goffman's which posits a self which assumes and exchanges various 'roles' within the complex social expectations of the 'game' of modern life ("Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" 528).

Therefore, the performance of a gender is an act constituted by a social fiction in a real society. Gender, hence, is what is put on by the individual who follows social norms daily through performances of various kinds. However, it should be considered that Butler's notion of performance claims an interior structural permanence dictated by the psychological interiority of social fiction. Gender acts in a way which is inevitably affected by the apparatus of permanence. The performativity of a performance, however, needs an appropriate setting in order to be valid. A performance hence can be examined when it is on a stage as well as in quotidian life depending on the context. It is not difficult to claim at this point that a performance – seen within the same semantic field of theatricality – is a concept that can belong to daily life and not only to the well-known association with theater. Acts that partake in a situation of the quotidian. Acts that engage a relationship between a speaker, who can also be a performer or actor, and a second part that satisfies the role of the audience. Moreover, as also

⁴⁵ To learn more about Goffman's theory on roles I recommend reading *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.

the theory by Austin emphasizes, the setting where the performance takes place is as important as the act performed since the performative practice is mostly considered a matter of language. When speech acts are performed, the performance, as a whole, is able to assign to the acts a signification not only to intentions but also to what is declared. Butler, in fact, in her book *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex,"* observes how performativity can acquire meanings in a political sphere as well as within gender discourse. On this matter, she observes how:

a discursive practice (performative "acts" must be repeated to become efficacious), performatives constitute a locus of discursive production. No "act" apart from a regularized and sanctioned practice can wield the power to produce that which it declares. Indeed, a performative act apart from a reiterated and, hence, sanctioned set of conventions can appear only as a vain effort to produce effects that it cannot possibly produce (*Bodies that Matters* 107).

Therefore, the performativity of speech acts can only produce what is declared through language, in the appropriate setting. This characteristic leads us back again to the relationship that the performer has with its audience. The audience witnesses the performance of the speaker who conveys his/her message through acts. The performer is thereby acting in spite of the audience. That is because, as Butler says, a performance is effective in the case in which it is repeated and takes place in the appropriate setting.

5.2 The Role of The Audience and The Issue of Agency

The setting is a fundamental element in order to recognize the performativity of an act. Butler stresses this element in her theory, drawing on John L. Austin's idea that a speech act becomes effective only in the case in which all the "actors" are in the right setting where they

can declare and produce an act⁴⁶. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler contends that gender is performative. That means that gender is constituted by “acts, gestures, and desire [that] produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this on the surface of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause” (*Gender Trouble* 136). She means that gender is performative inasmuch as its meaning is maintained and produced as an internal substance that is manifested to the exterior. That is because: “Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means” (*Gender Trouble* 136). The body, thus, embodies the identity of a person and externalizes it through performative acts. Clearly, such performances take place when an individual is speaking and interacting with another. Namely, a performance – in whatever form it could be intended – could be possible only if it is performed in front of someone else. In doing so, Butler’s theory retains the notion of audience. The audience maintains its fundamental role and influences the performance. As a matter of fact, if the acts are sets of compelling illusions, the audience would grasp the object of belief that is conveyed by the actor during his/her performance. The same thing occurs with theatricality. The audience receives nothing more than the illusion of the performance. However, talking about the theory of performative agency it is possible to see how the focus is shifted to the individual. As a matter of fact, performativity is not applied to objects, collective subjects, or cultural phenomenon. *Performative agency* considers all the things before mentioned but uses them to reinforce the very protagonist, the performer. Those things are useful to forge the identity of the individual but are as not as

⁴⁶ An example would be the case of a marriage in which the utterance, “I do”—said under the right circumstances by the bride or the groom with the intention of marrying the other person—transforms the utterer from being unmarried to being married. Therefore, the utterance will be enounced in front of a celebrant that would validate the whole event.

important as its whole. The identity and therefore gender, is built through acts. The performative, hence, is enacted when a person interacts with others, also known as the audience. The person thereby can claim his/her identity that he/she performed through interactions. Gender, hence, is an important part that constitutes the identity of a person; Butler argues that gender is performative since it should be considered, “for instance, as a *corporeal style*, an ‘act,’ as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where ‘*performative*’ suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning” (*Gender Trouble* 139). The body of the individual, as it was already suggested, conveys the act through gestures and corporeal signs. These would be interpreted and attributed meaning, as we would with any performance since “the effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body” (*Gender Trouble* 140). Butler, in fact, argues that gender is an act to the extent necessary to ritualized behaviors that have been already performed in society. On this matter, Butler says that as it happens in “other ritual social dramas, the action of gender requires a performance that is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation” (*Gender Trouble* 140). As a ritual that is performed within society, the act would demand legitimation from that precise society that would function as an audience. The performance is inevitably affected by time and space since, even in this case, the individual behaves through repetition and according to the surrounding social norms. In this regard, Butler says:

Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. This formulation moves the conception of gender off the ground of a substantial model of identity to one that requires a conception of gender as a constituted social temporality. Significantly, if gender is instituted through acts which

are internally discontinuous, then the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief (*Gender Trouble* 140-141).

The audience, therefore, in the performativity of gender is none other than society looking with a critical eye over the acts that do not conform to the constituted social temporality. The fact that initially, the acts performed by gender are discontinuous indicates how repetition is fundamental in order to construct identity. Moreover, the identity is built around what is believed to be the correct way to act, accomplished through social norms. Moreover, Butler argues that behind identity there are political interests and action since the question of gender relies on feminist politics as much as other categories that are considered minorities⁴⁷. Gender, which is expressed through acts, gender becomes nothing more than an exterior illusion. And that is because: “if the ‘cause’ of desire, gesture, and act can be localized within the ‘self’ of the actor, then the political regulations and disciplinary practices which produce that ostensibly coherent gender are effectively displaced from view” (*Gender Trouble* 136). That is because identity and identity politics, similarly, seem to be a fictionalized version of the real self of a person. A full-fledged performance. Nevertheless, *Gender Trouble* wants to find an antidote to the problems that women have faced in the political realm, and yet the strategy that Butler suggests for the empowerment of women – in the political sphere⁴⁸, for instance - has been widely criticized⁴⁹. However, *Gender Trouble* raises the issue of locating agency since Butler argues that identity should not be the locus of agency. Stephanie Clare, a scholar who works in

⁴⁷Group of minorities such as people from LGBTQ+, racial minority, person with disabilities, etc. are all considered of political interest. All of them are to consider organization of political movements around specific identities.

⁴⁸ I recommend reading Judith Butler’s article “Performative Agency” which gives an insight to economic and political performative agency by drawing on Austin’s theory.

⁴⁹ I recommend reading Susan Hekman’s “Beyond identity: Feminism, identity and identity politics.” An article that analyzes the issues raised by identity and identity politics that have been criticized in Butler’s *Gender Trouble*.

feminist, queer, and trans theory, wrote an essay named “Agency, Signification and Temporality,” in which she analyzes the temporality of agency from Butler’s point of view. As temporality has been mentioned in this dissertation as one of the fundamental factors that is used to recognize theatricality in specific contexts, it is important to understand the importance of temporality in agency, precisely in performative agency: “Butler theorizes agency in terms of signification. She contends that the gendered subject is constituted through performativity and that the notion of performativity provides a theory of agency” (Clare 51). As it is mentioned by Clare, the concept of performativity and the concept of agency are strictly connected as one provides a thesis for the other. Butler, in fact, argues that agency is associated inevitably with the subject, a subject that seem to belong somehow to a pre-existing culture:

The question of locating "agency" is usually associated with the viability of the "subject," where the "subject" is understood to have some stable existence prior to the cultural field that it negotiates. Or, if the subject is culturally constructed, it is nevertheless vested with an agency, usually figured as the capacity for reflexive mediation, that remains intact regardless of its cultural embeddedness. On such a model, "culture" and "discourse" *mire* the subject, but do not constitute that subject. This move to qualify and enmire the preexisting subject has appeared necessary to establish a point of agency that is not fully *determined* by that culture and discourse. And yet, this kind of reasoning falsely presumes (a) agency can only be established through recourse to a prediscursive "I," even if that "I" is found in the midst of a discursive convergence, and (b) that to be *constituted* by discourse is to be *determined* by discourse, where determination forecloses the possibility of agency (*Gender Trouble* 142-143).

The subject, therefore, exists under the conditions of society and its cultural structure. Albeit determinant, the norms that subjects follow, as Butler argues, do not constitute the subject *per se*. That is because the agency is not fully located within the culture. In fact, it was very difficult to determine agency since the desire to determine it would prevent it from being possible. Agency, in dictionaries, is defined as “the capacity, condition, or state of acting or of exerting power” (“agency”). Consequently, if agency is to be located with the performative, it is because

of the condition in which the performance can be validated. A setting enables the negotiation between the subject and the performance. Between the performer and the audience. Agency, therefore, collocates agency in the relations with acts. The same acts validate the performance of subjects under the right setting and the right discourses. In this regard, Clare argues that it is: “because performativity requires continual repetition,” as it happens with performances of speech acts, “there is the possibility of introducing difference into the chain of citationality. The gaps embedded in repetition are, for Butler, the location of the agency. This agency is in no way pure or independent from relations of power or discourse; it exists within the citational chain—a chain, that is, of signifying relations” (Clare 51). Within repetitions, Clare suggests the undeniable relation between performativity and agency. Performative agency, therefore, becomes a chain that can be perfected through repetition.

5.3 Performance and Parody

In this last section, I will analyze the concept of performance and parody from the perspective of a possible bond with dramaturgy. In order to do so, I will analyze what Jena A. Zelezny – a scholar who seeks to describe and deploy the agency of theater in the field of performance and performance studies - argues in her essay “Judith Butler: Performativity and Dramaturgy.” Zelezny proposes a new perspective in which Butler’s theory of performativity can have a relation with dramaturgy. A relation that is important to determine if *performative agency* can be truly related to the notion of theatricality in each of its aspects in a non-theatrical context. To begin with, she distinguishes Austin’s choice of the word ‘performative’ with the collective perception of the performance of the everyday which is meant as “performance as carrying out a task, performability, and playability in a theatrical or aesthetic context” (Zelezny 4). Moreover, Zelezny adds that an act that can be described or intended in the theatrical sense of entertainment is not an act that is:

‘performative’ in the Austinian sense nor is it a performative in the Butlerian sense. While an audience or set of spectators may perhaps be receptive to the carrying out of this task as a ‘performance’ this does not mean that the exchange, the communication between performer and audience, is ‘performative.’ For a task or act to be a ‘performative’, additional dynamics must be apparent (Zelezny 4).

The performativity, therefore, lies in the dynamic that has an intention, an action, and an effect. Because an act, in order to be performative, needs to take place besides being described or enounced. However, it can be noticed how the relationship between performer and audience remains central even though the communication should have certain apparent characteristics. At the beginning of this chapter, I tried to unpack the linguistic side of performative agency. In this last part, however, it is necessary to investigate the theatrical connotation that Butler’s theory has. Since the performance is subject to interpretation and it is presented to an audience, as Butler says, this theory takes the connotation of theatrical. Zelezny argues, in this regard, that the “particular agency of theatre can communicate the complex processes at work in the way meaning is created and communicated” (Zelezny 11). Since Butler’s theory of performativity is based on giving meaning to the performative utterance between a speaker and an audience, Zelezny proposes that theater has an agency too, an agency that also conveys meanings just as a daily situation. Consequently, it is possible to see how the performative may have application within the *theatrical* and everyday life. Although it is possible to distinguish these two spheres, it should be considered that Butler’s theory of performativity tries to depict a complex process of how the social world works. It should be considered that a performative act works and gains force when the speech act acquires enough authority through repetitive utterances. As we said, performative utterance comes from Austin’s performative utterances that perform an action and a linguistic act at the same time in an appropriate setting. The process is truly similar to Nietzsche’s idea of linking a set of processes and acts that transmit signifiers through a moment that is repeated and thus “returns like a spectre to trouble the quiet of a later moment” (Nietzsche qtd. in Zelezny 9). The performative act may lose its force only in the

case in which a second clause of a statement restores the constative assertion⁵⁰. That is because a speech act not only reports something but also performs an action. A contractual reality hence is created when the speech act and the physical action are equal to the desired effect of the speaker's intent. Hence, the desired effect is inevitably affected by the intent of the speaker on the audience. Therefore, since not all the performances have the desired effect depending on the force of the utterance, I argue that the desire behind the performative may uncover the dramaturgy side of Butler's theory. If it is considered that the audience beholds the utterance, as it was argued in the second section of this chapter, Butler's performative theory effectively assumes an audience. In doing so, the connection that can come from it would recall the *theatrical* in the theater context, which is what I am trying to avoid while presenting the notion of theatricality. However, other theories of the *theatrical* employed the presence of an audience even though the setting was not the theater. Therefore, in order to clearly point out Butler's bond with dramaturgy I need to expand the concept of the performative. To ensure the connection of the notion of theatricality in a non-theatrical context, I will make use of a definition by Josette Féral. As it was possible to read in the third chapter, Féral offers examples of how the notion of theatricality is to be found in theater as well as in daily life, namely a non-theatrical context. Féral, in fact, is the scholar who distinguishes the various contexts in which a theatrical situation can be found. However, in this context, she would make a great contribution since she differentiates theatricality and performativity. In her essay "Performance

⁵⁰ The example that Butler proposes is about a homosexual that declares: "I am a homosexual and I intend not to act on my desire." Butler in this particular case in which there is a rebuttable presumption that a person action would reflect in his/her being, says "the first clause, 'I am a homosexual:' loses its performative force; its constative status is restored through the addition of the second clause. In Freud, the renunciation takes the form of regret and atonement, but it makes no claims to having annihilated the desire; indeed, within renunciation, the desire is kept intact, and there is a strange and important way in which prohibition might be said to preserve desire" (*Excitable Speech* 116).

and Theatricality: The Subject Demystified,” Féral unpacks the concept of performance and says that:

the absence of narrativity (continuous narrativity, that is) is one of the dominant characteristics of performance. If the performer should unwittingly give in to the temptation of narrativity, he does so never continuously or consistently, but rather ironically with a certain remove, as if he were quoting, or in order to reveal its inner workings. This absence leads to a certain frustration on the part of the spectator, when he is confronted with performance which takes him away from the experience of theatricality. For there is nothing to say about performance, nothing to tell yourself, nothing to grasp, project, introject, except for flows, networks, and systems. Everything appears and disappears like a galaxy of “transitional objects” representing only the failures of representation (Féral 179).

Féral notices how within the performative field there is not a direct conversation between the performer and the audience since the performance grasps bits and pieces of meaning and representation without having the support of a narrativity. The performance is not able to represent as theater does. The point is that performativity, to function like theatricality, needs the support of an audience. Having a response from an audience – that may be in a quotidian as much as in an artistic, social, or political sphere – allows the whole act to be considered *theatrical*. The performance through acts that Butler theorizes, then, differs from the performance as an art form since Butler’s concept of performance is conveyed by the speaker as a linguistic act and produces an effect on the interlocutor. As Butler says performative acts must be repeated in order to be efficacious. Moreover, a performative act uses language as its vehicle to convey a representation, as it does for identity and gender. The performance, instead, is not able to be the vehicle of representation because of the lack of narrativity. The non-use of language. However, performance uses other elements to speak to others. By considering the performative component in the various contexts analyzed – in its art forms as much as in the quotidian - Féral adds:

Performance not only speaks to the mind, but also speaks to the senses (cf. Angela Ricci Lucchi's and Gianikian's experiments with smell), and it speaks from subject to subject. It attempts not to tell (like theatre), but rather to provoke synaesthetic relationships between subjects. Performance can therefore be seen as an art-form whose primary aim is to undo "competencies" (which are primarily theatrical) ... Performance readjusts these competencies and redistributes them in a desystematized arrangement. We cannot avoid speaking of "deconstruction" here. We are not, however, dealing with a "linguistico-theoretical" gesture, but rather with a real gesture, a kind of deterritorialized gesturality. As such, performance poses a challenge to the theatre and to any reflection that theatre might make upon itself. Performance reorients such reflections by forcing them to open up and by compelling them to explore the margins of theatre. For this reason, an excursion into performance has seemed not only interesting, but essential to our ultimate concern, which is to come back to the theatre after a long detour behind the scenes of theatricality (Féral 179).

As it is possible to understand from this passage, performance explores the margins of theater by speaking to the mind and the senses. Even though performance and performative acts are two different concepts, since each can be only applied to a specific context, Féral claims that performativity deals with real gestures and not linguistic gestures such as the illocutionary gestures that seem to bound the speaker to "the analytic philosophy of language" ("Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" 519), as Butler argues for the performative acts. Comparing Féral and Butler's versions of performance, it is possible to notice a sort of detachment from the concept of the *theatrical*. Is performance the foundation of performativity? Since Butler talks about acting and performative acts, can those be compared to theatricality? In the essay "Theatricality's proper objects: genealogies of performance and gender theory," part of the collection of essays on *Theatricality* edited by Tracy C. Davis, and Thomas Postlewait, author Shannon Jackson discusses the proper relationship between performance and theatricality through works of critical theorists including Judith Butler. Jackson examines some of the most important theoretical pieces to contend that in the field of critical theory, performativity has been opposed to theatricality for a long time that brought to

an elision of the semantic binary that put theatricality and performativity together. That may be because performativity, as it is possible to see through Butler, has been associated foremost with speech-act theory. Indeed, Jackson shows how different lenses may change the way performativity and theatricality are perceived. Theater scholars are studying the relationship between theatricality and performativity in a theoretical context that mostly concerns the theater set. That is because, as Jackson says, history “can be conveniently sidestepped by the frame of performativity, one that equates theatre with the real and the intentional in order to celebrate (or condemn) theories of performativity for their engagement with the play of representation” (*Theatricality* 209). Moreover, this relation is investigated under the lens that does not require a “complex treatment in order to secure intellectual legitimacy” (*Theatricality* 209). However, if the roles of actors or performers in the performance are analyzed for their intentions, and their awareness, that may turn the whole debate that exists about theatricality. Namely, if theater relates to values of reality and intentionality, that would be in contrast with the *theatrical* associations with artifice, figuration, and representation. And that is mostly because of what Butler argues about the performativity of genders. The identity of a person is expressed through the gender that, in turn, needs speech acts to be performed. And yet, gender identity is not prior to its acts, the acts construct the actor’s identity as a compelling illusion, an object of belief, as it was possible to see in the first section of this chapter.

The concept of identity as an illusion is one of the main points that connects performativity with theatricality. However, Butler, in *Gender Trouble*, uses another term that semantically recalls the performative and the *theatrical*. A connection that can be found in Butler whenever she employs the term parodic. The term parody is used as a suggestion to the “perpetual displacement constitutes a fluidity of identities that suggests an openness to resignification and recontextualization” (*Gender Trouble* 138). Therefore, parody becomes a practice in which a recontextualization is needed in order to naturalize gender identity.

However, it is important to consider that Butler argues that parody is not a subversive destabilization of gender. Parody consciously exposes the artificiality of gender roles within gender conventions traditionally imposed by society. Therefore, cross-dressing and drag are considered deviant gendered behaviors since the traditional correspondence between gender, sex, and sexuality exposes the artificiality of the conventional gender binary. For this reason, Butler argues that:

Parody by itself is not subversive, and there must be a way to understand what makes certain kinds of parodic repetitions effectively disruptive, truly troubling, and which repetitions become domesticated and recirculated as instruments of cultural hegemony. A typology of actions would clearly not suffice, for parodic displacement, indeed, parodic laughter, depends on a context and reception in which subversive confusions can be fostered. What performance where will invert the inner/outer distinction and compel a radical rethinking of the psychological presuppositions of gender identity and sexuality? What performance where will compel a reconsideration of the place and stability of the masculine and the feminine? And what kind of gender performance will enact and reveal the performativity of gender itself in a way that destabilizes the naturalized categories of identity and desire (*Gender Trouble* 139).

Parody may be considered a part of the performativity of gender that escapes the repetitive acts that reinforce history to give space to a subversive action that would raise questions on the so-acknowledged gender binary. In doing so, therefore, parody reveals the gender identity as a mere illusion. In conclusion, I argue that parody, as well as performative agency, are seen as acts delivered by a person who wants to establish his/her identity in front of an audience. It is a bodily act expressed in a space where the performance is conveyed. Butler recognizes a performative force in everyone. A force that is dictated by internal and external factors. Space, as it was possible to see with Michael Fried, Josette Fèral, and Susan Sontag is fundamental, and as Butler stresses, the setting is fundamental whenever a performance should be rightfully conveyed. Space, as a matter of fact, is the element that is able to comprehend all those theories in the very concept of theatricality. In each theory, the space in which the act is conveyed

enables judgment and reception of the object, the subject, or the performance. All those elements of theatricality own the right amount of artificiality to create an illusion. With Fried, it was possible to see how an object acquires a soul and a meaning in the eyes of a beholder, despite its qualities of exaggeration and artifice. Féral proposes that theatricality is to be seen in each situation since the eyes of the gazer may recognize factors of theatricality in the space and time in which a subject move. Sontag, instead, acclaims the exaggeration and the artifice side of a whole revolutionary concept of camp, a sensibility or taste that had a wide cultural resonance, a taste that is to be found in the contemporary time as much as in the last century thanks to the elements of pop culture. At last, Butler recognizes a certain performativity in the way in which people perform their own identity. Theatricality can be recognized in the relations between people with objects and space, and these relationships are emphasized by all the scholars I draw on. An additional confirmation of the importance of space and relations in the theory of the theatrical is given by John Lutterbie, whose areas of interest are theory, history, and criticism of theater and performance art. In his essay “Phenomenology and the Dramaturgy of Space and Place,” he contends that performance is available for consumption in a space that is produced. As he says: “Space is not something that is lived in the way that a rehearsal is lived in readying a performance. The equivalent of rehearsal in this analogy is place” (Lutterbie 125). Lutterbie argues that the performance needs a phenomenological observation. That is because, as Butler would also contend, the place in the world in which we experience life is at the basis of our construction of space and identity. However, the way in which we experience a certain space has its relevance. It's the experience that is lived by the person that becomes relevant in the concept of theatricality. Even though the relation is always observed to be between an actor – that could either be an object or a subject - and an audience – denominated also as beholder or gazer - it is the experience of the individual that establishes the theatricality as a whole. As Lutterbie explains: “While space is framed in the third person, the experience

of place is always in the first person” (Lutterbie 128). As it was possible to see, the term *theatrical* is analyzed in its element of spatiality and temporality as much as in the dynamic that can be seen between an actor and his/her audience. Situations that can be analyzed in many fields such as the artistic, the sociological, and the cultural. However, theatricality can be found in daily life as well. All these dynamics contain the elements of illusion and artificiality. Elements that may recall a theater-like dynamic and yet be a dynamic that exists in its own dimension that is different. Theater in fact is mostly based on real life and yet is fiction. The qualities and values presented in ourselves, in our interests, and in all the things that surround us are a reenactment of theater-like dynamic and yet are nothing more than daily reality. The product of a social and cultural influence on each one of us creates an object of belief.

Conclusion

I have argued throughout this work that the concept of the *theatrical* is a concept that stands apart from its common connection with theater. Writing this dissertation, I came across a new vision of the things that surround me in my daily life and its cultural relevance, a vision of theatricality that in fact was distinct from the performative context. A vision that I took for granted until I started my research. As I am very fascinated by the world of theater, I wanted to work with this concept and perhaps expand my knowledge about it. However, when Prof. Mena Mitrano suggested the idea of theatricality, I immediately felt attracted by it. Until that moment I would have connected theater only to a space in which people go with the purpose to see a performance which can either be a play or a musical piece, a theatrical space. A show in which the audience is focused on a fictional world escaping their real life and their real-life problems. Theater can be considered an exciting escape that includes a magical illusion and perhaps live music. Initially, I had no clue what the theatricality meant for my studies. When I first came across the definitions given by dictionaries, I used to connect the theatrical with the romanticization of life. A way for people to idealize their own lives by romanticizing the little things. A phenomenon that is vastly spread among people of my age. Young people try to imitate certain aesthetics inspired by films, TV series, or shows. The idea that life can be rosy is more and more tempting for people who stay up to date on social media and that can be problematic. This exact thought, along with a strong interest of mine, made me believe that the romanticization of life could have found an association with the world of theater. People, inspired by the romanticization of their actions, start to act for their own “plot,” they start to create an illusion of their own existence somehow. The *theatrical*, despite being a term that seemed to be based on a theater context, is to be found in many products of our society. In the introduction of a volume of the journal *The Eighteenth Century*, John O’Brien emphasizes the

centrality of theater in cultures by pointing out the artificiality that comes from it. Theater is usually presented with many characteristics that initially seem to be against what is solid and authentic. A value that is also associated with the *theatrical*. However, in theater, there is a real difficulty in recognizing what is real and what is not. For O'Brien, that could be attributed to the new current that realized what anti-theatricalist writers – who were in opposition to any form of theater - were afraid of the impossibility of distinguishing reality from its representation. The impossibility of making such a distinction becomes a problem the moment in which theater is presupposed to be the space in which one can see a performance. One thing remains important: the power owned by theater on culture, and an audience to be addressed by those who perform. As O'Brien writes in his introduction, he expands on the relationship between people of the eighteenth century and theater itself. He argues that theater has the power to: “absorb its audiences, provoke its enemies, and help people understand and shape their cultures” (O'Brien 194-195). This is the thing that the *theatrical* and theater have in common: theatricality is shaped by culture and at the same time theatricality shapes culture. Analyzing the term from a cultural perspective, the *theatrical* is to be found in music, cinema, and in as many forms of art as one can count. Consequently, art was the first cultural aspect of our society in which I researched the concept of theatricality. The *theatrical*, as a concept, was easy to find within the performative field of study, yet not many scholars have tried to apply the term to other contexts. Due to this, the *theatrical* inquiry begins within the artistic and performative field and goes on within social and cultural contexts of daily life. As the American theater scholar Marvin Carlson points out, the investigative fields of theater have changed. Carlson argues that theatricality, “like performance, has been very differently configured as a result of the interpenetration of theatrical and social science theory, but which has not gained, as performance has, a higher visibility and a generally more productive and flexible critical usage as a result” (Carlson 239). The *theatrical* and performance are terms that inevitably have been

connected. However, throughout this research, it has been possible to delineate a profile of the *theatrical* that stands out for some characteristics. Namely, the concepts of self and identity, the dichotomy of real and artificial, and the coordinates of time and space are all elements that help the term *theatrical* to rise among the common associations. Yet, theatricality exceeds the negative qualities that have been attributed to it for years. Theatricality, as Carlson contends as well,

can admit to all those qualities that have historically been cited against it—that it is artificial, removed from everyday life, exaggerated, extreme, flamboyant, distracting. Yet despite indeed because of these qualities, it can still be recognized as an essential element in the continued vitality and enjoyment of both theater and performance and beyond that, as a positive, indeed celebrative expression of human potential (Carlson 249).

As it was possible to observe throughout this inquiry, in the artistic field, it is clear that Fried views theatricality as an enemy since he strives for authenticity in each piece of art. Feral, instead, provides scenarios in which theatricality is portrayed in a more positive light by presenting diverse narratives. Additionally, she introduces the *theatrical* outside the performative, allowing it to be part of everyday life. Sontag's thoughts on humans, cultural embeddedness, and the constant proposal of dichotomies in Western culture are provided through the idea of *camp* as a metaphor for the *theatrical*. Lastly, Butler redefines theatricality as a question of self and identity. Butler believes that the subject is constituted by a ritualized production of codified behavior. Therefore, agreeing with Carlson, the *theatrical* is indeed a celebration of human potential, but it is also a phenomenon that is widespread throughout the culture for interpretative and critical usage.

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