

*The Culture of Improvement
and “Great Expences”
Neighborhoods, Playhouses, and Stagecraft*

Thomas Killigrew’s penchant for braggadocio and Samuel Pepys’s affinity for recordation collocated on the afternoon of August 2, 1664, in the Theatre Royal. While they waited for the curtain to rise on a revival of Jonson’s *Bartholomew Fair*, Killigrew seized the opportunity to enthuse about the additional theatrical improvements he envisioned: a “house in Moore fields” that would not only feature “common plays” but also function as a “Nursery” – a training school for fledging actors. It would have “the best Scenes and Machines, the best Musique, and everything as Magnificent as is in Christendome,” and Killigrew “to that end hath sent for voices and painters and other persons from Italy.”¹ Killigrew’s gasconade reveals how the quest for prestige dovetailed with an equally fervent desire to rival continental developments. Only in Italy does one find “the best” singers, painters, and machinists, and they are “[m]agnificent” precisely because they have the skills to realize the latest innovations in stagecraft and musical technique. That desire for “the best” and the latest intensified over time. Three years later, on February 12, 1667, Killigrew ran into Pepys once again at Lord Brouncker’s house. This time, the theatre manager crowed over what he had achieved since their last conversation, proclaiming “that the stage is now by his pains a thousand times better and more glorious than ever heretofore.”² Itemized were various improvements: wax candles, not tallow; polite audiences, not “then, as in a bear-garden”; nine or ten musicians, not “two or three fiddlers”; and baize to cover the stage floor, not rushes on the ground.³ Best of all, the king and “civil people” now attend frequently, whereas “then, the Queen seldom

¹ Pepys, *Diary*, 5:230. We know little about the workings of the nursery. Pepys saw a show there on February 24, 1668. A year later, his wife, Elizabeth, Mary Batelier, and her boyfriend saw “a play at the new Nursery, which is set up at the House in Lincoln’s [Inn] fields which was formerly the King’s House” (Pepys, *Diary*, 9:531).

² Pepys, *Diary*, 8:55.

³ Pepys, 55.

and the King would never come,” a proud declaration of how theatrical improvements were attracting a new demographic.⁴

The adverbial emphasis in the preceding passage underscores the overriding sense of historicity Killigrew shared with William Davenant, the manager of the rival Duke’s Company. Both men believed in historical change as progress, with one theatrical epoch ameliorating the previous one. In a poem written to Charles II, Davenant, too, boasts about the changes he has wrought. What his predecessors “have done we do again / But with less loss of time and lesser pain” – a tribute to the rapid scene changes of which baroque stagecraft was capable.⁵ Davenant emphasizes another facet of improvement: how the new stagecraft makes possible the penning of plays with more complicated plots and settings. So fast and “various” are Restoration scene changes that “the *Dramatick* Plots of *Greece*, and *Rome*, / Compar’d to ours, do from their height decline, / And shrink in all the compass of design.”⁶ Effortlessly transported from one locale to another, spectators no longer need a chorus to tell them that an empty stage signifies the fields of Agincourt. In a similar vein, Davenant extols improvements to discovery scenes. In pre-Commonwealth playhouses, these effects were “so transparent made, / That Expectation . . . Saw, on a sodain, all that Art should hide; / Whilst at the plain contrivance all did grieve; / For it was there no trepass to deceive.”⁷ By contrast, Restoration playhouses not only surpass this “plain contrivance” but also satisfy dramatic “Expectation[s]” by staging revelations. Not surprisingly, sex comedies and horror plays – dramatic forms that use the sudden opening of scenes to show couples *in flagrante* or dead, mangled bodies – emerged in the 1670s after the enlarged theatres could produce even more spectacular effects.

That same sense of historicity – of the sharp difference between “then” and “now” – imbues the orders for the royal warrants authorizing the duopoly. The warrant issued on July 19, 1660, requests that the patent companies have the right to “establish such payments to be payed by those that shall resort to see the sayed Representations . . . as shall now be thought reasonable by them in regard of the great expences of scenes, musick and new decorations as have not bin formerly used.”⁸ Even prior to securing the duopoly or building new playhouses, both managers envisaged lavishing “great expences” on moveable scenery, expanded musical

⁴ Pepys, 55–56.

⁵ Sir William Davenant, *Poem, to the King’s Most Sacred Majesty* (London, 1663), 25.

⁶ Davenant, *Poem*, 25.

⁷ Davenant, 25.

⁸ Hotson, *The Commonwealth and Restoration Stage*, 199.

elements, and “new decorations.” The grant from Charles II issued five weeks later, on August 21, authorized both men to furnish their theatres “withal Convenient Roomes and other Necessaries thereunto appertaining for the Representation of Tragydies Comedyes, Playes, Operas & all other Entertainments of that nature In Convenient places.”⁹ “Convenient” encompasses not only our modern sense of something that is easy to execute but also the seventeenth-century signification of “befitting.”¹⁰ Effectively, this wording suggests that both men were thinking ahead to the expansive scene and wardrobe rooms that would house the machinery and costumes necessary to realize their ambitions.

If engineered scarcity was implicit to the economic logic of the duopoly, so too was the notion of improvement. “Better and more glorious than ever heretofore” and “great expences” would prove as foundational to architecture and stagecraft as rarity and exclusivity were to company practices and dramatic repertory. As Chapter 2 recounts, monopolies functioned as a form of protectionism, giving the grantee dominion over a product in exchange for generating jobs and maintaining order. The restored theatre, of course, would provide employment in an industry that had languished for nearly two decades. The language of the patents also emphasized innovation, thereby recasting commercial theatre as a new product in need of the additional oversight that only a duopoly could provide. Innovation also affiliated the theatre with the improvements sweeping London. Bolstered was national pride – the English were finally catching up with continental stagecraft – and newly commodified was a technology endowed by earlier royal ownership.¹¹ The special effects and lavish scenes and machines once reserved exclusively for kings and courtiers could now be had for a shilling. Extravagantly and innovatively produced shows did indeed pack playhouses with spectators. The theatre of “great expences,” however, collided with the straitened circumstances in which both companies found themselves, especially toward the end of the century. Without financial assistance from the court – which the stop payment on the Exchequer made impossible after January 1672 – the patent companies could not afford new scenes, new costumes, and new effects for every production. Management thus risked disappointing the very consumer expectations aroused by the promise of “better and more glorious.” The new high-tech theatres of the

⁹ Bawcutt, *The Control and Censorship of Caroline Drama*, 227.

¹⁰ OED Online, s.v. “convenient, adj. and n.,” www.oed.com.

¹¹ I am drawing upon Paul Bloom’s notion of “endowment,” whereby previous ownership imbues objects or practices with value that far surpasses material worth. See Paul Bloom, *How Pleasure Works: The New Science of Why We Like What We Like* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010), 97–101.

Restoration were also vastly expensive to run on a daily basis, never mind the additional costs associated with dramatic operas and spectacle-heavy productions.

The Restoration acting companies nonetheless clung to the notion of improvement despite the seeming irrationality of pursuing a course of action inimical to their economic self-interest. Put another way, management saw in their glorious baroque playhouses what Lauren Berlant describes as “the cloud of possibility that is generated by the gap between an object’s specificity and the needs and promises projected onto it.”¹² Objects, of course, do not exist apart from our affective encounters with them: they function as the “things and scenes that you have converted into propping up your world.”¹³ The upmarket theatrical “world” envisioned by Killigrew, as his comments to Pepys reveal, would be propped up by the most technologically advanced and sumptuously beautiful playhouses seen to date. These exquisite, jewel-like theatres, downsized for exclusivity and embellished by the latest innovations, were also unsustainable financially. Nonetheless, so seductive was the notion of “the best” and so powerful the lure of innovation that it would take a succession of managers over three decades to walk away from the theatre of “great expenses.” The adored objects into which we invest our time, emotions, and money can prove as difficult to cede as a doomed love affair.

The Quest for Improvement

People have always wanted to better their lot, but the quest for improvement quickened in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Elizabethan “how to” manuals provided instruction on how to better agrarian practices; how to manage domestic households; how to educate children; how to improve livestock yields; and how to learn “hard words.” Indeed, so pervasive were the latter publications that the Lexicons of Early Modern English website lists 526 known “hard words” titles encompassing everything from mastering difficult phrases in Herodian to understanding basic musical terms.¹⁴ Natural philosophers such as Francis Bacon sought to improve training in universities by replacing the Aristotelian emphasis on syllogism and sophistry with an empirical method grounded in the observation of nature, an ambitious program he outlined in *The Advancement of*

¹² Lauren Berlant, *Desire/Love* (Brooklyn, NY: Punctum Books, 2012), 6.

¹³ Berlant, *Desire/Love*, 6.

¹⁴ LEME: Lexicons of Early Modern English, <https://leme.library.utoronto.ca/>.

Learning (1605). By the Restoration, as Paul Slack has argued, the notion of improvement had overtaken English culture.¹⁵ Intellectuals such as John Evelyn, Thomas Sprat, Robert Hooke, William Petty, and Christopher Wren pointed to the manifold benefits of pressing science into the service of burgeoning commerce: new highways that would move foodstuffs and commodities; new construction techniques that would expand neighborhoods; and new modes of measurements and building materials that would produce larger and more comfortable edifices. Andrew Yarrington's pamphlet *England's Improvement by Sea and Land* (1677) advocates ship-building and the expansion of waterways that might allow England to overtake the thriving Dutch economy. So widespread was interest in the economic benefits of innovation that discussions spilled over from the intellectual environs of the Royal Society to sites of sociability, such as taverns and coffeehouses.¹⁶

Some detractors, such as Sir William Temple, worried that an economy predicated on innovation would incline citizens toward "excess and luxury."¹⁷ Nonetheless, pamphlets such as *England's Great Happiness* (1677) and *A Discourse Shewing the Great Advantages that New-Buildings and the Enlarging of Towns and Cities Do Bring to a Nation* (1678) detailed the manifold benefits of improvements that in turn would lift standards of living. The latter pamphlet, probably written by Nicholas Barbon, casts London as a beehive of commercial creativity where contented citizens, flush with money, build new houses furnished with the "niceties" of life and thus energize the economy. The past was also scrutinized with an eye toward innovation. The Royal Society established various subcommittees to gather information on how to improve earlier agricultural practices and spur reforestation, both of which were essential to growing the economy. Nowhere was the yen for improvement more evident than in the rebuilding of London after the Great Fire of 1666. Rather than reproducing what had existed previously, the government seized the opportunity to widen streets, enlarge buildings, such as the Royal Exchange and the Guildhall, and construct dwellings out of tile and brick instead of highly flammable wood and straw.

¹⁵ Paul Slack, *The Invention of Improvement: Information and Material Progress in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 134–35.

¹⁶ John Spurr references a conversation between Hooke, a Captain Hamden, and "one [Andrew] Yarrington" at Garraway's coffeehouse about the importation of tin-making from Saxony that captures "the omnivorous interests of both the practical scientist and the amateur, their concern with practical problems and applied science, with technique and technology, all in the service of improvement." John Spurr, *England in the 1670s: This Masquerading Age* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 135.

¹⁷ Sir William Temple, quoted in Slack, *Invention of Improvement*, 141.

The fervor to improve rather than reinstate similarly overtook the acting companies, and just as the Royal Society studied the past to better the present, so did company managers scrutinize pre-Commonwealth theatres with an eye towards revamping Restoration playhouses. Even detractors such as Richard Flecknoe grudgingly praised the improvements that had occurred since the Caroline period: “Now, for the difference betwixt our Theaters and those of former times, they were but plain and simple, with no other Scenes, nor Decorations of the Stage, but onely old Tapestry, and the Stage strew’d with Rushes, (with their Habits accordingly) whereas ours now for cost and ornament are arriv’d to the height of Magnificence.”¹⁸ If improvements to commerce and waterways would enable the English, in the words of Yarrington, “To out-do the Dutch,” the transformation of architecture and stagecraft would allow the acting companies to surpass continental playhouses. At the outset of the Restoration, commercial playhouse architecture in London lagged a good thirty years behind Paris and at least forty years behind Italian cities such as Parma and Venice – an uncomfortable gap the new, costly, high-tech edifices would close. When Killigrew rebuilt the Theatre Royal after fire had destroyed the Bridges Street playhouse in 1672, he most likely turned to Christopher Wren, who pointedly shared his enthusiasm for architectural improvement.¹⁹ Like Hooke, Wren saw the Great Fire as an opportunity to remake London, starting with the rebuild of St. Paul’s Cathedral. Additionally, Wren designed and built the Royal Naval College, Greenwich, fifty-two new churches in London, and, in all likelihood, Drury Lane theatre.

Contemporary reports from foreign visitors extolled the new improvements made to English playhouses. The French savant Samuel Sorbière, a keen supporter of Pierre Gassendi and other proponents of the “new science,” came to London in 1663 for induction into the Royal Academy.

¹⁸ Richard Flecknoe, “A Short Treatise of the English Stage,” attached to his *Love’s Kingdom* (London, 1664), H3r–v.

¹⁹ Robert D. Hume points out that the unsigned illustration often attributed to Wren – a longitudinal section of a playhouse showing the sections of the auditorium along with four pairs of shutters and grooves along the stage – might be a discarded sketch that has nothing to do with Drury Lane Theatre. That drawing and an unlabeled plan were found in 1913 among the Wren papers in All Souls College, Oxford, and this discovery encouraged their attribution to Wren. See Robert D. Hume, “Theatre History, 1660–1800: Aims, Materials, Methodology,” in *Players, Playwrights, Playhouses: Investigating Performance, 1660–1800*, ed. Michael Corder and Peter Holland (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 23. Tim Keenan further discusses these drawings in *Restoration Staging*, 9–10. As Keenan notes, we have no evidence for Wren having designed Drury Lane other than Cibber’s description of “the original Figure” of the building, “which Sir Christopher Wren first gave it” (Cibber, 224). Wren’s status as one of the foremost improvers in London after 1666, however, would have made him an especially appealing choice to Killigrew, given the latter’s aspirations.

Eager to witness firsthand the changes overtaking the capital, he attended a performance at the Theatre Royal in Bridges Street – the same playhouse where Killigrew had enthused to Pepys about his plans for additional improvements. Sorbière was impressed by what he saw: the stage was “*fort beau, couvert d’un tapis vert, & la scene y est toute libre, avec beaucoup de changements, & des perspectives. La symphonie y fait attendre agreablement l’ouverture du theatre, & on y va volontiers de bonne heure pour l’escouter*” (“very beautiful, closed by a green curtain, and the scenery is quite open, with many changes and perspectives. Music is played agreeably during the overture and people go early to listen.”)²⁰ The Grand Duke of Tuscany, Cosmo the Third, saw that same playhouse six years later and also commented on the scenery being very “light” – perhaps another way of saying “open” – and “capable of a great many changes, and embellished with beautiful landscapes.”²¹ In an unpublished manuscript, François Brunet records a visit to Dorset Garden playhouse on October 6, 1676, which he thought “*plus beau et plus propre que ceux de nos Comediens*”; in other words, “more beautiful and cleaner than those of our players.”²² In 1685, when Henri Misson visited the capital, he too was taken with the “large and handsome” Dorset Garden Theatre, which he contrasted with the “something smaller” Theatre Royal in Drury Lane.²³ Like Sorbière, he was captivated by the “green Cloth” covering the benches in the pit, a bit of luxury evidently uncommon in continental playhouses.²⁴ Equally luxurious was the choice of neighborhood, as the following section explores.

Deciphering Neighborhood Geographies

In their quest for improvement, Killigrew and Davenant ignored the parts of London closely identified with pre-Commonwealth playhouses. Never, for instance, was modestly priced Southwark considered, despite the legacies of the Rose, the Swan, the Hope, and, of course, the Globe. The managers did not look to the area around Gracechurch Street, where city inns such as the Bell and the Cross Keys had provided roofed venues

²⁰ Samuel Sorbière, French quoted in John Sayer, *Jean Racine: Life and Legend* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2006), 53. The translation is mine.

²¹ Lorenzo Magalotti, *Travels of Cosmo the Third, Grand Duke of Tuscany, through England, during the Reign of King Charles the Second* (1669; repr., London: 1821), 190–91. Page references are to the 1821 edition.

²² Hotson, *The Commonwealth and Restoration Stage*, 234.

²³ Henri Misson, *M. Misson’s Memoirs and Observations in His Travels over England*, trans. Mr. Ozell (London, 1719), 219.

²⁴ Misson, *Memoirs and Observations*, 219.

long before the construction of Blackfriars in 1596.²⁵ They discounted the northern suburbs, home to amphitheatres such as the Fortune, just off Golding Lane, and The Curtain, near Finsbury Fields. Indeed, the Fortune, although partially dismantled in 1649, could have been renovated at a reasonable cost.²⁶ Clerkenwell was also ignored, the suburb slightly west of these amphitheatres, despite the viability of the Red Bull, which had been rebuilt and enlarged in the 1650s. Used occasionally for illegal performances during the Interregnum, the Red Bull after the Restoration briefly hosted fencers and an obscure acting company before falling into disrepair.²⁷ Similarly overlooked was the Blackfriars district, home to the first roofed theatre. Blackfriars had the additional advantage of being five minutes from St. Paul's Cathedral, a popular location for booksellers purveying play quartos: one exited the playhouse, turned right on Carter Lane, and then ducked through a gap between houses to arrive at the front gates. The Cockpit (also called the Phoenix) and Salisbury Court were closer to the desirable neighborhoods ultimately selected for the Restoration playhouses. Killigrew and Davenant "worked temporarily in those relics" but ultimately "elected not to make them permanent theatrical homes."²⁸ Sought instead were neighborhoods closely associated with the latest urban improvements.

In terms of where to site their playhouses, the Restoration acting companies had unprecedented freedom of choice. Unlike earlier companies, they were not forced to inhabit "liberties," such as Shoreditch or Blackfriars, which were outside of city limits and therefore beyond the legal reach of anti-theatrical factions. The royal imprimatur of the duopoly protected Restoration companies from angry shopkeepers disgruntled by playhouse traffic or disapproving City aldermen shocked by scandalous plays.²⁹ Given the "persistence of high Calvinism in Restoration England,"

²⁵ Gurr, 119.

²⁶ The playhouse laid dormant throughout the Interregnum. Finally, a notice appeared in *Mercurius Publicus* for the week of 14–21 February 1661 disclosing plans to tear down the remaining structure and build 23 "Tenements" on the site (*Register*, 1:17).

²⁷ *LS*, xxxi.

²⁸ Edward A. Langhans, "The Theatre," in *The Cambridge Companion to English Restoration Theatre*, ed. Deborah Payne Fisk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2.

²⁹ Nothing like the 1572 "Acte for the punishment of Vacabondes" exists for the Restoration. For an overview of early modern opposition to the acting companies, see Jonas Barish, "Puritans and Proteans," in *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 80–131. The sole known opposition to the proposed erection of a playhouse came from the residents of St. Giles in 1671, when they learned of Lady Davenant's plans to erect a nursery in their neighborhood, an instance of late seventeenth-century nimbyism. The court concurred that building another playhouse "soe neere the Bowells of the City" would create "great evill & inconveniency" to the residents (*Register*, 1:130).

many citizens undoubtedly still harbored a deep suspicion of live performance, but they were not about to voice their objections, especially given court support of the acting companies.³⁰ Indeed, so successful was the government in dismantling anti-theatricality that it retreated into the crevices of sermons and religious writings until a turn toward social conservatism at the end of the century made it acceptable once again to publish diatribes against plays and the playhouse.³¹ The publication of Jeremy Collier's *A Short View of the Immorality, and Profaneness of the English Stage* (1698) ushered in a pamphlet war that, according to Lisa A. Freeman, quickly reached a "feverish pitch" by the turn of the century.³² Until that moment, however, the Restoration companies were not affected by the antitheatrical sentiments that had pushed so many troupes outside of Westminster or across the Thames to Southwark half a century earlier.

Accordingly, Restoration management settled upon the "Town," the fashionable West End location under development since the 1630s. The 4th Earl of Bedford paid £2,000 for a license in 1634 to build "houses and buildings as fit for the habitacons of gentlemen and men of ability" in Covent Garden, land that had sat fallow since the dissolution of the monasteries in the mid-fifteenth century.³³ To create this upmarket venture, Inigo Jones drew upon the piazza at Leghorn (Livorno) in Tuscany for inspiration, thus setting off what Malcolm Billings calls a "speculative building boom" in the westernmost part of London that continued well into the Restoration.³⁴ In 1678, Nicholas Barbon noted that so much construction had occurred around the Strand over the preceding 40 years that "now by the addition of the New-buildings of *Covent-Garden, Lincolnes-Inne-Fields, Clare-Market*, and those towards *Pickadilly* and *St. James*, the *Strand* is much nearer the middle of the Town, and the Rents of the *Strand* since that time are more then doubled, that is a House that was then

³⁰ Dewey D. Wallace, Jr., *Shapers of English Calvinism, 1660–1714: Variety, Persistence, and Transformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 92.

³¹ Except for "A Discourse against Plays and Romances" by the French Jansenist apologist Pierre Nicole, not one essay against the stage was printed during the reign of Charles II. The publishers of "A Discourse" buried the essay in the third volume of Nicole's *Moral Essays* (1680) and referred to it innocuously, if misleadingly, as "a small Writing of Plays" in their prefatory advertisement to avoid government censors (A2v). A different translation of the *Discourse* circulated in manuscript and is now held in the Folger Shakespeare Library. See Deborah Payne Fisk, "Shakespearean Manuscripts, French Jansenists, and the Cultural Politics of Misprision," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 62, no. 1–2 (1999): 25–42.

³² Lisa A. Freeman, *Antitheatricality and the Body Public* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 7.

³³ Malcolm Billings, *London: A Companion to Its History and Archaeology* (London: Kyle Cathie, 1994), 139.

³⁴ Billings, *London*, 139.

worth but twenty pounds *per Annum*, is now worth fifty.”³⁵ These neighborhoods had become the most expensive in London: merely to rent the land increased the bottom line for any business venture.

That expense did not deter Davenant from selecting the old Lisle’s Tennis Court in Lincoln’s Inn Fields for his first playhouse and personal dwelling. Two years earlier, the developer William Newton procured a license to turn the open plot of land just behind Lincoln’s Inn, one of the four Inns of Court, into thirty-two houses. Quickly, that neighborhood attracted minor nobility, landed gentry, and even royal mistresses: the actress Nell Gwyn gave birth to a royal bastard, the future Duke of St. Albans, in one of the houses built by Newton.³⁶ According to a drawing by Leslie Hotson, a garden separated the new playhouse, the scene room, and Davenant’s lodgings from newly built homes belonging to Lord Brudenell (soon to be elevated to an earldom); Sir Philip Warwick, the politician and historian; and Sir John Carew, the MP for Cornwall.³⁷ Cynthia Wall points out that this new “theatre area, between the City walls and the court at Westminster, known as the Town, had ... by the Restoration ... become ‘the permanent, fashionable center for England’s elite.’”³⁸ It was not, however, simply a matter of situating the new playhouses in upscale neighborhoods to attract the “right” clientele. Urban space was also constitutive of the very spectators sought by both acting companies: “New buildings, especially buildings that initiate new categories of building in a given location (like the theatres or the Royal Exchange) produce new ways of being, new social orientations.”³⁹ The neighborhoods selected by Killigrew and Davenant thus encouraged a cognitive mapping that reinforced their own, as well as their target audience’s, sense of themselves as urban elites.

The selection of the West End, however, made playgoing more difficult for Londoners outside of that privileged enclave. In 1600, between 15 and 20 percent of people living in South Bank, many of whom were artisans

³⁵ [Nicholas Barbon], *A Discourse Shewing the Great Advantages that New-Buildings, and the Enlarging of Towns and Cities Do Bring to a Nation* (London, 1678), 3.

³⁶ Billings, *London*, 140.

³⁷ Hotson, between 124 and 125. Hotson reproduces the names he found in the *London County Council Survey of London* (1912), which accounts for the discrepancy in spelling between his original plan and my information here. For instance, he lists “Lord Brudene,” not Lord Brudenell, who purchased one of the new homes built by Newton, in addition to buying a coaching house abutting the green space separating the playhouse from the new development.

³⁸ Cynthia Wall, *The Literary and Cultural Spaces of Restoration London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 152.

³⁹ Janette Dillon, *Theatre, Court and City, 1595–1610: Drama and Social Space in London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 7.

and tradesmen, walked to local playhouses for entertainment.⁴⁰ For a penny, they could stand at the Globe, the Rose, or the Swan to see a wide variety of fare. To see theatre after 1660, they needed either to pay a boatman or walk over London bridge – the only bridge crossing the Thames until 1729 – and then hike two miles west through dirty streets. Occluded at the other end of the social spectrum were what Lawrence Stone calls the “merchant elite” of the Restoration.⁴¹ These prosperous citizens overwhelmingly eschewed the new residential developments in the West End for older, more established neighborhoods. Stone points out that a 1677 directory of nearly 2,000 London merchants and bankers

offers further proof that hardly any of the monied elite lived in the west suburbs. Only 4 percent lived in the West End at all, and they were mostly in the already decayed area of King Street, Queen Street, and the eastern side of St. Martin’s Lane. There was only one in Lincoln’s Inn Fields, one in Covent Garden, and two in Bloomsbury ... The conclusion that merchants did not reside in the fashionable western suburbs in the seventeenth century is supported by the record of tenancies, which have been preserved for the west side of St. Martin’s Lane, Covent Garden, Lincoln’s Inn Fields, Golden Square, and St. James’s Square.⁴²

For merchants too, a trip to theatres located in “the fashionable western suburbs” necessitated either a goodly hike or the hiring of a hackney carriage. The prologue to Dryden’s *Marriage A-la-Mode* suggests few were willing to travel to the Bridges Street playhouse: “Our City Friends so far will hardly come” when they “can take up with Pleasures nearer home.”⁴³ For many, the cost of transport and expensive tickets undoubtedly made “Pleasures nearer home” a more attractive prospect than a trip to the theatre.

The Theatre of “Great Expences”

The desire for “the best” informed the selection of playhouse architecture as much as it did the choice of neighborhood. The decision to build tiny, technologically complicated theatres was hardly a foregone conclusion: here, too, the companies had choices ranging from English to

⁴⁰ Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage, 1574–1642*, 196.

⁴¹ Lawrence Stone, “The Residential Development of the West End of London in the Seventeenth Century,” in *After the Reformation: Essays in Honor of J. H. Hexter*, ed. Barbara C. Malament (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1980), 186.

⁴² Stone, “The Residential Development,” 187.

⁴³ Dryden, *Works*, 11:225.

continental models. Far more cost effective than the baroque playhouses were the amphitheatres still in use up to the Civil War. Seating over 3,000 spectators, playhouses such as the Globe, the Fortune, and the Red Bull offered standing room for a penny: one-twelfth the cost of the cheapest seat in a roofed hall theatre. Shakespeare's company retained use of the Globe even after they acquired the lease to the indoor Blackfriars Theatre in 1608, which suggests "that they too saw the citizen market as by no means insignificant or unprofitable."⁴⁴ It was also strategic insofar as citizens and tradesmen did not have the luxury of country estates to which they could escape to avoid the summer heat. To accommodate this segment of their audience, the King's Men switched during the summer months to playing largely in their open-air playhouse. This "two-pronged commercial strategy" of dividing a carefully devised repertory between the elite market in the winter and the popular market in the summer paid off handsomely, making them the most prosperous of several successful companies operating until the government closure of the theatres in 1642.⁴⁵ Playgoers in London thus had the choice of three affordable amphitheatres and three upmarket hall theatres, a "perfect fit between supply and demand."⁴⁶

Killigrew and Davenant spurned this earlier commercial strategy despite its manifest success. Instead, they played one continuous repertory at small, upscale hall theatres built from scratch or converted from tennis courts. Here too, they had options that would have saddled them with less debt; for instance, they could easily have retrofitted an extant hall theatre, such as the Cockpit or Salisbury Court. In the 1650s, William Beeston had made repairs to Salisbury Court for the relatively modest sum of £320.⁴⁷ Downes records that John Rhodes also decided to renovate an extant playhouse that same decade: "getting a License from the then Governing State, [he] fitted up a House then for Acting call'd the *Cock-Pit* in *Drury-Lane*, and in a short time Completed his Company."⁴⁸ Rather than using either of these buildings, Killigrew converted Gibbons's Tennis Court, which was located just off Vere Street by Clare Market, into his first playhouse, the Vere Street Theatre. Davenant also converted a tennis

⁴⁴ Martin Butler, "Adult and Boy Playing Companies, 1625–1642," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theatre*, ed. Richard Dutton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 106.

⁴⁵ Butler, "Adult and Boy Playing Companies," 106.

⁴⁶ Butler, 106.

⁴⁷ Extant lawsuits suggest that even though Beeston asked for damages from the builders for £2,000, actual expenditures on repairs to the playhouse amounted to roughly £320. I have calculated this estimate based on figures provided in Hotson, *The Commonwealth and Restoration Stage*, 95–96.

⁴⁸ Downes, *Roscius Anglicanus, or An Historical Review of the Stage*, 43.

court for his first theatre. In March of 1660 – a good two years before the court signed off on the final letters patent – he contracted to lease the site of Lisle's Tennis Court. Renovations took well over a year, largely because of Davenant's insistence on enlarging the footprint of the original building as well as "having new Scenes and Decorations, being the first that e're were Introduc'd in *England*."⁴⁹ Robert D. Hume thinks that the introduction of music and changeable scenery at this new playhouse "forced the King's Company to build a new theatre (Bridges Street, opened in May 1663) and reply in kind," although the language of the patent suggests that Killigrew from the outset had in mind a similarly apportioned edifice.⁵⁰ Alfred Harbage points out that, as early as the 1630s, Killigrew was "dealing, in his imagination at least, with a type of stage which is frequently ... considered a Restoration innovation."⁵¹

Both managers rejected basic structures for buildings capable of providing the sort of improvements extolled by Killigrew to Pepys. Again, Salisbury Court is instructive insofar as it reveals what the King's Company pointedly did *not* want. Built in 1629 for £950, it would have been possible to build a comparable, modestly apportioned private playhouse in 1660 for £1,200.⁵² Instead, the desire for vast improvements and "great expences" spurred the company to abandon the Vere Street playhouse – which appears to have lacked the capacity for scenery – and construct a new theatre in Bridges Street. Built in 1663, it cost £2,400.⁵³ Within three years the company widened the stage, racking up additional costs. When fire destroyed that theatre in January of 1672, the company constructed the new Theatre Royal in Drury Lane for £3,900.⁵⁴ The new scene-house and scenery cost

⁴⁹ Downes, 51.

⁵⁰ Robert D. Hume, "Theatres and Repertory," in *The Cambridge History of British Theatre*, ed. Joseph Donahue, vol. 2, 1660–1895 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 55. Killigrew had already signed a lease and construction agreement for Drury Lane on December 20, 1661, a good six months before the opening of Davenant's Lincoln's Inn Fields (*Register*, 1:28). It stands to reason that he would have been scouting locations for his new, improved playhouse well in advance of signing the lease.

⁵¹ Harbage, 217.

⁵² Between 1629 and 1660, the cost of living in London peaked and ebbed, with some periods, such as the 1630s and late 1640s, witnessing sharp increases in the cost of foodstuffs, textiles, and building materials, while other years saw stability or actual declines. By the time Killigrew and Davenant built their new playhouses, cost of living increases amortized over the previous three decades would have run between 25 and 28 percent, adding roughly £260 to the price of constructing a basic hall theatre. I have derived these figures based on calculations in Jeremy Boulton's "Food Prices and the Standard of Living in London in the 'Century of Revolution', 1580–1700," *Economic History Review* 53, no. 3 (2000): 455–92.

⁵³ Edward A. Langhans, "Staging Practices in the Restoration Theatres 1660–1682" (PhD diss., Yale University, 1955), 46.

⁵⁴ Hotson, *The Commonwealth and Restoration Stage*, 254.

an additional £2,040, bringing the total to roughly £6,000 (255).⁵⁵ Under Thomas Betterton's management, the Duke's Company spent the astronomical sum of £9,000 on Dorset Garden in 1671.⁵⁶ In short, expenditures on playhouse construction skyrocketed 60–90 percent from the pre-Commonwealth period. And both companies still had to pay annual rent on the very expensive property they had leased in the West End. When the King's Company signed the lease for the land on which the Bridges Street theatre stood, they paid £30 annual ground rent for the plot adjacent to Vinegar Yard and another £50 to the Earl of Bedford for the theatre plot.⁵⁷ The Duke's Company agreed to pay £130 annual rent over thirty-nine years for the ground lease for Dorset Garden.⁵⁸ By contrast, ground rent for playhouses in 1600 ranged between £7 and £14 annually, a cost that increased slightly by the 1630s.⁵⁹ Ground rent thus shot up by 80–100 percent from what it had been at the beginning of the century. For their upmarket location, the companies paid dearly. Moreover, their determination to construct expensive playhouses in exclusive neighborhoods would redound on operating costs, affecting everything from dramatic repertory to expenditures on scenic effects.

Scenes and Machines

Above all else, it was the capacity for scenes and machines that, for Killigrew especially, distinguished the Restoration stage from its “bear-garden” predecessors. Offered in a commercial environment for the first time was technology both men had witnessed in the court masques of the 1630s. Additionally, when Killigrew and Davenant followed the court abroad during the Interregnum, they saw the commercial potential of moveable scenery and spectacular effects. By the 1640s, machine plays were an essential part of Parisian theatre and “soon to be the Marais’ most popular offerings.”⁶⁰ Upon his return to England, Davenant experimented with moveable scenery, as we know from John Webb’s extant drawings

⁵⁵ Hotson, 255.

⁵⁶ LS, li.

⁵⁷ “The Theatre Royal: Site,” in *Survey of London*, vol. 35, *The Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, and the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden*, ed. F. H. W. Sheppard (London: London County Council, 1970), 30–39, *British History Online*, www.british-history.ac.uk.

⁵⁸ *Register*, 1:117.

⁵⁹ S. P. Cerasano, “Economics,” in *A Concise Companion to English Renaissance Literature*, ed. Donna B. Hamilton (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 20.

⁶⁰ W. L. Wiley, *The Early Public Theatre in France* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), 199.

for *The Siege of Rhodes* (1656).⁶¹ According to John Orrell, English court appetites “accustomed to the fare of Paris, and even of Italy, demanded the sort of theatre at home that they had enjoyed in exile.”⁶² The choice of machine playhouses that could accommodate lightning-fast scene changes signified that the English theatre had finally caught up with a technology first invented by Italian designers in the sixteenth century. And the close association of scenes and machines with the court masques of the 1620s and 1630s further imbued the new stagecraft with the aura of royalty, an ineffable value that went well beyond the material improvements.

The Restoration thus witnessed nothing less than what Tim Keenan calls “a revolution in the way plays were performed on the public stage.”⁶³ Paying spectators for the first time saw plays performed against a backdrop of changeable scenery situated upstage of a front curtain and downstage of the large forestage inherited from the Elizabethan playhouse. Shutters comprised of two painted scenes sliding in parallel grooves met stage center, offering spectators a unified picture. Capable of shifting with almost cinematic celerity, these scenic elements transported spectators visually from one location to another. Stage floors were grooved in successive parallels, which permitted shutters to be preset for many shows: one set would open quickly to reveal another stage picture just behind it.⁶⁴ Wings (also known as side-shutters) allowed for the possibility of perspective. These painted scenes slid halfway onto the stage, thus creating with the addition of the back scene a composite picture. And, finally, relief scenes – individual flats slotted into the floor upstage of the back shutters – further enhanced visual dimension and depth. In a survey of forty plays staged at Lincoln’s Inn Fields between 1661 and 1674, Keenan tabulates an average of four to five shutter and wing changes and one to two relief changes, even for modest shows. Lavish productions, such as Thomas Shipman’s *Henry the Third of France, Stabb’d by a Fryer* (1678) or Crowne’s *Juliana, or The Princess of Poland* (1671) more than doubled that number.⁶⁵

Scenery in the early years of the Restoration, especially for revivals of pre-Commonwealth plays, was largely decorative. It took a while, as

⁶¹ John Orrell, *The Theatres of Inigo Jones and John Webb* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 68.

⁶² Orrell, *Theatres of Jones and Webb*, 4.

⁶³ Keenan, *Restoration Staging*, 2.

⁶⁴ There is ongoing scholarly debate about the number of parallel grooves in the stage floor: estimates range from three, especially for the earlier playhouses, to five. See Keenan, 74–97.

⁶⁵ Keenan, 108–10.

Keenan observes, for “its dramaturgical implications to be absorbed.”⁶⁶ Not until the Dryden/Davenant redaction of *The Tempest* did productions fully utilize the thematic potential of interweaving staging with narrative, a development that would accelerate in the 1670s.⁶⁷ Rapid scene changes allowed for effortless discovery scenes of sexual and political intrigue, thus making possible the sex comedies and horror plays that were so popular by the middle of the decade. In addition to catalyzing changes to dramatic form, the new scenic technologies provided spectators with hitherto unknown theatrical delights. Foremost among these was “[t]he thrill of recognition” as shutters opened to reveal a preset scene depicting the New Exchange or St. James’s Park.⁶⁸ These identifiable locales were perhaps all the more delightful for their relative rarity. Generic scenes, especially of interiors, nonetheless promised their own pleasures. In his examination of 200 plays, comprising over 3,000 scenes, Juan Antonio Prieto-Pablos concludes that representations of interior space showcased “private homes as places that *could be* lived in under certain conditions, and that those conditions expressed a way of life endorsed by the aristocracy and emulated by its closer associate group, the urban gentry.”⁶⁹ If siting playhouses in the West End reinforced for moneyed spectators a sense of themselves as urban elites, so did interior scenes of dining rooms, closets, bed chambers, antechambers, halls, parlors, gaming rooms, and smoking rooms. For spectators of modest means, these scenes hardly corresponded to their lived reality; rather, they stoked aspirational desires for a London lifestyle most would never enjoy.

Machines created effects just as breathtaking as the new moveable scenery, and these too beguiled spectators. Cranes flew in performers or slowly lowered them from the flies. By the time Dorset Garden was built in 1671, effects such as flashes of lightning and rolling waves offered additional thrills. John Evelyn expressly visited the playhouse while it was still under construction to see firsthand the latest evidence of improvement as well as “great expences.” The “new Machines for the intended scenes,” he observed, “were indeede very costly, & magnificent.”⁷⁰ Sound effects

⁶⁶ Keenan, 176.

⁶⁷ Keenan, 174.

⁶⁸ Tim Keenan, “Shopping and Flirting: Staging the New Exchange in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Comedies,” *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theatre Research* 30, no. 1–2 (2015): 37.

⁶⁹ Juan A. Prieto-Pablos, “From the Parlour to the Dressing Chamber: The Shaping of Domestic Space in Restoration London,” in *Thresholds and Ways Forward in English Studies*, ed. Lourdes López Roperó, Sara Prieto García-Cañedo and José Antonio Sánchez Fajardo (Alicante, Spain: Publicaciones de la Universidad de Alicante, 2020), 21.

⁷⁰ Evelyn, *Diary*, 3:583.

were also *de rigueur*. Lyndsey Bakewell identifies “seventeen plays referencing clouds which ascend, descend or open; fifty-two which used either thunder, or light[n]ing, or a combination of both; and twelve plays that depicted storms.”⁷¹ She concludes that “the frequency with which these elements of nature are employed suggests that the techniques used were effective, attainable, and above all, spectacular enough to impress an ever more demanding audience.”⁷² So enamored were the companies with these technologies that the effects could sometimes verge on the ludicrous. In the epilogue to *The Empress of Morocco, A Farce* (1674), Duffett advertises the ensuing burlesque as “a new Fancy after the old, and most surprising way of *Macbeth*,” emphasizing that it was “Perform’d with new and costly MACHINES.”⁷³ Duffett’s burlesque features, among other effects, the “melodious song of *John Dory*, being heard as it were in the Air sung in parts by Spirits”; a “*Hellish noise ... within*”; and, of course, the requisite “Thunder and Lightning,” which not only crash throughout the play but also appear as dramatic characters.⁷⁴ In addition to these spectacular sounds, “Three Witches fly over the Pit, Riding upon Beesomes”; “*Heccate* descends in a Glorious Chariot”; and “two Spirits” enter “*with Brandy burning, which [they] drink while it flames*.”⁷⁵ Duffett’s farce suggests that not all spectators were enchanted with over-the-top spectacle, especially at the King’s Company.

Unanticipated Agencies

Considerable labor was necessary to produce this level of spectacle, and behind-the-scenes costs put an additional strain on company budgets. Tim Keenan points out that whenever a complete scene change occurred, a minimum of “one stagehand would have been needed at each wing and shutter position.”⁷⁶ Even a modest show at Lincoln’s Inn Fields necessitated at least ten men “to effect a complete scene change: eight for the wing shutters and two for the backshutters.”⁷⁷ If a play called for complicated descents, additional men were needed to work flying machinery that

⁷¹ Lyndsey Bakewell, “Changing Scenes and Flying Machines: Re-examination of Spectacle and the Spectacular in Restoration Theatre, 1660–1714” (PhD diss., Loughborough University, 2015), 83–84, <https://hdl.handle.net>.

⁷² Bakewell, “Changing Scenes,” 84.

⁷³ [Thomas Duffett], *The Empress of Morocco, A Farce* (London, 1674), 27.

⁷⁴ [Duffett], *Empress of Morocco*, 29, 30–39.

⁷⁵ [Duffett], 30, 33.

⁷⁶ Keenan, *Restoration Staging*, 88.

⁷⁷ Keenan, 89.

could range from “single lines capable of moving in nearly all directions, to huge platforms carrying heavy burdens of actors and scenery.”⁷⁸ Stage directions indicate that after 1674, especially at Dorset Garden, these lavish descents were increasingly common, thus adding to the payroll a small army of highly skilled men that could work flying machinery.⁷⁹ Juan Antonio Prieto-Pablos believes we have woefully underestimated both the number and the artistic contribution of scene keepers and machinists on the Restoration stage.⁸⁰ As part of his quest to improve the theatre, Killigrew around 1663 appears to have imported the master scene keeper Antonio Brunati (or Brunatti), who previously had worked for the Swedish court, as well as in Italy. His expertise would not have been inexpensive. English scene keepers earned £25 annually. Brunati probably earned twice that amount, bringing backstage labor costs at the King’s Company to at least £300 per annum.⁸¹ By the 1670s, the pursuit of spectacle at playhouses like Dorset Garden would have necessitated at least fifteen scene keepers, perhaps twenty, thereby doubling labor costs to upwards of £600 annually.

These numbers far outstripped what was needed to produce equivalent effects on the continent. The Restoration companies rejected what Richard Southern dubs the *scène à l’italienne* common to French and Italian playhouses. Although more expensive to install, the *scène à l’italienne* was more affordable in the long run than the English shutter-and-groove system. In the continental system of stagecraft, sub-stage machines shifted scenes, necessitating several hefty men to turn the shaft or capstan connecting to the ropes, known as chariots or *carrettos*, that pulled the section of the flats just below the stage floor into place. Just as limited deck space on a midsize yacht accommodates no more than a few sailors to winch and furl sails, so the confined sub-stage space typical of continental playhouses held no more than half a dozen powerful stagehands.⁸² Not surprisingly, continental theatres such as the court playhouse at Drottningholm Palace used “old sailors, who still had a working knowledge of similar constructions

⁷⁸ Langhans, “Staging Practices,” 371.

⁷⁹ Nicoll, *A History of English Drama*, 1:49.

⁸⁰ Juan A. Prieto-Pablos, “Antonio Brunati, King’s Company Scenekeeper (1664–65),” *Theatre Notebook* 71, no. 2 (2017): 97–98.

⁸¹ Prieto-Pablos, “Antonio Brunati,” 102.

⁸² Willmar Sauter and David Wiles, *The Theatre of Drottningholm – Then and Now: Performance between the 18th and 21st Centuries* (Stockholm: Stockholm University, 2014). Sauter points out that the court theatre at Drottningholm used six men to turn the capstan – rather like the wheel of a sailing vessel – that changed scenes simultaneously, with the disappearing flat being replaced by the new one. While the performance took place, they had time to unhook the ropes and connect them to a new set of carriages for the next *changement à vue* (33–34).

on commercial sailing boats.”⁸³ Installed instead in English playhouses was the manually operated shutter-and-groove system designed earlier in the century by Inigo Jones and revived later in the Restoration by John Webb. Killigrew and Davenant wanted “the best” technology for their playhouses, but in this instance, they chose outdated stagecraft consecrated by its previous appearance in Jacobean and Caroline masques over more advanced and cost-efficient continental technology.⁸⁴

Returns suggest that scenic sumptuousness paid off. Throughout *Roscius Anglicanus*, John Downes consistently attributes box office success to high production values. Shakespeare’s *Henry VIII* (performed 1663) succeeded, “it being all new Cloath’d and new Scenes”; *Macbeth* similarly prospered, “being drest in all it’s Finery, as new Cloath’s, new Scenes, Machines, as flyings for the Witches ... it Recompenc’d double the Expence.”⁸⁵ *The Tempest* also proved profitable, “having all New in it; as Scenes, Machines; particularly, one Scene Painted with Myriads of Ariel Spirits; and another flying away, with a Table Furnisht out with Fruits, Sweet meats, and all sorts of Viands.”⁸⁶ The acting companies also spent lavishly on clothing, as they had earlier in the century.⁸⁷ Although many of these productions were multimedia spectacles, replete with song and dance, drawing-room comedies, such as *The Man of Mode*, also benefited from new costumes. “Well Cloath’d,” it succeeded with audiences.⁸⁸ Downes says nothing about Etherege’s brilliant dialogue, again testifying to his conviction that spectacle, not writerly skill, drew audiences.

Exquisite outfits and complicated machinery would, however, exert their own unanticipated agencies: these required repair and upkeep, which in turn necessitated more workers on the payroll. While we do not possess anything for the Restoration like the Henslowe or Alleyn papers, which inventory production costs in the Shakespearean period, evidence suggests that costumes could decimate budgets. Downes, for instance, mentions that Dennis’s *Iphigenia*, despite being “a good Tragedy and well Acted ...

⁸³ Sauter and Wiles, *Theatre of Drottningholm*, 8.

⁸⁴ Richard Southern, *The Seven Ages of the Theatre* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1961), 223–30.

⁸⁵ Downes, *Roscius Anglicanus, or An Historical Review of the Stage*, 56, 71–72.

⁸⁶ Downes, 73–74.

⁸⁷ Andrew Gurr estimates that out of the annual company expenditure of £1,377 at the Rose playhouse between 1597 and 1599, at least £150 would have been spent on costumes, roughly 11 percent of the operating budget and twice the expenditure on properties. See Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespeare Company, 1594–1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 106. Jean MacIntyre and Garret P. J. Epp think that accumulated costumes and properties cost more than playhouse construction. See Jean MacIntyre and Garret P. J. Epp, “Clothes Worth All the Rest: Costumes and Properties,” in *Early English Drama*, ed. Cox and Kastan, 284.

⁸⁸ Downes, *Roscius Anglicanus, or An Historical Review of the Stage*, 77.

answer'd not the Expences they were at in Cloathing it."⁸⁹ Companies were expected to provide their star actors annually with key articles of clothing, such as periwigs, cravats, silk stockings, shoes, and hats, thereby adding even more to production costs.⁹⁰ Occasionally in the early 1660s, the court assisted by providing additional funds, luxurious fabrics, or even coronation robes to ensure that productions would appear lavish, especially for plays penned by courtiers. For a revival of Davenant's *Love and Honour*, the court lent coronation robes to the Duke's Company in 1661; three years later, the robes resurfaced in Orrery's *Henry V*.⁹¹ The Master of the Great Wardrobe provided silks to the value of £40 "to cloath the Musick for the play called the Indian Queene," the 1664 joint effort by Sir Robert Howard and Dryden staged by the King's Company.⁹² By the 1670s, when the court was too broke to dispense similar instances of largesse, the acting companies absorbed all costs related to costuming.

Stagecraft shackled management to labor costs that further bloated budgets. The shutter-and-groove system may have been less expensive to install and simpler to work than the continental sub-stage system, but it was three times as costly to operate in the long run given the number of men needed to shift scenes.⁹³ The maintenance of complicated stage machinery and delicate costumes necessitated a small army of backstage and house workers. A roster of King's Company personnel compiled in 1671 for Henry Jermyn, the 1st Earl of St. Albans – Lord Chamberlain at the time – reveals positions such as "Tyreweoman," "Wardrobe keeper," "servant," "Taylor," "Dorekeeper," and, of course, "scene keeper" and "Scenekeeper & Machelnes."⁹⁴ The numbers tally up to twenty-five support personnel as opposed to six actresses and eleven actors. Even more sobering is the comparison to pre-Commonwealth playhouses. Theatres such as Blackfriars or

⁸⁹ Downes, 94.

⁹⁰ A 1672 decree from the Lord Chamberlain orders the King's Company to furnish the lead actors and co-managers Michael Mohun, Edward Kynaston, and Charles Hart with items that include "Two perruques to begin with for the first yeare, One perruque yearely afterwards to begin a year hence, Two Cravats yearely, One Lace or point Band in two yeares the first band to be now provided, Three paire of Silke Stockins yearely, Four paire of Shooes yearely, Three Hatts yearely, Two plumes of feathers yearely, Three Shirts with Cuffs to them yearely" (*LS*, xcii). Costume bills for Drury Lane in the early eighteenth century give precise costs, some of which seem staggering: £23 8s. 3d. "for cleaning a gown for Mrs Mountfort and for fabrics and labor on costumes for Mesdames Barbier, Santlow, Bicknell, and Younger in *Myrtillo*" (*Register*, 1:63).

⁹¹ Downes, *Roscius Anglicanus, or An Historical Review of the Stage*, 52, 61.

⁹² *Register*, 1:63.

⁹³ I am grateful to Franklin J. Hildy for pointing out to me in a conversation the labor costs resulting from the Restoration embrace of the shutter-and-groove system over continental sub-space machinery.

⁹⁴ *Register*, 1:125–27.

the Globe employed a bookkeeper responsible for the scripts, two or three “call boys” who reminded actors of upcoming cues, perhaps a properties man who handed off props, a “tireman” (or perhaps woman) who oversaw costumes, and a doorkeeper who collected money: less than one-third of the workers necessary to materialize the sumptuousness of the Restoration stage.⁹⁵ In addition to these regular expenses were outsourced costs. Hired to paint flats and shutters were easel artists – not until the late eighteenth century would scene painters be attached to major companies – and they charged exorbitant fees for their work. An extant lawsuit reveals that the painter Isaac Fuller was awarded the £335 10s. od. he was owed from the King’s Company for a “new Scene of an Elysium” he had painted late in April 1669 for Dryden’s *Tyrannick Love* (1670).⁹⁶ Although this seems like a startling amount of money for a single scene, it was not out of line with the sort of history painting in which Fuller specialized. In the 1680s, Sir James Oxenden of Dene, Kent, paid £310 for a large battle scene, close to what Fuller charged the King’s Company.⁹⁷ Companies extolled the “great expences” associated with scene painting, and, like Downes, expected that freshly executed scenes would draw crowds. The epilogue to the *The Indian Queen* holds up for appreciation “the Plot, the Show, / The Poets Scenes, nay, more the Painters too” and concludes that “If all this fail, considering the cost, / ‘Tis a true voyage to the Indies lost.”⁹⁸ Tellingly, it is spectacle that transports spectators on a “true voyage” to the Indies, not a compelling script.

The intensive reuse of scenery underscores the economic impossibility of outsourcing regularly to easel painters. It was, of course, prudent for the companies to have a goodly supply of stock scenery upon which

⁹⁵ Scholars such as Jonathan Gil Harris and Andrew Sofer have overturned the earlier twentieth-century notion of the early modern stage as an “empty” space; as they point out, plays regularly featured rich costumes and objects. *The Alchemist* – as might befit a comedy preoccupied with the trafficking of money and goods – requires a staggering forty-three different props. Sofer thinks that players were largely responsible for “a bewildering number of prop entrances, exchanges, and departures from the stage” (Andrew Sofer, “Properties,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theatre*, ed., Richard Dutton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 566). Peter Thomson points out that inventories for the Admiral’s Men from 1598 or 1599 do not include “reference to a property master” who might fashion objects for the company. See *Shakespeare’s Theatre*, 2nd ed. 1983. Reprint, London: Routledge, 1992). Page references are to the 1992 edition. It seems reasonable, though, to assume the presence of at least one assistant backstage who might assist actors with rapid costume changes or with handing off props, especially at moments of close timing.

⁹⁶ A thorough overview of the circumstances surrounding this lawsuit is provided in Dryden, *Works*, 10:380–81.

⁹⁷ Ian Mortimer, *The Time Traveler’s Guide to Restoration Britain: A Handbook for Visitors to the Seventeenth Century, 1660–1700* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2017), 246.

⁹⁸ Dryden, *Works*, 8:231.

to draw; accordingly, even the expensive “new Scene” Fuller had painted for *Tyrannick Love* was destined for recycling. The only way to offset the investment in new scenes, as Milhous and Hume stress, was to amortize it over a number of years: “The scenery for most new plays (like the costumes) was simply pulled from stock, not specially designed and painted for each play.”⁹⁹ They additionally point out that the inclination of newspaper advertisements early in the eighteenth century to publicize “new scenery and new costumes is clear evidence of their rarity.”¹⁰⁰ A notice that appeared in the *Post Boy* between June 12 and June 15, 1697 to advertise Settle’s forthcoming opera, *The World in the Moon*, confirms this claim. Strikingly, the advertisement says nothing about the cast or the author; it does, however, tout “several new Sets” and especially promotes “a model different from all that have been used in any Theatre whatever, being twice as high as any of their former Scenes.”¹⁰¹ While the box office success of *The Indian Queen* was partly responsible for Dryden’s follow-up heroic play, *The Indian Emperour* (1668), what largely drove the sequel, according to Keenan, “was the opportunity to recycle the expensive new scenery and costumes made specifically for the earlier play.”¹⁰² At the same time, the prologue discloses the company’s understanding that recycled scenes put the new show at a disadvantage. Hoping to coax the audience into approval, it gives “timely warning of our Play. / The Scenes are old, the Habits are the same / We wore last year, before the Spaniards came.”¹⁰³ Although resequencing scenes in future productions might offset visual satiety, eventually regular attendees would lose the “thrill of recognition” when shown repeatedly the same tired representation of St. James’s Park. Like new machines and costumes, the promise of new scenes catalyzed consumer appetites that ultimately could not be sated given bloated operating budgets.

Dramatic Operas and the Pursuit of Improvement

Nowhere was the belief in “better and more glorious” more in evidence than in the staging of dramatic operas from the 1670s to the end of the century. These Restoration confections punctuated spoken dialogue with brief episodes of vocal music and dance; in that regard, they were closer to modern musicals

⁹⁹ Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, *Producible Interpretation: Eight English Plays, 1675–1707* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985), 53.

¹⁰⁰ Milhous and Hume, *Producible Interpretation*, 53.

¹⁰¹ *Register*, 1:325.

¹⁰² Keenan, *Restoration Staging*, 126.

¹⁰³ Dryden, *Works*, 9:29.



Figure 3.1 François Chauveau, baroque set design by Giacomo Torelli for *Andromède*, 1651

than the sung-through, heavily orchestrated, grand operas of the nineteenth century. Because of its reliance on mythological storylines, dramatic opera, more than any other form in the period, realized the capacity of theatre to function as an “invisibility machine,” making the invisible visible thanks to the latest innovations in stagecraft.¹⁰⁴ Spectral beings, such as ghosts, witches, sprites, and goddesses, suddenly descended from rafters or flew in from the wings: the ineffable materialized for the delectation of spectators (Figure 3.1).¹⁰⁵ Improved sound effects summoned forth non-diegetic realms, such as the crashing thunder that signified heavens. Innovation and lavishness were everywhere apparent in dramatic operas, which in turn perhaps explains the

¹⁰⁴ Andrew Sofer, “Spectral Readings,” *Theatre Journal* 64, no. 3 (2012): 333.

¹⁰⁵ Although this illustration suggests the extravagant possibilities of baroque stagecraft, it does not bear a strict relationship to what audiences saw produced in London after the Restoration. When Corneille’s *Andromède* premiered in 1650, it “set a new standard of spectacular musical theater” that required heavy subsidy from the French court. Because English acting companies relied solely on box office to finance their dramatic operas, they most likely did not have the means to equal Torelli’s spectacular use of scenes and machines. See John S. Powell, “Pierre Beauchamps and the Public Theater,” in *Dance, Spectacle, and the Body Politick, 1250–1750*, ed. Jennifer Nevile (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 117.

willingness of companies to hazard between one-sixth and one-fourth of their annual budget on a single production. Milhous puts operating expenses for the Duke's Company at £5,000 per annum in the 1670s, when Betterton and Davenant's widow, Mary, had assumed control.¹⁰⁶ In 1675, the Duke's Company spent over £800 just on scenery for Shadwell's *Psyche*; overall costs totaled approximately £1,300.¹⁰⁷ In their pursuit of the biggest and the latest, the company expended over one-quarter of their annual operating budget on this one show.

As the above example indicates, from their inception, dramatic operas were staggeringly expensive to produce. Increasingly complicated scores, which necessitated additional musicians and singers, drove up costs even further by the end of the century. A decade after *Psyche*, costs for Dryden's dramatic opera *Albion and Albanus* (1685) had ballooned to £4,000 while Purcell's *The Fairy Queen* (1692) cost £3,000.¹⁰⁸ Both failed to make money for the United Company. According to Downes, *Albion and Albanus*, "not Answering half the Charge they were at, Involv'd the Company very much in Debt."¹⁰⁹ As for *The Fairy Queen*, despite the "Court and Town" being "wonderfully satisfy'd with it ... the Expences in setting it out being so great, the Company got very little by it."¹¹⁰ Sometimes the start-up costs were worth it: Charles Davenant's *Circe* indeed "answer'd the Expectation of the Company," a triumph Downes chalked up to Banister's music and the excellent performances.¹¹¹ The Duke's Company showed the largest single dividend in their history immediately after the success of *Circe*, but they did not mount another dramatic opera for eight years. Money was not solely at issue. Dramatic operas required new scenery and machine effects, not to mention the doubling of stagehands, sumptuous costumes, large casts, additional musical personnel, and long rehearsal periods.¹¹² Gerard Langbaine claimed the court masque, *Calisto*, "was rehearsed near Thirty times."¹¹³ Milhous thinks advance preparations for commercial dramatic operas could run anywhere from six months to more than two years.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁶ Judith Milhous, "Opera Finances in London, 1674–1738," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 37, no. 3 (1984): 568.

¹⁰⁷ Milhous, "Opera Finances," 568–69.

¹⁰⁸ Milhous, "Opera Finances," 569.

¹⁰⁹ Downes, *Roscius Anglicanus, or An Historical Review of the Stage*, 84.

¹¹⁰ Downes, 89.

¹¹¹ Downes, 77.

¹¹² Milhous, "Opera Finances," 568.

¹¹³ Langbaine, *English Dramatic Poets*, 1:92. As a masque performed by amateur players, *Calisto* would not have undergone the lengthy rehearsal process typical of commercial dramatic operas. Indeed, members of the royal family could not be expected to commit that sort of time to an amateur production, however lavishly conceived.

¹¹⁴ Milhous, "Opera Finances," 568.

These shows posed an additional problem beyond decimating annual operating expenses. To break even, much less turn a modest profit, the companies had to keep the opera in repertory for an extended period, thus risking audience satiety. To offset start-up costs, ticket prices were doubled and sometimes tripled. A doubled ticket – 8s. for a box seat and 5s. for the pit, or roughly £130 and £75 in modern terms – would have made it impossible for most people to attend a performance given how few possessed sufficient disposable income.¹¹⁵ Prices on special occasions could go even higher, giving pause even to those at the very top of the social ladder. In a letter written to the Countess of Rutland on January 1, 1685, Edward Bedingfield predicted – accurately, as it turned out – that “the rates proposed” for *Albion and Albanus* “will not take soe well, for they have set the boxes at a guyny a place, and the Pitt at halfe.”¹¹⁶ Even if the Duke of Monmouth’s invasion had not shuttered the playhouse two days into the run, few Londoners could have afforded the modern equivalent of seats that cost upwards of £320 for the box and £160 for the pit.¹¹⁷ Certainly, they did not show up in anything like the numbers necessary for the company to break even. So keen was the United Company to stage an allegorical opera that surpassed the lavishness of Jacobean and Caroline court masques that they envisaged glory, not account books, when embarking on this ill-fated show.

The Retreat from “Great Expences”

The glittering prospect of “better and more glorious” and “great expences” exerted an extraordinary hold on managerial desire for over thirty years, prompting investment in expensive playhouses, upmarket neighborhoods, and costly forms such as dramatic operas. The culture of improvement, however much it fed affective attachments, was impossible to sustain, and in the 1680s a slow retreat began. When the two companies merged into the United Company in 1682, they had at their disposal the two playhouses built during the previous decade: Dorset Garden, used by the Duke’s Company, and Drury Lane, that “Plain built” playhouse, in the words of Dryden, with “humble Roofs” and a “mean ungilded Stage” used by the

¹¹⁵ See Robert D. Hume, “The Value of Money in Eighteenth-Century England: Incomes, Prices, Buying Power – and Some Problems in Cultural Economics,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 77, no. 4 (2014): 381–82. Hume usefully points out that multipliers fail to consider how few people during the Restoration – unlike today – could afford luxuries such as opera tickets.

¹¹⁶ *LS*, 334.

¹¹⁷ I have departed slightly from Hume’s multiplier since the guinea, normally worth 20s. (or £1) rose slightly in the 1680s to 22s.

King's Company.¹¹⁸ The United Company appears to have chosen Drury Lane for most of their shows, even though "there was a lack in the scenery department," as Edward A. Langhans observes.¹¹⁹ Dorset Garden, richly ornate and equipped with superior scenic possibilities, would have been the logical choice: it seated more spectators (1,000 as opposed to perhaps 700 in Drury Lane); it fronted the Thames, thus affording access by water and land; and it could accommodate dramatic operas as well as spoken plays. Langhans's detailed analysis, however, suggests that Dorset Garden was far more expensive to operate.¹²⁰ Although the United Company shuttled between both playhouses during the 1680s, using Dorset Garden for dramatic operas and Drury Lane for non-musical shows, the costs of maintaining the former inclined them toward the simpler, less expensive building.

The calendar of performances in Part I of *The London Stage* reveals that the United Company preferred Drury Lane by a three-to-one ratio. Although the editors cannot identify the location for nearly sixty performances during the 1680s, of the fifty-seven known to have taken place in a specific playhouse, forty-two – over 80 percent – were staged in the "Plain built" Drury Lane rather than the more technologically advanced Dorset Garden. By 1690, eighteen years after its opening, this grand edifice, now abandoned by the United Company, had degenerated largely into a space for wrestling and fencing matches. By 1698, Dorset Garden had declined further: it was now used for lotteries, although the ghosts of theatrical performance haunted the main event. Broadside and satirical poems, such as *The Wheel of Fortune; or, Nothing for a Penny* (1698), reveal that songs, prologues, and epilogues framed the drawing of penny lottery tickets.¹²¹ No longer did these paratextual elements serve an exquisitely wrought tragicomedy by Dryden or a gimlet-eyed comedy by Behn. The machine-generated effects that once embellished scripts now genuflected to the gods of gambling. One published lottery entertainment specifies that during a symphony of music, "*the Curtain rises very slowly, and discovers Two Wheels upon the Stage: Then Two Figures, representing Fortuna, and Astraea the Goddess of Justice, descend over each Wheel, in two rich Chariots gilt with Gold.*"¹²² According to Edward Ward, by 1703, nobody "except Rats and Mice" inhabited this once "Noble and Delightful Mansion"; only "an Old Superannuated Jack-Pudding" remained to ensure that

¹¹⁸ Dryden, *Works*, 1:148.

¹¹⁹ Langhans, "Staging Practices," 260.

¹²⁰ See Langhans, 350–414.

¹²¹ For an excellent overview of these lotteries, see Danchin, *Prologues and Epilogues*, 6:531–41.

¹²² Danchin, 6:538.

no decay'd Lover of the Drama, should get in and steal away the Poets Pictures, and sell 'em to some Upholsters for Roman Emperours; I suppose there being little else to lose, except Scenes, Machines, or some such Jim-cracks. For this, says he, is one of the Theatres, but now wholly abandon'd by the Players; and 'tis thought, will in a little time be pulled down.¹²³

The decision to abandon an investment of £9,000 is as revelatory as the decision not to invest further in "Jim-cracks": the scenes, machines, and lavish trappings essential to realizing the magnificence of Dorset Garden Theatre. The glory days of innovation and "great expences" were over.

Even Betterton eventually abandoned the culture of improvement, although no one was more responsible in the period for materializing the extravagance originally envisioned by Davenant and Killigrew. When Betterton, along with Elizabeth Barry and Anne Bracegirdle, departed from the United Company in 1695, they had to start over from scratch. Left behind were decades of carefully amassed stock scenery and costumes. Although they had a choice of venues, the new break-away company ignored Dorset Garden, despite its vastly superior scenic capabilities, nor did they embark on a new building venture. Instead, Betterton did precisely what Davenant and Killigrew had rejected out of hand at the outset of the Restoration: he retrofitted old playhouse space. Chosen was Lincoln's Inn Fields, the modest theatre abandoned twenty-five years earlier by the Duke's Company after Dorset Garden was built. Although the King's Company used the space for two years when a fire destroyed their Bridges Street Theatre, no one wanted the theatre subsequently. In 1676, it reverted into a tennis court once again until Betterton, Barry, and Bracegirdle eyed it for their new venture.¹²⁴ Fundraising was not an issue; according to Colley Cibber, "many People of Quality came into a voluntary Subscription of twenty, and some of forty Guineas a-piece, for the erecting a Theatre within the Walls of the Tennis-Court, in *Lincolns-Inn-Fields*."¹²⁵ In all likelihood, Betterton could have asked for additional funding had he wanted a more technologically advanced theatre.

Rather than investing those subscription monies into a wholesale transformation of Lincoln's Inn Fields, Betterton, Barry, and Bracegirdle settled upon a renovation so plain that it invited derision. The prologue to

¹²³ Edward Ward, *The London-Spy Compleat, In Eighteen Parts*, 2 vols. (London, 1703), 1:148.

¹²⁴ Hotson, *The Commonwealth and Restoration Stage*, 127. Richard Reeve, the son-in-law of Thomas Lisle, who owned the grounds, spent £500 to return the playhouse to its original, intended state as a tennis court.

¹²⁵ Cibber, *An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber*, 109.

The Fatal Discovery (1698), which was staged by the rival United Company, refers to the restored playhouse contemptuously as “*Betterton’s Booth*.”¹²⁶ Paratexts apologized frequently for its simplicity. In the prologue Betterton delivered in 1697 to Ravenscroft’s comic hit *The Anatomist*, he advises the audience to “expect no Pageant Decoration” and admits that “what we call a Masque some will allow / To be an Op’ra,” thereby warning audiences to scale back expectations.¹²⁷ That same year, Edward Filmer, in the prologue to *The Unnatural Brother*, makes amends for his “*almost naked*” play, one that is unadorned by “*Paint ... Patches ... thundering Consort, nor no glaring show; / Those pretty knacks, so much of late in use*.”¹²⁸ Despite the sneers issuing from the rival United Company, Lincoln’s Inn Fields was not a literal box: it could still accommodate a few scene changes, as plays written for that space reveal. The stage directions in act 2 of Congreve’s vastly popular she-tragedy *The Mourning Bride* (1697), stipulate that “*The Scene opening discovers a Place of Tombs. One Monument fronting the View, greater than the rest*,” which suggests that some degree of perspectivism could still be achieved.¹²⁹

Striking, however, are the paucity of scene changes in the scripts written for Lincoln’s Inn Fields after 1695 when compared to plays penned for that same playhouse earlier in the period. Keenan estimates that the 1660s’ playhouse in Bridges Street had four wing grooves and three backshutter grooves. This arrangement made possible the multiple settings – five scenes, four wings, and one relief setting – found in a comedy like Etherege’s *She Wou’d If She Cou’d* (1668).¹³⁰ The marked reduction in scene changes after 1695 suggests that “*Betterton’s Booth*” lacked the capacity to preset more than one, or at most two, scene changes. Mary Pix’s *The Innocent Mistress* (1697) specifies only three locales for five acts and two internal changes. Thomas Dilke’s *The City Lady; or, Folly Reclaim’d* (1697) similarly lists three scene changes. George Granville’s tragedy *Heroick Love* (1698) uses only two locations: “*Agamemnon’s Pavillion*” and “*the Tents of Achilles*.”¹³¹ John Dennis’s *Iphigenia* (1700) stipulates two settings: acts 1–4 unfold in an unspecified location and act 5 in “*The Outward Temple*.”¹³² One internal discovery occurs halfway through the final act – “*The flat Scene draws and discovers the Altar*” – and this solitary change would have

¹²⁶ George Powell, *The Fatal Discovery; or, Love in Ruines* (London, 1698), A2r.

¹²⁷ Edward Ravenscroft, *The Anatomist: or, The Sham Doctor* (London, 1697), av.

¹²⁸ [Edward Filmer], *The Unnatural Brother* (London, 1697), A3v.

¹²⁹ William Congreve, *The Mourning Bride* (London, 1697), 16.

¹³⁰ Keenan, *Restoration Staging*, 85, 91.

¹³¹ George Granville, *Heroick Love* (London, 1698), 1, 17.

¹³² John Dennis, *Iphigenia* (London, 1700), 47.

provided stagehands enough time for presetting.¹³³ Notably, several plays written for the post-1695 Lincoln's Inn Fields lack scene changes entirely. In the preface to his tragedy *Beauty in Distress* (1698), Peter Motteux complains that in production it was "divested of all the things that now recommend a Play most to the Liking of the Many. For it has no Singing, no Dancing . . . no change of Scene, no rich Dresses . . . no Ghost, no Prodigy," and the stage direction for the first act does indeed state that "*The Scene throughout the Play is an Anti Chamber.*"¹³⁴ Especially poor finances that season may very well have been responsible for the bare-bones staging of *Beauty in Distress*: Judith Milhous points out that the company in 1697–98 showed "a dangerous inclination toward stasis."¹³⁵ Clearly, the budget did not allow for the singing, dancing, painted scenes, and special effects Motteux so badly wanted. In addition to voicing their displeasure in prefaces, playwrights resorted to other strategies to compensate for minimalist stagecraft. Edward Ravenscroft uncharacteristically appends a "prælude" to *The Italian Husband* (1698), in which three characters debate the current state of tragedy while alerting spectators that "the Scene" lies in "*Italy*," a point made three times in less than four pages.¹³⁶ Well they might: virtually nothing in the stage directions makes the setting evident other than the vaguely Italian names assigned to several characters.

In addition to sharply curtailing scene changes, "*Betterton's Booth*" used machinery sparingly, if at all. To judge by first editions of play quartos, the magical descents or frequent scene changes common to Dorset Garden were not a feature of the newly refurbished Lincoln's Inn Fields. Stage directions are notably old-fashioned: they detail simple entrances, exits, and physical business. Playwrights penning scripts for this new space understood how the lack of machine-generated effects hurt their prospects with audiences long primed for spectacle. The prologue Motteux wrote for Mary Pix's *The Innocent Mistress* (1697) shifts attention away from spectacle to the actors' preparation of their roles: "*W' have Every Act, and every week a Play; / Nay, w' have had new ones studied for one Day.*"¹³⁷ The prologue admits that Drury Lane can embellish operas with machines and "*well painted Scenes*" whereas Lincoln's Inn Fields – "*here without Machines*" – lacks that same capacity. They can nonetheless offer "*Scenes well wrought.*"¹³⁸ "Wrought" in seventeenth-century usage connotes

¹³³ Dennis, *Iphigenia*, 47.

¹³⁴ Peter Motteux, *Beauty in Distress* (London, 1698), 1.

¹³⁵ Milhous, *Thomas Betterton and the Management of Lincoln's Inn Fields, 1695–1708* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1979), 107.

¹³⁶ Edward Ravenscroft, *The Italian Husband* (London, 1698), A2r–A3v.

¹³⁷ Mary Pix, *The Innocent Mistress* (London, 1697), A4r.

¹³⁸ Pix, *The Innocent Mistress*, A4r.

something that has been thoroughly worked – subjected to lengthy preparation and labor – a meaning that points to the dramatic scenes performed by the actors rather than the “*well painted Scenes*” commissioned to create a stage picture. Perhaps not surprisingly, many of the plays written for Lincoln’s Inn Fields after 1695 are heavily plotted and linguistically dense, as exemplified by Congreve’s masterpiece *The Way of the World* (1700). Showcased are dramaturgy and thespian skill, not spectacle.

At the same time, Betterton did not entirely relinquish the belief – long inculcated by the culture of improvement – that lavishness might rescue the company during tough stretches. After the lackluster 1697–98 season, the company imported continental singers, such as Anthony L’Abbé, Marie-Thérèse Subligny, and dancers, such as Jean Balon, who commanded exceptionally high salaries. Despite the company’s straitened circumstances, Balon earned the astonishing amount of 400 guineas for a mere five weeks of work in April and May of 1699.¹³⁹ The gambit paid off: “the Town ran mad to see him.”¹⁴⁰ Far less profitable was the sole opera mounted at the end of the century, John Dennis’s *Rinaldo and Armida* (1699). Given the limited capacity of the playhouse, the “Town” was surprised that the “old Stagers in *Lincolns-Inn-fields*,” had undertaken the production since “no body ever dream[ed] of an *Opera* there.”¹⁴¹ The popularity, however, of Motteux’s operatic adaptation of Fletcher’s *The Island Princess* at the rival company prompted this departure from four years of modestly apportioned shows. Stage directions suggest the playhouse could be retrofitted for some effects: Anne Bracegirdle appeared suspended “in a Machine; there she shin’d in a full Zodiack, the brightest Constellation there; ‘twas a pleasant Reflection all this time to see her scituated among the Bulls, Capricorns, [and] Sagittaries.”¹⁴² These effects, however, were modest compared to the dramatic operas staged earlier in the period. In the preface, Dennis describes how he crafted the action “to the Reserve of the Machines to which the necessity of the Subject oblig’d me.”¹⁴³ And, indeed, machine-generated effects were reserved solely for the splashy opening and grand finale. After the overture, “Spirits in the Air” sing and an “*Enchanted Palace rises to Musick*.”¹⁴⁴ *Rinaldo and Armida*, however, requires three intervening acts before singers can once again be hoisted

¹³⁹ Downes, *Roscius Anglicanus, or An Historical Review of the Stage*, n. 341 on page 96.

¹⁴⁰ *A Comparison Between the Two Stages* (London, 1702), 49.

¹⁴¹ *A Comparison*, 35.

¹⁴² *A Comparison*, 36.

¹⁴³ John Dennis, *The Musical Entertainments in the Tragedy of Rinaldo and Armida* (London, 1699), a2v.

¹⁴⁴ Dennis, *Musical Entertainments*, 4.

aloft for the conclusion: "Scene opens, and discovers Fame, Heros and Heroines in the Clouds."¹⁴⁵ More commonly, characters enter from the wings or rise from the stage floor trap ("*Spirits or Dreams arise*"), and the action alternates between only two settings, a "*Delightful Wilderness*" and "*The Inside of the Enchanted Palace*."¹⁴⁶ The performance space apparently could not easily accommodate more than two settings and two instances of aerial effects.

Despite these limitations, the actors' company never attempted to renovate Lincoln's Inn Fields: Betterton was done with the crushing burden entailed by "better and more glorious" and "great expences." Instead, the company under his tenure returned to a basic indoor playhouse that privileged the actor's voice and the dramatist's language over spectacle. By contrast, the United Company in the 1690s took an entirely different approach to the problem of meagre returns; they were beset by internal discord over finances and management.¹⁴⁷ Rather than emulating the minimalism of "*Betterton's Booth*," Christopher Rich in 1696 reduced the fore-stage in Drury Lane and replaced the downstage proscenium doors with boxes to increase seating capacity.¹⁴⁸ In his memoir, Cibber was explicit about Rich's financial aim: Drury Lane was altered "to make it hold more Mony," a telling phrase.¹⁴⁹ As a result, the box office took in "Ten Pounds more, than could have been taken formerly" for every performance, which did indeed offset production costs and spotty attendance.¹⁵⁰ These changes, however, diminished performance conditions. The deep thrust stage of Wren's original playhouse had allowed actors to play downstage and project their voices

¹⁴⁵ Dennis, 53.

¹⁴⁶ Dennis, 16, 1, 9.

¹⁴⁷ From 1688 onwards, the United Company was embroiled in financial disputes and, by the 1690s, in quarrels over the chain of command and the rights and obligations of patentees. A series of depositions, writs, and petitions allege shady bookkeeping practices and underhanded manipulation of company shares. Also mounted were complaints about salaries and poor working conditions for actors. While it is difficult to determine the absolute validity of these accusations, circumstances were sufficiently bad enough to prompt their star players – Betterton, Barry, and Bracegirdle – to break away and form their own company in 1695. The momentousness of their departure has not always been fully appreciated. All three had been with the United Company since its inception in 1682, and both Betterton and Barry had long histories with the Duke's Company prior to the merger. For an overview of the disputes, see *Register*, 1:277–315.

¹⁴⁸ Langhans, "Staging Practices," 199. Christopher Rich's son John pursued an even more radical course in his 1714 overhaul of the playhouse, which compacted roughly 1,400 spectators into a space originally designed for between 500 and 700 people. He did not enlarge the footprint, thereby doubling, if not tripling, his take at the door.

¹⁴⁹ Cibber, *An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber*, 224.

¹⁵⁰ Cibber, 224.

more in the Centre of the House, so that the most distant Ear had scarce the least Doubt, or Difficulty in hearing what fell from the weakest Utterance: All Objects were thus drawn nearer to the Sense; every painted Scene was stronger; every Grand Scene and Dance more extended; every rich, or fine-coloured Habit had a more lively Lustre: Nor was the minutest Motion of a Feature (properly changing with the Passion, or Humour it suited) ever lost, as they frequently must be in the Obscurity of too great a Distance.¹⁵¹

Cibber's wistful remembrance half a century later speaks to the complex emotional and physical entanglements between humans and the objects they are loath to relinquish precisely for the very promises they betoken. Until Betterton's rebellion against the culture of improvement in 1695, the acting companies clearly expected their high-tech theatres would work silently and obediently, passively awaiting animation from their human handlers. Once activated, these inventions would produce the emotional and cognitive pleasure for which spectators would pay handsomely. As Bruno Latour observes, however, objects and inventions are not simply inert matter but *actants*, with the energy and potential to affect human environments.¹⁵² If the notion of *actant* encompasses the human and the non-human, breaking down the traditional opposition between subject and object, then it follows that the things we create not only exert their own, oftentimes unintended, agencies but also possess the power to reshape the social. And so it was with the playhouses, machines, and scenes made available to a paying public after 1660. For over twenty years, so enthralled were managerial Pygmalions with their high-tech Galateas that they failed to notice that their lovely creations now mastered them. Not until the economic collapse of the King's Company in 1682 was a retreat attempted; as Bill Brown slyly observes, "we begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us."¹⁵³ By the close of the century, strategies were devised to escape the economic stranglehold of the quest for improvement. However, as the next chapter discloses, the acting companies were less successful in perceiving their situatedness in a culture that had changed markedly from the 1620s and 1630s. They banked on the economic and aesthetic efficaciousness of their tiny, exquisite playhouses, but they ignored to their detriment the tsunamis of new goods, entertainments, and pastimes that now afforded very different – and far less expensive – pleasures than what they had on offer.

¹⁵¹ Cibber, 225.

¹⁵² Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 72.

¹⁵³ Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 1 (2001): 4.