

# Towards a Postulation of the "Theater of Eroticism" (The Fluidity Principle) in Contemporary Performance

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*Abstract- Theater, as a vibrant and continually developing art form, evolves to reflect the complex changes of human existence, moving past conventional narratives and formats. A notable modern development is the emergence of the "Theater of Eroticism," which embraces the "Fluidity Principle." This approach transcends simple depictions of sex, instead exploring eroticism as a nuanced inquiry into desire, emotional bonds, and the workings of the human psyche. Unlike pornography or explicit sexual display, this theatrical genre provides a space for introspection and understanding, inviting audiences to confront their deepest desires, fantasies, and internal struggles with openness. It encourages a unique blend of reality and imagination, prioritizing emotional satisfaction and psychological aspects of sexuality over just physical acts. Within this safe setting, the delicate intricacies of romance, love, and ambiguous relationships can be explored with honesty and poetic subtlety. Erotic expression here goes beyond the purely corporeal, addressing the politics of desire and its impact on identity, power dynamics, and emotional resilience. The Theater of Eroticism functions not merely as a form of artistic expression but also as an essential dialogue within performance art, expanding theatrical boundaries and offering fresh perspectives on the sophisticated and layered nature of erotic desire in contemporary times.*

*Index Terms- Theater of Eroticism, Fluidity Principle, Desire, Intimacy, Performance Art*

## I. INTRODUCTION

As a dynamic and evolving art form, theater continually transforms to mirror the changing intricacies of human life, moving beyond traditional stories and structures. A significant contemporary

innovation is the rise of the "Theater of Eroticism", embodying the "Fluidity Principle," which moves past straightforward portrayals of sex to delve into eroticism as a complex investigation of desire, emotional connection, and the workings of the human mind. Distinct from pornography or simple sexual exhibition, this form of theater serves as a realm for insight and self-reflection, encouraging spectators to face their deepest longings, fantasies, and inner conflicts openly. Rather than depicting erotic acts in a literal manner, it suggests the imagined outlines of these experiences, enabling the audience to feel the tension and gratification of illicit or socially taboo desires without violating norms of propriety or consent.

This theatrical style fosters a distinctive interaction between the real and the imaginary, emphasizing emotional gratification and psychological sexual fulfillment over mere physical actions. It creates a secure environment where the delicate frameworks of romance, love, and situationships the intricate spaces bridging friendship and intimacy can be examined with sincerity and lyrical nuance. An example of this is the avant-garde performance "Scoops of Situationship: Lamentations from Za Oda Roo", which illustrates the approach by breaking down conventional storytelling methods and utilizing novel actor training techniques to capture the fragile, frequently ambiguous qualities of contemporary relationships. As observed in "Innovations in Acting Pedagogy: Exploring Chorale Acting in the Experimental Production Scoops of Situationship: Lamentations from Za Oda Room", innovative narrative structures and actor training exemplify how contemporary theater "pushes conventional boundaries, exploring new storytelling methods and actor training" (Ihunwo, 320).

Eroticism here transcends mere physicality, encompassing the politics of desire and its influence on identity, power relations, and emotional endurance. In this context, the Theater of Eroticism, embodying the "Fluidity Principle," serves as a provocative alternative to the often sanitized or overly sexualized portrayals prevalent in mainstream media. This form of theater reveals, inviting spectators to encounter themselves in their most authentic form free from societal masks confronting the raw, frequently conflicting drives that underpin human relationships. By focusing on dramatizing "desire" and "fantasy" instead of just sexual acts, this theatrical approach resonates with ongoing modern movements aimed at breaking taboos, reevaluating intimacy, and redefining emotional and mental fulfillment in a socially fragmented world. Therefore, the Theater of Eroticism stands not only as an artistic exploration but also as a crucial discourse within performance art, pushing the limits of theater while opening new avenues for comprehending the intricate, multifaceted dimensions of erotic desire today.

## II. THEORETICAL BACKDROP

The Theater of Eroticism draws profoundly from a variety of seminal theatrical theories that shed light on the complex dimensions of desire and intimacy within performance. These conceptual foundations underpin a theatrical approach that pushes conventional limits while encouraging deep introspection on both personal and communal levels.

### 1. Antonin Artaud's Theater of Cruelty

Antonin Artaud transformed theater with his "Theatre of Cruelty", advocating for a drastic break from traditional narratives and stage aesthetics. His goal was to confront spectators with the primal forces shaping human life forces typically repressed or sanitized in mainstream theater. Artaud insisted that "the theater must be a revelation not of human cruelty but of human desire as a cosmic force" (Artaud, 1938),

highlighting desire as a powerful, elemental energy that motivates and alters experience. The Theater of Eroticism takes Artaud's ideas as a foundation but shifts the focus from cruelty toward the investigation

of erotic desire as a dynamic and transformative energy. Within this new framework, the theatrical space evolves beyond mere storytelling to become a platform where desire its fantasies, vulnerabilities, and longings is revealed and communalized. This process of revelation is not voyeuristic; rather, it serves to illuminate, enabling audiences to connect with their own erotic impulses in a manner that is simultaneously secure and enlightening.

By adopting Artaud's invitation to dismantle narrative and aesthetic norms, the Theater of Eroticism cultivates a space where imagination dominates over explicit representation. Rather than depicting erotic actions literally, the theater relies on symbolic and poetic expressions to capture the intricate nature of emotional fulfillment and psychological sexual satisfaction. Consequently, the stage acts as a reflective surface for untamed desires, encouraging audiences to rethink social taboos surrounding intimacy and to welcome the emancipatory potential of fantasy.

### 2. Bertolt Brecht's Alienation Effect

Bertolt Brecht's notion of the "Alienation Effect" (*Verfremdungseffekt*) fundamentally transformed how audiences engage with theatrical performances. Instead of aiming solely for emotional involvement, Brecht intended to foster spectatorship that is critical and contemplative encouraging viewers to intellectually analyze the play's social and political messages. As Brecht himself explained,

"The alienation effect is not designed to estrange the audience but to immerse them more deeply in the critique of society" (Brecht, 1964).

This purposeful detachment inhibits passive viewing and compels active examination of the societal frameworks and ideologies beneath the surface. Building on Brecht's principles, the Theater of Eroticism challenges conventional and uniform portrayals of erotic desire and gender identities. It refuses to depict desire as a fixed or singular phenomenon, instead spotlighting the inherent complexity, ambiguity, and fragmentation of human intimacy. This approach disrupts audience expectations that might otherwise reduce sexuality to simplistic or comfortable interpretations.

Employing performative methods reminiscent of Brechtian distancing such as fragmented storytelling, non-linear plots, meta-theatrical interventions, and symbolic actions the Theater of Eroticism frames erotic desire as a fluid and contested space. It resists voyeuristic fantasy or stereotype reinforcement, urging spectators to critically examine cultural taboos and socially constructed norms concerning sex, romance, and emotional connections. This provokes greater self-reflection, encouraging the audience to reconsider their own biases and unease regarding desire, identity, and intimacy.

### 3. Jerzy Grotowski's Poor Theatre

Jerzy Grotowski's concept of "Poor Theatre" marks a profound shift back to the core elements of theatrical expression, highlighting the actor's body and voice as the fundamental tools for conveying meaning and emotion. He advocated for the removal of elaborate stage designs, costumes, and technical enhancements to expose the raw vitality and immediacy inherent in live performance. As Grotowski famously stated in 1968, "The actor's body is the central instrument of theatrical communication, capable of transmuting the invisible into palpable experience." This idea places embodiment at the forefront, where every movement, gesture, and vocal inflection carries deep significance.

In the context of the Theater of Eroticism, Grotowski's ideas take on particular importance, since eroticism is expressed not through overt visuals or props but through the actors' physical presence, nuance, and dynamic interplay. The erotic tension arises physically from a glance charged with meaning, the cadence of breathing, a fleeting touch, and the balance of vulnerability and strength among performers. This theatrical form relies heavily on the actor's ability to physically manifest intricate layers of desire, emotional fulfillment, and fantasy, transforming unseen erotic currents into an immediate and tangible force for the audience.

"Innovations in Acting Pedagogy: Exploring Chorale Acting in the Experimental Production Scoops of Situationship: Lamentations from Za Oda Room", demonstrates this focus on embodied acting by utilizing chorale-style performance, a method demanding "an exceptional level of precision in

physicality and vocal delivery." ( Ihunwo, 2025). Such a collective technique amplifies the connection between performers and spectators, creating a visceral, nearly ritualistic atmosphere where emotional and erotic energies reverberate throughout the space. The minimalist aesthetic championed by Poor Theatre aligns seamlessly with the Theater of Eroticism's aim to foster intimate and transformative connections rather than relying on external spectacle.

### 4. Michel Foucault's Theories on Power and Sexuality

Michel Foucault's influential study, "The History of Sexuality", reconceptualizes sexuality and eroticism as fundamentally embedded within systems of power, knowledge, and social control. He contends that sexuality transcends the private or biological sphere, constituting a multifaceted domain shaped by discourses that both limit and facilitate personal and collective actions. His famous claim, "Where there is power, there is resistance" (Foucault, 1976), highlights the constant tension between domination and opposition present in sexual and erotic interactions.

Drawing heavily on Foucault's ideas, the Theater of Eroticism seeks to unravel and display the complex power relations inherent in erotic experiences and their theatrical portrayals. This form of theater confronts desire as a contested space marked by negotiation, authority, fragility, and defiance. By exposing how power structures affect who desires whom, the manner in which desire is performed or controlled, and the emotional effort entailed, the Theater of Eroticism invites spectators to critically engage with the societal forces shaping intimate and erotic life.

The work "Scoops of Situationship: Lamentations from Za Oda Room" concretely exemplifies Foucault's concepts by exploring issues such as dependence on sexual enhancers alongside the psychological toll of unfulfilled yearning and expectations. These themes demonstrate how cultural norms and economic factors exert pressure on personal connections and sexual fulfillment, often resulting in a fragmented and shadowy experience of intimacy.

Within this framework, eroticism on stage functions as a space for both revelation and resistance, encouraging the audience to challenge prevailing narratives and acknowledge the inherent complexities and paradoxes of human desire. Foucault's theoretical perspective offers the Theater of Eroticism a critical foundation to question established norms, emphasizing that erotic power is never absolute but persistently contested and open to reinterpretation.

#### 5. Judith Butler's Performativity

Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity fundamentally transforms how gender and sexuality are understood, arguing that these are not inherent or static qualities, but rather outcomes generated through continual enactments and repeated performances. As Butler asserts,

“Gender is a performance with no pre-existing subject; it is an act which constructs the identity it claims to express” (Butler, 1990).

This perspective confronts traditional essentialist views of sexual and gender identity, highlighting instead their fluid, multiple, and constructed nature. Drawing heavily on Butler's ideas, the Theater of Eroticism critically examines and disrupts conventional classifications of desire, gender, and sexual identity. It positions eroticism not as a fixed identity or mode of expression, but as a performative and evolving process, constantly redefined through embodiment and social interaction. This approach creates a theatrical space where desire can be explored in diverse manifestations, beyond rigid binaries and normative frameworks.

The article “Innovations in Acting Pedagogy: Exploring Chorale Acting in the Experimental Production Scoops of Situationship: Lamentations from Za Oda Room” vividly exemplifies Butler's theory in practice. Utilizing chorale acting that fragments and multiplies character identities, the production embodies the fluid and hybrid aspects of desire. By dissolving traditional distinctions between selves, genders, and roles, the performance presents eroticism as a changeable and dynamic force. This dramaturgical method reveals the intricate negotiations involved in shaping identity, depicting

erotic desire as an ongoing construction rather than a fixed truth.

Within this stage environment, the performance interrogates and deconstructs essentialist beliefs about sexuality and identity. It invites viewers to perceive eroticism as a continual process of becoming, where identities are performed and re-performed, allowing for richer and more inclusive explorations of intimacy, love, and desire. Through Butler's theoretical framework, the Theater of Eroticism becomes a space for social and political reflection, demonstrating how performance both mirrors and transforms lived experiences related to gender and sexuality.

### III. DEFINING THE THEATER OF EROTICISM

The concept of the Theater of Eroticism can be understood through a set of interconnected ideas that highlight its distinctive methodology:

- Embodied Understanding Through Erotic Experience

At the core of the Theater of Eroticism lies the concept that eroticism is a form of embodied knowledge arising not merely from overt sexual behavior but through the nuanced, charged exchanges between bodies occupying the same space. Erotic energy is produced and transmitted via subtle yet potent elements such as a lingering touch, synchronized breathing rhythms between performers, and the shifting physical proximity that unfolds between them. This approach moves beyond treating physicality as simple action; instead, it regards sensation itself as a means of knowing an epistemic tool by which individuals come to understand and express their identities, desires, and vulnerabilities.

This notion resonates strongly with Jerzy Grotowski's “Poor Theatre” philosophy, which highlights the actor's body as the primary vessel for generating theatrical meaning. Within this theatrical framework, physicality becomes the conduit for invisible currents of desire and emotional intimacy to emerge, transforming ephemeral feelings into concrete experience. Through deliberate control of movement, breath, and gaze, performers bring forth

the intricate subtleties of erotic tension, enabling audiences not just to observe but to viscerally experience the ebb and flow of passion, tenderness, and longing.

By prioritizing embodiment over explicit depiction, this theatrical approach also invites the audience's imagination and inner emotional landscape to play an active role, fostering personal sensory and emotional engagement in co-creating the erotic narrative. Consequently, the Theater of Eroticism becomes a collective space for intimate exploration, where the distinctions between spectator and performer blur, fostering a deeper self-awareness and mutual recognition within the realm of desire.

- **Disrupting Normative Desire**

A central tenet of the Theater of Eroticism lies in its purposeful challenge and subversion of traditional heteronormative and patriarchal frameworks that have long defined and limited erotic desire. Instead of sustaining fixed, singular identities, this theatrical form embraces desire as intrinsically polyphonic consisting of diverse voices, stories, and experiences and intersectional, recognizing the complex ways gender, sexuality, race, class, and culture influence erotic expression.

In doing so, the Theater of Eroticism closely resonates with Judith Butler's concept of performativity, which proposes that gender and desire are not inherent qualities but performed acts, open to contestation and transformation. Within the theatrical setting, desire unfolds as a fluid, evolving phenomenon that persistently challenges restrictive binary classifications, thereby expanding the possibilities of erotic identity. The stage thus becomes a space of political defiance where normative beliefs about who desires whom and in what manner are disrupted and re-envisioned.

This challenge to normative desire invites spectators to perceive eroticism as a mutable continuum rather than a fixed point. Characters and narratives defy straightforward categorization, often representing fragmented or hybrid identities that resist essentialist interpretations of sexuality. Such pluralism cultivates a deeper, more inclusive appreciation of intimacy and connection, surfacing the wide-ranging spectrum of

human erotic experience frequently marginalized or silenced in dominant cultural portrayals.

Furthermore, by unveiling how heteronormativity and patriarchy constrain and prescribe desire, the Theater of Eroticism fosters critical awareness of the workings of power within erotic relationships. It underscores the potential for emancipation and change that arises when desire escapes oppressive narratives, positioning the theater as a fertile ground for exploring novel forms of erotic existence grounded in inclusivity, equity, and genuine expression.

- **Political and Social Critique**

In the realm of the Theater of Eroticism, erotic expression moves beyond merely personal or intimate levels, becoming a potent platform to challenge dominant social norms, censorship policies, and systems of repression. Here, erotic performances serve not only as visually or sensually engaging events but as intentional political acts that question and undermine the frameworks governing sexuality, morality, and public conversation.

This concept is heavily influenced by Michel Foucault's incisive examination of the power dynamics inherent in sexuality. His assertion that "where there is power, there is resistance" redefines eroticism as a contested space, where performances represent ongoing conflicts over autonomy, consent, and control. Through theatrical enactment, eroticism reveals both overt and subtle manifestations of power within interpersonal relations be it through cultural conventions, institutional censorship, or self-imposed restrictions highlighting how desire is regulated, monitored, and frequently suppressed.

Viewed through this perspective, erotic theater operates as a mode of resistance that challenges deep-seated taboos, inviting spectators to engage in critical reflection and heightened awareness. It disrupts simplistic ideas about consent and power by dramatizing the complex negotiations embedded in intimacy and elevating voices historically marginalized or silenced. Consequently, erotic performances reclaim arenas for suppressed stories to be told, facilitating conversations about the ethics of desire, mutual respect, and emotional openness.

Additionally, by stretching the limits of what is deemed acceptable in public performance, the Theater of Eroticism directly confronts censorship, employing theatrical expression to reveal the often arbitrary and repressive forces regulating sexual discourse. In this way, it cultivates a cultural context where eroticism is neither stigmatized nor confined to private spaces but acknowledged as a vital arena for exploring questions of identity, freedom, and social justice.

- Affective Intensity and Vulnerability

At the heart of the Theater of Eroticism lies a profound celebration of vulnerability, regarded not as weakness but as a vital source of strength and transformative potential. Distinct from theatrical traditions that often emphasize spectacle or emotional distance, this approach foregrounds the unguarded revelation of intimate feelings, inviting both actors and spectators into a deeply immersive experience marked by shared empathy and emotional resonance. By unveiling the intricate and sometimes conflicting dimensions of human desire including its fears, aspirations, uncertainties, and transcendent moments the theater serves as a powerful medium for fostering richer interpersonal connections and deeper mutual understanding.

This focus on emotional intensity finds a strong echo in Antonin Artaud's conception of theater as a deeply corporeal and sensorial phenomenon. Artaud argued that theater should transcend rational thought to engage with the primal and universal forces within humanity, exposing concealed emotional and psychological realities. The Theater of Eroticism adopts this philosophy by transforming the stage into a space where genuine emotional expression reigns supreme. Through intensified physical movements, evocative vocalization, and symbolic gestures, performers willingly embrace the vulnerability woven into erotic desire, crafting scenes charged with tension and profound emotional complexity.

Within this vulnerable environment, the audience is encouraged to move beyond passive observation and to participate empathetically, sharing with the performers the wide range of sensations that characterize erotic closeness. Such interaction cultivates a collective sense of bearing witness and

mutual recognition, effectively breaking down the barriers that separate individual experiences from communal expression.

Furthermore, positioning vulnerability as a source of empowerment confronts prevailing social stigmas that link erotic desire to shame or fragility. Instead, it redefines vulnerability as a crucial dimension of human connection and emotional richness one that demands bravery, openness, and trust. Consequently, the Theater of Eroticism establishes a bold dramaturgy in which emotional intensity and vulnerability transcend artistic technique to become ethical necessities, allowing desire to be explored in its most sincere and healing manifestations.

- Audience as Erotic Participant

A pivotal and transformative concept within the Theater of Eroticism lies in its deliberate dissolution of the conventional barrier separating actor from audience, redefining spectators as active contributors rather than mere onlookers in the erotic unfolding. This concept recognizes eroticism as inherently relational, wherein the energy generated on stage transcends performers alone, engaging the audience's imaginations, emotions, and desires.

By inviting spectators to partake as co-creators of meaning, the Theater of Eroticism turns the performance venue into a vibrant space of mutual discovery. Audience members are urged to immerse themselves fully not just intellectually but also emotionally and sensually in the thematic content and energies at play. This interactive exchange awakens each spectator's erotic imagination, allowing their personal desires, fantasies, and vulnerabilities to intertwine with the theatrical narrative on a deeply personal and unique level.

Such a collapse of distance not only sparks emotional involvement but also encourages critical reflection. Instead of passively consuming eroticism as a fixed spectacle or representation, viewers are inspired to examine their own beliefs, taboos, and experiences around intimacy and desire. Consequently, the Theater of Eroticism becomes a dialogic forum where individual and collective stories merge, fostering a richer, more profound understanding of erotic existence.

Moreover, by diminishing the separation between performer and audience, this principle disrupts traditional theatrical power structures. It democratizes the expression of eroticism through decentralizing authority and inviting communal engagement, thereby amplifying empathy, intimacy, and connection within the shared performance space.

#### IV. PRACTICAL MANIFESTATIONS

As an avant-garde theatrical concept, the Theater of Eroticism is realized through diverse dramaturgical techniques designed to embody and convey the intricate, fluid, and intensely felt essence of erotic desire. Rather than adhering to traditional theatrical conventions, these strategies immerse spectators both sensually and intellectually, emphasizing core ideas such as embodied understanding, disruption of normative desires, political commentary, emotional intensity, and active audience engagement.

- Non-Linear Storytelling

Since erotic experience seldom progresses in a straightforward, chronological manner, unfolding instead through fragmented recollections, fantasies, and fluctuating emotions, the Theater of Eroticism reflects this by adopting non-linear narratives. These stories may repeat, intersect, or branch unexpectedly, mirroring desire's multifaceted and often contradictory nature. This narrative complexity invites viewers to actively interpret the material, assembling meaning and emotionally connecting with the layered depiction of intimacy.

- Minimalist Scenic Design

The use of minimalism in staging and props highlights the performers' physical presence their bodies, touch, breath, and spatial dynamics which are essential for conveying erotic vigor. Stripping away extraneous elements fosters an intimate and concentrated atmosphere, where subtle movements and closeness gain profound significance. Complementary soundscapes and carefully managed lighting heighten sensory awareness, allowing every gesture and interaction to carry weight. This sparse aesthetic nurtures a space where eroticism emerges

through implication and presence rather than overt representation.

- Integration Of Interdisciplinary Performative Aspects

Acknowledging the multisensory dimension of erotic experience, the Theater of Eroticism weaves together components from dance, spoken word, music, and sensory installations to deepen the audience's immersion. Choreography emphasizes the bodily rhythm and physicality of desire, while spoken word adds a poetic and contemplative layer. Sensory elements such as tactile objects, fragrances, and ambient sounds engage the audience's senses beyond sight and sound, eliciting associative and emotional reactions. This blending of disciplines enriches the narrative's complexity, crafting a comprehensive performative space that resonates across various sensory modalities.

- Techniques Of Brechtian Estrangement

Drawing on Bertolt Brecht's concept of alienation, the Theater of Eroticism deliberately employs estrangement techniques to keep audiences critically engaged even while immersed in sensual stimuli. Performers might break the fourth wall, directly address viewers, or incorporate symbolic actions that reveal the staged and artificial nature of the performance. This careful interplay between immediate sensory allure and thoughtful detachment discourages voyeuristic or passive responses, encouraging spectators to contemplate the social, cultural, and political implications of erotic desire. In doing so, the theatrical experience becomes not only a space for emotional expression but also an active arena for reflection and resistance.

By utilizing these dramaturgical strategies, the Theater of Eroticism creates a setting where eroticism is not simply acted out but deeply felt as a complex fusion of sensation, creativity, and critical analysis. In moving beyond traditional theatrical norms, it offers its audience a transformative experience that probes desire's diverse dimensions from intimate personal feelings to broader societal and political contexts.

#### CONCLUSION

Emerging as an essential and timely framework in both theory and practice, the Theater of Eroticism, or the "Fluidity Principle," enhances contemporary theater's ability to explore the intricate dimensions of human desire, intimacy, and identity. Building upon the foundational ideas of Artaud, Brecht, Grotowski, Foucault, and Butler, it reconceptualizes erotic experience as a socially significant, politically charged, and deeply interactive phenomenon. Experiment productions like "Scoops of Situationship", which adopt inventive dramaturgy and critical reflection, play a crucial role in advancing the artistic development of performers and unlocking performance's transformative capacities. Rather than remaining fixed, the Theater of Eroticism is a dynamic and evolving model that continually adapts to and interrogates changing social, cultural, and political landscapes. It expands the limits of theatrical form and meaning, creating a distinct and vital arena for erotic engagement that is intimate, disruptive, and emancipatory. In doing so, it encourages both artists and audiences to delve into and accept the complex and often paradoxical nature of desire that fundamentally shapes human experience.

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