



The State of Current Theatre Research

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1. Review of Research

1.1 Before Semiology: Dramaturgical Analysis

Performance analysis obviously does not simply date from the age of structuralism and semiology. Any spectator who comments on a performance analyses it ipso facto, since he selects, names, prioritises and examines one particular element as opposed to another and establishes links between these elements. When spectators comment on the performance, they do not have to verbalise the unsayable; they try rather to find a few landmarks. The description most often takes the form of the narration of a story (plot or *fabula*) or at least an account of the most remarkable stage events which facilitates an understanding of the materials used, a natural segmentation of the performance and a highlighting of the most powerful or chosen moments in the *mise en scène*.

The tradition of dramaturgical analysis goes back to Diderot (*De la poésie dramatique*, 1758) and Lessing (*La dramatique de Hambourg*, 1767) in whose work we find remarkable descriptions of acting and stage effects. Brecht therefore only renews a tradition already established in Germany, that of the *Dramaturg* (the director's literary and theatrical advisor, now known as the dramaturge). He offers dramaturgical analyses on the theatre and particular productions of his time which reveal much about the general conception of *mise en scène*. In France, this same approach is found in critical theorists such as Roland Barthes or Bernard Dort. Their analyses are always based on ideological and aesthetic mechanisms found

in the production. Until the 1960s, this mode of description dominated all others due to its breadth of vision, its precision and the compromise it managed to find between meticulous observation and interpretation. Dramaturgical analysis, aware that it is not exhaustive although not necessarily aware that it also contributes to performance, offers an initial synthetic approach to performance; it underlines the main structures of a performance while avoiding a fragmented perception of it.

The following chapter shall show that there are numerous other tools at our disposal with which we might examine a performance; and it is useful to link all these different methods and increase our sources of information. It is advisable to start by putting forward the possibility of performance semiology, which is both a well established ‘science’ and a field of research in the process of being ‘restructured.’

1.2 Analysis and Semiology

The stock phrase ‘performance analysis’ is perhaps not the most suitable term. Analysing means deconstructing, fragmenting or breaking up the performance’s continuum into small pieces or tiny units, producing more of a ‘butchered’ effect or a *mise en pièces* rather than an overall understanding of the *mise en scène* through the *mise en scène*. However, the spectator needs to see and thus describe the totality or at least the ensemble of systems which are already structured and organised into what we now call the *mise en scène*. In this respect, it does not make sense to speak of an analysis of the *mise en scène*, since *mise en scène* is, by definition, a synthetic system of options and organising principles and is not, unlike the final performance, the empirical and concrete object of future analysis. *Mise en scène* is an abstract and theoretical concept, a more or less homogenous network of choices and constraints which is sometimes called metatext (Pavis, 1985), performance text or *testo spettacolo* (de Marinis, 1982). The metatext is an unwritten text which encompasses all the various choices the director has consciously or unconsciously made during the rehearsal process, options which are visible in the final product (or which can sometimes be found in the production book which is not, however, identical to the metatext). The performance text is the *mise en scène* considered not as an empirical object, but as an abstract system, an organised ensemble of signs. These types of texts – in the semiological

and etymological sense of fabric/texture and network – provide a key to possible ways of reading performance, but they must not be confused with the empirical object: the performance in all its materiality and concrete situation of enunciation. Performance analysis – whether it be dramaturgical analysis or a mere description of fragments or details – necessarily leads to an understanding of the *mise en scène* which itself groups and systematically organises the different materials of the empirical object, the performance. In this respect, it seems easier – and perhaps more obvious – to suggest some general hypotheses on the way *mise en scène* works rather than provide exhaustive so-called objective descriptions of the heterogeneous aspects of the performance. But these hypotheses obviously are only worth as much as the person who proposes them, i.e. the spectator/analyst in search of a global understanding of the *mise en scène*. They do not have the apparent objectivity of empirical observation, nor the absolute universality of abstract theory; they oscillate between close yet fragmentary description and general, uncertain theory, between formless signifiers and polysemic signifieds.

Moreover, one should determine for whom the analysis is meant, its aim and in what ‘spirit’ it is undertaken. It seems to have two main functions: reporting and reconstruction.

1.3 Two Types of Analysis

Reporting-analysis could have live radio sports broadcasting as its model; such an analysis would comment on the performance in progress, as in a soccer game, indicating what is happening on stage between the ‘players’, highlighting their strategies, recording the result and ‘goals’ of both teams. This would mean approaching the performance ‘from within,’ in the heat of the action, reproducing the detail and impact of the events, experiencing there and then everything that moves the spectator throughout the performance, determining the *punctum* (Barthes, 1980) and how the spectator is emotionally and cognitively implicated in the dynamics of the acting, the waves of meaning and sensations which have been generated by the multiple, simultaneous signs.

Ideally, reporting-analysis should be carried out during the performance; the spectator reacts immediately and becomes conscious of his

reactions just after he has expressed them; he notates the ‘emotional punctuation,’ both the punctuation of the *mise en scène* and his own reception of it. Although this practice is uncommon in a performance, apart from recording on a medical level the spectator’s physiological or summary psychological reactions, such reporting nevertheless does penetrate the live experience, and observes *in situ* the spectator’s reactions to the stage events. Most traces of these reactions are lost however, as in Western culture, the theatre spectator (at least the adult spectator) is not exactly permitted to express his impressions, reactions and thoughts during a performance; he is expected to wait until the end of the performance to express them. Therefore, an important part of these immediate impressions is lost for ever, or at least buried beneath a memory and rationalisation a posteriori of past emotions. One of the tasks of performance analysis is to note when and how such emotions arise and how they influence meaning and the senses. Dramatic criticism, insofar as it is immediate and spontaneous, sometimes retains a valuable trace of these early impressions when it describes the performance as a metaphor of first impressions.

Reconstruction-analysis, on the other hand, is a speciality of the West which is inclined to conserve and store documents and to maintain historical monuments. It is in some respect similar to historical reconstructions of past productions. It is always done *post festum*; it collects clues, relies on documents from the performance as well as artists’ statements of their intentions which were written down during the performance’s preparation and all mechanical recordings from all angles and in all possible forms. Such a *studium* (Barthes, 1980: 50) is endless, but the difficulty – as we shall see in chapter 2 of the book whose first chapter is constituted by this article – is to use all these documents in such a way so as to restore some of the audience’s aesthetic experience. A performance, whether it dates from yesterday or the time of the Greeks, is lost forever, and we can no longer have an aesthetic experience of it nor have access to its living materiality. Henceforth, we must settle for a mediated and abstract relationship with the aesthetic object and aesthetic experience; it is a relationship which no longer allows for an examination of objective, aesthetic data, but which, at best, permits an understanding of the artist’s intentions and their impact on the audience. Whether we are dealing with a production which has actually been seen by the analyst or a reconstruction of a past performance, we only really ever reconstruct a few of its main principles and not the authentic event. Once these principles are established, the performance text becomes an object of knowledge, a theoretical object substituted for that empirical object which was once the

performance itself. However useful and important the statement of such principles, intentions or effects may be, they still cannot be considered as performance analysis; they serve rather as a theoretical framework which the analyst will use to relate in detail certain aspects of the performance.

Reconstruction-analysis is particularly concerned with the study of the performance's context and the nature and extent of this context or contexts. This context might be the place where a performance is held, the audience on a given night including that audience's expectations and socio-cultural composition, but it might also be the place and concrete circumstances of the performance itself. Obviously it is not easy to restore these contexts and the modes of behaviour which created them. Richard Schechner's notion of "restoration of behavior" allows us to imagine and restore 'the actors' behaviour or that of all artists involved in various performances. But these contexts and modes of behaviour are extremely variable, potentially infinite and absolutely immeasurable: "Even if human memory can be improved upon by the use of film or exact notation, a performance always happens within several contexts, and these are not easily controllable. The social circumstances change" (Schechner, 1985: 43) These contexts, considered either as restored behaviour, socio-cultural codes or social context (Pavis, 1980: 250-94), place us in a semiological or, more precisely, a socio-semiotic perspective. This is obviously not the only existing methodology for performance analysis, but it offers a whole ensemble of techniques which we ought to consider. Rather than give a regimented exposé of all these theories (already studied, in any case, by Kowzan, Übersfeld, de Marinis, and Elam), an overall review shall be given here if only to measure what we have acquired and learned from semiology, even if it is all rather obvious now. The early stages of semiology shall be evaluated, including its debits and debates, in the hope of moving beyond some dogmatic prejudices, prejudices which we shall mention here so as not to succumb to them a second time.

1.4. Semiology: Rise and Crisis

Since the sixties and seventies, the structural analysis of the narrative has been applied to various literary and artistic fields – fairy tales, comic strips, film, the plastic arts, etc. Theatre, as text and performance, has not escaped such systematic analysis and the very first theories sought to test

the hypothesis of a specific theatre sign (Kowzan, 1992). The semiology of literature and theatre takes the stage as a means of moving beyond the impressionism and relativism of so-called traditional criticism which is more interested in the text rather than performance. In reaction to the somewhat vague discourse of dramatic criticism, it sometimes believed that it had found a universal model in cybernetics and the theory of information: but such a model often remains slave to a linear model of communication. It leads to an extremely naive conception of theatre as a piece of information which is coded by the director, to be then decoded by the spectator, as if it were a mere question of transmitting a message with as little loss as possible! Semiology is not a 'code-sharing' between author-actor-director and the spectator who is then expected to mechanically decode those signs directed his way. This caricature promptly disappeared in later analyses inspired by semiology, despite a persistent and fairly malicious tendency to attribute it to semiology by constructing a semiology of a particularly narrow and limited sort.

Theatre semiology established itself as the dominant academic discourse of the seventies because theatre (since Artaud) felt the need to be treated as a discipline in and for itself, as an autonomous language and not as a branch of literature. Its principal concern has thus been to start with the stage, with the large moments or stage units, and to examine the text as it is enunciated on stage. As a result, the semiology of the text was neglected or even disqualified, the text and the stage were radically separated as were dramaturgical analysis and 'theatrical language.' But now the dramatic text is making a marked comeback: theatre is no longer simply considered as a performance space, but once again, albeit in a different way, as textual practice. Once again, we talk of theatricality, but theatricality as found in the text (Bernard, 1976/1995) and in language (Finter, 1985). We must examine this return to the staged text (see chapter 5, part 2), to stage pragmatics where the text is spoken and unspoken.

The rise of semiology in the human sciences coincides with the sort of criticism, most often Marxist, of so-called bourgeois ideology. Barthes (1964) best exemplifies this alliance between linguistics and sociology:

Tired with the slippery, oratorical nature of ideological denunciations, I was dazzled when reading Saussure (it was in 1956), that an elegant method (as is said of the solution to a mathematical problem) could be developed for the analysis of social symbols, class distinctions and the cunning mechanism of ideology.

What has changed since the dazzle and optimism of the sixties is the belief that semiology necessarily has a socio-critical perspective, the confidence in a radical criticism of ideology. Since the fall of empires and 'socialist' ideologies, semiology has often been accused of having compromised too much with ideologists and 'masters of meaning.' Such criticism is all the more violent now that we are no longer interested in denouncing false consciousness, and generally condemn any established system, discipline, or theatre which claims to represent reality. For many critics, nothing remains of these ruins of ideology and militant critical thinking but a sceptical relativism and a vague meditation on the 'end of history' and the futility of theory. Such a vision is rather limited and pointless when the theoretical reflection strives systematically to describe a production in all its components: such a task is obviously very demanding and requires considerable patience.

Such a task is all the more demanding given that post-modern criticism accuses semiology of camouflaging notions of intention and authority behind the concept of signification, to which post-modernism opposes the ideas of opening and non-representation. Thus, the very model of the sign is called into question.

This misunderstanding is not a recent one, as semiology has always been accused of mechanically applying the linguistic model to fields other than literature, notably social and artistic practices. However, since Saussure and Barthes, it ought to be clear that even if these other practices are based on the signifier/signified opposition, they cannot be reduced to a grid where non-linguistic signifiers are automatically translated into linguistic signifiers. Nothing forces, nor allows for that matter, the spectator to translate the experience of contemplating a light, a system of gestures or music into words that can then be integrated into the global meaning of the stage. The objection made by the Québécois theorist, Rodrigue Villeneuve (1989: 25), seems to be inappropriate: "what seems to be difficult to accept," he writes, "is this general attitude, more or less clearly manifest, that confines everything that is not linguistic translation of the stage object to an indefinable zone." Semiology, even Saussurian semiology, is not obsessed with describing everything, which would, in any case, be impossible, still less with translating everything into words.

There are, in fact, several questions mixed into this critique of the sign. Certainly, the Saussurian model of the sign is binary (signifier /signified) and not ternary like that of Peirce (1978) (representation, object, interpretant). In this way, we can consider theatre performance as an en-

semble of signifiers which only have meaning as a series of differences. As regards the possible signifiers which arise from this series of differences, we can link them with those signifieds in other semiological systems borrowed from the referent (or real world); thus this world can be included in our consciousness as a series of semiological systems already preformed and pre-constructed by culture and language. Thanks to Saussure, therefore, we can grasp meaning as the construction of a signification and not as the naive communication of a preexisting signification.

However, once we actually perceive the materiality of the Performance (the signifiers, in Saussurian terms), nothing prevents us from positioning ourselves in the pre-linguistic, “just before Language,” of grasping “the body in the mind;”¹ this is, after all, what we actually do when we watch a dance, a gesture or any signifier not yet contaminated or transcribed by language. Another question is how to link these pre-linguistic impressions to the other elements of the performance, notably the linguistic and narrative elements. We will later examine (in chapter 1, Part 2) if it is possible to do this without a binary semiology, if the spectator’s gaze or desire is not always directed, channelled, vectorised by signs.

There are many other misunderstandings about this initial semiology which need to be clarified. Those with which we have just dealt here are easily dissipated; however, this first phase of semiological research has many other limitations which we must try to overcome by imagining all possible solutions.

1.5. Limitations of Classical Semiology

Minimal units

Theatre performance cannot be segmented, like natural languages, into a limited series of units or phonemes, where rules of combination could demonstrate all the possibilities. It is impossible then to transpose

1. To use the title of Mark Johnson’s Book, *The Body in the Mind* (1987), Univ. of Chicago Press.

the linguistic model of phonemes and morphemes onto the plane of what is now metaphorically known (since Artaud) as 'theatre language.' It is no use trying to isolate, in the continuum of the performance, minimal elements distinguished as the smallest units of time and space. Such careful examination is only interesting if it does not leave out important clues to help us understand the performance; it does not explain how the signs work and the minimal unit is not or is no longer the philosopher's stone which will segment the performance as if by magic.

Categories of signs

Analysis should not concern itself with establishing a repertory or a system of signs which would provide a framework for any performance and which could be found in every production. Such a system does not exist and enumerating signs or types of signs proves nothing, whether it be a semiotic typology of signs (Pavis, 1975) or a classification of performance types: thus, there is no point in drawing up a 'dead list' of the categories of signs used in any (Western, text-based) performance, categories which the analyst would have to pinpoint, noting when and how often the signs appear. The categories of Kowzan (1970), Elam (1980) or Fischer-Lichte (1983) only deal with the elements which belong to the 'average' Western theatre performance, notably that of illusion and bourgeois realism. Unfortunately, these subdivisions limit performance rather than shed any light on the subject.]bey force us to think in old-fashioned, ready-made categories which any avant-garde or indeed any *mise en scène* systematically calls into question. For instance, the way in which these categories radically separate the human system of the (animate) subject and system of the (inanimate) object is no longer relevant in current theatre practice: the human body is sometimes treated as inert material (Butoh dance) and an object often replaces and signifies a human presence (an item of clothing, for example, or a prop associated with a person). This is the reason why we will not use these old categories in this current work, even if they are part of our Western cultural heritage and even if we have difficulty in doing without them when discussing theatre.

These categories inherited from the classical, indeed antiquated European theatre tradition, whose aesthetics and division of labour no longer have much in common with current practice, shall be replaced with trans-

verse systems or categories, such as the system of chronotopes (see Chapter 3, Part 2), the system of vectorisation, or other transverse tools which enable us to move beyond a compartmentalised vision of performance.

1.6. New Departures

A desemiotics?

More recent attempts have tried to set themselves apart from that initial sort of semiotics which was too taxonomic and fragmentary by seeking alternatives in the hermeneutic and pragmatic German tradition or in phenomenology (Ingarden, Derrida, Carlson, States, Gardner). Here, it has been most often a question of going beyond Saussurian binarism and “closure of representation,” (Derrida, 1967: 341-68) and of suggesting a “generalized desemiotics” and a “theatre of energies” (Lyotard, 1973) instead of a theatre of signs. Lyotard (1973: 104), the most articulate representative of this tendency, has, himself written a radical criticism of the sign from Brecht to Artaud; but his criticism of theatre as “taking place” (*lieu-tenance*) and representation, and his proposal of an energetic theatre unfortunately remain rather undeveloped and questionable: “It [energetic theatre] does not have to suggest that this means that; it does not have to say it either, as Brecht wished. It has to produce the greatest intensity (by excess or default) of what is there, without intention. Here is my question: is this possible, and if so, how?”

Lyotard’s desemiotics, it seems, is even less possible and feasible than semiotics, but it is commendable in that it questions the notion of the sign, at least the fixed sign, as linked to language and taking the place of the whole materiality of the performance. This is what phenomenology also sets out to do, criticizing the segmentation of everything into signs and thus the semiological function of representation and performance. In phenomenology, the perception of the performance event is global, so all semiological segmentation is absurd. The problem with semiotics is that in addressing theatre as a system of codes, it necessarily dissects the perceptual impression theatre makes on the spectator. And as Merleau-Ponty has said, “it is impossible (...) to decompose a perception, to make it into

a collection of sensations, because in it the whole is prior to the parts.”² This is the source of anti-analysis reactions and the beginnings of a globalising phase where the aim is to provide syntheses rather than reading grids.

Global Understanding and Vectorisation

These various critiques of classical semiological analysis led, in the 1980s, to a globalizing phase: performance considered as a series of syntheses or frameworks. The *mise en scène*, in the structuralist sense of the term, became the key notion in a new theory able to synthesize stage options, dramaturgical choices and the performance’s main structures. Instead of fragmenting perception, differentiating sensations, multiplying signification, and thus, arbitrarily segmenting the signifier in order to translate it into possible signifieds, the signifiers are imagined as those which anticipate possible signifieds; the notion of individualized signs is replaced with series of signs grouped according to a process of vectorisation. Vectorisation is at once a methodological, mnemo-technical and dramaturgical method which links networks of signs. It consists of associating and connecting different signs in a network within which each sign has meaning only in relation to other signs. Let us suppose that, like in Chekhov’s *Seagull*, a gun appears on a wall: the spectators relate it to other indices and the moment it disappears and they hear gunshots, they have no doubt that the depressed and suicidal hero has just put an end to his life. Such networks are like nets which hold the production together and prevent it from being permanently fragmented.

This globalisation, however, is not risk free, since analysis looks for a kind of secret ‘key’ to the *mise en scène*, when this term is taken in its centred and concentrated form, thereby excluding theatre practices based on “decentering,” arbitrariness and chance. To avoid an all too coherent closure of *mise en scène* and its analysis, it should be made clear that *mise en scène* – both production and reception – never comes ready made, but that there is – and this is our hypothesis – a vectorisation: certain signs

2. Quoted by States (1987), from Merleau-Ponty in *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays...*, ed. James M. Edie, Northern University Press, p.15.

or moments in the performance are linked dynamically together and there is a network of meaning which links these moments and makes their interaction relevant- we can only describe the guiding lines in the dramaturgy and the main stage options without excluding those pragmatic decisions which digress from the main idea. Since it is impossible to be exhaustive, it is of interest to replace the signs and vectors in a guiding schema which constantly evolves: thus the spectator does not run the risk of being submerged by insignificant details. It is better to reconstruct the network, understanding its orientation and guiding lines than be left with a disorganised mass of surplus material or useless recorded documents. Thus the description of a performance always oscillates between a totalizing demand for synthesis and empirical individualization, between order and chaos, between abstraction and materiality.

The Experience of Materiality

The spectators concretely experience the materiality when they perceive the various materials and forms in the performance, provided that they remain on the side of the signifier, i.e. provided that they resist the temptation to immediately translate everything into signifieds. Whether it is a question of the presence and corporeality of the actor, the texture of his voice, or some kind of music, colour or rhythm, the spectators are at first submerged in an aesthetic experience and the material event; they do not have to reduce this experience to words, they savour rather the “erotic in the theatre process” (Lehmann, 1989: 48) without trying to reduce the performance to a series of signs, as, according to Bert States (1987: 7) semiotics sometimes does: “What is disturbing, if anything, about semiotics is not its narrowness, but its almost imperialistic confidence in its product: that is, its implicit belief that you have exhausted a thing’s interest when you have explained how it works as a sign.” Such an objection is worth considering: performance should be treated both as materiality and as potential meaning, and should never be reduced to an abstract and fixed sign. When the spectators observe a gesture, a particular space or listens to music, they appreciate the materiality of the performance for as long as possible; they are at first touched, surprised and silenced by these things in front of them which offer themselves to the spectators in their being-there before becoming completely integrated

into the rest of the performance and evaporating into an immaterial signified. But sooner or later, the spectators' desires are bound to become vectorised, the arrow is bound to reach its target, transforming the object of desire into a signified. Reading the signs in a performance thus means, paradoxically, resisting their sublimation: the question is for how long?

Desublimation

Getting to grips – body to body – with the performance's materiality is thus to be taken literally: the analyst returns to the 'body' of the performance, moving beyond the kind of sublimation which comes about whenever we use signs; he is fully absorbed by the aesthetic experience and by the material aspects presented on stage. He desperately tries to overcome the "blindness of many semiologists when it comes to the material force of aesthetic signifiers" (Villeneuve, 1989: 25); he is aware of the "phenomenon of non-intentionality, of libidinal investment of events, of the sensual materiality of signifiers, which make it impossible not to consider the corporeality of things, structures and living beings through which signifiers are produced in the theatre" (Lehmann, 1989: 48). To experience aesthetically a circus, a performance or any production using several kinds of materials, we must be open to the impressions such materiality might create and resist giving it meaning. This comes naturally to children as well as those who watch a performance from a cultural tradition different from their own.

The current trend in performance analysis is thus a return to the material and concrete reality of the stage, a desublimated return to the body of the performance. This breaks with the abstract idea of the *mise en scène* as sublimation of the body, as idealised abstract schema. We shall see in the chapters dealing with the different components of performance how this materiality can be revealed in detail and how we can trace the vectorisation which organises this materiality in what can be called 'space-time-action.' Suffice it to point out here that it is possible to follow the traces of the trajectory and energy in any movement or utterance; it is possible to closely determine the breath, rhythm and the 'voice' and 'path' of the performed text. This "logic of sensation" (De-leuze), this movement which moves the text and nerves the spectator, this displacing of affects and attention can only be grasped and felt if we refrain from

resublimating them in a univocal written trace, reduced to a signified or a secret code.

However, this insistence on the material side of signs is always carried out in the structured framework of the organised and channelled event which is the performance, i.e. according to a certain vectorisation. Semiotisation and desemiotisation are thus both antithetical and complementary operations of a work of art and an aesthetic experience of it. We must bear this in mind when we evaluate methods of performance analysis. Hence, the double criteria when describing performance: we must, on the one hand, return to the 'body' of the performance, but on the other hand, distance oneself from it and draw the outline and itinerary of the performance from the point of view of the desiring subject. Such is the current state of analysis: the progress it has made is remarkable, but new developments are still necessary. Semiology must take advantage of this sceptical age into which it is drawn by its post-modern demon. Semiologists are still faced with many methodological problems and questions which have not yet been answered; they will be systematically outlined here.

2. Unanswered Questions

However annoying these limits and unanswered questions may be, they reflect the difficulty of adapting analysis for performances which are constantly changing, defying all interpretation and demanding new strategies.

2.1. Experience or Reconstruction?

Is the average spectator's experience of seeing a performance only once sufficient for analysis? In principle, yes, and this unique experience should be the golden rule when examining a performance, itself unique and organised in terms of the ephemeral and the singular. However, the

temptation to cheat is great – to use, for example, the experience of a spectator who has seen the performance more than once (which radically changes the normal position of the receptor) and to artificially reconstruct the performance using substituted, indeed left over material from the theatre act: photos, audio-visual recordings, statements preceding the performance (notes, preliminary plans and proposals, artists' statements of their intentions or interviews following the premiere). It is essential to distinguish carefully between the artists' intentions or statements on the one hand, and on the other, the artistic result, the final product viewed by the audience which should be our sole focus. We must make a clear distinction between (1) statements of intention (documents outlining the project, a commentary, an interview etc.), (2) the paratext (or the ensemble of texts which are written around the actual dramatic text, notably stage directions), (3) mechanical recordings of the performance (sound-track, images, videos or films), (4) the technical notation carried out after the performance, (5) the semiological analysis of signs and the network of vectors, an hermeneutic interpretation of the work, and the critical discourse which follows the performance.

The kind of analysis desired here does not of course exclude the historical reconstruction of past performances and all the disciplines which that involves, but it is based above all on the unique and individual experience of the spectator watching the stage event, an experience which theory endeavours to generalise in a method of analysis.

2.2. Segmentation

Segmentation remains the main issue for performance analysis. If it is agreed that nothing would be gained by producing an 'atomization' of the performance into minimal units, one does not yet know what the dimension of the macro-units of the performance should be. Unfortunately, performance is still often segmented according to the text (according to its standard division into lines, scenes and acts); it is rarely based on observable units in the performance. A text-based segmentation, however, does not necessarily correspond to the dynamics of the performance. The latter has its own rhetorical framework, its breaking points and pauses which provide the only adequate reference points for any segmentation of the performance.

In reaction to this text-based segmentation (i.e. a segmentation suggested by the text), theory has naturally looked for units based on the stage actions of the performance. But here again, researchers do not always resist the philological (or text-centric) temptation to reduce the acting to units which are marked in the text where it is possible (or, in their view where it is essential) to note an actor's move. Such segmentation, which absolutely insists on movements and dramaturgical units coinciding at very precise moments anchored in the text, arbitrarily privileges one signifying system (visible, marked moves) and imposes a text-based segmentation on the rest of the performance. Rather than establishing a purely textual segmentation, one should choose a mode of segmentation based on the global rhythm of the performance, the rhythm of physical actions and the musical composition of the *mise en scène*: i.e. according to the temporal sequence of the rhythmic frameworks. In brief, one should take into account those sequences when text and stage move 'out of sync,' and above all respect the possible vectorisations in the *mise en scène* as a whole.

2.3. Textual Concretisation

In the same logocentric way, there is (or was) a tendency to see the production as the stage concretisation of the preexisting dramatic text, to deduct it from the reading of the dramatic text, which would find its concretisation in the performance. As regards classical works which are produced over and over again, of course one can understand this need to refer back to the text in order to compare the series of possible stage concretisations (Pavis, 1985). But that again is a philological, "bookish" attitude – to use Lehmann's (1989: 43) merciless term – where the stage is examined from a textual point of view: in actual fact, the two fields cannot really be compared. Performance analysis takes the completed empirical object as its starting point and does not attempt to go back to what might have generated it. We must consider the stage as an autonomous field which, contrary to Ingarden's view, does not have to concretise, materialise or negate a preexisting dramatic text, and is thus "an artistic practice which cannot be foreseen and predetermined from the perspective of the text" (Lehmann, 1989: 44). We shall return to this relationship be-

tween the text and performance if only to overcome this false opposition (part 2, chapter 5).

2.4. The Status of the Text

The status of the text in the production, which might be called the staged text, should be questioned here. The words spoken by the actor (or any other kind of stage utterance) must be analysed in the way they are concretely stated on stage, coloured by the voice of the actor and the interpretation of the scene, and not in the way we would analyse them if we had read the written text. Text and performance are no longer thought of as having a cause and effect relationship, but as two relatively independent ensembles which do not always necessarily work together for the sake of illustration, redundancy or commentary.

2.5. The Narratological Model

Performance analysis can also have recourse to narratology, which serves to identify the various components of the performance and make the dynamics of the stage events explicit. But here again, as with the segmentation of the performance, the narratological model should not be based on the text alone, but also on the stage events; it should be neither too universal nor too closely modelled on a parochial case. If narratology is particularly well-developed for the, analysis of narrative and film, it is not the case with theatre; perhaps because theatre, particularly Western theatre is too often considered in an all too unilateral way in terms of mimesis as opposed to diegesis. Instead of asking ourselves what is represented mimetically, we shall examine what is narrated, how, by whom and from which perspective (Barko, Burgess 1988). Theatre is not a world full of mimetic signs, but a narrative which uses signs. Dynamic research on

the storyteller in the theatre (Haddad, 1982)³ clearly shows that the actor can also narrate and that narratology would be very useful for dramaturgy.

A first step would involve arranging the different rhythms in the stage system, locating the rhythmic frameworks and seeing the resultant rhythm. For those performances which tell a story in a figurative way, where the spectator follows the ‘sensory motor logic’ of the action and the plot, we can take inspiration from the Stanislavskian notions of physical action, through-line of action or superobjective. A theory of vectors which groups and energizes entire moments in the performance shall be suggested later. These vectorised figures are found within the restricting yet clarifying framework of the orientated action, the plot (fable or fabula) and the way it is chronologically presented in the subject (two Russian formalist notions which should be recovered from the prop store!).⁴

2.6. The Question of Subjectivity

Semiology was set up as a means of avoiding an impressionistic discourse on performance. As a simple notation of signs, it eliminated the spectator’s subjective gaze which is never neutral, considering the object of analysis by means of a conceptual and methodological apparatus. However, this fragile gaze, whether masculine or feminine, should never be totally eliminated, but examined in its relationship with the stage and the actor, above all, in order to grasp intuitively “what is indefinable in the acting, the obscure emergence of emotion” (Behnamou, 1988: 10). But how can we determine and note down the occurrence of such emotion? At best we can imagine – bearing in mind the cinema’s perspective on theatrical reality – that the analysts gaze is comparable, albeit metaphorically, to that of film apparatus: point of view, distance, scale of shots, framings, montage, connections made through free associations,

3. See also Pepito Mateo, “Pepito Matéo, Conteur?” *Dire*, no 15.

4. See Tzvetan Todorov, *Théorie des formalistes russes.*, Paris, Seuil, 1965.

etc. In this way, theatre analyses gain from the language of cinema, which itself has been influenced by a particular logic of the human gaze.

But the subjective gaze of the (film or dramaturgical) lens is not so much a fugitive impression which is mechanically grasped, but rather a way for the spectators to experience the movements of the perceived object aesthetically, i.e. follow the movements of the actor-dancer and the overall dynamics of the performance corporeally. Like Barba (1992: 101), we are thinking of “those few spectators capable of following or accompanying the actor in the dance of ‘thought-in-action.’” In our view, these spectators should not be so rare, they should even be the general rule: theatre lovers who are capable of feeling and understanding the sensations and movements of their own body, of perceiving the ‘thought-in-action’, the body of the performers and the performance as an auto-biography in the strict sense of the term, i.e as a writing of the actor’s body as much as the spectators, a writing which inscribes itself in the scene (to be) described.

2.7. The Non-Representable

The stage event, for that matter, is not always easy to describe because the signs of the acting in current practice are often tiny, almost imperceptible and always ambiguous, if not unreadable: intonations, gazes, restrained rather than manifest gestures are so many fleeting moments where meaning is suggested, but difficult to read and scarcely externalised. How do we notice signs which are scarcely materialised, if not by intuition and by a ‘body to body’, sensory-driven experience of the performance? The rather unscientific and unsemiological term, energy, can be useful in an attempt to determine what this non-representable phenomenon is: by his presence, movement, and phrasing, the actor or dancer releases an energy which directly reaches the spectator. Such a quality makes all the difference and contributes to the whole aesthetic experience as well as the development of meaning. In reaction to a hegemonic, visual culture of the obvious, we are trying here to identify the non-representable which is essentially, but not exclusively, the invisible, as rhythm, that which is heard, or kinesthetically perceived, i.e beyond

over obvious visual signs or units that are largely visible. Here we must read the body, as does Foster (1988: 58), as that of a dancer, for example:

Literacy in the dance begins with seeing, hearing and feeling how the body moves. The of dances must learn to see and feel rhythm in movement to comprehend the three-dimensionality of the body, to sense its anatomical capabilities and its relation to gravity, to identify the gestures and shapes made by the body, and even to re-identify them when they are performed by different dancers. The reader must also notice changes in the tensile qualities of movement – the dynamics and effort with which it is performed – and be able to trace the path of dancers from one part of the performance area to another.

All of these tentative questions, as yet unanswered, clearly demonstrate how theory and performance analysis, in trying to unbolt every door, have moved away from a semiotics of communication and codes, and how little the semantic model of the sign and levels of meaning is adapted to contemporary performance. On the other hand, we already foresee a more flexible model for the working of signs and their vectors where the signifier is not sublimated into an immaterial signified, and where the guiding lines of the vectors are clearly indicated (the following chapters will come back to this): This vectorisation of desire – as much the desire of the body of the performance as that of the spectator – becomes a possible model for analysis, as soon as we are able to see vectorisation as that which organises the performance, opening it out to contradictory perspectives without confining it within a definitive structure.

In order for this model to develop further, the conditions for analysis and the most appropriate theoretical fields for it to be put to use most effectively need to be outlined.

3. Updating Theory

The fundamental question in any analysis is to know why and for whom we are doing the analysis and which method is the most suitable. Whereas the review in the printed or audiovisual media is addressed to a large audience which wishes above all to be informed and advised, the semiological review, which demands a longer time for reflection and a

more sophisticated conceptual apparatus, is practically always addressed to other theatre theorists and intellectuals, to other colleagues entrenched in the same somewhat frosty, studious or fetishistic relationship with the stage. Theatre artists are rarely users of analysis, either through fear of being 'revealed,' through a vague fear of theory or some primal anti-intellectualism, through disinterest or lack of time or curiosity. The question is not how to interest them in our theories, but – all modesty aside – how will our theories influence their practice in the same way that their practice has given rise to our theories. To this tragic misunderstanding is added the fact that research is nearly always carried out in isolation by a group of specialists working within the same critical tradition, often unaware of other traditions. It is well known that between French semiology, Dutch empiricism, Swedish audience reception studies, English pragmatism, German hermeneutics or Italian historiography, there is practically no exchange. Alas, poor Erasmus.

Despite all these obstacles and the rather discouraging list of unanswered questions above, it seems that analysis, 'twenty years on,' could begin over again on more solid ground if we were to take advantage of some well established, sophisticated disciplines like sociology and anthropology which have almost always been developed far from the concrete case of texts and performances. We will limit ourselves as a reminder to listing five fields of research which are best discussed using concrete analyses as found in various other chapters in my new book.

3.1. Productive-Receptive Theory

For an analysis which is interested in both the final product of the *mise en scène* and its origins, we have to invent a theory which considers production as well as reception; a theory which is neither partial nor unilateral like the research on the creative process in literature and theatre or the aesthetics of reception (where everything is based on different readings of a work by different audiences). We must invent a model which combines aesthetics of production and reception, a model which studies their dialectical interaction, which looks at both the anticipated reception of the production and the activity of the spectator in the act of reception (Pavis, 1985: 281-297).

There is indeed a real danger, as Thies Lehmann points out, of simply transferring the production problems to the realm of reception, naively expecting the spectators to resolve them all with a wave of a magic wand, as if they were endowed with all theoretical power. Productive-receptive theory attempts to distribute evenly the process of shaping forms and signs among productive and receptive instances; it assumes that one cannot ignore the other, that in fact they work artfully in tandem, generating strategies and routes of greater or lesser negotiability. This productive-receptive concept results in an interactive strategy where we produce as a creator and receive as a spectator. Such a strategy prevents us from returning to the debate about the intentionality of the creator-producer and the subjectivity of the spectator-receiver. We must look for their mutual seduction (rather than reduction); this seduction is familiar to those cultures involved in intercultural exchange; they surrender to it without hesitation and not without pleasure.

In the same way, it hardly seems worthwhile to reintroduce the subjectivity/objectivity polarity in order to associate subjectivity with the artist and spectator, and objectivity with the work of art. Evidently, it is the subject who analyses and evaluates, but to say that analysis is subjective is not only banal, it also presupposes the existence of an objectivity on which everyone might finally agree, and which would be the common, lasting reference, the object finally trapped in the flight of desire.

3.2. Socio-Semiotics

Another field which needs to be developed is the kind of semiology which is interested in ideological questions and observes how signs are anchored and constituted in a whole socio-economic-cultural context. Empirical studies on audiences have (or should have) understood that an examination of the cognitive, emotional and semiological mechanisms used by the spectator to create meaning cannot be neglected (Schoenmakers, ed., 1986 and Sauter, 1988). Is the semio-cognitive approach compatible with the sociological and ideological approach? A method such as socio-semiotics explicitly asks that crucial question. Socio-semiotics differs from reception theory stemming from German *Rezeptionsästhetik* and American reader-response criticism, both of which unfortunately neglect the ideological plurality of the reader or spectator be-

cause they presuppose an 'ideal,' isolated, individual reader rather than an ideological, cultural intersection of tensions and contradictions corresponding to conflicting tendencies and groups (chapter 2, part 3).

3.3. Between Socio-semiotics and Cultural Anthropology

In the last few years, socio-semiotics has moved towards cultural anthropology which encompasses the cultural and relational dimension of performance. The development of an intercultural theatre (Brook, Grotowski, Barba) over the past few years has accelerated the challenge of purely linguistic and semiotic instruments for analysis. Intercultural semiotics encourages us to relativize our choices, priorities and habits when analysing a performance. It warns us, for instance, against our obsession of describing a visible and readable space, of looking for and quantitatively processing information and redundancies, of valuing all that deviates from the norm and shows originality. Such semiotics may heal us of our inability to understand the phenomena of hearing, voice, time and rhythm, our inability to follow several parallel actions and to assess the energy of an actor. Without demagogically renouncing our Western cultural habits, we should acknowledge how our ethnocentric or Eurocentric gaze influences and often distorts our perception, and how much we will gain by changing our perspective and tools for analysis (Pavis, 1990).

3.4. Phenomenology

The basis of phenomenological thought⁵ is that any experience of perception has a form or gestalt which contains organized, defined

5. Phenomenology applied to theatre can be found in Bert States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms* (1987), Marvin Carlson, *Theories of the Theatre* (1987) and Stanton Gardner, *Bodied Space* (1994).

wholes standing out against a background. The spectator's perception tends to look for the most balanced, simple and regular form to distinguish different ensembles with clearly defined contours: the ensembles are in a relation of hierarchy, but they are, nonetheless, globally perceived by the human eye and understanding, as Tindenmans (1983: 53) suggests:

Perception is fundamentally a constructive rather than a receptive or simply analytical act. [...] A really satisfying theory of mental processes can only exist, however, if we find an equally important place for theories of motivation, of personality and of social interaction. Is it a risk to say that when people watch a performance, they also look continuously for points of recognition, for causal connections between events.

Phenomenology provides an image of the stage processes which is at the same time a theory of action and a theory of the perceiver's appropriation of the performance (he seizes everything). "Theatre does not 'reach' someone, someone has the theatre 'reach' him" (Tindenmans, 1983: 55). Whether we are thinking conceptually, looking at a painting or watching a performance, eye and mind are active and not merely recording. "To think means to try, to operate, to "reform, regulated only by an experimental control in which only the most highly 'wrought' phenomena intervene, phenomena which our mechanisms produce rather than record" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964: 10). Likewise, the spectators produce their perceptions and the connections between them, instead of merely notating them. "This phenomenological perspective is a valuable invitation to move interactively through the highways and byways of performance and meaning.

3.5. Theories of Vectors

To a relative degree, moreover, one must 'follow the arrows' on such walks, for our movement is channelled by the 'arrow of desire' (an arrow which seeks, but does not find), but also by an arrow which outlines a way through the performance according to vectors which, as we shall see in the chapter on the actor, organize and dynamise the whole perfor-

mance). This idea of an open yet coherent network will enable us to take into account the necessary updating of theory while addressing different methods of analysis and the various components of performance. This open and coherent network of vectors will allow us to accept the necessary renewal of theories, while retaining the general framework of vectorisation. Semiology remains a discipline – in the sense of an ethical and methodological guiding rule – which we naturally use to observe theatre performances. It must always be enriched – without losing any of its rigour if possible – by studying the mechanisms of (sociological) necessity and (psychoanalytical) desire from the perspective of an anthropology of the actor and of the spectator.

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