

MARCO DE MARINIS
Bologna

UNDERSTANDING THEATRE: TOWARDS A HISTORICAL SEMIOTICS AS AN EPISTEMOLOGY OF THE THEATRICAL DISCIPLINES*

1. A CENTER OF THEATRICAL STUDIES (C.S.T.)

The initial "gesture" of this Center of Theatrical Semiotics (instituted in November, 1982) consists in the declared intention of wanting to move ourselves in a direction exactly opposed to that toward which the evermore numerous chanters of the destruction of meaning, of the death of reason, of epistemological anarchy, etc., tend to drag us today. What is, however, this direction? It is that of a reconstitution of a series of reference points, or to put it better, a reconstitution of an organic frame (even if, by sheer necessity, partial and provisional) of hypotheses and cognitions contributing thereby to the relaunching of that serious scientific reflection in and on the theatre for which a lack is felt and for which there is also emerging a strong and widespread demand (which is a demand of a theatrical culture).¹

2. SEMIOTICS OF THE THEATRE: A UNIFYING PERSPECTIVE IN THEATRICAL STUDIES

I come, then, to the second, fundamental gesture which stands at the beginnings of the new-found center: and that is the choice of semiotics as the eponymous discipline which has been preferred to furnish the methodological

* An introductory report for the conference: "The Semiotics of the Theatre: definitions, perspectives, and relations with the other theatrical disciplines", organized by the Centro di Semiotica Teatrale del Teatro (Prato, Italy) the 14th of January, 1983. The principal aim of this text is that of presenting, in the form of an organic project, the scientific hypotheses which are at the base of the Center and which found the theoretical and practical activities which it promotes.

¹ Obviously, founding itself on an epistemology of the partiality and temporary nature of models, our proposal of constructing—on the basis of semiotics—an organic, theoretical frame for the study of theatrical facts shares nothing with the holistic tendencies towards abstract, ahistorical system — a tendency which seems to be emerging from certain sectors in contemporary theatrical studies.

coordinates and the theoretical instruments for the research that the center will seek to conduct and promote at various levels. One will ask: why semiotics? Why exactly the privileged elevation of semiotics to the status of that of a scientific "container"? I will attempt to respond in a synthetic manner even if, by necessity, it will not be very brief. I will say then that semiotics, as a guide-discipline, presents several important advantages.

In the first place, it constitutes a theory with declared globalizing ambitions. Segre (1979:6) has spoken of this as "a project of global interpretation of cultural facts [and of a] global systematization of our fields of knowledge."² But still more noteworthy is the perspective elaborated by Umberto Eco (particularly in *A Theory of Semiotics* [1976]) and according to which semiotics poses itself as a "general theory of culture", an anthropological theory aiming, therefore, toward making explicit the underlying logic of the functioning of a culture through a unified study of cultural phenomena as signifying communicative phenomena; or, to put it better, as communicative processes which found themselves on systems of signification (or codes).³ As far as this is concerned, I don't think that it is necessary to insist on the sure advantages offered to the study of theatre by the possibility of an organic, global approach to theatrical facts as communicative phenomena (even if of a very particular type). Such an approach would have, as its end, among others, the rendering explicit of regularities and invariants, both intra-and intercultural, both synchronic and diachronic, subtended to the discursive functioning of those theatrical facts. Which obviously does not in any way mean ignoring the fundamental given of discontinuity and heterogeneity which is constitutive of the events which offer themselves in the field of the so-called "theatre"; it indicates instead upholding something much different: which is that at a certain level, and from a determined point of view, the heterogeneity and indefinite plurality of "theatres" can leave room for dynamics (to be precise, the semiotic dynamics of sign production and interpretation) which are, at least in part, unitary (at least inside a determinate culture);

² See also Segre (1983: 144—145).

³ On the other hand, the theory of codes proposed by Eco, founded on an encyclopedic semantics (hence rhizomatic, with infinite recourse: cfr. the Q-model), demonstrates that the adoption of uncentered and local models is not at all disturbed by their function inside unitary theoretical perspective. In this regard, one thinks of the distinction between a global encyclopedia and a partial encyclopedic knowledge, actualized each time in the production and interpretation of texts (Eco, 1981b: 860 ff), and also the difference between a general semiotic and a specific semiotics: while the task of the former is that of "locating one single formal structure" which underlies the sign-phenomena (a formal structure that Eco identifies by implication), the task of the latter is that of studying the modifications which this unvarying deep structure undergoes in differing systems of signification (Eco, 1981a: 663). According to Eco, while a specific semiotics "can aspire to the dignity of science, elaborating falsifiable hypotheses and providing provisional instruments", a general semiotics "is not a science: it is philosophical activity. [...] A general semiotics is a philosophy of languages [...] it is a philosophy of semiosis" (Eco, 1982: 574). On this theme, see also Eco (1983), which pulls together and elaborates on the texts cited in this note.

which is to say, these dynamics can come to be advantageously investigated in the invariances and variables of the production reception process which marks out these dynamics with the help of unified models, of a coherent methodological apparatus, and on the basis of a system terminologically and categorially homogeneous.⁴ (It seems to me, to give a well-known example even if on a different level, that it is in a direction of this kind that run the scientific interests of such a prestigious director like Eugenio Barba when he researches biological principles and transcultural pre-expressive techniques which regulate the behavior of man in non-daily or theatrical situations [cfr. Barba, 1981]).

In addition to such a decided globality of vision, semiotics presents a second important advantage which finally contributes to recommending its adoption as a base-discipline also in teatrology: I mean that capacity of self-reflection (and therefore of self-control and self-correction) which is characteristic of semiotics, but only insofar and to the degree in which it poses itself according to, for example, the suggestions of Kristeva (1969/30ff)—as a critical science and as a critique of science; that is, as a semiotics which “is each time a re-evaluation of its own object and/or its own models, and a critique of these models (hence of the sciences from which they have evolved) and of itself (as a system of unchanging truths).”

3. SEMIOTICS OF THE THEATRE AS A TRANSDISCIPLINARY EPISTEMOLOGY

These characteristics of the theory of semiotics (of certain semiotic theory, to be more exact), together with others which I have not mentioned for the sake of brevity, allow us to think of its double utilization in theatrical studies: not only—as has just been mentioned—on a disciplinary (methodological) level as a study of theatrical phenomena *sub specie communicationis*, but also and above all on a second and superior level which we could call meta-disciplinary or epistemological. In fact, for the reasons expressed, semiotics, among all the other human sciences, appears quite securely as the most fitting to function as a theatrical meta-discipline (or trans-discipline) with propaedeutic and epistemological functions with respect to other disciplines of the theatre ranging from the historical to the socio-anthropological.⁵

⁴ For a global (general) approach to the theatrical fact *sub specie semiotica*, cfr. De Marinis (1982), to which I refer, obviously, in the course of this article. At the base of this proposal is the distinction between the theatrical performance as a material object, an observable phenomenon, and the performance text as a theoretical object resulting from the lifting of the performance into the inside of the paradigms of textual semiotics. The performance text constitutes, hence, a theoretical model not of the theatrical fact as a whole, but only of one of its aspects, which is the textual aspect concerning the semiotic functioning of the performance.

⁵ Cfr. Pavis (1978: 45) for a kind of semiotics as “epistemology and propedeutic of the ‘science’ of the performance”. In this regard, see also Ruffini (1976a), Kowzan (1978), De Marinis (1982: 16 ff.), van Kesteren and van Stepele (1982).

Semiotics as a meta- or trans-disciplinary epistemology, does not constitute, certainly, an unheard of conception if it is true that we can find it in various theorists and in numerous moments of semiotic reflection in the twentieth century (even if only at the level of an undeveloped hint): one thinks to name but a few—of the already cited Eco, Kristeva and Segre, and also Hjelmslev, Barthes (above all, his *Leçon*) not to mention, more directly, the “founding fathers” of modern semiotics, de Saussure and Peirce. Nevertheless, in the last few years this perspective has affirmed itself with particular force (mostly in some specific fields of semiotics) and with an accentuation much more marked—with respect to the past—on the criticism and surmounting of (as trans-disciplinary) the too rigid fences between various human sciences as well as the divisions between diverse sectional approaches to cultural phenomena.

It seems to me that the function of a semiotics of the theatre as a theatrical meta-science is of two kinds. In the first place, it ought to have the task of subjecting to examination, and eventually refounding, the statutes of the various theatrical studies, and in particular the traditional, historical disciplines belonging within the sphere of the *Theaterwissenschaft*. In the second place (but the distinction is particularly practical and explanatory) a semiotics-epistemology posits itself as a comprehensive framework, or frame-discipline, whose labor is that of framing and coordinating the various and partial approaches to the “theatrical object” (from that of the just-mentioned historical and socio-anthropological to the psychological-psychoanalytical, as well as to the recently appeared approach of the physico-biological sciences)⁶ with and through the help of putting to work coherent conceptual grids and homogeneous theoretical metalanguages.

4. WHICH SEMIOTICS? OUTLINE OF A PRAGMATICS OF THEATRICAL COMMUNICATION

After having asked ourselves why semiotics?, we will also inevitably ask ourselves which semiotics?—especially given the diversity, if not the contradictoriness, of trends, philosophies and scientific paradigms which are actually operating in the field of semiotics. In reality, by responding to the first query, I have already, and inevitably, begun to respond to the second. Nevertheless, while keeping in mind the exigencies of brevity, some supplementary information will not be unuseful. Let us begin by saying that a semiotics of the theatre, which is functional for experimental-operative use—a use which we would want to test and develop at the CST (and here I refer to two projects just sent out, one on the “transcription” of the performance and the other on the spectator’s reception)⁷ must take full part in that profound reconversion, from the structuralist to the pragmatic, from the taxonomic to the explanatory, from

⁶ As for the latter, see, at least, Laborit (1982) and Pradier (1979, 1980).

⁷ The results of this research will be published in the near future.

the synchronic to the diachronic, which for several years has been taking place in general and applied semiotics.

What does this signify, what does this reconversion carry with it? Fundamentally, it means passing from an approach to (semiotic) texts and their systems of signification (codes) which is principally classificatory, internal and immanent, to an analysis of the discursive functioning of these texts; which is to say, an analysis of the communicative events to which these texts give rise, and an analysis, above all, of the interpretative procedures which actualize differently these texts in their semantic and communicative potentiality, in their will-to-say and in their will-to-do.⁸ To be precise, we could describe this passage (which implies, however, an epistemological coupure) as the transition from a semiotics of codes to a semiotics of interpretation,⁹ wherein the accent is placed not so much on systems of signification as mechanisms that generate signs or texts, but, on the contrary, is placed on the work which is carried out through these systems—which is to say, on the use that is made of these signs and codes in the productive as well as in the receptive phase. Moreover, it forms, restructures, reinvents and “perverts” the codes as well as actualizing them, doing so in the some moment in which it actualizes them.

The necessity of the passage from a structuralist approach to a pragmatic approach is by now widely recognized in every sector of semiotics; but it appears so much more urgent and unrenounceable for a semiotics of the theatre, given the very particular characteristics of its object: the theatrical fact. I am thinking not only of the well noted and obvious nature of the transitory and ephemeral event which is particular of the performance; I am referring to something more, and different. Looking thoroughly, the performance does not really possess an existence which is autonomous and self-sufficient—as a finished entity, closed in itself; on the contrary, it acquires meaning, becomes intelligible and begins to exist as such, and as a semiotic fact, only in reference to opposed moments of, on the hand, its production and, on the other hand, its reception (rather, its receptions). Hence one could also say, as some in fact do, that in a precise sense, the performance itself does not exist, but rather what exists is only theatrical relation, that is, that complex network of communicative and interac-

⁸ Cfr., for example, the following differing lines of research (which have at times great distances between their adopted models): the *Rezeptionsästhetik* by Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser, the pragmatic of discourse in the work of Teun van Dijk and Walter Kintsch, the textual theories of Siegfried Schmidt and Janós S. Petöfi, the semiotics of manipulation of Algirdas J. Greimas, the speech-acts theory with their recent textual extensions, the semiotics of film following the work of Metz (such as that of Gianfranco Bettetini, Roger Odin and Dominique Chateau), and Italian proposals on literary communication (from Cesare Segre and Maria Corti to Marcello Pagnini, to above all, the work of Eco in his *Lector in fabula*).

⁹ Cfr., in this regard, Bonfantini (1981). One sees, for example, how Eco, in his most recent theoretical proposals, has shifted the accent onto interpretability as the constitutive condition of the sign: “The sign is not (only) that which stands for something else: it is before all—and eminently—that which stands for its possible interpretations. A sign is that which can be interpreted” (Eco, 1982: 572).

tional processes which the performance implies, or better, for which the performance is an occasion and a stimulus, from its first ideation until its fruition on the part of the spectator, along with the cognitive, emotive and pragmatic modifications involved therein.¹⁰

It is clear, then, that the object of a semiotics of the theatre (given such dimensions) will no longer be the performance, but rather a theatrical communication; that is, the object will become the entire productive-receptive process which the performance locates, but of which it constitutes only **an** aspect, **a** moment (not isolatable from the others); or, to put it better, the object can continue to be the performance, textually conceived (the performance text), with the understanding however, that it is conceived not as a text in itself, autonomous and self-sufficient, but as a text-in-situation and as a text-in-history.

5. TEXT-IN-SITUATION AND TEXT-IN-HISTORY: THE CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF THE PERFORMANCE

In effect, the contexts in relation to which the theatrical fact is situated and studied are at least two: an immediate context and a general one.

1) The immediate context (or performance context) is represented by the pragmatic situation to which the performance text has recourse (hence I have used the phrase, "text-in-situation"). This situation is, in the first place, the circumstances of enunciation and fruition of the performance, including also, however, its various genetic phases (training of the actors, textual adaptation, rehearsal, etc.) and finally—but not secondarily—the other theatrical activities which surround and found the performative moment ("group culture", according to the terminology of Eugenio Barba). 2) The general context (or cultural context) is, on the other hand, constituted by the culture which is contemporary with the theatrical fact under examination; or more exactly, this context is represented by the whole of cultural texts, theatrical and extra-theatrical, aesthetic and non-aesthetic, which can be placed in relation to the performance text being referred to, or with one of its components. These texts include, on the one hand, those of dramaturgy, declamation, gestures, choreography, scenography, etc., while, on the other hand, those of literature, rhetoric, philosophy, painting, urban design and architecture (De Marinis, 1982: 97ff., 139ff.).

In the case of the theatrical phenomenon, the drawing up of relations with other "objects", belonging to the same cultural system (*epistème*), represents at times an indispensable operation precisely in order to recuperate the performance to a scientific presence (more or less partial); but it is a question of an operation which is nevertheless necessary and preliminary (also in the case

¹⁰ On the theatrical relation see Durand, ed. (1980). For several sketches on a socio-semiotic theory of theatrical reception, cfr. Pavis (1980), Uberfeld (1981), De Marinis (1982, 1983).

of the contemporary theatre) in order to have an adequate comprehension of the performance (also on the part of the everyday spectator).

So it is that I speak of a performance text as a "text-in-history". But not only in the sense, by now somewhat obvious and taken for granted, that each work lives in and of the culture of its time and is therefore studied also on the basis of that culture (of its aesthetic, ideological and axiological systems); the expression in question is to be understood here in a strict and narrow sense because it refers to the possibility of recuperating and thereby studying the performance (a determined, specific theatrical event—not only of the past) through a contextual analysis (to cite the formula of Ruffini, 1976b). And it is worth noting that such an approach makes use of other culturally synchronic texts (which does not always equal a chronological contemporaneity), in the attempt to complete the documentary shortage (and so the textual lacunae) with regard to the theatrical fact under examination.

To provide again well known examples, already taken for granted, it is only through a contextual analysis, which turns to the painting, architecture and urban design of the 1500's, that we can attempt to make up for the scarcity and incompleteness of direct accounts of the theatrical space and scenography of Renaissance comedy (more precisely, of specific theatrical stagings of the Renaissance) With the same motive, we make use of Renaissance rhetorical tracts and manuals of etiquette on order to infer information about theatrical recitation of that epoch which was, as one knows, so little documented and recognized. It is likewise of supreme importance the status which the study of eighteenth and nineteenth century iconography (and portraiture in particular) can take on for the purpose of a more profound comprehension of the stage rhetoric, mimed-gestural-postural, of the so-called "great actors", from Kean to Talma and up to the Italian actors (at least until the appearance of photography).

6. SEMIOTICS AND HISTORY: TOWARDS A HISTORICAL SEMIOTICS OF THEATRICAL FACTS

The problems which appear at this point are quite large and would require much more space to be confronted or even to be adequately addressed. We will leave aside the performance as a text-in-situation (and all the questions a pragmatic approach carries with it), and limit ourselves to a few hints on the analysis of drama as text-in-history. Here the problems are, in the first place, those linked to a definition of the criteria of the historical contextualization of theatrical occurrences. It is true, on the one hand, that all the caution and philological rigor possible is necessary in order that the contextualization of the theatrical phenomenon does not transform itself into an arbitrary and casual approach which hastily promotes to the level of reliable evidence any sort of cultural object. But on the other hand, it is equally true that a contextual analysis, if it wishes to reach its objectives, cannot and must not reduce itself to a simple "critique of

the sources" of a work, but must rather go much beyond such a restricted, historical-philological utilization of the documents.

In this regard, a concept such as that of intertextuality (Kristeva) reveals itself as one great theoretical and operative utility; this concept refers, as one knows, to the complex game of quotations, transpositions, implicit and explicit references,—representing the essential characteristics of the relations between texts of the same culture (but, also, of different cultures, as Lotman declared when speaking of "poli-culturality"). It is the task of analysis to bring to light this intertextual game, or better to postulate it as a structural relationing, each time that interpretive exigencies make it necessary even in the absence of secure philological confirmations (or even, at times, opposed to these confirmations).¹¹ The disclosing of the intertextual labor (which is subtended both to the production of as well as the collective reception of the performance text) permits a better focusing on the theatrical phenomenon in its hybrid mixture of the "already said" and the "not yet said", as well as its blend of tradition and innovation. On the one hand, the performance utilizes and applies cultural codes while, on the other hand, and at the same time, it transforms, transposes and "reinvents" them (though certainly in a different way, each time, and sometimes minimally). If we refer to the notion of a semiotic encyclopedia (as a "sum of socialized knowledge") elaborated by Umberto Eco,¹² we note that the performance (which is, after all, on the same level of every other aesthetic text) represents always a restructuring (even if minimally) of the encyclopedia besides being one of its local actualizations.

At this point, having some time, it would be important to mention a few examples of research which have moved in the direction hinted of here and which allow us to measure the intervening distance between a contextual analysis as a revealing (and abductive postulating) of semiotic links (the "discursive regularities" of Foucault, 1969) and that analysis as only a documentary assessment of explicit and voluntary relations. One thinks of the research of Pierre Francastel on Italian painting and theatre of the 1400's, and of his fundamental conception of the work (but also of the performance, as well as the feast) as a "montage of cultural objects";¹³ and then there is that work of Jurij Lotman on the relations between the stage, painting and everyday life of nineteenth Russia—studies based on the definition of aesthetic texts in terms of "secondary modelling systems";¹⁴ and we have also the work of Franco Ruffini on the Ital-

¹¹ In this regard, see Ruffini (1976a: 19—20). With regard to the proposals of Julia Kristeva against the attempts of a philological banalization of her concept of intertextuality, see Kristeva (1974: 59—60). For an initial, typological approach towards a theatrical intertextuality, cfr. De Marinis (1982: 149—155).

¹² Cfr. at least Eco (1976, 1979, 1981b, 1983).

¹³ Cfr. at least Francastel (1965, 1967).

¹⁴ Cfr. Lotman (1973, 1977, 1980). For the notion of "secondary modelling systems", see especially Ivanov, Lotman et al. (1973).

ian theatre of the Renaissance and, in particular, his work on the *Calandria* staged at Urbino in 1513 (Ruffini, 1976b, 1978a).

Not having the possibility to dwell on these or other examples, I will limit myself, in conclusion, to several general observations which relate to today's theme. It is in fact evident how this whole order of methodological questions (relative, to be precise, to the criteria and limits of the historical contextualization of theatrical events: selection of documentary texts, their positioning with regard to the fact of reference, etc.) creates the premises, or directly postulates the necessity of a privileged relation between semiotics and the history of the theatre. It is a relation which, obviously, will not found itself on a level of competition, or with an unconditional surrender by only one of the parties; but rather, it must develop—in order to have a profitable outcome—in the spirit of reciprocal collaboration and methodological integration. A good example is that suggested by Segre (1979) between semiotics and philology in the study of literary texts. In this regard, it does not seem any longer possible to content ourselves with the proposal made by Ruffini (1978b: 60) some time ago (and the same scholar, moreover, has not himself remained content with such an application):

History recovers texts, which is justified (historically) by associating them with a theatrical fact; semiotics investigates the mechanisms of interrelation between these texts and that theatrical fact.

As I have just said, in fact, it is necessary that the semiotic point of view enters already into action—making use of its own categories and instruments of analysis—in the phase of choosing the texts which are to be associated with the theatrical object of reference.

There exist, moreover, ideological bad habits and methodological deficiencies for which studies of theatre history are often accused still today and for which a semiotic epistemology could offer itself as an efficacious antidote. To speak clearly, among the urgent objectives for a collaboration between semiotics and the historical-philological disciplines would be the overcoming (hopefully definitive) of certain ingenuously realistic conceptions of the theatrical fact (such as an existing material entity in itself and thereby recognizable), and of certain late-positivistic fetishisms of the document (as a “natural”, neutral, objective given) which still run through contemporary theatrical historiography, aside from the fact that it has been almost seventy years since the foundation of the *Annales* of Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre!¹⁵ No matter

¹⁵ In his inaugural address to the Collège de France (1933), Lucien Febvre writes: “The fact in itself, this alledged atom of history, wherever are we to go to have it? Is it a fact the assassination of Henry the Fourth by the hand of of Ravallac? One analyzes it, one dismantles it into its elements, both material and spiritual,—a combined result of general laws, of particular circumstances of time and place, and even of the particular circumstances of each individual, known or unknown, that took part in the tragedy. But as we quickly see dividing, dismantling and separating a complicated tangle [...] which is not given, but created by the historian—and how

how clear, however, and how just this undeferable overcoming of every realistic fallacy might be, it must not carry us to the opposite extreme which is that of a metaphysics of absence and of the irrecoverability (and unanalyzability) of the performance, wherein the well-deserved criticism of the persistent illusions about the objective and immanent nature of the performance and about the "reconstruction" of theatrical events, has become, however, at times unduly radical.

Speaking in general, a total relativism risks, in fact, in spite of its microanalytic optics and its scientific claims, bringing about a relapse, of the work of contemporary history, back to that same "narrative history" of the old historiography which was called the "history of treaties and battles"—even while coming from the opposite direction. As for us, if it is true that the history of the theatre is, substantially, a history of the documents on theatre,¹⁶ it is likewise true, however (and it seems banal to recall it) that the document (theatrical or of another genre) never speaks by itself, but represents in itself a pure potentiality, an inexhaustible material object. To Foucault's criticism of the document-monument (subjective, partial, and always, to a certain extent, lying), it is necessary to add a conceptualizing approach to use the expression of Veyne (1974) — which is an approach that develops a network of "new concepts" which can then pose new questions to documents, drawing from them responses which they have not yet given:

The comprehension of events is not immediate, and human societies are not transparent to themselves. [...] History is analysis rather than narration [emp. mine]. Concepts are what distinguishes history from the historical novel and from its own documents; if it were resurrection and not analysis, there would be no more need to write history: *War and Peace* and film magazines would be enough (Veyne, 1974: 67—69).¹⁷

It is useless to add, after what has been said up to this point, that semiotics, with its apparatus of categories (sign, text, code, system, signification, communication, enunciation, intertextuality, etc.), can offer to the history of the theatre a not secondary aid on this way toward conceptualization which Veyne (*ibid*: 71) justly proclaims indispensable "at the risk of reducing historiography to impressionism."

Up until this point, and very briefly, I have put forward several possibilities that semiotics offers to a history of the theatre. But, as I have more than once

many times? This is something invented and fabricated by means of hypotheses and conjectures, by means of an impassioned and delicate labour" (Febvre, 1933: 7; emp. mine). And it is Marc Bloch, together with Febvre, who begin that overcoming of the fetishism of the document peculiar to positivistic historiography and who have influenced the criticism of the document as monument as seen in the works of Foucault, Zumthor and Le Goff (cfr. Bloch, 1949; Zumthor, 1960; Foucault, 1969; Le Goff, 1978a, 1978b).

¹⁶ Cfr., for example, Ruffini (1978b: 59) and Taviani (1982: 8).

¹⁷ See also what Le Goff (1978b: 217) writes about the necessity of a "scientific construction of the document whose analysis must allow for the reconstruction and explanation of the past" (emp. mine).

repeated in the course of this talk, the contribution of the *Theaterwissenschaft* and the history of the theatre is very important, in turn, to semiotics in its study of theatrical facts. In effect, if semiotics wants profitably to carry out the tasks which stand before it in the field of theatre studies, it must, first of all, repudiate every reductive, synchronic tendency and overcome the recurrent tendency toward an abstract and a-historical scientism. Only under these conditions can semiotics succeed in seriously touching upon the theatrical object, that is, in comprehending this object in its decisive concreteness as a historical object.

As Segre writes (1979: 6,20), An attitude and the experience of a philologist is necessary to confront the study of codes and cultural systems, texts and contexts. [...] The philologist has, more than others, the sense of the endurance of texts. [...] The philologist has the clear consciousness of the transformations of codes, of their being-in-history. Philology therefore helps to overcome the subjectivism and the solipsism of certain modern positions of criticism and, unfortunately, of semiotics...

Barthes (1978: 36)—it is known—called “apophatic”, which is to say negative, the semiology he hoped for which doesn’t negate tout court the sign, “but [...] denies that it is possible to attribute to it positive, fixed, a-historical acorporeal characteristics”. I shall content myself with a term less “ponderous” and figurative (the former qualifier is Barthes’) and will speak—and also in the wake of some proposals which have emerged through semantics of historical semiotics.¹⁸ A historical semiotics of theatrical facts must be a semiotics (a science) of the concrete and the particular, which respects and takes account of the “socio-historical consitution”¹⁹ of these facts (and hence of the meta-languages which speak them) without, however, giving up its chosen task of making explicit the laws, regularities and invariants (synchronic and diachronic, in the événementiel and in the longue durée, and also the intercultural as well as the transcultural) which are subtended to these facts, and are eventually transformed by them, in their communicative functioning.

Understanding theatre cannot mean halting oneself in ecstatic contemplation (to be then worked out in a literary vein) of an irreducible and unexpressible différence (estrangement). It means instead, seeking to take account (explain?), at least in part, of that difference (estrangement) beginning from a more or less dense network of constants, similarities, homologies and symmetries against whose background (which is a linguistic and cultural background, i.e., semiotic) this difference stands out — is made possible and is literally, unveiled

¹⁸ See, for instance, Kristeva (1970)—the historical science as a component of semiotics; Macek (1973)—a historical semantics as an “auxiliary historical science”; Suvin (1981)—a critique which moves from that of the a-historical semiotics to a sketch of a socio-formalistic theory of the analysis of the narrative agent. But profoundly historical (outside and beyond nominalistic questions), and in the sense which presses upon us here, are the instructional semantics in the format of encyclopedia (and therefore the general semiotics which founds itself on this semantics and, in turn, which founds it) proposed by Eco and especially developed in his most recent works (Eco, 1981b, 1983).

¹⁹ Cfr. Suvin (1981: 83).

Up until today, because of the marked eventfulness of their object, theatrical studies have generally characterized themselves—recall Taviani (1982:9)—as *opus oratoricum maxime*. It would not be bad if in the future, this were to also become, if not entirely, an *opus semioticum*.

Translated from Italian by Sam Whitsitt

BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

- BARBA, E.
1982 *Theatre anthropology*, The Drama Review, XXVI, 2 (T—94).
- BARTHES, R.
1978 *Leçon*, Paris.
- BLOCH, M.
1949 *Apologie pour l'histoire ou métier d'historien*, Paris,
- BONFANTINI, M.
1981 *Le tre tendenze semiotiche del Novecento*, "Versus", 30.
- DE MARINIS, M.
1981 *Vers une pragmatique de la communication théâtrale*, "Versus", 30.
1982 *Semiotica del teatro. L'analisi testuale dello spettacolo*, Milano.
1983 *The theatrical comprehension: a Sociasemiotic approach*, "Theater" (Yale School of Drama), XV, 1, winter 1983.
- DURAND, R., ed.
1980 *La relation théâtrale*, Lille.
- ECO, U.
1976 *A theory of semiotics*. Bloomington.
1979 *The role of the reader*, Bloomington.
1981a "Segno", *Enciclopedia Einaudi*, vol. XII.
1981b "Significato", *ibidem*.
1982 "Segno", *ibidem* vol. XV ("Sistemica").
1983 *Semiotics and philosophy of languages*, Bloomington.
- FEBVRE, L.
1933 *Examen de conscience d'une histoire et d'un historien*, [in:] *Combats pour l'histoire*. Paris, 1953.
- FOUCAULT, M.
1969 *L'archéologie du savoir*, Paris.
- FRANCASTEL, P.
1965 *La réalité figurative*. Paris.
1967 *La figure et le lieu*, Paris.
- IVANOV, V., LOTMAN, J. M. et alii
1973 *Tezisy k semiotičeskomu izučeniju kultur* [Theses on the semiotic study of culture], [in:] *Semiotyka i struktura tekstu*, Warszawa.
- KESTEREN, A. VAN & STEPELE, P. VAN
1982 *Theses on Theatre research and Theatre*, "Degrés", 29.
- KOWZAN, T.
1978 *Intervento*, "Versus" 21 ("Dibattito sulla semiotica del teatro").

KRISTEVA, J.

1969 Σημειωτική. *Recherches pour une sémanalyse*, Paris.

1970 *La mutation sémiotique*, "Annales", XXV, 6.

1974 *Révolution du langage poétique*, Paris.

LABORIT, H. M.

1982 *Le geste et la parole. Le théâtre vu dans l'optique de la biologie des comportements*, "Degrés" 29.

LE GOFF, J.

1978a "Documento/monumento", *Enciclopedia Einaudi*, vol. IV.

1978b *La nouvelle histoire*, [in:] H. Le Goff, R. Chartier & J. Revel, eds., *La nouvelle histoire*, Paris.

LOTMAN, J. M.

1973 *Scena i Žipovis' kak kodirujuščie ustrojstva kul'turnogo povedenija čeloveka načala XIX stoletija* [Stage and painting as codifying devices of cultural behaviour in early nineteenth century Russia], [in:] *Stat'i tipologii kultury*. L. Tartu.

1977 *Poetica bytovogo povedenija v russkoj kulture XVIII veka* [The poetics of everyday behaviour in the Russia culture of the 1700's], in Σημειωτική. *Trudy po znakovym sistemam*, 8.

1980 *Semiotika sceny* [Semiotics of the stage], "Teatr", 1.

MACEK, J.

1973 *Pour une sémantique historique, Méthodologie de l'histoire et des sciences humaines. Mélanges en l'honneur de Ferdinand Braudel*, Paris.

PAVIS, P.

1978 *Intervento*, "Versus", 21, cit.

1980 *Vers une esthétique de la réception théâtrale*, [in:] DURAND, ed. (1980).

1982 *Languages of the stage*, New York, "Performing Arts Journal Publications".

PRADIER, J.

1979 *Fondement biologique du théâtre*, [in:] *Livre sur l'acteur. Rapports, actes du IV Symposium international des critiques de théâtre et théâtreologues* (11/12 avril 1969, Novi Sad).

1980 "Scienza", in Antonio Attisani, ed., *Enciclopedia del teatro del '900*, Milano.

RUFFINI, F.

1976a *Semiotica del teatro: per una epistemologia degli studi teatrali* "Biblioteca teatrale", 13

1976b *Analisi contestuale della "Calandria" nella rappresentazione urbinata del 1513: I. Il luogo teatrale*, "Biblioteca teatrale", 15/16.

1978a *Semiotica del testo: l'esempio teatro*, Roma.

1978b *Intervento*, "Versus". 21, cit.

SEGRE, C.

1979 *Semiotica filologica*, Torino.

1983 *Linguistica e semiotica*, [in:] C. Segre, ed., *Intorno alla linguistica*, Milano.

SUVIN, D.

1981 *Per una teoria dell'analisi agenziale*, "Versus". 30.

TAVIANI, F.

1982 *Presentazione*, "Quaderni di teatro". IV, 16 ("Le visioni del teatro").

UBERSFELD, A.

1981 *L'école du spectateur*, Paris.

VEYNE, P.

1974 *L'histoire conceptualisante*, [in:] J. Le Goff & P. Nora, eds., *Faire de l'histoire. I — Nouveaux problèmes*, Paris.

ZUMTHOR, P.

1960 *Document et monument. A propos des plus anciens textes de langue française*, "Revue des sciences humaines". 97.

ZROZUMIENIE TEATRU: W SPRAWIE SEMIOTYKI HISTORYCZNEJ
JAKO EPISTEMOLOGII DYSCYPLIN TEATRALNYCH

STRESZCZENIE

Posługując się — przy rozwijaniu pewnych właściwości charakterystycznych właściwych semiotyce ogólnej jako takiej (mianowicie: a. ambicja interpretacji globalnej faktów kulturowych; b. zdolność autorefleksji, a tym samym autokorektorstwa jako nauki krytycznej) — semiotyka teatru może prawomocnie aspirować do tego, aby zaproponować siebie jako epistemologię międzydyscyplinarną, lub jako metadyscyplinę o funkcjach propedeutycznych i epistemologicznych wobec innych dyscyplin teatralnych — od tych historycznych po socjoantropologiczne. Ale w tym celu jest jednakże konieczne, aby semiotyka teatralna przekroczyła ten wymiar ciasno strukturalistyczny i immanentystyczny, który ją dotychczas charakteryzował, a to dla próby zreformułowania w terminach znacznie bardziej adekwatnych jej zbliżenia do semiotyki pragmatycznej i historycznej, które studiują fakt teatralny wewnątrz procesu komunikatywnego (tzw. relacja teatralna: widowisko i widz) od jednej strony, a od drugiej przez odniesienie go do kontekstu kulturowego.

Analiza kontekstualna faktów teatralnych (w podwójnym rozumieniu, pragmatycznym i historycznym, terminu: kontekst) domaga się — i to z naciskiem, jako konieczności współpracy znacznie bardziej niż dotąd ścisłej pomiędzy semiotyką i historią, to znaczy pomiędzy teoretykami i teatrologami z jednej strony, a z historykami teatru z drugiej. Ta współpraca — niezależnie od innych względów — będzie mogła może pomóc jednym, semiologom, w porzuceniu ich powołania, często ekskluzywnego, dla synchronii, oraz do przezwyciężenia pokusy dość rozpowszechnionej scientyzmu abstrakcyjnego i niekiedy totalizującego, a równocześnie będzie mogła ta współpraca skłonić innych — historyków — do przezwyciężenia tej naiwnej realistycznej koncepcji faktu teatralnego i tego fetysyzmu pozytywistycznego wobec dokumentu, które to orientacje, obie, są jeszcze ciągle dość rozpowszechnione, i to pomimo epistemologicznej rewolucji, która płodnie w naszym wieku wstrząsnęła historią powszechną, i sporą ilością poglądów niegdysiejszych.

Przełożyła *Stefania Skwarczyńska*