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Language in the Theater

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The question with which I will be broadly preoccupied in the following pages may be posed in brief: does language in theatrical performance fulfil peculiar functions, distinguishing it from "literary language" and the language of other modes of discourse, notably speech in social intercourse? This fundamental question immediately generates a whole family of problematic issues, whose intimate relationship with each other and with the broad problem of the "status" of theatrical language demands that they be confronted. Does the linguistic signifier in the drama have a primary signified (such as the "speech" or "thought" of a character) which it can never escape? How does language in the theatre take its place in relation to other, non-linguistic signifying processes operative in the performance? What constraints do the invariables of performance place upon language? Is there a range of roles that language can adopt within those necessary constraints? What are the relations between language as it appears in the written text of the play and language as it emerges from the mouth of actors?

These may appear to be—as indeed they are—ambitious aesthetic problems to attempt to wrestle with, and I certainly make no pretence to answering the questions in any authoritative or *ex cathedra* way. It is my hope simply to ask them in an intelligent and useful way, and to explore certain (sometimes contradictory) means by which the problematic of theatrical discourse may be tackled.

The questions, especially as posed above, may be considered semiological in nature. What I am crucially concerned with is the manner in which language *signifies* in the performance, and the kinds and levels of signification that it may offer. In saying this I am making various—not incontestable—assumptions both about language and about the nature of theatrical performance, the principal being that each is a "signifying system" (albeit of a different kind), one of which (langauge) may be contributory to the other. I make these assumptions without rehearsing the semiological tradition as it has developed since Saussure—it is familiar enough after recent years of intense debate. Suffice it to say that not only the methodological framework of my analysis is inherited, but also most of the terminology I will employ. I borrow extensively from early European formalism, especially the Prague School of linguists, from the Danish linguist Louis Hjelmslev, as well as from later semiologists such as Roland Barthes and Christian Metz. The discussion that follows, therefore, will fall largely within well-established formalistic limits.

Occasionally, however, I have found it useful for dialectical purposes to penetrate beyond these bounds and incorporate into the discussion suggestions from sources that may seem eccentrically diverse—Ernst Cassirer, for example, modern post-Goffman sociology, even W. J. Ong and Marshall McLuhan. Moreover, in meditating upon the relations between written text and the performance, I have found it impossible to ignore another tradition of formalism, the "Anglo-American", which has had much to say about dramatic texts. I would defend myself against a charge of mere eclecticism by stating at the outset: that not all of these often mutually exclusive influences have been blandly assimilated into my own argument. I attempt to consider them dialec-

tically in the hope that they will illuminate local and general problems that arise in dealing with those awkward phenomena, "plays". I remain committed to a semio-logical approach, with all the methodological and ideological consequences which that entails.

A semiotics of theatre is at best a retarded enterprise, at present, in comparison with the work completed and in progress on the novel, poetry, film, myth, etc. The reasons for the relative neglect of theatre as a field of semiotic investigation (despite the fact that, as Roland Barthes wrote many years ago, "one can even say that the theater constitutes a privileged semiological object since its system is apparently original (polyphonic) in relation to that of language (which is linear)."[1]) are doubtless many, and some of them will emerge in the course of my discussion. At this point I wish to draw a distinction so fundamental that it seems self-evident, although it has never been adequately formulated or strictly observed, either in semiology or in literary criticism. The failure to make clear this distinction is, I think, one of the contributory factors to the failure of a semiotics of theatre in achieving any degree of rigour. The distinction is simply between two *texts*, that is to say two objects (distinct, yet essentially recipro-cal) of analysis, namely the *written text* and the *text of the performance*.

The written text has, of course, been subjected to much literary critical scrutiny; it has been comfortably, and somewhat unquestioningly, assimilated into the domain of literary criticism. It is customary, at least in the Anglo-American tradition, to consider the "play" as something primarily literary, and which is later "realised" on stage. This view of the text has become naturalized, unexamined (except, fleetingly, by such European theorists of literature as the Polish phenomenologist Roman Ingarden[2]), but is, in fact, based on ideological grounds that I wish to question later. As for the other text, the text of the performance, it has rarely been considered as a text at all, but rather as a happy hunting ground for producers, reviewers, reminiscing actors and theatrical theorists. The relations between the two kinds of text, as modes of sig-nifying, have never been seriously formalized. The terms "play" and "drama" are usually applied to both vaguely, allowing critics to pass from one to the other without obstacle.

If I am more concerned with the text of the performance, with the signifying pro-cesses at work in the theatre, it is largely because this is the more neglected field. I do not wish to assert that either text "precedes" the other, or is more "important" than the other as object of study, simply that it is useful to consider them separately and in inter-relationship.

In applying the term "text" to the performance (the particular performance, the theatrical *parole* rather than the various *langues* by which it is constituted) I am doing no more than re-stating my initial assumption that what happens on stage is primarily a signifying process. In comparison with certain other kinds of text, notably the literary, the performance may be characterised as a text of peculiar *density* and *openness*. It is, indeed, these two complementary characteristics of the text that make it so forbidding as a field of investigation. Roland Barthes, in an essay from which I have already quoted briefly, was perhaps the first writer to point out the multi-levelled quality of the theatrical *parole*:

> What we have, then, is a real informational polyphony, which is
> what theatricality is: a *density of signs* (in relation to literary mono-
> dy and leaving aside the question of cinema). What relations do these
> counterpointed signs (i.e., at once dense and extensive, simultaneous
> and successive) have amongst themselves?... Which prevail on the
> stage? Every performance is an extremely dense semantic act: the
> nature of the theatrical sign, whether analogical, symbolic or conven-
> tional, the denotation and connotation of the message—all these fun-
> damental problems of semiology are present in the theater.[3]

It is precisely these "fundamental problems of semiology" that are at issue here.

The peculiar density which characterises the theatrical performance arises, as Barthes observes, from the interaction, simultaneously and successively, between radically different kinds of sign-system. As a result of its apparent isomorphism to social intercourse, the "drama" is a field in which no type of sign is in principle out of place. There are various ways in which theatrical signs might be characterised. For instance, one might classify each *langue* according to the senses it brings into force: thus the visual (which will include set, backdrop, gesture, action), the auditory (the phones of speech, music, noises off, etc.) even, in recent theatre at least, the tactile and the olfactory (both between actors and between actors and audience). An alter-native, complementary classification, might exploit the pioneering work of C. S. Peirce. The iconic (set, backdrop, props, the actor himself) co-exists and co-operates with the indexical (the fanfare as signal of an entrance, etc.) and the symbolic (a painted sun symbolising "kingship").

No classification will be exhaustive. Yet the essential point to stress at this juncture is that the potential density of simultaneous signifying processes on stage (clearly not sharing an identical signifed) is limitless, though in practice it is restricted in order to keep mayhem at bay and not to over-tax the audience's capacity for concentration. Such density is not unique to theatre. It is shared, to a certain extent, by cinema. Christian Metz has been anxious to develop a semiotics of film which will be adequate to a text where:

> Different, perfectly distinct systems intervene in the same message.[4]

Whether or not he has met with any success, he perceives and confronts the special difficulties inhering in the chosen object.

But the analogy between cinema and theatre, in this as in most respects, is rapidly exhausted. For the most insurmountable obstacle thwarting the best intentions of a proposed semiotics of the performance is not so much the *density* of the process but its *openness as* process. Having identified the performance, the individual happening, as the proper object of textual analysis, the semiologist then encounters a monstrosity: none of his classifications will impinge upon the object itself. It will always elude him because it must remain *in motion*. Theatricality is essentially a dynamism, and there-fore incalculable, uncertain, unrecordable, unrepeatable. Other texts also demand respect as processes—movies must move and reading ceases precisely when it is stopped —but the given texts (the novel, the film) remain constant. Not so with the text which

awaits the semiologist of theatre. No frame-by-frame analyses are permitted to him; no verifiable quotations from the text of the performance (in terms of gesture, the formalisations of precise sign-relations as they come into being and pass away, etc.) All that seems open to him is a classification of the invariables and an impressionistic and hazardous approximation of the in-variable factors (which is to say everything that gives to theatrical discourse its own distinctiveness or constitutes it as a particular *écriture*).

That theatre is dynamic—and in a way, unlike reading, for instance, entirely beyond the volitional powers of the analyst—is not a new discovery, but it may go to explain, in part, the degree of avoidance with which the theatrical text, the performance, has been greeted in the semiological tradition. Elizabeth Burns, in her useful book on the very subject of "theatricality" (in all its senses), confronts the problem of the unrepeatability of the performance and suggests that this need not be the ground for semiological despair:

> Unlike all other forms of literary art [this, of course, is a very loaded term] a play is remade every time it is performed. The remaking occurs through the performance in which dramatist, producer, actors and audience all participate. This situation has for so long been taken for granted that the importance and nature of the conventions on which theatrical performance rests is easily overlooked, all the more easily because these conventions are for the most part implicit.[5]

(The *conventional* nature of the performance, considered as the proper foundation for a semiotics of theatre, is a matter to which I will return.)

The impossibility of stopping the "cybernetic machine"[6] of theatre is compounded by the difficulty of *delimiting* it. This is a matter of extensiveness rather than density or dynamism. What are the spatial and temporal *bounds* of the performance considered as a text? Are the lines of demarcation simply the "beginning" and "end" of the play in one dimension and the edges of the stage in the other? Plainly, matters are not so simple. There is no reason to exclude the audience, for example, from the domain of signification. How is the "meaning" of a comedy affected by the presence or absence of laughter? How great is the contribution of the atmosphere in the auditorium preceding the performance as such? How influential as a semiological factor is theatrical architecture? And so on. Even if one confines "theatricality" to what transpires within a theatre (an arbitrary act, as Elizabeth Burns insistently demonstrates in her book), the problem of delimiting fields of investigation is a real one.

At the very least, one can say that many contiguous disciplines are necessarily involved in a semiotics of the performance which has any claim to seriousness. Christian Metz is preoccupied with the analagous extensiveness of cinema:

> ... the phenomenon which is the cinema, with its vast scope, covers a field of which certain areas coincide with the objects of diverse, fairly well-established, and fairly unrelated disciplines (technology, sociology of audiences, economics, etc.). It is in this sense—com-

pletely relative in the eyes of an historian of epistemologies, but
provisionally absolute for the "fieldworker"—that the cinema is not
a unitary object. It is also in this sense that semiotics could not,
without some degree of immoderation, adopt as its goal the com-
plete study of the cinematic fact.[7]

Confining the problem to what actually transpires within the playhouse, one must
nevertheless find room to accommodate such distinct, though related disciplines as
linguistics (notably phonology), paralinguistics (the analysis of intonation, etc.),
kinesics (the study of the syntax and semantics of body-motion), proxemics (the
attempt to determine the semantic component of space), iconology, musicology,
the sociology of audiences and of conventions, etc. The most optimistic prognosis
might declare that all of these fields will one day be fully developed as part of the
general semiological enterprise. Meanwhile, we are faced with what appears to be an
embarassment of riches, more daunting than enticing.

In terms of general systems theory, the performance is, then, very much an "open
system" (where, according to the definition of Ludwig von Bertalanffy, "processes are
going on and the system never domes to 'rest'."[8] In using the term "system" here, I
am not confusing the individual performance as *parole* with theater in general as
langue. The noun is used metaphorically.) This is not to say, however, that the delimi-
tation of "sub-systems" for the purposes of analysis is prohibited, however arbitrary.
It is precisely the possibility of local classification that will allow us, later, to come to
the written text as a legitimate object of study. But it is most important to be aware of
the final inadequacy of such classifications.

Having issued this series of caveats concerning the nature of theatrical semiosis, I
will now confront that process directly, attempting to explore some general principles
regarding its status *as* a signifying process, and to consider the place of language, the
sign-system *par excellence*, within that process. What is ultimately in question is the
relation of theatre to society (and thus, if you will, of art to life), a perpetual aesthetic
issue of such enormity that it would be absurd to undertake an engagement with it
here. I will limit the discussion to the realm of the theatrical sign, which is a mixed,
"impure" sign, and its constitution.

The mimetic powers of the performance, viewed crudely as a direct analogue to
social interaction, are immense. As I have already suggested, there is potentially no
limit to the number of co-operating *langues* that may be exploited in the semiosis of
performance, a plenitude of resources which makes theatre a peculiarly privileged art
form. But this very opulence has the consequence of affording an apparent "trans-
parency" to theatre which is not shared by literature, say, or the plastic arts. So
strongly mimetic may the theatrical signifiers become (especially since the nineteenth
century with the vastly improved technical means of creating "realistic" illusory
effects which it, and our own century, introduced), that they are often scarcely recog-
nised as signifiers at all, but become "naturalized", mistaken for signifieds.

Let us take the case of the set. The set is, in Peirce's terms, directly iconic—it is an
analogical, pictorial representation of a signified that it strongly resembles. But more
than this: the set often appears to be more or less identical with its signified. A chair
will be signified by a chair, identical to it in every respect. Yet the chair on stage

retains, firmly, a sign function with the signified remaining—as Saussure would insist—the concept "chair" and not the actual object identical with the signifying chair. This is a curious factor—the chair both is and is not an "object" (as soon as it leaves the stage, it may be utilised as an object, an instrument, and loses its sign function).

The case is clearer with the actor. In the performance the signified "human beings", the fictive characters, are again designated iconically by what appear to be "real" human beings but who, for the sake and duration of the performance lose their humanity or reality in favour of their function within the signifying process. No-one but the most naive spectator will confuse the actor with the signified character, but it is essential to the effective creation of a fictive dramatic "world" that the actor loses his substantiveness as "person" and instead acquire a signified from which he is at a necessary remove even while he is co-extensive with it.

In general terms, then (they are Jiri Veltrusky's terms), "All that is on stage is a sign",[9] and is a sign as a consequence of being on stage. This, at least, is the case in "traditional" theatre, where the stage is clearly marked and the audience is strategically distanced from the actors. This distance, upon which the precise *langues* of theatrical discourse depend, has, of course, been questioned and eventually rejected by various theatre groups in the last two decades (The Living Theatre being the most radical case in point). Moreover, I am discounting the fact, for the moment, that signification is a two-way process in the theatre: at the very least the audience is free to signify approval or the lack of it, amusement, etc.

What converts objects, people and action into signs on stage (though let it be said at this point that for most spectators the sign is by no means pure—the actor remains a named, known person to everyone even as he surrenders his person-hood) is the removal of the performance from praxis. This may seem self-evident and commonplace, but upon this simple act of severance rests the whole power of theatrical semiosis, indeed its very existence. We may have known this since Aristotle, but it is worthy of careful re-statement, and Jiri Veltrusky, of the Prague School of linguistics, stated the matter lucidly:

> In the theatre. . . the action is an end in itself and it lacks an external practical purpose which might determine its properties. The action is here geared towards being understood as a meaningful coherent series. This is why it is formed of various signs which first in the awareness of the audience are reflected as properties; the props of the action are thus pure meanings, just as its purpose is a semiological matter and not a matter of practical life.[10]

The meanings may not be as pure as Veltrusky believed, but it is true that the *semantic* value of actor, prop and set is paramount and subsumes their physical presence. It is in this way, broadly (and acknowledging the immense complexity of the relationship), that the performance may be most usefully distinguished, for semiology, from its supposed "analogue" in the world of praxis. I leave the final statement of the case to a French sociologist of the theatre, Jean Duvignaud:

> En ce sens, la *situation dramatique* diffère de la *situation sociale*, et

font que l'une incarne les rôles sociaux pour affirmer son dynamisme et modifier ses propres structures, tandis que la seconde *représente* l'action, non pour l'accomplir, mais pour en assumer le caractere symbolique.[11]

The general effect of their assumption of sign-functions on stage by actors, props and set may be described as a placing of "quotation marks" around them. They become more fictional than real, more discourse than subject or object. What happens to language, which is already a sign-system, indeed the most intricate and fully-developed of sign-systems, when it takes its place in this semiotic process? Plainly its "ontic character" as Roman Ingarden suggests, is radically changed. It, too, becomes fictionalised:

> Because we know which character is speaking, the sentences belonging to the main text acquire, so to speak, "quotation marks"... That is, for the represented persons, these words have the character of reality, i.e., they see the expression of these words as a fact in their common (represented) world, the one to which they themselves belong. The spectators in the audience, on the contrary, observe the spoken only as something "represented", as something portrayed by artistic means but not actually existing in the real world.[12]

The speech of drama acquires an extra, and indeed superordinate signified, which may be characterised as the "speech" or the "thought" (in the case of soliloquies) of the "character" in the play. That is to say, while its function remains a semiological one, as in all modes of discourse, including social intercourse, its semiological instrumentality shifts from an allegiance to the speaking subject to a primary allegiance to the text of the performance. It is essentially no different, on the functional level of signifying the fictive world of the play, from actor, prop or set.

What this seems to entail is a certain loss of semiotic status for language in relation to other modes of signifying. In society, language is without rival as a semiotic system simply because it alone is *primarily* a means of signifying, whatever else it may become. With other kinds of sign in society (with the fairly trivial exception of such systems as Morse codes, semaphor, traffic lights, ships' flags, etc., which are in any case merely ersatz languages), the semiotic function is secondary to some other form of instrumantality or use. As Roland Barthes observes:

> Many semiological systems (objects, gestures, pictorial images) have a substance of expression whose essence is not to signify; often, they are objects of everyday use... as soon as there is a society, every usage is converted into a sign of itself.[13]

With food, clothing, motor cars, and all the cultural accretions of modern society, the sign function, however powerful it becomes (and even though it may often come to predominate at the expense of use value, e.g., in the case of "status symbol" cars or

fashionable clothes) remains secondary to the objects' instrumental function.

In the theatre, as we have seen, the "use value" of objects—operative only in the world of praxis—is banished in favour of a sign function (albeit less than pure). Thus the social process is reversed—what is in society primordially of use becomes on stage primordially, and almost exclusively semiotic. Which is to say that language is no longer the only *primarily* semiotic system available—it acquires a legion of rivals.

It is in this sense, then, that we are able to view the whole performance as a text, as if it were a linguistic construct. Language, as we have known since Plato's *Cratylus*, and as a little more recently Saussure and his disciples have been anxious to remind us (ad nauseam, perhaps) is a strictly *conventional* system. That is, the sign-relation is arbitrary and language operates only according to its internal rules, enforced by a "contractual system"[14] amongst its users in society. The theatrical performance is conventional in an analagous sense—it signifies only by means of a "contract" between performers and audience, who are prepared to accept the (arbitrary) signifier/signified relationship of the theatrical signs:

> For drama is not a mirror of action. It is a composition. In com-
> posing words, gestures, and deeds to form a play, dramatist and per-
> formers operate with the constraints (or generate drama according to
> the grammar) of. . . convention. Together the constraints amount to
> a code of rules for the transmission of specific beliefs, attitudes and
> feelings in terms of organised social behaviour.[15]

The conventions of the performance apply to its every aspect, and to language no more than any other constitutive sub-system. Elizabeth Burns distinguishes two kinds of convention at work in the theatre: what she calls "rhetorical conventions", which operate between performers and audience as persuasive devices (including not only such verbal devices as the prologue or apostrophe but also masques, plays within plays, etc.) and "authenticating conventions", appearing to operate only between "charac-ters" as a means of heightening the mimetic, illusory power of the performance.

Rhetoric, then, is not in the theatre the exclusive property of language. Indeed the whole performance, to the extent that it is designed to influence or persuade the audience, is strictly rhetorical. Language loses all its exclusive privileges and has instead to share them with the co-operating or rival *langues* such as gesture. "Gesture", indeed, is essentially a rhetorical mode of action. Action becomes gesture when it assumes a semiotic function. As the pioneering kinesicist, Ray L. Birdwhistell, puts the matter:

> Gesture is restricted to those actions whose descriptions contain
> vocalised rationalisations by the actor or viewer.[16]

Every action on stage is in this sense a gesture, and movement in the theatre consti-tutes a distinct *langue* subject to its own syntactic and, as it were, lexical rules. How precise and how versatile a *langue* it will be depends upon the strictness of the con-straints operative upon it, which in turn are dependent on performer-audience conven-tions. In the Japanese Noh theatre, for example, gesture becomes so strongly codified

a *langue* that every change of body position or finger movement has a predetermined semantic function. The elaborate treatises on "chirography" for orators that appeared in the early seventeenth century, suggest a similar language of gesture that might well have been exploited by actors on the Elizabethan stage.[17]

To say that language loses its privilged status as semiotic system when it becomes part of a theatrical performance is not, of course, to claim that it suffers any actual or absolute loss of *power* (for example, rhetorical power). On the contrary, language in the theatre is generally far more "powerful", rhetorically and otherwise, than in its social usage, since it is subject to far greater compositional or oratorical constraints than in any other mode of discourse except literature or oratory itself. It is rather to emphasise that it is no longer *indispensable* as a means of initiating articulated semiosis, and must accede to a general semiotic process to which it is subordinate. Thus the loss of status is relative and determined by the very *increase* in semiotic or semantic power of other, normally non-semiotic systems.

The question then arises: is there a natural hierarchy of importance (or semiotic power) amongst the elements contributory to the performance as a whole? Does language, for example, have a natural supremacy in terms of signifying function because it is, prior to its use in the theatre, already a wonderfully well-developed semiotic system?

Jiri Veltrusky, in an important and early attempt to initiate a semiotics of theatre, postulates that a hierarchy of performance elements does indeed exist, and at its apex he places not language but the actor:

> The figure of the actor is the dynamic unity of an entire set of signs,
> the carrier of which may be the actor's body, voice movement, but
> also various objects, from parts of the costume to the set. The
> important thing is, however, that the actor enters their meaning
> upon himself.[18]

Veltrusky establishes the dominance of the actor on the grounds of his dynamism as acting and speaking subject. Clearly, his instigatory and versatile presence makes him the normal centre of theatrical semiosis. Yet the hierarchy of parts is not fixed. It is capable of shifting, even at its head. Veltrusky modifies his formalisation of the disposition of elements on stage by observing that the actor may surrender his "subjectivity" as moving and speaking sign-bearer to become, instead, a mere signifying object, an icon like the props or stage furniture:

> The action may fall to the "zero level", the figure then becomes a
> part of the *set*. . . Human parts of the set can of course no longer in
> any way be considered active performers. Their reality is likewise
> depressed to the "zero level", since their constituent signs are
> limited to the minimum.[19]

At this 'zero degree' of semiotic power, the actor's place at the head of the hierarchy of signs is taken by some other element in the performance.

Veltrusky is drawing, here, upon an important concept—or rather a double concept

—developed by two other Prague linguists, Jan Mukarovsky and Bohuslav Havranek. Language (or, by semiological extension, any sign system) in its normal usage is *automatized*—that is, the uses of the language become naturalized, and cease to be anything more than instrumental. Havranek gives the following explication:

> By automatization we. . . mean such a use of the devices of language, in isolation or in combination with each other, as is used for a certain expressive purpose, that is, such a use that the expression itself does not attract any attention; the communication occurs, and is received, as conventional in linguistic form and is to be 'understood' by virtue of the linguistic system without first being supplemented, in the concrete utterance, by additional understanding derived from the situation and context.[20]

The complementary process, whereby linguistic devices become, on the contrary, conspicuous rather than merely instrumental, the Prague linguists termed *foregrounding (aktualisace)*, which bears an evident family resemblance to the Russian Formalists' better-known "de-familiarisation":

> By foregrounding, on the other hand, we mean the use of the devices of the language in such a way that this use itself attracts attention and is perceived as uncommon, as deprived of automatization, as deautomatized, such as live poetic metaphor (as opposed to a lexicalised one, which is automatized).[21]

Veltrusky's adaptation of these notions to the text of the performance supposes not only that the performance is a kind of linguistic construct, but also that the automatized norm in the performance disposes its signs around the central and dominating presence of the actor (and in particular the "lead" actor). Foregrounding occurs in the performance precisely when this normal, automatized state of affairs is disrupted by the actor's loss of subjectivity. Some other element, that is to say, becomes temporarily superordinate, and thus foregrounded and conspicuous. Foregrounding may even be achieved by the lowly prop:

> The prop is not always passive. It has a force (which we called the action force) that attracts a certain action to it. As soon as a certain prop appears on the stage, this force which it has provokes in us the expectation of a certain action. It is so closely linked to this action that its use for another purpose is perceived as a scenic metonymy.[22]

A dagger, for example, foregrounded from its automatized role as accoutrement, may come for a time to signify "murder" and thereby set off particular expectations which may or may not be fulfilled. For as long as the dagger continues to provoke expectations of this sort, it is no longer merely an adjunct of the actor (it might be lying on a table). In the history of the theatre the dominance of the actor has been for so long

automatized, indeed institutionalized, that the foregrounding of normally subsidiary, instrumental elements is usually brief. Yet Veltrusky's insight was genuine and prophetic—in recent decades the role of the actor as subject has been severely undermined in certain performances (notably of Samuel Beckett's *Breath*, where the stage is occupied only by the set—it is entirely foregrounded).

How may the concepts of automatization and foregrounding be applied to theatrical language and its place in the performance hierarchy? Since the terms were devised, in the first instance, to describe linguistic phenomena, it would seem that language is peculiarly susceptible to various kinds and degrees of foregrounding. But it is important not to confuse two distinct issues here. One concerns the foregrounding of certain linguistic devices within stage *"dialogue"* itself, and the second involves the possibility of foregrounding language within the dramatic *performance*. In other words, how far do those uses of languages which serve to foreground specific linguistic or rhetorical devices (metaphor, puns, rhyme, etc.) at the same time succeed in foregrounding *language* itself in relation to the non-linguistic signs with which it both co-operates and, in a sense, competes on stage? Furthermore, are there particular means, beyond the deployment of "poetic" figures and tropes, by which a maximal foregrounding of the linguistic system may be achieved in the drama?

In beginning to address these broad and problematic questions, I wish to reflect further on Veltrusky's scheme for the shifting hierarchy of theatrical signs. According to Veltrusky, in order for an element in the performance to achieve dominance, especially dominance over the actor, it must be granted a momentary subjectivity that it does not possess in the customary, automatized state of things. It is for this reason, perhaps, that he does not even conceive the possibility of a foregrounding of language. For of all the constraints governing the employment of speech in the theatre, the greatest appears to be its *necessary instrumentality*. That is to say, unlike prop, set, music, lighting, etc., language must always be subject to the initiating force of the speaking actor, must always be subsidiary to his dynamic presence, since it cannot detach itself from him (this is true, at least, if we discount such special "disembodied" forms of language as pre-recorded speech, "voices off", and the dialogue of radio drama).

The foregrounding of language, then, is severely limited by its very role as tool, albeit a highly sophisticated and versatile tool, of the actor. Whatever the degree of power and conspicuousness it might achieve, its very coming-into-existence remains irremediably dependent on a force that is thereby prior, the actor as subject, as sign-maker. Speech on stage can never assume "subjectivity", the "action force" that allows an independent act of signification.*

There are other important factors restricting the capacity of language to foreground itself in the performance. "Conspicuousness" is a visual concept. Those signs susceptible to true foregrounding, to genuine conspicuousness, are iconic—i.e., the signifier/signified relationship is pictorial, analogical, direct. Actor, prop, set, even costume are all iconic in nature. They are visible, and may thereby achieve a semiotic independence which, too, is visible. Before it is filled with such iconic signs the stage is, in Peter Brook's phrase, an "empty space".[23] Iconic signs possess a spatiality which is immedi-

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* This, of course, is a major distinction between the signifying function of a literary text and the speech of drama. See below in my discussion of the status of the "written text".

ately evident. Speech, on the contrary, cannot make claim to spatiality of the same
sort (and certainly not to pictorial iconicity of any kind). It seems to be purely tem-
poral, as Colin Cherry observes:

> The sounds of speech are tied to the time continuum—and the hearer
> must accept them as they come; time is the current of the vocal
> stream. But with sight it is different; the eye may scan a scene, or
> may phrases and lines in a book, at varying speeds, as may suit
> the viewer or reader. . . the stream of words and phrases may be
> dammed or checked at will.[24]

Speech, whether on stage or in social usage, has none of the visible spatiality of the
written or printed signs of literature. W. J. Ong, to whom this is a happy rather than a
lamentable condition of the spoken word, echoes Cherry:

> Speech itself as sound is irrecoverably committed to time. It leaves
> no discernible effects in space, where the letters of the alphabet have
> their existence. Words come into being in time and exist only so long
> as they are going out of existence.[25]

Cherry and Ong may be overstating their mutual case. Speech is not lacking in a
spatial dimension of a kind: it is capable of "filling" a room, hall, stage or auditorium.
McLuhan's concept of "acoustic space" may not be as paradoxical as it appears.
Nevertheless, it is true that this spatiality, in comparison with the permanent, visible
and, in certain cases, tangible semiotic presence of other signs, fails to impinge as
readily upon the consciousness of the audience (despite the auditory bias of this
word). McLuhan complains that to the perception of modern man, due to a disastrous
imbalance in his sensorium, space *is* visual:

> . . . in our workday world, space is conceived in terms of that which
> separates visible objects. "Empty space" suggests a field in which
> there is nothing to see.[26]

   Whether or not McLuhan's lamentations are well-grounded in general, it is true that
visible spatiality is a factor crucial to theatrical performance. The stage area itself is
defined precisely by a demarcation which registers upon the eye (this is especially true
of proscenium arch stages, where the "space" of the stage is actually framed, like a
picture). The consequence of this for language is a certain lack not only of permanence
but of *materiality* (as either "object" or "subject") for the audience. Speech is not
conspicuous within the space marked by the stage. It is the very materiality of the
iconic signs that make them so eminently capable of being foregrounded. Speech is at
a further disadvantage in its relations with other modes of signifying in the theatre.
   What I am setting up, in effect, is a "dialectic antinomy"[27] between the conven-
tional and the iconic sign on stage. However arbitrary this opposition may seem, it has
a strategic value here and possibly an historical validation. The "antinomy" is founded
on the possibility that language, a system of conventional signs, is capable of perform-

ing certain "iconic" functions (by means of "pictorial" description, for example, setting the scene of the action for the imagination of the spectator). It is possible, at the greatest extreme of mimetic austerity, to do without the iconic sign at all on stage (the actor apart) and give the responsibility for pictorial representation to the linguistic sign. It is evident, from a historical viewpoint, that at early phases in the development of the theatre, the reliance upon such an "iconic" use of language was stronger than during recent centuries, with the vast increase in the range and power of directly iconic devices that has occurred. Elizabethan drama, for example, makes ample use of the description as a rhetorical device. Pictorial representation on the Elizabethan stage was less direct, more conventionalised, than in most modern performances.

The relationship between iconicity and conventionality in theatrical semiosis may, therefore, be described as one of dialectical opposition. To cite a further example: iconicity in the eastern theatrical tradition, such as the classical Chinese and Japanese Noh theatres, seems to have been relatively low (the symbol, for instance the tree in Noh drama, has prevailed at the cost of the icon). Correspondingly, a high degree of conventionalisation, not only in the use of language but also in the "languages" of gesture and music, has become institutionalized (and thereby automatized) in these traditions.

Language, then, need not remain hopelessly limited by its lack of literal iconicity, although its iconic power is necessarily less direct, more laborious and more evanescent than that of set or prop. The assumption of an iconic function might be seen as one way in which language attempts to foreground itself within the performance. If language is able to usurp or appropriate the role normally (at least in modern theatrical display) assumed by set or prop, its status, its place in the hierarchy of theatrical signs, is obviously raised. I wish now to consider other means by which language, notwithstanding the unconquerable constraints within which it must operate and which I have attempted to establish, strives to raise its own status, or foreground itself, in the theatre.

The Prague linguists, as we have seen, developed the concept of foregrounding with reference to "poetic" uses of language (viewed as deviating, in certain ways, from the automatized norm of language use in society). Plainly, a "poetic" or highly rhetorical use of language in the drama is bound to make that use more conspicuous than a more modest, instrumental, "transparent" deployment of dialogue. This, at least, seems to be a logical conclusion. A colourful, metaphorical, self-advertising mode of dramatic discourse ought to foreground language beyond the merely functional norm of a dialogue designed, say, to further the plot or impart simple information. However, it is perfectly possible for language full of figures and tropes to become automatized—as it was, for example, in the Elizabethan tradition. Poetry is so much the normal foundation of the Elizabethan drama that a mere metaphor or a simple rhyme ceased, fairly early in development of secular drama, to possess any specific foregrounding force. A very austere use of language, might, indeed, have been far more conspicuous than the staple rhetoric.

It remains true, however, that in "poetic" drama such as much Elizabethan tragedy and comedy, the status of language is high. The importance of the linguistic sign in itself declined during the nineteenth century. Today, it is perfectly possible to discover theatrical performances where the linguistic sign has been virtually abandoned (I refer

not to mime, which is a rather special case, but to theatre influenced, for example, by Grotowski). Where poetic dialogue has itself become automatised, the playwright, if he wishes to have his words noticed and admired, is forced to ever finer and, perhaps, more desperate flights of rhetoric. The excesses of much sixteenth and early seventeenth century poetic drama bear witness to this process.

Metaphor and simile, rhyme and metre, pun and aphorism foreground language not merely by increasing its apparent "materiality" (an effect that we have known of since Coleridge[28]), but by making it, in the terminology of Louis Hjelmslev, more highly *connotative*. Hjelmslev defines a "connotative semiotic" as a semiotic "whose expression plane is a semiotic".[29] Roland Barthes expands Hjelmslev's definition somewhat in his *Elements of Semiology*:

> a connoted system is a system whose plane of expression is itself constituted by a signifying system.[30]

Connotation, that is to say, is a second-order mode of signifying, constituted by the first-order, denotational mode. The "systems" connoted may be many. If in the course of a normal English conversation one were to exclaim suddenly "Quel cochon!" the "system" most strongly connoted would be "French" (though others, such as "affectation" or "erudition" might also be signified for the interlocutor).

Roland Barthes, elsewhere, prefers to term the connoted "system" a "code":

> semiologically each connotation is the starting point of a code.[31]

The term "code" is metaphorical rather than literal here, but it has a value in distinguishing what is connoted from the connoting system or language itself. In dramatic speech where liberal use is made of the devices of rhetoric, the connoted code is that of "poetry", "literature" or "rhetoric". Language in the Elizabethan drama, for example, is foregrounded (though still within strict limits) by connoting poetry, which has a particular social meaning and value.

Connotation makes "conspicuous" not merely speech itself nor, where it is constituted by poetic language, poetry as a general "code", but also the *written text*, as a composed artifact produced by a poet. Elaborate uses of language on stage, therefore, signify an allegiance to the literary, to a premeditated compositional act which to some extent "determines" what transpires on stage. Poetic dialogue, in brief, connotes authorship (just as a language which aspires to pure instrumentality connotes the self-effacement of the playwright as initiator of the drama). Of course, connotation is by no means the exclusive privilege of linguistic signs. Gesture, scenic and costume design, etc., are equally capable of great connotative power. Indeed, connotation is an inescapable function of every act of signification. There is no "innocent" denotational language. One observer's transparency is another's ideology (consider the "naturalism" of a playwright like Arthur Wing Pinero. No dramatic language could be more connotative or "opaque"—signifying of a certain archaism or affectation— today). However, connotation *is* one of means by which language foregrounds itself, or attempts to do so, in the dramatic performance.

But connotation is a very limited means of achieving prominence, for its very

existence seems to depend upon a denotational system devoted to signifieds which are not identical with the *connoted* signifieds. That is, it is a subordinate system (just as language itself is subordinate to the speaker). The only way in which this secondary status may be escaped is by means of blocking off the signifieds of the denotational system altogether, allowing a free-play of the signifiers. In this case the connoted "code" is merely "nonsense". Needless to say, the versatility of a nonsensical language is very limited, and the freeplay of the signifiers rapidly becomes a semiotic straight-jacket.

Hjelmslev distinguishes another second-order semiotic system which, like connotation, is one of the ways in which language may raise its status in the theatre (or, indeed, in any mode of discourse). This he defines as *metalanguage*. Metalanguage is defined in terms of its function. It is in no sense a separate or special language, but simply a particular use of language in general. Hjelmslev defines metalanguage as a semiotic "whose content plane is a semiotic",[32] and again Barthes gives a useful expansion of the definition:

> there the signifieds of the second system are constituted by the signs
> of the first.[33]

A metalingual use of language, therefore, is a parasitic use, in which the signifieds (denoted in this case) are also linguistic signs, the signs of what Hjelmslev terms the *object language*.

Metalanguage may serve to foreground language in the drama by making it both signifier and signified of the discourse. A drama in which the signifieds of the linguistic signifiers are themselves linguistic signs—to the exclusion of any extra-linguistic reference—might be termed a *logomachy*. As such it is a monstrosity, a pure hypothesis, since the drama would never advance beyond the level of debate. Nonetheless, there are examples in the history of English drama of plays which seem to aspire to the condition of logomachy, where the signifieds of the linguistic signifiers are, in the main, though not exclusively, other linguistic signs (or even the signs of the play itself, through a retroactive metalingual commentary). I refer again to certain Elizabethan plays: the "Parnassus" plays, *Lingua*, various Jonsonian plays such as *Cynthia's Revels* and *Every Man Out of His Humour*, and above all, the logomachic drama par excellence, Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost*.

If there is any way in which language may achieve "materiality", may become "conspicuous" and even an "object", it would seem to be by means of metalanguage. Language is presented by this device as precisely a (functional and grammatical) object, its existence affirmed by the re-iterative act of metalingual commentary. A metalanguage which is at the same time metaphorical may convert the signified linguistic sign into a real object (in terms of the realm of the signifieds, where it has its existence)—for instance, a powerful weapon. Consider Berowne's metalingual commentary on the language of his beloved Rosaline and its power as weapon in *Love's Labour's Lost*:

> Berowne: Here stand I, lady; dart they skill at me;
>   Bruise me with scorn, confound me with a flout;

> Thrust thy sharp wit quite through my ignorance;
> Cut me to pieces with thy keen conceit;
>
> (V, ii, 397-9)

or again, the following duel of proverbs in *The Comedy of Errors*:

> Dromio: O Lord, I must laugh;
>   Have at you with a proverb—shall I set in my stuff?
>
> Luciana: Have at you with another, that's—when? can you tell?...
>
> Dromio: So come, help, well struck, there was blow for blow.
>
> (III, i, 50-6)

In both instances metalanguage serves to present object language as, precisely, object.*

Yet metalanguage, like connotation, suffers severe limitations in its capacity to materialise or substantify language. For by presenting the linguistic sign as its signified, metalanguage also presents itself as a parasitic usage, at an essential distance from its object language. The signifier and signified of metalanguage can never be identical; the very possibility of metalingual usage presupposes difference between the two. The "objectivity" or substantiveness of the object language remains metaphorical, exists only within the realm of the signifieds and never of the signifiers. The signifiers, on the contrary, form a weakened, *de*-materialised system hopelessly dependent on signs which, even while presented as signifieds are absent.

Language, it appears, can never become fully foregrounded within the performance, no matter how wide the range of powerful rhetorical devices at its disposal. It is condemned to subordination of various kinds, and even when it achieves prominence at the expense of co-operating or competing signs, fails to appropriate their function or their substantiveness with anything more than a metaphorical success. For a language which was genuinely iconic, or in which the signifier and signified were identical as *objects* or, in some way, as acting objects, whereby the set, prop and even the actor become mere redundancies (the actor being at most a tool of the language rather than its manipulator), would be a vast onomatopoeia. A dramatic language which strove for such a status would be yearning nostalgically for a mythical "primitivism" as described by Ernst Cassirer:

> it is characteristic of the earliest conscious reflection on the world as
> a whole that there was as yet no distinction between language and
> being, word and meaning, but that they still formed an indivisible
> unity. . . From the moment when man first turns his attention to it,
> the world of language assumes for him the same specificity and
> necessity, the same "objectivity" as the world of things. Like the

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* I am aware that I have already, in a sense, wandered into the realm of the written text here, as elsewhere I have used the term "play" or "drama" loosely to indicate what lies both in the written text and in the performance text. My self-defense would be on the grounds that the lines also appear in the performance text. The relation between the two texts is explored below.

world of things, it confronts him as a whole, possessing its own self-contained nature.[34]

It is at this point that we arrive, somewhat circuitously and with the assistance of two American critics, at the written text and its relations with the performance text. For it is precisely the "materiality" as object that a certain view of poetry—which we might call the "sacramental" view—attempts to attribute to the poetic word, including the language of "poetic drama". The mimetic ideal, which approximates to Cassirer's mythologisation of language in its "first" stage, is stated by J. L. Calderwood, a Shakespearean critic:

> if the poet could draw on a language intrinsically bound to things,
> still trailing clouds of the original magic with which God swathed it,
> then the very materials of his trade would be endowed with truth,
> beauty and power.[35]

For Calderwood, dramatic language has a materiality which it loses as soon as the play is performed. The privileged status of literary language (which is more than a mere signifying system, since it is given body on the page) is lost as soon as literature becomes drama:

> the poet has a great advantage over the dramatist, for whereas the
> poet may carefully supervise the preservation of his words in print
> (as Shakespeare did in *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*),
> in the dramatist's medium of the stage his words dissolve even as
> they are formed—dissolve and fall back into the great public reser-
> voir of language where he originally found them and where they
> resumed their referential status as signs.[36]

The dramatist, according to Calderwood, is reluctant to surrender the special, material status of his language and therefore endeavours, by various means, to give it materiality.

Calderwood shares, to a certain extent, common ground with another Shakespearean critic, Sigurd Burckhardt, who expounds an explicitly "incarnatory" or sacramental theory of the poetic word—including dramatic language. Burckhardt sees the poet's task as an attempt to give "corporeality" to the word, which in its normal usage is transparent and referential:

> (The poet's) "material cause" is a medium before he starts to fashion
> it; he must deal in an already current and largely defaced coinage. In
> fact, it is not even a coinage, but rather a paper currency. Words, as
> the poet finds them, as tokens for "real" things, which they are
> supposed to signify—drafts upon a hoard of reality which it would
> be too cumbersome to put into circulation. Not merely is the poet
> denied the creative privilege of coining his own medium; his medium

lacks all corporeality, is a system of signs which have only a secon-
dary referential substance.[37]

The poet's use of language is a defiance of the unsubstantiveness of his medium,
which becomes in his hands materialised, embodied, powerful:

> To attain the position of creative sovereignty over matter, the
> poet must first of all reduce language to something resembling a
> material.[38]

When applied to the drama, this view of "poetic" language—which derives from
Coleridge's Secondary Imagination—is close to my analysis of foregrounding as an
attempt to give "objectivity" to theatrical language. The Anglo-American formalist
tradition is to this extent perfectly reconcilable with the formalist concepts upon
which I have drawn. However, Burckhardt's sacramentalism is based on certain as-
sumptions which a textual semiotics must subject to rigorous questioning.

Firstly, Burckhardt's notion of the "sign" is extremely naive—he posits "things" as
the signifieds of linguistic signs. Moreover, his assumption that the sign in its normal
social use is merely transparent—

> ideally the language of social intercourse should be as windowglass;
> we should not notice that it stands between us and the meanings
> "behind" it.[39]

is more ideological, more a part of his critical strategy, than realistic. It discounts the
possibility of an opaque, highly connotative mode of discourse in "everyday speech".
As I have already suggested, no use of language can be as innocent as that which
Burckhardt assigns to social discourse.

But it is the view of the written text valorised by the sacramental approach that is
most crucial here. Both Burckhardt and Calderwood—like many other post-New
Criticism formalists—wish to totalise the "play", as written text, as if it were essential-
ly a literary "object" and subject to the same rules as a poem. For them the "play"
begins life as a literary artifact and is thereafter, at some point, realised in the perfor-
mance, where its language loses its privileged literary status. For Burckhardt, espe-
cially, the "play" is very much a "dramatic poem". It is for this reason, no doubt, that
Shakespearean drama is his favoured paradigm.

Taking the play as something primarily *written* is a stratagem scarcely likely to
cause scandal. Indeed, it is this very coup which allows literary criticism to appropriate
the "text of the play" as part of its proper domain. Yet, despite a conspicuous absence
of protest until recently, it is by no means a self-evidently justifiable critical ploy.
While the "literariness" or "poeticality" of certain plays can be supported by the
written evidence, others have no written text to speak of at all. How is the "literary
critical" view of the drama to come to terms with much recent drama which, if re-
duced to written texts, would appear formless, banal or mindless (except by dismissing
them in precisely those weighted terms)?

To what extent is the performance a *realisation* of a text which is prior, literary and

dominant? Roman Ingarden issues a warning against regarding drama as primordially a province of literature:

> the stage play differs from a *purely* literary work. . . in that entirely new means of representation, precluded by the essential nature of a purely literary work, appear in it: 1) real objects engaged in perform-ing the function of reproduction and representation and 2) aspects appropriately formed and predetermined by the properties of these real objects, in which merely held in *readiness* by various artistic means, as in a purely literary work, but instead are determined *concretely*—to the extent that their content is dependent on the objects that appear—by representing objects as aspects of repre-sented objects, so that only the spectator is needed for them to be actualized in their full concreteness. . . In view of what we have said, it would be a mistake to claim that the stage play is. . . a realization of a corresponding purely literary work. In the stage play we are thus dealing with a *different type* of work than the *purely* literary work.[40]

Ingarden's caveat is useful: it at least raises the possibility that the textual relations between the "play" as written and the "play" as performed are not necessarily ordered according to the precedence of one over the other. (One might equally well claim—though the claim is equally questionable—that the written text, far from taking prior-ity over the performance text, is derived from it.) Rather, we are dealing with different kinds of text which have an intimate relationship with each other:

> there is a close connection between a stage play and the correspond-ing purely literary work, provided that the latter exists at all, which —and this must be emphasized—need not necessarily be the case at all.[41]

How can we discuss this relationship without subscribing to the view that one text either determines or is realized by the other? What Ingarden describes as the "close connection between a stage play and the corresponding purely literary work" does indeed exist, though to refer to the written text as "literary" at all has a necessary ideological implication (i.e., that it invariably connotes "literature" by its mode of signifying). Since this is so, on what grounds may we intelligently and without pre-supposing a unilateral dominance?

The relations between the two may, perhaps, best be described as *intertextual* in the sense that Julia Kristeva gives to the term:

> The text is a permutation of texts, an inter-textuality. In the space of a single text several *énoncés* from other texts cross and neutralise each other.[42]

The application of this concept to the relations between the two kinds of text is

clear: the written text is as much a permutation of the text of the performance as it is in turn permuted by that text. The inter-textual relationship here is unusually privileged, since the written text, in its permuted form (and provided that a written text as such exists) is always a factor contributory to the performance text. This is not to say that it is merely transformed by the text of the performance, but that it may be considered both as one of the constraining elements in the performance—however much transformed by it—and as it is in turn constrained by the requirements of the performance—however much it, in turn, transforms the "play" as performed.

To deem the written text a constraining force—indeed, a fairly precise, if flexible, network of constraints—upon the text of the performance is simply to assert, as common sense, if not theatrical practice, dictates, that in any given performance of, say, *Hamlet* or *Antigone*, the linguistic signifiers will be identical to those at work in another performance. (Whether or not the linguistic *signs* remain the same is another matter, dependent on the use to which the signifiers are put.) This is not exactly a *pre*-determination, since for the performance of the play the linguistic signifiers, like other signifiers and signs, are not pre-existent; they only come into force *during* the performance. Furthermore, not only do they act as constraints, limiting the performance with regard to its use of language, but they are in turn severely constrained by the other elements in the performance (which help to determine the sign-relations set up between linguistic signifier and its signified or signifieds, for example).

What we have, then, is a relationship of mutual and shifting constraints between two kinds of text, neither of which is prior and neither of which is precisely "immanent" within the other, since each text is radically transformed by its relations with the other (the written text, for example, ceases to be written within the domain of the performance text, and the non-linguistic elements of the performance text are not "present" within the written text but remain as mere memories or potentialities). I have already said a good deal about the constraints which are imposed upon the written text within the domain of the performance—in terms of the limits, for example, to which the linguistic signifier can be foregrounded within the theatrical performance. There remains for consideration, in the terms that I have set up, the ways in which the written text constrains the performance.

Beyond the simple fact that the "words" used in two performances of *Hamlet* are, by and large, the same, there are means by which the written text, considered not as literature but still as distinct from the performance itself, imposes "meanings" upon them. The formalist notions that I have already invoked with regard to the performance may again be drawn upon here.

The particular connotative power that the linguistic signifiers will have for a given audience is highly variable, of course, but to a certain extent it is determined by factors that are discernible in the written text. The written text of an Elizabethan drama, for example, will reveal the precise rhetorical devices employed which connote "poetry" or "oratory" as well, perhaps, as "affectation", "excess", "beauty", or whatever, according to text, reader and the situation of the potential performance. Likewise, the would-be "transparency" of the linguistic signifier in certain nineteenth and early twentieth century plays (considered as potential performances) is founded upon specific rhetorical usages which are classifiable within the written text.

To re-invoke the terminology of the Prague School, the degree of foregrounding

which the linguistic signifier (and indeed the sign) can achieve in a particular performance is, again, dependent partly on the devices of language as they manifest themselves in the written text (as well as on the use made of language by the actors, and the disposition of other sign-functions on stage). It might, indeed, be justly said that certain written texts attempt to foreground *themselves* as composed or quasi-literary artifacts. The written text, that is, may endeavour to impose constraints so powerful upon the performance that the primary signified of every performance will be the connoted "writtenness" of the play. Its success is, of course, dependent on the compliance of the performers.

Without confronting the separate problem of what Ingarden terms the *Nebentext*, namely the stage directions, and its relations to both written and performance text (since it could be said to constitute a third text), we can see that the study of the written text even in isolation is of value to a semiotics of theatre. It may be that there are two distinct activities, two semiotics involved with regard to theatre, or perhaps even three. A semiotics of the performance (which has to come to terms with the immense methodological problems that I adumbrated above) is distinguishable from a semiotics of the written text, though the relations between the two activities, like those between the *objects*, the two kinds of text, are intimate and dialectical. A third endeavour, a semiotics of the inter-textual relations between particular written texts and particular theatrical performances, might establish itself on the ground of that very dialectical intimacy.

A semiotics of the written text would differ from a literary critical approach to the "language of the play" by refusing to totalise that text as a self-sufficient literary structure. On the contrary, the "meaning" of the written text is its function in relation both to other written texts—whether "dramatic" or "literary" (for it may have relations with each)—and to the text of the performance or every potential performance. This is not to exclude the insights that literary criticism—as represented, for instance, by the "sacramentalism" of Burckhardt—has to offer through the vast tradition of textual analysis that it has established and that constitutes it. It is simply to re-locate them on different grounds.

I make no claim that the deliberately restricted, predominantly formalistic framework that I have adopted here is adequate to found a semiotics of theatre, whether of the written text or of the performance. Nor indeed will a semiotics of theatre ever be able to provide *answers* to the problems I have raised. Its aspirations must be more modest. However, the questions addressed here are, I think, real and important ones, and I have endeavoured to establish certain principles which I believe to be of value in confronting them. Much exploration remains, I hope, to be-undertaken in the problematic field of theatrical semiosis.

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NOTES

1. Roland Barthes, "Literature and Signification", in *Critical Essays*, transl. Richard Howard (Northwestern U.P., 1972), p. 262.

2. Cf. "The Functions of Language in the Theatre", appended to *The Literary Work of Art*, transl. George C. Gabrowicz (Northwestern U.P., 1973), pp. 377-396.

3. Roland Barthes, *op. cit.*, pp. 261-2.

4. Christian Metz, *Language and Cinema*, transl. Donna Jean Umiker-Sebaok (The Hague: Mouton, 1974), p. 32.

5. Elizabeth Burns, *Theatricality* (London: Longmans, 1972), p. 23.

6. Roland Barthes, *op. cit.*, p. 261.

7. Christian Metz, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

8. Ludwig von Bertalanffy, "General Theory of Systems: Application to Psychology", in *Essays in Semiotics*, ed. J. Kristeva et al. (Mouton, 1971), p. 194.

9. Jiri Veltrusky, "Man and Object in the Theatre", in *A Prague School Reader*, ed. P. L. Garvin (Georgetown U.P., 1964), p. 84.

10. Jiri Veltrusky, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

11. Jean Duvignaud, *Sociologie du Theatre, Essai sur les Ombres Collectives*, Presses Universitaires du France (Paris, 1965), p. 11.

12. Roman Ingarden, *op. cit.*, p. 395.

13. Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, transl. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (London: Cape, 1967), p. 41.

14. Roland Barthes, *ibid.*, p. 14.

15. Elizabeth Burns, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

16. Ray L. Birdwhistell, "Kinesics and Communication", in *Explorations in Communication*, eds. E. Carpenter and H. M. McLuhan (London: Cape, 1970), p. 58.

17. Cf. B. L. Joseph, *Elizabethan Acting* (Oxford U.P., 1951), for a discussion of this possibility.

18. Jiri Veltrusky, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

20. Bohuslav Havranek, "The Functional Differentiation of the Standard Language", in *A Prague School Reader*, p. 9.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

22. Jiri Veltrusky, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

23. Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (London: Penguin, 1968).

24. Colin Cherry, *On Human Communication* (Cambridge, Mass., 1957), p. 122.

25. W. J. Ong, S. J., *The Presence of the Word* (Yale U.P., 1967), p. 40.

26. H. M. McLuhan, "Acoustic Space", in *Explorations in Communication*, p. 65.

27. The Hegelian phrase is Veltrusky's: cf. *op cit.*, p. 88.

28. Cf. *Biographia Literaria*, ch. XIII.

29. Louis Hjelmslev, *Prologomena to a Theory of Language*, transl. F. J. Whitfield (Wisconsin, 1963), Section 114.

30. Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, p. 92.

31. Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, transl. Richard Miller (New York, 1974), p. 9.

32. Louis Hjelmslev, *op. cit.*, Section 114.

33. Roland Barthes, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

34. Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, trans. R. Manheim (Yale U.P., 1953), Vol. I, *Language*, p. 193.

35. J. L. Calderwood, *Shakespearean Metadrama* (U. of Minnesota Press, 1971), p. 173.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

37. Sigurd Burckhardt, "The Poet as Fool and Priest: a Discourse on Method", in *Shakespearean Meanings* (Princeton U.P., 1968), p. 23.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

40. Roman Ingarden, *op. cit.*, p. 322.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 322.

42. Julia Kristeva, *Le Texte du Roman* (Mouton, 1970), p. 12.