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TOWARD A THEORY OF CULTURE AND *MISE EN SCÈNE*

The object of this study is the crossroads of cultures in contemporary theatre practice. This crossroads, where foreign cultures, unfamiliar discourses and the myriad artistic effects of estrangement are jumbled together, is hard to define but it could assert itself, in years to come, as that of a theatre of *culture(s)*. The moment is both favorable and difficult. Never before has the western stage contemplated and manipulated the various cultures of the world to such a degree, but never before has it been at such a loss as to what to make of their inexhaustible babble, their explosive mix, the inextricable collage of their languages. *Mise en scène* in the theatre is today perhaps the last refuge and the most rigorous laboratory for this mix: it examines every cultural representation, exposing each one to the eye and the ear, and displaying and appropriating it through the mediation of stage and auditorium. Access to this exceptional laboratory remains difficult, however, as much because of the artists, who do not like to talk too much about their creations, as because of the spectators, disarmed face to face with a phenomenon as complex and inexpressible as intercultural exchange. Does this difficulty spring from a purely aesthetic and consumerist vision of cultures, which thinks itself capable of dispensing with both socioeconomic and anthropological theory, or which would like to play anthropology against semiotics and sociology?

A SATURATED THEORY

When one seeks humanity, one seeks oneself. Every theory is something of a self-portrait.

André Leroi-Gourhan

Theory has a lot to put up with. It is reproached on the one hand for its complexity, on the other for its partiality. In our desire to understand theatre at the crossroads of culture, we certainly risk losing its substance, displacing theatre from one world to another, forgetting it along the way, and losing the means of observing all the maneuvers that accompany such a transfer and appropriation.

Any theory which would mark these cultural slippages suffers the same vertiginous displacement. The model of intertextuality, derived from structuralism and semiotics, yields to that of interculturalism. It is no longer enough to describe the relationships between texts (or even between performances) to grasp their internal functioning; it is also necessary to understand their inscription within contexts and cultures and to appreciate the cultural production that stems from these unexpected transfers. The term *interculturalism,* rather than *multiculturalism* or *transculturalism,* seems appropriate to the task of grasping the dialectic of exchanges of civilities between cultures.[1]

Confronted with intercultural exchange, contemporary theatre practice —from Artaud to Wilson, from Brook to Barba, from Heiner Müller to Ariane Mnouchkine—goes on the attack: it confronts and examines traditions, styles of performance and cultures which would never have encountered one another without this sudden need to fill a vacuum. And theory, as a docile servant of practice, no longer knows which way to turn: descriptive and sterile semiotics will no longer suffice, sociologism has been sent back to the drawing board, anthropology is seized on in all its forms—physical, economic, political, philosophical and cultural— though the nature of their relationships is unclear. But the most difficult link to establish is that between the sociosemiotic model and the anthropological approach. This link is all the more imperative as avant-garde theatre production attempts to get beyond the historicist model by way of a confrontation between the most diverse cultures, and (not without a certain risk of lapsing into folklore) to return to ritual, to myth and to anthropology as an integrating model of all experience (Barba, Grotowski, Brook, Schechner).

This keeps us within the scope of a semiology. Semiology has established itself as a discipline for the analysis of dramatic texts and stage performances. We are now beyond the quarrel between a semiology of text and a semiology of performance. Each has developed its own analytical tools and we no longer attempt to analyse a performance on the basis of a pre-existing dramatic text. However, the notion of a *performance text* (*testo spettacolare,* in the Italian terminology of de Marinis (1987:100)) is still frowned on by earlier

semioticians such as Kowzan (1988:180) or even Elam (1989:4) and by cultural anthropologists (Halstrup 1990). This seems mainly a question of terminology because we certainly need a notion of texture, i.e. of a codified, readable artifact, be it a performance or the cultural models inscribed in it.

What is at stake is something quite different. It is the possibility of a universal, precise performance analysis and of an adequate notation system. It would seem that not only is notation never satisfying but that analysis can only ever be tentative and partial. If we accept these serious limitations, if we give up the hope of reconstructing the totality of a performance, then we can at least understand a few basic principles of the *mise en scène:* its main options, the acting choices, the organization of space and time. This may seem a rather poor analytic result, if we expect, as before, a precise and complete description of the performance. But, on the other hand, we should also question the aim of a precise and exhaustive semiotic description, if such a project arouses no interest. As Keir Elam puts it, 'the more successful and rigorous we are in doing justice to the object, the less interest we seem to arouse within both the theatrical and the academic communities' (1989:6). For this reason, Elam proposes a shift from theoretical to empirical semiotics: 'a semiotics of theatre as empirical rather than theoretical object may yet be possible' (1989: 11). It is certainly true that we should consider 'reshaping' the semiology of theatre by checking its theoretical hypotheses and results with the practical work of the actor, dramaturge and director (Pavis 1985). But it would be naïve to think that one will solve the problems of theory just by describing the process of production. It is not enough to follow carefully the preparations for the performance, to be among the actors, directors, musicians, as we are during the International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA). We also, and first and foremost, need theoretical tools in order to analyse the operations involved. One has to be able to help a 'genuine' audience understand the meaning of the production (and the production of meaning). How can the production be described and interpreted from the point of a single spectator receiving the production as an aesthetic object? Instead of looking for further refinement of western performance analysis, we can institute another approach, the study of intercultural theatre, in the hope that it will produce a new way of understanding theatre practice and will thus contribute to promoting a new methodology of performance analysis. In order to encompass this overflow of experiences, the theoretician needs a model with the patience and attention to minute detail of the hourglass.
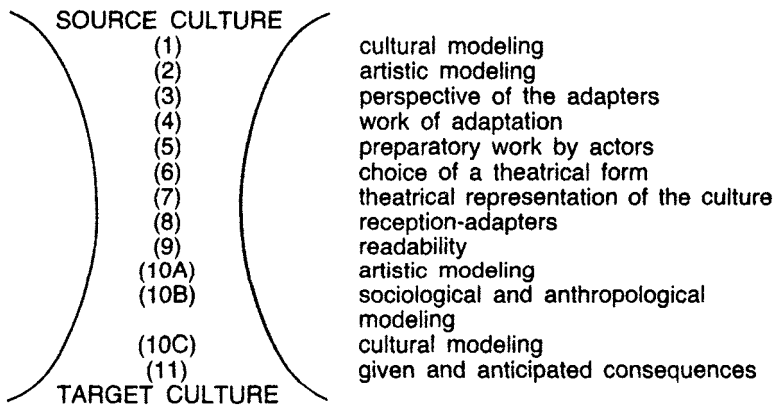
AN HOURGLASS READY FOR EVERYTHING

> We count the minutes we have left to live, and we shake our
> hourglass to hasten it along.
>
> *Alfred de Vigny*

'An hourglass? Dear Alfred, what is an hourglass?' ask the younger
generation with their quartz watches.

   It is a strange object, reminiscent of a funnel and a mill (see Fig. 1.1).
In the upper bowl is the foreign culture, the source culture, which is
more or less codified and solidified in diverse anthropological,
sociocultural or artistic modelizations. In order to reach us, this culture
must pass through a narrow neck. If the grains of culture or their
conglomerate are sufficiently fine, they will flow through without any
trouble, however slowly, into the lower bowl, that of the target culture,
from which point we observe this slow flow; The grains will rearrange
themselves in a way which appears random, but which is partly
regulated by their passage through some dozen filters put in place by the
target culture and the observer.[2]

Figure 1.1 The hourglass of cultures

SOURCE CULTURE	
(1)	cultural modeling
(2)	artistic modeling
(3)	perspective of the adapters
(4)	work of adaptation
(5)	preparatory work by actors
(6)	choice of a theatrical form
(7)	theatrical representation of the culture
(8)	reception-adapters
(9)	readability
(10A)	artistic modeling
(10B)	sociological and anthropological modeling
(10C)	cultural modeling
(11)	given and anticipated consequences
TARGET CULTURE	

   The hourglass presents two risks. If it is only a mill, it will blend the
source culture, destroy its every specificity and drop into the lower
bowl an inert and deformed substance which will have lost its original
modeling without being molded into that of the target culture. If it is

only a funnel, it will indiscriminately absorb the initial substance without reshaping it through the series of filters or leaving any trace of the original matter.

This book is devoted to the study of this hourglass and the filters interposed between 'our' culture and that of others, to these accommodating obstacles which check and fix the grains of culture and reconstitute sedimentary beds, themselves aspects and layers of culture. The better to show the relativity of the notion of culture and the complicated relationship that we have with it, we will focus here on the intercultural transfer between source and target culture. We will investigate how a target culture analyses and appropriates a foreign culture and how this appropriation is accompanied by a series of theatrical operations.

This appropriation of the other culture is never definitive, however. It is turned upside-down as soon as the users of a foreign culture ask themselves how they can communicate their own culture to another target culture. The hourglass is designed to be turned upside-down, to question once again every sedimentation, to flow indefinitely from one culture to the other.

What theory is, so to speak, contained in the hourglass? It has become almost impossible to represent other than in the metaphoric form of an hourglass. It includes a semiotic model of the production and reception of the performance (Pavis 1985) in which one can particularly study the reception of a performance and the transfer from one culture to the other.

Can the most complex case of theatre production, i.e. interculturalism, be of any use for the development and *déblocage* of the current theory of performance? It certainly forces the analyst to reconsider his own cultural parameters and his viewing habits, to accept elements he[3] does not fully understand, to complement and activate the *mise en scène*. Barba's practice (at the ISTA), his trial-and-error method, his search for a resistance, his confrontation, with a puzzle-like use of bricolage, with several traditions at the same time, enable us to understand the making and the reception of a *mise en scène,* which can no longer be 'decoded' from one single and legitimate point of view.

The fact that other cultures have gradually permeated our own leads (or should lead) us to abandon or relativize any dominant western (or Eurocentric) universalizing view.

The notion of *mise en scène* remains, however, central to the theory of intercultural theatre, because it is bound to the practical, pragmatic aspect of putting systems of signs together and organizing them from a

semiotic point of view, i.e. of giving them productive and receptive pertinence.

Mise en scène is a kind of *réglage* ('fine-tuning') between different contexts and cultures; it is no longer only a question of intercultural exchange or of a dialectics between text and context; it is a mediation between different cultural backgrounds, traditions and methods of acting. Thus its appearance towards the end of the nineteenth century is also the consequence of the disappearance of a strong western tradition, of a certain unified acting style, which makes the presence of an 'author' of the performance, in the figure of the director, indispensable.

CAVITY, CRUCIBLE, CROSSING, CROSSROADS

> Theatre is a crucible of civilizations. It is a place for human communication.
>
> *Victor Hugo*

Is the hourglass the same top and bottom? Yes, but only in appearance. For one ought not to focus solely on the grains, tiny atoms of meaning; it is necessary to investigate their combination, their capacity for gathering in conglomerates and in strata whose thickness and composition are variable but not arbitrary. The sand in the hourglass prevents us from believing naïvely in the melting pot, in the crucible where cultures would be miraculously melted and reduced to a radically different substance, *Pace* Victor, there is no theatre in the crucible of a humanity where all specificity melts into a universal substance, or in the warm cavity of a familiarly cupped hand. It is at the crossing of ways, of traditions, of artistic practices that we can hope to grasp the distinct hybridization of cultures, and bring together the winding paths of anthropology, sociology and artistic practices.

Crossroads refers partly to the crossing of the ways, partly to the hybridization of races and traditions. This ambiguity is admirably suited to a description of the links between cultures: for these cultures meet either by passing close by one another or by reproducing thanks to crossbreeding. All nuances are possible, as we shall see.

In taking intercultural theatre and *mise en scène* as its subject, this book has selected a figuration at once eternal and new: *eternal,* because theatrical performance has always mixed traditions and diverse styles, translated from one language or discourse into another, covered space

and time in every direction; *new,* because western *mise en scène,* itself a recent notion, has made use of these meetings of performances and traditions in a conscious, deliberate and aesthetic manner only since the experiments by the multicultural groups of Barba, Brook or Mnouchkine (to cite only the most visible artists that interest us here). In this book, we will be studying only situations of exchange in one direction from a source culture, a culture foreign to us (westerners), to a target culture, western culture, in which the artists work and within which the target audience is situated.

The context of these studies can be easily circumscribed: France between 1968 and 1988, with some geographic forays. After maximal openness in 1968, there followed the 'leaden years' *(années de plomb)* of artistic and ideological isolation, elimination of dialectic thought and historicized dramaturgy, the last sparks of theoretical fireworks, the end of a radical way of thinking about culture which was still that of Freud and Artaud. From 1973 to 1981, the retreat of ideology and historicity became even more pronounced, communication advisers and sponsors gave us our daily bread, the economic crisis slowed down initiatives; foreign cultures were perceived more as a threat or an object of exploitation than as partners in exchange; this general numbness, this jaded lack of differentiation, this theoretical droning none the less did not prevent certain more or less subsidized artists from attempting a cultural exchange; geography and anthropology replaced a failing history. From 1981 to 1988, the French socialist experiment exploded a last taboo (so-called socialist chaos), but came up against the hard realities of management, tasted the social democracy of ideas; the debate on the relativity of cultures and on *La Défaite de la pensée* ('The defeat of thought') by Alain Finkielkraut (1987) managed to compress every historicizing perspective, but rediscovered geographical and cultural horizons, which it recuperated with a postmodern scepticism and functionalism. Culture is at the center of all these debates: everything is cultural, but where has theatrical culture gone?

CULTURE AND ITS DOUBLES

Never before, when it is life itself that is threatened, has so much been said about civilization and culture. And there is a strange parallelism between this generalized collapse of life, which is the basis for the current demoralization and

> the concern of a culture that has never merged with life, and
> which is made to dictate to life.
>
> *Antonin Artaud (Theatre and its Double)*

Let us admit it (and not without apologizing to Antonin): our western culture, be it modern or postmodern, is certainly tired; theory aspires in vain to encompass all questions posed by the scope of the concept. The concepts it opposes are just as varied, whether it be life (Artaud), nature (Lévi-Strauss), technology (McLuhan), civilization (Elias, Marcuse), chaos, entropy or non-culture (Lotman). In theatre, the definition is still sharper and the exclusion more marked, since the first cultural act consists of tracing a circle around the stage event and thus of separating performance from non-performance, culture from non-culture, interior from exterior, the object of the gaze from the gazer.

Before following the flow of sand from one bowl to the other and tracing the series of filters and deposits, it is perhaps useful to mobilize for theatre and *mise en scène* some of the definitions and problematics which the notion of culture in anthropology and sociology offers. The excellent synthesis of Camille Camilleri (1982) is illuminating here: we will consider in turn culturalist conceptions and sociological approaches, before examining how we might find them again at each level of the hourglass, and whether it is possible to attempt to differentiate them.

Culturalist premises

Cultural anthropology, particularly in America (Benedict, Mead, Kardiner), investigates culture with regard to the coherence of the group within the sum of the norms and symbols that structure the emotions and instincts of individuals: it 'attempts to discover the characteristics of a culture through the study of its manifestations in individuals and in its influences on their behavior' (Panoff and Perrin). Globally, one might say that culture is a signifying system (a modeling system, in Lotman's sense), thanks to which a society or a group understands itself in its relationship with the world. As Clifford Geertz has it:

> A culture is a system of symbols by which man confers significance upon his own experience. Symbol systems, man-created, shared, conventional, ordered, and indeed learned, provide human beings with a meaningful framework for orienting

themselves to one another, to the world around them and to themselves.

<div align="right">(1973:250)</div>

More specific definitions, inspired by Camilleri's reflections, will enable us to become aware of the ramifications of culture at all levels of the theatrical enterprise.

Definition 1

'Culture is a kind of bent, of foreseeable determinations, which our representations, feelings, modes of conduct, in general all the aspects of our psyche and even of biological organism, take on under the influence of the group' (Camilleri 1982:16),

Transposed to the stage, one might observe that every element, living or inanimate, of the performance is subject to a similar determination; it is reworked, cultivated, inscribed in a meaningful totality. The dramatic text includes countless deposits, which are as many traces of these determinations; the actors' bodies, in training or in performance, are as though 'penetrated' by the 'body techniques' belonging to their culture, to a performance tradition or an acculturation. It is (almost) impossible to unravel this complex and compact body, whose origin can no longer be seen.

Definition 2

'This determination is common to members of the same group' (Camilleri 1982:16). Actors also possess a culture, which is that of their own group and which they acquire especially during the preparatory phase of the *mise en scène*. This process of *inculturation,* conscious or unconscious, makes them assimilate the traditions and (especially corporal, vocal and rhetorical) techniques of the group. Because actors belong to a certain culture, they have convictions and expectations, techniques and habits, which they cannot do without. Actors are thus defined by 'body techniques' (Mauss 1936), which can be got rid of only with difficulty and which are inscribed by the culture on their bodies, then on the performance. According to Barba, part of the actor's work consists of undoing this natural acculturation, or this everyday behavior, so as to acquire a new 'body technique.' Even naturalist actors, who ought to be free of this constraint by virtue of their

mimeticism and supposed 'spontaneity,' are subject to a repertoire of signs, attitudes, 'authenticity effects.'

Definition 3

'Cultural order is *artificial* in the proper sense of that term, that is, made by human art. It is distinct from the natural order' (Camilleri 1982:16). Culture is opposed to nature, the acquired to the innate, artifice and creation to spontaneity. This is the meaning of Lévi-Strauss' celebrated opposition:

> everything universal in humankind relates to the natural order and is characterized by spontaneity, everything subject to a norm is cultural and is both relative and particular.
>
> (1949:10; 1969:8).

> What heredity determines in human beings is the general aptitude to acquire any culture whatever; the specific culture, however, depends on random factors of birth and on the society in which one is raised.
>
> (1983:40; 1984:18)

In theatre, stage and actor play on this ambiguity of the natural milieu and the artificial, constructed object. Everything tends to transform itself into a sign, to become semiotic. Even the natural utilization of the actor's body is inscribed in a mechanism of meaning, which claims from the reluctant flesh its share of artificiality and codification.

Definition 4

'Culture is transmitted by what has since been called "social heredity": a certain number of techniques by means of which each generation makes possible the later generation's internalization of the common determination of the psyche and organism, which make up culture' (Camilleri 1982:16–17).

In the *mise en scène,* one cannot establish the internalization of techniques quite so clearly. On the other hand, certain performance traditions in the most codified and stabilized genres transmit these techniques, and the players internalize, incorporate, a style of performance (such as the *commedia dell'arte* or Peking Opera).

Definition 5

Certain cultures are essentially defined by national characteristics, which are sometimes opposed to cultural minorities, the better to affirm themselves (see Chapter 7). These majority cultures are sometimes so powerful that they are capable of appropriating— in the negative sense this time—foreign cultures, and transforming them according to their own majority interests. We are so much caught in the network of our national cultural modelizations, Eurocentric in this case, that we find it difficult to conceive of the study of performance or of a theatrical genre within a perspective other than that of our acquaintance with the European practice of theatre.

From these definitions inspired by cultural anthropology flows a series of consequences linked to the following general hypothesis: 'Cultures are without doubt the principal means that humankind has invented to regulate its amorphous psychic form, so as to give itself a minimal psychic homogeneity that makes group life possible' (Camilleri 1982:18).

A. This regulation by culture is both a repression of individual, instinctive spontaneity and an expression of human creativity:

> Civilization is built upon a renunciation of instinct…it presupposes precisely the non-satisfaction (by suppression, repression, or some other means) of powerful instincts.
>
> (Freud 1961:97)

> There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.
>
> (Benjamin 1969:256)

In theatre, this regulation is assured by the *mise en scène,* which prevents any one sign system from taking on unlimited or unilateral importance. The function of the director is relegated to a physical absence, to a superego that does not directly display itself. The real authority is thus *internalized* and 'civilized.' This is the 'discreet charm of good staging.'

B. The principle of internalization of authority consists in accepting the repressive and expressive function of culture. The *mise en scène* regroups directives in order to put on the performance, accepting the constraints of meaning. Likewise, actors internalize the sum of rules of behavior, habits of performance. They accept the ephemeral nature of

theatre, the way it cannot be stored, grasped or memorized. These are the unwritten laws, which control everything and which are permanent: 'What is of short duration,' writes Eugenio Barba, 'is not theatre, but performance. Theatre is made of traditions, conventions, institutions, habits, which are permanent in time' (1988:26). This is the phenomenon of internalization of authority, which should inspire a 'negative' semiotics capable of indicating what is hidden in the sign, what makes a sign without signaling it, what the actor or the stage shows while hiding it.

All these definitions accentuate the cultural unity of humankind, but they tend to isolate it from its sociohistorical context, grasping it only on a very abstract anthropological level. These definitions need therefore to be completed (and not replaced) by a sociological approach, better grounded in history and ideological context.

Sociohistorical premises

The ideological, especially the Marxist, approach tends to be undermined by the very fact of being opened up to foreign cultures and to the enlargement of the anthropological notion of culture. In the process, the notions of group, subgroup, subculture or minority tend to replace those of classes in conflict. Conversely, Marxist sociology has too often simplified the debate and proposed ready-made answers without a knowledge of all the implications of the cultural debate. To say, for example, that, 'in Marxist terms, culture is the ideological superstructure, in a given civilization, relative to the material infrastructure of society' (art. 'culture,' *Dictionnaire Marabout*), does not help to clarify the cultural mechanisms at work. It would be necessary to show that culture conditions and is also conditioned by social action, of which it is the cause and the consequence.

I have elsewhere proposed a theory of ideologemes and their function in the ideological and fictional construction of the dramatic and performance text (Pavis 1985:290–4). But that was within the perspective of the dramatic text's inscription within history rather than within culture. The phenomena are obviously still more complex when they are considered within very different, especially extra-European, cultural contexts. It is therefore necessary to imagine a theory of mediation, of exchange, of intercultural transfer, a 'culture of links' in Brook's sense (Brook 1987:239), i.e. 'between man and society, between one race and another, between micro- and macrocosm, between humanity and machinery, between the visible and invisible, between

categories, languages, genres' (1987:239). The image of the hourglass emerges once again, as a means of understanding the dynamic of the flow and the successive deposits. We will examine each step of the cultural transfer, noting which conception of culture is presupposed by each operation at each level of the hourglass (see Fig. 1.1)

(1), (2) *Cultural and/or artistic modeling*. An initial difficulty, particularly in our western societies, consists in marking the points of modeling, whether in the source culture (1), (2) or in the target (10A), (10B), which are clearly specific either to an artistic activity or to a codification proper to a subgroup or given culture. With the multiplication of subgroups and subcultures, culture, especially national culture, can only with difficulty integrate and reflect the sum of particular or minority codifications. As Camilleri writes, culture tends 'to become what would be common to the subgroups that constitute society, once we have separated out the differences. But this common content becomes more and more difficult to define' (1982:23). In contemporary *mise en scène,* it is practically impossible to understand what a commercial play, an operetta, an avant-garde play or a Bunraku performance have in common, not only because of the artistic codifications at work, which are extremely varied, but also because of their ideological and aesthetic function.

In short, the difficulty in all these examples is to grasp the connection between artistic modeling on the one hand and sociological and/or anthropological modeling on the other. We can observe that comprehension of specifically artistic codes generates an interest in the comprehension of cultural and sociological codes in general, and conversely the knowledge of general cultural codes is indispensable to the comprehension of specifically artistic codes. The fact of grasping the symbolic functioning of a society (1) invites one to perceive artistic codifications in particular (2). In tackling source and target cultures, we are on the other hand led to compare the relationship of (1) and (2) specific to each culture with the slippage which is produced when the source culture is received in the target culture, thus the relationships between (1) and (2) as well as among (10A), (10B) and (10C). We have thus to determine how we recognize a foreign culture, what indices, stereotypes, presuppositions we associate with it, how we construct it from our point of view, even at the risk of being ethnocentric.

(3) *Perspective of the adapters*. As soon as we are asked to take account of this segmentation of modeling—for example, when trying to convey a foreign culture to our western tradition—it becomes difficult

to find a unifying point of view; the result is a relativism in concepts of culture and the real.

> We in industrial or at least western societies are witness today to a segmentation of systems of thought. As there cannot be several truths on the same point, one gets used to thinking that these systems (themselves often relative to the subcultures of different subgroups, in particular sociopolitical groups) are simply points of view on the real, and to reconnecting these systems to thinking subjects. Hence the appearance of the spirit of relativism, which goes hand in hand with the progress of disenchantment [*désacralisation*].
>
> (Camilleri 1982:23)

Relativism is particularly evident in what has been called the postmodern *mise en scène* of the classics: the rejection of any centralizing and committed reading, the leveling of codes, the undoing of discursive hierarchies, the rejection of a separation between 'high' culture and mass culture are all symptoms of the relativization of points of view. We are no longer encumbered with the scruples of a Marx, who sees in classical (for example, Greek) art a high culture admittedly distorted by class, but above all a potential universality, which ought to be preserved. At the moment, the split between tried and tested classical values and modern values to be tested no longer exists; we no longer believe in the geographical, temporal or thematic universality of the classics. Their *mise en scène* opts for a resolutely relativist and consumerist attitude, which is postmodern since their only value now resides in their integration into a discourse that is obsessed neither by meaning, nor by truth, nor by totality, nor by coherence.

(4) The perspective of the adapters and their *work of adaptation* and interpretation are influenced by 'high' culture, that is the culture of a limited subgroup, which possesses (or arrogates to itself) knowledge, education and power of decision. This 'concentrated' culture becomes a methodological code, an expertise the mastery of which enables us to deepen our knowledge: 'we acquire schemas of thinking, equipment which permits us to discover other information based on this initial knowledge and thus to deepen the analysis' (Camilleri 1982:25). This conception is not far from Lotman's semiotic conception of culture: a hierarchy of partial signifying systems, of a sum of texts and an assortment of functions corresponding to them, and finally a mechanism generating these texts (Lotman 1976).

This methodological code, this expertise, is often a 'cultural cipher' (Bourdieu) which enables the act of deciphering: it is sometimes also the instrument of one subgroup against the others. As Michel de Certeau remarks, cultivated people 'conform to a model elaborated in societies stratified by a category which has introduced its norms at the point where it imposed its power' (1974:235). The difficulty is often in guessing where expertise becomes power, in noting the fluctuations of the code and the powers it confers. Take the example of the treatment of the classics: during the era of Jean Vilar's 'popular theatre,' the classics were presented implicitly as a universal good, but in reality they represented a cultural good whose acquisition led to social promotion. At the moment, postmodern utilization of these same classical goods no longer attempts to give the audience cultural baggage or political arms, but to manipulate codes and to relativize every message, especially political messages.

(5) The *preparatory work of the actors* does not simply involve rehearsal or the *choice of a theatrical form* (6), but the actor's entire culture, 'theatrical knowledge, which transmits from generation to generation the living work of art that is the actor' (Barba 1989:64). The actor accomplishes the semiotic project of culture conceived as the memory storage *(mise en mémoire)* of past information and the generation of future information. According to Barba, culture is in this sense always 'the capacity of adapting to and modifying the environment, as a means of organizing and exchanging numerous individual and collective activities, the capacity to transmit collective 'wisdom,' the fruit of different experiences and different technical expertises' (1982:122). The culture of the actor, especially the western actor, is not always readable or codified according to a sum of stable and recurring rules and practices. But even western actors are not protected by a dominant style or fashion, or by body techniques or specific codifications, but are impregnated by formulas, habits of work, which belong to the anthropological and sociological codifications of their milieu, imperceptible codifications which try to escape notice, the better to proclaim the original genius of the actors, but which are in reality omnipresent and can be easily picked up and parodied.

(7) *The theatrical representation/performance of culture* obliges us to find specific dramatic means to represent or perform a foreign or domestic culture, to utilize theatre as an instrument to transmit and produce information on the conveyed culture.[4] Theatre can resolve one of anthropology's difficulties: translating/visualizing abstract elements of a culture, as a system of beliefs and values, by using concrete means:

for example, performing instead of explaining a ritual, showing rather than expounding the social conditions of individuals, using an immediately readable *gestus*. The *mise en scène* and theatrical performance are always a stage translation (thanks to the actor and all the elements of the performance) of another cultural totality (text, adaptation, body). When one remembers, following Lotman, that cultural appropriation of reality takes place in the form of a translation of an extract of reality into a text, one understands that the *mise en scène* or intercultural transposition is *a fortiori* a translation in the form of an appropriation of a foreign culture with its own modeling.

(8) The term 'appropriation' sufficiently indicates that the adapter and the receptor take possession of the source culture according to their own perspectives; hence the risk of ethnocentrism, Eurocentrism in this case. This Eurocentrism is not so much a rejection of eastern forms as a myopic view of other forms and especially conceptual tools different from those in Europe, an inability to conceptualize cultural modeling, western and eastern, theoretically and globally. Until the conceptual tools (extremely problematic in their very hybridization) which would do justice to the western and eastern context become available, intercultural communication needs *reception-adapters,* 'conducting elements' that facilitate the passage from one world to the other. These adapters allow for the reconstruction of a series of methodological principles on the basis of the source culture and for their adaptation to the target culture:

> Discovering the secret of some fascinating exotic dance does not mean that one can easily import it: one would have grasped at most an inspiration, a utopia or more exactly a series of methodological principles subject to reconstruction in the context of our culture.
>
> (Volli 1985:113)

Whatever the nature of this adaptation—character, dramaturgy (Shakespeare as dramaturgical model for the *Indiade* or for the adaptation of the *Mahabkarata*), these adapters are always placed beside receptors simplifying and modeling some key elements of the source culture. In this sense, the adapters necessarily have an ethnocentric position but, conscious of this distorting perspective, they can relativize the discrepancy and make one aware of differences.

(9) *Moments of readability* are also responsible for relativizing the production of meaning and the level of reading that varies from one

culture to the other. They respond to the crisis of the transcendental and universal subject which claimed, in the name of universal Cartesian reason and of centralized *raison d'état,* to reduce all differences: 'All *"general"* human formations rebound against humanity if they are not reappropriated every day by the concrete subject, in everyday operations' (Camilleri 1982:29).

The theory of levels of readability explains how the receiver more or less freely decides at which level (for example, narrative, thematic, formal, ideological, sociocultural, etc.) to read the cultural facts presented by the *mise en scène*. This theory presupposes an epistemological concern to possess the cultural means of knowing the other, and which aspects of the other. Cultural transfer most often takes place due to a change in the level of readability, which profoundly modifies the reception of the work (10). The change in the level of readability often corresponds to an ideological struggle between dominant and dominated cultures. In the transfer from (1), (2) to (10), certain elements are assimilated and disappear; these are what Dalrymple (1987) calls Residual ideology,' the residue of ideas and practices in a culture which belong to another social formation. Other elements, on the contrary, emerge and are integrated into the dominant ideology in (10): this emergent ideology can become a normative model of sociological (10B) or more generally cultural (10C) codification (Dalrymple 1987:136).

(10) Examining the cultural confrontation in (1)–(2) and (10), we choose to compare, to evaluate and to set up a dialogue between source and target cultures, but this confrontation has so to speak been attenuated by the filters from (3) to (9) which prepare the terrain and gradually transform the source culture, or referred culture, into the reception culture in which we find ourselves. Instead of avoiding this confrontation, it is useful to seek it out. It is necessary to pre-empt the demagogy that consists of rejecting comparison, in order not to risk imposing a hierarchy or setting a value on the confronted cultures, a demagogy that leads to cultural relativism and so to a lack of differentiation. Since Todorov has adequately criticized this rejection, it is unnecessary to return to it (Todorov 1986:10–13). Encouraged by Todorov and Finkielkraut, Montaigne and Lévi-Strauss, in the excellent company of Brook, Barba and Mnouchkine, we have dared to compare two or more cultures in manifestly asymmetrical positions, where one appropriates the other and the target stage receives the whole mix at the crossroads of discourses and cultures. It is up to others to judge whether this theatrical confrontation leads to a generalized acculturation or

mutual destruction, or rather to an amorous encounter (this deliciously vague metaphor has been deliberately chosen), a 'bricolage' (Lévi-Strauss), Eurasian theatre (in Barba's case), a 'culture of links' (Brook 1987:239) or an 'influence' of eastern theatre (Mnouchkine 1982:8). In reality, the hourglass is sufficiently complex to avoid a direct confrontation between peoples, languages or ethical values. Instead we compare theatrical forms and practices (between (2) and (10A), modelizations and codifications capable of being engaged and *intertwined* with each other (instead of merging together).

(11) *Given and anticipated consequences.* After the sand has filtered from one bowl of the hourglass to the other, the spectators are the final and only guarantors of the culture which reaches them, whether it be foreign or familiar. Once the performance is complete, all the sand rests on the spectator's frail shoulders. Everything depends on what the spectator has remembered and forgotten. Whence Edouard Henriot's perfect quip: 'culture is what remains when one has forgotten everything, what is missing when one has learnt everything'! After this continuous flow of the grains of culture, when the sand castles which are the *mises en scène* have collapsed, the spectators are finally compelled to accept the fact that the performance is transformed in them, that it succeeds or founders in them, and that it wipes itself out to be reborn. Spectators must welcome forgetfulness, which sifts everything for them, buries them alive in the sand; a forgetfulness which will eventually mitigate suffering. This forgetfulness is a savior and God knows what one can forget at the theatre (thank God)! Thus, the culture that the spectators reconstitute and which in turn constitutes them as spectating subjects is in perpetual mutation; it passes through selective amnesia: 'the essential dimension of the theatrical performance resists time, not by being fixed in a recording, but by transforming itself' (Barba 1988:27).

It therefore becomes difficult to follow these transformations of memory, to predict how the spectators will organize their reading, whether they will accept or reject the series of filters that have predetermined and selected cultural and especially foreign material. It is still more problematic to determine what course the performance will take within the spectators: 'Spectators, as individuals, decide the issue of depth: that is, how far the performance has managed to sink its roots into particular individual memories' (Barba 1988:27), Despite this relativity in the depth of the performance's penetration in us, it is always culturally pertinent to see what the spectators retain and what they exclude, how they define culture and non-culture, what beckons

them, what they do not pick up. The receiver—whether envisaged as a customer-king, a pig of a paymaster, a flock of sheep ('tas de veaux') (*Cyrano de Bergerac,* I, 2) or, more seldom, a partner—is at present an object often pursued by the covetous eyes of theory and cosmopolitan producers. But this sudden concern, this discovery of the spectator's freedom of choice and productivity, often leads to an anti-theoretical and anti-explanatory conception of art. Meanings belong to the realm of self-service, we are continually told. Perhaps, but do we still have to go past the cash register? 'Theatre should not interpret, it ought to give us the opportunity of contemplating a work and thinking about it,' as the great Bob Wilson warns us (1987:208). So, let us contemplate….

   All these testimonies apparently revalorize the function of the spectator and the receiver, but they also lead to relativism and theoretical skepticism. Reception theory cancels itself if it confers on the receivers the absolute power of following their critical course without taking the objective givens of the work into account, under the pretext that, exposed to the whims of the text, they can pick and choose in the self-service of meaning. We will have the chance, in the body of this book, to return to this postmodern relativism which often takes the guise of the intercultural, the better to disguise an anti-historical and relativist discourse, in which works and their contexts are no longer anything but pleasing pretexts for undifferentiated diversions, deferred rendezvous at the crossroads of a nebulous postmodernity.

NOTES

1. We should make the following distinctions: the *intracultural* dimension refers to the traditions of a single nation, which are very often almost forgotten or deformed, and have to be reconstructed

   the *transcultural* transcends particular cultures and looks for a universal human condition, as in the case of Brook's notion of 'culture of links,' which supposedly unites all human beings beyond their ethnic differences and which can be directly transmitted to any audience without distinction of race, culture or class

   the *ultracultural* could be called the somewhat mystical quest for the origin of theatre, the search for a primal language in the sense of Artaud. In Brook's *Orghast* (1970), Serban's *Medea* and *The Trojan Women,* Ronconi's *Oresteia* (1972), we had such a quest for a universal language of sounds and emotions, as if all human experience sprang from the same source

the *precultural,* which Barba calls the *pre-expressive,* would be the common ground of any tradition in the world, which affects any audience, 'before' (temporally and logically) it is individualized and 'culturalized' in a specific cultural tradition

the *postcultural* would apply to the postmodern imagination, which tends to view any cultural act as a quotation of restructuring of already known elements

the *metacultural* aspects refer to the commentary a given culture can make on other cultural elements, when explaining, comparing and commenting on it.

2. It is therefore almost impossible to separate source culture from target culture. But one can, at least, observe how the source culture is appropriated step by step by the target culture. This does not mean, however, that we are using a model borrowed from the theory of communication which studies the transfer of information between sender and receiver. Each level of the hourglass (i.e. each 'layer') must be seen as also determined by the levels of the opposite bowl.

It is true, as Fischer-Lichte notes, that 'the foreign text or the foreign theatrical conventions are chosen according to their relevance to the situation in question; transformed and replanted' (1990:284). But we would not draw the same conclusions, since, according to Fischer-Lichte,

> It makes little sense, therefore, to speak of the source text and the target text, even less of a source culture or target culture, as should be the case when the foreign is to be communicated in translation. This is due to the fact that the source culture and the target culture are one and the same thing, i.e. the culture.
>
> (1990:284)

This would seem to lead all too quickly to giving up any theory of the transfer. The translation model itself is only a particular case of the general model of cultural transfer, which manifests itself in translation, *mise en scène,* intercultural exchange, etc. Moreover, in our culture, we are still quite able to make a distinction between native elements and imported elements. Source culture and target culture are never blended into one, other than in the case of complete annihilation (Marvin Carlson's second category where foreign elements [are] assimilated into the tradition and absorbed by it. The audience can be interested, entertained, stimulated, but they are not challenged by the foreign materials' (1990:50). In this case we cannot speak of intercultural exchanges). For our

hourglass model of intercultural exchange, we no longer need a theory of 'productive reception' (Pavis 1985: 233–96) and we should resist the temptation to reduce the exchange and the theory to a single pole of reception/target culture. Even if the source culture is almost assimilated and reconstructed by the target culture, we should still look for the means to describe its modelization and possible reconstruction. What we enumerate in the lower bowl of the hourglass ('layers' (3) to (11)) should therefore also be distinguished and studied—even if only in a tentative reconstruction from the viewpoint of our target culture.

3. I am using *he/his* since I am a male critic. I am aware that it could also be *she/her,* but I would like to speak from my own point of view rather than repeat in each sentence *he/she* since the text would then become repetitive and hard to follow.

4. I use the notion of *representation* both in the meaning of a stage performance (*représentation* in French) and in that of 'being replaced or depicted by something,' as Marx uses it in *The 18 Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* ('Sie können sich nicht vertreten, sie müssen vertreten werden'). The *representation* of a culture thus refers to all texts which depict it, in the sense of Said's notion of *orientalism,* i.e. of texts exterior to it, which are supposed to describe it adequately. The texts of the represented culture are 'found just as prominently in the so-called truthful text (histories, philological analyses, political treatises) as in the avowedly artistic (i.e. openly imaginative) text' (1978:21), As in the case of orientalism, 'the things to look at are style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances, *not* the correctness of the representation nor its fidelity to some great original' (1978:21). Thus, in order to describe/represent the foreign culture, we have to look for its conventions, codification, modelizations, i.e. for its forms and codes.

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