

7

Staging the Text

When a text is produced on stage, how is it received and interpreted by the spectator? This is a crucial issue for analysis of performance that still often uses texts. In the Western tradition, the dramatic text remains one of the essential components of performance. In theater it has long been assimilated as the primary component, with its performance on stage only accorded a subordinate, optional role. However, things changed radically with the recognition of the director's function, toward the end of the nineteenth century, when it was acknowledged that a director is capable (or culpable?) of marking a text produced on stage with the stamp of a personal vision. For the theater of *mise-en-scène*, therefore, it is quite logical to focus analysis on the performance as a whole, rather than considering the latter to be something derived exclusively from the text. Theater studies, and performance analysis in particular, are interested in performance as a whole, in everything that surrounds and exceeds the text in an overall event. One repercussion of this has been the reduction of the dramatic text to the status of a sort of cumbersome accessory, now left, rather contemptuously, at the disposal of philologists. So in the space of fifty years, there has been a shift from one extreme to the other: from philology to scenology.

Perhaps it is time to restore a little more equity and, if possible, subtlety. My aim here is not to return to a purely literary vision of theater, nor to engage in an endless discussion as to whether theater constitutes literature or performance. Instead I propose to reconsider the place of text in performance, and to distinguish between text as read off the page of a book and text as perceived in a *mise-en-scène*.

In the concern to review the principal elements of contemporary Western *mise-en-scène*, and to conceive of the most appropriate analytical methods for them, one should quite naturally reserve a select place for the dramatic text—without however prejudging its status *inside* the performance; here the text is conceived as being *within* the performance, rather than *above* or *beside* it. Most importantly, this chapter aims to suggest a viewpoint and a method that are adequate to evaluate the impact and function of text within performance. Commentaries on dramatic texts only rarely take into consideration the ways in which they are manifested: the individual reading of words in a book, or attendance at a live performance, in the course of which the text is perceived, most often delivered by the actors.

Staged Text, Articulated Text

Written Text, Enunciated Text

Before even being able to describe the devices through which a dramatic text is vocalized, embodied, and performed by actor and director, one must start by specifying the object of an analysis of a staged dramatic text. Two perspectives seem legitimate here:

- To examine the ways in which a (preexistent) text has been staged (*texte mis en scène*);
- To observe the ways in which the text is articulated on stage (*texte émis en scène*), how it is made audible and visible.

Study of the Mise-en-scène of a Text

This form of study is devoted to the genesis of a *mise-en-scène*, the preparatory phase before the final fine tuning of a performance: dramaturgical analysis to determine the time, place, and protagonists of the action; readings by the actors and director, involvement of the scenographer, costume designer, lighting designer; the trying out, activating, and rejecting of avenues opened up by possible readings; the exploration of vocalization, and the progressive establishment of the vocal and gestural score.

Study of the Articulation of a Text on Stage

This describes the way in which a text is delivered, enunciated, “emitted” on stage: a text produced, switched on, transmitted with all possible mean-

ing in all possible directions. The *articulated* text is already there, colored by a voice, a concrete vocal version of a text uttered that the spectator, or listener, does not need to activate with his own voice (as the reader of a written text does). The articulated text is already integrated into a *mise-en-scène*, it is already staged; for the actor, with the help of the other practitioners, has already vocalized it, ipso facto realizing a vocal *mise-en-scène* that makes the dramatic text the object of a performance. For the listener/spectator hearing and seeing the actor deliver her text, it is difficult to abstract from what is perceived and to read the dramatic text as if discovering it on paper, giving it life and voice through one's own reading. If by chance she already knows the text (it is a classic, for example), evidently she could compare the current *mise-en-scène* with her own former reading of the text; however, it will be difficult for her to preserve this former reading from the insistent particularities of the actor's vocalization in the present instance. Only an expert spectator will be in a position to reconstitute and distinguish between the current *mise-en-scène* and the reading she was able to make previously. (Similarly, one would not know how to distinguish which elements of a *mise-en-scène* stem from stage directions in the text and which are contributed by the *mise-en-scène*.)

These two forms of study and the perspectives they offer are obviously not incompatible, but only the study of text as articulated in a given *mise-en-scène* is of concern for performance analysis; the "average" spectator is not expected to know about the genesis of a performance. Nevertheless the process of a performance's genesis—the repetitions, adjustments, improvements, changes of mind made in the elaboration of a *mise-en-scène*—leaves indelible traces in the final product that will not escape the expert, although they may well go unnoticed by the audience in general. Performance analysis—or more precisely the classical analysis of Western performance, for it is a different matter for intercultural performance or performance from other cultures—is based on a final, more or less stabilized version of theater work, which is not concerned with exact reasons for artists' aesthetic choices and therefore does not need to try to locate their intentions. Another reason not to confuse a text that is read with a text that is performed . . .

Read Text, Performed Text

In order to analyze the true merits of a text, one must know how it presents itself to its receiver: is it read by the receiver, or is it performed by actors in front of the receiver? And what happens when the reading is staged, as is the

case with contemporary performances that test the boundaries of performance and reading?

A *text that is read* has not been activated by a human (or synthetic) voice other than that of its author, who is not present to deliver it. It is activated in the act of its perception, but in an individual and silent manner. (It is only since the end of the Middle Ages that reading has been silent, and the individual has become the depositary of meaning, the subject internalizing laws and norms.)

A *text that is performed* and delivered by the actor is already served by a stage space and prosodic, visual, and gestural signs one can no longer abstract. Listening to this verbal copy of the text, seeing what kind of enunciatory situation is put in place, in turn producing a certain meaning for the text, the spectator receives a quite specific option (even though it's often rather illegible or incoherent) that closes interpretation to other options. On the other hand, the same spectator may be receptive to particular qualities of the dramatic text that would have perhaps escaped her in a reading.

The performed text is already divided up and distributed between various different speakers; the enunciatory situation has been specified in a nonambiguous way. The meaning of the situation immediately leaps out, dazzles the spectator just as we are blinded by evidence, even though the dispersal of the sources of enunciation discourages any clear and definitive synthesis.

The performed text is subdivided into a text that is *only heard* and a text that is heard and *seen* (i.e., performed, activated, staged). The text that is heard is that of a reading, what used to be called an "oratory recital." The listener has at her disposal information about its enunciation, its psychological interpretation; but she must imagine a performance context (as if they were hearing it on the radio). In the case of the text that is *seen*, this context has been materialized visually and scenically, and the spectator cannot avoid it; she watches what occurs there. For performance analysis, it is a matter of determining whether primarily to watch or to listen, whether one is inundated with visual signs or whether one should employ one's imagination solely by listening to the text: in short, whether one is attending a *drama* or listening to a *story*.

Comprehension of the Read Text

We need to return to the current state of our techniques for reading dramatic texts: an impossible undertaking in the context of this study. Despite the dispersal of the dramatic text into autonomous utterances, a multiplic-

ity and apparent equality of the different perspectives, despite the rapid procession of words and the acoustic difficulty of hearing them, the reader/listener takes her bearings by forming units or ensembles. She goes toward the pre-text or post-text, in accordance with the operative processes that the phenomenology of reading calls *retention* or *protension*. Lost in the maze of utterances, she watches out for textual indications as to the "given circumstances," the motivations and superobjectives of characters. She makes full use of her ability to synthesize, to cross-check and to analyze dramaturgically; she has to establish who speaks, to whom, with what end in mind, where, and in what way the word gives rise to an action. She plays with the discontinuity of the word in theater by examining "what occurs between one utterance and another in an exchange, and what is at the heart of each reply. What kind of movement takes place to engender the shift from one position to the following position."¹ In so doing, she provides herself with the means to imagine, if not a concrete *mise-en-scène*, at least a dramatic situation within which the text necessarily assumes a meaning, since it is already divided up among speakers and structured as a sequence of conflictual situations.

Obviously all of these dramaturgical and textual processes remain valid for the study of the text in the context of a *mise-en-scène*; but this performance context adds on a series of particular treatments of verbal material (which will be described below). First one must clarify the relation between text and performance, thereby establishing their hierarchy and conflict.

Text and Performance

In order to elucidate these very complex interrelations, it is advisable to specify one's historical moment and cultural location; for the text is not always (far from it) the preexistent and fixed element that it is the stage's task to serve or illustrate—to put on stage (*mettre en scène*), in the Western sense. In fact it is only since the beginning of the seventeenth century that the text has preceded performance, and that actors have placed themselves at the service of an author's text. Before that time, there was a close alliance between bodies and words, and actors improvised around familiar scenarios. From the time of Rotrou and Corneille, language begins to secure possession of bodies so as to incarnate the word of the author; and performance sometimes resembles the incarnation (and therefore also the

servant) of a text deemed to be the source of everything. The fixing of texts and their infinite revivals—initially in accordance with a rhetoric of highly codified actions, then subsequently in accordance with a creativity connected to the irresistible emergence of a director—is a historical accident, which has managed to pass for a universal law, according to which the text supposedly precedes the stage in both temporal and statutory terms. This is the "textocentric" vision of theater that still holds sway to a large extent over theater theory; and it remains very difficult to move away from this predominant model, whatever the importance accorded to *mise-en-scène* and the nonverbal elements of performance.

"Textocentric" Vision of *Mise-en-Scène*

Returning to the framework of performance analysis, and performance containing a text (preexistent to the performance or not), one must once again consider the relations between text and performance; this then leads one to ask whether the performance issues from the text or not, and from the reading one might make of the text.

Now, this comparison or confrontation of text and performance is a deadly habit that encourages the thought that a *mise-en-scène* is an actualization, manifestation, or concretization of elements already contained within the text. Perhaps this is true from a diachronic perspective on a study of the *mise-en-scène*'s genesis, following on from the director's own study of the dramatic text she intends to stage. However, it is not inevitably true from a synchronic perspective, since the spectator receives the text and extratextual signs at the same time, without one necessarily being anterior and superior to the other. Indeed it is possible to imagine a model of *mise-en-scène* elaborated without knowledge of the text, the text only being selected at the very last moment, once the *mise-en-scène* has been concluded; Robert Wilson and a number of other theater artists proceed in this way.

The problem is not one of knowing to an absolute degree which element is primary—the text or the stage—for clearly responses will vary depending on the historical moments envisaged. The problem is this: in a performance containing a text (which may have existed prior to the theater work or not, we don't know), how does one know whether one element stems from the other, and therefore requires the other in order to resolve itself, to determine its own forms?

In truth, it is rare to come across the thesis that suggests that the text

stems from the stage space used and from the actors' performances; and yet it would be easy to show that the writing of texts is substantially influenced by the stage practices of an era, by what it can do theatrically.

Inversely, it is common to consider the *mise-en-scène* as issuing directly from the text; in other words, the stage actualizes elements contained within the text. Fundamentally, that is the actual meaning of "putting a text on stage" (*mettre en scène*); after reading the text, elements are extracted from it and are put on stage. So the text is conceived as a reserve, even as the depository of meaning; and the task of performance is to extract and express this meaning, just as one extracts (scenic) juice from a (textual) carrot.

This vision of the relation between text and performance is that of philologists—for whom the dramatic text is all and the stage a simple illustration, a rhetorical aspect to "season" the text—as well as of numerous theater theorists, including semiologists. I will restrict myself to a few quotations drawn from the latter:

- Anne Ubersfeld talks, for example, of "kernels of theatricality," "textual matrices of representativity," textual holes to be filled by the *mise-en-scène*.²
- Alessandro Serpieri is interested in the scenic virtuality of the dramatic text.³
- Erika Fischer-Lichte sees theory as "the systematic study of possible relations between the written text and performance";⁴ according to her, performance should be understood as an interpretant for the possible significations of the drama that lies at its base.
- Keir Elam asks "in what ways are the dramatic text and the performance text related—what are the points of contact between them?"⁵
- Horst Turk dreams of finding "the articulation missing between the semiology of theater and the poetics of drama, which would yield results for each of them."⁶

All of these positions are philological insofar as the performance appeals to the authority of a text for its interpretation and its very existence. The text is not described in its scenic enunciation, that is, as stage practice, but as absolute and immutable reference, fulcrum of the *mise-en-scène* in its entirety. At the same time, the text is declared to be incomplete since it requires performance to acquire its meaning. These philological positions all have in common a normative and derivative vision of *mise-en-scène*

according to which *mise-en-scène* should not be arbitrary, but should serve the text and justify itself as a correct reading of the dramatic text. It is presupposed that text and stage are bound together, that they have been conceived in terms of each other: the text with a view to a future *mise-en-scène*, or at least a given acting style; the stage envisaging what the text suggests as to how it should be performed in space.

"Stage-Centered" Vision of *Mise-en-scène*

To move on from these philological viewpoints, perhaps one needs the radicality of an aesthete like Thies Lehmann for whom "*mise-en-scène* is an artistic practice that is strictly unforeseeable from the perspective of the text."⁷ This radical position denies any causal connection between text and stage by granting *mise-en-scène* the sovereign power to decide on its aesthetic choices. And in fact this is precisely how many directors proceed, from Wilson to Grüber, from Mesguich to Heiner Müller. They prepare text, music, scenography, actors' performances in an autonomous way, and do not realize the final "mix" of these different aspects until the end of their process, in the same way one edits a film. In these examples, the text no longer enjoys an anterior or exclusive status; it is only one of a number of performance materials, and it neither centralizes nor organizes the nonverbal elements. On the other hand, Lehmann's thesis is virtually untenable in relation to *mise-en-scènes* of texts read and known in ways that are "inevitable," so to speak (such texts might be very well known, or simply based on characters and situations of which it would be difficult to be unaware); for spectators will not fail to interrogate the relation between artistic practice and text, even if only to ask themselves how the stage could ignore what the text suggests to us at a particular juncture.

In the case of a *mise-en-scène* in which an understanding of a text can still be discerned, I propose the following compromise (in relation to Lehmann's clear-cut affirmation). *Mise-en-scène* is not dictated by a reading of the text alone; however, readings do provide practitioners with suggestions for an experimental and progressive placement of enunciatory situations—in other words with a choice of "given circumstances" (Stanislavsky), which propose a perspective for an understanding of the text, activate a reading of it, and generate interpretations that a reader undoubtedly would not have foreseen, emerging from the intervention of actors and other artists involved in the stage practice.

Let us conclude, therefore, in favor of a compromise between a text-centered and a stage-centered position. There is no sense in wanting to tie *mise-en-scène* to the potential or incomplete elements of a text, even if one always ends up finding a textual indication on which to hang the *mise-en-scène* "legitimately." There is no "pre-*mise-en-scène*" already inscribed in the dramatic text, although the text can only be read by imagining the dramatic situations in which the action can unfold.

What are the implications of this for the analysis of a performance containing a dramatic text? To what should analysis be attentive?

- At all costs it should avoid comparing a *mise-en-scène* with the text that seems to be its source. The text is not some indisputable reference point to which analysis must return in order to analyze a performance.
- It must painstakingly separate what it knows of the written text, through previous knowledge "on the page," from what is discerned of the text as articulated on stage, and thus expressed in a very precise enunciatory situation that its first task is to describe.
- Therefore it is a question of separating one's thoughts on the study of written texts from that of stage practices involving texts.

A common tendency of contemporary *mise-en-scène* is to deny any link between texts and stage practices. Certain directors seek out texts that theoretically cannot be performed on a stage, or resist being performed. Heiner Müller even made this the criterion of a productive theater: "It's only when a text cannot be realized with the existing theater that it becomes productive and interesting for the theater."⁸

So today *mise-en-scène* is no longer the passage of a text to the stage; sometimes it is an installation, in other words a bringing together of diverse stage practices (lighting, plastic arts, improvisation), without the possibility of establishing a hierarchy between them, and without the text assuming the role of magnetic pole for the rest of the performance.

In that sense, it is the performing of a text that provides initial indications as to the text's meaning, and in particular the status one should accord it within the analyzed performance.

Status of the Staged Text

This question also concerns performance analysis, for it requires the spectator to establish the status of the text in a *mise-en-scène*.

Autonomy or Dependence of the Text

In order to establish the status of the dramatic text one perceives in a *mise-en-scène*, one must first establish whether it exists independently of the *mise-en-scène*, as a published or publishable text: in other words, as a legible or at least audible text existing in a form other than stage orality.

In the case of a classic or modern text, by definition this text exists independently of and anterior to its stage enunciation; therefore one can always reread it and compare this reading with that proposed by the *mise-en-scène*.

It is equally possible that the text of the play did not exist as a starting point, and that it was elaborated gradually in the course of rehearsals; or even that it was introduced right at the very end of rehearsals, even though the stage score had already been definitively fixed. So there is no sense in searching for a link between what is shown and what is said.

Finally, it is possible for a text not to acquire any semantic value; in other words, one is not in a position to read or hear it, it constitutes nothing more than verbal decor, a music comprised of sounds or words whose arrangement makes no sense. Such is the case, for example, with Robert Wilson's text for *The Golden Windows*. There is no point reading the script (although it has been published), for not only did it not exist during the creation of the *mise-en-scène*; above all it simply comprises vocal and rhythmic material to be used as a plastic element without any claim to semantic referentiality—so it would be quite fruitless to launch oneself into scholarly exegeses.

One thing is certain: our evaluation of the intrinsic value of a text evolves over time. What appears illegible to us today was perhaps legible formerly for an audience familiar with the relevant allusions and cultural practices (nineteenth-century vaudeville, for example); or it becomes legible with the passage of time, once an audience has the keys and rules to decipher it (e.g., Beckett's theater has become "classic," in the sense that it is now known and understood by most spectators). Therefore one must be very careful in determining a text's legibility, for it is always relative. It would be better to stick to the criterion of knowing whether or not a text is known to the audience, like the classic play, myth, or news item at the source of a *mise-en-scène*.

Specificity of the Dramatic Text

An examination of performances currently using texts clearly reveals that all sorts of texts are used on stage, and not only dramatic texts written for

theater. So it seems out of the question to limit texts for the stage to a specific type of dramatic writing, or to talk of “the specific character of theater writing,”⁹ as Vinaver does. Moreover, it does not seem possible to define this specifically dramatic writing in a transhistorical, universal manner. But the only thing one can affirm is that each historical moment, and each dramaturgical and stage practice corresponding with that moment, possesses its own criteria of dramaticity (way of setting up a conflict) and of theatricality (manner of using the stage). Consequently, instead of attempting a phenomenological, universal, and abstract definition of the specificity of dramatic writing, it would be more useful to deal with each particular case historically—in other words, by examining how a text has been conceived in terms of a certain practice of language and of the stage, and recognizing what dramaturgical processes are privileged. For performance analysis, it is advisable to determine what a particular stage practice enables us to understand of the text, what meanings it opens up or empties out. We know that every text, and the dramatic text in particular, metamorphoses in the course of history; it gives rise to a series of different interpretations, sometimes called *concretizations* (in reception theory).

Once these different concretizations have been outlined, along with the horizon of expectation of the reader/spectator and the historical framework, one is in a position to enumerate the specific properties of the dramatic writing in question.¹⁰

Consequently historical knowledge of the production and reception of a text paves the way for its dramaturgical analysis, for increased awareness of elements that affect text as much as stage, in particular

- The determination of action and actants
- The structures of space, time, rhythm
- The articulation and establishment of the plot

Dramaturgical analysis of text “at the origin” or “at the heart” of a *mise-en-scène* is the primary reflex of performance analysis; it clarifies and systematizes the majority of isolated perceptions and provides information on the way stage and text influence one another permanently.

Evidently dramaturgical analysis is applicable primarily to classical or figurative works, when a story is told through actions effected by characters. Nevertheless, even for texts devoid of plot, character, and mimetic representation, dramaturgical analysis has something to contribute—if only in elucidating the textual mechanisms or the language games at the surface of the word.

The relativity of the specificity of dramatic writing (and therefore its nonspecificity) problematizes any method of textual analysis that makes a claim to universality, connecting it with some mythical essence of the dramatic. Therefore analysis of performance containing text should start by specifying the “given circumstances” of the text, but without restricting them to psychological situations, as Stanislavsky advised. It should locate the text historically, at the moment of its production as well as that of its current use within the *mise-en-scène*, the moment of its inscription in a sociocultural context. Contrary to Michel Vinaver’s assertion, one cannot read a dramatic text without imagining a concrete situation, which depends on the ideological conditions of that particular moment, nor without having at one’s disposal a minimal amount of preexisting knowledge of the text and the mode of performance.¹¹

This historicizing process also involves the text/performance interrelation, which one must be wary of approaching in the absolute, eternal terms of an immutable theory set in concrete. A few major historical references will be sufficient here:

- In the era of French classicism, that of Corneille, Racine, and beyond, up until about 1750, a rhetorical system regulated the relations between text and stage, using strictly codified postures and vocal inflections that were supposed to fix emotions. A performance consisted of respecting and reproducing this system.
- From 1750, with Diderot, and increasingly so until 1880, a demand for realism and a reclamation of authentic romantic emotions launched a broadside on classicism’s gestural rhetoric; this tended to impose an individualized reading of the text, with gestural language and scenic interpretation breaking away from stereotypes.¹²
- After 1880, with the appearance of the role of director, increasingly the text seems to be a relative and variable element, tied to the historical context—as variable as the gaze of the reader/spectator (and consequently the director) can be. The text was now displaced in relation to a monolithic stage; it was decentered, even dispersed by psychoanalysis that announced the displacement of the subject. The *mise-en-scène*, assuming overall charge of the text to be interpreted, was supposed to bridge the historical, cultural, and hermeneutic distance between the text and its new audience.
- From 1880 to about 1960, *mise-en-scène* consolidated its position and coincided with the emergence and apogee of theatrical avant-gardes. Whatever the particular moment or current of practice, one witnessed a

ity. In place of the linguistic text, *mise-en-scène* sought to substitute a "language of the stage" (Artaud) or a "gestus" (Brecht)—the emanation of a visual mode of thought controlled by the *mise-en-scène*, which would put an end to logocentrism once and for all. According to the classical conception, that of Copeau for example, *mise-en-scène* constitutes "the outlining of a dramatic action. It is the ensemble of movements, gestures and attitudes, the concordance of physiognomies, voices and silences, the totality of the stage performance, emanating from a unique way of thinking that conceives, regulates and harmonizes it."¹³ The director had gradually replaced the author as authority controlling the production of meaning and the stable signification of the text. In turn, it would not be long before the director was suspected of closing meaning down: of being an authoritarian subject whose authority neither the (ex-)author, nor the actor, nor the spectator would feel disposed to recognize for much longer. And this leads us directly to the negation of *mise-en-scène*, to "post-*mise-en-scène*."

- **Post-*mise-en-scène*** (after 1960): in these times that no longer know how to describe themselves except to say that they are "postmodern," the director is now accused of being the one whose supposed systematicity and authoritarianism are harmful to the productivity of performance. Both stage and text are now no more than open "signifying practices" (which means one can get them to say whatever one wants, and that theory is nothing more than a game). The alternative is no longer (as it was formerly) between a text having a signified to transmit "faithfully" and a text one can use as building material; neither is it any longer between a *metaphorical* type of *mise-en-scène* (in which the stage metaphorizes the text's meaning) and a *scenographic* type (in which the only writing is that of the stage).¹⁴ Instead, the alternative is now between the pretension to control overall meaning and the renunciation of all foreseeable meaning. In the latter case, in fact *mise-en-scène* is only an installation; all of its materials are installed in a space-time and are activated to the full extent of their possibilities, while spectators are quite content to observe fortuitous interactions and to see what happens and who wins.

This review of some historical stages still provides many models for contemporary performance, and so it seems useful to outline them, albeit all too briefly. In fact, they often coincide within one *mise-en-scène*, and seem to illustrate well the diversity of relations between stage and text. One should relativize these relations further by comparing them with completely different cultural contexts. Then it would become apparent that

whereas Western culture and the most beautiful feather in its cap, the theatrical *mise-en-scène* of literary texts, consider the text as source or reference for a performance, it works otherwise in other cultures. In African culture, for example, it is quite appropriate to reconsider the dividing lines between text, movement, dance, and music. The text is no longer the focal point; it could be replaced or taken over by a completely different medium—for example, by talking drums conveying a text that white people cannot understand (in Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*). But for Western *mise-en-scène*, text remains the one element that enables us to compare the major types of *mise-en-scène*.

Typologies of *Mise-en-scène*

In relation to contemporary *mise-en-scène*, it is very difficult to get one's bearings in the multiplicity of experiences. However, one can suggest a few typologies, in particular if one returns to the categories that emerged from the history of theater at the turn of the last century.

Historical Typology

These categories are well known and frequently used:

- **Naturalist** *mise-en-scène*: the actor's performance, scenography, diction, and rhythm all claim to provide a mimesis of the real; for example, Stanislavsky's productions of Chekhov's plays at the Moscow Arts Theatre.
- **Realist** *mise-en-scène*: the real is no longer rendered photographically, as in the preceding case, but is codified in an ensemble of signs that are deemed to be pertinent; mimesis is selective, critical, inclusive, and systematic; for example, the *mise-en-scènes* of Brecht, or of Planchon in the 1960s and 1970s.
- **Symbolist** *mise-en-scène*: the reality represented is the idealized essence of the real world; for example, Meyerhold's 1905 *mise-en-scène* for *The Death of Tintagiles*, and certain Robert Wilson productions.
- **Expressionist** *mise-en-scène*: particular aspects and features of reality are clearly emphasized, as if to express the personal attitude of the director; for example, the productions of Fritz Kortner or Matthias Langhoff.
- **Epic** *mise-en-scène*: it narrates by means of the actor, the scenography and the plot; for example, the work of Piscator and of Brecht in the past, and of actor-storytellers today.

- *Theatricalized* mise-en-scène: instead of imitating the real, the signs of performance insist on play and fiction, and an acceptance of the theater as fiction and convention; for example, the mise-en-scènes of Meyerhold in the past, or of Vitez and Mesguich more recently.

Other aesthetics have also provided model performance forms, by setting up new stylistic categories and raising to an aesthetic and theoretical status particular historical characteristics arising from concrete circumstances.

The case of productions of so-called classic texts should be examined separately, for the relation to the classic text varies considerably.

Mise-en-Scènes of Classic Texts

This typology is based on the conception that a mise-en-scène stems, implicitly or explicitly, from the dramatic text: does the mise-en-scène attach itself to the letter of the text, to the story narrated, to the raw materials the text offers, to the multiple meanings it allows, to the rhetoric that animates it, or to the myth in which it takes root?

- The *archaeological reconstruction* of a performance attempts to rediscover the text as it may have been presented (to the best of one's knowledge) when the play was first created. Such mise-en-scène is preoccupied with archaeological details only, without reevaluating the new relation between this rather questionable reconstruction and the contemporary spectator's horizon of expectation.
- *Historicization* is the exact opposite of archaeological reconstruction. With little concern for the historical exactitude of performance conditions at the original creation of a work, it endeavors to relativize this perspective, and to rediscover in the narrative a (hi)story that concerns us directly, adapting situations, characters, and conflicts as required. In the 1950s and 1960s, this led to a "sociological" mise-en-scène in which the text was illuminated by all sorts of socioeconomic indications (Plançon, Strehler).
- The *recuperation* of a text as raw material is the most radical method for dealing with the dramatic text. In contemporary practice, it bears a number of different names: actualization, modernization, adaptation, rewriting, and so on. It includes many working processes that not only modify the letter of the text, but insistently work at not being interested in the text, treating it as pretext for variations or rewritings; which makes this practice of recuperation unpredictable and untheorizable.
- The *mise-en-scène of possible meanings* does not aim to reconstruct an

earlier type of performance or to adapt a play to our own times; instead it aims to open the text to a plurality of readings that contradict and are in dialogue with each other, refusing to be reduced to a final overall meaning. The plurality of possible meanings is achieved by means of a multiplication of enunciatory voices (actors, scenographer, musician, etc.), all of whom work for themselves; this multiplication stems from a refusal to hierarchize signs, to divide them up into major and minor systems, and ultimately from a desire to give rise to "an infinite number of interpretations."¹⁵

- *Vocalizing the text* avoids any aprioristic interpretation of a text, particularly in terms of a reading of situations, of characters' motivations, or of the world of the play, so as to focus on a rhetorical and vocal treatment of the linguistic text; it suggests actors approach their roles through a breath-based, rhythmic reading of the text. Systematized by Copeau and Jouvet, then Vitez, this reading technique starts resolutely from the text as respiratory trace of the author, hoping subsequently to tap into the text's meaning once the actors are able to convey it through their diction and the rhythmic structures of their vocalizations.
- *The return to myth* represents a negation of historicization, recuperation, and vocalization. It takes no interest in the dramaturgy of the text, its forms and codes, so as to go directly to the heart of the plot and of its founding myth.

These six categories rarely occur in a pure state; productions often combine several of the respective characteristics above, thus making any strict typology problematic. So we will have to content ourselves with major distinctions such as those suggested by Pavis or Lehmann.

Auto-, Ideo- and Intertextual Dimensions

Any *text* (in the semiological sense of the word) is defined by its autotextual, ideotextual, and intertextual dimensions.

Autotextual mise-en-scène endeavors not to go outside the boundaries of the stage, not to make reference to an external reality. This category includes "archaeological" mise-en-scènes, which reconstruct the performance conditions of a particular time and shut themselves off from modern perspectives, as well as mise-en-scènes that are hermetically closed around a director's choice or thesis; such productions do not tolerate any external perspective that might impact upon their orientation. This was the case with avant-garde mise-en-scènes, in particular symbolist work (Craig,

Appia); it is also the case with Robert Wilson. Such productions invent and isolate a coherent scenic universe, closed in upon itself in an autonomous aesthetic system.

Ideotextual mise-en-scène, inversely, opens itself up to the psychological or social world within which it is inscribed. It loses its texture and its autonomy in favor of ready-made knowledges and discourses: ideologies, explanations of the world, concrete references to social practices. All mise-en-scène that alludes to social reality produces a subtextual or metatextual commentary—and this connects it back to the external world. Mise-en-scènes that endeavor to engage with social reality belong to this category, that is, so-called Brechtian productions. This category also includes pedagogical plays, social parables, work that uses actual documentary material.

Intertextual mise-en-scène ensures a necessary mediation between the autotextuality of the first category and the ideological reference of the second. It relativizes mise-en-scène's desire for autonomy, locates itself within an ongoing series of interpretations, demarcating in a polemical way its differences from other solutions and other kinds of mise-en-scène. Often the mise-en-scène of a very well known classical text is necessarily intertextual, for it alludes to preceding productions, or at least to the major ways in which the enigma of that text has been resolved in the past. Vitez proceeded in this way in his productions of Molière, which invariably included possible allusions to one or more of its predecessors.

Metaphor, Scenography, Event

The final and most recent typology, another very general one, is that of Hans-Thies Lehmann (1989), which distinguishes between metaphorical, scenographic, and eventlike mise-en-scènes.

- *Metaphoric* mise-en-scène uses the stage as a metaphor of the dramatic text that it comments upon and illustrates by scenic means. Amateur directors, often proceed in this way, using the stage as an illustration of how they have understood the text.
- *Scenographic* mise-en-scène constitutes an autonomous scenic writing; from Artaud to Wilson, it uses the stage as an entirely separate language. Signification is at the discretion of the observer, as simply the possibility of a synthesis.
- Mise-en-scène is *eventlike* when the stage is presented as an event that owes nothing to a reading of the text, but provides a configuration or an installation, a situation characterized by the copresence of production

and reception, of actors and spectators. Lehmann gives the example of a Viennese group, Angelus Novus, who produced a continuous reading of Homer's *Iliad* lasting twenty-two hours.

This typology relates fairly closely to that of Robert Abirached,¹⁶ who also distinguishes three possible orders of mise-en-scène:

- Mise-en-scène wholly bound by and compliant with the text (Lehmann's "metaphoric")
- Mise-en-scène having an absolute autonomy and possessing its own scenic language (Lehmann's "scenographic")
- Mise-en-scène making use of texts, rather than being at their service (Lehmann's "eventlike")

Whatever typology one retains, the categories remain very general and at best only draw out a few indicatory properties or tendencies. They provide an initial orientation enabling a mise-en-scène to be placed within existing frameworks, although this may be dangerous if the particular mise-en-scène actually endeavors to occupy new territory. More often than not, this orientation goes hand in hand with a critical evaluation that one must differentiate from a straightforward semiological analysis; it is closer to dramatic criticism. Although it tends to be avoided by the deliberately functionalist and intellectualist approach of semiology, critical evaluation is nevertheless an integral component of critical theory as it is understood here.

Treatment of the Text in the Public Space of Performance

An analysis of the text as articulated on stage must concern itself in a concrete way with all of the processes that the text has been through, and continues to undergo, in the mise-en-scène, in terms of the manner in which it is treated through stage means.

Plasticity of the Text

Once a text is enunciated on stage, in whatever form, it is treated plastically, musically, gesturally; it has relinquished the abstraction and potentiality of

the written text so as to be activated in performance. Colored by voice and gesture (in accordance with its "coloration"),¹⁷ the text becomes texture; it is embodied by the actors, as if they are able to "physicalize" it, to absorb it, to breathe it in before breathing it out, to hold it within themselves or, on the contrary, to discharge it, to make it available to others or to retain it partly for themselves. Their approach is physical, before it is psychological and abstract:

So a reading of a text by an actor in no way resembles a learning process outside of meaning in which psychology strives to make it comprehensible to us. The text *works*, it shifts in its texture; and it is transformed through the very fact that the body itself has meaning, and always keeps mobile the *directions* of meaning that constitute the *style* of the text. This is the way of temporality, for the body here neither acts nor speaks but is the site in which all creation originates.¹⁸

Here Fédida is talking about text in general, but his words are all the more valid for the dramatic text, which becomes *scenic* and *theatrical* as soon as *mise-en-scène* turns it into action.

The "Given Circumstances"

As soon as it has been enunciated, "articulated" on stage, the text brings to the fore what Stanislavsky called the "given circumstances," and what linguists call the situation of the enunciation. The text is distributed among different speakers; the *mise-en-scène* has clarified who speaks, to whom and why; paraverbal elements provide immediate information about the verbal message. The dispersal of the word into the various utterances of different characters, and therefore the multiplicity and apparent equivalence of different perspectives, can be disconcerting to the spectator. However, they oblige her to watch closely for indications as to the "given circumstances," to follow the characters' motivations and the superobjective of the play, to attempt a dramaturgical synthesis and to organize the scenic material around its major axes.

The division of text among different speakers plays on the discontinuity of the word in theater; it requires us to examine "what occurs between one utterance and another in an exchange, and what is at the heart of each reply. What kind of movement takes place to engender the shift from one

position to the following position."¹⁹ *Mise-en-scène* clarifies and specifies this transition from one position to another; analysis endeavors to rediscover the logic according to which it occurs. Therefore, finding a text's meaning entails gathering information as to the ways in which the *mise-en-scène* secures and represents this logic. The work of the actor consists of complementing the work of the author: "The richer a text is, the poorer the actor's music must be; the poorer a text, the richer the actor's music."²⁰ It follows that analysis must evaluate the respective "riches" of text and performance and understand the system of their correlation. One must show what the text receives through the actor's performance, as well as what the performance reveals of the hidden richness of the text: something very difficult to describe, undoubtedly, since one must establish what the stage gives rise to in the text.

Reconstituting the System of Stage Enunciation

In order to describe what arises in the text, it is useful to reconstitute the system of stage enunciation; this is achieved by considering the factors in play and their hierarchical structure. This structure is never fixed, but as the mime artist Decroux noted, there is a scale of expressive factors, the word being the strongest of all:

In the order of importance of the elements of expression, gesture comes last. First of all, there is the word as written and therefore read with the eyes; then there is diction; then the correct posture; finally, that leaves gesture.²¹

Any analysis should reconsider this hierarchy of word, diction (which is "a kind of mime, the vocal form of mime"), posture, and gesture. One must venture an evaluation of the proportionate amounts of text and gesture; a production's gestural strategy (which is ultimately what I understand by *mise-en-scène*) consists of either communicating or silencing a particular part or aspect of the text. It is always revealing to observe the gesture on which text is said, and its particular rhythm, once one realizes (with Decroux) that "a gesture deployed without acceleration, slowing down, or jerkiness, does not distract from the text."²² It is instructive to examine the ways in which a *mise-en-scène* sets out the text as it unfolds: whether or not it allows spectators time to be transported by it, to immerse themselves in

their own thought processes, to ponder, to draw closer or to withdraw, distancing themselves from the words.

Voicing the Text

The voice also provides valuable information for apprehending the emergence of meaning in the text. It should be the object of a psychological decoding (if it conveys situations drawn from ordinary communication); psychological analysis occurs quite naturally and provides information on the motivations of characters, particularly by means of analysis of paraverbal elements of communication. In addition, it gives a corporeal and material dimension to the text that is much more difficult to perceive than emotions and motivations. This materiality, the quality Barthes called "the grain of the voice," is the incarnation of the text in the body of the actors. An analysis of text delivered by actors requires a baring of their corporeal sensibility and an analysis of the effect produced on the spectator:

Reciting or singing in front of others entails showing them something of one's body; it also means discovering, in a flash, a given diffuse sensibility of our body. . . . The voice is bodily *matter*—preobjective *element* (quite unlike the objectivity of our ocular relation to the person and their capacity to represent themselves).²³

When the voice of an actor reaches us, the vocal *mise-en-scène* of the text has already occurred; the spectator receives a vocal copy of the text, so she does not have to activate it herself, as a reader does. It is this vocality, this concrete and personal signing of the message, that constitutes its originality and that analysis should endeavor to describe.

It is also useful to determine which of the resonators used are prioritized. It is a matter of sensing the part of the body from which words seem to arise, how the actor has controlled their emission and the ways in which their meaning and impact are affected by bodily postures. A standard diction exercise consists of corporeally displacing the point from which words emerge, varying one's posture, adjusting the meaning of words through the manner in which they are delivered; similarly spectators, receiving a text embodied by the actors, should try to imagine the impact of their physical enunciation on the production of meaning on stage and in the text.

Staging the Text

Kinesthetic Factors of the Text

The text articulated on stage can be felt in its vibratory quality, as if the text were able to trace in space-time the trajectory of its directions and moves; its intonatory and rhetorical schema is immediately figurable; a word to the wise is enough. Analysis focuses especially on the following particularities:

- The intonatory schema of sentences and speeches
- The mimo-posturo-verbal sequence, that is, the way in which the message moves imperceptibly from body to posture, and to voice.
- An enunciation's logical and rhetorical points of support, the sum of which constitute the actor's underscore
- The coloration and origin of the voice; where does the voice come from? Does it emanate from deep in the body and the breath, organically supported by the body as a whole? Or is it in fact a voice "prompted" (Finter) from outside, artificially grafted on to a body extraneous to its source?
- The "carriage" of the text (in the way one talks of the "carriage" of a head); the ways in which the text is carried are examined
- by a voice, an intonation, extended by a gesture, as if from a rocket launcher, or on the other hand held back within the speaker, spoken as an aside;
- toward the exterior or toward the interior; the speaker endeavors to reach the other, or keeps the meaning to herself, she speaks without projection;
- by means of the modalization of what is said in all its possible nuances: affirmative/negative, dubitative/assertive; the numerous modalities that are of a physical or kinesthetic order, rather than decorative or psychological;
- as a vocal or corporeal punctuation; verbal and gestural phrases require stopping points, pauses for clarification and figuration of structural relief; these provide contrast.

Text and Paraverbal Signs

Text needs to be considered in the light of how one hears and feels it evolve through systems of nonlinguistic signs. One should examine the effects of interaction and correspondence²⁴ between two or more systems. One must

ask why certain sign systems are traditionally (in productions of classic texts, for instance) at the service of others—as lighting and music are at the service of text and its maximal legibility in the case of the classics.²⁵ The desired effect is of insistence, confirmation, redundancy, or clarification.

Vectors of the Text

Texts have a distinct propensity to exploit their neighbors, to base themselves on them or amalgamate with them. For example, a text often relies on

- The conventional system of emotions and postures, that is, on the rhetoricization of the body (in the eighteenth century)
- The space, which structures and fixes the major reference points in outlining and establishing the score
- The general rhythmic pattern of the performance (in particular constituted by music, diction, the tempo-rhythm of physical actions)

Effects of Synchronization/Desynchronization

Between text and paraverbal elements, there is

- *synchronization* when each signifying system tends to coincide, in terms of its rhythm, with the others: a “symphonic” effect in which the part blends with the whole and reinforces its coherence;
- *desynchronization* when dissonances between rhythms are perceptible, particularly when one system is sufficiently strong not to assimilate with the others;
- an effect of *syncretism* when a sonic phenomenon and a visual phenomenon coincide. Syncretism, a word coined from the terms *synchronism* and *synthesis*, is “the irresistible and spontaneous conjunction or suture that is produced between a specific sonic phenomenon and a specific visual phenomenon when they occur at exactly the same time, in a way that is independent of all rational logic.”²⁶ This is the case in cinema (the focus of Chion’s description here), but also in theater when the text conjoins with a paraverbal phenomenon in an unexpected way: for example, when the repetition of a word or phrase (e.g., “le pauvre homme!” in *Tartuffe*) is the repeated signal to the speaker or his partners for some shared mimic action or stage business, for example, eyes raised to the sky (see chapter 4).

Double System for Perception/Codification/Memorization

The force (which is, above all, mnemotechnical) of these sudden conjunctures of text and paraverbal signs stems from a radical difference in nature between verbal and visual codes.

Visual codes are suitable for global, spatial, and synchronic information; several systems of visual signs can be perceived synchronically and synthetically in their spatial coexistence.

Verbal codes are subject to the spoken sequence, to an irreversible temporality; they are suitable not only for language and discourse, but also for the narrative structures of plot. Our perception of them is therefore successive, analytical, discriminatory, our memorization of them conceptual and abstract.

When a spectator “hears” a text articulated on stage, she is no longer in a position to dissociate it from her visual environment. So two kinds of codification and memorization come into play, with their different but complementary properties; as a result they consolidate the aesthetic experience and make analysis problematic insofar as it must dismantle what is one body.

Verbalization or Figurability?

In addition to the problem of analysis and of dissociating the verbal and the visual, a further difficulty lies in the difference between the mental decoding of visual signs into words and an ineffable aesthetic experience. According to psycholinguists,

from childhood, a human being is . . . accustomed to *mentally* decoding all denominational (verbal) signs. A “percept” is only effected when one gives a name, mentally, to any perceived object.²⁷

According to Simon Thorpe, when we leaf through a magazine full of images, we are able to “identify the majority of the images perceived, and also to find the verbal ‘labels’ necessary to describe them.”²⁸

But what about in theater? Evidently we are able to recognize all sorts of percepts on the stage that we could name. But this would be to confuse the stage with a fashion catalog, rather than attempting to bring these objects into relief by naming them systematically. In fact, we perceive all sorts of other materials that remain in the state of signifiers, forms and colors that disallow translation into words—the perception of which constitutes the spectator’s aesthetic experience. The stage and its images, music and its sounds, text and its vocality all resist any figurative recognition; they remain in the order of what Lyotard designated as *figural*.²⁹ Much contemporary stage work, for example physical theater, discourages any verbaliza-

tion, immersing the spectator within an ineffable experience. "Vectorization of desire" limits itself to referencing some of the transit points of the gaze and of spectatorial desire, without ever naming the proposed route or the zones it traverses. The unnameable is part of the plan.

The Text Treated Electronically

Nowadays, the text is not only processed by the actor's body, but also by the means afforded by electronic sound equipment. The voice can be "extracted" from the natural body of the actor, treated electroacoustically and reinserted into the body of the speaker with wholly different properties. In this way the relationship between body and word is destabilized, distorted, reworked, and yet maintained live. Processed in such a way, the text loses its stable identity, becoming a very plastic material that loses its central or primary position, and intertwines with other signs in the performance, thus becoming desublimated. Opening the way to all sorts of manipulations, the electronic text tends to abolish the distinction between language and music, between the arbitrariness of linguistic signs and the iconicity of visual signs, as well as between presence and absence, human being and object. The electronic text is infinitely manipulable; it can be reduplicated, extended spatially, its gaps filled with noises of all kinds, broken up and transmitted to various sources in the overall sound space of stage and auditorium.

Therefore it is the text/stage pairing, and above all the bonding of text and stage, that is challenged here. Not only must one get used to not deriving an entire performance from a text; one must also look closely at the ways in which a text *feels its way*, and sometimes gets lost and desperate, within the spatiotemporal elements of its configuration or installation on stage. The text creeps among these elements, resisting the fatal attraction of an actress's mimicry, of a place, or of an old story. It is a substance that insinuates itself everywhere, but that no longer commands or guarantees anything, a plastic material no closer to the source of meaning than any of the other stage components.

The principal difficulty of analyzing a text within a *mise-en-scène* is in not confusing the reading and the analysis we would make of it while reading, with reception and the impact it produces in the spectator. These are two different perspectives, which are obviously interconnected, but which

must remain distinct. Between text and stage, union and uniformity are impossible:

The union of text and stage, which is the primary aim of theater, in some ways goes against nature. It is only ever realized through compromises, partial and unstable balancing acts. Sometimes it is the stage that is subordinated to the text; a certain tradition in the West wants it that way. . . . Sometimes the text is submissive to the stage. . . ; such is the rule in all non-European traditions.³⁰

Evidently it would be quite wrong to deprive ourselves, in the analysis of text in performance, of the range of procedures for textual analysis that literary theory has refined over the centuries. The methodology proposed by Vinaver and his collaborators can serve as a starting point, but it must of necessity be verified and completed through a historical approach to texts.³¹

Each new stage practice changes the ways in which the dramatic text is treated. The current tendency is to separate text and stage radically, not to make the stage into a metaphor of the text, or one the match of the other, but to disconnect listening and sight; text and stage are no longer consubstantial, they are dissociated. The stage is no longer the site of the text's enunciation and actualization; it is no longer its metaphor, but its absolute alterity. One sees this in the work of Heiner Müller or Robert Wilson, where everything is done to make the *mise-en-scène* totally "foreign" to the text. Or, for example, in Tadeusz Kantor's work, where the actor plays with the text like a cat with a ball of wool, pulling back from it or drawing closer to it, juggling with the phonetics of words, making signifiers vibrate: the actor as "a mill to grind the text." The text no longer has to be represented, staged, made explicit, nor even, as in Meyerhold, divorced from the plasticity of the stage; it is in an entirely different universe where the endeavor is (as in Kantor's *Emballage Theatre*) "to telescope the body of the text with the theatrical body."³² Such telescoping problematizes all theory on the production of meaning and the relations between text and stage. At least until that time when the telescoping ends up repeating itself, and lays itself open to theory . . .