

SEVEN

The Spectator's Task

There are three kinds of readers: the first group enjoys without judgment; the third judges without enjoyment; the second judges with enjoyment: this is the group that, properly speaking, recreates the work of art.

Goethe, Letter to J. F. Rochlitz, June 13, 1819

The sense of my plays is immanent. You have to fish it out for yourself.

Berthold Brecht, *Brecht on Theater*

7.1. THE CURRENT STATE OF RESEARCH ON THEATRICAL RECEPTION

While distinguishing between the different kinds of reception, *analysis* (the theorist's descriptive/explanatory approach), and *reading* (the ordinary spectator's interpretive cooperation), I argued in chapter 3 that one of the tasks of analysis is to explain the rules and mechanisms underlying the processes of reading. I will now examine more closely how and to what extent the theoretical model of performance and theatrical communication that I have been constructing up to this point might be used to formulate a scientific analysis of theatrical reading, i.e., of the psycho-cognitive process that leads from the spectator's perception of the performance-text to his comprehension, interpretation, and memorization of that experience.

In the previous chapter I considered the spectator mainly as the target of theatrical manipulation, as the more or less passive object of the emotive and intellectual transformations that the performance tries to bring about. It is now time to look at the other side of the coin, by considering the spectator as the *subject* of theatrical interaction, as coproducer of the performance, the active creator of its meanings; in short, as the only producer of the semantic and communicative potential of the performance text. The theatrical relationship involves not only "persuasive action" (see Greimas) but also, and especially, I might add, the spectator's "interpretive action": an accumulation of perceptive, hermeneutic, evaluative, and, even more importantly, *experiential* activities, which my model can account for only to

a very small degree, as is obvious and appropriate. What I propose to do with the model in this case is to cast some light on some of the basic cognitive operations in the process of understanding the performance text. I will avoid dealing with the issue in a diachronic perspective, at least for the moment.

Before picking up the thread of my theoretical discussion, it would be useful to take a rather brief look at the current state of research on theatrical reception in various disciplines, as well as the most stimulating ideas on this topic from other research fields, such as linguistics and literature. The general shift toward the pragmatic and away from the structuralist approach, which has been evident over the past few years in the entire field of semiotic studies, has increasingly placed the receiver (listener, reader, spectator) and his practices of reception at the center of theoretical interest. In fact, this has produced much more limited results in theater semiotics than in other fields. Remaining within the scope of artistic studies, we know much more about literary, cinematic, or musical reception than about the activities of the theatrical spectator.

The claim may seem paradoxical, but despite its importance (or perhaps because of it), the spectator still remains a glaring "black hole" in semiotic studies of theater, and undoubtedly in pre-semiotic or non-semiotic studies also. The perceptive-interpretive processes of theatrical reception, except for a few partial exceptions that I will examine later,¹ have not been the object of adequate scientific attention up to this point. A science of theatrical reception that could be placed alongside Brecht's "art of the spectator" does not yet exist, nor does there seem any sign of its coming into existence. This does not mean that theorists do not mention the spectator. In fact, the spectator is mentioned all too often, but on other levels and for other purposes. Spectatorship is unfailingly present in every discussion *about* and *on* theater, and is often invoked in order to provide a basis and validation for arguments. Scholars theorize about what spectators *should* or *should not* do. For example, whether they should participate or stay detached, become involved or alienated, be critical and rational or yield to fantasy, be instructed or entertained, and so on. There are disputes about how performance *should* act on the spectator, whether it should act as an instrument of ideological persuasion or whether it should liberate or purify the emotions, and so on. What the spectator *actually* does while attending a performance and what action, or kind of action, the performance *really* carries out on the theatergoer are issues that have been neglected and continue to be neglected. We know almost nothing about all of this, except on an intuitive, prescientific basis.

Let us consider, for example, the theory and poetics of theater. From Aristotle to our own time reflection on theatrical spectatorship has mainly produced *proposals* of reception, more or less *prescriptive* models for the enjoyment of performance: from classical catharsis to Brechtian alienation, from Lessing's tragic "compassion" (*Mitleid*), to Artaud's concept of the-

ater as contagion or plague, and to the psychophysical involvement theorized in the early works of Grotowski. These are essentially dogmatic, normative hypotheses, a *poetics of spectatorship* (linked to and following from both to the poetics of theater and the poetics of acting) rather than descriptive, analytic hypotheses. As I have already said, they are more concerned with how the spectator *ought* to behave than on the *actual* behavior of audiences.²

This does not detract from the fact that many of these theories still retain a great deal of importance in my discussion for two kinds of reasons. In the first place, they concern intellectual and emotional dynamics that we know to be real because of our experience as spectators. More importantly, however, the widespread acceptance that many of these theories have enjoyed, or continue to enjoy (as the stable legacy of our theatrical culture, and indeed sometimes its very institutions), means that they influence the audience's expectations, understanding, and fruition of theater at various levels of awareness and in different historical periods. Theories of theater have thus often been transformed into *models of theatrical behavior*, and they are indispensable to historical studies of theatrical reception. For example, a scholar wishing to study the attitudes and tastes of a given aristocratic audience in France in the second half of the seventeenth century cannot proceed without a knowledge of such works as the Abbé d'Aubignac's *Pratique du théâtre* (1657) or Boileau's *Art poétique* (1674).³ In conclusion, although the aesthetics and poetics of spectatorship that come from traditional scholarly reflection on theater do not, generally speaking, constitute scientific theories of theatrical reception, they can contribute substantial information, ideas, and suggestions to the scientific analysis of reception.

With regard to more specifically scientific areas, apart from a certain number of rather dated historical studies (Mélèse 1934; Harbage 1941; Lough 1957; Descotes 1964),⁴ and the already classical psychoanalytical research on the primary processes underlying the phenomena of identification and illusion (see Freud 1905; Mannoni 1957; Mauron 1964),⁵ the most conspicuous contribution of research on audiences and their modes of reception has come from sociology. However, we are dealing mostly with empirical inquiries of a rather traditional kind, consisting in the statistical study—through interviews and questionnaires—of data regarding theater attendance, sociocultural and gender composition of audiences, their tastes and preferences (for example, Ravar and Anrieu 1964; Kaës 1965; Mann 1966, 1967; *Cahiers pédagogique* 94: 1970; Goodlad 1971; Holmström 1971; Coppieters 1981).

I do not wish to overemphasize this type of research. Generally these authors do not go beyond a simple, positivist statement of certain facts and their numerical quantification. Rarely do they attempt to interpret or explain the data they collect, by analyzing this information with the help of adequate theoretical instruments. I know of very few exceptions to this tendency. Among the exceptions, I must note Holm's interesting inquiry

(1972) into the reactions of the audience in a small Danish town to *Ferai*, a prestigious production by the Odin Teatret, one of the leading groups in international theatrical experimentation.⁶ I must also and above all mention Demarcy's 1973 study which tries to discover the reasons for the strong preference among French audiences during the 1960s for two very different types of theater—genres that seem at first glance completely opposite to each other—operetta and musical comedy on the one hand (popular, escapist entertainment) and classical theater on the other ("serious" high culture). It is very interesting that in moving from the statement of facts to the interpretation of their causes (and hence from the *audience* as an exclusively social entity in the eyes of the quantifying sociologist to the *spectator*, understood as a more complex anthropological entity, determined by ideological and psychological factors as well as sociocultural elements), Demarcy is obliged to use a wider range of theoretical tools, by drawing on semantics and semiotics. He thus enriches traditional content analysis with a more typically semiological deciphering of the theatrical languages and signifying systems brought into play by the two genres in question.⁷

What we thus find in studies on theatrical reception today is a blatant split between the normative tendencies of traditional theater studies relying on *a priori* principles and the shortsighted empiricism of sociological research. It is in the almost absolute void between the two levels that we must locate the semiotics of theater reception. This semiotics is of course still to be created, and will have the task of elaborating hypotheses and models to be verified through empirical tests and practical applications in a constant interaction between theory and experimental inquiry.

7.2. RESEARCH ON RECEPTION OUTSIDE OF THEATER

As I have already mentioned, for the past few years the issue of the receiver/addressee has occupied a central place in the disciplines (semiotically oriented or otherwise) that study aesthetic texts and their modes of production, from literature to cinema, from visual arts to television, to music.⁸ But the pragmatic approach is also especially prevalent in linguistics and textual semiotics, where it is implemented through the study of verbal texts and utterances in relation to their communicative context and to factors characterizing it.⁹

It would take too long to enumerate even the principal ideas that emerge from these numerous subdisciplines. I would like, however, to pause briefly to comment on two of these fields since they seem particularly interesting and progressive, and thus promise to provide useful theoretical support to the foundation of a semiotics of theatrical reception. I am referring first of all to the already vast body of work—both historical and theoretical—on "reception aesthetics," produced by what

is usually called the Konstanz school, from the university where its principal representatives are located, especially Hans R. Jauss and Wolfgang Iser, the leading lights of reception theory. Second, I would like to mention the interdisciplinary research produced by the longtime collaborative efforts of Teun A. van Dijk and Walter Kintsch on discourse comprehension (particularly literary discourse), involving a balance of theoretical inquiry and experimental proof through the combined use of textual grammar of a generative-transformational type and cognitive psychology.

Some important theories that are of a more narrowly semiotic type are associated with these two research trends. Often using different methods and tools, these theoretical processes have sometimes arrived at conclusions that are significantly similar regarding the issues of reading and the reader, such as the theories of *Rezeptionsästhetik* or discourse pragmatics. I am thinking especially of Eco's theoretical proposals on reading (1979), to which I have already referred several times in this work, but I could also cite Lotman (1970a), Segre (1974), Corti (1976), and Pagnini (1980), among others.

7.2.1. THE KONSTANZ SCHOOL AND "REZEPTIONSÄSTHETIK"

The research carried out by the Konstanz School, heir to the great German tradition of hermeneutics, focuses on the "public factor," or the relationship that links the literary work to the reader, and takes into account both the effect produced (*Wirkung*) and its reception (*Rezeption*):

A renewal of literary history demands the removal of the prejudices of historical objectivism and the grounding of the traditional aesthetics of production and representation in an aesthetics of reception and influence. The historicity of literature rests not on an organization of "literary facts" that is established *post festum*, but rather on the preceding experience of the literary work by its readers. (Jauss 20)

In 1967 Jauss wrote this in the first of seven theses presented in the now classic *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation* (translated as *Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory* [1982: 3-45]), which constitutes something like a manifesto for reception theory.¹⁰ In order to overcome the biases and reductive oppositions typical of the socio-Marxist approach on the one hand and the formalist-structuralist approach on the other, Jauss claims that it is necessary to relocate the *reader* at the center of the theory and history of literature. This reader is understood as a role and as a function, and is restored to a position that had been unfairly usurped by the writer (the producer) and the critic or professional reader (21).

With the intention of initiating an adequate categorization of the reader's aesthetic experience, removing it from the perils of excessively psychological or empirical approaches, Jauss takes up and develops in a systematic way (in the text from which I cite and in later studies) the notion of a *horizon of expectation* (*Erwartungshorizont*). Together with the complementary concepts of "horizon change" and "aesthetic distance," this notion constitutes one of the keys to Jauss's theory, and is added in order to re-

spond to the "question of knowing what data can be allowed to organize and integrate within a system of forms the effect produced by a specific work on a certain audience." According to Jauss:

A literary work, even when it appears to be new, does not present itself as something absolutely new in an informational vacuum, but predisposes its audience to a very specific kind of reception by announcements, overt and covert signals, familiar characteristics, or implicit allusions. . . . The psychic process in the reception of a text is, in the primary horizon of aesthetic experience, by no means only an arbitrary series of merely subjective impressions, but rather the carrying out of specific instructions in a process of directed perception, which can be comprehended according to its constitutive motivations and triggering signals, and which also can be described by a textual linguistics. . . . A corresponding process for the continuous establishing and altering of horizons also determines the relationship of the individual text to the succession of texts that forms the genre. The new text evokes for the reader (listener) the horizon of expectations and rules familiar from earlier texts, which are then varied, corrected, altered, or even just reproduced. Variation and correction determine the scope, whereas alteration and reproduction determine the borders of a genre-structure. (23)¹¹

I would like to point out that Jauss's statement on a work's *Erwartungshorizont* and its variations presents an interesting similarity to the hypothesis I expressed above in chapter 4—based on a different framework of theoretical references—regarding the conventions of the performance text (general, particular, and specific) and the dialectic creation/satisfaction/frustration of expectations linked to it. Besides, as the passage just cited demonstrates, Jauss (among other pioneers of the Konstanz school) has the merit of being one of the first to place the category of *genre* at the center of a theory of reception. By now genre is always more frequently indicated as a key category for the correct approach to the analysis of the mechanisms and modalities of textual comprehension.

I will avoid following Jauss into the more complex investigations to which he submitted the "horizon of expectations" after its initial formulation, taking into account the many objections raised against his views (see Priotto 1979: 158ff.; Segers 1978: 45-46). It is more important to note the fact that for Jauss—as is clear from the text cited above—a work has aesthetic value only when it provokes a *change of horizons* in the receiver, frustrating or exceeding his expectations, and only to the degree that this occurs. The value of a work is therefore measured by *aesthetic distance*, that is, by "the disparity between the given horizon of expectations and the appearance of a new work whose reception can result in a 'change of horizons' through negation of familiar experience" (25). When this disparity is minimal, or even nonexistent, the work is considered of little or no value (for example, kitsch, *Trivialliteratur*, mass-produced or escapist art).¹²

The other leader of the reception-theory movement is Wolfgang Iser, to whom we owe the concept of the *implied reader* (*implizite Leser*), which was also the title of the seminal work of the Konstanz school (Iser 1972). This notion has become widespread by now, also due to similar but indepen-

dent theoretical developments in other research areas of literary theory and textual semiotics. Iser arrives at a definition of this category through close theoretical reflection and applied research, on the process of reading (called "the act of reading" in his 1976 volume) and on the factors that determine it in the literary work and on the part of the receiver.

Iser sees the literary text as a *structure* that allows the reader to *generate* meanings, not as a vehicle through which a predetermined meaning can be "discovered" through interpretation. Reading (*Leservorgang*: the reading process) thus constitutes an *actualization, fulfillment, and materialization* of the text, which produces meanings. It is above all through its "gaps" (*Leerstellen*), its points of *indeterminacy* (the implied, the unsaid), that the text fulfills its own "offer of participation" to the reader. As Priotto points out: "it is through what is not explicitly formulated or what is presented in contradictory ways that the reader is obliged to participate in constructing the meaning of what he is reading" (1979: 111). Nevertheless, the reader is not entirely free in his active task of "completing" the text during the process of reading. The textual structures (e.g., narrative, rhetorical, stylistic, ideological) intervene to guide the process of "materialization," providing instructions or restrictions on the ways the gaps can be filled or the uncertainties clarified.

We thus arrive at the definition of the *implied reader* as the "role of the reader" constructed by (and inscribed in) the text: "The implied reader means the act of reading preestablished by the text":

This term incorporates both the pre-structuring of the *potential meaning* by the text, and the reader's actualization of this potential through the reading process. It refers to the *active* nature of this process—which will vary historically from one age to another—and not to a typology of possible readers. (1972: ET xii)

The implied reader is therefore a theoretical model that synthesizes the dialectical elements constituted by every concrete act of reading, every real relationship of text and reader. The freedom of the reader is indeed a relative or partial one. He can offer different "perspectives" in order to fill up the *Leerstellen* in the text. Yet he cannot randomly chose any perspective, but must limit himself to those that will fit in with the *overall point of view* provided by the work through its structures and through the implied or explicit clues that reveal them (Iser 1976). The implied reader is therefore the Model Reader (to use Eco's 1979 term) who, while valuing the guidance offered in advance by the text, actualizes it semantically according to perspectives that are immanent to it and manifest through its structures.¹³

7.2.2. T. A. VAN DIJK AND W. KINTSCH:

THE COGNITIVE PROCESSES OF DISCOURSE COMPREHENSION

As I have already mentioned, T. A. van Dijk, a linguist and literary theorist, and W. Kintsch, a cognitive psychologist, began their fruitful collaborative research in the mid-1970s pursuing the goal of formulating and providing

models of the rules that govern the cognitive processes of the reader/listener in the reception/comprehension/memorization/paraphrasing of verbal texts, both written and oral, by means of theoretical speculation and empirical testing. Their basic theoretical hypotheses are as follows:

(1) What is imagined in memory corresponds to the macrostructure of the text, accompanied by some propositions of the microstructure subordinated to the categories of the macrostructure. In retrieving its memory [*rappel*] subjects utilize the macrostructure as an index of the recovering propositional information about the details of the text. Summaries or condensed versions directly reflect the macrostructure. (2) In order to understand stories, subjects must have at their disposal a classical narrative schema that belongs to their general awareness. (3) The construction of a macrostructure is a necessary element in comprehension. From it follows that macrostructures are established during reading rather than at the moment in which the story is remembered or summarized. (van Dijk and Kintsch 1975: 106-107)

At this point I will not go into the empirical investigations undertaken by the authors with the aim of proving (and possibly rejecting or correcting) their initial theoretical statements.¹⁴ Rather, I would like to point out immediately some interesting points of contact that they share with the theoretical positions of "reception aesthetics" examined in the previous section. One of the central hypotheses of van Dijk and Kintsch—amply supported by their experiments and developed in publications subsequent to the work cited here¹⁵—is the central role played in discourse reception (of a literary or nonliterary kind) by the co-textual and contextual elements that relate a certain discursive occurrence to a certain class of texts, or text type, and which are part of the reader's general knowledge (or, more precisely, his intertextual competence). These elements are literary frames, narrative structures (which van Dijk refers to elsewhere as "schematic superstructures" [1979b]), pragmatic frames (concerning the contexts and circumstances in which a given text may recur), metatextual signals of genre (title, subtitle, and the like).

These are the clues (referring as a whole to genre in the widest and least prescriptive semantic-pragmatic meaning of the term) that direct the subject's reception to a given text, inducing a specific cognitive attitude. I will have the opportunity to return to these issues later, in reference to the performance text.¹⁶

7.3. THE MODEL SPECTATOR: "CLOSED" SPECTATORS AND "OPEN" SPECTATORS

There seem to be two principal arguments that constitute points of agreement in the various trends in reception theory that I have examined or simply mentioned in the previous pages (and I have already anticipated these in my discussion).

(a) The study of the reception of aesthetic texts (and, more generally, of

all texts) should be developed on two very distinct and basic levels (though it is possible eventually to identify connections between them): (i) the intratextual level of the *implied receiver* (whether this receiver is termed "ideal," "virtual," "model," or "hypothetical"),¹⁷ understood as a textual strategy, an interpretive path variously inscribed within the text (see Iser 1972 and 1976 and Eco 1979, to which I will make particular reference in this section); (ii) the extratextual level of the *real (empirical) receiver* and the reading strategies really activated in the interpretation of the text—obviously, this is the only receptive level that can be investigated in an experimental way. I must point out that up to now the real receiver has received much less attention than deserved. While Segers is convinced that "the real reader is much more important to reception theorists than the categories of the ideal and implied reader, which are both rather hypothetical constructions" (1978: 52), Coste is obliged to admit that "the empirical reader . . . is not normally included in hermeneutic models of literary communication. . . . On the contrary, he goes beyond the models, constantly threatening their integrity" (1980: 362, 356).¹⁸

(b) By supplying the receiver with intertextual schemas and systems of expectation, *genre* (in its widely accepted analytical and descriptive meaning as a "class of texts with specific co-textual and/or contextual traits in common") plays a crucial role in the process of textual comprehension and interpretation (and also, of course, in the process of textual *evaluation*, as Segers points out [*ibid.*]). In order to be understood and interpreted correctly, every textual event must be (and in fact always is) related back to a genre, to a broader intertextual backdrop, on the basis of co-textual and contextual signals or clues which are more or less explicitly supplied by the text itself. Obviously, this holds true both in the case of the hypothetically implied receiver and in the case of the real addressee.

In the following pages I will work with this twofold scheme while attempting to utilize my model of the performance text in order to create a way of categorizing some aspects of theatrical reception. Naturally, in extrapolating these concepts from the literary and linguistic field, one must, as always, bear in mind the particular traits of the performance text and its communication, which stands out primarily for the collective character of its reception, hence for the physical copresence of sender and receiver and the consequently dynamic nature of their interaction. In theatrical interaction, as in everyday interactions, communicative roles are not rigidly predetermined but are subjected to a continual definition and structuring, negotiated in the course of the performance *in* and *with* the sign-actions that it produces.

Beginning with the first question, I would argue that in the case of theater it is both possible and necessary to distinguish two levels of reception: the intratextual and the extratextual level. I will now propose the Model Spectator (analogous to Eco's "Model Reader" [1979]), quite distinct from the empirical extratextual spectator, and understood, by contrast, as a strategy of interpretive cooperation foreseen by, and variously inscribed in,

the performance text (like a "guideline for reading"). In other words, the Model Spectator represents the entire set of "felicity conditions" that must be satisfied in order for the performance text to be completely realized as a linguistic macro-act.¹⁹ In referring to the literary (narrative) text, Eco made an observation that can be extended *mutatis mutandis* to the case of the performance text:

A text postulates its own addressee as an indispensable condition not only of its own concrete communicative capacity but also of its own signifying potential. *A text is a product whose interpretive fortune must be a part of its own generative mechanism. . . .* To organize his own textual strategy an author must refer to a series of competencies (a more inclusive expression than "knowledge of the codes") which confer content on the expressions that he uses. He must assume that the entire set of competencies to which he refers are the same as those referred to by the reader. Therefore he will foresee a Model Reader capable of cooperating in the textual production as the author thought, and moving interpretively the way he moved in generating the text. (52-53)

Clearly, then, the Model Spectator is both *implied*, since inscribed in the performance text, and *ideal*, since imagined as possessing the greatest possible competence. Only in the case of the Model Spectator can the conditions of *complete communication* be fulfilled—which I have described as impossible on the level of real reception (6.2.)—thanks to the complete equality between the competence of the sender and the competence of the receiver. Because this is so, it is still true that, according to my theoretical framework, the Model Spectator's competence does not include the knowledge of the *single* conventions (and codes) on which a theatrical occurrence is *always* based (to some degree). But we must suppose (since this is what postulates the spectator as the Model) that his encyclopedic and intertextual knowledge is such that he is easily capable of identifying new codes through a series of correct abductive inferences, on the basis of the co-textual and contextual suggestions of the performance text. Indeed, more precisely, the Model Spectator is one who *recognizes* all the codes of the performance text in question, reconstructing the entire structure of the performance text in the way that is textually proposed by the sender: his reading is therefore a *pertinent reading* par excellence (see 3.4.).

The fact that my Model Spectator is something other than the empirical spectator is so obvious as to need no further emphasis. We are dealing with entities that are theoretically completely distinct. It is equally obvious that they do not coincide even in practice (except in very rare cases, and even then, not for all the members of the audience). Let us take the case of deserted, contested, or boycotted performances, which I will mention at greater length later. Or let us consider the consequences for the performance text of audience responses that are the very opposite of what is hoped for: laughter instead of tears, distance instead of involvement (or vice versa: see Brecht), skepticism or even rejection instead of the desired

acceptance, and so on. The difference between the expected result and the actual result is in fact what creates the dynamic nature of theatrical communication. Not only communication roles and acts but also the meanings of the performance and the effects of their meanings must be negotiated. In theater, far more than elsewhere, "comprehension does not mean mirroring but mutual definition" (Fabbri and Sbis 1980: 182).

But the really important issue lies elsewhere. If the necessity of not confusing the Model Spectator and the empirical spectator is accepted by everyone, the hypothesis that these two entities (or more accurately, their respective protocols as receivers) are somehow related to each other is an equally acceptable one (and is in fact widely supported). This hypothesis brings us back to the characterization of theatrical reception (just like almost any other kind of aesthetic fruition) in terms of an interpretive activity whose freedom is limited by the restrictions of the performance (to varying degrees according to each case), by the "filter" that the performance text uses to prevent a theoretically infinite proliferation of readings through the conditioning exercised by its codes and by the textual structure of the performance in which these codes are organized.

But what kind of relationship can be postulated between the intratextual level of implied reception and the extratextual level of empirical reception, while remaining within the theoretical framework that I have constructed? Could we think of the Model Spectator as a "model of spectatorship"? Transcending word games, this would mean the spectator is a theoretical construct capable of clarifying the rules and invariables subtending the hermeneutical activities of the real spectator, and categorizing them in an adequate way. The performance text not only presupposes a competence but also contributes to its production: it *institutes* it. The Model Spectator's competence is nothing other than the idealized competence of the empirical spectator. In this sense, it would perhaps be more correct to speak of a theoretical spectator, or more precisely of a *metaspectator*, i.e., a metalinguistic construction used by the analyst to study the concrete processes of reception. This is the metaspectator that is intended in the hypotheses elaborated in the following sections, where I will discuss the constitutive factors of the comprehension and interpretation of the performance text.

For the moment I will return to the Model Spectator. Continuing to draw on Eco's observations (57-58), it is possible to hypothesize a textual typology situated between the extremes of *closed/open*, according to the modes in which the performance text foresees and "constructs" the Model Spectator(s).²⁰

(A) "*Closed*" performances. These are performances that predict specific addressee, requiring definite kinds of competence for their "correct" interpretation: theater for children, psychodrama, propaganda theater, feminist theater, gay theater, religious theater, vaudeville, curtain raisers, rituals of trance and possession, folk festivals, and the like. Obviously, in these cases, everything works well provided that the spectator truly corresponds

to the one imagined and reacts in the predicted manner. It is very different however when a "closed" performance is attended by spectators very different from the model desired. Consider, for example, the behavior of an adult at a show intended for children, or an intolerant bigot watching a curtain raiser that is somewhat *risqué*, or the reactions of a politically hostile spectator during an agitprop performance, or the reaction of an atheistic spectator at a religious ceremony who, in the very best of circumstances, will only enjoy the event as pure spectacle. Perhaps Eco is correct when he makes the following claim while deliberately playing with the paradox:

The text goes from being "closed" and repressive to wide open. It becomes a machine for generating perverse adventures. . . . Its openness is the effect of an external cue, a way of using the text, not of being gently used by it. (58)

(B) "Open" works. At the opposite pole—though I have already said that we are dealing with the theoretical extremes of a nuanced continuum—we find the kinds of performance intended to reach a fairly nonspecific addressee who is not too narrowly defined from the encyclopedic, intertextual, and ideological standpoint. In short, a performance is "open" when the senders do not foresee a rigidly predetermined interpretive process as a requirement for their success, but allow the audience a variable margin of freedom deciding up to what point they can control the cooperation, "where it is triggered, where it is directed, and where it must be transformed into a free interpretive adventure" (Eco 58). The reference to avant-garde theater and experimental theater in its various forms from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present seems obvious. It is also obvious that the deliberate "openness" of a dada performance at the Café Voltaire in Zurich in the second decade of the century seemed much more provocative than, for example, a piece of "image-theater" (by Ricci, Perlini, or Nanni) in the basement theaters of Rome in the 1960s and 1970s. I think it is more interesting to remember how the practice of leaving a great deal of interpretive freedom to the audience by avoiding a rigidly predetermined insistence on one or more ways of reading constitutes the norm in many non-Western theatrical traditions. The classical theater of India, Kathakali, Balinese dance, or Noh and Kabuki theater generally provide for many, sometimes a great many, levels of comprehension and enjoyment, all equally legitimate or "pertinent" even if all are not of the same depth and importance, since all of them grasp an element that is actually present in the performance, allowing in return a range of emotional response or intellectual enrichment.²¹

In the *Natya-Sastra*, the already mentioned poetics of classical Indian theater, this multiplicity of levels of fruition is the topic of exemplary theorizing:

[*Natya-Sastra*] teaches duty to those who have no sense of duty, love to those who are eager for its fulfillment; and it chastises those who are ill-bred or unruly, and promotes self-restraint in those who are undisciplined. It gives cour-

age to cowards, energy to heroic persons, enlightens men of poor intellect, and gives wisdom to the learned. It gives diversion to kings, and firmness (of mind) to persons who are afflicted with sorrow, and (hints on acquiring) wealth to those who are earning it, and brings composure to persons agitated in mind. (Cited in Ghosh 1967: xxxiv)

As Manomohan Ghosh, the editor of the *Natya-Sastra*, rightly observes, the ancient author does not wish to claim that a drama must or can please all kinds of people indiscriminately. He wishes to point out instead the many different ways that dramatic performances "can attract a multitude of spectators." E. Kalidasa expresses the same opinion on the versatility of the ideal drama, commenting that "the drama is to provide satisfaction in one [place] to people who may differ a great deal as regards their tastes" (cited in Ghosh xxxv).

The example of the *Natya-Sastra* and the theater of India is also important since it obliges us to note that around this second pole of "open" texts we find works that not only are of a different type, as is obvious, but also require very divergent procedures of interpretive cooperation, thus establishing extremely diversified relationships with their audiences. In particular, it seems that the notion of "openness" subsumes (see Eco *ibid.*) two phenomena that should perhaps be better differentiated.

(i) On the one hand, there are avant-garde and experimental texts (for the sake of approximation I am obliged to use labels), where "openness"—meaning a high level of indeterminacy and non-rigid, predetermined ways of reading—does *not* result in an actual *broadening* of the number and kind of desired readers, but a more or less drastic *reduction* of readers. This is because the reader's cooperation is called into play to fill the text's "gaps." In this way the successful actualization of the text's signifying and communicative potential requires a series of encyclopedic, intertextual, and ideological kinds of competence that are far from standard. In this sense, Eco is correct when he insinuates that there is actually nothing more closed than an "open" work. Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*, one of the most open works that could be named, by virtue of the great amount of work that its very numerous *Leerstellen* imposes on the reader, limits in a drastic way the number and kind of readers capable of successfully cooperating in its interpretation. In the same way, *si parva licet . . .*, a performance by Carrozzone/Magazzini Criminali, the experimental group in Florence, especially during its second period, extending from *The Garden of the Split Paths* (1976) to *Views of Port Said* (1977) and *A Confidential Relationship* (1978), can only be understood by an audience with a solid competence in this genre, accustomed to regular attendance at experimental theater and visual art events of the 1960s and hence capable of deciphering the rich network of references and citations (Wilson, Foreman, Gina Pane, Chris Burden, body art, rock music, and so on) that allow the group's work to be understood in depth, by grasping its metatheatrical, interdisciplinary character.

(ii) On the other hand, there are also texts whose openness on the interpretive plane corresponds to an *actual* openness on the concrete level of

reception, meaning a *real* widening of the category of the "authorized" reader, or permitted and compatible readings. In theater, as well as in the non-Western examples given above, there are many examples in current theatrical trends (Brook, Grotowski, Barba, Wilson). Turning again to the example of ancient Indian drama, this art form was conceived in such a way as to allow all spectators to find legitimacy in what they found personally most interesting, yet without causing the drama to be misused or misunderstood:

Young people like to see (the representation) of love, the learned a reference to some (religious or philosophical) doctrine, the seekers after money to the topic of wealth, and the passionless to the topics of liberation. Heroic persons are always pleased in the Odious and Terrible Sentiments, personal combats and battles, and the old in Puranic legends, and tales of virtue. And common women, children, and uncultured persons are always delighted with the Comic Sentiment and remarkable costumes and makeup. (Cited in Ghosh xxxv)

On the basis of the theory of the *bhava* and the *rasa*, which I mentioned in 6.4., this means that each spectator, according to individual taste, moods, and cultural levels, will seek a particular emotion (*bhava*) and the corresponding sentiment or "flavor" (*rasa*) in a performance text that is conceived specifically to allow a range of possibilities of reception, each of them involving different kinds of competence, issues, and needs. Although it is true that not all of these approaches have equal dignity or importance (as the Hindu writer reminds us),²² it is also true (to use Eco's distinction) that we are still dealing with *textual interpretations* and not presumed *uses*.

7.4. THEATRICAL COMPETENCE

The study of theatrical reception at the extratextual level of the real spectator requires serious, systematic, empirical investigation that transcends the aims of the current volume, as well as my actual competence in this area. Hence in the following pages I will work in a different direction. As already announced, I will limit myself to examining to what extent and in what way the performance text model enables us to elaborate a theoretical perspective for analyzing reception processes in theater.²³

To begin, it would be useful to recapitulate and develop the insights that have been anticipated from time to time in the course of this study regarding the comprehension and interpretation of the performance text and the different kinds of competence involved in theatrical interaction on the part of the sender and the addressee. We must, in fact, start (again) with the very concept of *theatrical competence* itself. Referring back to Chomsky (1965), we could now define it as the *sum total of knowledge, rules, and skills that account for the ability to produce performance texts as well as the ability to understand them*. We are, in fact, dealing with a *kind of textual competence*²⁴

involving not only a knowledge of the performance text's conventions and codes, but also many other things: circumstantial competence, rules of co-textual and contextual inference, and so forth. We could thus characterize it more correctly and comprehensively as *communicative competence* (Habermas 1970; Hymes 1972; Schmidt 1973; Zuanelli Sonino 1981). I will have more to say about this later. For the moment, I must emphasize instead that in the case of the performance text (as in the case of any semiotic text), *productive* and *receptive* competence cannot be placed on the same level. Even more importantly, they should not be identified with each other, as most of Chomsky's idealizations would tend to do in the case of language. They are placed instead at the starting point of two processes, the "generation" of the performance text on the one hand and its reception on the other. These two processes can never be considered symmetrical or capable of mirroring each other (except, of course, in the case of the Model Spectator).

As I have already stated repeatedly, if the disparity between the codes of the sender and the receiver, along with the ensuing disparity in competence between the two, could be said to represent a constitutive characteristic of each textual communication, it increases to a considerable extent in the case of very "complex" semiotic texts (multi-coded, multidimensional, or multimedia) such as performance texts, which, in addition, are, as we now know, always grounded to some degree on *specific* codes and conventions that are "invented." These can never be decoded, but are inferred abductively on the basis of co-textual and contextual information on the one hand and encyclopedic knowledge on the other. Comprehension of the performance text cannot therefore be reduced to a mechanical process of decoding, but implies a series of several connected procedures of textual interpretation, in which pragmatic, contextual factors also play a very relevant part, influencing the direction of the spectator's cognitive, axiological attitudes.

I should also state that, even in the case of the performance texts, one of the basic assumptions of linguistics and textual semiotics also holds true:

Comprehension of a discourse (of a text) is not the mechanical outcome of comprehending the individual sentences that constitute it. Comprehension must be studied at the discourse level, even if it cannot do without what happens *on the local level*, in relation to each individual sentence. (Lumbelli, in Casetti, Lumbelli, and Wolf 1978: 42)

The performance text is a complex discursive unit, a whole that is hierarchically superior to the sum of its parts (partial texts, fragments of performance, and so on), just as the textual structure of performance is always something more, something other than the sum of the organizing, "transforming" codes. Ultimately, we could say that theatrical performance addresses a collective addressee, usually undifferentiated from the sociocultural, and hence ideological, standpoint. This addressee is thus endowed with widely divergent competence, which conditions modes of fruition

("naive," "educated," "scientific," "ordinary," "original," and so on), levels of comprehension, and standards of evaluation.

This general premise touches upon three points that I will now examine separately in a more complex way: (i) the differences and lack of symmetry between the sender's competence and the addressee's competence; (ii) what constitutes the spectator's (ideal) competence; (iii) the variations that can really occur in the latter, and which are to a great extent attributable to sociocultural factors.

7.4.1.

In order to properly integrate what I have already said about the first problem, I should add immediately that the distinction between a productive theatrical competence and a receptive theatrical competence is not based only on the (incomplete) coincidence of codes (on differences of knowledge as well as in the other forms of knowledge contained in them: presuppositions, values, beliefs, and the like), but is also founded above all on the already mentioned dissociation between *knowledge* and *use* of the codes themselves. As we have seen in 6.2., the former does not imply the latter and is sufficient on its own to ensure (at least) partial comprehension, and hence communication. The fact that people know (and decipher) codes they are not capable of actively using is quite a normal circumstance in everyday experience. In the case of theater (though the argument could also probably apply to any artistic practice from literature to music, and particularly to the visual arts), this dissociation becomes more marked since we are dealing with specialized technical rules, difficult to use, and requiring training that is not simply cultural in the narrow sense, such as the rules of acting, with its language of mime and gesture, or the rules observed by the stage designer or the musician. Generally we understand these (in varying degrees, of course), but we are not capable of practicing them actively just because of this: at least, not in the same way or the same degree. Following Labov's sociolinguistic model, we should thus distinguish clearly between *active theatrical competence*, proper to senders, which is the result of the sum of knowledge + use, and which accounts for the capacity to produce performance texts,²⁵ and *passive theatrical competence*, proper to the addressee, the audience, which accounts instead for the capacity to understand, interpret, and evaluate performance texts in the first place by deciphering underlying codes and conventions.²⁶

It should be clear that the active/passive distinction must not be taken as absolute and unchangeable. Apart from the semiotic reasons given above, this distinction can also be explained by historical and sociocultural factors. In Western culture, for example, the professional separation of the roles of producer (creator) and user (audience) was rigidly codified, disallowing their interchangeability, and thus delegating permanently to a limited number of individuals within a given community the active use of certain codes and productive rules that are inaccessible through ordinary cultural acquisition.²⁷

In conclusion, I must repeat that from both the standpoint of the sender (director, writer, actors, technicians) and the addressee, knowledge of theatrical codes and conventions can present different degrees of difficulty, varying between a tacit, intuitive (nontheoretical) awareness and a very explicit, rational (theoretical) awareness. Yet, while emphasizing that the theoretical is a *graduated concept* including a wide range of degrees, for the sake of convenience I would define the kinds of active and passive competence that are proper to both poles of theatrical communication as *nontheoretical*, in contrast with the *marked theoretical quality proper (by definition) to the competence of the critical analyst*.²⁸

7.4.2.

I will now examine the elements that constitute the spectator's passive (non-theoretical) competence.²⁹ In this case also I will develop ideas that have already been mentioned several times in the course of this study.

We must first draw a distinction between *encyclopedic* and the more narrowly defined *intertextual competence* within the spectator's overall competence. I use this distinction to separate the kind of historical and nonhistorical competence relative to nontheatrical aesthetic texts or extra-aesthetic cultural units (located within encyclopedic competence along with more general kinds of knowledge, beliefs, and value systems) and the kind of knowledge acquired from previous experiences of other performance texts, or from other kinds of contact with the world of theater (historical information, etc.). Obviously, even the kinds of knowledge that are located in the encyclopedias ultimately represent a kind of intertextual knowledge, since these, too, are relative to (or derived from) texts.³⁰ Those kinds of awareness that I call /intertextual/ are intertextual only in the strictest sense, i.e., "internal" to theatrical competence (or culture) in the common understanding of the term. Hence the utility of making a distinction in theoretical metalanguage between the two components that are nevertheless intimately interwoven in the cognitive-perceptive processes of theatrical reception.³¹

So far, I have argued basically that it is the spectator's competence that explains his capacity to perceive, understand, or evaluate the performance text, in the first place by correctly deciphering the underlying productive rules. But there are many different processes subtending the comprehension of performance, and only serious, properly founded empirical research can bring them to light, revealing their interconnections and dominant traits. Nevertheless, with respect to my theoretical model, two operations involving the spectator's competence are especially crucial and indispensable: those linked to the capacity to (a) recognize a theatrical performance as such, distinguishing it from other types of aesthetic texts or from real life (informal gatherings, interpersonal reactions, or the like), and to (b) relate the performance text in question to a wider class, identifying its theatrical type or genre of origin.

We are dealing with two *preliminary* cognitive operations in theatrical reception. In fact, the spectator has access to an adequate comprehension

of the performance text only if these operations are properly carried out. In other words, these represent the "conditions of felicity" for the discursive functioning of performance, for the proper actualization of its semantic and communicative potential. The first of these operations (*recognition* of the theatrical event as such) is made possible through knowledge of the *general conventions*, that is, the rules that furnish the distinctive traits of the *theatrical frame* or, more precisely, the traits of the frame called "theatrical representation" or "theatrical fiction" (see above, 4.6.1.).³² We could therefore apply the term *general competence* to the "sector" of receptive competence in which these conventions are deposited, and which thus accounts for the spectator's ability to actuate this preliminary recognition, linking the performance text in question to the macro-genre of /theatrical performance/ through over-coding. On the other hand, the second operation (the recognition of the subgenre or textual type to which the performance text belongs) presupposes a *particular competence* (or *competence of genre*) that is constituted above all by intertextual knowledge, relative to what I called *particular conventions* in 4.6.2., and whose principal category involves the rules of genre (hence the possibility of metonymically equating particular competence with genre competence, in line with the commonly used terminology).³³ Genre competence enables the spectator to distinguish between various classes of texts within the macro-genre performance text, and allows him to assign different theatrical occurrences to these classes. The spectator is thus in a position to judge how the specific event is appropriate to the type, and can simultaneously draw inferences by activating predictive hypotheses and interpretive schemes through appropriate intertextual scenarios.

If these preliminary operations involved in the recognition of the performance text are unsuccessful, or only partially successful, this can be attributed to "defects" in the respective components of receptive competence. For example, if a lack in general competence causes the "naive" spectator to believe that the fictional events and imaginary characters in a play are real, conversely, a similar lack of competence can cause another spectator to assume as fictitious (or at least to interpret according to the laws of representational theater) real, "literal" (in Grotowski's term) actions, objects, and events that are often presented rather than represented, produced rather than reproduced, on the stage (in keeping with a long-standing custom).

Nevertheless, apart from encyclopedic and intertextual competence, information from the spectator's co-text and context plays a fundamental role in this basic dual process, along with the inferences that can be drawn by the audience.³⁴ As in the second example cited above, the rules of genre are sometimes at odds with the general conventions—for example, in a happening, an animation show, a street act, a folk festival, or a sports event. In these cases, co-textual information and, above all, contextual information (relative to the pragmatic specificity of the performance text: the spatiotemporal circumstances of utterance, and the like) allow the spectator with ad-

equate genre competence to recognize the performance text in question as theatrical, through a more or less radical reformulation of the frame, and at the same time to interpret it correctly outside the representational conventions of dramatic fiction.

More precisely, the use of contextual knowledge and information is always necessary for a performance text to be recognized as theatrical, insofar as it can be assigned to the class of theatrical performance. In fact, our general conventions not only do not apply to *all* possible theatrical events, but, as I have already said, they are not even specific "to the greatest degree," in the sense that they apply not only to theater but to other artistic practices which, like theater, are founded on representation and visual *mise-en-scène*, including cinema, television, and painting. Therefore receptive competence must involve rules that permit the theatrical spectator to achieve an adequate evaluation of the co-textual traits of the performance text and above all the contextual traits relative to the modalities of the text's enunciation—(1) real, physical copresence of sender and addressee and (2) simultaneity of production and communication—in order to be able to distinguish between a theatrical event and a television show or film (usually based on the same representational conventions) on the basis of the information that can be inferred from these traits, without, on the other hand, confusing the event with everyday life.

I will postpone for the moment a more detailed description of the role played by the pragmatic context in assigning a performance text to a particular genre as well as in the decision of appropriateness that must be made in this process. In the meantime, I would like to state that the importance of co-textual and contextual knowledge (and the inferences that can be drawn from these) immediately becomes crucial in the case of very innovative, original performance texts, founded to a large degree on *individual conventions*, which, as such, are not located within the range of the spectator's competence and consequently transcend his horizon of expectation. In these cases, comprehension of the performance is based not on the knowledge of general or particular rules but on the abductive work of under-coding, consisting in the *ad hoc* elaboration of intertextual-encyclopedic inferences on the one hand and co-textual/contextual inferences on the other.

To conclude on this point for the moment, it is clear from what has been said above that we must include in the spectator's competence a *contextual component* (it could be called /contextual competence/ or /pragmatic competence/), primarily consisting of rules of inference and circumstantial interpretation (Hymes 1972: 233ff.), along with the textual component (general and particular). As we have just seen, this component should take into account the spectator's ability to evaluate the data provided by his co-text and context, activating the knowledge of general and particular competence pertinent and useful to the goal of recognizing the performance text as such, distinguishing its genre, and, as a result, comprehending it appropriately. As the product of both a textual component and a contextual

component, theatrical competence must therefore be more appropriately conceived as *communicative competence*.

7.4.3.

We now come to the third problem: the issue of sociocultural variables in the spectator's competence. On this subject, it is clear that by using the term /particular competence/ in the singular, I am resorting to a theoretical abstraction. Indeed, in the reality of productive-receptive processes this is fragmented into an infinite multiplicity of particular kinds of competence, at least as many kinds as there are genres and other classes of performance texts, e.g., the works of a particular director, actor, historical period, a geographical area, artistic movement, and so on. Moreover, the category /spectator's competence/ as an *overall competence* is itself an idealization which serves, as I have said, to account for given abilities possessed by the theatrical addressee, but which must never be understood as a concrete, unified, or homogeneous entity. It is fairly easy to see that quite significant variations can intervene within the range of competence of a particular theatrical audience. These variations can also explain how there are very noticeable differences in levels of comprehension and evaluation (*partial competence*). It would be less easy to begin to account for these variations by studying experimentally the relationship that occurs in the spectator's reception between encyclopedic knowledge and genre competence on the one hand and the relationship between genre competence and sociocultural background on the other hand (Ryan 1979). It might be very useful in this regard to take into account Labov's hypotheses (1972) on *community competence*, conceived as a highly heterogeneous entity distinct from the *kinds of individual competence* with variable rules that circulate within it.³⁵

7.5. THEATRICAL GENRE AS
A TEXTUAL TYPE

As already seen in the previous section, I must completely corroborate a conviction that has surfaced throughout this volume. Genre (understood both as macro-genre, the entire class of theatrical performances, and, above all, as subgenre or textual type: the theatrical "genre" in the narrow sense, but not only in this sense) plays a crucial role in the receptive and interpretive process of the performance text, as well, of course, as in its production. I can now articulate the hypothesis that the identification of genre (the text type, in Schmidt's term [1977]) is a cognitive operation indispensable to the comprehension of a given performance text, or to its full semantic and communicative actualization. Only after having recognized the occurrence in question as theatrical and having assigned it to a given subclass of performance text³⁶ can the spectator cooperate in the way(s) "foreséen" by the text, (a) activating pertinent systems of expectation (*Erwartungshorizont*), (b) correctly choosing the possible world of reference, (c) selecting the appropriate (common and intertextual) frames, (d) assuming

adequate cognitive dispositions, and (e) making grounded judgments of acceptability and appropriateness. As Hirsch has said on literary interpretation:

The interpreter has to make a guess about the kind of meaning he confronts, since without this guess he possesses no way of grounding and unifying his transient encounters with details. . . . A generic conception is not simply a tool that can be discarded once understanding is attained, because . . . *understanding itself is genre-bound*. The generic conception serves both a heuristic and a constitutive function. . . . For if correct understanding has in fact been achieved, and if understanding is genre-bound, it follows that *verbal meaning must be genre-bound as well*.³⁷ (1967: 78, emphasis added)

It should be clear, however, as I have already repeatedly stated, that genre can become the key concept in a theory of reception, bringing together all the cognitive operations just listed, only on condition that the term is no longer understood in the traditionally *restrictive, normative* sense (in relation to socially institutionalized and historically inherited discursive groupings: tragedy, comedy, melodrama, farce, mime, dance, circus, and so on) and is used instead in the *descriptive* sense to mean *any class of texts possessing (to different degrees and with varying frequency) common co-textual and/or contextual traits*. The *co-textual traits* are obviously those that involve semantic sub-universes and specific thematic repertoires on the one hand (tragic, comic, sentimental, historical, political, imaginary, and so on) and characteristic styles and means of expression on the other (realistic, naturalistic, symbolic, abstract, expressionistic; verbal, gestural, scenographic, musical, and so on). By *contextual traits* are meant the aspects that concern the communicative situation and its components (time and location of the act of utterance, type of concrete relationship between performance and spectator, type of "serious" linguistic acts conveyed by the performance text).³⁸ The term /theatrical genre/ will thus be applied to every (large, small, or very small) subclass of performance texts delimited or delimitable in this way within the class or macro-genre /theatrical performance/. Hence even the historically institutionalized genres will be described as theatrical genres, along with, for example, (a) the work of a particular director or company, (b) the theatrical works of a particular artistic tendency or experimental trend, (c) different productions of the same play, (d) the theatrical productions of a particular cultural-geographical area or historical period, and the like.³⁹

This is why I say (and what I mean when I say) that any performance text, not only the so-called genre performance, is *always* attributable (and is attributed, in fact, through the reception process) to a genre, that it is always readable (and is read) based on the kind of competence activated by that genre. To make this claim is to assert that every performance, apart from being identifiable as such (that is, as belonging to the macro-genre performance text), is always part of some other textual class (which can be a traditional "genre" or simply the plays of a director or actor), and that it

is always received and interpreted in relation to an intertextual backdrop of this kind, whether broad or narrow. This also holds true for particularly innovative and original performance texts, produced mainly through "invention" and governed to a very great extent by specific conventions, placed *ex novo* within the performance itself.⁴⁰

It is already clear that there are two basic differences between my notion of theatrical genre and the traditional concept, allowing me to assimilate it into the category of textual type: (a) its descriptive rather than prescriptive character and (b) its identification with every possible subclass of the performance text macro-genre. The first difference does not require further explanation, since a rejection of all normative attitudes in favor of descriptive, explanatory models is the constitutive condition of the analytic approach (and of any other scientific approach). Nevertheless, the generalization of the concept implied in the second point necessitates some further clarification in order to elucidate its theoretical legitimacy and practical usefulness.

The main reason for my proposed broadening of the category of genre can be found in the modalities underlying the real processes of theatrical reception. It is indeed possible to take into account phenomena that are widely felt in our common experience as theatergoers (in addition to our experience as scholars of theater) only if we admit that receptive competence (especially in the component described above as *particular competence* or *genre competence*) includes knowledge, rules, and intertextual scenarios that involve other classes or groups of performance texts (of very different dimensions), as well as institutionally denominated genres.⁴¹ Conversely, I could not explain the differences in the protocols of reading (cognitive dispositions, expectations, focus, presuppositions) employed by the spectator watching a play by Grotowski, a performance of Balinese theater, a production by the Piccolo Teatro di Milano, or a performance by one of the basic groups at the Santarcangelo Festival. We are dealing with deliberately chosen examples of performance texts that do not belong to a "genre" in the traditionally narrow sense of the term, and yet they can all be perceived as related to other performance texts (and indeed they are thus perceived by the audience, as is easily verified), and therefore to particular textual subclasses or textual types, on the basis of numerous, recurrent, and more or less explicit *co-textual* clues (specific semantic sub-universes, characteristic expressive stylemes, and the like) and/or *contextual* clues (circumstances of utterance, and the like). Using appropriate codes and frames, the spectator will interpret these performance texts against the intertextual backdrop of the genre to which they belong.

Balinese theater cannot be considered a true genre in the proper sense (if anything it is a group of genres), but there is no doubt that it includes a huge class of performance texts with a great many common traits that recur very frequently (from magic tales represented on stage, to the kinds of gesture and dance used, along with trance-states and repetitive music), since we are indeed dealing with a highly coded theatrical tradition. The spectator, or at least the "competent" spectator, has certain expectations and calls

to mind certain kinds of knowledge just because of the fact that he is about to attend a performance of Balinese theater. Yet approximately the same thing happens when we attend a production by the Piccolo Teatro di Milano. In this case the traits that define the class are probably vaguer, less numerous, and less frequent,⁴² and nevertheless we expect certain things rather than others from that splendid theater, whether the production is directed by Giorgio Strehler or not. We expect, for example, certain plays (the "classics": Brecht, Pirandello, Shakespeare, Goldoni), a style of stage design (which never exceeds the limits of a careful, well-produced "director's theater"), a recognizable acting style (academic, professional, yet imaginative). The Piccolo Teatro's productions are not a genre, but they undoubtedly possess a recognizable "manner." This fact is borne out when people complain that a production does not live up to the theater's characteristic standards, which, in fact, rarely happens.

I would nevertheless like to make clear that the performance text is always inevitably related by the audience to a broader textual class, even if this sometimes involves error. In some cases it is only on the basis of contextual clues, such as those relative to the theater's location, that the identification is made. Leaving out other similarities that almost always exist, the simple fact that these performances are staged in the same way, in the town square and in the open air (as happened with the performances at the Santarcangelo Festival in 1977 and 1980), allows the audience to draw a connection between very different performances, creating common cognitive dispositions and focus, quite distinct from the reactions provoked in an audience attending a production in the red velvet decor of a nineteenth-century theater.

To recapitulate, the theatrical genre as it has been traditionally understood foresees and institutes a competence that operates in a way that is completely similar to the competence related to other groups of performance texts, both large and small. Hence the motive for broadening the description of the category in question.

Furthermore, we should remember that in theater more than elsewhere,⁴³ traditional genres tend to disappear (the terms "tragedy," "comedy," and "drama" are no longer taken into account in theatrical work) and the new genres that are introduced are, as a rule, weakly coded, since they are founded on "elastic" grammars, with ever-widening boundaries of acceptability and appropriateness, if indeed they are not based on a trans-genre hybridization of rules and expressive media (as in the post-avant-garde).

7.6. PRAGMATIC ASPECTS OF THEATRICAL GENRES

Once it has been identified with every possible subclass of performance texts, theatrical genre can be defined, as we have seen, by a co-textual and contextual *group of traits*, relating on the one hand to the level of specific semantic fields and characteristic forms of expression and on the other hand to the communicative situation, or what I have called the "perfor-

mance context." Nevertheless, as can be seen even in the examples given earlier, all of these traits cannot be placed on the same level. More precisely, those relating to the performance context have a much greater importance in the definition of the textual genre and above all in its reception/interpretation. I must therefore partially modify my previous definition and invoke a *hierarchy of traits* where the contextual-pragmatic clues play a major part in comparison to other clues, both in the case of recognizing a theatrical occurrence and in evaluating its appropriateness.

Recent research in the field of textual semiotics also seems to be heading in this direction. For example, when van Dijk describes the nature of the "ritual linguistic act" which he claims is proper to literary discourse, he makes the following assertion:

In other words, the contextual restraints of ritual communication induce a specific cognitive set in the reader. This cognitive set will determine the ways in which the text is analyzed and interpreted. (1979a: 153)

Mauro Wolf, on the other hand, describes televisual communication in the following way:

The recognizability of genre by receivers could be defined more by traits of pragmatic appropriateness than judgments of grammatical acceptability: *there are no strong genres* (since all genres are strong) *but there are strong infractions of genre*. What "makes the text" for the receiver is the context.⁴⁴ (Casetti, Lumbelli, Wolf 36)

Even in cases of genre communication that is much more standardized and serialized than theatrical communication (mass literature, television programs, and the like), these hypotheses can be used in their essence, as is also true in the case of theatrical genre-types. I can thus argue that it is above all based on the pragmatic (performance) context that the performance text is recognized as belonging to a given genre, and can thus be evaluated in relation to it (genre expectations, horizon of expectation, and so on).

It should be clear that this holds true both in recognizing the theatrical performance as such (that is, as a member of the performance-text macro-class) and in identifying the genre to which it belongs (subclass of the performance text). In the first case, the pragmatic context (with its specific elements relative to the sender, the addressee, the place and time of utterance, and so on) directs the cognitive disposition of the spectator, enabling him to interpret the current situation as "theatrical" (thanks to the rules of his general competence), while distinguishing it from real-life interactions, and, at the same time, from other forms of fiction and artistic representation without those pragmatic requirements (physical copresence of sender and addressee; simultaneity of production and communication). And it is always the performance text's pragmatic situation (with its vast array of macro-genre and subgenre signals) that activates what I have called contextual or circumstantial competence. The pragmatic situation also makes it possible for the spectator to recognize as a theatrical event one that temporarily "parenthesizes" the

representational conventions, so to speak (a happening, for example, or one of Grotowski's "paratheatrical" shows).

In order to develop a pragmatic model of the performance text which might put to use the general schema elaborated by Wunderlich for verbal communication, both written and oral (see Wunderlich 1971), I must first examine more closely the identity and functions of the implicit and explicit *contextual signals of genre* which are linked to the circumstances of the performance utterance, and which, in addition to facilitating the recognition of the performance text as theatrical, activate in the spectator the competence necessary to identify its genre, and consequently to interpret it.

Clearly, these are inquiries to be carried out in relation to concrete discursive events. For the moment, I will limit myself to mentioning what seems like the most important and quantitatively most conspicuous category of these signals. I am alluding to the *genre labels* that function as genuine "instructions for use" for the receiver. We are dealing with contextual clues such as the name of the author, the director, or the actors, the characteristics of the performance site (traditional theater, basement, hangar, church, town square), etc., or signs that are more properly metatextual, such as the title and especially the subtitle of the performance text.⁴⁵ Many of these genre labels are contained in the so-called *paratexts*, or in the texts that precede, accompany, or follow the performance text: playbills, posters, and other forms of publicity, theater programs, newspaper write-ups and reviews, and the like. Wolf, who uses the term "parasitic texts" to describe these objects, makes the following observation:

[Parasitic texts function] to predispose the spectator (and hence a reading, an attitude, an interpretation, an understanding) to the genre. Expectations and indications of genre are frequent and centrally placed in the "paratext," working like isotopic agents. From the standpoint of the receivers' genre competence, the pragmatic specifications relative to the context . . . and the "paratext" thus play the role of "encapsulating" the text within precise, recurrent "opportunities." They prepare the ground for the text's recognizability. (34)

Naturally, among the contextual clues available to the spectator in his capacity to recognize the genre of the performance text, I must also mention the behavior and reactions of other members of the audience, who not only stimulate similar reactions but often constitute a valuable source of information on the performance text, the class it belongs to, and hence the psycho-cognitive attitudes that are to be assumed in relation to it, the schemata to be adopted before seeing it, and so on.

7.7. AVANT-GARDE THEATER AS METALINGUISTIC MANIPULATION OF THE PERFORMANCE CONTEXT

In the previous sections I was able to evaluate the importance assumed by the pragmatic situation of the performance text, with its specific character-

istic components, in the recognition and in the interpretation of the theatrical occurrence against the backdrop of the textual class to which the particular text belongs. It seems appropriate at this point to suppose that the provocative and disorienting effects that have been produced on the "average" spectator⁴⁶ over the past hundred years by so-called avant-garde theater with its most recent (and already involuted) experimental offshoots, resulting, as is well known, in aberrant decoding or rejections, can be explained at least in part as the result of the *metalinguistic manipulation* operated by the senders against the pragmatic marks of performance (genre labels, paratexts, etc.) and the relative expectations of the audience. Naturally, this is not to underrate the (conflicting) role in the relationship between avant-garde and audience that "defects" in receptive competence have always played, along with co-textual factors linked to the semantic and syntactical complexity of works based on code *inventions* rather than code *executions*. Examples of cases where general conventions are violated can be found in theatrical or other artistic experiments which deliberately play on the relationship between truth and falsity, the natural and the artificial, the real and the simulated. These works present *real* events, actions, and objects (really constructing something; for example, the real wall built in real time by Remondi and Caporossi in *Cottimisti* [1977]; genuinely acting on the human body, wounding it, secreting fluids, accomplishing difficult feats; for example, performances of body art; bringing live animals on stage, and so on) to a spectator, who—on the basis of the pragmatic situation (/we are in a theater, or at any rate in a place where artistic practices are occurring, since playbills, posters, and newspaper articles have confirmed this/), and the resulting inferences of his "average" competence (/therefore those who act are actors, or at least artists who are *pretending* to . . . who are *imitating* . . . /)—expects simulation and artifice, not reality.⁴⁷

As for the transgression of particular conventions and the falsification of relative contextual clues, we know, for example, that contemporary experimental theater has been attempting for years to transcend traditional genres, both theatrical and nontheatrical, as well as to mingle interdisciplinary languages: not only dramatic acting, dance, mime, music, singing, and poetry, but also painting, cinema, and photography. This provokes varied effects of disorientation and rejection (and continues to have the same effect today, when the phenomenon has become fashionable) even among a well-educated audience, obviously still attached to the "specific," and to the rigid separation between the so-called arts.⁴⁸ I will now examine some of the pragmatic-semiotic reasons for this phenomenon of "defective" reception. (a) On the basis of contextual clues, especially paratextual clues (characteristics of the place where the event takes place; the title and subtitle of the work, which may have been written by a famous playwright), the spectator may expect to see a play, the staging of a work by a classical author, let us say, and instead he finds himself faced with something very different, which he will therefore judge as completely inappropriate or even unrecognizable as "theater." Consider, for example, the per-

formance of a set of actions, images, and sounds, where the written text has almost completely disappeared or has become utterly contorted, at least on the literal level (as happened with the already famous 1970 production of *King Lear* by Mario Ricci, or, more recently, with Carmelo Bene's "metarepresentational" productions of Shakespeare: his 1975 *Hamlet*, 1976 *Romeo and Juliet*, 1977 *Richard the Third*, and 1978 *Othello*). (b) On the basis of clues of the same kind, a spectator attends a dance performance (for example, the show organized by the National Theater in Milan in the fall of 1979) expecting to see ballet, and is utterly bewildered and outraged (as happened to many seasoned audience members) to find instead the postmodern dance display staged by Lucinda Childs and Carolyn Carlson. This performance had nothing to do with the conventions of classical ballet or even of modern ballet, and aimed at completely contrasting effects, by rejecting the restraints of controlled movement and by adopting an entirely improvised, haphazard style. (c) On other occasions the disorientation is caused above all by the title. We might consider the example of the audience about to attend the already mentioned *Edison* by Wilson, expecting a play on the life of the famous scientist. These individuals would be disappointed, since, as is well known, in Wilson's work Edison's name functions only as a pretext, an initial tease, an extremely general field of cultural/anthropological reference for a fascinating and ironic exploration of the contemporary American imaginary, in the same way as the names of other famous people functioned in his previous works: Stalin, Freud, Queen Victoria, allowing the educated audience member to be forewarned. Leaving the world of theater, a similar example can be found in the case of Marco Ferreri's film *Dillinger Is Dead*.⁴⁹

7.8. GRAMMATICALITY, ACCEPTABILITY, AND APPROPRIATENESS OF THE PERFORMANCE TEXT

What has been clarified up to this point allows us to formulate some observations on the question of the "grammar" and "rules" of the performance text. This question is probably unresolvable and is thus destined to lead only to aporia if stated in reference to theater *as a whole*, that is, to the entire macro-class of the performance text. I propose to begin with the following three hypotheses. (1) It is possible to speak of the grammatical rules of the performance text only in reference to given genres, to specific subclasses of the performance text, and not in reference to the entire performance text supergenre. (2) The problem of the rules of genre should not be approached, at least as far as the receiver is concerned, from the standpoint of *grammaticality* (which is abstract and absolute), but from the standpoint of actual *acceptability*, or, more precisely, pragmatic acceptability, or *appropriateness*. This is the category that evaluates the suitability of a given text in relation to a specific communicative context, and to the fulfillment of specific goals, both illocutionary and perlocutionary (Ferrara 1977: 65ff.; La

Porta 1979: 256).⁵⁰ (3) Judgments of appropriateness are "graduated," as Ferrara has pointed out:

Failing to fulfill one of the conditions does not always lead to the complete failure of the linguistic act. Appropriateness is a problem of degree. We should thus construct a scale of appropriateness . . . ranging from "total inappropriateness" to the superficial anomalies of linguistic acts. (60)

If we enlarge the category of the /pragmatic context/ in order to include within it genre or the textual subclass⁵¹ in addition to the communicative situation, as seems possible and correct, then the hypotheses expressed in (1) and (2) will coincide, at least in part, and can be assumed as a point of departure for a contextual grammar of the performance text.

I would like above all to stress that in the case of theater, though not only in this case, judgments of grammaticality and acceptability can be formulated, and are formulated, only in relation to smaller groups or classes of performance texts and their conventions—historically institutionalized genres, the theatrical productions of a given era, a stylistic movement, an author's work, and so on—rather than in relation to the macro-genre of all theatrical performances.⁵²

Returning to the issue of misunderstanding and rejection briefly examined in 7.7., I would now like to define these as judgments of inappropriateness formulated in an inappropriate manner, meaning on the basis of an improper evaluation of the communicative situation (and related signals, probably manipulated with the purpose of deceiving by provoking false expectations) and on the resulting, erroneous identification of genre. A "performance" staged by Meredith Monk (*Education of a Girl Child* [1972/73], *Quarry* [1976], *Recent Ruins* [1979]) will appear incongruous and ungrammatical if compared to genres such as ballet, opera, or drama (an inappropriate comparison, even if it is made through erroneous contextual deciphering: /we are in a theater, therefore . . . /, /we are dealing with a dance performance, therefore . . . /). To evaluate and enjoy it in a different and more appropriate way, the spectator must bear in mind the kind of "interdisciplinary" experimentation on voice and gesture underlying this type of performance, thus reading it against the background of pertinent artistic trends and experiments: new dance, postmodern dance, repetitive music, the theatrical work of Wilson and Foreman.⁵³

I could, however, supply an infinite number of examples on the practical nature of judgments on theatrical grammaticality, if I take into account the different meanings previously included in the definition of /context/. It is well known that what constitutes a "good" movement in mime (brusque and jerky [*saccade*], or slow and continuous [*fondue*]) is not good movement in the case of classical ballet, which is based mainly on the *ressort*, that is, on an unbroken, fluid, elastic movement, marked by a strong, upward thrust (*élévation*), at least according to Decroux (1963: Italian translation in De Marinis 1980a: 87ff.). Also taking into consideration the variations that occur from time to time (another type of context, another possible class of

text) even in over-coded genres such as ballet, we can see that the "romantic" style of the great nineteenth-century interpreters (like Taglioni, for example) is no longer tolerated in contemporary ballet, as the result of major innovations wrought in the early part of this century by dancers and choreographers such as Diaghilev, Fokine, Massine, and Nijinsky.⁵⁴

As for the circumstances of utterance, it is obvious that theatrical occurrences that are acceptable in the specific context proper to them (*street* acts, *marketplace* theater, and the like) would be judged, and are indeed judged, as completely inappropriate in different spatiotemporal circumstances, such as on the stage of a traditional Italian theater where certain rules of academic acting "must" be observed (hence the enduringly provocative power of Carmelo Bene's work, which functions as a profane transgression of the locations sacred to theatrical tradition).

There is also the context provided by particular artistic tendencies or by the works of a director or theatrical company. An audience will not readily tolerate actors speaking incessantly, as they would in a *pièce bien fait*, when attending performances that belong to experimental trends that privilege imagery and nonverbal elements. Hence the disappointment often provoked by the recent re-introduction of words into the works of the leading lights of the "theater of the body," such as the Living Theater, or, in a different way, Wilson's work. This means that even in an environment dedicated to breaking tradition (including the work of Wilson and the Living Theater, as well as that of Foreman, Barba, Monk, and others, in different ways), and above all committed to the interdisciplinary contamination of genres, it is nevertheless possible to find invariable features, recurrent traits (both on the co-textual and contextual level), ways of functioning that bring together performances by the same author or the same tendency, creating certain kinds of competence, and stimulating certain expectations and preconceptions. People in fact say /a Living-Theater style of performance/, or /the Living Theater isn't what it used to be/ (in reference to a scene in Toller's *Mass Man* [1979], for example), thus revealing an understanding of these works as a "genre" based on rather precise rules, which when broken can lead to disappointment and bewilderment.

At this juncture someone might object: To the extent that this volume has elaborated a definition of /theatrical performance/ and established the minimal requirements for a performance text (coherence and completeness), has it not offered *absolute* criteria of grammaticality, and hence does it not facilitate the discovery of actual errors in theatrical events independently of the issues of acceptability and appropriateness? The answer is no, and for the following reasons. First, the two pragmatic requirements for the definition of /theatrical performance/ provided in 2.2., even if interpreted as rules of production, do not offer criteria of grammaticality but only *criteria of recognizability*. If a discursive event does not meet the two conditions of (1) coincidence of production and communication and (2) the real, physical copresence of sender and addressee, it cannot be assigned to the class /theatrical performance/.⁵⁵ This means that on the basis of these

two principles one cannot judge if a theatrical performance is "ungrammatical" or not, but only if a given artistic occurrence does or does not constitute a theatrical performance, and is recognizable as such.

Regarding the requirements of coherence and completeness, we must instead bear in mind that these do not concern the theatrical performance as a concrete object but only the performance text as its theoretical model.⁵⁶ The verification of coherence and completeness aids the capacity to recognize a performance as a text, thus assuming it as the object of textual analysis, not in order to judge its grammaticality as a concrete object. An "incoherent" performance is not necessarily a textually ungrammatical performance. Only the communicative context and the class to which the text belongs are decisive in this regard, as can be seen in the case of "happenings" and performance art, but also in the case of popular vaudeville shows. Not to mention the rather important fact that a text's coherence and completeness both depend to a large extent on pragmatic operations carried out by the receiver (see 2.3.2.). Even in the case of variously "incoherent" and often hard-to-define occurrences like a street act or a Wilson performance piece, it is always possible for the receiver to circumscribe a complete text and to assign some level of coherence to it. In the case of the example just cited, this would happen by discovering the performative hyperphrase underlying the work as its motivation, project, and theoretical premise (see the concept of "motivational paraphrase" in Segre [1979]), or by distinguishing the overall macro-speech act with its relative pragmatic goal.

To conclude, I think that in the case of theatrical performance it is not possible to speak of any kind of grammaticality that does not mean appropriateness to the pragmatic context and to the genre in relation to which performance is always inevitably received. I would be tempted to say that the distinction made by linguists between *grammatical competence* relative to the knowledge of morphology and semantics of language and a *pragmatic competence* which "determines the appropriate use of linguistic objects within the framework of human institutions" (Chomsky, cited in Scalise 1979: 337) can be overruled in the case of theater in favor of the latter term. *No competence in theatrical experience exists apart from pragmatic competence, for both senders and addressees.*

Having said this, I should add however that the *margins of acceptability* vary quite considerably from case to case. This means that there are genres (in the usual meaning of the term) that prescribe in a rigid way the criteria for judging the appropriateness of one of their occurrences and genres that conversely set very wide boundaries. Strong genres or very strong genres belong to the first kind, which, through no coincidence, all belong to a particular tradition, such as melodramatic opera, academic ballet, puppet theater, some circus "turns," Kathakali, and Noh theater. At the opposite pole we find a large number of contemporary experimental trends (post- and trans-avant-garde, group theater, new dance, and so on) which, as we know, usually work against specifics, against institutionalized genres,

through the metalinguistic manipulation and systematic transgression of their rules. In the middle we find a multiform historical and contemporary phenomenology, where a systematic approach, carried out on these foundations, should succeed in creating more detailed typologies. But this is a task that transcends the limits imposed by the present chapter. I wish only to observe in conclusion that today the overall tendency in theater, as in all artistic practices, seems to be one of progressive enlargement of the margins of acceptability, through the increasingly less-rigid application of rules and conventions both in the productive phase as well as in the act of interpretation.