

active, individual subject, not the member of an audience-as-community; his project is to "challenge the opposition between viewing and acting": "viewing," he argues, "is also an action" (13), and "being a spectator is not some passive condition that we should transform into activity. It is our normal situation" (17). Ultimately, this version of spectatorship is concerned with the limits of (semiotic) representation itself: for Rancière, sometimes a spectacle is just a spectacle.

3 Disseminations

In 2008 Yana Meerzon edited a special issue of the journal *Semiotica* that set out "to reevaluate the relevance and the possibilities of semiotic approaches to performance and drama analysis, theatre criticism and performance studies today" (1). In her invitation to contributors, she asked them to consider, as a starting point, Keir Elam's "Post'-Script" to his 2002 second edition of *The Semiotics of Drama and Theatre*, in which Elam noted that, while semiotics – "in its structuralist guise" (194) – "has long lost its cultural pre-eminence" (193), it nevertheless subtends many of the theoretical approaches that appear to have superseded it. Elam finds in many of these approaches what he calls "a closet semiotics" (195), and traces the afterlife of semiotics in work that is haunted by the semiotic approach, but dare not, as it were, speak its name.

Elam focuses his "post-script" around various "posts," including the post-structuralist, organized into four categories: reactions to the semiotic approach (in the British press and British and American professional theatre, largely negative); institutionalizations (in guides, dictionaries, and academic institutions); extensions (in late-coming translations and new publications, notably feminist ones); and disseminations, which he refers to as "the 'post'-semiotic diaspora of the sign" (215).

It is this last category that I wish to pursue here in a way that Elam doesn't, considering what I think of as "critical intersections" between semiotics and other practices, many of which claim to have superseded it but which, as Sylvíja Jestrović argues, with Elam, are "grounded in a suppressed semiotic approach" (Jestrović 95). I have addressed many of the critiques of semiotics and continuities between semiotics

and one branch of poststructuralist thought, deconstruction, in Chapter 1 – and indeed, as time passes the continuities seem increasingly prominent, to the degree that the two are now frequently lumped together: “Semiotics,” as Janelle Reinelt summarizes it, “provides a means of articulating the production of meaning-in-performance, while deconstruction provides purpose or motive (the dismantling of usually operative logics of interpretation)” (“Introduction” 113). Other disseminations and intersections can usefully be divided into two types, which Reinelt refers to as “libidinal investments” and “materiality” (“Performance” 8), and which I call the *phenomenological* (including theories of affect and cognition) and the *materialist* (including feminist, new historicist, cultural materialist, postcolonialist, and intercultural).

Phenomenology and its doubles

Phenomenology itself (understood as the study of the direct encounter of human consciousness with the phenomenal world or, in theatre studies, with what's on stage) has sometimes been seen as the anti-representational polar opposite of semiotics, but the two approaches now tend to be seen as complementary, “different aspects that often occur simultaneously in the process of creation and reception necessitating a combined methodological approach” (Jestrovic 95). As we've seen in Chapter 2, above, this observation is not entirely new; indeed, Jan Mukařovský of the Prague School semioticians resisted the view that everything ostended to the view of the audience was totally subsumed in its sign value, and in more recent years theatre phenomenologist Bert States interrupted the rush to semiotic analysis to make the same point. According to States, “The problem with semiotics is that in addressing theater as a system of codes it necessarily dissects the perceptual impression theater makes on the spectator. [...] When the critic posits a division in the art image, he [sic]

may be saying something about language, but he is no longer talking about art, or at least about the affective power of art” (*Great Reckonings* 7). It is “the affective power” of art that I address in this section.

The phenomenology of theatre is partly about the “showness” of the show (and the “thingness” of the things in it), and partly about the perception of the spectator and her direct, purportedly unmediated encounter with it – though this lack of mediation is a theoretical ideal rather than a practical possibility. Initially at least it is less about meaning than about the experience of a human subject encountering its object. As such, phenomenology can be understood to claim *precedence*, insofar as it claims, or tries, to account for that encounter as it happens (as if) for the first time. As Patrice Pavis argues, while this encounter with “thingness” – the body-to-body encounter of the audience with the performance's materiality – should be sustained as long as possible in order to allow the “libidinal” aesthetic experience to be fully absorbed and the consciousness to be “impressed” by that materiality (*Analyzing* 19), that same materiality, together with its “eventness,” inevitably “evaporates into an immaterial signified” (18). When Nora frenetically rehearses the tarantella in the second act of Ibsen's *A Doll House*, the spectator may initially be startled into seeing the character, and the dance, afresh, as if for the first time, in a way that seems to exceed interpretation. Eventually, however, the experience dwindles into meaning (or what Nicholas Ridout calls “the grave that is semiotics” (104)), though it is manifestly read differently by each of the characters on stage and by the audience. What is clear is that phenomenology and semiology, in the first instance, agree about the materiality of the signifier.

As a critical or analytical approach, Bert O. States has described phenomenology as an *attitude* (“the phenomenological attitude”) that is fundamentally personal, accepting, impressionist, and *mimetic* – even tautological. As an *attitude*, then, it is distinct from what Fernando de Toro calls “semiotic

or dramatic light cues that may prepare us for the moment. *Emotion* is the identification of our physiological responses as having added up to excitement, or fear.

These concepts are useful in themselves as tools for understanding how audiences respond physically and (then) emotionally to action in the theatre; they are also extremely useful in understanding the *structuring* of the theatrical event through inciting and releasing tension, elongating and compressing time, and shaping the sequencing of events through successive affective states. Hurley also provides some important conceptual tools that serve to address the analysis of feeling in the theatre, chiefly the idea of "feeling labour" ("theatre's solicitation, management, and display of feelings" (4)) and "feeling technologies" ("mechanisms that do something with feeling" (28)).

Clearly affect, in Hurley's sense, is closest to the immediacy that phenomenology most values and that most sets it apart from semiotics. Emotion, however, inflects the semiotic in interesting ways, partly because it is explicitly interpretative ("I reacted like that because I care about this"), and partly because, like meanings, emotions are relational (20). "Emotion" Hurley argues, "takes us out of ourselves by taking subjective experiences and inserting them into a social context of meaning and relation" (21). Hurley's technologies of feeling – language, plot, scenography, acting, character – are also the (complementary) technologies of meaning production. At its best, affect theory can bring to semiotics the capacity to mediate between the intensely personal and the social, and can motivate the study of meaning by demonstrating that, and perhaps why, it matters to us.

Hurley spends a significant portion of her short book worrying away at a subject that underpins her enterprise but about which she is clearly ambivalent and which is unacknowledged in the book's index: the relationship between affect theory and cognitive science (though the index does list *neuroscience*, an important distinction that I suspect is

thinking" (123, emphasis added), which is fundamentally social, analytical, and translational, abstracting (and therefore distancing) meaning from experience and translating it into the terms of another discourse. As such – as attitude versus thought – the two approaches may be understood to be less hostile than complementary, or even to be sequential technologies for describing the theatrical event, in which (as Pavis suggests) encounter precedes analysis. As Joseph Roach says, "working together [phenomenology and semiotics] provide a kind of binocular vision: phenomenology sees the stage as direct experience ('everything is nothing but itself'); semiotics sees it as wholly significative ('everything is something else')" (354).

What phenomenology brings to semiotics is a combination of immediacy, an awareness of actors and audience members as perceiving bodies (see Garner, *Bodied Spaces* 49), and a valuing of the thingness of things on stage (including bodies), that in taking on their roles as signs are always nevertheless capable of exceeding their sign value. The physiological thrill of the immediate phenomenological encounter of perceiving bodies has provided the impetus for an "affective turn" in theatre and performance as in other studies (Clough). Erin Hurley distinguishes among three types of "feeling" in the theatre: affect ("immediate," "uncontrollable," "skin-level" "muscular and/or glandular responses" (13)); emotion ("an act of interpretation of bodily responses" (19)); and mood ("background states that raise or lower our susceptibility to emotional stimuli" (21, quoting Evans 68)). *Affect* is the thrill that rushes through the body when, in Hurley's example, the high-wire artist at Cirque du Soleil's 2007 show *KOOZÁ* appears to slip and (almost!) fall ("our hearts race, our pupils dilate, and goose pimples rise" (Hurley 12)). (This affect, unfortunately, is now heightened in the wake of actual accidents at Cirque shows in Las Vegas in June and November of 2013 that caused the death of one performer and the hospitalization of another.) *Mood* is the feeling produced by any anticipatory drum rolls, silences,

the source of her ambivalence). "Cognitive Science" is a field and an administrative unit in the academy dominated by philosophers and psychologists that is sometimes regarded with scepticism by neuro- and other "hard" scientists. This is also an area that the contributors to Meerzon's special Theatre and Drama issue of *Semiotica* advocate putting into conversation with a newly interdisciplinary semiotics, and again, it has links to phenomenology, with which, "with its emphasis on empathic and emotional engagement" it has much in common (McConachie and Hart 6). Michael Sidnell cites Neal Bruss on the material, organic, "bio-semiotic" origins of psychoanalytic theory (Sidnell 28; Bruss) and applies these to role playing in theatre practice. Semiotics also has a once and future branch in medical diagnosis and an on-going life in biological science, as the wide influence of the work of biosemiotician Jakob von Uexküll would suggest, and as an important recent book on semiotic biology edited by Claus Emmeche and Kalevi Kull and subtitled "Life is the Action of Signs" demonstrates. Its introduction acknowledges "the relatedness of linguistic (Saussurean) semiotics and biological structuralism" (Kull, Emmeche, and Hoffmeyer 8), and its contributors draw heavily on Peircean semiotics throughout.

This semiotic turn in the biological sciences would seem to call into question the claims by some proponents of the cognitive turn in theatre studies that science somehow disproves the errors of semiotics (and with it poststructuralism) as "unscientific" (McConachie, *Theatre* 57), failing to pass the test of "empirical falsifiability" (McConachie, "Falsifiable"). According to some, cognitive science has "proven" that meaning *precedes* language in the individual brain rather than being constituted by and through language, and that therefore direct, psychophysical connections can be made between the bodies of performers and those of spectators, unmediated by conditioning or social context. Claims are also made that cognitive science has proven false Saussure's

dictum that the relationship between the material signifier and signified as mental image is arbitrary, though I would suggest that all it has demonstrated is iconicity: some signs resemble their referents. And indeed theatre semiotician Eli Rozik has drawn significantly on the discoveries of cognitive neuroscience around "metaphoric thinking" and the brain's capacity to think imagistically as ways of exploring the workings of stage iconicity (Rozik, *Metaphoric* 3-4 and *passim*).

In the excesses of its still early days, some proponents of a cognitive science approach to theatre studies seem to replicate the excessive claims of the early days of semiotics itself, which Saussure initially proposed as a "science *which studies the role of signs as part of social life*" (Saussure 15, emphasis in original), offering an objective correction to the "errors" of earlier linguistic studies (4). At its worst, this scholarship promotes caricatures of a semiotics which purportedly "direct[s] scholars to narrow spectatorial activity to the reading of signs on stage," activity it "unscientifically" assumes to be "primarily engaged in trying to understand the symbolic meanings of a theatrical performance" (McConachie *Theatre* 57).

Semiotics, except perhaps in some imagined purist form, makes no such assumptions. But at its best, and when it's not proselytizing – and its antisemiotic moment seems fortunately to have passed – a cognitive science approach has contributed to an expanded agenda for semiotic analysis and its understanding of "the making of meaning" (McConachie and Hart 6). What Rozik proposes in his reconsideration of iconicity in the *Semiotica* special issue is iconicity's redefinition in terms of "imagistic thinking" ("Homogeneous" 188). This is entirely compatible with and informed by the insights of cognitive science concerning brain imaging. It is compatible, in particular, with cognitive scientist Gerald Edelman's and cognitive philosopher Mark Johnson's understandings of embodied and non-representational mental "concepts" (McConachie, *Engaging*; Edelman and Tononi 104; Johnson 157). If States is right in his reading of neurobiologist Jean-Pierre Changeaux

that art, including the arts of the theatre, can be understood to give concrete material existence to the brain's imagings, then the brain's production of "mental objects" can be understood and studied as a primary source (rather than a simple receiver or processor) of theatrical representations: signs (States *Plenary* 20, cited in Hurley 31-2). As Shakespeare's Theseus has it in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, "as imagination bodies forth/ The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen/Turns them into shapes, and gives to aery nothing/A local habitation and a name" (V.1.14-17). The study of *how* the imagination "bodies forth/The forms of things unknown" can only support the semiotic study of how those forms-become-shapes produce theatrical meaning.

The application of cognitive science to theatre studies has been overwhelmingly dominated by theatre scholars' response to the celebrated discovery by Vittorio Gallese in 1996 of "mirror neurons" in macaque monkeys (see Gallese et al.; Gallese) and the subsequent confirmation that such neurons also exist in humans. What Gallese and his partners demonstrated was that the observation of others engaged in a purposeful activity triggers the same response in the brain of observers as it would if they were themselves engaged in that activity. This physical (neuronal) participation in observed activity has been understood to corroborate and increase our understanding of what has been a key concept in theatre studies for centuries: empathy (or empathic identification – the capacity "to sense the emotions and read the intentions of another" (McConachie, *Theatre* 16)). And like emotion, empathy is essential to our engagement with those theatrical signs known as characters, and is perhaps one of the things that keeps us sufficiently engaged to (want to) read the signs. Indeed, it's unclear – and the experiment has not been undertaken in controlled conditions – whether an empathic response to a dramatic character relies on the spectator's prior reading of them as characters engaged in "purposeful activity" that is fictional (or is purposeful for the fictional character in a

different way than it is for the actor who performs the activities with the purpose of representing characters).

Empathy is, moreover, a problematic concept, in the theatre as elsewhere, particularly because of its potential to "eat" its other, appropriating and ultimately negating the other's experience by making it one's own. Dominick LaCapra warns against "unchecked identification, vicarious experience, and surrogate victimhood" (40), while Sarah Ahmed characterizes empathy as "a 'wish feeling,' in which subjects 'feel' something other than what another feels in the very moment of imagining they could feel what another feels" (30). Bryoni Treize parses Ahmed's argument as "intimating that at the heart of empathy there exists an important, but often overlooked, discordance between an intention to enact it and the actuality of performing it." "Perhaps," she suggests, "empathy might always already be diverting itself from its own central cause" (216). Finally, both Ahmed and Susan Leigh Foster relate empathy to the cultural production of "the stranger" as "other," both historically and in the contemporary context of globalization and multiculturalism. Ahmed argues that "emotions may involve 'being moved' for some precisely by fixing others as 'having' certain characteristics. The circulation of objects of emotion involves the transformation of others into objects of feeling," and thereby objectifies them (11). Affect, then, is potentially complicit with representation in the cultural production of the (stereotyped) "other." When audiences for over forty years empathized with "Indian" characters in plays such as John Augustus Stone's 1829 *Metamora: The Last of the Wampanoags*, as noble remnants of an inevitably dying race, they were no closer to understanding, and they did actual Native Americans no favours.

Another concept emerging from the cognitive approach to theatre studies is that of "conceptual blending," which is understood to be the basis of role playing and therefore, again, central to the operations of the theatre. As applied to theatre, conceptual blending refers to the double consciousness of

also susceptible to abuse. What all of these approaches share is the risk of privileging the individual and psychological over the social and historical, while also reifying the idea of a universal human subject. Each, therefore, risks being called upon to serve a reactionary ideology that effaces difference. Even as sophisticated a theorist as States has a tendency to use a universal first-person plural, to ask questions such as "who does not?" and "who has not?" to make statements such as "one has always" ("Phenomenological" 34), and to talk about "the [universal human] mind" and "the mode of thought and expression the mind *naturally* adopts" ("Phenomenological" 35, emphasis added). This tendency is still more pronounced among less careful proponents of a cognitive approach – less careful, perhaps, because they believe themselves to be proponents of an "objective" and universal science. As a corrective to this universalizing tendency, while semiotics is forging its interdisciplinary alliances it needs also to collaborate with a range of materialist approaches that share its interest in representation, but not its idealist roots. It needs, that is, to develop a sociosemiotics.

Sociosemiotics

The section of Elam's "post-script" on "disseminations" notes that "the chief accusation of post-structuralist criticism towards semiotics has been that of excessive formalism" (216) and an avoidance of any engagement with ideology – a legacy, no doubt, of its roots in structuralist linguistics. And indeed, semiotics in its earliest incarnations was, and was criticized by poststructuralists for being, a fundamentally idealist discourse. But in discussing these politicized critiques, Elam also argues that the "post" in post-structuralism "took on the meaning of going beyond rather than merely doing away with structuralism" (216), not superseding it, but rather "politicizing and relativizing [...] its objectives" (221). Several of the

spectators who are able to keep in mind (as it were) the simultaneous, sequential, or oscillating, but always variable perception of an "actor/character" rather than simply to suspend their disbelief in the fictional representation. Bruce McConechie cites as an example a spectator watching Marlon Brando play Stanley Kowalksi in *A Streetcar Named Desire* and being more aware of Brando the actor than of Tennessee Williams's fictional character; however, when the same spectator sees an unknown actor in the role, the character may come to the forefront of her perception (*Engaging* 44). This is a useful corrective to a simplified semiotic approach that engages with representation as one dimensional: "Brando" in performance is always an actor *and* a signifier of multiple resonances (his previous roles, his public persona), arguably even a "brand" in the marketing sense.

Perhaps the most important contribution of the application of cognitive science to theatre studies is the confirmation (the idea is not new) that "the mind is embodied" (McConachie, *Theatre* 1), that the visceral, kinaesthetic responses of the embodied subject are among the primary technologies of meaning production. Semiotics understood as the study of the production of meaning in the theatre can certainly benefit from the reminder that meaning, thought, and cognition are muscular, visceral, and (emotionally) engaged, not simply the provenance of detached, "slit-eyed analysis" (Berger 159). But Susan Leigh Foster argues in *Choreographing Empathy*, a book that is heavily influenced by cognitive studies' discovery of mirror neurons and its conclusions about empathetic responses, this does not mean that meanings are not socially produced or are not produced differently in different cultures and different historical periods (126–73).

Phenomenology, affect theory, and cognitive science, then, can make significant contributions to semiotics by reminding performance analysts that meaning is the multifaceted product of thought, emotion, and physiological response working together. But each of these approaches is

studies into cultural studies; performance studies; cultural materialist, new historicist, and postcolonial studies; and indeed into any area concerned with representation, particularly the representation of gendered, sexual, or racialized identities. Among such alternative practices for the representation of gender and sexuality are cross dressing, drag, camp, mimicry, queer parody, transgender performance, and what Jose Muñoz calls "disidentification" (working inside of, while nevertheless critiquing, dominant culture). When the young boy playing the heroine, Rosalind, who has been playing the boy, Ganymede, steps forward at the end of Shakespeare's *As You Like It* and promises, "If I were a woman I'd kiss as many of you as had beards that pleased me" (Epilogue 18–19), we are perhaps less securely grounded in dominant gender ideologies. When a drag queen or king exhibits by sheer virtuosity (or sometimes even by clumsiness) the performative nature of all gender roles, we can become positively unmoored. And even in *A Doll House*, when well into the first act Nora confesses her urge to say "to hell and be damned" (141), the seamless representation of her 19th-century femininity begins to unravel; when she exits at the end of the play, slamming the door, the entire sex-gender edifice is shaken.

Carlson also finds in feminist work, including film theory, sophisticated contributions to the semiotics of spectatorship by way of the psychoanalytical theories of Jacques Lacan, whose theories of self-alienation through entry into the (semiotic) "symbolic order" (or "the law of the father") undergird the productive notion of "the male gaze." Laura Mulvey, in an essay on classic Hollywood cinema that has been widely influential in theatre studies, demonstrates the ways in which such a gaze is constituted as male through narcissism (identification with an active male hero who owns the camera position and drives the action) and fetishism (objectification of a passive female figure in moments of decorative spectacle that interrupt the action). In this analysis the female spectator

contributors to Meerzon's special issue of *Semiotica* call for flexible interdisciplinary engagement with post-structuralism in its politicized form in feminism, new historicism, cultural materialism, postmodernism, postcolonialism and politicized interculturalism.

Feminist theory

Marvin Carlson notes the close ties between early feminist work in theatre studies and semiotics, citing as a significant step forward for the latter Sue-Ellen Case's argument in *Feminism and Theatre* that cultural encoding – fundamental to semiotic analysis – consists of "the imprint of ideology upon the sign" (Carlson, "Intercultural" 130; Case 116). He argues elsewhere that for Case, Jill Dolan, and "this new [late 1980s] generation" of semioticians, "semiotics was no longer a study of the elements of theatrical communication based on an assumption of objective and value-free selection of signs by the artist, but rather of the way in which the sign thus selected worked to reinforce the dominant ideology or beliefs of their cultural context" ("Semiotics" 21). As I argued in the introduction to this book, this is how ideology works through recognition and interpellation: when Nora first enters in a typical production of *A Doll House* with long curly hair, wearing a frilly dress, unpacking the shopping, and responding chirpily to being addressed by her husband as "my little lark twittering out there" ("Yes, it is," she replies, completing the play's first lines of dialogue (125–6)), we "recognize" her as a woman. In doing so we are giving our assent to this as an accurate representation of women, and we are thereby hailed into a sex-gender system that tells us that this is what women are like, this is what women are for.

But "by revealing the dynamics of this process," Carlson continues, feminist "semiotics provided the first step toward the development of alternative practices" (20–1) – alternative practices that extended beyond feminism, gender, and queer

"reading" all documents and artefacts as culturally produced and culturally productive "texts." Like cultural materialism, it privileged the social over the individual and the historical over the universal or transcendent, and it has been widely influential in asserting the ways in which creative practice is necessarily embedded in the culture from which it emerges while also serving to *shape* that culture and potentially to change it. Elam finds in new historicism, and in particular in the work of Greenblatt, "an often undeclared or 'closet' semiotics... that might benefit from greater theoretical explicitness or (self-)awareness" (Elam, *Semiotics* 218). He criticizes the new historicist project for masking its base in "a general semiotic model, namely the principle of similitude and resemblance" (219), and for its lack of reference to performance, but acknowledges that it brought to semiotics a much needed "opening up to the ideological play of power" (220). That is, it raised the question I asked in Chapter 1: *who controls the semiosis*, and in whose interests?

As we have seen, the semiotic study of theatre and performance also tended to focus in its earliest incarnations on language and the dramatic text, after which it expanded to consider performances themselves, the performance text, and the audience. The final step in this expansion, under the influence of new historicist and cultural materialist discourses, moves to consider meaning systems that extend far beyond the performance "itself" to what Marvin Carlson calls "the entire theatre experience" (*Theatre* xiii). Carlson has undertaken much of this work, notably in his 1989 book, *Places of Performance*, where he considers the semiotics of theatre architecture and its relationship to urban planning, analysing medieval cathedrals, Greek amphitheatres, Italian Renaissance palace and palazzo theatres, façade theatres, and others all in relation to the urban environments from which they derived their meanings. And in each case, from the ways in which "narrow and tortuous" streets resisted triumphant displays of royal power during medieval royal entries (10–11) to the

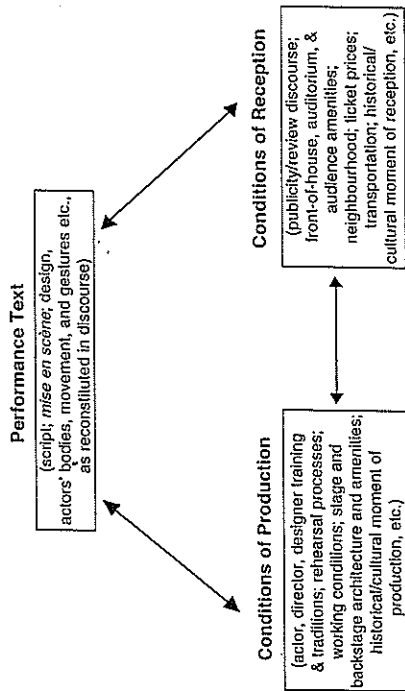
who wishes to enjoy the show is forced to efface her position as woman and assume that of a male viewer.

The concept of the male gaze has developed over the years into considerations of the orientalist gaze, the colonizing gaze, and the objectifying gaze more generally, each of which similarly demands the adoption of a dominant viewing position. It has also issued in the theory and practice of productively resistant strategies such as "staging the gaze" and "returning the gaze," both phrases that have made it into the titles of more than one book (see Freedman, Bannerji). When in *A Doll House* Nora dances the tarantella as the eroticized object of the gaze of her husband, Doctor Rank, and the audience, that gaze is disrupted, triangulated, and problematized by the entry of Mrs Linde and her simple exclamation, "Ah –!" (175). When performance artist Annie Sprinkle, in the "public cervix announcement" portion of her 1991 performance, *Post-porn Modernist*, invited individual spectators, with the help of a flashlight and a speculum, to examine her cervix as she and the rest of the (paying) audience watched, most found this reversal of the gaze unsettling at best, perhaps because, as Nicholas Ridout suggests, it foregrounded a parallel economic relationship between theatre and prostitution as leisure industries (27–8). At least one participant found it "terrifying" ("Annie").

New historicism and cultural materialism

Elam spends much of the "disseminations" section of his "Post-Script" on new historicism, which might be regarded as the American branch of cultural materialist discourse practiced in the UK by Catherine Belsey, Jonathan Dollimore, Alan Sinfield and others (see Brannigan, Ryan, Scott Wilson). The new historicist enterprise of the 1980s and 90s led by literary theorist Stephen Greenblatt, much of it centred on the drama of the early modern period, was committed to reading every expressive act within its historical and social context, to

it produces independently of conscious coding – working through the mutually constitutive poles of a meaning-producing triangle:



(Knowles, *Reading 19*)

Each pole of the triangle is constituted by multiple ideologically coded systems working in consort or in tension with one another. Meaning in a given performance situation – the social and cultural work done by the performance, its performativity, and its force – is the effect of all of these systems, and each pole of the interpretative triangle, working dynamically and relationally together. The degree to which reception is (pre) determined by theatrically and culturally dominant contexts and mechanisms, and the degree to which resistant meanings are available (or to which meaning systems are open to a free play of signification or contained to predetermined meanings) depends upon the amount of productive tension and slippage within and among the corners. But at the connotative (associative) level each element in each corner of the triangle, and each of the corners taken together, encodes its own “myth,” in Barthes’s sense, and its own ideologies. It is the bringing of these myths and ideologies together in productive tension that potentially denaturalizes them, makes them visible, and

deliberate segregation of social classes in the auditoria of 19th-century Europe (149), Carlson demonstrates that these spaces were sites of ideological struggle.

Susan Bennett has considered what she calls the “threshold” (milieu, façade, box office, and program) and “post-performance” experiences (125–39; 163–5), and again, both are, as she argues, “ideologically coded” (126). Bennett has also probed the relationships between the theatrical event and the larger culture, and between production and reception as social processes (86–106; 106–24). There have also been various sophisticated semiotic analyses of framing devices such as applause and curtain calls. Martin Revermann, for example, considers the curtain call to be a threshold phase, where “two modes of semiotization” coincide and collide (193; see also Ridout 161–8), while Baz Kershaw productively examines applause, including curtain calls, as a sign of the increasing “taming of the audience” (“Oh” 141) and their gradual shift since 1945 from patrons to clients to customers. And there are few theatre goers in the English-speaking world, at least, who haven’t at one time or another resented the coercive force of extended orchestrated applause or obligatory standing ovations.

In my 2004 book, *Reading the Material Theatre*, I formulate a “materialist semiotics” that brings the semiotics of drama and theatre together with the cultural materialist analyses of representations and with cultural studies analyses of readers as active and independent users of cultural productions. The shared assumption underlying all of this work is that cultural productions, including theatre and performance, neither contain meaning nor uni-dimensionally shape behaviour or belief; rather they produce meaning through the discursive work of an interpretative community and through the lived, everyday relationship of people with texts, including performance texts. I schematize the relationship among conditions of production, performance text, and conditions of reception as the political unconscious of a production – the meaning

We saw at the end of Chapter 2 that philosopher Jacques Rancière has challenged the traditional wisdom that theatre constitutes and consolidates audiences as communities that react as one. Increasingly, especially in large "global cities" (the term was coined by Saskia Sassen) where populations are increasingly diverse, theatres attract non-homogeneous audiences, divergent "interpretive communities" with different reading strategies, different theatrical and cultural competencies, and different horizons of expectations, all assembled in the same space, but not necessarily producing the same meanings. And it has been recognized from the beginnings of semiotics as a discipline that sign systems are culturally specific; indeed semiotics has long had a special interest in performance that crosses cultures. One of the initiators and early leaders of the study of intercultural performance, Patrice Pavis, in his influential 1992 volume *Theatre at the Crossroads of Cultures*, follows anthropologist Clifford Geertz in defining culture as (among other things) "a signifying system" (Pavis, *Theatre* 8). Pavis launches his study, not out of any interest in cross-cultural communication as such, but for the purposes of renewing the semiotic method of performance analysis:

What is at stake [he argues] is the possibility of a universal, precise performance analysis and of an adequate notation system. [...] Instead of looking for further refinement of western performance analysis, we can institute another approach, the study of intercultural theatre, in the hope that it will produce a new way of understanding theatre practice and will thus contribute to promoting a new methodology of performance analysis. (3-4)

If the stage, with its multiplicity of intersecting sign-systems, is an ideal test case for semiotics, the intercultural city, its stages and audiences, with their multiplicity of intersecting interpretive communities, might equally be considered the perfect test for the semiotics of theatre and performance, and perhaps

enters them into "intersemiotic" negotiation with one another, and it is crucial for theatre artists to be conscious, not only of what they are trying to encode and communicate, but of the ways in which their meanings are shaped and contained by signifiers that extend beyond what they consciously place on the stage. When the English Shakespeare Company brought its production of *The Henrys* (Shakespeare's *Henry IV parts 1 and 2* and *Henry V*) to "the colonies" in Toronto, for example, its avowedly socialist performance text was sabotaged by the company's failure to attend to the politics of funding, sponsorship, and marketing, the politics of location, and the complex localized postcolonial politics of cultural meaning-making, all of which positioned them, in spite of their best intentions, as neo-colonialist invaders firmly in the camp of English cultural imperialism.

Postcolonial and intercultural performance

Perhaps the most urgent call made by the contributors to Meerzon's special issue of *Semiotica* is for semiotics fully to explore cultural difference. Silvija Jestrović, for example, discusses the ways in which "a well-recognized and established semiotic pattern in one culture becomes the means for negotiating the sign-referent relationship in another" (103) and thereby opens up avenues for exploration involving translation studies, multicultural studies, postcolonial studies, and intercultural theatre studies. In the same volume Marvin Carlson, discussing contemporary theatrical interculturalisms (including cultural studies and postcolonialism), calls this "the road not (yet) taken" in semiotic analysis ("Intercultural" 129). Carlson concludes his contribution to the special issue with an urgent plea that semiotics be allowed "the freedom to explore highly intricate and challenging patterns of signification offered by the modern multicultural work, with its constantly shifting configurations of audience, artists, and cultural context" (141).

to both the sign and the context. For them an "intercultural" production such as French director Ariane Mnouchkine's "Indian" *Twelfth Night* in 1982 was not the rich, resonant, and sensuous evocation of the east that many western critics felt it to be. Indeed, Bharucha felt that its "self-conscious images of a phantasmagoric 'India'" embodied "the worst indulgences of 'orientalism'": "I did not see 'India' in Mnouchkine's spectacle," he writes; "I saw France" (*Theatre* 244; see also *Politics and "Sombodys"*).

Analysis of intercultural work has also followed two streams. The earliest systematic model of intercultural communication in the theatre was devised by Pavis as a tool for the analysis of English director Peter Brook's famously problematic adaptation of the sacred Hindu text, *The Mahabharata*. Pavis's famous "hour-glass" model involved a binary division between the source ("other") and target (western) cultures, reifying the west-and-the-rest binary, but accurately modelling the universalists' practices. Pavis's hourglass inscribed a pattern of distillation of source-culture signs to their apparent (pre-cultural) essences, and a subsequent expansion using the semiosis of the target culture. In this process the cultural and artistic "modelling" of the source culture is "adapted" through theatrical production to the artistic and cultural "modelling" of the target culture in order to achieve "readability" at the point of reception in the west (*Theatre* 185). The result is a watered down and distorted version of the original, one that only benefits the (western) producers and often does violence to the (non-western) source cultures. Pavis's hourglass assumed, moreover, a kind of cultural (and therefore semiotic) homogeneity in each of the participating cultures, as well as in the receiving audience.

Pavis's semiotic model was challenged by a second analytical stream, emerging from postcolonial theory, where the primacy of western reception and dominant-culture "readability" was replaced by a concern for the politics of cross-cultural collaboration, and specifically with power relationships and the

especially for the semiotics of production and reception. It is interesting that the early systematic theorists of intercultural performance were primarily drawn from the ranks of the semioticians, most notably Pavis and Erika Fischer-Lichte ("Staging"; "Theatre").

I have elsewhere traced the history of theatrical interculturalism and its analysis (Knowles, *Theatre*), tracking in the 20th century two key streams: Brecht and the materialists, and Artaud and the universalists, including Jerzy Grotowski, Eugenio Barba, and Peter Brook. It's a fraught history, mostly dominated by charismatic western men shoring up a decadent western tradition by "discovering," appropriating, and decontextualizing eastern and "Other" performance forms. For Brecht this meant "discovering" what he was looking for: a non-naturalistic model for the *verfremdungseffekt* (defamiliarization effect), which he found in the work of Chinese actor Mei Linfang (91-9). For the universalists it meant mining "oriental," African, or Indigenous peoples' ritual and performance forms for their supposed pre-cultural, "pre-expressive," or primitive universalism: the pure "truths" that precede the supposed contaminations and accidentals of culture. "Man [sic]," Grotowski asserts, "precedes difference" (qtd in Maranca 16).

There are others who have disagreed with the universalists, writers for whom difference is itself significant, and for whom it is not immediately apparent that those ways in which the peoples of the world are perceived (usually by dominant cultures) to be fundamentally the same are more important than the ways in which they are, perhaps also fundamentally different. In this critical tradition, it is significant that many of those in the latter group - including Rustom Bharucha, Biodun Jeyifo, Gautam Dasgupta, Una Chaudhuri ("Future"), and others - come from non-western cultural traditions. For these critics, to deploy a sign or cultural text outside of its cultural context (or to frame it within a foreign sign system) is necessarily to re-signify it in ways that most often do violence

Julie Holledge and Joanne Tompkins, on the other hand, focus their analysis on intercultural work by women from non-dominant groups from around the world, employing a materialist approach that focuses less on aesthetics than politics, using a methodology that brings cultural and performance studies into a methodological mix that complicates semiotics' focus on representation. They trace the cultural exchange of Ibsen's *A Doll House* and Sophocles' *Antigone* through Japan, China, Iran, and Argentina; explore the divergent meanings attributed to Korean and Aboriginal women's ritual performances when staged in urban Australia; address different cultural positionings of public and private space in "returning home" plays from Algeria, South Africa, and Ghana; and analyse the female performing body as the site of intercultural encounter, looking at Japanese women's performance in Australia and at solo women performers from Japan and Québec who combine diverse cultural influences in their work.

Christopher Balme, in his 1999 book *Decolonizing the Stage*, shifts attention to theatrical productions by third- and fourth-world communities, again globally, but Balme's approach is explicitly and systematically semiotic. He focuses on "the process whereby culturally heterogeneous signs and codes are merged together," which he calls "theatrical syncretism" (Balme 1). The concept of syncretism is derived from comparative religion, particularly during the colonial period, and it signifies the process by which elements of two or more religions are merged to produce change. It is related to concepts such as creolization or hybridity as used by postcolonial theorists, including Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*, where he argues that "the interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (4).

Some aspects of the show with which I opened this book fit the bill. Monique Mojica's *Chocolate Woman Dreams the Milky*

question of who benefits from such collaboration. The most direct postcolonialist response to the Pavis model came from Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert, whose 2002 article, "Toward a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis," proposed an alternative model, a kind of horizontal hourglass, which represents intercultural exchange as a two-way flow, with both partners considered as sources, while a target culture, the audience, is positioned along a continuum between them into which both cultures feed. The strength of their model, Lo and Gilbert argue, is that it "locates all intercultural activity within an identifiable socio-political context" – but it does not do so for its audience, the "anticipated" but problematically uncharacterized "target culture" (45).

Pavis's concern was for the health of the semiotic method (echoing Saussure's rather astonishing observations that "colonization... transports a language into new environments, and this brings about changes in the language" (Saussure 21) and that "even savages [sic] grasp territorial divergences in linguistic usage" (189). Postcolonialists are more concerned with the contribution of the sign systems of performance to the act of colonization; they focus on the colonized rather than on the languages themselves. Thus Andrzej Wirth, noting "the flow of exchanges" that characterize contemporary intercultural performance, calls for "another model in which the very notion of source and target is invalidated" (Wirth 284), and Rustom Bharucha proposes and practices "intracultural" explorations within India that dislodge the identification of culture with nation-state and prioritize the "interactivity" of different cultures, including cross-cultural collaboration between "othered" cultures. He describes, for example, an adaptation of Nigerian Chinua Achebe's novel, *Things Fall Apart* (an already intercultural phrase borrowed from W. B. Yeats and T. S. Eliot), by a cultural group, Ninasam, in a small Hindu village in southern India, in collaboration with a marginalized Siddhi community who had been transplanted as slaves from Africa by the Arabs, Portuguese, and Dutch (*Theatre* 229–32).

Way, about the journey home of a lost "Dule Girl" (a woman of the Guna people of coastal Panama), is framed by the weaving together of: the Haudosaunee (Iroquois) creation story of Sky Woman falling from the heavens to land on turtle's back and create the earth from a retrieved clump of mud; the story of Alice in Wonderland falling down the rabbit hole, filtered through Jefferson Airplane's 1967 song, "White Rabbit"; the Guna story of Olonadili, youngest of the daughters of the stars, who came to earth and was caught by humans; and the Paul Vance and Lee Pockriss song, "Catch a Falling Star," made famous by Perry Como's 1957 recording. The dramaturgical deep structure of this truly syncretic theatre piece, which I will use as a case study in Part II, is based on the textile arts of the women of Guna Yala and the Guna cosmology that those artforms embody.

Balme is concerned with meaning, and his focus is textual, but his version of semiotics is different from that of Pavis, in that it focuses on cultural texts as carriers of meaning that are fully comprehensible only within the culture that produces and uses them. Most importantly, he is concerned with what happens when, in the hands of Indigenous or colonized artists as in the case of *Chocolate Woman Dreams the Milky Way*, Indigenous performance elements are syncretized with the western theatrical tradition as a response to the western tendency to homogenize, to exclude, and to privilege formal, stylistic, racial, or cultural "purity" (Balme 8).

Because Balme concentrates on work produced by Indigenous peoples within their own cultural context in response to colonization rather than on intercultural work produced for western audiences under the synthesizing control of western directors or playwrights (what Esther Kim Lee calls "hegemonic intercultural theatre" (571)), his book invaluable complicates the linearity of Pavis's analysis. His emphasis on language, ritual, orality, and embodiment also complicates western textuality and raises crucial questions not only about the hierarchies of verbal language in intercultural practice but

also about the language of the body, issues of translation, and the negotiation of meaning in performance. In his conclusion, however, Balme acknowledges the fundamentally aesthetic nature of much of his inquiry, which avoids until its final pages the question of the portability of the syncretic theatre he examines and the ways in which local conditions of reception frame the possibilities for cross-cultural exchange.

It is the local conditions of reception that interested Susan Bennett when in 1997 she published a revised edition of *Theatre Audiences* with an added chapter on "Spectatorship Across Culture." In outlining her focus on "issues of spectatorship when the theatrical product does not coincide to a substantial degree with the cultural education and practice of the audience" (166), Bennett cogently observes that "it takes one culturally specific spectator [of a culture different from that of the creators] to make an intercultural performance" (171). "The audience," she argues, "is the material evidence of a target culture and the factor of their horizons of expectations becomes heightened in such conditions" (171). Focusing on work such as African American Anna Deavere Smith's *Fires in the Mirror* and *Twilight Los Angeles* that probe cultural conflict, represent different sides in that conflict, and consciously aim to gather together as audiences "people who would not normally be gathered in the same space," Bennett usefully points to the potential for performance to promote dialogue "precisely on the grounds of that diversity" (179). We might extend her insight to work such as Argentinian Canadian Guillermo Verdecchia's *Proterias Americanas* that uses untranslated Spanish – "for dose of you who want a translation of dat, come and see me after de show" (41) – consciously to divide its audiences between Spanish speakers and members of "de Saxonian community" (40) in order to produce the felt experience of exclusion and minoritization among members of the dominant culture. "Are you a Group?" asks the grotesque Latino stereotype, Facundo Morales Segundo (aka Wideload Mckennah).

Do you know each other? No, well, some of you know de person next to you but collectively, you are strangers. Estrangers in de night. But perhaps by the end of the evening you will have shared an experience. You will have gone through dis show together and it will have created a common bond among you, a common reference point.

That's the theory anyway. That the theatre is valuable because a bunch of strangers come together and share an experience. But is it true? I mean how can you be sharing an experience when you are all (thankfully) different people? You have different jobs, different sexual orientations, different lives, different histories. You are all watching dis show from a different perspective. [...] (53)

It is this valuing and highlighting of difference, I suggest, that is the appropriate work of intercultural performance. This is what Bennett is referring to when she argues that "[i]f intercultural theatre is to extend its own processes and questions into the fields of meaning produced by the spectators, then the compromises and conciliations, as well as the translations, need to find a language in performance – to draw attention to themselves, as it were, and to find their complexity embedded in the receptive processes that the performance stimulates" (200).

The final chapter of Patrice Pavis's 1996 book, *Analyzing Performance* (translated into English in 2003), turns to "the anthropological approach and intercultural analysis" (271) as a kind of synthesis of the psychological and sociological approaches to theatrical reception that he had proposed in his previous two chapters. Pavis first argues that "if the object of an anthropological analysis of performance must be constantly redefined and broadened in order for its cultural complexity to be grasped, we must rethink the existing methodology for analysis, by adapting a 'Western' semiology ('manufactured' in the West) to non-Western traditions and intercultural production." He then introduces "a new notion: that of

ethnoscenology" (288). Pavis fails to acknowledge the problematics of a "we" who "must" do the adapting, is presumably western, and is still in control of the discourse, but he proceeds to outline an approach that privileges "parallel series" of signs over minimal units, "energy" over meaning, the concrete over the abstract, the "autonomy of elements" over "hierarchical arrangements," "partial perspectives" over centralization, "differential density" over homogeneity, and syncretism over purity (290–6). His conclusion calls for an "integrated semiology" (314), one that "requires cultural semiotics to observe how a culture or cultures are inscribed in the object described, and how writing itself imprints its mark on this object" (325).

Jane Turner's analysis of Eugenio Barba's intercultural *Ego Faust*, in Meerzon's issue of *Semiotica*, develops and applies Pavis's "ethnoscenological" or "ethnoscenographic" approach, demonstrating ways in which it can serve as "a challenge to the Eurocentric gaze" (143) on which it nevertheless focuses:

This ethnoscenographic position incorporates both a semiotic and anthropological approach to analysis that enables the spectator/critic to better acknowledge his or her own cultural baggage as well as avoid the tendency to condense or displace any ambiguous or seemingly discrepant aspects of performance. Both Barba's and Pavis's work feeds an ethnoscenographic position that offers the spectator the opportunity of engaging with the experience of a performance event where he or she is not merely the passive receiver but able to participate in a dialogue with culturally diverse performance practices. (Turner 165)

My own short 2010 book, *Theatre & Interculturalism*, does not assume that audiences for intercultural work will be exclusively western, but argues essentially for a kind of "interculturalism-from-below" that bypasses white brokerage and involves solidarities and collaborations across real, acknowledged, and

respected material differences. What is needed, I argue, is a model of scholarship that is humble before the dizzying multiplicities of its intercultural objects of study; that is cognisant of the researcher's own positioning and the process of scholarship, from whatever culture it emerges, as itself necessarily intercultural performance; and that does its homework in terms of attempting to understand cultural and performance forms *in situ*. Further, what is needed is a model of scholarship that understands the multiple performances of difference, local and global, as *processes*, circulations of energy, in which previously marginalized cultures are seen to work *together* rather than *against*, constructing genuine, rhizomatic (non-hierarchical, horizontal), and multiple interculturalities that respect difference while building solidarities. These types of collaboration involve resignifying as a process of negotiation across existing cultural formations and sign systems, a performative process of new, diasporic identity formation that forges meaning in studios, on stages, between stages and audiences, and within audiences. In practice these collaborations might employ tools such as: the tactical reappropriation of dominant culture texts (Djanet Sears's *Harlem Diet*, a prequel to Shakespeare's *Othello*, relocates the action to the heart of African-American culture); diasporic transnationalisms working across national borders and not (necessarily) centred in the west (Helen Gilbert and Jacqueline Lo cite productive "AborAsian" alliances in Australasia in their 2007 book, *Performance and Cosmopolitics* (2009)); and dynamic and fluid urban intraculturalisms in the world's new global cities (groups such as Toronto's Cahoots Theatre Company with explicitly cross-cultural mandates are now bringing diverse marginalized groups within a city together in solidarity to create theatre).

I treat these cities, following Foucault, as "heterotopic spaces" ("Of Other Spaces"), defined by Kevin Hetherington as "spaces of alternate ordering" (viii), and it is such fluid and unstable spaces that a renewed semiotics occupies in the 21st century. Baz Kershaw refers to them as "ecologies of theatre"

and "ecologies of performance" (*Theatre Ecology* 16), describing theatres and performances as "ecosystems" (15). Elsewhere he describes within these systems "the complicated and unavoidable inter-dependency between any element of a performance event and its environment," where "the smallest change of one element in some way, however minutely, effects change in all the rest" ("Oh" 136). He also notes that, as in all ecologies (and contra the totalizing tendencies of early versions of semiotics), the health of an ecosystem might best be judged by the diversity of its species – an insight with crucial relevance to intercultural work. Kershaw's ecosystem might be understood to be analogous to Juri Lotman's "semiosphere," in which "semiotic systems are in a constant state of flux" (*Universe* 151), a concept that both Meerzon and Jestrović use to broaden our understanding of diverse acts of "interpretation," including "reading into" (Jestrović 103) – and I would add misreading and translation – that might give rise to new, dynamic, and flexible semiotic possibilities, including what Jestrović calls the "experiential" (103).

One of the strongest arguments in Meerzon's issue of *Semiotica* is that of Michael Sidnell, advocating what he calls "semiotic arts of theatre": "there is no evading of the praxis of the signifying act," he urges; "there is no such thing as a non-pragmatic sign, no reference without a performance" (38). He concludes: "being arts, semiotic arts are (axiomatically) not only not identifiable with their productions and inseparable from qualities of their execution but are largely inaccessible without active involvement in their practices" (39–41). Pavis also ends *Analyzing Performance* with gestures toward "the field of practice" (303). He imagines an "ethnoscenologist who abandons the assurance of her critical and semiological positions, in order to immerse herself in a performance and in the universe that produced it" risking "being transformed into a dramaturge, a director, even an actor" (302). "In calling for new theories more appropriate to the task and continually updated," he argues, "performance practice also takes theory

forward; and in return theory contributes to an improvement in the understanding we have of practice. In this way they feed (off) each other; out of this ongoing and generalized 'intercannibalism' arises a revolution that is nowhere near its end" (327).

Which takes us to Part 2: Practice.

Part Two Practice

What use is all of this? Beyond using semiotics to develop a general, theoretical understanding of the modes and mechanisms whereby meaning is produced in theatre and performance, what might be the practical applications of seeing performance through a semiotic lens for the analysis of specific scripts, processes, and plays in production? Part II of this book attempts to answer these questions by focusing, in Chapter 4, on script analysis and devising, and in Chapter 5 on the analysis of actual performances. In each case I will keep in mind the problematics of representation, misrepresentation, recognition, and misrecognition that I discussed in the Introduction, focusing on some of the ways that an expanded semiotic analysis can help both scholarly and theatrical practitioners avoid some of the pitfalls inherent in the theatrical production of signs, particularly in productions that work across cultural and other forms of difference.

My focus here is on the production rather than simply the interpretation of signs; that is, I consider the act of analysis itself to be a generative one, an act of creation. A director, dramaturge or scholar selecting a project, or a scholar analysing a dramatic work, can usefully be understood to be engaging in an act of collaboration (with a script, with an idea, with a scenario) in the creation of a new work, whether it be a published essay, a performance, or simply a mental image. As we have seen in Chapters 2 and 3, something very similar can be said of a spectator.