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FOR A THEORY OF THEATRE: THE PERFORMANCE TEXT AS AUDIENCE-STAGE DIALOG INDUCING A POSSIBLE WORLD

0. Some Presuppositions

<u>0.1.</u> I wish to elucidate one series each of terms and presuppositions for this paper. As to terms, I shall here mention quite briefly, without the possibility of a full theoretical analysis, those of a general nature, before discussing Bakhtin's concept of dialog: the terms of fiction, text, element, existent, agent, object, and narrative. I consider as "fiction" all constructs based on imagining states of affairs similar to inhabited worlds, and "text" any signic work -- in literature, painting, music, and similar -- which can be thought of as a coherent unit (cf. Bakhtin, <u>Èstetika</u>: 281ff.), without entering upon the discussion of the lower and upper limits of such a unit, i.e. whether either a single scene in a play or the ensemble of all plays of a period are <u>a</u> text.[1/] I consider as "elements" of an imaginary, and in that sense necessarily fictive world (without prejudging anything about its empirical reality), events, existents, and relationships to be found in it. The "existents" themselves, defined as all world elements that can be formulated as nouns or nominal syntagms, are either "agents" or "objects," the former being able and the latter unable to carry out independent action in that imaginary world. Finally, a "narrative" or "narrative text" may be provisionally defined as *a finite and coherent sequence of actions, located in the spacetime of a possible world and proceeding from an initial to a final state of affairs*. Its minimal required elements would be an agent, an initial state of relationships changing to a commensurate final state, and a series of changes consubstantial to varying spacetimes or, in Bakhtin's pragmatico-esthetically redefined sense, chronotopes (*Dialogic*; see also the seminal discussions of Eco, *Lector* 70, 107-08, and passim).

<u>0.2.</u> As to presuppositions, I have four main ones. My opening presupposition is of general scope. I am persuaded it is necessary to reduce the gap between intellectuals and other productively working people, between hieratic and everyday language, between specialist producers and practical users of theories -- especially in culture. Already wide, the gap is threatening to become unbridgeable. I am under no illusions that it can be bridged from one side only, but I believe it behooves us intellectuals to hold our part of the bridge in readiness for any favourable circumstances which might present themselves -- not only as a necessary gesture of utopian politics, but also as a heuristic principle to shape our own productivity. This productivity will be enhanced when we realize that there is, *à la longue*, no fully extrinsic and therefore "scientific" meta-language independent either of the pragmatic subject or of the thematic object. We should therefore use all the formalizations absolutely necessary but absolutely no more formalization than

necessary. Otherwise, the new semiotics will become a new esoteric priesthood, necessarily allied to the rulers in their need for obfuscation of the ruled. Thus, basic political ethics of intellectual production are at stake here. Until proof to the contrary, this means the for me that the use of symbolic logic in cultural discussions is unnecessary and therefore to be shunned. I hope the kind of approach undertaken here might contribute to prove this.

The second presupposition is that in all that we today call art or fiction, we are in final analysis dealing with human relationships, given that at the moment -- not having yet met any intelligent aliens -- we cannot imagine any other ones. My cautionary use of "in final analysis" indicates that relationships between people may but do not have to be the ostensible surface of any fictional text. What matters is that they are any text's signification. This kind of tenor is not necessarily vehiculated by human figures: dragons or Martians will do, and even superficially "iconic" human figures turn upon closer inspection (as I argue about narrative agents) to be complex and shifty. In some ways I cannot here enter into, so that they form my next presupposition, I would contend that all fictional texts are open or -- in the case of "realism" -- hidden parables, in the accepted sense of pieces that present _models_ of general validity by comparison with and eduction from a particular group of fictional actions. I will in this essay reluctantly eschew also the discussion of models, which I have begun in another place (Suvin "Metaphoricity"; cf. from that huge discussion at least Hesse, Masterman, Gentner, and Ricoeur). I am, though, generalizing the terms of "vehicle" for the particular sequence of actions that form the textual surface, and "tenor" for its overall signification.[2/]

My fourth presupposition is that the fictional events are imaginable as forming a coherent action and story only because the imaginary states of affairs presented by the letter of the text, and by which fictive human relationships are parabolically signified, constitute _possible worlds_ (further PW). In other words, for practical purposes it is usually possible to take as vehicle for the general signification of a text its syntagmatic sequence of actions (crudely put, its plot). Yet theoretical stringency demands that these actions itself be read in terms of their chronotope(s): no action is understandable unless as a spacetime change (cf. Suvin "Metaphoricity"). Now this overall chronotopic frame is composed not simply of "positive" changes in spatiotemporal location but also, and even centrally, of changes in agential relationships. Therefore, it always implies a general, meaning-bestowing frame of relationships, both posed and presupposed. That frame -- as is made quite clear by non-"mimetic" texts such as an absurdist play (cf. Revzina & Revzin) or an SF novel -- is a PW. However, within the horizon I wish to sketch here, the notion of PW, born in philosophy and in fiction, must first be liberated from the appropriation by technocratic logicians à la Kripke et Co.: "if the notion of possible worlds comes from literature, why not bring it back there?" (Eco, *Role* 219). I shall develop this point in section 2.

0.3. I am in this essay proposing a brief general hypothesis about theatre as a kind of cybernetic machine which functions as interaction of stage and audience. The hypothesis assembles seemingly disparate building blocks: first, the anthropological approach to "dialogue" by Mikhail M. Bakhtin; second, a "cultural" rather than logistic semiotics of communication pivoting on the induction of Possible Worlds in the addressees; and third, the application of both to the audience-stage interaction which involves two physically present human groups, bound by the contract of a split between visual and tactile apperception and communication that inhibits audience action in favour of cognition. This means that formalised semiotic procedures must be subsumed under

investigation into socialized actions: in semiotics as well as in linguistics, pragmatics encompass both semantics and syntactics. As always, a PW belongs to the anthropological family of utopian fictions, characterized by a conditional spacetime, but the sensual presence of people lends the subgroup of theatrical PWs its uncommon charm of directly participating in a temporary utopia.

1. Bakhtinian Dialog and Theatre

1.0. I approach here Bakhtin's "dialogue" as a significant example of a socio-anthropological semiotics. His stance refuses individualism, so that hiss addressor and addressee may be not only a rather elastic typification of human stances but also fully allegorical agents, such as a horizon of understanding or the Sun. I take it that such a semiotics is a necessary component of a theory of theatre.

1.1. Bakhtin's use of "dialog" and "dialogism" are situated within his ideé maitresse that all understanding is based on a recognition of signs, their signification in a given context, synchronic as well as diachronic, and finally their active inclusion in a dialogical, necessarily evaluative context (Èstetika 361). "Every sign...is a construct between socially organized persons in the process of their interaction, Therefore, ...*[the] sign may not be divorced from the concrete forms of social intercourse*"; "*the unity of the social milieu and the unity of the immediate social event of communication*" are essential conditions for any language-speech and any signic fact, which they "*determine from within*" (Vološinov 21, 47, and 86). My premise in dealing with his understanding of the dialogic principle or "dialogism" is opposed to the brilliant booklet of Todorov's, who chooses to use Kristeva's (pioneering but unclear) "intertextuality" and reserve "dialogical" for "certain specific instances... such as the exchange of responses by two speakers, or Bakhtin's conception of human personality" (60). On the contrary, I shall argue that dialog in Bakhtin's spirit is not to be reserved for verbal interaction (as Todorov concedes by the end of his cited sentence). True, Bakhtin's treatment of dialog overwhelmingly focusses on verbal utterances, always oriented toward and most intimately determined by who they come from, for whom they are meant, and what their theme is. Each "word" is "*the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addressor and addressee*.... I give myself verbal shape from another's point of view, ultimately from the point of view of the community to which I belong. A word is a bridge thrown between myself and another. If one end of the bridge depends on me, then the other end depends on my addressee." (Vološinov 86).

However, first of all, it is quite clear that dialog is for Bakhtin always an anthropological principle. His central strategy is to explicitly extend dialog further from actual instances of empirical or fictionally formalized turn-taking in speech into "a broader sense, meaning not only ... vocalized verbal communication between persons, but also verbal communication of any type whatsoever"; furthermore, the example immediately following is one of dialog between a printed book, which among other things "anticipates possible responses and objections," and the readers' "attentive reading and inner responsiveness" (Vološinov 95)! All verbal interaction is thus always

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and without any exception dialogic in the sense of being addressed to "a more or less differentiated audience" (*Èstetika* 275); and furthermore, dialog does not necessarily imply an explicit presence of animated interlocutors. Thus, the participants in any speech event may within a specific situation be "both explicit and implicit participants" (Vološinov 86); further, the unspoken "answering understanding" is equivalent to the "loud reply" (*Èstetika* 262, and cf. 276).

But second and for my immediate purpose most important, not only verbal communication but "[*a]ny true understanding is dialogic in nature.... Meaning is the effect of interaction between speaker and listener...*" (ibidem 102-03). At one place, Bakhtin/ Vološinov even acknowledges that no other "ideological sign" (in music, painting, ritual, or "simplest gesture") can be adequately replaced or conveyed by words (15). Thus, it is any text (in his wide sense) that truly lives "*on the borders of two consciousnesses, of two subjects*" (*Èstetika* 285). The dialog happens between horizons of understanding (cf. Todorov 72-73), even between cosmic entities:

> Witness and judge. As soon as consciousness appears in the world, ...the sun, while retaining its physical identity, became other, because it began to be cognized by the witness and judge. It ceased just existing ... because it was reflected in the consciousness of another (witness and judge): by this, it changed radically, enriched and transformed itself. (Bakhtin, *Èstetika* 341)

Clearly, Bakhtin's usage of the term dialog is often strongly metaphorical (is spite of his doctrinal enmity toward metaphor). "Dialog" therefore can, and in Bakhtin centrally does, refer to any interaction between a socially or culturally typified addressor and addressee. But each of these interlocutors can range from an individual to a whole historical tradition, and from a human being to a text or indeed a quite abstract, allegorical "subject" such as a horizon of understanding. What matters is that one interlocutor explicitly *or implicitly* respond to the positions and presuppositions of the other.

1.2. How far is, then, such a Bakhtinian approach applicable outside literature, and in particular in theatre? Perhaps a general answer can only be arrived at after verifications in several fields, beginning with non-verbal arts. But in principle, I would maintain that the metaphor of dialogism is as applicable to non-verbal as to verbal cognition and signification: I cannot see much difference between a dialog of user with book and with painting. "From the point of view of the extralinguistic goals of utterance, all that is linguistic is only a means" (Bakhtin, *Èstetika* 287). True, Bakhtin himself privileged literature, and in particular the novel. His understanding of drama was neither original nor rich (cf. Todorov 89-90); he wrote little on it, when he could publish nothing else. Nonetheless, his work on the carnival and the "folkloric chronotope" suggests this is not essential to his approach but a contingent feature of his personal interests and social circumstances. In that case, his term of dialog could, not only in narratological but also in dramaturgic analysis, become as crucial as that of chronotope.

At the end of this minimal survey of Bakhtin's dialogism I wish to draw attention to a few of his most usable hints in the direction of mediating between the "performance text", or "spectacle text" (De Marinis), and the always implicit audience. These hints will be sometimes wrenched out

of their immediate context (and, as in the case of the first quote, they will have to be mentally translated out of his logocracy, evident in the overestimation of inner speech):

> outwardly actualized utterance is an island rising from the boundless sea of inner speech...Situation and audience make inner speech undergo actualization into some kind of specific outer expression that is directly included into an unverbalized behavioral context and in that context is amplified by actions, behavior or verbal responses of other participants of the utterance....The structure these little behavioral genres [i.e., full-fledged question, exclamation, command, request] will achieve is determined by the effect, upon a word, of its coming up against the extraverbal milieu and against another word.... (Vološinov 96)

And Bakhtin/Vološinov continues by a highly suggestive list of such pragmatic, pre-esthetic genres: the causerie in the drawing-room, conversation between different social roles, village sewing circles, urban carousals, workers' lunchtime chats -- each with "a particular kind of organization of audience" in function of the social environment or spacetime. A theory of theatre could do worse than start from here. And I can here only hint at strong similarities between Bakhtin's and Karl Bühler's speech pragmatics; Bühler's *deixis am Phantasma* should also be a part of any theatre theory, just as Brecht's "Street Scene".

Directly applicable to the audience-stage relation are the two quotes I wish to close with (in order to re-actualize and conclude about theatre as Bakhtinian dialog in section 3, after a detour through' a discussion of PWs and pragmatics):

> In speaking I always take into account the apperceptive background of the addressee's reception of my word: how well is he acquainted with the situation, does he possess special knowledge of a given cultural area of communication, his prejudices (from our point of view), his sympathies and antipathies -- for all of this will determine his active answering understanding of my utterance. This taking into account will determine the choice of utterance genre, and of compositional devices, and finally of language means....

> […I]t is …a human being full of inner words [who receives another's utterance]. All his experiences -- his so-called apperceptive background -- exist encoded in his inner speech.... [The] active inner-speech reception proceeds in two directions: first, the received utterance is framed within a context of factual commentary..., the visual signs of expression, and so on; second, a reply [(*internal retort*)] is prepared.[3/]

2. On PWs, on Subordinating Communication to Pragmatics, and again on Dialog

2.0. My attempt to use the notion of PW will be, as suggested in 0.2, part of a counter-project to the logistic trend in semiotics -- a counter-project which has learned much from them and yet which tries to expropriate the expropriators and collocate those technical matters that will prove transferrable into a different horizon. I have been stimulated by the fundamental discussion of Eco and his definition of a PW as a "'cultural' construct" rather than an either metaphysical or purely ideational one (Role 221) -- though I am here for my own purposes of theatre discussion attempting to do without some of his complex proceedings -- as well as by Elam's (1980) path-breaking overview and by a number of other people, including prominently three Canadians, Thomas Pavel, Lubomir Doležel, and John Woods.[4/] I shall enter upon this by largely bending to that purpose the issue of VS (Versus) no. 17 (1977) issue, which not only handily summarizes and stimulatingly develops widely accepted logistic ideas on PWs but also applies it to text semiotics and indeed to dialog. I shall also discuss the "impure" PWs of fiction where totalisations are always provisional because of the manifest text's permanent interaction with the users understanding of their empirical "zero world", PW_0. It follows that the notion of communication is useful for a theatre theory only if it encompasses the interlocutors' cognitions and stances, if pragmatics dominates – as it does in linguistics – semantics and syntactics.

2.1. I hold that each PW is to be defined as an ensemble of elements plus an ensemble of traits characterizing either single elements or constellations of elements. However, orthodox "logistical" semiotics presented in the cited issue postulate that a PW in culture is necessarily a maximal or complete state of affairs (Vaina 3). Insofar as this notion is of any possible use in cultural studies, I would deny this for any fictional, imaginary PW, which is necessarily an *impure and porous entity*, that ceaselessly refers to the user's empirical world. For, to speak with Pavel, "fictions speak of worlds which, without belonging to the 'real' cosmos, take it as their support and use it as their ontic foundation" ("Tragedy" 239). Or, to speak with Woods, the reader has an "ability to fill the story in, in various places, with sentences that do not occur in the story or logically follow from those that do.... The story, just as it stands, presents only enthymematic explanation-sketches, the missing 'premisses' of which it is the reader's job to furnish." (63-64) Or, to speak with Eco: "A fictional text abundantly overlaps the world of the reader's encyclopedia" (*Role* 221).

Therefore, a fictional or imaginary PW is necessarily composed of several kinds of elements: those expressly presented as different from (dominant ideas about) empirical reality; those not presented (posed) but presupposed; and those presented but expressly defined as identical, in central operative or functional aspects, to elements in empirical reality (cf. Angenot chap. 6, Ducrot 1972). Their mixture is why I call a fictional PW impure; their sum makes nonetheless for a provisional totalisation, fit to be discussed as a unit -- e.g., any painting, novel, or theatre performance. The elements involved are therefore -- symmetrically inverse to the normative logistic definition of PW -- *minimal and incomplete* (cf. Elam 101-04). A completely stipulated or an exhaustively posed PW, full of and only of newly described elements (themselves new or not), would not be an imaginary or fictional PW, since -- to mention only one reason -- it would be a frozen, unchangeable world. In other words, logistic and imaginary PWs are mutually exclusive.

Each and every fictional text implies in semiotics a PW analysable as if based on counterfactual conditionals or "as if" hypotheses. I therefore much doubt that matricial definition or even representation is either possible or necessary for cultural semiotics. It seems to be both

theoretically dubious and practically difficult even in logicians' PWs (cf. Eco, *Role* 221-22). In cultural texts giving rise to a PW, matricial representation becomes increasingly uneconomical -- and very soon outright impossible -- in proportion to the complexity of the text, both as concerns thematic fertility and as concerns its embodying not only a frozen norm but also a creative playing with the norm. In the perspective I am arguing for, one can continue to treat as an event any change or transformation of an initial state of affairs into a spatiotemporally and/or agentially different state of affairs, on condition that this difference be taken as an imaginary and not necessarily visual or otherwise pseudo-empirical change. What I propose as a crucial postulate is that the difference necessarily pertains to a "model ensemble" (Eco, *Role* 221), i.e. that it model or signify a change in human relationships. I agree with Vaina (6) that this entails a "requirement of alternativeness" -- i.e., that any change be considered against the alternative background of a state of affairs in that PW which would have obtained if given agents had *not* performed given actions bringing about a change (a matter of choice and freedom, cf. Macherey). The same applies to a stress (Vaina 10; and, better, Pavel passim) on sub-worlds that would be constituted by what I would call different agential attitudes toward possible changes in that PW. That sub-world could not then be given a static definition simply as an ensemble of traits characterizing a given element, e.g. a narrative agent. More usefully, it would have to be primarily defined as those agential traits (e.g., modal attitudes of desire, knowledge, power, etc.) which build up a coherent imaginary relationship at least to significant elements within the PW (as in Pavel's excellent example of Banquo's ghost apparent only to Macbeth among the banquet guests).

2.2. How, then, should one approach communication? Is it, first of all, sufficient to adopt the model of communication for dialog in general? To my mind, yes and no: that is, if and only if it can include cognition, especially about the social interests and stances of agents.

Continuing to refunction logician-type semiotics, I would hold (at least provisionally and for operative purposes) that the necessary elements of a communication are: 1/ an initial pragmatic situation with a minimum of two agents, which dynamically participate in the societal roles of addressor and addressee, and which share a given system of presuppositions (beliefs, knowledges, views, etc.); 2/ a modification of this initial system of agential relationships by explicit -- i.e. in that situation new -- propositions addressed by one specified agent to another; 3/ a final pragmatic situation or system of relationships consequent upon the change undertaken. Further, the important proviso has to be added that 4/ in theatre -- as in all fiction, and in much empirical practice -- the pragmatic agents are necessarily to be apprehended as representative roles or types: they are collectively representative (significant), so that when an addressor changes the situation, this is meaningful for the (equally typical) social addressee (cf. Eco, "Semiotics" 109-10, Suvin "Approach"). If the addressor and addressee in communication are defined as being each "an ensemble of psycho-social traits: age, gender, social position, etc." (Runcan 15), I propose to add to this that it is an ensemble held together by a presupposition of homology to an empirical type or other agential (i.e. personified) entity. However, all of this also means that a key trait in PWs is the narrative *stance*, which can lead to a changed imaginary relationship toward significant elements inside that world (cf. Suvin, „Haltung" and „*Haltung* (Bearing)"). Pragmatically, the number of such standpoints is itself not infinite, for they are generated and sustained by interests of societal classes or class fractions and alliances, which are in any sociohistorical situation and spacetime finite (usually in single digits).

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I would further stress Runcan's important insight that, within the ensemble of possible relationships which exists in a communicative situation between such an addressor and such an addressee, any given binary relation constitutes an essential pragmatic constraint that acts upon the semantico-syntactic structure of any proposition produced during this communication. Yet this insight either controverts or makes irrelevant her claim that the "universe of thought" of any participant in a communicative situation is "theoretically infinite and practically non-enumerable, so that it cannot be the object of an analysis" (18): the pragmatic, i.e. both physical and ideological, social constraints make any communicative situation by definition a theoretically finite one for given standpoints of factuality and value, whatever the practical difficulties of enumeration may be.

2.3. What this argument -- and the horizon of my whole essay -- amounts to is a plea for full consequences to be drawn from a considerable amount of evidence that formalized semiotic procedures must be subsumed under investigation into socialized actions. From Peirce to Searle, including notably Bakhtin/Vološinov, it is growing clear that _pragmatics_ encompass both semantics and syntactics. An element (word, agent, shape, color, change, etc.) becomes a sign only in a signifying situation; it has no "natural" meaning outside of it. This situation is constituted by the relation between signs and their users; a user can take something to be a sign only as it is spatio-temporally concrete and localized, and as it relates to the user's disposition toward potential action; both the concrete localization and the user's disposition are always socio-historical. Furthermore, all of this postulates a reality focussed not only on the signs but also on the subjects, in the double sense of psychophysical personality and of a socialized, collectively representative subject. The entry of potentially acting subjects reintroduces acceptance and choice, temporal genesis and mutation, and a possibility of dialectical negation into the frozen constraints of syntax -- e.g. into the exhaustively posed PWs of the logicians.

Thus, only pragmatics is able to take into account the sociohistorical situation of the text's producers and its addressees and the whole spread of their relationships within given cognitive (epistemological and ideological) presuppositions, conventions, economical and institutional frames, etc. This also re-grounds semantics: even in language, all words have a pragmatic value based on an implicit classification that follows the kind of interest which they evoke in the interlocutor, the advantages or inconveniences, pleasures or sufferings, which they suggest. Thus, each and every semantic presupposition is also a pragmatic one (though the contrary does not hold). The pragmatic presuppositions about the signs' possible uses by their users, then, necessarily inscribe historical reality, as understood by the users, between the lines of any text. Semiotics is either informed by an open historicity or it is, on its own methodical terms, truncated. In this light, I believe the fundamental factor of pragmatic constraints flies in the face of Runcan's further claim that the communicative act and situation "can be expressed by means of semantic concepts: the participants are reduced to their universe of discourse..." (21). True, we can, as observers of one, or theoreticians of any, communication describe it in a meta-language by means of words, semantically, but such a meta-statement will itself be pragmatically constrained. Perhaps the fundamental ambiguity, the terms that speak the speaker, is here an exclusive reliance on a syntactically oriented communication theory. Useful up to a point, and certainly applicable to theatre too, it ought to be in cultural studies accompanied by and subordinated to terms from pragmatically oriented semiotics and epistemology. This too was pioneered by Bakhtin:

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Context and code. Context is potentially limitless, code must be limited. Code is only a technical means of information, it has no cognitive creative significance. Code is a specially fixed, frozen context. (*Èstetika* 352; cf. also Todorov 55-56).

2.4. Within such a redefined communicative, signifying, cognitive, and indeed ludic situation, theatre too may profit from Runcan's definition of dialog as *a type of communication characterized by two restrictions*: the pragmatic one that *in it each addressor-participant must in her/his turn become addressee;* and the semantic one that *it must bear on a delimitable domain* (as different from e.g. conversation, which may touch on various topics). In that case, as she rightly remarks, "1/ an exchange of messages between two or more participants does not constitute a dialog unless it results in a text; 2/ each change of subject-matter under discussion represents the limit of a dialog" (all 13). In brief, the dialog is an ordered sequence of interactions bearing on a delimitable domain, i.e. constituting a text. I would here only dissent from two of her suggestions: first, that a text is defined simply as a coherent ensemble of propositions, since I think the presuppositions ought to be explicitly included in a definition; second, as I have argued against Bakhtin, that such a communication and such a text do not have to be only verbal.

My case may be best prepared by a brief glance at Veltruský 's analysis of dramatic dialog. Much of what he says is not directly transportable from the interaction of dramaturgic agents into the stage-audience interaction. Let me stress that I am in this whole essay talking only about *theatre dialog*, between stage and audience, and not about *stage dialog*, between agents on the stage -- in spite of their close interaction (Bogatyrev 148-49). Nonetheless, Veltruský notes not only that dialog is an interaction between alternating participants "always integrated into the extralinguistic situation" (material and psychological), but he takes from Mukařovský an aspect lacking in Runcan: the dialectics of unity and opposition. As different from the true monolog, the unitary subject-matter or theme is in dialog constituted by an interpenetration of two or more "contexts," each defined as "the attitude [the speaker] adopts toward the theme and his assessment of it." Veltruský adds to this quote from Mukařovský (who took it from Bakhtin/Vološinov) that this attitude

depends mainly on [the interlocutor's] place in the extralinguistic situation, Furthermore, if the interlocutors can understand each other and grasp each other's standpoint only when they speak about the same thing, this is not a unilateral relation. Often the addressee can understand what the speaker is talking about only if he knows [the addressor's] attitude toward that subject matter or, what amounts to the same thing, only if he knows the sense that unifies the context to which the speech in question belongs. A mistake concerning a very slight element of the psychological or material situation may lead to a far-reaching misapprehension of what the whole discussion is about. (Veltruský 128-29)

3. The Audience-Stage Dialog as Induction of PWs

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3.0. What, then, is the defining contract of theatre communication, i.e. of the situation of an audience assisting to a representation? It is theoretically a most illuminating case because it is as a rule composed of non-verbal reactions to the largely but by no means exclusively verbal stage actions. But is it a dialog? And to begin with, how does one begin talking about the "theatre contract" of a two-way relation between spectators and performers, between the two indispensable spacetimes and worlds of audience and performance, *la salle* and *la scène*?

I have argued about dramaturgy and its imaginary space(s) at length elsewhere (Suvin, *To Brecht* and "Approach"), drawing on developments in the German sphere from the 1900s on, in Slavic countries from the 1920s on (including Bakhtin), then on the interface between the less dogmatic wings of French Structuralism and Marxism from the 1940s on, and finally on the contemporary discussion, most usefully oriented to some sociohistorical uses of semiotics (Lotman, Eco, Ubersfeld, Elam). I concluded that the indispensable elements for theatre were *the presentation* (or, adopting Eco's refunctioning of that beautiful word in "Semiotics" 110, *the ostending) of human relationships organized into a story with its own spacetime to an audience by conscious and present agents*. A theatre performance is therefore not only a communicative *praxis,* often usable (say in TV) as an inculcation of dominant **mythical** stances to a subordinate mass (**see Barthes**) but it is simultaneously a cognitive, epistemological experiment clarifying existing views of reality. The theatre's ostending of human relationships to an audience presupposes a sensually concrete array of signs which functions as a model. I would like now to advance these investigations into the hypothesis that the imaginary spacetime of the story, modelling human relationships, is best understood as a PW. Furthermore, it is an imaginary PW situated in the audience's "mind's eye" but induced in a continuing complex dialog between the stage and the spectators.

3.1. The story of a performance text is, no doubt (as in all fiction), shaped by the representative displacement and condensation into the limited spacetime at its disposal, where it unfolds through an agential constellation. In reading fiction, the interaction between the elements being presented and the implied reader induces in the reader a specific PW. This seems to me the enabling as well as the central factor of all fiction as game and cognition (at least as much as communication). The imaginary PW of a fictional text is constituted by complex and intimate feedback with the readers on the basis of its <u>not</u> being identical with their empirical world (or empirical PW) and yet being imaginatively supported by it. The PW is constructed by the reader's largely constrained yet at the same time creatively free imagination, it is a signified and *representamen*, to be clearly distinguished from the text surface, which is a signifier and *representans*.

However, in the case of a theatre *performance text*, there is an additional *differentia specifica* (or even *generica*?) in comparison to fiction being only read. Oscillating between clarity and dream, theatre ostends an exemplary story or model to physically present but also deeply stimulated people. My earlier argumentation, applied now to the performance text, is then: *the dramaturgic story and spacetime induce, by the interaction between the existents, events, and relationships being ostended and the **physically present** audience for which they are ostended, a specific Possible World*. This seems to me, again, the enabling as well as the central factor of theatre as game, cognition and if you wish communication. Pragmatically, any text -- and in particular a "performance text" -- is not primarily an utterance nor even a system of propositions but rather an apparatus or -- as Barthes once said -- a cybernetic machine for inducing a certain

type of imaginative interaction with it by the users on the basis of inference: "Roughly, the convention pertaining to inferences from fictional sentences is that, unless the author indicates otherwise [in the story], standard inference procedures are retained" (Woods 25; cf. Eco *Lector*, 24-26 and passim). I also hold that any text's sociohistorically contingent signifiers and signs always and without exception signify and refer to some type of human relationships imaginable by the audience. Whatever the spatiotemporal and agential signifiers, it is always *de nobis* or, more precisely and significantly, *de possibilibus pro nobis* (about our own possibilities) that the fable narrates.

But most persuasively, it is the dramaturgic narration that always functions, in a wider sense, as a parable. This, I believe, is why all the PWs in theatre are lay but semi-numinous, i.e. at least residually and potentially *utopian*, **destructive of the dominant class's myths**. Even the most banal and hegemonically coopted dramaturgic stories hold out the salvational and miraculous possibility that, given a different PW induced by the sensually concrete stage, things in the everyday spacetime too could be otherwise; but then, it is also true that corruption of the potentially best is the worst (such as Broadway).

3.2. How is the feedback between stage and audience possible? It is rooted in the anthropologically basic and constitutive theatre fact: that the spectators' pragmatic position is specifically one *cut off from tactility*; they may look but not touch. The PW in theatre is centrally constituted by the resulting *basic split between visual and tactile space* experienced by the audience. From this decisive factor of theatre all other aspects issue or depend. This additional hypothesis in my approach is based on an application to theatre of unambiguous findings by the major authorities on space perception and imagination (cf. Helmholtz, Mach, Gibson, and in particular Merleau-Ponty).

First of all, our perceptions of empirical space are based on our capability for directly changing a spatial relationship by volitional impulses: the "socially informed body" was the original "geometer" (Bourdieu 114-24). Therefore -- continuing this biologically central union of perception and action -- any psychological image, and any "intuition of space" as well (and a PW is clearly both), is not a passive "reading of the objects' properties" but clearly an at least implicit "action exerted on them" (Piaget & Inhelder 342 and 523). Conversely, *any human action is an imaginative one*, it "demands that the subject subordinate its sensori-motoric activity to forms lacking sensual reality" (Wallon 164). This unity of the human sensorium and brain, of imaginative models and gestural re-production, of perception and intervention, finally of "imagined space and motoric space" (ibidem 214), is now artificially and artfully prevented. The theatre spectators are, by definition, *unable to experience tactile sensations or mechanical bodily consequences from events within the dramaturgic space* (and viceversa -- though with important differences -- so are the actors in relation to empirical space). In a longer and much more substantiated discussion of the anthropology of dramaturgic space I have argued (Suvin "Approach") that this is the central practical or ontological contract between theatre audience and theatre stage.

This new bodily and imaginative attitude of the theatre spectator is a quite extraordinary cultural creation, a kind of benign but biologically literal abnormality which suspends her/his power of changing the environment to enhance his/her exclusive concentration on signifying understanding and cognition. It has fascinating parallels with a disturbance impeding purposeful

actions and much discussed in pathology as _apraxia_ (Merleau-Ponty 119-72; cf. a lengthy discussion in Suvin "Approach"). In it, the subject loses the capacity for an overview allowing him/her to hold situations at arm's length -- or to crack a joke (which seems to be a traffic between two semantic domains), or to evince sexual desire as different from sexual consummation (Merleau-Ponty 157ff. and 181ff.). The theatre spectator shares with the apractic patient the split between action and imagination: between, on the one hand, the subject's concept of space beyond grasp and, on the other, her/his body concept and voluntary motoric actions. Symmetrically obverse to the apractic patient's impossibility of imagining actions, the spectator abandons her/his body concept and motoric movement in favour of exclusive concentration on imaginatively different situations, desires, and spaces. (A quite different parallel between theatre and dream cannot be discussed here.)

In theatre, the basic difference between a full sensori-motoric space and a sensually truncated but imaginatively modifiable visual-cum-auditive space both induces and is transposed into a basic ontological distinction: on the one hand, there are the audience and empirical relations in _the everyday world_ with its dominant ideological constructions of reality, and on the other, the dramaturgic space of the ostended performance constructing _a Possible World_ with possibly different relationships. Thus, the result of the provisional sundering of tactile from visual space, of suppressing motoric action in favour of an intensification of imagination, is that the spectator, like the apractic patient, becomes an empirically "worldless subject" (Binswanger 184). But as opposed to the apractic, the theatre spectator, by concentrating on the ostended imaginary action, gains an imaginary world: s/he perceives a new PW. A PW is an abnormal normality of the anthropological family of utopian fictions, characterized by a _conditional_ timespace (cf. Suvin, _Metamorphoses_ ch. 3).

A highly important aspect is that for a PW "the term of 'world' is not a manner of speaking: it means that the 'mental' or cultural life borrows its structures from natural life" (Merleau-Ponty 225), that "our _hic et nunc_" has "a preferential status" (Eco, _Role_ 223). In the same vein, Marin concluded -- significantly, by advancing from an openly parabolic text -- that "the natural world, as an organized and perceptually structured spatiotemporal ensemble, constitutes the original text ...of all possible discourse, its 'origin' and its constitutive environment.... All possible discourse is enunciated only against the ground of the perceived world's significant space, by which it is surrounded...." (167 and 175). In short, a background "zero world" or PW_0 is presupposed in any culturally constructed imaginary world or PWn. Or, more prudently: the sum of all the presuppositions necessary for understanding PWn is PW_0 (the empirical world, or better the culturally relevant part or _pars pro toto_ of PW_0, Eco's "imaginary encyclopedia" in each human mind).

3.3. Finally, what does the feedback dialog between stage and audience consist of, how is it concretely constituted? Only a brief and vague sketch is possible here: we know far too little about it. To begin with, I will call the two interlocutors stage (group) vs. audience (group), since we are not dealing here with verbalizing human foci only but also with sound, noise, light, space perceptions, etc. These two groups are in many ways asymmetrical. The stage group, the seeming addressor, is also, even before the play "opens," first a potential and then a real audience's addressee (cf. the splendid brief section in Elam 95-97). In any performance, "the actor finds himself simultaneously in front of an addressee who sends him, no doubt, phatic or emotive

messages of control (i.e. gives him the feeling that the contact continues, or even gives him signals of approval or disapproval), but by means of different codes" (Eco, *Terzoprogramma* 62). The stage transmits a full array of complex visual and auditive signs, and I shall not expatiate upon them here. The audience response is omnipresent and well known, though practically not yet theorized -- except for exceptions such as Wekwerth's Brechtian identification of the spectator as "the primary player in the theater," who assimilates the stage events by confronting "the inner model in his head" and "the objectified equivalent (*gegenständliche Entsprechung*) of the events on the stage" (474; cf, also the most stimulating Althusser[5/]). The audience responses are expressions of such spectatorial playing. They are in modern Euro-American conditions -- but not in Kabuki -- rarely conducted by means of visual signs (but cf. Coppieters) and even more rarely by means of verbal ones. Mostly, emotive and phatic signals are given by means of variations in noise level and quality (from tense silence and fidgeting with coughing through laughter to overt clapping, booing or even walk-out) with which the audience reacts to the stage. In function of this interlocutory activity, theatre professionals have from time immemorial classified audiences not only into "good" and "bad" but also "difficult," "hard (to warm up)" or "stupid" (cf. Ravar & Anrieu 34-39). Though coextensive with the duration of the performance text, audience activity seems to be an archipelago of point-like manifestations. If the stage functions mainly as a spread (analogically), the audience seems to function mainly on an on-off basis (digitally).

But of course, this is only speculation; I hope this approach of mine might lead to more inductive work. At least, it seems clear that the two collectives or personifications of stage and audience share a delimited domain (the play's dramaturgic story), they take turns as addressor and addressee, they fashion a text (the performance and its induced PW). If so, they satisfy Bakhtin's and Runcan's conditions for dialog. Cognitively speaking, the audience-stage relation participates in the primal hermeneutic circle where "No assertion is possible that cannot be understood as an answer to a question, and assertions can only be understood in this way" (Gadamer 107). Gadamer's notions of "prejudice" and "horizons" could thus be -- perhaps somewhat forcibly -- adapted to theatre: only as far as the spectators places themselves into the horizon of the PW induced by their interactions with the stage events, only insofar does that spectator group or audience consciously confront its prejudices or pre-judgments. This dialectic of closeness and distance (Brecht's and perhaps Gadamer's *Verfremdung*, estrangement) in the dialog between audience and stage constitutes the performance text. Finally, using Mukařovský's analysis of art works (3), the "perceivable signifier" of the performance text is actions constituting the flowing spacetime on the stage; its "signification" or "esthetic object registered in a collective consciousness" is the spacetime of the dramaturgic story with its PW; and its "relationship with that which is signified" is to function as a model of people's relationships with each other and the universe which is at least formally alternative to the audience's dominant social construction of reality.

Notes

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1/ All references are keyed to the final bibliography and entered in the body of the essay by last name with page. My thanks go to Marc Angenot for many fruitful discussions, and to Simonetta Salvestroni and Silvano Tagliagambe for inviting me to the conference "Bakhtin Theorist of Dialog" at the Univ. of Cagliari, May 1985, for which a first sketch of this essay was written; I am also grateful to Marco De Marinis, Umberto Eco, and Michael Holquist for some crucial secondary literature. Special thanks for helpful comments about my discreet reworking go to Goran Sergej Pristaš. All translations from non-English titles cited are mine.

2/ I follow here the usage of most students of biblical parable, (see, e.g., Bultmann, Crossan, Dodd, Funk, Jeremias, Jones, Linnemann, and Via in the bibliography of Suvin "Approach"), which differs from I.A. Richards's pioneering but somewhat confusing use of these terms for the "subject" and "modifier" of a metaphor.

3/ By the way: the first quote is from Bakhtin (*Èstetika* 276), the second from "Vološinov " [118] -- so much for their supposed different identities.

4/ I am acutely aware of the fact that (not to speak of Aristotle, Buridan, Hume, Leibniz, and Carnap) within formalised logics and "analytic philosophy" probably no other subject has elicited such a flood of writings as that of possible worlds, and that I am rushing in where philosophers tread warily. I also do not at all have spacetime here to buttress my positions by recourse to philosophical authorities such as Cresswell or Rescher. I shall mention only the anthologies of Linsky and Loux (where further references may be found to basic works such as von Wright's, Hintikka's, etc., and to a representative array of discordances) for three reasons. First, that anyway discussions of theories that make artworks possible "beg some of the hardest philosophical questions" (as Danto has somewhere said). Second, that many pretty problems seem, alas, interesting strictly within the specialized semantic world of a philosophy whose presuppositions and vocabulary I largely do not share. But third, more nastily, so far as I can see after several years of gleanings the idea of an imaginary or ideological location for existents (which would immediately introduce the necessity to speak of pragmatic constraints rather than oscillate between Platonism and a twisted positivism) has not become dominant among practitioners of analytical philosophy. I must regretfully confess that I thus find their dominant majority uselessly metaphysical, in the double sense of mystical and empiricistically non-dialectical. More interesting are attempts at discussions of fiction and/or literary semantics and text semiotics stimulated by but strongly deviating from reigning orthodoxy: Woods, some articles in the special issues of *Versus* no. 19-20 (1978), *Poetics* 1-2 (1979) and 1980, and above all Eco, *Lector* 122-73 and *Role*, Elam 100-14, and the articles by Pavel, later brought to a head in his *Fictional Worlds*.

5/ It ought to be self-critically noted that this essay remains within the framework of a semiotics, still lacking what I have been since the 1990s calling a political epistemology. To integrate them, one would have to take into major account -- possibly with a smaller and different reliance on Freud -- Althusser's insistence on both the violent and the ideological

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State apparati, in our century better fused than ever since the times of the Holy Inquisition, and his dramaturgic sense of politics (most explicit in "Piccolo" and "On Brecht"), that also means a political sense of dramaturgy. Theatre is not only Barthes's semiotic machine but also Althusser's machine for disrupting identities.

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(See also Vološinov.)

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