

REVIEW ARTICLE:

MAPPING THE SEMIOTICS OF THEATER: FABIÁN GUTIÉRREZ FLOREZ'S *TEORÍA Y PRAXIS DE SEMIÓTICA TEATRAL*

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Translations of essays dealing with literary and critical theory have a significance that is not always acknowledged by commentators. They are key signposts on the forking paths of intellectual history or, to evoke a more timely metaphor, they form the nodes on the genealogical tree of knowledge that allow us to chart how epistemes move through history and culture. Were we to position ourselves at the time and location of key translations, focusing on the silent *before*, the gap stretching back to the time and place of publication in the original, and on the clamorous *after*, the critical or literary furor activated by an infusion of new ideas into the new culture, we would begin to see how and where knowledge advances, pivots, forks, or is stymied. We would thereby gain a deeper understanding of the culture text in its universal dimension and would envision more clearly the role linguistic boundaries play in organizing that text into spheres of understanding.

A case in point involves the history and evolution of theater semiotics as summarized by two of this methodology's prime contributors, Kier Elam and Erika Fischer-Lichte. The former's declaration that 1931 is "an important date in the history of theatre studies" (Elam 5) might just as well be written in Czech since one of the two essays

referred to, Otakar Zich's *Aesthetics of the Art of Drama*, has not been translated and is known to readers of Western European languages primarily through the appropriation of Zich's ideas by fellow Prague-school linguists, especially Veltrusky and Bogatyrev (see works cited), whose studies, in turn, first appear in Western European languages in the 1960s and 1970s. The other essay (Mukarovsky 1966), moreover, does not reach non-Czech speaking readers until 1966, a fact whose implications seem not to be lost to Erika Fischer-Lichte when she acknowledges, albeit in a footnote, the spawning of ideas that occurs as Prague School semiotics finds access into Poland in the 1960s, following Roman Ingarden's work on the functions of language in theater, and then into France and Italy, where Michel Corvin, Regis Durand, André Helbo, Marcello Pagnini, Gianfranco Bettetini, Paola Gullí Pugliatti, Franco Ruffini, Alessandro Serpieri, and, most notably, Anne Ubersfeld, Patrice Pavis, and Marco de Marinis graft these ideas onto the trunk of Saussurean-based structuralism, as previously advanced by Roland Barthes and Georges Mounin. As Fischer-Lichte implies, 1964 (Garvin), 1971 (Bogatyrev and Ingarden, *Poétique*), and especially 1976 (Matejka and Titunik) are far more significant than 1931 as chronological signposts for non-Czech speaking critics and scholars who grapple with the history of theater criticism in the West (Fischer-Lichte 129, n. 2).

These observations bear directly on the meaning and value of a work such as Fabián Gutiérrez Flórez's *Teoría y praxis de semiótica teatral*, for at stake here is the question of translation regarded not only in its conventional sense but also as an infusion of ideas that gives shape to human history, figuratively speaking, when those ideas pass, under a new guise, from one culture to the next. Translation may thus be taken as the lifeblood of knowledge in its trans-national and trans-historical dimension, a fact that relates especially to the methodology under consideration since semiotics may itself be described as a practice founded upon and, at once, in search of universalities. It has developed a complex nomenclature for identifying and problematizing the totality of signifying systems that function in the work of art and that link that work globally to others like it. Even when it addresses the issue of specificity, of a play or period of history for instance, the sign that is uniquely *theatrical* or the *cultural* codes that are specific to a given *socio-historical* context nonetheless serve to establish the grounds for comparing plays, places, and moments in time. The Inter-

national Society of Semioticians, journals that publish in different languages (e.g., *Degrés*), and the fact that critics have often issued first versions of their articles in languages other than their own are further signs of the cosmopolitan nature of a methodology concerned primarily with the universalities of artistic and cultural manifestations.

It follows then that *manuals* as sweeping in their aims as Gutiérrez Flórez's have special importance for semioticians since they attest to the global framework of a methodology firmly rooted, as mentioned, in the very concept of the global. Some of the more important examples in this regard are Ubersfeld (1978, 1981), Elam (1980), Pavis (1976, 1980, 1982, 1985), De Marinis (1982), Fischer-Lichte (1983), Bobes (1987), Toro (1990), Carlson (1990), and Melrose (1994). These so-called "estudios orgánicos" of theater semiotics (De Marinis, in Toro 10) lay bare the methodology's problems and procedures in its broadest sense. They allow us to chart the way the critical practice emerges, coalesces, ascends to a position of dominance then becomes diffused (most recently) among the forest of other dominant discourses, winding its way across the temporal and spatial map of human culture. They are the documents of the golden age of theater semiotics from whence we may telescope back through the genealogical tree in order to see how far the methodology has traveled since 1931 and where to position Fabián Gutiérrez Flórez's work on that tree.

As one of the most recent contributors to the field, Susan Melrose is particularly well positioned to help us to do so. She approaches the topic with a decidedly post-modern slant that serves to locate the peak of theater semiotics at the beginning of the past decade when prevailing practices show the movement to be most closely aligned with 20th-century modernism. "It is the triumphant rule of modernism—Melrose declares—which designates as *natural* and as *rational*, clear categories—units, boundary-marked entities, atoms, *individuals*, ideas—on the basis of their neat relation to (a perceived) *what they are not*" (Melrose 36). Such an affirmation recalls especially the formal (quantitative and statistical) inquiries into the identity and function of the theatrical sign, an approach that Elam documents in detail and that reaches Italy (Ruffini, Serpieri) by way of Jansen (1967, 1968, 1968, 1973, 1978). This modernist approach of earlier semiotics may be traced back beyond Barthes' celebrated acknowledgment of the semiotic basis of theater—"density of signs" / "informational polyphony" (Barthes)—and beyond Kowzan's typology of sign systems (Kowzan 1968) and its

various offsprings to the Prague School's ground breaking studies of the essential mobility (Honzl 1940) and hierarchies (Honzl 1943) of the theatrical sign. Segmentation, stratification, duration, frequency, and simultaneity are the primary spatiotemporal markers that, during this phase, show the extent to which critics privilege the syntactical and semantic functions of dramatic discourse at the expense of pragmatics. Implicit in these tendencies is the notion of art as a "closed system," as Pavis has mentioned, in a period of theater semiotics that he and Marco De Marinis describe as structuralist-based and signification-oriented (De Marinis 1982: 45; Pavis 1982: 80-83; 1985: 235). For all of its hierarchies, typologies, and taxonomies, the movement remains firmly rooted in the modernist "theory of creativity as masterly, centered and globalizing control" (Melrose 22).

Whereas Pavis and Ubersfeld themselves may be viewed as early exponents—as Melrose insists—of some of the principles that prevail during this phase, it is also true that they anticipate many of the very changes that lead theater semiotics beyond the epistemological and methodological confines described above and toward the critical ideology that predominates today and that Melrose identifies in the following terms:

We have moved in our understanding from the notion of a centered, dominant and tyrannical single-subject-specific "creative thrust," which weaves its web over the harmonious whole and perfectly communicates its intention to "like minds" who reproduce "the message" in the image of its maker, to that of a looser and more fluid practice marked by numerous focus points, and permitting any number of "voyages" by a number of always-singular social subjects—that is, offering the potential of a network of different conceptual and practical schema. (24)

This, in short, is the essence of post-modernism applied to theater criticism, a shift that Ubersfeld anticipates, as Melrose in fact acknowledges, by focusing on the "*combinatory* capacity" of theater, on the problematic "voids" and "unseizable interstices" that open up between actor and character, the actual and the possible, sign and reference, interstices that theater flaunts more than any other form of art. In their recognition of these factors, Melrose and Ubersfeld are obviously

indebted to early Prague school contributions, most importantly to Petr Bogatyrev (Bogatyrev 1938), the first to discuss the unique and complex way semiotisation occurs in theater. As Bogatyrev explains, the theatrical sign derives from *real* people and objects when they are divested of their materialism to be transformed into signs referring back to themselves on the seemingly discordant plane of *fictional* reality (Bogatyrev 1971: 529). At question here is a new referential slant on the timeworn if not problematic marriage between fiction and reality that is fundamental for the theater and that Ubersfeld addresses in her comments on the specificity of the genre: "Le lieu de l'in-vraisemblance est le lieu même de la spécificité théâtrale" (Ubersfeld 1978: 55); "tel est le paradoxe de la mimesis, que plus l'imitation est parfaite, 'réaliste', 'vraisemblable', moins elle est crue en tant que telle, moins la confusion avec le réel est possible" (Ubersfeld 1981: 312). This realization brings Ubersfeld to underscore the role of Freudian denial in theater—one of her most important contributions to the field—as she assesses how the tension between fiction and reality—object, sign and reference—lead the spectator in theater, as they do in our dreams, to unforeseen truths, the profoundness of which lies in direct correlation to the fictionality of their representation. The linkage Ubersfeld establishes between the spectator's consciousness and the "contradictions" that, in theater, are as inherent as they are "unresolvable" (Ubersfeld 1978: 13 ff.) is a vital harbinger of Melrose's own program for the 1990s: to make the " 'unseizable' residue graspable"; to problematize—and presumably denounce—theater's "desire traps," those complex "ways of knowing" (epistemes) that are widely disseminated and that "imprison and please us in the apparent user-defining 'certainties' [they] offer" (Melrose 30). In short, the path that leads from Ubersfeld to Melrose's proclamation in favor of heterogeneity, specificity, diversity, and marginality, dependent as it is on the latter's reading of Michel de Certeau and Pierre Bourdieu, is heavily informed by theories of reception that are oriented toward the psychological dimension of theater.

By contrast, we may speak of a separate yet parallel departure from the "masterly control" of late modernism in a line of critical thinking that links Pavis and De Marinis to recent studies by Toro, Alter, and Carlson, that shares common ground with sociological and anthropological models of inquiry, and that concentrates, not on the psychological tendencies of the hypothetical individual, but rather on the ideo-

logically charged structures—spatial, temporal, conceptual—that mediate between real communities and their theater. Attention ascribed by semioticians to the *mise-en-scène*, which grows considerably with time, is an important early indication of this development for, as a primary subject of study, the *mise-en-scène* allows critics to approach dramatic literature via its performance, when it is fully *realized* at a specific time and place as the expression of a real community. Pavis is a pioneer in this regard, as may be seen by his concern for notational systems, that is, for the way directors (usually) attempt to transcribe performance and thereby bear written testimony to the problematic relationship between one relatively fixed text (written) and another (performance) that is ephemeral by nature. These systems constitute a “model” or “schema,” as Pavis argues, that “strives to show the close link between the said and the shown, the utterance and its enunciation, the said and the non-said” (Pavis 1982: 128). As such, they possess a textuality of their own, one that Pavis regards as “meta-textual” and as corresponding in nature to Lotman’s “secondary modeling systems” (Pavis 1982: 126). Coupled with Pavis’s subsequent analyses of tempo, rhythm, and gestural language, the prime stumbling blocks of notation, this research suggests important means for addressing the way *ideology* mediates between the *langue* of dramatic literature (codes and conventions) and of culture (gestural, corporal modes of expression), on the one hand, and the *parole* of the specific play or performance on the other. Such an approach culminates in his latest essay, where Pavis cites Antoine Vitez’s notion of the stage as a “laboratoire de la langue et des gestes de la nation” to discuss the usefulness of semiotics for uncovering the “héritage des *pratiques gestuelles, vocales, intonatives*” that constitute a culture (Pavis 1990: 73).

The shift from the *logocentrism* of earlier theater semiotics that is signaled, according to Melrose, by the very title of *The Languages of the Stage*, to the *culture-centrism* represented by Pavis’s latest essay is exemplary and it has as much to do with the influence of Lotman on the main exponents of theater semiotics in the 1980s as it does with the growing importance of performance as a prime object of concern. Lotman’s notion of culture as the “appropriation sémiotique de la réalité sociale” (Pavis 1990: 156) and, more importantly, his attempts at identifying the means and methods by which such an appropriation takes place, have special meaning for Marco De Marinis, who, over the past decade, has focused increasingly on pragmatics, reception, and the

spectators' role in the production of meaning through performance. Like Pavis, De Marinis seeks to posit as well the existence of ideologically charged mediating structures. Yet whereas Pavis has tended to evaluate those structures within the framework of a specific play or performance, emphasizing, as indicated, the tools for relating the *mise-en-scène* and the written text (gesture, mime, rhythm, notation), De Marinis focuses on the mediatory role that conventions and codes play in a broader dimension, highlighting the need to historicize plays and their performance by "reinserting" them synchronically into the plurilingual "culture text" to which they are intertextually linked (De Marinis 154). The methods of analysis prescribed by De Marinis—grouping plays according to the time or place of their performance, or as the expression of a single style of directing or acting—and his open recognition of the importance of sociology and anthropology as collateral fields of expertise for theater critics (De Marinis 1982: 182, 194; 1988: 80-127) are key indications of the way theater semiotics has moved recently. In his approach, De Marinis echoes beliefs expressed by Michael Hays, who in 1977 proclaims with the force of a manifesto that "theater practice," being "social in nature," must therefore be reintegrated "into the social context from which [it has] been so unnecessarily removed" (Hays 1977: 85), and who subsequently develops a method for evaluating the "culturally and ideologically conditioned frame of reference" that "is the foundation upon which not only the play and performance, but also the space and function of the theatrical institution are built" (Hays 1983: 6). Together these critics represent a predominant strain of late theater semiotics, one ascribed to by Fernando de Toro (Toro 137-160), Jean Alter in his essay on socio-semiotics (Alter), and Marvin Carlson, who undertakes the study of institutions and buildings, read socio-historically within an urban framework and in relation to theater production (Carlson 56-122), and who proclaims *his* program for semiotics today: to stress (1) the contribution of the *empirical* audience toward the production of drama and theater, (2) the *complete* theater experience, which includes such marginalia as institutions, buildings, and societies, and (3) the relationship between the signs and codes of theater and those of everyday life.

To sum up, this overview of the basic premises evident in what have been termed the "estudios orgánicos" of theater semiotics should help us to trace in the most schematic way this school's evolution from its birth in Prague in the 1930s to its appropriation and transformation

in Western Europe and North and South America since the 1960s. As mentioned, one may note a clear departure, beginning around 1980, from the logocentrism of early semiotics toward a greater awareness of the complex interrelatedness of dramatic literature and its representation. Likewise, through the influence especially of Jauss, Ingarden, and Lotman, critics have passed from an earlier treatment of theater as signification toward a more acute understanding of the communicative strategies of the genre, from the focus on plays as closed totalities and toward greater concern for the multiple, open-ended positions theater shares with society at different stages of history and in a constantly shifting cultural context. These developments have produced a heightened concern for theatricality as a counterpoint to the parallel notions of textuality, discursivity, and narrativity and as a basis upon which to link spectator and spectacle (Fischer-Lichte 1994), theater and painting (Lotman 1973), stage and social practices (Lotman 1974). That is, they have produced a greater sensitivity toward the *pragmatics* of performance in society, thereby piloting theater semiotics toward the brink of its own demise as a dominant discourse, toward the vaguely delimited yet ever more captivating borderland that semiotics shares as a methodology with performance theory (Schechner 1977), sociocriticism (Hays 1983; Duchet and Gaillard 1976), and cultural studies (Hall 1980). In this regard, Susan Melrose's work, despite its title, appears less as an "estudio orgánico" of theater semiotics than as a retrospective, after-the-fact appraisal of an essentially modernist methodology that has run its course in the post-modern era.

This, then, is the panorama that bears relating to Fabián Gutiérrez Flórez's *Teoría y praxis de la semiótica teatral*, the most recent addition to the small collection of manuals on the topic in Spanish. The critical rapport that this essay seeks to establish with the field of theater semiotics today is awkward at best, for in many ways the study seems rooted, methodologically and ideologically, in the structuralist-oriented phase of semiotics. What attempts the author does make at moving toward the notions of heterogeneity and specificity that have emerged as promising guidelines for the 1990s are meager at best and constitute an unfortunate sign of his disinterest, disregard, or misappropriation of the most recent developments in the field. Despite his stated desire to focus on the interstitial, mediatory forces that predominate in theater production, that is, on the process of transformation that the "material narrativo" undergoes "para convertirse en material

dramático" (Gutiérrez Flórez 54-55), his emphasis falls on the universal and definitive nature of the "material" itself, not on the ambiguities of the process, a primary indication of this work's methodological and ideological belatedness.

This is initially apparent in the axiomatic tone of the Introduction, the first of three sections in which Gutiérrez Flórez attempts to establish the basis and aims of his essay. In doing so he includes a string of thumbnail summaries of theories covering an ambitious range of topics—the philosophy of logic (Lakatos, Popper, Bunge), of semiotics (Saussure, Pierce, Morris, Helmslev, Lázaro Carreter) and of literary criticism (Eco, Kristeva, García Berrio)—arriving at conclusions that are as superfluous as they are matter-of-fact. He defines the "método científico" and justifies his preference for the "método hipotético deductivo como base metodológica constante" (Gutiérrez Flórez 17). He reminds us that semiotics "se ocupa de los análisis particulares de los sistemas sígnicos incluidos en la semiología general" (Gutiérrez Flórez 20) and that "la Ciencia de la literatura cumple con los requisitos exigibles a una disciplina para convertirse en ciencia" (Gutiérrez Flórez 23). His survey of the history ("breve diacronía") of theater semiotics in four short pages fails to establish a serious dialogue with important recent works cited in passing. As a consequence, the Introduction proves tangential to his stipulated aims and fails to clarify what innovations he proposes to a well-established field. It is couched in a meta-discourse that seems exceedingly self-reflective and that shows excessive concern for the mechanics of his study. Most importantly, it conveys a rigid faith in the absolute, something that is evident in nearly every aspect of the essay.

This rigidity is most visible in the plethora of categories, hierarchies, taxonomies, schema, and charts that are apparently intended to lead us to the inalterable facts and undeniable truths of theater criticism. Due to excessive ambition and to conceptual anachronisms, these factors entrap the reader instead in a jungle of technical terms and obscure connections. In the *Introduction*, summaries of Pierce's indexical, iconic, and symbolic functions and of the communication / signification polarity return us to the polemics of the 1970s. The first serves to delimit the "relaciones básicas entre signo y referente" and is followed by a schematic presentation of the "relaciones entre signos": the subdivision of the general sign into its semiotic, involuntary, and linguistic subsets. The second leads the author to denounce the

narrowness of Mounin's stimulus-response model of communication in terms that add nothing to Elam's or Ubersfeld's discussion of the same matter more than a decade earlier (Elam 33-97; Ubersfeld 1978: 40-57). Presentation of the theoretical model in the *Primera Parte* is equally confusing and shows the same thirst for compounded, totalizing structures. Here the author dedicates considerable attention to the "elementos y fases," sequences and segments, that constitute the "hecho teatral," a reflection of the influence of linguistic and formalist-structuralist models developed by Steen Jansen and Alessandro Serpieri in the 1960s and 1970s. Classical and modern notions of the opposition of the diegetic and mimetic planes, Morris's "intensional" and "extensional" categories for semantics, and, most significantly, the latter's tripartite organization of inquiry into syntactical, semantic, and pragmatic areas all constitute a formidable collection of tools for proving that "el relato . . . se halla también en la lírica y en la dramática" (Gutiérrez Flórez 35), a statement that reflects the reductive nature of this study and, by the same token, the author's disregard for the specificity of theater, despite his claims to the contrary. Indeed, Morris's triptych shapes this work in the broadest way and is the most important indication of the Gutiérrez Flórez's quest for the same "totalité de signification" pursued by Greimas, whose influence is profound and whose actantial model is treated as crucial for studying how narrative is transformed into drama.

Greimas's influence is suggested initially by the "único axioma" (Gutiérrez Flórez 49) used to introduce the theoretical model (*Primera parte*), that linguistic structures provide models that may be applied to basic plot paradigms. It is more fully conveyed, however, by a distinct imbalance in the discussions of each of Morris's three "áreas." Sections dealing with questions of syntax are far better developed and more heavily documented than those treating semantics, a topic that is trivialized—"el estudio del significado es necesario para cualquier método que, como dice J.M. Lotman, coloca en el centro de su investigación el problema de la semiosis" (Gutiérrez Flórez 159)—and weighted toward the "factores intensionales" governing signs: that is, toward inventories of the syntax-related "funciones" and "secuencias," "isotopías" and "ejes semánticos," that shape signification (Gutiérrez Flórez 162-69). The most essential features of semantics—*reference* and its attendant "imagen del mundo"—are reduced to a tidy triptych based on "lo verdadero," "lo ficcional verosímil," and "lo ficcional no verosímil,"

the author's formula for addressing the "eterno problema de la estructuración del significado" (Gutiérrez Flórez 157). When applied to Antonio and Manuel Machado's *Desdichas de la fortuna o Julianillo Valcárcel* in the "praxis" section (*Segunda parte*), these notions lead to conclusions that would be as easily accessible via the most traditional form of thematic criticism: a detailed list of traits typifying each of the characters; a superficial account of how the play's historical setting (the *Siglo de Oro*) "pesa en la concepción" of these traits. Pragmatics fares worse, for the topic receives rather scant attention despite its emergence as the primary area of concern in late theater semiotics. The vital contributions of the 1980s, by such critics as Pavis and De Marinis, have left little if any imprint on Gutiérrez Flórez's theory. Where the author shifts from theory to praxis, he reverts once again to the most conventional models of analysis. He reviews the life and times of the Machados, describes the historical context when their play was first performed, and summarizes the critical reaction to it by important theater critics of the 1920s. The "sistema complejo de relaciones extra-textuales" and "jerarquía de normas artísticas," concepts borrowed from Lotman (Gutiérrez Flórez 169), fail to emerge as a *system* in any semiotic sense.

The extent to which Gutiérrez Flórez privileges structure-related issues betrays a critical ideology that is textual-based and logocentric, as summarized by the author's rejection of "cualquier consideración de una fase espectacular que niegue . . . la fase textual, la cual siempre debe preceder y sustentar a la representación, porque repetimos, el texto teatral contiene virtualmente su propia representación" (Gutiérrez Flórez 81). This ideology and the critical practice that it supports derive from the judgment that the "fase espectacular es en la práctica inaprehensible," for which the dramatic text constitutes the (only?) "objeto material válido sobre el que se puede efectuar un estudio semiótico teatral" (Gutiérrez Flórez 81). Such declarations help to account for the author's decidedly narratological approach to the topic, as exemplified by his "análisis estructural del relato" and his application of the actantial model to the *Conde Lucanor*, distracting material at best for an essay promoting theater semiotics in the 1990s. Even more problematic is Gutiérrez Flórez's conception of theater production as a "proceso acumulativo," that is, as emanating inalterably from the *inventio* and *elocutio* of the initial "fase textual" and as moving forth toward moments involving the director, actors, and the audience in the

subsequent "fase espectacular." The rigidly linear construction of this model shows no regard for the complex network of multiple and multi-directional lines of communication that sustain the theater event, some of which are activated by actors, directors, and real communities as they generate undeniable influence upon the *inventio*. Moreover, it counters without justification important beliefs that have gained a broad following among semioticians since the early 1980s: that the "*mise en scène* of a text" has a creative force of its own and is not to be regarded simply as a mere "transcodification of one system into another" (Pavis 1982: 18); that the study of social, institutional, and literary factors renders at least the grounding of the *mise-en-scène* "apprehensible"; that the road connecting the written text and its performance is a two-way, multi-laned super-highway humming with traffic. Generally speaking, Gutiérrez Flórez fails to account for the *intertextual* thrust of post-modernism, leading us back, instead, to Bremond, Propp, and Greimas and, as a consequence, to the predominant critical ideology of the 1960s and 1970s, one that privileges the finite, meaning-conveying structures and paradigms of literature as a means for defining the full range and potential of Greimas's narrational *combinatoire*.

Gutiérrez Flórez's work conveys such an ideology despite important objections that critics have raised specifically to Greimas's model, some of which the author summarily acknowledges. Already in 1975, Culler identified the difficulty (impossibility?) of discovering and maintaining "the isotopy of the text" (Culler 99), the basis for Greimas's theory of functions and actants and the primary indication of his hegemonically modernist hermeneutics. Moreover, as Culler explains, in structural linguistics "everything referring to the act of enunciation—everything, that is, that relativizes meaning—is first eliminated: first and second persons (which are replaced by 'the speaker' and 'the listener'), all references to the time of the message, deictics, and in so far as they are dependent on the situation of the speaker and not simply on other parts of the message" (Culler 82). The method produces, in short, the dehumanization, detemporalization, and decontextualization of that which, *especially* in theater and drama, is *essentially* and *inextricably* human, temporal, and context dependent. Such a method stands diametrically opposed to—and is in fact, undermined by—the very framing devices that underscore the uncertainty of interpretation in general, that serve specifically to problematize the indetermi-

nant, ephemeral or "unseizable" (Ubersfeld, Melrose) quality of performance—Gutiérrez Flórez's justification for giving priority to the written text as source and not product—and that have become the focus of critical attention in the 1980s and early 1990s: spectator's competence, theatrical institutions and architecture, and setting, social codes, and artistic conventions that, as indicated, are historically and culturally specific.

For this reason both Culler and Elam recommend transcending structural semantics by "focusing on the gaps" in Greimas's method (Culler 85) to seek a less rigid model, one attenuated by the post-Romantic view of "the *dramatis persona* as a more or less complex and unified network of psychological and social traits" (Elam 131). In this way, they anticipate the important contributions of Anne Ubersfeld, who argues for modifying Greimas's system in accordance with the polycentric, decentered, and conflictive nature of theater, by allowing for the possibility of disparate models based on the multiple points of subjectivity within the plot (Ubersfeld 1978: 58-118). Such a procedure would serve to expose the essential reversibility of Greimas's binary oppositions (subject-object, sender-receiver, helper-opponent) and would lead us to see precisely what theater dramatizes at its greatest moments: the duplicity of human psychology and the dialogic structure of social interaction; the mirroring of a culture's hidden paradigms on the surface.

Gutiérrez Flórez does acknowledge some of Culler's objections and Ubersfeld's modifications, but he fails to assimilate them meaningfully in his theory and praxis. He affirms his belief in the essential unity of the written text and performance, disclaiming to profess any "sacralización del texto [escrito]," yet he is clearly seduced away from a more timely approach to that unity by the "facilidad de acceso al texto (que precede y sobrevive a la representación), y la potencial valoración a lo largo de la historia del teatro" (Gutiérrez Flórez 83). His disregard for the "sala teatral, empresario, director escénico y crítico," which he considers as "adheridos *externamente* al hecho teatral" (Gutiérrez Flórez 62; my emphasis) is an important sign of a deep-rooted ambivalence if not outright contradiction. His partition of theater into the "internal" literary-artistic experience and the "external" social, political, anthropological, and historical context is spurious and undermines the very notion of a text-performance construct. And finally, although he claims that he accepts Ubersfeld's refinement of Greimas's model,

his insistence on limiting his practice to the "esquema de relaciones entre actantes que estimamos más representativo" implies a return to the monolithic and totalizing programs of the past. This tendency is reconfirmed by his brief analysis of Antonio Gala's *Los verdes campos de Edén*—Juan is *the* subject, the rest, adjutants—and by his failure to assess the psychological, thematic, or ideological tensions suggested by the two (not "multiple") actantial schema that he outlines in chart form as corresponding to the Machado brothers' play.

In short, Gutiérrez Flórez fails to heed the broadest and most significant implications of recent trends in theater semiotics and to *translate* those trends into a coherent, innovative critical model of his own. Had he done so, his method would elucidate differences rather than norms, contradictions and ambiguities rather than absolute truths, and it would be grounded therefore in a more timely ideology. Such a method would prove more attentive to the rich ways in which critics are able to address the virtuality *and* independence of performance—as source, process, *and* product—and thereby reveal its special significance in the post-modern era.

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