

Foreword

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The Performance Analysis Working Group was established in 1991 at the initiative of Sarah Bryant-Bertail, Freddie Rokem and I, and we met for the first time at the International Federation for Theatre Research conference in Dublin, 1992. We decided to work together throughout the year between conferences and establish ourselves as a permanent working group for the foreseeable future. We have met annually at Dublin, 1992; Helsinki, 1993; Moscow, 1994; Montreal, 1995 and Tel Aviv, 1996. Shortly before the Moscow Congress, Janelle Reinelt was invited to join the convenors of the working group. The first selection of articles written for and presented in this working group was edited by Sarah Bryant-Bertail and published in *Theatre Research International*, Volume 19, Number 2, Summer 1994. The present issue features our second selection.

Our group has been motivated by a major theoretical preoccupation: among theatre scholars, particularly those with semiotic schooling, there was a widespread tendency to theorize on performance texts, while very little was done, if at all, in the analysis of actual productions, whether to test such theories or for their own sake. We have set up three basic methodological requirements: a) each paper should focus on a particular production; b) theory should be used only if subordinated to the needs of the analysis of a particular performance; c) each analysis should be backed by audiovisual material, particularly video recordings, of the performance. The group thus circumvented the ongoing controversy over the use of video by establishing its importance in theatre research, obviously not as a primary source, but as the best available tool for preserving most of the ephemeral components of a performance text or for verification of the scholar's memory of the event.

There is a slight difference in approach between the American and the Israeli convenors. The American school conceives 'performance' in a wider sense, probably under the influence of Schechner's theory of performance, and thus includes in its field of research a wide range of productions, beyond the boundaries of theatre proper, such as the work of Karen Finley. In contrast, the Israeli school focuses on theatre proper and is interested in other kinds of performance only in so far as they include theatrical elements. The Israeli school also shows a tendency to see the playscript as a legitimate object of inquiry, particularly for purposes of performance analysis, although, in contrast to the traditional literary approach, they aim at developing a theatrical approach to play analysis. They conceive the playscript as both an incomplete text and partial design of the verbal element of an intended production, like any piece of costume or set design. The assumption is that play analysis should be reincorporated into the theory of theatre and that performance analysis should adopt some of the principles which were wrongly applied in the past to playscripts, with performance being the real and complete text of the theatre.

However, these differences in approach do not preclude productive co-operation and are viewed as thought provoking and mutually enriching. Both sides tacitly accept that the existence of a play is not a prerequisite either to 'performance' in the wide sense or 'theatre' in the narrow sense. Moreover, both sides actually approach any performance as a text, while attempting to establish overall authorial intention and meaning by analysing constituent units, although diversely understood. In other words, the Performance Analysis Working Group reflects deep criticism of the traditional semiotic approach and, by the

same token, materializes its genuine and ultimate aim.

Since the first meeting in Dublin, there has been co-operation and fruitful interaction with the Historiography Working Group. There is fundamental correspondence and affinity in the ways the two groups work, not only in sharing the view that the performance is the *raison d'être* of theatre theory, whatever the approach, but also in viewing performance as an analysable text. The influence of the Historiography Working Group is felt in the growing awareness that, despite difference in stress, no performance analysis can be complete unless the wider sociocultural context is taken into account. It is tacitly agreed that there is no history of theatre without sound performance analysis and there is no sound performance analysis without proper historiography.

The main difference probably resides in the experience of seeing the performance by the scholar who conducts the analysis. In the Performance Analysis Group such experience has been implicitly accepted as a precondition of reliable performance analysis. However, Erika Fischer-Lichte only recently questioned this assumption by asking, whether or not experiencing a performance introduces a qualitative difference in the actual process of analysis, given the fact that all scholars eventually work with secondary sources, such as video recordings or verbal descriptions.¹

I believe that the underlying intuition of our working group is that experience of a performance makes a qualitative difference. Historians of theatre should be credited with having achieved very imaginative and persuasive reconstructions of performances in the past. However, in many cases, nothing can prove their theories, since such performances have left insufficient textual traces, little or no indication of audience response and, in some cases, no playscripts. Direct experience can thus be seen, at least, as a controlling device which prevents groundless descriptions and imbues the entire analysis with a sense of immediacy and credibility. Obviously, two scholars may experience and describe the same performance differently; but, since we are dealing with descriptions and not evaluations, diversity reinforces the authenticity of the reports and enables corrective readings. Only with the introduction of Performance Analysis, for the first time in the history of theatre, theatre scholars in the future

will be provided with detailed descriptions of major performances, making their reconstruction superfluous.²

In recent years the Performance Analysis Group has felt the need to work more closely with the Reception Analysis Group with which it shares and faces fundamental methodological problems. It is self-understood that performance analysis cannot overlook audience response. In our group, however, we share a clear tendency to rely on the analysis of the text itself and reveal its potential readings, whether these are materialized or not. It assumes that meaning is conditioned by the components and structure of the text and that an account by a well-trained scholar based on introspection is no less reliable than interviews with a score of untrained spectators.

The collective work within our group, complemented by interaction with other groups, particularly Historiography and Reception Analysis, is the path to follow in the future. The main tasks ahead are the development of shared methodology and terminology, and intensification of performance research throughout the world, particularly in national theatres, in order to promote deeper understanding of the art of theatre/performance and provide methodically recorded materials for future research.

The set of articles in this issue of *Theatre Research International* was selected by five referees from among those presented at the conferences in Helsinki, 1993; Moscow, 1994 and Montreal, 1995. On behalf of all the convenors of the Performance Analysis Working Group I thank Claude Schumacher for being so supportive of our work and willing to invest a great deal of effort in enabling the publication of these two selections.

Notes

1. See Erika Fischer-Lichte, 'Theatre Historiography and Performance Analysis', *Assaph—Studies in the Theatre* (Number 10, 1994).

2. See Sarah Bryant-Bertail's Foreword to the first selection of Performance Analysis essays, *Theatre Research International* (Volume 19, Number 2, Summer 1994).

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Eli Rozik is Professor of Theatre Studies and Dean of the Faculty of the Arts at Tel Aviv University, and editor of *Assaph—Theatre Studies*. He specializes in theatre theory, particularly in non-verbal communication within performance analysis. He has published many articles in Europe and in the USA, and three books: *Metaphor in Theatre and Poetry* (1981), *The Language of the Theatre* (1991), and *Elements of Play Analysis* (1992). His next book, *The Roots of Theatre*, is in preparation.

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Dean Wilcox received his Ph.D. from the University of Washington in 1994 with a dissertation that employed a semiotic frame to analyse the work of Josef Svoboda, Meredith Monk, and Robert Wilson. Since then he has taught courses on performance studies, semiotics, and visual perception at Cornell University; modern theatre history and post-modernism at The University of California, San Diego. He is currently Assistant Professor in the Department of Theatre and Dance at Texas Tech University, teaching dramatic criticism and postmodern performance. His writings deal with such diverse topics as: Robert Wilson's manipulation of the human form; Josef Svoboda's multi-media design for The Opera Company of Boston's 1965 production of *Intolleranza*; the convergence of chaos theory and contemporary performance theory and practice.