

PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS: THEORY AND PRACTICE

Gay McAuley
University of Sydney

My interest in the practice of analysis has emerged from attempts to explore the semiotics of performance with undergraduate students both in the Department of French Studies, where the starting point was usually a literary text, and in Performance Studies, where we work with both live and recorded performance. Analysis can take many forms, as Patrice Pavis points out:

The form of these analyses and the discourses in which they are embedded are extremely diverse: spontaneous commentaries by spectators, specialised articles by print and audiovisual critics, questionnaires written up after a more or less lengthy period of reflection, audio or audiovisual recordings, spoken or written descriptions by conscientious semioticians of the operative sign systems, poetic or philosophical meditations triggered by the performance, etc. (Pavis, 1996, 4)

He certainly casts the net very wide here, and I suggest that, while they are clearly related, there are nevertheless important differences between the viewing practices of normal, "one-time" spectators, and the analytical practices I am claiming are central to the developing discipline of Performance Studies.

It is noteworthy that scholarly interest in performance analysis seems in general to have emerged from semiotics rather than from the *Theaterwissenschaft* of the early part of the century which can be seen as providing the conceptual framework for the drama and theatre studies departments that were set up first in America, later in the rest of Europe. It was the Prague School semioticians in the 1920s and 1930s who first began to theorise the theatre spectator's meaning making processes (see Garvin, 1964; Matejka and Titunik, 1976) but it took another 30 years for theatre specialists in western Europe (and beyond) to take up these ideas. Tadeusz Kowzan occupies a pivotal position here, his early work on theatre semiotics, published originally in Polish and relating clearly to the work of the east European theorists, was later elaborated in articles and books in French and in his tertiary teaching practice in France (see Kowzan, 1970, 1975 and 1992).

Kowzan's table of 13 sign systems (Kowzan, 1975, 206), grouped differently in terms of their relationship to the actor and to their inscription in time and space, has often been criticised but it forms the basis for nearly every subsequent analyst's attempt to list the material signifiers of performance. The value of Kowzan's work is that it was the first attempt to move beyond the vaguely descriptive level of personal response to something more analytical. The problem with the table is not so much the omissions or the ways in which the categories are grouped but that, notwithstanding Kowzan's intelligent discussion of levels of meaning (denotational, conno-