Ethical Encounters

Ethical Encounters: Boundaries of Theatre, Performance and Philosophy

Edited by

Daniel Meyer-Dinkgräfe and Daniel Watt

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

DANIEL MEYER-DINKGRÄFE AND DANIEL WATT

Within TaPRA, the Theatre and Performance Research Association, founded in 2005, the working group *Theatre, Performance and Philosophy* (TPP) had chosen to focus on a specific topic at TaPRA's 2007 annual conference, *theatre and ethics*. The conference organisers asked working groups represented at the conference to present a question to the other working groups at the first plenary. The TPP group developed this set of related questions: "How do we decide what is acceptable in the theatre? Are there ethical limits?" At their final meeting as a group at the conference, TPP members noted that many other working groups had addressed issues relating to ethics. Ursula Canton commented that at a recent conference, *Beyond Postmodernism*, many delegates had expressed both their unhappiness with postmodernism and their exasperation at having no real idea as to how to get beyond it. Perhaps this theoretical position together with the world situation, both different from what they were ten years ago, give ethics a strong position as providing the guiding principle for the way for academics beyond postmodernism and "back into the world".

The annual TaPRA conference has developed the practice of inviting a theatre studies academic from outside the UK to serve as a VIP observer (they have included Hans Thies Lehmann from Germany and Phil Auslander from the USA). For the 2007 conference, observer Janelle Reinelt chaired the second plenary and here she also noted the frequency of reference to ethics at the first plenary and selected the TPP working group's questions for general discussion at the plenary. The group's contribution to that discussion was Ursula Canton's proposal for the reasons for that resurgence now. Other major strands of the discussions were these:

- Note the geographical dimensions of what is acceptable when and where;

- Boundaries (including those of acceptability) are changing all the time. The time aspect is what the historiography working group is interested in;
- Some working groups noted a shift in their discussions from politics to ethics, in line with a shift from identity to community;
- More specifically, in the case of confidential documents, the question arises: what is the relation between legal positions, the right to disclose, implications of the absence of the knowledge contained in those documents to the academic community and the general public, the respect we owe fellow humans, and the accuracy of the information found in such documents and what is disseminated on their basis;
- Any separation of ethics and politics is dangerous;
- The scenography working group indicated their decision to deal with ethical issues at its 2008 conference meeting: scenography as the gateway to visual culture and the implications of visually traumatising accosting an audience;
- Who is "we" in the initial question raised by the working group Theatre, Performance and Philosophy?
- Are there threshold moments, e.g. when spectators walk out of a performance? Here, censorship comes in.
- What are the implications for research within the TaPRA constituency of institutional ethics committees?
- The stage is a location of power, increasingly so through the use of technology, which brings with it responsibility;
- In the debate of ethics and aesthetics, there is a move away from Kantian notions.

The overarching topic of ethics was then chosen for the 2008 annual TaPRA conference, and the conference started with a plenary composed of individual *provocations.* One of these in particular, or rather the video played during Lourdes Orozco's presentation, proved pivotal for the rest of the plenary discussion at the conference. Her paper about Rodrigo García's performance *ACCIDENS (matar para comer)* [*INCIDENT (kill to eat)*] had a video on screen behind her, an excerpt of Garcia's performance in which the former butcher turned performance artist hangs a live lobster in mid-air, suspended on a nylon thread, and places a microphone into the lobster so that we can hear it. Orozco then froze the film, and at the end of her talk continued playing the end of the film, which shows Garcia slaughtering the lobster: he takes it off the string, places it on a chopping

board, cuts off its pincers and then plunges a large knife into its underside, which causes the animal's bodily fluids to gush out of the wound. This section of the film was shown to the conference audience in silence, as the presenter's talk had ended. The discussion of this provocation, chaired by 2008 VIP observer Phil Auslander, was extraordinary. A film studies academic and film maker, an outsider-visitor at a conference largely attended by theatre and performance makers and researchers, raised concerns about the fact that the entire audience seemed to have been forced to watch this scene of animal slaughter, and he wondered aloud, in a brief comment addressed from among the audience to all present, whether he was the only one present who was seriously concerned about the slaughter and its presentation at the conference, and who in fact objected to it. This comment led to a few voices raised against the slaughter, and the choice of the presenter, Orozco, to force her audience to watch the film. The latter is ironic in itself—you cannot first ask for a provocation and then criticise the presenter for being provocati! The question was raised why those in the audience who objected to the contents of the film did not leave the auditorium (because they did not want to draw attention to themselves, given the setup of the audience where everyone leaving mid-screening would have been noticed by everyone). People who did not want to see the images on the screen could have closed their eyes. Nobody apparently did, because despite objecting to, or being appalled, disgusted, offended, by the images, there is still some (morbid) fascination with the shown that compels us to keep watching.

It was at this point of the debate that it became really uncomfortable, as people could no longer only blame the presenter, or the performance artist at the centre of the screen or the presentation, but had to confront their own responses and the reasons behind them. In the course of the further plenary sessions at the conference, the chair in fact publically asked for the conference to finally abandon this idea discussing ethical implications of theatre. Delegates realised that this debate is by necessity a very personal one—there are no ready-made and easily adoptable answers provided by others. Sure, others have thought and published about ethical implications of many areas of life, including theatre, as the recent launch of *Performing Ethos*, which "considers ethical questions relating to contemporary theatre and live performance" demonstrates[1]. Philosophy may provide support to each individual confronted with the practical need to form an opinion, potentially as the basis for decisions regarding their action, in ethical issues. However, the opinion and the related decision for action are and remain that of the individual.

The essays on dimensions of theatre ethics at the heart of contributions to this volume should be understood in those theoretical and practical contexts. They demonstrate how individual academics and theatre artists have thought about the ethical implications of theatre, and present the concepts and paradigms that have guided and influenced their thinking. They raise relevant issues and debate these in clearly defined, but not uniform ways—ways that have helped them to come to terms with the issues they raise. The reader may agree or disagree with individual authors or individual arguments. If such agreement or disagreement supports them to form and develop their own opinions and resultant actions, this book has served its purpose.

This volume arises from the 2007 and 2008 TaPRA conferences and all of its essays, at one level or another, reflect upon what is possible within the environment of theatre. *Possibility* is one form of ethical engagement with the boundaries of Philosophy and Performance and reminds us of the inherently political aspect of any ethical question. So whilst the most obviously ethically oriented papers appear towards the end of the volume, in a separate section, let us bear in mind that throughout certain limits of representation will always be in question for any understanding of theatre.

James Hamilton opens with a return to fundamental questions, and seeks to utilise analytical thought to provide a clearer understanding of the actor's task through the parallel tracks of display and pretence theories. **Paul Johnson** further defines the conditions of performance by employing the work of Karl Popper on falsification and the evolution of knowledge to argue for performance as a process of rational problem solving. **Jeremy Ekberg** examines the suppressed narratives of Beckett's Endgame through the work of J.L. Austin and finds in the dysfunctional competing stories of its characters the urge to be heard that typifies the actor's struggle to be heard. **Mark James Hamilton** explores martial disciplines and codified combat to elaborate the divisions between ritual and aesthetic practices and the competing pressures of sensualised performative display and traditional training philosophies. **Jones Irwin** asserts the power of an ethical dimension to Deconstruction's 'force before form'; arising from an Artaudian orientation within Derrida's performative philosophy. **Japhet Johnstone** sets the absence of death in Hegel against its presence in Ionesco to reveal the limitations of language and theatre in representations of death. Continuing with the examination of the performative language of philosophy **Eve Katsouraki** investigates the foundational creativity of Nietzschean thought for the Modernist theatre and the early avant-garde. **Wankwan Polachan** discusses the Postmodern in Thai culture through a

theatrical tradition predicated on the revelation of Buddhist impermanence opposed to the contemporary obsession with media forms which invite only consumerism. **Martin A. Hainz** offers a playful post-mortem of art theory demonstrating the activity of thought as an instance of artistic creation itself. **Cormac Power** argues that failure is a foundational aspect of creativity that manifests itself in contemporary performance by obliging the spectator to remain 'within' a performance raising issues of the ethical immediacy of 'human interaction'.

Daniel Meyer-Dinkgräfe begins the 'Ethical Encounters' section by focusing on the reception of theatre and the limits to which theatre makers can take their audiences and consequently the obligation of critics to theatre if it is to provoke wider change in the world. **Daniel Watt** examines Levinas' distrust of theatre but finds in the confrontation between actor and audience enacted on the stage precisely the face-to-face situation that describes Levinasian responsibility. **Eduardo Abrantes** also explores the threshold between actor and audience arguing for the actor a case of 're-appropriated authenticity' which emphasizes theatre's ethical environment. **Kathryn Brown** argues for the active situation of the observer in works of art that demand reconstruction of moral perspectives, enabling an ethical reflection on the theatrical gaze. **Bryce Lease** discusses the ethical obligations of alternative theatre, specifically in the context of Polish theatre, asking whether a radical position is possible in the face of liberal capitalism. **Vicky Angelaki** concludes the volume by asserting the need for theatre to show its relevance to society by innovative productions that challenge and invigorate audiences to reflect upon their own ethical obligations.

Note

[1] (http://www.intellectbooks.co.uk/journals.appx.php?issn=17571979)

CHAPTER ONE

JAMES R. HAMILTON

WHAT ACTORS DO

The question discussed in this essay is this: What do actors who portray characters do?

In discussing what actors do, we are focusing only on what theatrical performers do in narrative theatrical performances. The contents of such performances are stories. Stories are the representations of sequences of actions put in motion by agents. Unless we are committed to the view that all representations are fictional (Walton 1990), we should take the ordinary, pre-reflective view that stories may be fictional or non-fictional.

Such performances are familiar, of course. But their familiarity can be misleading. This kind of performance practice is not determinative or even paradigmatic of theatrical performance in general (Beeman, 1993). Still, the practice we focus upon here is related to the more general phenomenon, as something like a species is related to its genus. And that fact has important implications for determining what actors do.

§1. Some desiderata

First, as just noted, an adequate philosophical account of what *actors* do will provide an explanation of one specific case of the much more general phenomenon, namely, what it is that any *theatrical performers* do in any form of theatrical performance. So, for example, the account must not preclude explanations of performer behavior in non-narrative theatrical performances.

Second, in addition to being an account of the more specific case, an adequate account of what theatrical performers do will connect the behavior characteristic of the various practices of theater to simpler behavior that could plausibly be taken as its non-theatrical precursor.

Of course, theatrical performance might be a *sui generis* form of behavior, having no basis in other forms of human behavior that are earlier

or simpler and from which it developed. Unlike the other performing arts, there is no non-audience practice of theater (Hamilton, 2005). People make music and people dance in circumstances where there is neither an audience nor an implication the music or dance is for anyone other than the musicians or dancers themselves. But wherever theater is made, either an audience is present or its presence is implied. Actors in rehearsals for narrative performances engage in improvisations in which audiences are not implied, of course. But as soon as the improvisation is marshaled into a routine for performance, actors become aware of where the spectators will be and they revise the improvised material to make it accessible in the relevant directions. So, it may seem there is nothing quite like theatrical performance on which it is based. But this conclusion does not follow from the premises, even though they are true. All of them could be true and theatrical performance still be only the adventitious and opportunistic exploitation of a variety of precursor behaviors and cognitive systems, none of which is exclusively involved in the emergence or invention of acting.

Alternatively, it may seem more reasonable to think theatrical performance is clearly not a *sui generis* form of behavior, even one that exploits a variety of precursor behaviors. Here's a 'just-so' argument for this view: behavior that is not a culturally modified version of something more primitive is selected-for naturally; but behavior that is naturally selected-for provides some sexual or competitive advantage to members of a species or the species as a whole; and what that advantage might be for theatrical performance is imponderable; So, theatrical performance cannot be a *sui generis* form of behavior, nor one that emerges or is invented by exploiting more primitive precursors. It must be the extension of some single precursor behavior – an 'exaptation' – that has come to have significant benefits to outweigh its costs. And, if theatrical performance is not a *sui generis* form of behavior, then a theory that makes the connection to its precursor behavior will rely on an explanation of the crucial differences between the precursor behavior and any variety of theatrical performance. Moreover, the argument likely goes, whatever that difference is will play some role in the explanation of the more specific behavior that constitutes acting. This is not a particularly convincing argument. Not only is it a 'just so' story, but it actually fails to rule out the idea that acting is a behavior that is culturally emergent or invented in some, but not all, cultures by exploitation of previous resources.

Each of the foregoing arguments assumes there must be one precursor or none at all. And no argument for that hypothesis seems plausible. Still, even if we do not think there must be a *single* more primitive behavior

type, we may still learn something by considering that hypothesis. For the landscape of theorizing can be made much clearer by doing so. And that is what we will do in this paper.

Third, centrally and crucially, an adequate account of acting will explain how what the actor does and says counts as what the character she is portraying does and says. This will provide material for use in meeting a *fourth* desideratum, namely, explaining how spectators can see both the actor and the character during a narrative theatrical performance, and also sort between them.

Fifth, an adequate account of acting will yield an accurate story about actors' intentions, beliefs, desires, and obligations. And that story should lead to an explanation of what is going on when performers come to have their characteristic mental states and what is going on when they come to drop them. A related matter is the *sixth* desideratum: an adequate account of acting will be consistent with any reasonable analysis of different forms of rehearsal processes in which acting is the predominant species of theatrical performance.

Seventh, an adequate account of acting will explain performer behavior in improvisational, traditionally-transmitted, and script-driven performances.

And, *finally*, an adequate account of acting will be consistent with whatever obligations, if any, attend to the practice of acting itself. These might be obligations among performers or they might be obligations between performers and spectators. An adequate account of acting might actually reveal that there are such obligations and trace both how they arise, how they can be violated, and how they can be met or otherwise satisfied.

§2. The contending positions we will consider

The main families of theories that recommend themselves to us are those that regard acting as kind of pretending and those that regard acting as a form of display behavior. The pretense family of theories that I have in mind has a long pedigree, a distinguished list of contemporary supporters (Alward, 2008; Austin, 1962, 1979; Currie, 1990; Lewis, 1978; Osipovich, 2007; Searle, 1975; Walton, 1990) and, furthermore, has been given new life by work in the philosophy of mind and cognitive science over the past three decades. This work sets forth and purports to explain important connections among pretense, pretend play, and cognitive imagination (Leslie, 1987, 1994; Lillard, 1993; Nichols, 2006; Nichols and Stitch, 2000; Weinberg and Meskin, 2006). The display family of theories

is derivable from work by performance theorists in the 1970s, 80s and 90s (see Bial, 2007; Kirsenblatt-Gimblett, 1976; Schechner, 1985, 1988) who were deeply influenced by certain strands in anthropology and ethology focusing on the nature of rituals and display behavior, both in human cultures and among other animals, with a view to finding an evolutionary basis of that behavior and an explanatory model for the enrichments of those behaviors in human beings (Geertz, 1973, 1974; Goffman, 1959, 1961, 1963, 1974; Goodall, 1971, 1990; Huxley, 1964, 1968; Lorenz, 1966, 1970, 1973; and Turner, 1974, 1982).

In the next section, I sketch the first family, which I will refer to inclusively as "the pretense theory." I will discuss some of its strengths, and some of the reasons for thinking it must fail. The pretense theory seems strongest when analyzing the mental states of performers and explaining how what actors do counts as what their characters are doing. But, as I shall argue, it actually fails to deliver on the latter project and seems to presume something like the display theory on the former project.

In the fourth section, I discuss the origins of the second family, which I will refer to, again inclusive of its several varieties, as "the display theory," and offer a conjecture regarding why it failed to develop satisfactory analyses of theatrical performance. I will suggest that, because performance theorists were committed to grounding explanations of all aspects of performance in social parameters, their theories could not provide any detailed and accurate account of the mental states of performers. And, finally, I will propose a way it could have been developed that might have enabled it to hit the mark that its early versions did in fact miss.

In the end, I do not so much try to resolve the disputes between the two families of theories, as present them clearly and reasonably accurately. My goal is to see where we stand and to get a sense of the landscape. So, in this paper I am content to sketch the alternatives, together with their strengths and some challenges, and to clarify what needs to be done by way of further study.

§3: The pretense theory, its benefits and some problems

When Gertrude asserts, "Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended," how should we characterize what the actor playing Gertrude does? Here are some things she does *not* do: the actor may believe that Hamlet has offended his father, but she does not believe the actor playing Hamlet has offended anyone, she does not intend the actor playing Hamlet to understand *her* and to respond and explain himself *to her*, she is not

sincere in making a demand for an explanation, she is under no obligation to believe or intend any of these things. Neither does she intend that the audience should believe that she believes what she is saying; so Gricean implicature is not violated (Grice, 1957). So it is just easier and simpler to think is that she is playing a game in which she pretends to be Gertrude saying and doing what Gertrude says and does. Just at this point, for example, the script calls for Gertrude to say "Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended."

This theory is equally adaptable to actions other than illocutionary actions and it can capture the thought that actors do have some kinds of obligations, for example, if they are obliged to intend that spectators imagine what they do and say they are also obliged to be sincere in their desire that audiences imagine their characters saying and doing what they say and do.[1]

The institution of theatrical performance is often thought to have close connections to games of make-believe. It might seem that, to extend such games into the institution of theater, all we require is that some of us be willing to play such games in front of others. But we might reasonably think pretending to be cowboys and pretending to be Roy Rogers or Dale Evans are very different things. If I watch kids playing cowboys, it is those kids towards whom I direct my attention. If I watch someone pretend to be Roy Rogers, I have – as it were – two persons to attend to. Since this can have odd implications, most pretense theories will supplement the theory by holding that *spectators*, as well as actors, engage in make-believe or pretense; for example, they pretend that the actor is Gertrude, doing and saying those things.[2.] So far, so good.[3.]

The pretense theory fares less well in spelling out exactly what explains why an actor says the next line or engages in the next bit of stage-business. The most plausible explanation for what prompts the actor who is playing Hamlet to say "Mother, you have my father much offended" is that this is what is *called for by the script* right after "Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended." One way to think about a script "calling for" something to happen is to think of actors being caused to say their lines in a particular order by the order in which those lines appear in a routine developed in rehearsals (Alward, 2008). These routines are developed by examinations of scripts – the stories in scripts, the motives of their characters, and the directions of the overall narratives. But, once a routine is established, that is what the performers execute when they get to performance. This is another way in which theatrical pretense must differ from games of make-believe. Our explanations of actual games of make-believe involve reference to amendments that are made on the fly by

means of explicit suggestions that the parties amend the pretense (Nichols and Stitch, 2000). In scripted performances there is no moment that we need to explain by saying here and now there is a pretense of believing, intending, doing or saying something: instead we get all we want for scripted performances from the thought that here and now there is something said or done because that is caused to follow, given the rehearsed routine, after what happened there and then. Either the pretense story explains why an actor says "Mother, you have my father much offended" or we explain it by reference to the routine that the performers have developed and rehearsed. And it looks like only the latter is driving the explanation.

This result may only be an artifact of a mistaken idea of what the pretense theory is supposed to explain. We can avoid this consequence by holding this: we explain why a character does what she does by reference to the enacted narrative; we explain why a performer does what she does by reference to the routine resulting from rehearsals; and the pretense theory explains why what the performer says and does counts as what the character says and does.[4.] To make this work, we must specify the conditions that make saying or doing one thing amount to pretending to say or do another thing. Many pretense theorists have held something like John Searle's suggestion:

It is a general feature of the concept of pretending that one can pretend to perform a higher order or complex action by actually performing lower order or less complex actions which are constitutive parts of the higher order or complex action (Searle, 1975, 327).[5.]

So, for example, you might pretend to drink tea by holding out your hand in the shape it would have were you to have a grasp on the handle of a teacup and, moving your hand appropriately, bring it close to your face, tilt back your head and move the muscles in your throat as you would were you drinking. When we consider games of make-believe as our source for unproblematic cases of pretense, Searle's suggestion seems to be exactly right. But it fails to give us what we need for understanding narrative performances. Although common in games of make-believe, neither constituency nor even imitative resemblance of one action to a higher order or more complex action is necessary or sufficient for the representation of one action by another (Goodman, 1976). Just try explaining why someone could not assert (Saltz, 1991, 42):

"This stick is my bath towel and when I poke it in the ground I am drying my back," or engage in a portrayal in which that assertion is operative. Peter Alward has recently suggested we can amend the pretense view, and get what we want, by means of this stipulation:

> pretense requires the existence of conventions according to which actually performing an action of one type counts as pretending to engage in an act of another type (Alward, 2008).

This would help us with the stick-as-bath towel. Moreover, it reflects the way we already go about dealing with other symbolic actions, like those surrounding the following: "This stick is my country's standard and when I poke it in the ground I claim this land."

The difference between the cases is that in the latter we understand what is going on because we are familiar with conventions of claiming (and other social acts), while in the former we understand what is going on because we are familiar with conventions of pretending.[6.]

But there are two worries here, and they appear to be decisive. Imagine a spectator who has grasped that what is being performed is a narrative. Imagine she knows it is fictional. Finally, imagine the recognition of these facts is explained by saying she participates in make-believe or pretends things in order to sustain the narrative fiction. Does this entail the performer must also be pretending or engaged in make-believe in order to entice or induce that reaction in that spectator? The answer is no.[7.] Even if grasping the fiction, getting that the narrative is fictive, or even just getting that what is presented is a narrative requires that *spectators* engage in games of make-believe, we have so far learned little from this about what *actors* do. In particular we have not shown we need a pretense theory *of acting* in order to explain why what the performer does counts as what the character does.

That is the first problem. The second concerns whether the pretense-conventions stipulation actually works. It is right to think we must specify the conditions that make saying or doing one thing amount to saying or doing another thing in theatrical performances. And Alward is right to think that Searlean accounts of pretense do not do the job. Furthermore, he is right to think that doing that job has something to do with conventions.

But, to speak of theatrical conventions is to speak of something like the following: Imagine each of the following lines is delivered as follows: "And she said, Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended" followed by this: "And then he said, Mother, you have my father much offended." On the pretense theory, the actor playing Hamlet says the words in the first line pretending to say what Hamlet says in the way in which Hamlet would say it were he imitating or mocking Gertrude. He also says what Gertrude says; but he is not pretending to be her.

The point is not about iterated pretense; instead it is about how we explain what spectators go about grasping what they do. Consider: Who are the actors pretending to be were they, when saying these lines,

standing to one side while other performers manipulate a Hamlet-puppet and a Gertrude-puppet? Whose speech acts are they pretending to commit? Would we say the same thing were the human performers to stand still, staring across the stage at each other, and quietly pushing buttons on machines in an ordered sequence that resulted in our hearing these words from the closet scene? How does a spectator know what is being said and done, and who is doing the saying and doing?

Noticing *theatrical* conventions at work in a production is clearly required for *explaining* how spectators grasp what is going on in a scene. Do we have to refer to a second set of conventions, pretense-conventions, in order to explain how spectators understand the scene? In fact, we do *not* need to grasp the conventions in order to grasp the scene; indeed, some conventions are designed to work sub-doxastically. That is not at issue here because reference to the theatrical conventions themselves already does that job perfectly well. And, so, reference to pretense-conventions in the way Alward suggests is otiose. But if, to avoid this result, we revert to the Searlean idea that pretending to do one action necessarily involves executing some constituent part of that action or something like that action, we will be left with the puzzles that Alward's pretense-conventions were invoked to solve.

§4 The display theory, its origins, some defects, and its promise

The display theory of what actors do originated in performance theory in the 1980s and 90s that reflected on anthropological and ethological examinations of more general performance phenomena. It will be useful to do a quick rehearsal of key features of those influences.

The first thing to note is that the anthropologists who were influential on performance theorists – notably Geertz, Goffman, and Turner –focused their attention on rituals that were collective in nature, connected to supernatural beliefs, and examined as evolutionarily selected modes of human behavior. In contrast, the influential ethologists – notably Goodall, Huxley, and Lorenz – were focused on display behaviors of individuals who were, principally, non-human animals, where the mechanisms for delivery of information was thought to have had selection effects at the genetic level, and where some of those mechanisms had become sufficiently stereotypical that ethologists referred to them as "ritualized" (Smith, 1979).

The debates that have since raged in biology concerning the size of the evolutionary unit, what it is on which natural selection operates, is not

pertinent to our story. Nor are we concerned with differences among these figures regarding their uses of the terms "display" and "ritual." We can also ignore the connection of ritual to the supernatural that had an unfortunate, even embarrassing, influence on early performance theory. None of these issues need have an enduring legacy in the study of performance.

Several things are of continued interest, however. Performance theory provided one of the first instances of naturalistic explanations of human performance, as a wide and non-homogeneous class of human behavior, and of interpreting it as similar or analogous to behavior in other animals. For the most part, these influential figures thought of display and ritual as elements of information-transmission systems. Further, the picture of information transfer they adopted entailed two claims significant for understanding, or misunderstanding, what theatrical performers do: first, that ritual and display (and especially the latter) are capable of conveying information about "non-behavioral attributes" of the individual engaging in display behavior, including such things as location and identity, and second, that the motivational states of performers are "less relevant" than the "kinds of information displays make available to those individuals who interact with the communicator" (Smith, 1979, 61). Adam Kendon's study (1970) of the behavior people engage in when preparing for formal conversation exemplifies the application to human behavior involved in these studies. That study, along with others, showed this sort of behavior is extremely subtle, usually occurs below the level of conscious attention, and often puts speakers and listeners into a kind of physical synchrony with each other both before and during conversation. And this is useful information in any analysis of how performance works, and not only because it examines an important feature – the physicality – of the central relationship between performers and spectators in most theatrical performances. And the physical aspect of this relationship, usually subdoxastic, is especially important.[8.]

The main roadblock performance theory faced in the 80s and 90s was, I believe, self-imposed. It took the form of what we might refer to as the "seamless explanation hypothesis." This is the thought that, since theater and other forms of institutionalized performance are phenomena that grow out of other social phenomena, the only explanations of theater and other forms of performance that will suffice are of the kinds of explanation characteristic of anthropology, ethology, and sociobiology.

Much can be learned from these theories. For example, Victor Turner's analysis (1982) of the social determinants of late European theater provides genuine insight regarding the social significance of the

emergence of the modern theater. And important and insightful anthropological studies of theater, such as that offered by William O. Beeman (1993), arguably would not have arrived at all were it not for the rise of performance theory. It is also worth noting that performance theory did not accept all the results of ethology and anthropology uncritically. Richard Schechner (1988, 242-245), for example, criticizes Lorenz' account of theater for concentrating on "the finished artwork" in human culture and, so, failing to see how important the rehearsal process is to explaining any theatrical performance.

But Schechner's analysis of what he calls "blocked display" (Schechner, 1988) also provides a telling example of the constraints imposed by the seamless explanation hypothesis. Even though this analysis starts promisingly, by focusing on the ways in which human ritual behavior differs from that of other animals and on the "performer's process and the spectator's response" (Schecner, 1988, 261), the main thrust is still to find a completely sociological explanation of these phenomena. In his view, artistic performance occurs when a natural display response is stimulated but is "blocked from full expression" and morphs into a fantasy – which is "rarely a literal translation of the blocked display" – gets redirected, and "re-emerges as a display, a performance,...a public way to show off private stuff" (1988, 263-264). Schechner's discussion of jokes – in which the fundamental question becomes "what is their social function?" (1988, 282) – offers up a Freudean connection of jokes to "threat and bond," but provides no analysis of what threat or bond consists of or of how jokes manage to have any social function at all (1988, 281-283). Compare this to Ted Cohen's analysis (1999) which is also concerned with the social function of jokes and has a generally similar orientation to those social aspects. Cohen's analysis connects the social question to the examination of the beliefs and desires involved when someone understands or fails to understand a joke and when someone finds or fails to find a joke funny. And by means of talk about what people need to know, believe, hope, fear and so on – that is, *precisely* by means of reference to the mental states of individuals – Cohen is able to explain how jokes fulfill several social functions.

What was missing in the accounts of display and ritual in performance theory of the 80s and 90s was what is largely ignored in the anthropological and ethological studies that influenced it. Analyses having anything to do with the mental states of performers were set aside when it was seen that the motivational states of those engaging in display were not always relevant to understanding the behavior. But the fact is that any spectator engaged in trying to understand what is presented to her in a

theatrical performance recognizes that she is in the vicinity of intentional behavior, and that is a major part of why she is interested in the behavior in the first place. Examinations of social determinants alone do not respond to that interest in what particular performers are doing. Nor do they respond well to a theoretical interest in what it is that performers do. This is a failure to provide the kind of analysis of display that we need if we are going to understand how theatrical performance works. And it is a direct result, I believe, of performance theory's largely unconscious commitment to the seamless explanation hypothesis.

We should not conclude from this that the display theory lacks promise. To see how it might be developed, consider cases used to suggest a demonstrative theory of indirect discourse, of *saying that*. Jane Heal's (2001) is a case of showing someone how a tune goes. François Récanati's (2001) is a case of showing someone how his sister, Elizabeth, drinks tea. Similar examples have recently been deployed in discussing demonstrative theories of direct discourse as well (Clark & Gerrig, 1990; Saka 1998, 2995; Patterson, 2005).

To make the structure of any theatrical performance clear, I'd go in for something like this. Think of the institution of theater as functioning like the matrix of a quotation – the "He said, "…" part – and the performance as functioning like the quoted bit that goes in the space – the … part. And analyze quotation on the model of the forgoing examples of demonstrations. Finally and crucially, ignore the Davidsonian thought (Davidson, 1979) that what is referred to is something *linguistic*. To see how this goes, take a look at this report:

(R) He said, "I'm going to play Gertrude," and she went [*eyes rolling accompanied by a barely articulate gurgle*][9.]

Clearly there is some difference between the quotation inside the first matrix of (R) and the quotation inside the second. But is it a difference in the kind of thing referred to? Patterson claims there is no difference between the references in statements like (R); for in neither case is the reference to anything linguistic. Instead, both are references to behavior that is immediately displayed.

Whether Patterson is right about this as a matter of understanding quotations, this thought provides us with a heuristic we may exploit to show how the display theory of acting might go. This might do for starters: people who go to the theater recognize it is a place of demonstration (or, if you like, of presentation). Stories are often presented there. And this just means that, on any particular occasion, one or more performers is likely to demonstrate how a story goes.

How do performers' – including actors – accomplish the demonstrations? I propose they do so by displaying physical and vocal features of themselves individually and, working together, by displaying features of themselves in groups (Hamilton, 2007). Seen this way, the display theory provides an explanation for the demonstrations that performers provide to their audiences.

It is a fairly natural extension. Just as demonstrations are conducted for others, so also is display behavior. The aim in both cases is for another individual to grasp something – to be warned, please, informed. And the behavior is shaped, sometimes as the result of a good deal of forethought and even practice, with a view to determining its effectiveness as demonstration or display.

Now, what of the mental states and capacities of those who are demonstrating how stories go by displaying features of themselves? Well, they are going to turn out to be the same mental states and capacities as what are captured by the pretense theory and with which we began this discussion. To display features of oneself in order to demonstrate to others how something goes – for example, how the actions, intentions, beliefs, and emotions of a character develop over the course of her conduct in a story – one need not think of oneself as doing, believing, intending or feeling those same things. Of course it is open to an actor to attempt some semblance of those, if she thinks it will make the demonstration more effective. But she need not do so.

Notice that the problem that scripted performances appears to pose for the pretense theory does not arise for the display theory. It is, indeed, the script that determines the order of what is demonstrated, and the display sequence that makes that happen is guided by a rehearsal process so that the sequence of displayed behavior conforms to the planned sequence of demonstration. There is no tension between the *explanans* and *explanandum* here, as there is for the pretense theory.

In fact, it may come to seem that the reason the pretense theory gets a correct story going about the mental states of performers is that it employs the idea of display but hides the fact. To see what I have in mind, consider Walton's account of children playing a game of make-believe with a stump and pretending it is a bear. That is, they regard the stump as a bear, giving prominence and interacting with some features of the stump and ignoring others. A parallel for acting then would be this: if an actor pretends to be Gertrude, she regards herself as Gertrude, giving prominence to certain of her own features and ignoring – or hiding – others. Now, if "regarding herself as Gertrude" means more than giving prominence to some features and hiding others, the view will have the difficulties we have already

adduced. If, however, it means only that she gives prominence to some and hides others, then this just is the display theory. And now we can see why we might think it is actually the display theory, working as a machine-behind-the-curtain of the pretense theory, that gives us the right story about the mental states and capacities of performers.

§5. Concluding remarks

In this paper, I have limited the scope of discussion to a representation of two competing theories of the nature of acting. I have not attempted to offer anything like a final adjudication of those theories. I hope, however, to have loosened the grip that the pretense theory has had for us, to have shown something of the promise of the display theory, and to have indicated (at least in sketch form) why neither may in the end be completely satisfactory.

What needs to be done? Well, first, each theory needs yet further detailed examination. Second, other alternatives need to be proposed and worked out. Third, more than the desiderata I presented at the outset, we also need some account of what will count as theoretical adequacy for a theory of acting. And, finally, we will have to come to terms with the ways in which any theory that passes muster interacts with evolutionary biology and evolutionary psychology, and evolutionary anthropology.

So, there is plenty of work to be done. I hope to have made a good start.

Notes

[1] But, since performers need not be sincere about what they say or do, we need not go so far as to hold that actors engage in any special sort of speech and action, characteristic just of the stage. Such a view might be derivable from Currie (1990, chapters 1 & 2). Alward (2008) has suggested that this view is derivable from Currie so long as we see the creation of fiction as a species of theatrical production.

[2] One line of criticism of this thought, not pursued here, is that it is easily possible for someone to understand games of make-believe but have no concept of theater or theatrical analysis whatsoever. J. R. Hamilton (1992) develops this argument, but in a different context.

[3] I am, in fact, not convinced. It is worth saying that the pretense story of spectatorship was initially developed as an analysis of the fiction/non-fiction distinction. If to follow any narrative performance spectators must engage in games of make-believe, then either all narrative theatrical performances are fictional or the make-believe story has to be completely rethought as a strategy for

its originating task. The first is an odd result. So perhaps the second task must be undertaken.

[4] This way of putting the matter helps us see the following point. Earlier, I noted several things the actor playing Gertrude does not do. Here is another one: since she does not intend Hamlet to understand, respond and explain himself to *her*, so also ordinarily, *she* would not even expect Hamlet to explain himself to Gertrude. This is because she expects the *actor* playing Hamlet to pretend to explain himself to Gertrude; but again *this* is because the *scripted story* calls for *that* to happen. And it appears the appeal to pretense is an explanatory dangler.

[5] Similar ideas are expressed in Walton (1990) at 219, 221, and elsewhere, and in Currie (1990) at 32.

[6] Moreover, this enhancement allows the pretense theory to capture the fact that *sometimes* actors do intend precisely what they do and say, much in the way you might intend to purchase Park Place when playing a game of *Monopoly* (David Saltz, 1991). Absent the present suggestion, it is not clear how some versions of the pretense theory could capture this fact. It is reasonable to expect that whatever view we adopt must account for the fact that actors sometimes just do and say what they appear to be doing, saying, intending, and believing – and being sincerely involved in those efforts. The addition that one thing may count as another when pretense-conventions are in play allows for the possibility that, when they are not in play, the first thing may be just what it is and may count, so to speak, as itself.

[7] Currie (1990) thinks there must be some recognizable fictive intent to trigger the recognition of the presence of fiction and an invitation to engage in games of make-believe with that fiction. But there is nothing in that thought that requires the signal be carried out by an act of pretence. Indeed, Currie is at some pains to deny this himself, at least when it comes to authors of plays. I think Walton would agree with me here. He should. Walton holds that actors are props in games of make-believe. But there is nothing in that thought which requires they are engaged in make-believe. They may have more in common with what he calls "onlookers" – people who "take great interest in the game...may study it and its props thoroughly, learning what is fictional, which fictional truths imply others, what principles of generation are operative, and in many ways analyzing and explaining the game and assessing its significance" without, however, "thinking of themselves as subject to [the] rules [of the game]." (Walton, 1990, 209) What they are subject to, as we have just seen, is the routine they establish together by means of the sort of activities Walton attributes to onlookers.

[8] Hamilton (2008) in chapters 5 & 6, shows how we can distinguish between those reactions that are evidence a spectator understands a performance and those that are not evidence of understanding.

[9] Here I follow Heal's convention (2001) of putting a description of whatever is undeniably a demonstration inside brackets, e.g., [*rolling ones eyes*].

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CHAPTER TWO

PAUL JOHNSON

APPLYING POPPER: AN EVOLUTIONARY APPROACH TO PERFORMANCE

Introduction

This chapter applies the philosophical work of Karl Popper to the evolution of performance. The three areas of Popper's thought used are the idea of falsification, theories on the evolution of knowledge, and Popper's three world schema. These ideas are used in terms of establishing how the boundary conditions for what is considered performance at a particular point in history are established, so rather than for example merely defining what content is considered acceptable for performance, the acceptable forms of performance can be equally well defined. Furthermore, Popper's work indicates not only how these ideas of performance evolve, but how they exist beyond the moments of enactment. This position perhaps places theory in an unusually prominent position, but as will be seen it can be used to firmly connect the theoretical with the empirical. Performance is used as a term for the whole spectrum of drama, theatre and other work that might have an audience and a performer. This is a necessarily fluid category, as much of the discussion will consider the ways in which the boundary conditions of the term are established, and the evolution of what is considered the performance.

Popper is perhaps best known for his work on the philosophy of science, and this chapter attempts to show how these ideas can be applied to live performance. Popper's work has been described as having within it a constant theme of "the importance of philosophy for understanding and solving the practical problems of the world." (Stokes, 1998, 1) Consequently Popper himself applied his ideas to politics and the social sciences, and others have applied those ideas to a wide range of other

fields, most notably Ernst Gombrich in his account of the development of visual art.

Popper's proposal for a mechanism for the evolution of knowledge from initial problem, to tentative theory tested by error elimination through to new problem, allows for performance making, experimental performance making in particular, to be seen as the mechanism for the evolution of performance knowledge. This 'performance knowledge' at any stage of the evolutionary process is then the current theory of performance; here theory is used not in terms of critical theory, but instead as an explanatory model of practice. Popper's ideas can then be used to argue for change and evolution in performance practices without the requirement for either determinism or teleological progress. Furthermore it provides a mechanism for understanding influence both within and between disciplines. The chapter illustrates how this theory might be applied to performance practice and to the development of experimental or avant-garde work in particular, through an examination of the performance experiments of the Living Theatre in the 1950s and 1960s, including their production of Jack Gelber's *The Connection* (1959) Kenneth Brown's *The Brig* (1963) and the devised piece *Mysteries and Smaller Pieces* (1964).

Falsification

Popper's early key idea developed out of an attempt to solve the problem of induction; that is that "no number of singular observation statements, however large, could logically entail an unrestrictedly general statement." (Magee, 1985, 20) The observation of one event (the sun rising or an apple falling from a tree) following on from another (night time or a sudden gust of wind) does not necessarily mean that "it will be attended by it on any other occasion" (Magee, 1985, 20) Although there might well be strong psychological reasons for believing in the regularity of nature, for day following night or for apples falling to the ground, it does not necessarily follow that future events will be like past events. As future events cannot be observed and cannot be reasoned, there is no way of demonstrating the validity of inductive procedures.

Popper's solution to this problem of induction arises from the asymmetry between verification and falsification. Any number of confirming instances will not produce a verified universal statement, whereas only one refutation could falsify the same universal statement. As far as scientific laws are concerned, Popper was clear that they were conclusively falsifiable, and not conclusively verifiable. Of course there might be instances where an observed statement might not be valid, for