The Meaning in Mimesis:
Philosophy, Aesthetics, Acting Theory

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ABSTRACT

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Theatre as mimesis, the actor as mimic: can we still think in these terms, two and a half millennia after antiquity? The *Meaning in Mimesis* puts canonical texts of acting theory by Plato, Diderot, Stanislavsky, Brecht, and others back into conversation with their informing paradigms in philosophy and aesthetics, in order to trace the recurring impulse to theorize the actor's art and the theatrical experience in terms of one-to-one correspondences. I show that, across the history of ideas that is acting theory, the familiar conception of mimesis as imagistic representation entangles over and over again with an "other mimesis": mimesis as the embodied attunement with alterity, a human capacity that bridges the gap between self and other. When it comes to the philosophy of the theatre, it is virtually impossible to consider the one-to-one of representation or re-enactment without at the same time grappling with the one-to-one of identification or vicarious experience.

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Introduction:
The Meanings in Mimesis

We cannot escape mimesis. Although we might try to dismiss it as an antiquated

aesthetic orthodoxy, a paradigm rightfully discredited by Romantic theories of artistic

expression, mimesis is still very much with us. When theory turns to the operations of art

or the mechanisms behind contagious social behavior, mimesis keeps re-surfacing,

persistently, even relentlessly. There are at least three reasons why this is so. First,

mimetic thinking is so thoroughly interwoven into Western philosophy and aesthetics that

any turn back to this history of ideas requires grappling with the many meanings that

mimesis has carried within it. Second, mimesis terminology has long been associated

with certain fundamental human phenomena: acts of mimicry, imitative social behavior,

the performance and re-performance of identity, and the summoning of otherness in the

medium of the self. These phenomena are basic to social life, and so they will keep

happening, and so philosophers, psychologists, and anthropologists will keep talking

about them, for as long as humankind makes the effort to understand itself.

The third reason why the mimesis concept keeps returning to us is that it houses

within its core a provocatively simple – and powerfully seductive – conceptual schema:

that of one-to-one correspondence. Mimesis is redefined in terms of the one-to-one in

Plato's *Republic*, where the term comes to describe the correspondence among ideal

form, material entity, and artistic image as well as that between the human subject and

the behavioral models provided by epic and tragic poetry. (Of course, for Plato, the one-

to-one-to-one correspondence between form, object, and image is a progressively

deteriorating one, so that the artwork exists at a double remove from the truth of ideal

reality). The *Republic* also introduces the metaphor of the mirror and the analogy between poetry and visual art – two hallmarks of mimetic theory – into discussions of artistic production, so that the overall ontology of art can be better theorized in terms of a duplicative model-to-copy schema. Although Plato's conception of mimesis will be significantly transformed over the centuries, the one-to-one thinking at its core continues to shape discussions of art in classical antiquity, during the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries (after the rediscovery of antiquity during the Renaissance), and within the theoretical return to mimesis of the early twentieth through early twenty-first centuries.

Mimesis, then, is a remarkably adaptable concept, but one that retains its core identity – that provided by the one-to-one schema – across its various manifestations. Mimesis has surely been Western aesthetics' most successful conceptual "meme" – that is, an entity that has replicated itself within and across intellectual cultures with remarkable efficiency. The success of mimesis has been both a good and a bad thing. At its worst, the mimesis concept provides a restrictive template for thinking, which either closes down thought – for example, when eighteenth-century aestheticians uncritically recycle the "imitation of nature" formula *ad infinitum* – or invites a perverse kind of ingenuity, as philosophers of art endeavor to invent – in the realm of theory – the ideal or empirical originals that art is purported to "imitate." For those of us writing in the twenty-first century, there is another danger: that we take up mimesis as a vague placeholder term, chosen over "representation" for its pleasingly antique ring, and use it to ward off difficult questions about the fundamental human processes that sustain artistic production and reception. On the other hand, when it functions at its best, the mimesis concept challenges us to grapple with how artistic practices – and particularly the

performing arts – produce meaning by making otherness present in the here-and-now.

This otherness made present may come in the form of a "representation" of another time

or another place, of a memory or association sparked in the mind of an observer, or of

qualities of alterity summoned in the person of the artist. Over its long and varied

history, the mimesis concept has both opened up and closed down avenues into these

crucial areas of inquiry.

Re-thinking mimesis in terms of a relationship between identity and alterity has in

many ways been the most important shared concern of the various theoretical returns to

the concept over the past century. Walter Benjamin imagined the human capacity to

perceive and produce resemblances – even the "nonsensuous similarities" between

language and experience – as "a rudiment of the powerful compulsion in former times to

become and behave like something else." Benjamin goes so far as to propose that "there

is none of [mankind's] higher functions in which his mimetic faculty does not play a

decisive role" (Benjamin 1978:333).[1] In *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and

Horkheimer approach "mimetic behavior" as an "organic adaptation to others" that

emerges from humanity's "biological prehistory" (Adorno and Horkheimer 1972:180),

but which has since been repressed by civilization's rationalizing impulse and co-opted

by fascist mass movements. Of course, the theme of the self's adaptation to otherness is

by no means an invention of early twentieth-century mimetic theory: this concern is

already integral to Plato's *Republic*, motivating the banishment of poetry from his ideal

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[1] Many of the ideas presented in "On the Mimetic Faculty" are either restated or given
more extensive treatment in "Doctrine of the Similar" (also written in 1933). For
example, in the latter essay, Benjamin writes that the "gift of seeing resemblances is
nothing but a weak rudiment of the formerly powerful compulsion to become similar and
also to behave mimetically" (Benjamin 1979:69).

polis and standing behind the famous discussion of mimesis as artistic image-making in Book X.

Mimesis also functions as a key concept in important works of literary criticism during the twentieth century: Eric Auerbach re-thinks mimesis as a schema of figuration and fulfillment in his *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1946), and Paul Ricouer's three-volume *Time and Narrative* (1983-85) takes Aristotle's *Poetics* as its departure-point but divides mimesis into a tripartite model of narrative emplotment. In the latter half of the twentieth century, however, mimesis as a narrative principle co-exists with various conceptions of mimesis as a psychic, behavioral, or cultural phenomenon: literary theorist René Girard uses the term "mimetic desire" to describe a subject's unconscious adoption of another's desire for an object; feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray encourages women to "play with mimesis" (Irigaray 1985:76), taking up the performance of gendered identities to expose these as roles rather than biological norms; and postcolonial theorist Homi Bhaba examines the colonial subject's mimicry of the colonizer as an ambivalent, subversive, and even menacing form of imitation.[2]

Mimetic thinking has also entered a new vogue within the social and natural sciences. Taking imitation as an operative principle of human culture (as did Aristotle), the evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins has coined the term "meme," used earlier in this introduction, to describe a unit of cultural replication that reproduces ideas, beliefs, and behaviors in a fashion akin to the way genes transmit human traits across

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[2] See Girard's *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* (1961), Irigaray's *This Sex which Is Not One* (1977), and Bhaba's *The Location of Culture* (1984).

generations.[3] Recent collections like Nick Chater and Susan Hurley's *Perspectives on Imitation: From Neuroscience to Social Science* (2005) look at imitation as a form of brain activity, a mode of learning in children, a mechanism for behavioral contagion, and a driver of cultural evolution. Cognitive neuroscience's "mirror neuron" theory – which I will touch upon in the coda to this study – speculates that a correspondence in neural activity between observer and agent may enable us to understand the intentions and emotions of other human subjects. The diverse efforts of the above theorists, philosophers, and scientists suggest that the mimesis concept can still be put to productive use – but that, in making use of it, we may need to get beyond its historical formulations, or to excavate their neglected complexities, in order to build additional layers of nuance on the solid but potentially reductive foundation of the one-to-one.[4]

Mimesis has also made a relatively recent and highly significant re-appearance on the scene of theatre scholarship. Elin Diamond sets out to "unmake" mimesis with the tools provided by feminist theory and Brechtian thought. The mimesis Diamond deconstructs is, essentially, that of Plato's *Republic* X: a way of seeing and knowing that forces otherness into self-sameness.[5] Martin Puchner also re-engages with Plato by taking up the *Republic*'s distinction between mimesis and *diegesis* ("telling," "narrative") in his influential account of modernist anti-theatricality, *Stage Fright* (2002). Graham

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[3] See Dawkins's *The Selfish Gene* (1976).

[4] The twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have also seen several historians of ideas take a retrospective look at mimesis. See, for example, Arne Melberg's *Theories of Mimesis* (1995), Gunter Gebauer and Christoph Wulf's *Mimesis: Culture, Art, Society* (1992), Stephen Halliwell's *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Texts, Modern Problems* (2002), and Matthew Potolsky's *Mimesis* (2006). The twentieth century's many efforts to revise mimesis have also produced a need to review these revisions – a need met by collections like Mihai Spariosu's *Mimesis in Contemporary Theory* (1984).

[5] See Elin Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis: Essays on feminism and theater* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997).

Ley, who begins his selective survey of theatrical theory from Plato to performance studies with classical mimetic theory, notes that the mimesis concept holds an enduring fascination for criticism even as theory often takes the concept for granted. For Ley, unconsidered invocations threaten to turn mimesis into a "desperately exhausted philosophical concept" like "representation" (Ley 1999:295). Joseph Roach has very recently made a call to renovate mimesis, asking that theater and performance scholars take up Auerbach's notion of the "figura" to consider how performance unfolds as a reciprocal process of expectation and retrospection, of pre-signification and actualization.[6] Thinking about mimesis as an embodied process of "imitation by substitution" (Roach 2010:1083) extends Roach's influential discussion of performance as "surrogation" in *Cities of the Dead* (1996).

Let us hope that Roach's call to re-open "the question of mimesis" – rather than to uncritically recycle mimeticist orthodoxies – will be taken up by the field of performance studies, which has tended to view mimesis as a dangerous bugaboo. "Mimetic theater" (Schechner 1988:63) has often been posited as the "other" that performance is not. Under this view, cultural performance and performance art are actual, transformative, and performative – that is, performance actually *does* something – while "mimetic theater" must be content with a modus operandi of illusory re-duplication. Mimetic theater may give its audiences some cheap thrills, but has no transformative impact on their lives or the lives of its actors. We find an attack on mimeticism in Peggy Phelan's *Unmarked* (1993), which champions performance as a mode of "representation without reproduction," a "representational economy" in which "the reproduction of the Other *as*

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[6] See Joseph Roach, "Performance: The Blunders of Orpheus," *PMLA* 125.4 (October 2010): 1078-86.

the Same is not assured" (Phelan 1993:3). Diana Taylor's *The Archive and the Repertoire* approaches "mimetic representation" in terms of "an actor assuming a role" (Taylor 2003:30) or of "a break between the 'real' and its representation" (14). Performance studies' anti-mimetic move is in some ways perfectly understandable: it is a basic argumentative device to put another paradigm at a distance in order to consolidate one's own (we will find this move being made by many of the thinkers I examine in this study). But the danger in such a move is that, for the sake of rhetorical efficiency, the theorist constructs a reductive version of the rejected paradigm – a version that does not do justice to the paradigm's complexity or variability.

As it leaves behind its phase of disciplinary self-definition, performance studies may be taking up a more nuanced stance on mimesis. Rebecca Schneider's *Performing Remains* (2011), for example, approaches the gap between the ideal and the real, between the original and the copy, as an "ancient (and tired) Western anxiety" rather than a still pressing ontological problem. Binding the mimesis concept into her exploration of the temporality of re-enactment, Schneider asks that we see mimesis not as "the antithesis of some discreet authenticity or pure truth, but a powerful tool for cross- or intra-temporal negotiation," for bringing about the interaction or inter-animation of one time with another time (Schneider 2011:30-1). Invoking Aristotle, Schneider also asks us to accept that "mimesis is what we *do*" (18) – and Schneider's "we" seems to include theatre practitioners and performance artists along with those of us who engage in everyday and occasional performances out of love or obligation.

While my concerns in this study do overlap with several of the above attempts at renewal and revision of the mimesis concept, my interests in turning back to mimesis are

closest to those of anthropologist and performance theorist Michael Taussig's influential

Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses (1993). Taussig's mimetic

faculty is the "the capacity to Other" (Taussig 19), which "tak[es] us bodily into alterity"

(Taussig 1993:40) and sustains ritual enactments and totemic practices. When it comes

to the life of society, within and across generations, mimesis is "the nature that culture

uses to make second nature" (70) – that is, a physiological capacity enabling the

formation of the bodily habits that make up culture. Like Taussig, I am most interested in

thinking about mimesis in terms of the body – or, better, in giving mimesis back its body,

for, as I will show, the earliest meanings of mimesis in classical Greece center on acts

and performances that call upon the capacity to embody otherness.

The "compulsion to become Other" (33) that drives Taussig's mimesis can also be

conceived as a first principle of theatricality or the primal impetus behind the cultural

practice that is acting.[7] Taussig's work has already proved inspirational to a number of

theatre scholars and performance theorists,[8] but my aim is a new one: to re-engage with

mimesis on the terrain of acting theory, the heterogeneous body of discourse that has

examined the art of the stage performer from antiquity to the present. The story about the

actor's mimesis that I will tell over the following pages leaps from classical Greece to

eighteenth-century France, and then to the first half of the twentieth century, in showing

how mimetic thinking has informed four formative moments in acting theory's history of

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[7] Taussig implies rather than argues for a connection between mimesis and theatricality:
"Once the mimetic faculty has sprung into being, a terrifically ambiguous power is
established; there is born the power to represent the world, yet that same power is a
power to falsify, mask, and pose" (Taussig 1993:43). The "anti-theatrical prejudice" that
Jonas Barish traces from the Greek world to the middle of the twentieth century houses
within it an intense anxiety over the power of mimesis (see Barish 1981).
[8] See, for example, States 1994:23, Diamond 1997:184, Roach 2010:1079-80.

ideas. I also show that invocations of mimesis – as well as instances of one-to-one conceptualization that do not explicitly take up mimesis terminology – reappear again and again in more recent theatre and performance scholarship.

Since Plato's transformative discussion of mimesis, the concept has carried two distinct meanings: mimesis as an ontological classification, under which art is defined as the imagistic or quasi-imagistic reproduction of an ideal or empirical reality, and mimesis as an embodied phenomenon, through which human beings assimilate themselves to otherness. This second meaning of mimesis – what I will call the "other mimesis" in aesthetic theory's history of ideas – goes underground after Plato's intervention. It raises its head again and again across the centuries, however, sometimes under vocabularies linked to the Greek *mimesis* – like *imitatio* in Latin, "imitation" in English, *imitation* in French, and *Nachahmung* in German – but also in terms like "sympathy," "contagion," "identification," "empathy," and "intersubjectivity." One-to-one thinking about selfhood and otherness also arises in vocabularies familiar to contemporary scholars in the fields of theatre of performance studies: "the restoration of behavior," "citationality," "surrogation," and "kinesthetic empathy."[9] In the theory of the theatre, it is virtually impossible to consider the one-to-one of representation or re-enactment without at the same time grappling with the one-to-one of identification or vicarious experience.

While this study will necessarily concern itself with mimeticist theories of theatrical "imitation" or "representation" – and, in particular, how such theories visit themselves upon the figure of the actor – my main objective will be in raising to prominence historical discussions of the "other mimesis" as an important but neglected

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[9] See Schechner 1985, Butler 1993, Roach 1996, Foster 2010.

dimension of theatrical theory. In the theory and practice of acting, this "other mimesis" – mimesis as an embodied attunement with otherness – comes in two modes. The first form of attuning connects actor and spectator in the here-and-now; the second form enables a performer to summon qualities of otherness through the resources of body, voice, and imagination. In the first mode, self and other are materially discrete but intersubjectively connected beings: actor and spectator. In the second mode, the absent other comes to presence in the being of the performer. As I will show, the conceptually difficult issues of vicarious connection and performative summoning arise to entangle and complicate theories of theatrical representation again and again across acting theory's history of ideas.

In chapter one, I return to classical Greece to examine the "other mimesis" at its origins and to trace its transformation into the abstract model-to-copy schema that would later become the more dominant meaning of mimesis. I begin by examining the earliest surviving instances of mimesis terminology in the poetry, drama, history, and philosophy of the sixth through fourth centuries B.C.E. These instances describe the embodiment or actualization of otherness by a human being through the resources of body and voice – mimesis as "mimicry" or "impersonation," to oversimplify the matter. Following the suggestion of the pioneering classicist Eric Havelock, I ask that we consider this embodied mimesis within the context of Greek musico-poetic culture as it evolved from orality toward literacy. In this culture, *paideia* ("education") consisted in the imitative learning of metrically regulated sequences of poetic speech-and-song and choreographically patterned movements of choral dance. We can best understand Plato's discussion of mimesis in Books II and III of the *Republic* against the background of a

performance culture in which the bodies, voices, and psyches of young Athenians were molded by the combination of musical objectivity and emotional subjectivity embedded in poems as "oral entities."

When mimesis became a philosophical keyword in the fifth century BCE, however, the term began to take on more conceptually abstract meanings: it was applied to the nature of representation by the visual arts as well as forms of ethical correspondence, for example. Thus we arrive at Plato's mimesis in Book X of the *Republic*: mimesis as a form of ontologically degraded image-making, a debased copying of material objects that are themselves copies of ideal forms. Turning mimesis into a term generally applicable to the visual as well as the performing arts requires an analogy: one that claims that, in representing the phenomena of the world, artworks do something very much like what human beings do when they embody otherness within themselves. I conclude my first chapter by gesturing to the historical development of acting theory and showing how this foundational analogy of Western aesthetics revisits itself again and again upon the figure of the actor.

Chapter two shifts to the birth of modern acting theory out of oratorical theory in eighteenth-century France. By this time, the more abstract mimesis of *Republic* X has evolved into the "imitation of nature" doctrine, and the French theorists of stage declamation assume "imitation" as the theatre's essential ontology. However, one-to-one thinking also surfaces when these theorists – like Luigi Riccoboni, Rémond de Sainte-Albine, and Antoine-François Riccoboni – write obsessively about the contagiousness of affective experience between actor and spectator. In doing so, they take up a conception of *émotion* ("motion"/"emotion") as a literal movement of soul-and-body that extends

back through Descartes's analysis of the passions of the soul to Galenic physiology and classical *pathos* theory. Divided since Plato's intervention, the two meanings of mimesis in performance – as verisimilar duplication and the embodiment of alterity – merge once again when acting theorists like Sainte-Albine argue that the theatre's "truth of Representation" depends upon the shared sensation of passion, a kind of mimetic experience undergone by the actor and felt vicariously by the spectator. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of Diderot's *Paradoxe sur le Comédien*, which overturns the orthodoxy of passionate contagion and forwards in its place a theoretically perfect – and pristinely bodiless – conception of the actor's mimesis. Diderot's *modèle idéal* – a vision of the role pre-conceived in imagination and then grafted onto the actor's performing body – is the offspring of Plato's mirror, and this phantasmic double will haunt the figure of the actor from the end of the eighteenth century to the present.

Soon after Diderot penned his *Paradoxe*, the mimetic paradigm would be shaken by Romantic conceptions of expressivity, which conceived the artistic process as outpouring, growth, or emanation rather than reflection or duplication. But one-to-one thinking continued to hold strong within acting theory's history of ideas for another century – until the paradigm-shift effected by the Russian director and systematizer of actor-training Konstantin Stanislavsky. Stanislavsky wrote in response to treatises on aesthetics and theatrical art by Diderot, Pushkin, Tolstoy, and the French actor Benoît-Constant Coquelin. He also wrote under the influence of German Romanticism, Idealist philosophy, and the spread of Hindu philosophy through European intellectual culture during the nineteenth century. The synthesis of Romanticism, Idealism, and Hinduism in nineteenth-century thought gives rise to a metaphysics of oneness – between the self and

the absolute, between humanity and divinity, or, in matters of artistic practice, between the subjectivity of the artist and the objectivity of the work, and between the ideal image and the material form that emanates from this image. Stanislavsky carries the paradigm of oneness into acting theory, forwarding a conception of acting as genuine *action*, rather than the imitation of action or the representation of character.

For Stanislavsky, acting is a primary act, marked by the actor's experience of an organically unified self and a "sense of belief and truth" within fictional given circumstances. Stanislavsky's conception of theatrical truth is therefore highly subjective, but it is also intersubjective: the oneness of the actor with himself is marked by the phrase "I am," and the spectator, who feels at one with the actor's truthful behavior, is able to render the judgment, "I believe you." However, despite his debt of influence to nineteenth-century accounts of subjective oneness, which clash with the dualism of mimetic thinking, Stanislavsky cannot entirely escape one-to-one conceptualization, nor can any practical philosophy of acting avoid reckoning with the various phenomenon of mimesis-as-embodiment. I show how a transformed mimeticism runs through Stanislavskian thought, and how Stanislavsky, despite his general rejection of imitation as a theoretical model and a practical technique, sometimes preserves a positive role for imitative self-likening in the actor's art.

Chapter four explores the renewal of mimetic thinking and imitative practice in Bertolt Brecht's essays on the theatre. Brecht writes against Stanislavsky's "art of experiencing," but he also constructs his vision of an "epic" theatre against accounts of *Einfühlung* (typically translated as "empathy") in German philosophy, psychology, and aesthetics. In the writings of the philosophers Robert Vischer and Theodor Lipps,

Einfülung (literally, "in-feeling" or "one-feeling") describes the capacity of aesthetic

contemplators to feel-themselves-into or feel-themselves-at-one-with their objects of

contemplation – an operation that, in Brecht's early theatrical theory, the epic actor must

disrupt. The mature Brecht, however, allows for some moments of one-to-one

identification – between actor and character, and between spectator and actor-as-

character – along with a form of embodied attunement that may jar even more strongly

with our assumptions about the Brechtian theatre: Brecht believes that by feeling-at-one-

with the actor's *Leichtigkeit* – "lightness" or "ease" in gesture and movement – the

spectator can achieve a freedom of body and mind that will enable the critical attitude,

the ideal mode of consciousness for both Brecht's actor and spectator. Clarifying

Brecht's stance on *Einfühlung* helps us see that a dual mimesis drives the operations of

the epic theatre: a Marxist mirroring of the social world, which produces accurate but

critical "images" of happenings between human beings, and an embodied mimesis that

allows actors to model qualities of body-and-mind for audiences. In his late writings on

the theatre, the mature Brecht strives to bring about a theoretical reconciliation between

the one-to-one of *Einfühlung* and the one-against-another of dialectics – a reconciliation I

attempt to push further in the chapter's conclusion.

I have chosen the above four bodies of thought for their conceptual richness but

also for their momentousness within acting theory's history of ideas: Greek philosophy

provides us with European thought's first analyses of the performing arts; the treatises on

oratorical and theatrical declamation of eighteenth-century France launch the theory of

the stage actor as a sustained, modern conversation; Stanislavsky effects a paradigm-shift

in this conversation by integrating Romantic theories of expressivity and aspiring toward

a new degree of technical and theoretical precision; Brecht provides the most powerful anti-Stanislavskian conception of the actor's mission for much of the twentieth-century. In addition, in leaping across time and place from chapter to chapter, I am in fact following closely what I call Russo-European acting theory's "main line" of theoretical influence: Diderot had read Plato; Stanislavsky read and wrote against Diderot; Brecht read Plato and Diderot and wrote against Stanislavsky. The connections are clear and traceable. I have chosen to leave aside certain theorists of acting whose contributions hold great historical importance but which nevertheless lie outside this main line of influence (for example, the German actor-theorists Konrad Ekhof and August Wilhelm Iffland, the French prophet of the "Theatre of Cruelty" Antonin Artaud, and, more recently, the directors Anne Bogart and Tadashi Suzuki, whose actor-training techniques make up an alternative paradigm for the early twenty-first century).

Finally, in a short coda, I point toward other strands of mimetic thinking about the actor's art: in the "Biomechanical" theory of Vsevolod Meyerhold and Sergei Eisenstein, in the philosophy of theatrical energetics of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards, and in the way contemporary "mirror neuron" theory is being applied within the field of theatre and performance studies. I conclude by challenging theatre scholars and performance theorists to move beyond the limits of one-to-one conceptualization by referring to their own experiences as practitioners and spectators. Acknowledging and analyzing the complexity of subjective and intersubjective experience in the theatre is the most effective antidote against the theoretical complacency that mimeticist thinking often inspires.

If, as I believe, we cannot escape mimesis, either as an aesthetic concept or a human phenomenon, we should embrace this fact. We should use the concept as Plato did – as a provocation to dialectic that *gets us somewhere*, rather than a set of parallel conceptual grooves (the one-to-one) that takes us round and round in circles, so that we repeat intellectual conversations rehashed many times before. Broaching the question of use requires a note on methodology: any historian of ideas, in sifting through source texts, will generate thinking that exceeds the contents of this material. This is inevitable, and useful. What intellectual historians must guard against, however, is ventriloquizing the thinkers of the past – that is, voicing their own views after the preamble "Plato states," "Diderot argues," or "Brecht proposes." And they must just as strenuously guard against being ventriloquized by the arguments and concepts they encounter – that is, of slipping into unconscious recapitulation of opinions they have set out to examine and critique. In this latter respect, mimetic theory is particularly dangerous territory, for following the evolution of one-to-one thinking through the history of philosophy and aesthetics can quickly become a form of brainwashing.

Keeping the above in mind, I have done my best to exert self-discipline in matters of intellectual compartmentalization. In the body of each chapter, I summarize and explicate a set of texts, making connections between them, placing them within broader theoretical conversations, and, when it comes to texts of acting theory, situating them in relation to the theatrical practices of their period. I save my own extensions and extrapolations for the end of each chapter sub-section, and I give myself space to leave behind my source texts in pursuing their core questions in the conclusion to each chapter. Grotowski frequently voiced his conviction that a disciple should go one-fifth beyond the

master. If I have given myself scope to go as much as one-fifth beyond the philosophers, aestheticians, and theorists of the theatre with whom I engage over this course of this study, I will be well satisfied.

I have not set out to rewrite the history of aesthetics or to police the multiple significances that mimesis terminology has carried. In thinking about mimesis in terms of the inseparable practices of acting and spectating, however, I am attempting to endow the mimesis concept with some measure of concreteness – an experiential concreteness that it once possessed, but has now lost. As I will show in chapter one, mimetic theory began as what literary historian M.H. Abrams would call a highly "pragmatic" theory of art – one concerned with the transformative effects of artworks upon their receivers.[10] Returning mimesis to the performing body – or, better, giving mimesis back the body it once had – can help us grapple with how art *works* upon its receivers, and how artists *work upon themselves* to make otherness materially present. This move can also help us avoid the easier route of constructing theoretical unrealities to fit ontological assumptions. In this connection, the art of the actor can keep us grounded in embodied actuality. After all, if "[t]he fundamental move of the mimetic faculty taking us bodily into alterity is very much the task of the storyteller too" (Taussig 1993:40), then mimesis as a psycho-physical capacity comes into play even more crucially in the technique of the actor, whose task it is to embody otherness in the here-and-now as well as to enable the vicarious experience of otherness in those who watch from a distance.

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[10] See Abrams 1953:15.

1. Embodying Otherness:
Mimesis, *Mousike*, and the Philosophy of Plato

A priestess of Apollo gives voice to a foreign dialect. A flute-player makes a sound like a Gorgon's cry. A Trojan spy adopts the loping gait of a wolf. An Athenian woman disguised as a man infiltrates the city assembly. A tragic poet puts on the clothes and bearing of a woman in order to compose female roles. The disciple of an esteemed philosopher emulates his mentor. An Athenian youth learns choral dance. An epic poet sings the words of Achilles, Agamemnon, and Odysseus. A tragic actor impersonates Clytemnestra, Antigone, or Hecuba. What does any of these acts of embodiment have to do with mimesis?

In this chapter, I aim to rethink the mimesis concept by refreshing its earliest meanings: the significations and connotations carried by mimesis terminology in texts and fragments of Greek poetry, drama, history, and philosophy from the sixth through the fourth centuries BCE. I argue that, taken together, the earliest instances of mimesis terminology should be approached as describing phenomena of "embodiment" or "actualization" (rather than "imitation" in a contemporary sense), with one crucial qualification: that the entity or quality actualized is recognized as also existing elsewhere or "outside" the mimetic embodiment. In other words, the entity or quality made present by mimesis is perceived as "other" to the *mimos* (the one who mimics) or the *mimema* (the mimic thing). I understand mimesis as the summoning of otherness within the self, so that the self is likened to another. The paradox of mimesis as embodiment is that the

qualities of body and voice recognized as "other" are manifested, in the moment of enactment, nowhere but in the medium of the self that summons them.

Re-embodying mimesis puts me on a collision course with Plato – in particular, with Book X of the *Republic*, which remakes mimesis as an ontologically debased mode of image-making. Here Plato assimilates the mimesis concept to his static and hierarchical conceptual universe, opening up an ontological breach between ideal model and mimetic copy, with lasting consequences for aesthetic theory. However, I intend to show that Platonic thought preserves a sense of mimesis as an embodied and affective process of self-likening, particularly in the discussions of the way classical Greek culture's various genres of musico-poetic performance shape individual and collective character (*ethos*) in both the *Republic* and the *Laws*.

The broadest aim of this chapter is to put the enactive body summoning otherness back at the heart of the human phenomenon that is mimesis. Doing so will help us realize that when fifth-century Greek philosophy abstracted the mimesis concept to include more conceptual forms of correspondence, it laid down a foundational analogy that would shape the evolution of aesthetics in the classical era as well as the period between the Renaissance and the rise of Romanticism. This foundational analogy likens the "second nature" brought into bodily being by the mimetic faculty with the so-called "imitations" produced by artistic practices like painting, sculpture, and written poetry.
Ironically, in the Renaissance and beyond, this analogy is brought to bear upon the figure of the theatrical performer, and the actor's art is theorized through constant comparison with the aims and properties of representation in inanimate media.

When the Greeks used the term mimesis, I argue, they were referencing a fundamental capacity of the body in performance: the ability to summon otherness within the self. I here use the word "performance" in a broad, not specifically theatrical sense, which includes forms of musico-poetic performance as well as performances that spontaneously emerge out of the flow of everyday life. Some classical scholars seeking to reconstruct an "original" or "root" sense for the mimesis word-group have used theatrical terms like "drama" and "impersonation" to approximate these early significations. For example, G.F. Else speculates that mimesis and its variant forms at first "denoted a dramatic or quasi-dramatic representation, and their extension to nondramatic forms like painting and sculpture must have been a secondary development" (Else 1958:78). The impulse of the theatre scholar to leap at this mimesis-theatre conjunction – in order to stake a claim for the mimesis concept as "belonging" to the theatre as a form of practice and a field of study – must be kept down. To retroactively endow mimesis with a "dramatic" or even "quasi-dramatic" coloring before Plato and Aristotle made it a central concept in their theories of tragedy amounts to revisionist theatricalization. We should avoid using the theatre as the sole lens through which we re-examine mimesis, for the mimetic faculty – as the human capacity to embody otherness – is more basic to human culture than the theatre as an art form and more basic to the mental-and-physical life of social actors than the skill-sets employed in theatrical "impersonation." In this connection we can cite Aristotle's famous observation that

> the instinct of imitation is implanted in man from childhood, one difference between him and other animals being that he is the most imitative of living creatures, and through imitation learns his earliest lessons; and no less universal is the pleasure felt in things imitated. (Aristotle 1951:15)

Mimesis is a fundamentally human process – a "conditio humana" (Gebauer and Wulf

1995:1). It is not inherently "theatrical" (whatever that might mean), but it does make

theatre possible. By this I mean that the mimetic faculty provides enactments of

otherness, whether embedded in ritual proceedings, mime performances, or theatrical

productions, with their essential impetus and appeal. And if, as Michael Taussig

proposes, "the fundamental move of the mimetic faculty taking us bodily into alterity is

very much the task of the storyteller too" (Taussig 1993:40), it makes sense to re-

examine the fundamental meanings of mimesis by engaging with the embodied practices

of the epic, lyric, and tragic poets of ancient Greece – one of the earliest families of

storytellers in the European tradition. By doing so, we may be able to rescue mimesis

from theoretical ideality and return it to the bodily substance of lived reality.

At this point, a note on translation is required. Throughout this chapter, I will

quote translations that render the noun *mimesis* as "imitation" and the verb *mimeisthai* as

"imitate." However, I ask the reader to replace these words in imagination with

"embody" or "actualize." I also ask that the reader take a moment to consider how such

substitutions change the sense of the passages in question. It is unfortunate that the

English language possesses no verb-form with a close homophonous connection to the

Greek *mimeisthai*, the verb-form from which the word *mimesis* (as a noun of process)

appears to derive. The Spanish language, however, does possess such a word: *mimetizar*

("to copy, to imitate").[11] I therefore propose an Anglicization of the Spanish,

"mimetize," to be used sparingly throughout this chapter at those moments when it is

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[11] Webster's New World Spanish Dictionary 2008.

most necessary to emphasize mimesis's dynamic and processual nature.[12] Using

"mimetize" at selected moments will also highlight the inadequacy of alternative English

verbs like "imitate," "copy," "mimic," or "ape," all of which appear as translations of

mimeisthai in standard editions of classical texts from the late nineteenth century to the

present. These various translations confuse the cluster of related connotations that

classical Greek poets, philosophers, and historians were deliberately or unconsciously

invoking when they took up mimesis terminology.

Mimesis before Plato

Though Plato's transformative adoption of mimesis was in many ways radical, his

treatment of the concept drew on a long and varied history of terminological usage.

Instances of the mimesis word group are scattered across texts and fragments of fifth-

century poetry, drama, history, and philosophy. The mimesis word group includes

several variants:

1) The noun *mimos* (usually translated as "mime" or "mimic"), which designates someone carrying out an imitative activity in a general sense as well as the performer of the specific dramatic genre of mime;[13]
2) the verb *mimeisthai* (usually translated as "to imitate" or "to mimic");
3) the noun *mimesis* ("imitation," "mimicry"), which first appears in the fifth century BCE;
4) the noun forms *mimema* (singular) and *mimemata* (plural)*,* which describe *an* "imitation" or "imitations" as material objects or concrete phenomena;
5) the adjective *mimetikos*, which describes something that is imitative in its nature or capable of mimetic activity;
6) and the noun form *mimetes* ("imitator"), which designates the executor of mimetic activity, and which does not appear until the fourth century BCE.

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[12] Michael Taussig has already improvised his own novel verb-form, "mimeticise" (see Taussig 1993:106).

[13] Greek "mime" of the period in question consisted in dialogue-based sketches employing crude, earthy humor and not in the silent performance genre of expressive and representational gestures that we today associate with the term.

The terms above were used in a variety of contexts, to communicate a range of meanings, which classical scholar Stephen Halliwell has divided into five primary categories: "visual resemblance"; "behavioral emulation/imitation"; "impersonation, including dramatic enactment"; "vocal or musical production"; and "metaphysical conformity" (see Halliwell 2002:15).

A number of classical scholars working just after the midpoint of the twentieth century labored to reconstruct an "original" meaning of mimesis, though others since have argued that the existing evidence is too scarce to allow anything more than speculation.[14] Hermann Koller's *Die Mimesis in der Antike: Nachahmung, Darstellung, Ausdruck* ["Mimesis in Antiquity: Imitation, Representation, Expression"](1954) sparked this scholarly trend by arguing that mimesis terminology was at first associated with the representational and expressive qualities of Dionysian cultic performances. Gerald F. Else's "'Imitation' in the fifth century" (1958) refuted Koller's view by painstakingly assembling the earliest instances of mimesis terminology in order to argue for their "root sense" in "a miming or mimicking of the external appearance, utterances, and/or movements of an animal or a human being by a human being" (Else 1958:78). Else located the "original center of gravity" of mimesis terminology in a "'mimic' sense" associated with "'live' imitation" (Else 1958:82, 83); he also claimed that noun form *mimos* carried lingering associations with the genre of Sicilian mime. Else traced a semantic movement away from the early sense of mimic mimesis as "dramatic or quasi-dramatic representation" toward "a more abstract and colorless range of meaning," which included ethical emulation and visual representation in inanimate media (Else 1958:78,

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[14] See Moraux 1955, Halliwell 2002.

82). Göran Sörbom went further in endowing mimesis with dramatic origins, speculating

that the root word in the group was *mimos* and that its related terms carried the basic

metaphorical meaning: "to behave like a mime actor (or as people do in the mimes)"

(Sörbom 1966:39). According to Sörbom, the metaphor's gradual naturalization allowed

a more abstract set of meanings, conveying a general sense of similitude or

correspondence. However, classicist Stephen Halliwell, in his *Aesthetics of Mimesis:*

Ancient Texts and Modern Problems (2002), perhaps the most comprehensive intellectual

history of the mimesis concept to date, calls the search for the root meanings of mimesis

an "alluring" but "fruitless enterprise" and deems the etymology of mimesis terminology

"irrecoverable" (17).

Else may go too far in claiming an original "'mimic' sense" for mimesis.

Nevertheless, even if his argument for a "center of gravity" overreaches itself, the cluster

of early fragments that Else analyzes does seem to occupy a semantic field outlined by

the act of vocal-and-physical mimicry. I therefore put forward the following proposition

not as a philological claim but rather as a thought-experiment in re-conceptualizing

mimesis: that we need not locate the fundamental meaning of mimesis in the practice of

acting or in the dramatic genre of mime, but in the act of mimicry that exists at their core,

and in the mimetic faculty that enables such an act. Both miming and acting, whether

they arise spontaneously in social interaction or are deliberately orchestrated for public

performance, rely upon the fundamental human capacity to summon other ways of being

in the medium of the self. This capacity to bring otherness into bodily presence is

actually – rather than metaphorically – redeployed within the performing arts. It may be

that the early range of meanings in mimesis terminology was expanded to more abstract

forms of correspondence – such as ethical emulation and visual representation – through metaphorical comparison with this basic human faculty. As we shall see, none of the earliest surviving usages of the mimesis word-group need be interpreted in terms of the model-to-copy schema that we now associate with the ontology of mimesis-as-representation.

Let us turn now to some early instances of mimesis terminology that refer to musico-poetic performance practice. The set of practices comprising what the Greeks called *mousike* – the undifferentiated complex of poetry, song, dance, and instrumental accompaniment so central to their culture – were fundamentally arts of embodiment. To the Greeks, *mousike* simply meant the province of the Muses, and it should be kept in mind that the central function of the nine Muses was their divine patronage of rhythmic speech delivered in performance. No Muses presided over what we would today call the "visual arts" of painting and sculpture – indeed, as has often been noted, the Greeks had no notion of the aesthetic as a discrete sphere and no word for "art" in the general sense that the term connotes today. The Greek culture of *mousike* exploited the human capacity to manifest otherness in body and voice, and mimesis terminology was used to describe both this capacity and other elements of musical performance (like instruments) which themselves mimic this capacity.

The *Delian Hymn to Apollo* (ca. 600 BCE) is the first text in which the verb-form *mimeisthai* appears in a performance context, and here it still retains its "mimic" coloring: a chorus of Delian priestesses is described by the poet as able to mimic (*mimeisthai*) different dialects: "they can imitate the tongues of all men and their clattering speech [perhaps the alien sounds of unfamiliar accents or dialects]." The poet

continues: "each [audience member, perhaps at a festival gathering of Ionian tribes,] would say that he himself were singing, so [well] the beautiful song is fitted to them" (in Sörbom 1966:59). Here there is a sense of *fitness* to the priestesses' vocal impersonations, in that they accurately capture the accents they attempt, leading to recognition and admiration in the audience. But there is no model-to-copy divide: the imitated accents do not exist prior to and separate from the maidens' performance; rather, they pour out of the singing mouths of the priestesses in the act of mimetizing. The rightness of the vocal "imitations" produced derives from the assessment of the listeners, not from some form of ontological comparison.

In the *Problems*, Aristotle ventures an explanation for why people enjoy listening to familiar songs more than unfamiliar ones: "It is because it is more obvious when the singer […] hits the target" (in Barker 1984:190). Singing a song sung (or heard) before, like imitating a foreign dialect, is a mimetic act. The rightness or wrongness of this act – whether or not the singer or speaker "hits the target" – is *immanent* within the mimetic act itself; it is inherent in the activities of singing and listening. The listener does not compare what he or she is hearing with another song in his or her "mind's ear"; rather, he or she listens-to-and-assesses the actual song, perceiving qualities of rightness or wrongness *in the song itself*. There is no model-to-copy comparison within the conscious experience of the listener.

In a fragment of one of Pindar's Parthenian Odes, the singer uses the verb *mimeisthai* when she tells the listener that "to the notes of the lotus-pipe shall I mimic in song a siren-sound of praise, such as husheth the swift blasts of Zephyr" (in Sörbom 1966:60). As Sörbom observes, in this instance of mimetic song "there is no question at

all of making a copy, of repeating in all their details, the song of sirens" (Sörbom 1966:62). We could substitute the phrase "give voice to" for the verb "mimic" in the translation above, except that we would need to stipulate that the singer's act is a giving voice to an "other" voice (the voice of a siren). This other voice, however, exists nowhere except in the Greek mythic imagination and in the singer's vocalization that summons it.

In another Pindar fragment – this time, from a *hyporcheme*, a genre of lyric performance – the verb *mimeisthai* seems to be used in connection with a danced scenario of a hunt, in which the performer is to embody both the hunter's horse, hunting dog, and quarry. As Else writes: "The solo dancer is to mimic the actions of the bitch and her prey, including the tossing of the latter's head" (Else 1958:77). The ancient authorities on dance – like Xenophon, Lucian, and Plutarch – are unanimous on the fact that it was mimetic. Furthermore, in sources like the *Onomasticon* of Pollux (ca. late second century CE), many of the names of the various choral dances listed – like "the owl," "the crane," and "the kneading-trough" – "suggest imitation […] of an action or an animal or a person" (Zarifi 2007:242).[15]

Mimesis terminology also arises in discussions of musico-poetic performance when instruments are endowed with the ability to mimic the mimicry of the human voice. The *aulos* flute, accompaniment for Dionysian revels as well as the lyrical passages in tragic performance, was regarded by the Greeks as capable of capturing the timbre of the human voice. Pindar's twelfth Pythian Ode (lines 18-21) imagines Athena inventing "the

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[15] Classicist David Wiles argues: "The idea that dance is a form of imitation was rooted in cult, which required dancers to enact (for example) movement through the Cretan labyrinth, or the movements of Athena after her birth" (Wiles 1997:88).

many-voiced music of flutes, that so, by aid of music, she might imitate the cry exceeding

shrill that burst from the ravening jaws of [the Gorgon] Euryale" (in Sörbom 1966:59).

The verb in the passage cited is *mimeisthai*, and Pindar here imagines that the many

"voices" of which wind instruments are capable were devised to fulfill a mimetic

function. Another key example of what we might call instrumental mimesis comes in the

earliest extant occurrence of the plural noun-form *mimoi*: in Aeschylus's *Edonians*, the

ancient instruments known as bull-roarers seem to be regarded, metaphorically, as

"mimes" (*mimoi*) who imitate the bellowing of bulls, although, under another

interpretation, the sounds might be produced by human performers (see Else 1958:74-5,

Halliwell 2002:17, Sörbom 1966:54). As a final example of instrumental mimesis, the

chorus in Euripides's *Iphigenia at Aulis* describes the Trojan prince Paris as a young boy,

imitating the sounds of the aulos on his simple shepherd's pipe (the *syrinx*). More

precisely, the chorus says that Paris blows *mimemata* of the aulos (see Sörbom 1966:67-

8). It would be odd indeed to translate *mimemata* here as "representations" or even

"imitations"; like the "impressions" performed by vocal mimic, Paris's *mimemata* are

sounds that actualize certain qualities of "other" sounds, though these qualities of

otherness are recognized as present in the *mimemata* themselves.

Moving on from discussions of musico-poetic performance within poetry and

drama, we find mimesis terminology applied to acts of impersonation outside the context

of *mousike* in a number of Greek tragedies and comedies. For example, Aeschylus puts

the verb *mimeisthai* into the mouth of Orestes in the *Choephori* ("Libation Bearers") as

he prepares to disguise himself in order to enter his familial house and exact revenge

upon Clytemnestra and Aegisthus:

> I shall come with this man to the gate of the courtyard,
> with Pylades, a stranger and a spear-friend to the house.
> And we will both speak the dialect of Parnassus,
> copying the sound of the Phocian tongue. (Aeschylus 1970:41)

The word translated as "copying" above is *mimeisthai*. The success of Orestes and Pylades's impersonation will certainly depend upon their mimicry of the chosen accent, but also upon their ability to simulate the bearing and affect of strangers to the House of Atreus. In other words, some *acting* will be required of Orestes and Pylades.

In the tragedy *Rhesus,* attributed to Euripides, the Trojan spy Dolon disguises himself in a wolfskin and adopts the animal's gait in order to infiltrate the Greek camp after dark. About to set out upon his stealthy exploit, Dolon brags:

> Over my back a wolfskin will I draw,
> And the brute's gaping jaws shall frame mine head:
> Its forefeet will I fasten to my hands,
> Its legs to mine: the wolf's four-footed gait
> I'll mimic, baffling so our enemies […].[16]

The verb translated as "mimic" in the above passage is *mimeisthai*, and Dolon is described by the play's chorus as a *mimos* soon after this moment. Perhaps we cannot call Dolon's act an "impersonation," since he is a man embodying the movement qualities of an animal. But in this instance of a man summoning wolfness within himself, we find the same elements as the example from the *Choephori*: the convincing embodiment of qualities of otherness, with an intention to deceive – and high stakes for success or failure. Again, the presence of the "model" is immanent in Dolon's performance: when a man summons the physicality of a wolf – in the context of ritual enactment, choral dance, or intra-tragic performance – the observer does not see *a* wolf.

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[16] Translation by A.S. Way, in Sörbom 1966:28.

The "referent" is not phenomenally present to the observer's consciousness. Rather, the observer recognizes wolfness in the embodied qualities of the summoner's performance.

In the comedies of Aristophanes, mimesis often enables transgressive or provocative acts of gender performance – of the embodiment of otherness across the perceived divides of gender difference. The verb form *mimeisthai* arises in Aristophanes's *Ecclesiazusae* ("The Assembly Women"), when Praxagora convinces the women of Athens to disguise themselves as men, so that they can infiltrate the city's assembly and pass a series of radical communitarian proposals. Praxagora tells her followers to dress themselves in men's tunics and shoes, affix false beards to their faces, and then, "leaning on your sticks / Off to the Meeting, piping as ye go / Some old man's song, and mimicking the ways / Of country fellows" (Aristophanes 1924:271). Here again the context is one of disguise and impersonation: the women are costuming themselves as men, but they are also calling upon an intimate, bodily familiarity with men's ways – their ways of walking, singing, and conducting themselves generally – in order to simulate masculine behavior. Of course, the "women" of the *Ecclesiazusae* would have been played by male actors, so the embodiment of gender difference would already be part of the performance in the amphitheater of Dionysos. This embodiment of femininity, however, would probably have tended toward exaggeration and caricature, given the tone and aims of Aristophanic comedy. There may have even been a kind of doubled Brechtian estrangement at work in the male performers' mimetizing of their female characters' mimetizing of masculine characteristics.[17] Of course, the embodiment

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[17] Brecht's "Exercises for Acting Schools" highlight the gestures and attitudes associated with gender roles by having female actors carry out stereotyped male behaviors and vice versa (see Brecht 1964:129).

of femininity by male actors – what Froma Zeitlin calls "playing the other" – was also a

staple of tragedy, both as a protocol of Athenian performance culture and within fictional

dramatic events (as when Dionysos dresses Pentheus as a bacchante in Euripides's

Bacchae).[18]

In Aristophanes, mimesis terminology also describes a more specifically theatrical

mode of impersonation than in the above instances. At several moments, figures within

the comedies attempt to embody a particular character or personage well known to

themselves and well known to their prospective "audiences." In Aristophanes's *Clouds*,

Dionysos costumes himself as Heracles – with iconic club and lionskin – in order to

duplicate successfully Heracles's feat of journeying to the underworld. Dionysos uses

the mimesis verb-form to describe his attempt to impersonate Heracles – an attempt that

is revealed as unsuccessful and ridiculous when Dionysos meets the actual Heracles, who

cannot contain his mocking laughter.   Bungled mimesis – the failure to convincingly

embody a model – is a basic device of comedy from the Greeks to the present. The

spectator's perception of laughable *wrongness* – often juxtaposed with the character's

total confidence in his or her "acting" – is elicited in Greek comedy both "Old" and

"New," the Roman comedy of Plautus and Terence, Elizabethan comedy, and the

commedia dell'arte, along with more contemporary comic genres.

Dionysos's impersonation of Heracles in the above example carries a meta-

theatrical – or, perhaps better, meta-mythic – dimension: here a character is aware of the

correspondence between his or her situation and the situation of a character from pre-

existing drama or myth. This Aristophanic meta-awareness also arises in *Wealth*, when

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[18] See Zeitlin 1990.

the slave Cairo dances with happiness, crying out that he is "mimicking" the Cyclops (see

Else 1958:80, Sörbom 1966:71). In this passage, Aristophanes quotes from the *Loves of*

Galatea and Cyclops, a burlesque by the dithyrambic poet Philoxenus of Cythera. The

character Cairo may simply be drawing a situational parallel between himself and the

character of Philoxenus's Cyclops – as he later does with the mythological characters

Circe and Odysseus. It is also possible, however, that at this moment the performer

playing Cairo also takes up the metrical structure and danced movements of Philoxenus's

dithyramb, so that a citational mimesis – the embodied citation of an earlier poetic

performance – compounds the situational mimesis previously described.[19]

Perhaps the most interesting episode of mimetic performance in Aristophanes's

oeuvre comes in *Thezmophoriazusae* (also translated as *Women at the Thesmophoria*),

where Aristophanes depicts a visit by Euripides to the tragic poet Agathon.[20] Agathon is

caught in the act of composing a new play: he is dressed in feminine garments, and

alternates between portraying a Priestess chorus-leader and a chorus of Trojan women,

singing falsetto to the accompaniment of a lyre. Explaining the usefulness of his

accoutrements and bodily adjustments, Agathon explains:

> I change my clothing along with my purpose.
> For it's necessary that a poet-man have habits
> according to the plays that he must write.

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[19] In the *Thezmophoriazusae*, Aristophanes provides other instances of the parodic performance of gender traits as well as previous tragic models. In this play, Euripides's kinsman Mnesilochus disguises himself as a woman in order to advocate for his son-in-law at an assembly of women who wish to pass judgment on the tragic poet for his disrespectful dramatic treatment of female characters. The play also contains a scene parodying Euripides's *Helen* (produced just a year earlier than the *Thezmophoriazusae*, in 412 BCE), with Mnesilochus again performing exaggerated femininity as the Greek princess.

[20] This is the same tragic poet Agathon (c. 448-400 BCE), known to be a close friend of both Aristophanes and Euripides, who appears in Plato's *Symposium*.

> For example, if one is writing feminine plays,
> One's body must participate in their habits. […]
> If you're writing about masculine things, that which you need
> Is there in your body; but if we don't have it,
> Then it must be captured by imitation [*mimesis*].[21]

Agathon's mimesis is an embodied process, a trying-on-for-size of the corporeal ways of being (*tropoi*) that must be actualized convincingly in performance. Agathon does not experiment with different ways of "representing" the feminine, but, through the exercise of the mimetic faculty, partakes in the physical habits of women in order to stimulate his creative imagination – and, presumably, his ability to enter into the mental and emotional states of his female characters. For classicist Anne Duncan, the "mimetic body" of Agathon is "fundamentally indeterminate," "neither fully male nor fully female," and the tragedian's embodied mimesis "puts into question the distinctions between poet and work, actor and role, masculine and feminine, body and costume" (Duncan 2006:33). An "early figure for the actor," the "gender- and genre-bender" Agathon provokes "anxieties about mimesis and identity that will haunt the ancient world for a thousand years" (27).

Euripides says of Agathon's mimetic method, "I was the same way at his age, when I began to write" (Aristophanes 1996:104), suggesting that Aristophanes may not be depicting Agathon's process as ridiculously eccentric but as a variant of standard compositional practice – although one parodically heightened by the lampooning context. Evidence in Aristotle's *Poetics* may also suggest that the mode of enactive composition the fictionalized Agathon undertakes was not idiosyncratic. In Chapter XVII of the *Poetics,* Aristotle encourages the poet "to imagine his material to the fullest possible extent while composing his plot-structures and elaborating them in language. By seeing

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[21] Translation in Duncan 2006:42.

them as vividly as possible in this way – as if present at the very occurrence of the events – he is likely to discover what is appropriate, and least likely to miss contradictions" (Aristotle 1987:50). It is unclear here whether Aristotle means that the poet ought to take the perspective of a spectator at a theatrical performance or a witness at fictional dramatic events. Aristotle goes on to urge that "so far as possible, the poet should even include gestures in the process of composition: for, assuming the same natural talent, the most convincing effect comes from those who actually put themselves in the emotions; and the truest impression of distress or anger is given by the person who experiences these feelings" (50). While imaginative visualization is necessary in developing narrative coherence and detail – the discovery of "what is appropriate" and the editing out of "contradictions" – physicalization of gesture is necessary in order to generate the emotional dimension of the poetic score.

Since tragic gesture in Aristotle's day would have hardly been naturalistic, we can imagine the tragic poet of *Poetics* XVII experimenting with choreographic *schemata*, stylized dance-movements, in the medium of his own body. The Greek poet's process of artistic creation did not occur in confrontation with a blank page; instead, the poet, in a mode of enactive composition, simultaneously produced words, meter, dance movement, and musical accompaniment. These elements were not layered onto each other, as in most contemporary processes of theatrical production, which tend to begin with the text as blueprint, but born as an organic unity out of the poet's embodied imagination. The poet's process of creation, both in Aristophanes's *Thesmophoriazusae* and in *Poetics* XVII, unfolds as enactment more than the "making" (*poesis*) of an artifact in a medium outside the self.

Cataloguing the instances of mimesis terminology discussed above, we find usages that describe: acts of vocal or physical mimicry; the faculty of mimicry deployed within musico-poetic performance contexts (by human beings and, metaphorically, by musical instruments); the embodiment of gendered characteristics; and the impersonation of particular figures from myth or drama. We are thus moving closer to a more contemporary conception of the actor's task: the impersonation of character within fictional circumstances. However, during the fifth century, mimesis terminology is also applied to forms of self-likening more abstract than the embodied acts of imitation explicated above. During this period, G.F. Else perceives a line of semantic drift from mimesis terminology's "original center of gravity" in "'live' imitation" to a more conceptual, "generalized sense" operating more on the level of analogy rather than physiology (Else 1958:82).

One key example of the possible trend toward generalization is the appearance of *ethical* mimesis: the reproduction of behavior without actual mimicry. We have examples of this analogy-based ethical sense in Thucydides, when the generalship of Pausanias is called a *mimesis* of a tyranny,[22] and when the Athenians are deemed "a model which some follow, rather than the imitators of other peoples" (in Sörbom 1966:33). Another such instance comes in the elegiac poetry of Theognis (active in the sixth century BCE): "none of the unskilled will be able to emulate/match [*mimesthai*] me" (in Halliwell 2002:15). However, Eric Havelock disputes the degree of abstraction in instances like the aforementioned, insisting that they still carry the fundamental connotation of "sympathetic behavior" – of "doing what someone else does" or

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[22] See Else 1958:82.

"becoming like him" (Havelock 1963:56-7). Havelock accuses classical scholarship of importing into these early Greek examples "the Platonic abstract reduction of [the mimetic] process to a relationship between original and copy" (58).

Ethical mimesis also takes place between philosophers and their disciples. In his *Memorabilia*, the philosopher Xenophon (ca. 430-350 BCE), a contemporary and admirer of Socrates and an elder contemporary of Plato, argues that Socrates inspired a desire for goodness in his followers not through direct didacticism, "but, by letting his own light shine, he led his disciples to hope that they through imitation of him would attain to such excellence" (in Sörbom 1966:35). This instance might at first seem less concretely corporeal than the mimic acts of musico-poetic performers, but, taking Havelock's warning to heart, we should not ignore the element of mimetic behavior involved in the relationship between a disciple and an esteemed teacher. The absorption by a student of the physical idiosyncrasies of a teacher or other role-model is by no means limited to forms of physical practice and even occurs within disciplines commonly understood as involving the transfer of more abstract, conceptual forms of knowledge. The contemporary philosopher Simon Critchley has observed that

> philosophy can be seen to be embodied in a way of life. Thus, to endorse or champion the views of a particular philosopher might lead to a certain mimicking or attempted emulation of that life. One sees this all the time professionally, where the students of a charismatic and famous philosopher will not only defend his or her doctrine, but also imitate their hand gestures, hesitations, verbal tics, and even their smoking, drinking, and sexual habits. Discipleship is not too strong a word for what is taking place here. (Critchley 2001:61)

Perhaps "discipleship" is not strong *enough* a word for the mimetizing Critchley describes. "Incorporation" might serve better. The asymmetrical dynamics of authority that govern the disciple-guru relationship do, however, create favorable conditions for

mimetic absorption: the intense shaft of attention which the disciple focuses upon the authority figure, along with the former's wholehearted belief in the latter's intellect or wisdom, may indeed lead to a particularly potent form of openness to mimetic absorption.

In classical Athens, philosophy was itself a form of a performance practice: Socrates struck up debates with passersby in the agora (Athens' marketplace and place of assembly) and Aristotle lectured as he walked the grounds of the Lyceum (a gymnasium and public meeting place). Did Plato feel Socrates "in him" as he held court at the Academy? Did Aristotle notice upsurges of "Platonism" – as a way of being as well as a philosophical approach – in his body and voice as he walked and talked at the Lyceum? If so, it may be that Aristotle also – and unwittingly – manifested characteristics of an idiosyncratically "Socratic" sensibility, passed on down the genealogy of philosophic performance through the "medium" of Plato's body-and-consciousness.

If speaking about ethical emulation in terms of mimesis does not involve a radical abstraction of the concept, the meanings of mimesis I have assembled above are significantly transformed when the concept is applied to the visual arts – painting and sculpture, in particular. Mimesis now describes the presentation of otherness in a medium other than that of the human body. Athenian philosophers may have begun to discuss the artistic image under the rubric of mimesis during the late fifth and early fourth centuries (see Halliwell 2002:124), but evidence for this background to Plato's transformative discussion of artistic mimesis has been lost. Xenophon's *Memorabilia* has sometimes been argued to be the earliest surviving site of conjunction between the visual arts and a new conception of "imitation" (*mimesis*) as the "imaging" (*eikasia*) of

"appearance" (*phainomena*) – a foundational conjunction for aesthetic theory. The *Memorabilia* may therefore give us some insight into philosophical approaches to visual art by Socrates and his circle. It is also possible, however, that the text was written as late at the 350s BCE, meaning that Plato's more developed philosophy of art may have exerted an influence on Xenophon.

In the third chapter of the dialogic *Memorabilia*, Xenophon orchestrates a conversation between Socrates, the painter Parrhasius, and the sculptor Cleiton. Xenophon's Socrates proposes that painting should be understood as "the imaging of the visible world" (*eikasia ton horomenon*). Within this imaging, the character (*ethos*) or state of soul (*psuche*) of a represented figure "shows through" (*diaphainein*) the painterly rendering of physical bearing and facial expression, so that painting can indeed "realize" or "produce" (*energazesthai*) the "appearance of life" (*to zotikon phainesthai*) within an inanimate medium.[23] This last claim houses an interesting internal tension between a seemingly "quasi-vitalistic quality" in artistic mimesis (Halliwell 2002:123) and the notion that painting and sculpture must deal in appearances rather than actualities.

Because the date of composition of the Memorabilia is uncertain (it may post-date Plato's *Republic*) and its situation within the philosophical climate of its time is also unclear, we cannot know whether Xenophon was innovating when he applied mimetic terminology to the visual and plastic arts. Stephen Halliwell argues forcefully that he was not[24] and points to a fragment of Aeschylus's satyr play *Theoroi* as the main evidence to the contrary. The passage in question contains the earliest surviving instance

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[23] My discussion of the *Memorabilia* relies heavily on Halliwell 2002:122-24 and Sörbom 1966:78-105.
[24] See Halliwell 2002:122.

of the noun-form *mimema* as applied to visual art. A chorus of satyrs is astonished by a set of lifelike votive images of themselves; they refer to one remarkably convincing image as "the mimetic work [*mimema*] of Daedalus" and describe it as lacking only a voice to make the verisimilar effect complete. The satyr chorus-leader concludes that even his own mother would "think it was actually *me* – that's how like me it [the image] is" (in Halliwell 2002:19-20).

The historian Herodotus (c. 484-425 BCE) also uses mimesis vocabulary several times in connection with visual representations. Most of these instances describe Egyptian arts and crafts: painted *memento mori* of corpses; wooden embalmer's models; pillars sculpted in the shape of palm trees; a stylized image of the sun (see Sörbom 1966:63-67).   However, all of these instances in Herodotus – and, indeed, all applications of mimesis terminology to the visual and plastic arts before Xenophon and Plato – are functional descriptions of specific works rather than sweeping, ontological classifications. Before the early fourth century BCE, "[w]orks of art in general are not called mimetic, but only particular ones in given situations" (Sörbom 1966:78).

What does it mean to classify an artwork as a *mimema* – as, literally, a "mimetic thing?" There are three distinct possibilities: first, the work could be deemed to *be* mimetic (an ontological classification); second, it might be seen as having been *made* through mimetic processes (a generative classification); the final option, least intuitive for the contemporary mind, is that the work might be considered *a thing that mimics something else* – in other words, an artistic object that itself exercises the mimetic faculty

(an operational or functional classification).[25] Who is the mimetist in the passage from

the *Theoroi*? Does mimetic agency reside in the artist or in the image itself, which can be

thought of as mimicking the satyr? The latter interpretation would certainly have been in

keeping with stories of the mythical Daedalus, whose statues came to life and had to be

restrained to prevent them from running away. In other words, the satyr-image would

qualify as a *mimema* – a "mimetic thing" – not because it was judged so by some external

standard of classification but because it accomplished an act of mimetizing, revealing

some mimetic animus.[26] Although surviving textual evidence is too scant to make a

forceful case, it is tempting to hypothesize that, at least in some instances, the term

mimesis might have infiltrated the theory of the visual arts by means of the human form –

in other words, that the representational power of plastic media was at first likened to the

physiological capacity in the human figures (or quasi-human figures, in the case of

Aeschylus's satyrs) such artforms took as their primary subjects. If, in its first

applications to works of visual art, the term *mimema* did indeed designate "a thing that

mimetizes" rather than "a thing that is mimetic," then the history of Western aesthetic

theory would be built upon a foundational analogy: between the "imitations" produced by

artistic practices and the second nature brought into being by the embodied act of

mimetizing. In other words, mimetic aesthetics was founded upon the idea that art does

what human beings do when they summon otherness within themselves.

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[25] Göran Sörbom argues that the word *mimema* was applied to works of visual art to
denote that "they are vivid, vital, and concrete representations of the 'models' appearing
directly and immediately to the beholders 'as if they were living'" (Sörbom 1966:52).
[26] For another example of the term *mimema* used to describe a thing driven by a mimetic
animus occurs, see Euripides's *Helen*, wherein the doppelgänger of Helen sent by Hera to
Troy with Paris is labeled as such. For a provocative discussion of the figure of Helen's
relationship with uncanny images, see Elizabeth C. Mansfield's *Too Beautiful to Picture:
Zeuxis, Myth, and Mimesis* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1997).

Republic *II and III: Mimesis as Self-Likening*

Plato probably took up mimesis as a keyword already established in fifth-century critical discussions of the musico-poetic and visual arts. As we shall see, it was the incorporation and re-actualization of otherness traditionally associated with mimesis as a human operation that provoked Plato's deepest anxieties about the place of poetry in Athenian cultural life. Plato's dialogues do not offer up a monolithic "doctrine of mimesis," as some scholars have argued,[27] but rather represent the varied results of a "prolonged and profoundly ambivalent relationship with mimesis" (Halliwell 2002:70). The nature and effects of poetry are dealt with extensively in the *Apology*, *Ion*, and *Euthyphro*, and a significant treatment of mimesis appears in the dialogue *Cratylus* (possibly from the "middle" period of Plato's career). However, it is within the *magnum opus* of the *Republic* that Plato's Socrates gives mimesis its most comprehensive and varied treatment. Books II and III explore the concept from the standpoint of ethical transmission: they describe mimesis's effects on the receiver/participant in poetic performance and discuss what role mimetic poetry ought to play in the education and socialization of the ideal city-state's ruling elite. Book X, on the other hand, attempts to define the very ontology of the mimetic, "what mimesis in general is" (*Rep.* 595c, Plato 1968:278).

Plato assumes in the reader of *Republic* a background knowledge of Athenian poetic performance culture, so in order to approach the treatment of mimesis in Books II and III, we must first come to comprehend what "poetry" – a category encompassing epic

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[27] See, for example, W.J. Verdenius's *Mimesis: Plato's doctrine of artistic imitation and its meaning to us* (Leiden, Germany: Brill, 1962).

rhapsody, choral song, and tragic and comic drama – actually was during the Greek classical period. In doing so, we must bracket off contemporary conceptions of poetic production and consumption, wherein poems are composed in writing by a solitary author, published or otherwise circulated in some textual medium, and appreciated privately by readers. Within the Greek oral culture that was still dominant during Plato's time, poetry was transmitted primarily through recitation,[28] and the very word used by the Greeks to designate the plot of tragedies (*mythos*) implied "something spoken" (Wiles 2000:12). Throughout the *Republic*, Plato consistently refers to what poets "say" (rather than "write"), even in the case of Homer. Plato's poet always appears as a performer – that is, a hybrid reciter-and-actor – and never an author whose work might make its impact upon his audience as a literary artifact detached from his person.[29] It should also be remembered that, until the later fifth century, it was standard practice for the tragic dramatist to serve as lead actor. The poet was the "maker" (*poietes*) of the performance not only in its preparatory phases of composition and rehearsal but also in the moment of actual enactment.

In classical Athens, face-to-face, body-to-body transmission between poet/teacher and receiver/student was central to processes of theatrical production as well as the instruction in *paideia*: the educational apparatus essential to Greek culture, seen as shaping its individual members toward an ideal character.[30] Within this still largely oral

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[28] For a discussion of oral instruction in the transmission of poetry, see chapters 2 and 9 of Havelock 1963, and also Halliwell 2002:52.

[29] While it is true that some of the successors of Homer composed in writing, classical scholars like Eric Havelock have argued that these poets still wrote solely for performance before a live audience (Havelock 1963:46).

[30] The classic study on the subject is Werner Jaeger's three-volume work, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture,* trans. Gilbert Highet (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1945).

culture, paideutic instruction would have involved vocal-and-physical imitation of teacher's demonstration by learners. In preparation for a tragic performance, too, "dramatists taught the roles to their actors face to face, with the correct intonations, movement and music, and there is no evidence that actors ever received a script" (Wiles 2000:165). The technology of writing was eventually put to widespread use in recording the word-content of dramatic poetry (as a stream of letters, undivided by punctuation), but "the totality of words, music and dance were preserved into the classical period through memorization and reperformance" (167).

The *Republic*'s first extended discussion of mimesis bridges Books II and III, as Socrates and his disciples discuss the education of the guardian-class (*Rep.* 376c ff.). *Mousike* (poetry-song-dance) is regarded as most crucial in the formation of character, for it provides "models" (*typoi*) to which the malleable characters of the young assimilate themselves. The Greek word *typos* can signify a "model," "type," "mould," "stamp," or "pattern" in both literal and metaphorical senses, and Plato uses the term to designate a concrete moulding of the substance of individual character. This discussion of *mousike*'s power to shape the soul evolves into an analysis of the appropriate content of tales and poetry. At the close of Book II, Socrates leads his interlocutors to the conclusion that the traditional poetic treatment of the gods as fickle, quarrelsome, belligerent, and cruel must be forbidden in their ideal polis. Plato's chief targets here are epic and tragic poetry, which, through negative depiction of the gods, promote irreverence toward the divine and model intemperate behavior.

Although the language of mimesis appears only briefly in this closing section of Book II (at *Rep.* 382b), it is clear that the central mimetic relationship under discussion is

that between the *typoi* provided by the tale or poem and their youthful receivers. These models seem primarily ethical, consisting of narrative templates that describe structures of behavior taken as paradigmatic because of their association with the gods and heroes of myth. Socrates asserts the necessity of censoring these behavioral paradigms, and he argues that two anti-models for poetic speech ought to be endowed with the status of laws in his ideal city: that the gods not be depicted as capable of either doing evil or of transforming themselves and indulging in deceit (*Rep.* 381d-383c). The stance against protean changeability will resurface in Book X's discussion of mimesis. At the same time, Plato embraces what he sees as the age-old – and highly efficacious – function of poetic speech within classical Greek culture: to supply programmatic structures of human action for emulation by the young. It is Plato and not Aristotle who first introduces the idea that poetry works through the mimesis of divine or human action: "Imitation [*mimesis*], we say, imitates human beings performing forced or voluntary actions, and, as a result of the action, supposing themselves to have done well or badly, and in all of this experiencing pain or enjoyment" (Plato 1968:287, *Rep.* 603c). While the content of Book II does relate to the earlier uses of mimesis terminology to describe ethical emulation – found in Thucydides, Theognis, and Xenophon, for example – Plato's concern is with the way poetic speech can provide models of action equivalent to the behavior of living human beings (like Xenophon's Socrates, for example, whom his disciples imitate).

Mimesis terminology truly comes to the fore in Book III's continued discussion of poetic content and its extension to the topic of *lexis* – the "manner," "style," or "mode" of poetic speech – as Plato moves from the topic of "what must be said" in poetry to the matter of "how it must be said" (Plato 1968:72, *Rep.* 394c). After proscribing the

depiction of mythic figures bewailing loss, fearing death, or committing acts of impiety

or gratuitous violence, Socrates broaches the subject of *lexis* and poses the question,

"But, when he [a poet] gives a speech as though he were someone else, won't we say that

he then likens his own style as much as possible to that of the man he has announced as

the speaker?" After his disciple Adeimantus readily agrees, Socrates offers the closest

approximation of a definition of mimesis that appears in Book II, asking: "Isn't likening

himself to someone, either in voice or in looks, the same as imitating the man he likens

himself to?" Socrates concludes that this is indeed the case and that poets in general "use

imitation in making their narrative" (Plato 1968:71, *Rep.* 393c). Between Books II and

III, then, the two poles of the mimetic relationship have been reconceived: the mimetist is

now no longer the receiver of the poem, but the poet himself, who imitates the fictional

"someone other than he" whose first-person speech makes up the poem (Plato 1968:71,

Rep. 393a). We would today call this someone the poetic or dramatic "character." Book

II's notion of the mimesis of ethical models gives way to a more concrete conception of

vocal-and-physical "self-likening" (*aphomoioun hautous*) between the poetic performer

and the fictional figures he embodies (see Halliwell 2002:75). Both books treat mimesis

as a "*transformative* capacity" (Gebauer and Wulf 1995:36), but two distinct forms of

transformation are proposed: the behavioral emulation of ethical role-models (either

actual or fictive), and the poetic performer's self-assimilation to the characters of his

fiction through vocal-and-physical expression.

Book III also contains Plato's famous distinction between *mimesis* and *diegesis*

("telling," "report," "narration"), a distinction that is often taken as a matter of grammar

or genre, between first-person speech, third-person description, and poetic modes that

mix the two. Tragedy and comedy use pure mimesis; dithyrambic poetry relies on diegetic telling; epic poetry employs both, as the poet narrates in the mode of reportage and then switches his "style" of speech (*lexis*) to voice the various characters of the fiction (*Rep.* 392d-394c). Plato's distinction between mimetic and diegetic poetry is not a matter of grammatical analysis, but rather with the way in which a first-person versus third-person mode of speech invites a particular subjective relationship to the verbal content being delivered, in both the reciter and the listener. For example, when a rhapsode – a solo performer of epic poetry like the eponymous Ion of Plato's dialogue – slips from diegesis into mimesis, he becomes a different kind of subjective object for the spectator-listener. By speaking poetic lines driven by an "I," rather than a "he" or "she," the rhapsode's gestures, facial expressions, and intonations will instinctively adapt themselves to the first-person mode of delivery. His emotional life will also become differently implicated when required to speak I-sentences: rather than a narrator who speaks feelingly *about* the characters of his story, he becomes a speaking, acting, emotionally activated human subject, who speaks feelingly *as* the characters of his fiction. An instinctive ability to assimilate oneself to the "I" of the dramatic sentence – a capacity to speak first-person speech as if it were emerging organically from oneself – is perhaps the most basic gift of the dramatic actor. The shift from diegesis and mimesis in epic poetry, the moment when the performer adapted himself in order to give voice to the "I" of his characters as if he meant and felt what they said, can therefore be seen as the birth – or, at least, one of the multiple births – of acting in the European tradition.

According to Plato, then, the most pernicious characteristic of mimetic poetry is that it leads the reciter, by giving voice to the otherness embedded in the poem as oral

entity, to assimilate an alien, unconsidered attitude toward existence – and invites the

listener to take up this attitude as well. Understood in this way, poetic mimesis cannot be

separated from the basic human capacity known to present-day philosophers as

"simulation:" the ability to *try-on* or *feel-through* the experiences of others from a "first-

person" perspective. The reciter of poetry does not project a formal "representation" of

the wrath of Achilles or the madness of Ajax, but rather allows the dense verbal texture

of poetic speech to catalyze these states of subjectivity. The mimetic capacity allows the

voice of the other to flow through the self – far more than a ventriloquist's act. In the

process, the self's habitual modes of being are shifted onto unfamiliar psychological

terrain, as are those of the listener-spectator. The shift from diegesis to mimesis also

transforms the human dynamic between performer and spectator-listener: it enhances the

possibility of intersubjective attunement – that is, it invites the spectator to identify his

receiving "I" with the speaking "I" of the poetic performer.

Plato returns to Book II's model of the mimetic relation at *Republic* 395, when the

receiver/learner of poetic speech (rather than the poet) again becomes the mimetist, the

one who mimetizes. Plato proposes that if the guardians are to be the "craftsmen of the

city's freedom and practice nothing other than what tends to it" then they necessarily

> mustn't do or imitate anything else. And if they do imitate, they must imitate
> what's appropriate to them from childhood: men who are courageous, moderate,
> holy, free, and everything of the sort; and what is slavish, or anything else
> shameful, they must neither do nor be clever at imitating, so that they won't get a
> taste for the being from its imitation. Or haven't you observed that imitations, if
> they are practiced continually from youth onwards, become established as habits
> and nature, in body and sounds and in thought? (Plato1968:73, *Rep.* 395c-d)

Plato's concern in the above passage is not with the harmful effects of "passive"

reception of poetic performances; rather he fears the consequences of the young

guardians' memorizing and embodying the words, rhythms, and movements of musico-poetic performance taught to them by poet-teachers. Plato seeks to protect his guardians against habituation through what Joseph Roach calls "surrogation" (Roach 1996:2): the endless process of transformative substitution that enables cultural transmission. However, the poet (rather than the receiver/surrogate) becomes the mimetist once again at *Republic* 398a, the famous passage in which the poet as masterful *mimetes* – able "to become every sort of thing and to imitate all things" (Plato 1968:76) – is anointed with myrrh, crowned with wool in recognition of his virtuosity, but ultimately exiled from the ideal city. What at first might appear as a slippage back and forth between conflicting perspectives on mimesis across Books II and III of the *Republic* in fact reveals Plato's informing assumptions about the worrisome exchangeability of subjective positions that mimesis enables.

Some evidence that has often been taken as an extension of the mimesis concept to cover the process of identification-in-reception comes in Book X. Here Plato offers an account of the spectator's experience of an epic or tragic performance:

> When even the best of us hear Homer or any other of the tragic poets imitating one of the heroes in mourning and making quite an extended speech with lamentation, or, if you like, singing and beating his breast, you know that we enjoy it and that we *give ourselves over to following the imitation*; suffering along with the hero in all seriousness, we praise as a good poet the man who most puts us in this state. [emphasis added] (Plato 1968:289, *Rep.* 605c-d)

Plato's term for "suffering-along-with" in the passage above is *sumpaschein*, etymologically related to our word "sympathy," though the sense of emotional parallelism that the word carried in eighteenth-century philosophy would be a better gloss for Plato's term than the term's contemporary association with compassionate feeling-

for.[31] Plato's account of the spectator's sympathetic surrender to the poet's mimetic performance offers no direct support, however, for the common extrapolation by commentators of the *Republic* that the experience of audience members can also be classified as a kind of mimesis – in other words, that spectators at a tragic performance "imitate privately" the onstage suffering (Potolsky 2006:28). A reading that synthesizes Books II and III with Book X makes such an interpretation tempting, but nowhere in the *Republic* does Plato apply mimesis terminology to the theatrical spectator's experience of the live performance event: "following the imitation" is not necessarily equivalent to mimetizing.[32]

Eric Havelock, however, extrapolating from a synthetic reading of Books II, III, and X, offers just such a theory of the listener/learner as a "quasiparticipant" – first within a context of paideutic instruction, then within the reception dynamics of a choral or tragic performance. We ought to consider Havelock's hypothesis not for its faithfulness to Plato, but for its provocative attempt to reconstruct the human dynamics that sustained Athenian performance culture. Havelock begins by describing the experience of the listener/learner being taught a poem:

> If he listened silently, only the ears were fully engaged; but the ears transmitted messages to the nervous system as a whole, and thus limbs, lips, and throat might *perform slightly*, and the nervous system in general would be sympathetically engaged with what he was hearing. When he in turn repeated what had been sung, the vocal chords and perhaps the limbs were fully activated to go through and perform in identical sequence *what they had already sympathetically performed for themselves*, as it were, when he had listened. [emphasis added] (Havelock 1963:152)

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[31] The term "sympathy" is prominent in the discussions of social behavior in David Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739) and Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759).

[32] As Stephen Halliwell comments, "Audiences of tragedy, at any rate, are thus conceived of as engaged observers or 'witnesses,' but not quasiparticipants" (Halliwell 2002:81).

Havelock extends the above process of motor attunement to the audience member at a tragic performance, for he understands poetic recitation, reception, and repetition as forms of rhythmic doing, all of them synchronized by the power of the mimetic faculty. Audience members at a dithyrambic or tragic performance engaged, along with the performers, argues Havelock, "in a re-enactment of the [poetic] tradition with lips, larynx, and limbs, and with the whole apparatus of their unconscious nervous system" (160). Havelock therefore approaches the mimesis concept as "the one most adequate to describe both re-enactment and identification" – that is, "the one most applicable to the common psychology shared by both artist and by audience" (160). Under Havelock's account, the performer of Greek epic or drama would have learned the poem from a teacher through body-to-body, voice-to-voice transmission, and, later, in the moment of re-performance, the same intersubjective mechanism (mimesis) that enabled him to absorb song and movement in the first place would have made possible both their re-actualization and his communion with the spectator.

Earlier conceptions of mimesis as an embodied summoning surface even more prominently in the *Republic* when Socrates turns to the various harmonic modes and rhythms available to the arts of *mousike* during his day. Music and song were not "accompaniments" to epic and tragic performance, but essential dimensions of the various related performing art forms within the "song culture" of ancient Athens (Herington 1985:3-10). The *tragoidos*, the performer of ancient tragedies, was, in contemporary terms, just as much a "singer" as an "actor."[33] In a section of the *Republic*

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[33] See Edith Hall, "The Singing Actors of Antiquity," in *Greek and Roman Actors: Aspects of an Ancient Profession* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

indebted to the music theory of Damon, who held that the various musical modes were

associated with certain kinds of character (*ethos*),[34] the various musical modes are each

presented as the *mimema* of a "sort of life" or "disposition of the soul": for example, the

"mixed" and "tight" Lydian modes promote wailing and lamentation, and certain Ionian

and Lydian modes deemed "slack" are suitable for celebration and debauchery (Plato

1968:77-9, *Rep.* 398e-400d). Plato proscribes all rhythms and harmonies except those

appropriate to "an orderly and courageous life" – that is, endurance in times of war and

moderation in times of peace (Plato 1968:78, *Rep.* 399e).

The extension of mimesis terminology to the realm of melody, harmony, and

rhythm might be taken as a movement into abstraction and analogy. However, the central

operative dynamic – the assimilation of the self to an external mode of psychological and

physical subjectivity – carries over from Plato's preceding discussion of *lexis*. Plato

shares with his collocutors the conviction that "the rearing in music" has always been –

and, in his ideal polis, should remain – the "most sovereign" form of education because

"rhythm and harmony most of all insinuate themselves into the inmost part of the soul

and most vigorously lay hold of it in bringing grace with them" (Plato 1968:80, *Rep.*

401d). In other words, harmonic modes and rhythms promote specific states of body and

soul, again with lasting effects.

For Plato, the prime virtue of "the musical man" is *euschemosyne* (often

translated as "grace"), a conjunction of the prefix *eu-* ("good") and the noun *scheme*

("outward appearance," "posture, " "attitude") (Plato 1968:81, *Rep.* 402d). For Plato,

euschemosyne is an attribute of the organically unified body-and-mind – or, more in

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[34] Plato is said to have received musical instruction from Damon's pupil Draco.

keeping with the classical Greek context, we might say the *body-and-soul* – and carries connotations of "bearing" in terms of both physique and character.[35] The various choreographic postures and attitudes (*schemata*) comprising classical Greek dance forms were thus seen as literally capable of shaping an individual's habitual stance toward existence. The musical *mimemata* of Republic III, then, "imitate" particular corporeal stances toward existence by encapsulating-and-generating them.

As has been shown, mimetic terminology is applied to several processes in Republic II and III: the emulation of ethical models; the shifting relations between poet and receiver, poet and fictional other, and receiver and fictional other; and the musical encapsulation of various modes of being. However, these usages are unified by an understanding of mimesis as *the* mechanism for the psycho-physical assimilation to a mode of being initially encountered "outside" the self. The mimetic faculty therefore poses a dire threat to the Platonic ideals of fixity and integrity, of simplicity and oneness, of which the "Forms" or "Ideas" – as "permanent shapes imposed upon the flux of action" (Havelock 1963:263) – are the primary conceptual manifestation. *Republic* II and III house a deep anxiety over the unregulated relationships between self and other enabled by mimesis. According to Plato, "things that are in the best condition" are "least altered and moved by something else" (Plato 1968:58, *Rep.* 380d) and the "most courageous and most prudent" soul is least moved by "external affection" (Plato 1968:58, *Rep.* 381a). Socrates pronounces in the opening moments of Book II: "Moreover, we also say that such a man [the "decent man," or *epiekes*] is most of all sufficient unto

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[35] Plato's *scheme* functions as a nexus for the psychological, the physical, and the sociological, much like Brecht's *Haltung* ("attitude," "bearing," "stance"), which will appear prominently in Chapter Four of this study.

himself for living well and, in contrast to others, has least need of another" (Plato 1968:65, *Rep.* 387d).[36]   The idea that individual character might be formed within the vicissitudinal flux of social interaction was a source of profound anxiety for Plato. As the process through which human beings assimilate themselves to otherness, mimesis threatens radical self-sufficiency, but its very power to shape subjectivity can also serve as a powerful tool for social regulation within Plato's utopia. After all, the central project of the *Republic* is not the construction of an actual city but a theoretical remaking of human nature itself. The mimetic theory of Books II and III, then, is actually a highly "pragmatic"[37] account of how musico-poetic performance shapes the bodies, souls, and characters of its performers, receivers, and participants.

Mimesis, Paideia, Performance Culture

Plato's anxieties about mimesis cannot be properly appreciated without a clear conception of mimesis terminology's early meanings, which I hope I have now established. But these anxieties also need to be understood against the background of Athenian performance culture as it evolved from orality toward literacy in the fifth century BCE. Casting the "poetic" or "oral state of mind" as the "arch-enemy" of

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[36] In the *Laws*, Plato writes: "Change […] is much the most dangerous thing […] in the winds, in bodily habits, and in the characters of souls" (Plato 1980:185, *Laws* 797d).
[37] In *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*, Abrams lays out a quadripartite schema for aesthetic theories: 1) mimetic theories, which take as primary an artwork's external relations with the universe; 2) pragmatic theories, which approach a work of as "a means toward an end, an instrument for getting something done" (Abrams 1953:15) and thus privilege the artwork-audience relationship; 3) expressive theories, which see the artwork as a product of the outpouring of an artist's individual creative energies; and 4) objective theories, which analyze an artwork as a self-sufficient set of internal relations.

Platonic rationalism (Havelock 1963: 47), the pioneering classicist Eric Havelock, in his *Preface to Plato* (1963), argues that the anti-mimetic thrust of the *Republic* can only be fathomed in light of an understanding of poetic performance as a live and embodied process that facilitated the "indoctrination" (30) of young Athenians into the communal consciousness and collective memory of their society. If we conceptualize poetry as a pattern of marks inscribed upon a page (or wax tablet) and "music" (*mousike*) as an intangible stream of sound, it is almost impossible to comprehend Plato's concerns over the power of poetry and music to shape subjectivity. But if we instead conceive of musico-poetic performance as an embodied act driven by rhythmic speech, patterned body-movement, and mental-emotional associations, the mimetic potency with which Plato endows the poetic art form begins to make sense.

Havelock argues that Plato's anxieties over the transformative potency of the mimetic relation in the shaping of the personality cannot be made sense of without an understanding of the traditional role of performance practice in the education of Greek youth. For the Greeks, choral dance and song were "sociopoetic" practices (Martin 2007:45): they expressed, communicated, and re-confirmed the core values and institutions of Greek culture. The performance of specifically *dramatic* poetry – which drew upon the movements and rhythms of choral performance in ritual and festival contexts – also played a crucial role for the assimilation of many young Greeks into the Athenian social polity, in both its ideological and affective dimensions. For the male youth of Athens, representing one's tribe within the dithyrambic competition that preceded the presentations of tragic plays at the City Dionysia or membership in a tragic chorus within one of the plays themselves would have functioned as a rite of passage. As

theatre historian David Wiles emphasizes, "the ritual and educational dimensions of choral dance" could not be separated, and training in the techniques of vocal and physical synchronization necessary for choral performance would have served a powerful function in "teaching individuals to subordinate self to the collective" (Wiles 2000:131).

Regarded as a repository of cultural wisdom, the works of the epic poets – particularly Homer – played an essential role in the Greek system of *paideia*, the educational process intrinsic and essential to Greek culture. As already stated, these poetic works did not circulate in written form but were learned through recitation – that is, transmitted and absorbed through the act of performance. At the beginning of the fourth century, then, when Plato wrote the *Republic*, poetic treatments of myth from Homer to Aeschylus served simultaneously as a "social encyclopedia" and a "system of indoctrination" (Havelock 1963:30-1) into a cultural complex of beliefs, values, and ways of behaving. The physical dimension of this "indoctrination" process should not be overlooked. Paideutic transmission, like Joseph Roach's influential notion of "genealogies of performance," relied upon

> expressive movements as mnemonic reserves, including patterned movements made and remembered by bodies, residual movements retained implicitly in images or words […] and imaginary movements dreamed in minds, not prior to language but constitutive of it, a psychic rehearsal for physical actions drawn from a repertoire that culture provides. (Roach 1996:26)

This kind of thinking about embodied processes of cultural transmission, so current within the field of theatre and performance studies today, would have hardly been alien to Plato, who famously defined "the uneducated man" as "the one untrained in choral performances" and "the educated" as "the one sufficiently trained" in choral song and dance (Plato 1980:33, *Laws* 654ab).

Gymnastike (physical training) and *mousike* (poetry-song-dance) were the two basic components of a young Athenian male's traditional education. As customs thought to form and regulate moral character (*ethos*), *gymnastike* shaped the body and *mousike* conditioned the soul.[38] But the line between these two forms of physical practice was a hazy one. For example, the dance-form *gymnopaidike* drew upon and transformed movements from wrestling and boxing, and the *pyrrikhe* incorporated dodges and strikes from armed combat. These dances could, from one perspective, be seen as stylized "representations" of belligerent activities, but they also served as what Pierre Bourdieu would call "structural exercises," which evolve as means of transmitting forms of "practical mastery" within a culture (Bourdieu 1977:88). In the *Laws*, Plato writes that the *pyrrikhe* "consists in imitating, on the one hand, movements that evade all kinds of blows and missiles […] and then again striving to imitate the opposites to these, aggressive postures involved in striking with missiles – arrows and javelins – and with all sorts of blows" (Plato 1980:206, *Laws* 815a). In other words, the dancer mimetizes the movements of armed warfare. Furthermore, habituation of soul and body occurs through participation in "choral imitations" (184) – that is, the *mimemata* that comprise the movements and postures (*schemata*) of choral dance.[39]

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[38] See *Laws* 795d.

[39] In the *Laws*, Plato also argues that the armed dances honoring the Kuretes and Dioscuri are "entirely fitting for the boys and also the girls [of the hypothetical ideal city] to imitate" (Plato 1980:184, *Laws* 796c). John J. Winkler has argued for a close connection between military training and tragic performance in his influential essay "The Ephebes' Song" (1990). Winkler hypothesizes that tragic choruses were made up of eighteen- to twenty-year-old Athenian males in the process of undergoing hoplite military training, and that performance in the amphitheatre of Dionysus was a rite of passage into manhood, demonstrating discipline in the "exacting demands of unison movement" and willing subordination to the more prominent tragic actors (Winkler 1990:57). Winkler invites us to "perceive the role and movement of the tragic chorus as an esthetically

The "structural exercises" of Greek poetic performance would have involved the handling of rhythmic language and the execution of choreographic *schemata*, and the oral transmission of poetic speech and patterned movement would have relied upon the human capacity for mimesis. Indeed, Havelock, referring to the mimetic transmission of practical musical knowledge, calls the capacity for mimicry "the foundation of one of the *technae* of civilisation" (Havelock 1963:60), a psychic-and-physiological mechanism for education and socialization. In his classic essay, "Psychology of the Poetic Performance," Havelock presents a speculative but compelling account of Greek poetry as an embodied mnemonic technology of exceptional economy, one thoroughly successful in effecting the work of cultural transmission with a maximum of conformity across generations. The key to the efficiency of this technology, in Havelock's view, was the strict rhythmic patterning embedded in the metrical structure of poetic speech itself but also in the regulated physicality of dance movements and the musical accompaniment of lyre (for epic) or aulos flute (for drama). All of these processes are intensely corporeal: dance and the playing of instruments engage the limbs and trunk; speech engages the muscularity of all the elements of the vocal apparatus (articulators, soft palate, diaphragm). Havelock calls the "reflexes" that produce poetic speech and enactment "bodily actions": "they are a form of doing, but a special form, in which doing is repetitive, but in a specially complicated way we call rhythmic" (149). Havelock envisions Greek poetic performance as a kind of bio-mechanical process involving the

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elevated version of close-order drill" (22), gesturing to a social function closely connected with *gymnopaidike* and *pyrrikhe*.

doing and redoing of a complex vocal-physical score,[40] and these acts of rhythmic doing and re-doing make up the chain of transmission – or genealogy of performance – that sustains Greek musico-poetic culture.

Let me be clear: we have no text or fragment from classical Greece in which mimesis terminology is used to specify the process of transmission between teacher and student within musico-poetic performance practice. Placed against background of Athens's song-and-dance culture, Socrates's stipulation that his guardians not be *mimetai* ("imitators) (at *Rep.* 395c-d) implies a concern over processes of body-to-body, voice-to-voice transmission, but Havelock's conception of mimesis, however illuminating, is an extrapolation beyond Plato. We do, however, have an example of mimesis used to describe the act of transmitting embodied performance knowledge from late antiquity. The instance arises in the *Speech on Behalf of the Dancers* by Libanios (314-393 CE), an orator and teacher of rhetoric who lived in the ancient city of Antioch (near Antakya in present-day Turkey). Libanios describes a teacher (*didaskalos*) modeling the choreographic positions of the dance (*schemata*) for a student, who absorbs these by imitating them – that is, through *mimesis* (see Webb 2008:91).[41] This latter mode of

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[40] Havelock's vocabulary of "bodily reflexes" and "automatic behaviour" at times sounds positively Meyerholdian and almost certainly owes to a debt to the emotional theory of William James and the Russian "Objective Psychologists" Pavlov, Bekhterev, and Sechenov. For Havelock, writing in the 1960s, such thinking was probably filtered through the behaviorism of John B. Watson and B.F. Skinner, encountered either directly or through its dissemination in a wider intellectual milieu.

[41] Passages like this, along with attempt to imagine the practical dynamics of transmission and performance such passages describe, prompt Ruth Webb to locate "two different senses of *mimesis*" – as representation and reenactment – in her survey of discussions of dance, pantomime, and theatre in late antiquity, *Demons and Dancers* (2008). Webb asks her reader to be attentive both to "*mimesis* as copy and *mimesis* as active imitation that produces a result equivalent to the model, as in teaching by

mimesis sustains the transmissions of culture-as-performance through cycles of predecession and surrogation: a teacher demonstrates a vocal-and-physical score; a pupil imitates and reperforms it while the teacher watches with a critical eye; the teacher demonstrates again; the pupil imitates again, and better this time. At some future point, the pupil will become a teacher – a predecessor – and will pass on the store of embodied knowledge to a new pupil as surrogate – or *mimetes*.

As we have already seen, Plato draws upon Damon's "ethos theory" of *mousike*, which holds that each musical mode essentializes, captures, and produces a particular form of "character" (*ethos*) – in *Republic* III (398e-400d). Classical performance scholar Mark Griffith notes the close association in Greek thought between musical modes and "social-political-physiological institutions and modes of behavior" and points out that several terms could be used to denote both: *nomos* could mean "law, custom, norm" as well as "melody"; *harmonia* could both "arrangement" and "tuning, harmony"; and *tonos* was a term for physical-and-moral training as well as musical pitch (Griffiths 2007:17-18). *Republic* II and III ought to be read in conjunction Plato's discussion of *nomos* and *paideia* in *Laws* II and VII. Here Plato also discusses the formation of character through education in *mousike* and gives a bald equation: "choral art as a whole is for us the same as education as a whole" (Plato 1980:55, *Laws* 672e). He also provides a blunt summary of the theory of poetry-song-dance as the mimesis of *ethos*:

> Choral performances are imitations of characters, in all sorts of action and fortune, and each [participant] brings to bear both his habitual dispositions and his capacity to imitate. (Plato 1980:35, *Laws* 655d).

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demonstration" (17), and to observe the fact that "the two are never entirely separable and are liable to bleed into one another" (190).

"[T]he things we call songs," writes Plato, "are really incantations for souls" (Plato 1980:40, *Laws* 659e), and the soul acquires virtue by means of "the imitation in songs that makes the soul feel passions" (Plato 1980:203, *Laws* 812c). Ethos is shaped through musical habituation in posture (movement in the body), melody (movement in the voice), and rhythm (a form of movement that runs through both body and voice).[42] Greek musical education, for Plato, relies heavily upon what contemporary biomusicology calls rhythmic "entrainment" – the adaptation and synchronization of the individual subject's bodily rhythms to those of some external source.

Eric Havelock argues that Greek *paideia* involved not only a habituation of body and voice, but a habituation of an emotional attitude toward the verbal content of the poetic material being transmitted – and, by extension, the habituation of a more general worldview or orientation toward existence. Havelock therefore glosses the mimesis of *Republic* II and III as a "psychological mechanism" of "total personal involvement and therefore emotional identification with the substance of the poeticised statement that you are required to retain" (Havelock 1963:44). The "substance" of the poem as oral entity would have included metrically regulated verbal content, melodic structure, and dance movements patterned in synchrony with meter and melody. As the concrete vehicle for cultural transmission, the poem as oral entity is not a "thing" in the way a text is: as a "strip of behavior" (Schechner 1985:35), it exists nowhere except in the mind and body of its human carrier, as a potential to be actualized or as a current of expression running through the body and voice in the moment of performance. For a young Athenian citizen, undergoing cultural habituation would have meant giving over to being spoken

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[42] See *Laws* 672e-673a.

through by the voice of tradition and being danced by the body of tradition. This voice-and-body of tradition, passed down from "Homer" to the rhapsodes of Plato's day, told tales of violence, pride, ambition, betrayal, lust, and sorrow. At times, this traditional voice-and-body slipped into the first-person mode of mimesis, voicing and embodying the excessive emotional states just mentioned – states that Plato deemed destructive to the health of the soul. These states would not only be associated with the "characters" – in a contemporary sense, as fictional beings – of the poetic material, but also with the structures of speech, dance, and song through which these figures were described, voiced, and embodied – structures thought by the Greeks to shape the "character" (*ethos*) of the performer.

Greek poetry-dance-music (*mousike*), then, promoted ways of thinking-and-feeling about the world that were also ways of moving and giving voice within it. Viewed in this light, paideutic transmission should be seen not only as a form of "indoctrination" but one of corporeal and affective integration into a set of culturally embedded beliefs and moral values. The mimetic faculty, as the physiological mechanism exploited in service of this socialization process, was the nature classical Greek culture used to make second nature.[43] It is precisely in order to short-circuit this uncritical absorption of societal values – values that had evolved over generations rather than being proposed, debated, and instituted by a philosophical coterie – that Plato's Socrates insists that his guardians not be mimetists (*Rep.* 394e), or, if they are, that the poetic material they are to incorporate into their bodies and minds be rigorously regulated by the Republic's conceivers.

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[43] Here I again reference Michael Taussig's description of the mimetic faculty as "the nature that culture uses to make second nature" (Taussig 1993:70).

Mimesis, Collectivity, Ecstasy

If choral dance sustained the socio-political collectivity of classical Athens, the Greek chorus – as it appeared in tragic performance – has also served as the paradigm for a collectively bonded performance ensemble for theorists of the theatre as disparate as Hegel, Nietzsche, W.B. Yeats, and Jacques Lecoq. As John Gould writes, the orchestra of the Greek amphitheater was never empty, but always "inhabited by collectivity" in the shape of the ever present choral mass (Gould 1996:232). David Wiles sees the collectivity of the chorus as only a single manifestation of a "collective ideal" – an ideal that subsumed personal identity before group aims – prevailing across many forms of Greek social practice:

> For the Athenians dancing in a tragic chorus involved the same discipline as dancing a war dance, a form of military parade. The pipes which controlled the rhythm of the tragic chorus would control the same men as they rowed their warship fast enough to ram a Spartan. The survival of the city relied upon the collective solidarity engendered by tragedy. (Wiles 2000:52)

The stamp of feet on the earth of the orchestra and the chanting and singing of metrical speech would have regulated and harmonized the psycho-physiologies of chorus members. As a technology of synchronization, Greek poetic performance practice exploited the capacities of the mimetic faculty to an exceptional degree, transforming the fifteen individual choric performers into "a single organism, projecting a single emotion" (136). The sensation of *being voiced* by a collective vocal current moving through one's

physiology – a vocal current to which one contributes but which one cannot call "one's own" – can catalyze emotional states of extraordinary power.[44]

Perhaps we ought to include the audience in the "single organism" being born through tragic performance. Because of their passage through the system of paideutic instruction, almost all among the mass of fifteen- to twenty-thousand closely packed spectating bodies in the amphitheater of Dionysos would have possessed some embodied experience in poetic performance. David Wiles writes: "Since 1,000 citizens competed in this festival [the City Dionysia] alone, and choruses performed in many others contexts, most of the men who watched tragedy did so not as passive consumers but as sometime performers with experience in singing and dancing before a huge audience" (Wiles 2000:32). The spectators at a Greek poetic performance possessed a technical expertise of their own that enabled them not only to "appreciate" (in the sense of rendering an aesthetic judgment) but also to physically and emotionally attune to the human events taking place before them. During a tragic performance, the amphitheater of Dionysos would have been filled with closely packed bodies in psycho-physical synchronicity because of their shared training in the *techne* of poetic delivery.

Is there any evidence of the above vision of synchronized collectivity in Plato? We have already seen that Plato imagines that the audience members at an epic or tragic performance give themselves over to "following the imitation" and "suffering along with the hero" (Plato 1968:289, *Rep.* 605c-d). More relevant, however, is a consideration of

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[44] The French physical theatre practitioner Jacques Lecoq, who conducted practical experiments with choral synchronization and "group voice" based on a reconstructive understanding of Greek tragedy (see Lecoq 2000:126-43), often discussed "the unaccustomed sense of transpersonal linkage experienced by an actor in a chorus who feels that he or she is mouthing words that stem from other voices" (Wiles 2000:143).

the account of emotional contagion provided by Plato's "Ion," the European tradition's first text of acting theory proper, if by this we mean a treatise that takes as its main theme the art of the performer. "Ion" is thought to be one of Plato's earliest works, and mimesis terminology does not surface within the dialogue. However, there is a strand of one-to-one thinking within Socrates's analogy between the contagiousness of *enthusiasmos* (ecstasy, or the state of having "the god within" oneself) and the way in which a magnetic stone imparts the power of attraction to metal rings. Socrates likens the Muse to a magnet and the epic or tragic poet as the first magnetized ring; the rhapsode and tragic actor are the "intermediate links," along with "a vast chain of dancers and masters and under-masters of choruses, who are suspended, as if from the stone, at the side of the rings which hang down from the Muse" (Plato 1953:110; Ion 535e-536a). The "last of the rings" is the spectator, who receives "the power of the original magnet" through the preceding rings. Over the course of this study, we will find the one-to-one(-to-one) conceptual structure of Plato's hanging chain in other accounts of emotional contagion, which often cannot be extricated from theories of theatrical "truth" or "verisimilitude," and which are often broached under the rubric of "imitation."

Looking back over the *Republic*, the starting point for this account of the psycho-physiology of mimesis, two overall aspects of Plato's treatment of mimesis leap out: the acuity of Plato's insights into human processes of embodied synchronization and the vehemence of his protest against the performing artforms that fostered such sychronization during his day. Indeed, Plato seems to protest too much, making us suspect a hidden personal stake in his outcry. One cannot help but wonder about the nature of Plato's personal engagement with mimetic poetry. As David Wiles notes,

> Plato was an Athenian and grew up within the performance culture of the classical period, so it was natural that he should think of tragedy as a social practice. In the course of his youth, like other Athenians, he would have seen new plays, memorized some of the songs, dances and aphorisms, and absorbed theatrical performance as part of an Athenian way of life. (Wiles 2000:168)

We also hear in the (admittedly unreliable) *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* of Diogenes Laertius that as a youth Plato "applied himself to painting and wrote poems, first dithyrambs, afterwards lyric poems and tragedies" (Diogenes 1959:281).[45] The educative process of affective integration into Athenian performance culture and perhaps his own attempts at artistic creation – both forms of practice, of doing – would have established practical expertise in Plato, with lasting effects upon his psycho-physical receptivity to the mimetic impact of live performance. In other words, the tendency to "give over" to following the mimesis of the violent madness of Ajax or the intemperate grief of Achilles, or to the pull of collective *ekstasis*, may have been particularly strong for the poet-turned-philosopher.

Across the long history of the philosophy of performance, there appear several theorists who analyze with great incisiveness a trait they suffer as a perceived personal weakness: Diderot's discussion of the overwhelming effects of *sensibilité* in his *Paradoxe sur le Comédian* and Kleist's insights into the phenomenon of incapacitating self-consciousness in his essay "On the Marionette Theatre" are just two examples. It is tempting to see in Plato's anti-mimetism the human tendency to lash out against manifestations in the external world of those parts of the self that we attempt to deny, repress, or excise. Indeed, Stephen Halliwell characterizes Plato as a "romantic puritan" who "does not simply stigmatize certain kinds of art as dangerous or corrupting but who

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[45] Diogenes also states that Plato may have acted as a *choregos*, a producer-sponsor of a tragedy at the festival of Dionysos (see Diogenes 1959:279).

claims to appreciate, to know *from the inside*, just how seductive the transformative experience of art can be" (Halliwell 2002:74). When Plato's Socrates likens his band of repudiators of mimetic poetry to "men who have once fallen in love with someone, and don't believe the love is beneficial," and who "keep away from it even if they have to do violence to themselves" (Plato 1968:291, *Rep.* 607e), we can interpret this statement as a confession of the powerful role that engagement with poetry had had in shaping Plato's personal sensibility.

We can even allow ourselves to imagine the young Plato in the amphitheater of Dionysos, his body and soul being moved in synchrony with the powerful expressive score being enacted by the tragic performers. As he surfs the waves of ecstasy unifying the mass of closely packed spectators, he allows himself to be overcome by the irrational expressive currents surging through him. We can also imagine him at some point in his life – perhaps upon becoming part of Socrates's philosophic circle – becoming alarmed by this susceptibility and making the difficult decision to cut himself off from this experience. Diogenes Laertius renders this resolution by the young Plato resolution in a vividly symbolic episode: Plato, after listening to Socrates speaking outside the amphitheater of Dionysos, burns a newly composed tragedy and becomes a permanent member of the philosopher's circle.[46]

Diogenes, however, does not tell us that Plato never returned to the amphitheater of Dionysos. Indeed, it would be surprising it he did not do so upon some occasion, considering the theatre's important place in the life of the Athenian citizenry as a forum for political debate and societal self-examination as well as a cauldron of affective

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[46] See Diogenes 1959:281.

currents. Let us imagine then, the philosophically reformed Plato returning to the theatre

as a spectator after the apocryphal tragedy-burning incident, once again feeling the

currents of *ekstasis* beginning to stir in his body. Now, however, instead of allowing

himself to "follow the mimesis," the young Plato carries out a psychically agonized act of

mental discipline, cutting off this process of giving over even as it begins to draw him in.

Or we can imagine him, somewhat less dramatically, having erected such a sturdy

cognitive block against poetic performance – that is, having adopted such a severely

judgmental attitude against poetic performance – that he is left untouched, unmoved. In

either case, to become a philosopher and to found his philosophical enterprise, our

imagined Plato renounces a part of himself he deemed dangerously "other" to a Socratic

subjectivity of disinterestedness, rationality, and detachment from worldly affections – a

personal renunciation that foreshadows his banishment of the virtuosic mimetic poet at

Republic 398a:

> [I]f a man who is able by wisdom to become every sort of thing and to imitate all
> things should come to our city, wishing to make a display of himself and his
> poems, we would fall on our knees before him as a man sacred, wonderful, and
> pleasing; but we […] would send him to another city, with myrrh poured over his
> head and crowned with wool, while we ourselves would use a more austere and
> less pleasing poet and teller of tales for the sake of benefit, one who would imitate
> the style of the decent man […]. (Plato 1968:76, *Rep.* 398ab)

Plato's Mirror: Mimesis as Image-Making in Republic *X*

As many commentators have noted, there is a "break in the concept of mimesis" between

Plato's discussion of poetry in Books II and III of the *Republic* and his return to the topic

in Book X (Gebauer and Wulf 1995:31). Seeming to leave behind his concern with the

pragmatics of paideutic transmission, Plato's Socrates poses to his collocutors – with

mischievous disingenuousness – the ontological question: "Could you tell me just what

mimesis as a whole *is*; as I myself don't even have much idea what it is supposed to be?"

(Plato 1988:35). The Republic may have been composed over a number of years in the

380s and/or 370s BCE, and the conceptual break between the early and tenth books of the

work can be interpreted as evidence of an "increasing preoccupation" with mimesis

during Plato's "middle period" and a widening philosophical application of the concept to

artistic representation.[47] At this crucial turning point in the intellectual history of

mimesis, the concept is expanded and abstracted so that, as a theoretical schema, it can

encompass the visual, poetic, and performing arts in general.

Key to Book X's transformation of mimesis is Socrates's analogy between poetry

and painting. This analogy is introduced through the famous example of the painter who

depicts a couch: there exists a form (*eidos*) or idea (*idea*) of the couch, created in the

ideal realm by a god; a craftsman (*demiourgos*) "look[s] to the idea" in order to make a

material couch (Plato 1968:278, *Rep.* 596a); a painter imitates the appearance of the

craftsman's work, thereby producing the "phantom" or "simulacrum" (*phantasma*) of a

couch. The imitator (*mimetes*) therefore operates at a double remove from the ideal

reality of the form, and mimesis in general is said to be "concerned with something that is

third from the truth" (Plato 1968:285, *Rep.* 602c). Here Plato assimilates mimesis to the

hierarchical structure of his broader metaphysics, in which material reality corresponds to

a higher "intelligible" or "intellectual" realm of ideas. The mimesis concept adapts itself

to a characteristic cognitive schema of Platonic thought: a static hierarchy of structural

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[47] See Stephen Halliwell's introduction, in Plato 1988:5. The poetry-painting analogy of
Republic X indeed proves typical of Plato's later dialogues: *Cratylus*, *Phaedrus*, *Timaeus*,
and the *Laws*.

levels that bear a relation of correspondence despite an effect of ontological degradation in each move from a higher level to a lower. Plato remakes mimesis itself, imprinting it with the stamp of Platonic thought.

It is within the context of the discussion of painterly imitation that Socrates proposes the other famous simile of Book X: the artist is likened to the wielder of a mirror, who by turning it in various directions can be said in some sense to "produce" or "fabricate" the celestial and earthly objects it reflects (*Rep.* 596d-e). The painter, like the mirror-wielder, has no direct access to the forms themselves but only to their particular material manifestations. He is therefore incapable of "producing the real" and can at best make "something that is *like* the real, though not real itself" (Plato 1988:39, *Rep.* 597a). Nowhere in Book X does Plato use the standard term *eikon* for a painted image; instead these are always referred to as *phantasmata* ("appearances," "simulacra"), a word usually reserved for optical illusions, reflections in water, dream visions, ghosts, and conjuring tricks – that is, images with an inherently deceptive dimension.[48] Artistic mimesis, like the turning of the mirror to and fro, becomes a "demiurgy of images" (*eidolon demiourgia*).[49]

Having redefined mimesis as ontologically debased image-making, Plato makes the argumentative move we have long been awaiting: poetry is classed with painting as a form of mimesis and the poet supplants the painter as the paradigmatic mimetist: "those who take up tragic poetry in iambics and in epics are all imitators in the highest possible

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[48] See Halliwell's commentary in Plato 1988:118.

[49] At Republic 599a7, translated in Vernant 1991:165. The phrase resonates with Plato's gloss of mimesis as *eidolopoeisis* ("image-making") in the *Sophist*: "Mimesis is something like a fabrication, a fabrication of images, to be sure, and not of realities" (also in Vernant 1991:165).

degree" (Plato 1968:285, *Rep.* 602b). This sudden and definitive turn in the argument of

Book X has been long expected, for Plato's real concern is with poetry and its deleterious

effects, not with painting's imagistic deficiencies. Mimesis and understanding are set at

odds with one another as Plato sets out to strip the epic and tragic poets of any claim they

might make to a deep wisdom regarding human behavior: "[t]he maker of the phantom,

the imitator, we say, understands nothing of what *is* but rather of what looks like it is"

(Plato 1968:284, *Rep.* 601b); "the imitator knows nothing worth mentioning about what

he imitates" (Plato 1968:285, *Rep.* 602b).

It now becomes clear that, despite his excursion into the ontology of mimesis,

Plato's main concerns are still pragmatic and ethical (as in Books II and III): the real

problem with epic and tragic poetry is not that they are mimetic *per se*, but that they

imitate reckless, self-destructive models for behavior. Mimetic poetry appeals to the

"foolish," "mournful," "pitying" part of the soul, which indulges in suffering, complaint,

and lamentation. Plato even suggests that the "irritable and various disposition" (*ethos*)

lends itself to mimetic treatment, unlike the "prudent and quiet character" of the

deliberate man, which, even if effectively "imitated," is not "easily understood" by the

kind of assembly that gathers to view a tragic performance, "for the imitation is of a

condition that is surely alien to them" (Plato 1968:288, *Rep.* 604e-605a). The

philosophical *ethos* is here conceived as radically other to the "tragic sense of life"

(Halliwell 2002:114) promoted by the mimetic performance genres of his day. Plato

holds that the "enjoyment of other people's sufferings [at a tragic performance] has a

necessary effect on one's own," because the "pitying part [of the soul], fed strongly on

these examples, is not easily held down in one's own sufferings" (Plato 1968:290, *Rep.*

606b). In other words, giving over to suffering along with a protagonist who gives over

to suffering increases one's tendency to give over to suffering in one's own life. Plato's

most damning statement about the epic and tragic poets is that they are "imitators of

phantoms of virtue" (Plato 1968:283, *Rep.* 600e) – that is, that poets provide their

audiences with garbled conceptions of how one ought to live a happy, prosperous, and

virtuous life.[50]

For Plato, then, the stakes of the "old quarrel between poetry and philosophy" are

not primarily intellectual or theoretical, for this longstanding debate is but a particular

skirmish within a much broader field of conflict: the agonistic struggle with the self that,

for Plato, is life itself. This ongoing internal battle is an ethical one, a "contest that

concerns becoming good or bad" (Plato 1968:291, *Rep.* 608b), marked by the conflict of

contradictory psychic impulses of willed suppression and emotional eruption – of the

"holding down" and "release" of the drives toward desire, pleasure, and pain (*Rep.* 606c-

d). Within this struggle to life the good life, engagement with mimetic poetry entrains us

for suffering, while the discipline, detachment, and self-regulation required by the

examined life of the philosopher offers an avenue toward liberation from the shocks of

existence. For this reason, Plato's Socrates rehearses a stern reply to the tragic poets who

will ask for admission into the ideal city being hypothesized in the *Laws*:

> [W]e ourselves are poets [or "makers"], who have to the best of our ability
> created a tragedy that is the most beautiful and the best; at any rate, our whole

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[50] Jean-Pierre Vernant writes that Plato allies mimetic poetry with "the polymorphic and
gaudy world of becoming and with the inferior part of the soul that is always unstable and
in flux and is the seat in use of the desires and passions" (Vernant 1991:175). Plato's
commitment to an ethical ideal of total, unshakeable integrity means that the protean
poetic imitator, "skilled at taking all forms and imitating all things" (*Rep.* 398a, in
Vernant 1991:178), can only be seen as a dangerous anti-type for the *Republic*'s ideal
citizen.

> political regime is constructed on the imitation of the most beautiful and best way of life, which we at least assert to be really the truest tragedy. (Plato 1980:209, *Laws* 817b)

Let us read the above passage in light of the meaning of mimesis I have been calling attention to throughout this chapter: the political regime outlined in the *Laws* will *embody* and *actualize* – that is, *make present in the bodies of its citizens* – the virtuous, prosperous, and temperate style of living that Socratic philosophy pursues. The mimesis of the poets, which actualizes distressing and destructive impulses in the bodies and minds of its performers as well as its audience members, must therefore give way to philosophy's mimesis of the best life.

Acting as Imitation

Regardless of Plato's pragmatic, ethical agenda, *Republic* X's redefinition of mimesis as image-making – along with the painting-poetry analogy – has had longstanding consequences for aesthetic theory. The effect of Plato's intervention was to open up an ontological gap in the mimesis concept, a divide between ideal model and imagistic copy. Mimesis comes to define a static structure of "secondary representation" (Halliwell 2002:24-5) rather the processual embodiment of otherness, which can be viewed as a primary act of summoning rather than a secondary process of "imitation." In the words of Jean-Pierre Vernant, "Plato founds the first general theory of imitation and simultaneously cuts the image off from the real and from knowledge" (Vernant 1991:180).[51] Plato endows the mimetic image with a unique ontology of unreality: "If it

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[51] According to Vernant, in Greece before the fifth century the various phenomena termed *eidolon* ("image") extended far beyond the domain of artistic representations, including dream-images, heaven-sent apparitions, and the shades of the dead. Vernant

is understood as the outcome of imitation, the image consists of a pure 'semblance'; it has no other reality than this similitude in relation to what is not, to that other, real thing whose illusory replica it is, both its double and its phantom" (Vernant 1991:166). The mimesis concept comes to house a new paradox: not how otherness can be embodied in the self, but how reality can be depicted in unreal appearance.

Eric Havelock calls Plato's intervention an "abstract reduction of [the mimetic] process to a relationship between original and copy" (Havelock 1963:58), and Republic X inaugurates what Havelock calls the "era of the abstract and the conceptual" (188). Mimesis now takes on a new conceptual existence within this era as it breaks free of its grounding in the body and ascends into ideality to become a kind of theoretical "form" or "idea." Mimesis now becomes a conceptual "meme,"[52] a template for one-to-one thinking that takes its hierarchical structure from Plato's metaphysics and replicates itself over and over again across aesthetic theory's history of ideas.

According to Plutarch, the poet Simonides, toward the end of the sixth century BCE, described poetry as "speaking painting" or "painting with a voice," and,

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argues that the "archaic" Greek understanding of the function of images was one of "presentification" rather than representation: images were thought to "establish real contact with the world beyond, to actualize it, to make it present" (Vernant 1991:153). However, a radical shift in the ancient Greek discourse of imagery occurs, at the turn of the fifth into the fourth centuries BCE, as the understood function of the image moves from the "'presentification,' the making present, of the invisible" to the "imitation of appearance"; the image is no longer taken as an actualization of a divine or supernatural essence but as "an imitative artifice reproducing in the form of a counterfeit the external appearance of real things" (152). This transformation of understanding may have been based in broad cultural shifts within the Greek world during the period, but Greek philosophy's theorization of visual art as imagistic mimesis – in Plato, Xenophon, and perhaps in the lost works of other authors – surely advanced this transformed conception of the image.

[52] The term "meme" – used to signify a self-replicating unit of culture – was coined by evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins on an analogy with the gene. See Dawkins 1976.

conversely, called painting a form of "silent poetry" (in Halliwell 2002:118). M.H. Abrams has shown how this apocryphal statement by Simonides, popularized by Plutarch, would join with Horace's famous *ut pictura poesis* analogy to become "axioms in popular aesthetic wisdom" from the middle of the sixteenth to the middle of the eighteenth centuries (Abrams 1953:33). Abrams also demonstrates how the "archetypal analogy" (31) between the mirror-image/reflected object relationship and the artwork/model relationship provides a foundation for mimetic theories of art from the Renaissance onward. It was during this period the vocabulary of "imitation" came to be used synonymously with that of "representation" in various European languages.

Stephen Halliwell argues that the view of art as the "imitation of nature" that held sway during these years was never a unitary doctrine, but rather an umbrella formula under which divergent conceptions were articulated, and that Romantic and post-Romantic theorists have taken up a complex and ambivalent view of mimesis rather than rejecting it entirely.[53] Though Halliwell convincingly shows that there is underappreciated complexity in Renaissance and post-Renaissance mimetic theories, these are nevertheless built upon a shared conceptual foundation: that of one-to-one thinking, which locates the meaning and affective impact of art in some form of correspondence. And as painterly techniques developed from the High Renaissance to the Baroque and Neoclassical periods, allowing the depiction of emotion, dynamism, and atmosphere unlike anything the visual arts of antiquity had attempted or achieved, painting's position as the exemplary "art of imitation" was consolidated even as the meaning of *ut pictura poesis* was transformed.

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[53] See Halliwell 2002:344-69.

As we shall see in the next chapter of this study, when modern acting theory emerges out of oratorical discourse in eighteenth-century France, constant reference to painting as the explanatory paradigm for art-as-imitation gives rise to a doctrine that we might call *ut pictura hypokrisis*: the idea that the art of the actor is a kind of "visible painting."[54] Ironically, what I have called Western aesthetics' "foundational analogy" – the comparison between the "second nature" brought into bodily being by the mimetic faculty and the "imitations" produced by the arts in general – now reverses itself, so that the performing body is now seen as a medium or canvas upon which mimetic images of human action are represented. If Plato's mirror has "haunted" the philosophy of the visual arts (Gombrich 1977:83), the abstracted, imagistic mimesis of *Republic* X has dogged the figure of the actor. Across the following chapters of this study, the actor will be "ghosted"[55] by an unshakeable image of an absent other, often conceived as a vague entity called the "character," whom the actor is said to "represent," "depict," or "portray" (all terms used in the visual arts). Imagine one of the prisoners of Plato's cave emerging into the light of the world above and finding himself confronted by a *doppelgänger* – but his original, rather than his double – a being somehow more perfect, more ideal, more real than himself. The phantasmic character shadows the actor through acting theory's history of ideas, leading philosophers of the theatre to see the actor's art as one of secondary representation rather than primary actualization.

Perhaps if Aristotle had given more consideration to the art of actors, charged with embodying the "agents" (*prattontes*) who drive forward tragic action (*praxis*),

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[54] This characterization of the art of the actor is from Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Hamburg Dramaturgy* of 1767 (in Roach 1993:73).

[55] See Carlson 2001.

European theatrical thought might have developed a conception of acting-as-action (a primary process) rather than acting-as-imitation (a secondary one) before the Romantic era. But for Aristotle, tragedy's "mimesis of praxis" is effected by *mythos* ("story," "plot")[56], and not by the masked beings who spoke, sung, and danced in the amphitheater of Dionysos. The actor is at best an inconspicuous presence in the *Poetics*, lurking behind the analytic categories of *ethos* ("character"), *lexis* ("speech"), *melos* ("song"), and *opsis* ("spectacle"). Aristotle was born in Stageira and did not grow up within Athens's musico-poetic performance culture, and David Wiles argues that it was his outsider status that led Aristotle to prejudice the textual over the performative in his analysis of Athenian tragedy.[57]

And yet, even while imitation as the abstract relationship between model and copy holds sway over European aesthetics, the early meanings of mimesis as the embodiment of otherness surface again and again across acting theory's history of ideas. This is not because these meanings survive intact, transmitted across the centuries via an intellectual genealogy that bypasses Plato's redefinition of mimesis as image-making. Rather, it is because mimesis, as understood above, is a "conditio humana" (Gebauer and Wulf 1995:1) – a fact of the human condition, a basic human capacity that philosophers of art and theorists of performance will always need to address. As we shall see in subsequent chapters, the early meanings of mimesis reassert themselves under different vocabularies across the history of theatrical thought: "contagion," "infection," "communion," "identification," "empathy," "intersubjectivity," and other terms. They

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[56] See *Poetics* 50a.
[57] "When Aristotle came to Athens as a foreigner, it was […] inevitable that he should find in the written texts the real *Oedipus* and the real *Medea*" (Wiles 2000:168).

also arise within aesthetic vocabularies in various European languages that explicitly evoke the Greek *mimesis*: *imitatio* in Latin, *imitation* in French, and *Nachahmung* in German, for example. At times, the meanings of mimesis that point toward phenomena of embodiment and intersubjectivity will assimilate themselves – uneasily, problematically – with an assumed governing ontology of "imitation" or "representation." In theatrical theory, at least, it is virtually impossible to consider the one-to-one dimension of representation without the one-to-one of identification or the one-to-one of vicarious experience pressing itself to the fore.

Coda: Mimesis as Summoning

Before moving on to acting theory's modern rebirth in the eighteenth century, I will stay in the classical world for a moment longer, in order to explore one more modality of the embodied attunement with otherness that is mimesis. This modality stands behind Plato's concerns about the mimetic shaping of character by poetry, song, and dance in Books II and III of the *Republic*, but is never explicated or analyzed for its own sake in philosophy of the period. The topic I am interested in broaching is how a performer – or a human subject more generally – summons qualities of otherness in him- or herself when the other in question is present only a memory in the mind or in the body. This process does involve attunement in the here-and-now; the attunement, however, is not between co-present beings, but between the one who summons and the other manifested in the embodied being of the summoner.

Let us take the example of the rhapsode: the singer of epic poetry to the accompaniment of a lyre; the proto-actor who negotiated the shift of subjectivity between diegesis and mimesis over and over again within a given performance. Shaped by a lifetime of exposure to and participation in oral poetry and choral dance, the bodies and minds of rhapsodes would have been repositories of rhythmic patterns, metrical structures, formulaic word-sequences, and choreographic movements. In the moment of performance, the rhapsode would have allowed these incorporated resources to surge up in him, providing formal channels for creative impulses. "Rhapsode" derives from the verb *rhapsoidein*, which means "to stitch together," and the name probably signals rhapsody's hybrid mode of improvisatory re-performance: immersed in a process of delivery-cum-composition, the rhapsode would have relied upon kinesthetic memory to call up and suture together bursts of dynamic movement and rhythmic speech. This process of continual, improvisatory "stitching together" should be seen not as "improvisation" in the sense of total spontaneity, but as a kind of in-the-moment mimetic sampling of fixed patterns thoroughly ingrained in the body and mind, a process governed by a productive tension between the principles of structure and impulse. The rhapsode would have given himself over to mimetizing in order to activate a practical performance-knowledge – and to allow codified details of movement and voice to unleash themselves opportunistically, surging up out of the "the great underground of knowledges" in his embodied being (Taussig 1993:26).

It is this mode of mimetic attunement – a summoning of embodied resources that can be prompted but not entirely controlled by the conscious mind – that Gunter Gebauer and Christof Wulf point to when they write: "Mimesis brings into play a practical

knowledge, a *sens pratique*; it makes available models of behavior that are seemingly immediate and require no consideration" (Gebauer and Wulf 1995:316). Benjamin's "On the Mimetic Faculty" also touches upon the unconsciously informed, solo mimetic modality in question: Benjamin's essay does not examine mimesis as inter-relational synchronization but rather the individual acts of summoning or recognition that may inform an author's creative or a reader's receptive processes. Key to Benjamin's theorization of this writerly and readerly mimesis is the notion of the "flash": the production or recognition of similarity "is in many cases, and particularly the most important, limited to flashes. It flits past." Benjamin goes on to propose that "[i]t is not improbable that the rapidity of writing and reading heightens the fusion of the semiotic and the mimetic in the sphere of language" (Benjamin 1978:335-36). In other words, Benjamin suggests that a form of automatic writing (or reading) – or, at least, an unusually rapid and relatively unregulated mode of composition (or consumption) – might provide more favorable conditions for the mimetic faculty to surge into fullest operation. As writing becomes an uncontrolled falling-forward of the author into language, Benjamin implies, its mimetic aspect gains power.

Benjamin's notion of the "flash" can be usefully applied to performative acts of impersonation, in which the recognition of rightness – the insight that otherness has been accurately captured – comes to both performer and spectator in a sudden burst. This mimetized otherness may involve human characteristics encountered in the social world, genre-specific skills or modes of expressivity, or vocal-and-physical "entities" (like songs, dances, and routines) transmitted across generations within a performance culture. Mimetic summoning allows a performer to re-do a doing done before, or to manifest

qualities of otherness made self through long and dedicated practice. It should be emphasized that the precursor doing or the other-as-predecessor made present through this summoning resides in the bodies and minds of performers, and not in some ideal realm that must be access through the rational faculty or the compositional ability of the visual imagination. These ingrained doings and incorporated others press themselves up to and beyond the threshold of manifestation in the act of performance. "Copying" or "mirroring" does not capture the experience of the flash that gives mimetic summoning its rightness.

2. The Felt Truth of Mimetic Experience:
The Kinetics of Passion and the "Imitation of Nature" in the 18th-Century Theatre

In the year 1717 the actor Jean Poisson became the first professional stage performer in the French tradition to offer a full-length manual on matters of technique when his *Réflexions sur l'art de parler en public* appeared on the shelves of Parisian bookstalls.[58] This relatively unknown treatise by a now-obscure actor on acting, which rehashes established orthodoxies on stage declamation and which has never earned a place within the canon of acting theory's historical texts, now derives some interest from its very typicality, its thorough steeping in the assumptions of its cultural moment. The *Réflexions* conclude with a piece of "*Avis General*" that restates classical emotional doctrine in early eighteenth-century terms:

> All the Rules of Cicero, of Quintilian, and of the Illustrious Moderns who have been able to write on Declamation are useless to the Orator if he does not follow the first, which is to understand thoroughly what he is saying and to feel it strongly himself, in order to render it feelingly [*sensible*] to the Listener. When one is touched [*touché*] in one's speech, Face, Voice and Gesture lend assistance and conform to one's interior movements [*mouvemens interieurs*] [sic], and if one has any natural graces at all, through this alone, without much study, one can please and persuade, which is the sole aim of Eloquence. (Poisson 1717:34)

The notion of being "touched" still circulates within our twenty-first century vocabulary of emotion, but the phrase "interior movements" strikes us with the force of the alien.

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[58] Poisson was the younger son of Raymond Poisson and Victoire Guérin, celebrated actors at the Hôtel de Bourgogne during the latter decades of the seventeenth century. Less renowned than his brother Paul (known as Poisson *fils*), Jean Poisson made his debut at the Comédie-Française in 1694 and retired from the stage in 1710. Allison Grear has called Poisson's *Réflexions* "the first study of the psychology of acting" in Europe and Sabine Chaouche has emphasized the treatise's significance in accelerating acting theory's break from oratorical theory. See Allison Grear, "A Background to Diderot's *Paradoxe sur le comédien*," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 21, no. 3 (1985): 225-238, 232; Sabine Chaouche, ed., *Sept traits sur le jeu du comédien et autres texts: De l'action oratoire à l'art dramatique (1657-1750)* (Paris, 2001), 383-96.

What could Poisson mean here? The answer lies in Poisson's footnote to the above passage, a quotation from Cicero's rhetorical treatise *De Oratore* (55 BCE): "*Omnis motus animi suum quemdam a natura habet vultum & sonum & gestum*" ["Each movement of the soul has from nature a certain facial expression, sound, and gesture of its own"] (34). This brief citation hurtles us back across almost two millennia and into sudden reckoning with the classical understanding of emotion as *motus animi*: a literal "motion of the soul," a perturbation of the psychic substance propagating through the body and producing physiological changes in the organs, muscles, and other inner systems. This psycho-kinetic understanding of affect continued to carry authority throughout the medieval and into the early modern periods, when classical emotional theory was assimilated to Christian doctrine by Scholastic philosophers of the passions. As late as the end of the eighteenth century, the French word *émotion* still carried a heavily kinetic import, signifying "agitation, movement either in the body or in the soul" [*agitation, moûvement ou dans le corps ou dans l'âme*].[59]

However, by the first decades of the eighteenth century, the time of Poisson's writing, the philosophy of the passions had undergone a sea-change, transformed by accounts of soul-body interaction supplied by a new intellectual movement: mechanism. At the center of the mechanistic view of the human world stood a body highly sensitized to the motive forces acting upon it from without and highly attuned to the inner movements coursing through it – a psychically and physiologically activated body, bound by sense and affect into a network of relations with the world of objects and others. Less

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[59] In Féraud, Jean-François, *Dictionaire critique de la langue française* (1787-88). Accessed through ARTFL-FRANTEXT, Department of Romance Languages and Literatures, University of Chicago, http://artfl-project.uchicago.edu/node/17 (accessed 8 March 2010).

than half a century after the appearance of Poisson's treatise, the vision of an impassioned body, subject to the impressions of both external objects and inner events and capable of provoking affective experience in others through sudden, direct, and irresistible processes of contagion, had been thoroughly assimilated by both champions and critics of the eighteenth-century theatre's "unashamedly affective mission" (Worthen 1984:73).

Eighteenth-century theories of acting translate a mechanistic epistemology of affect into a kinetic model of the interpersonal dynamics of the theatre event. By first engaging with the fictional circumstances of his role – perhaps by summoning images "impressed" (*imprimé*) within his memory or imagination – the actor "animates" (*s'anime*) or "impassions" (*se passione*) himself. In other words, he generates in himself those motions of the soul-body composite that are the passions themselves, sometimes also referred to as "affections" (*affections*) or "sentiments" (*sentimens*). These "interior movements" (*mouvemens intérieurs*), which now "agitate" (*agite*) the actor's physical frame, spread through space and "excite" (*excite*) corresponding corporeal sensations within the assembled audience members. The organic interactivity of the soul-body composite means that these sensations are also immediately felt as passions in the spectators' souls. It is taken as natural and inevitable that when the actor genuinely "abandons himself" (*s'abandonner*) to the sequence of passions appropriate to his character, the assembled spectators will surrender themselves to a corresponding series of internal movements. As a result, the audience is literally – that is, kinetically and kinesthetically – "touched" (*touché*), "moved," (*ému*), or "struck" (*frappé*) by the actor's impassioned expressivity.

Joseph Roach has demonstrated the influence of Cartesian physiology and the "doctrine of sensibility" upon eighteenth-century theatrical theory; Angelica Goodden, Erec R. Koch, and Paul Goring have examined the "bodily transmission of sentiment, or the physiology of persuasion" (Goodden 1986:33) in oratorical treatises of the period; Shearer West has highlighted the connections between passion theory, acting practice, and the visual arts in the age of Garrick and Kemble; William B. Worthen has explored the role of the impassioned actor's gestural expressivity in catalyzing the sympathetic outbursts of emotion so characteristic of the eighteenth century's "sentimental theater"; and Sabine Chaouche has recently traced the dialectic between interior experience and exterior presentation across eighteenth-century French acting theory's most significant texts.[60] However, contemporary scholarship has yet to recognize fully the debt of eighteenth-century theatrical theory to the classical and Scholastic philosophy of the passions. Such scholarship often relies upon a crude dichotomy between "emotionalist" and "anti-emotionalist"[61] positions for its interpretative framework, rather than examining

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[60] See Joseph Roach, *The Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* (Ann Arbor, 1996); Goodden, 1986; Erec R. Koch, *The Aesthetic Body: Passion, Sensibility, and Corporeality in Seventeenth-Century France* (Newark, 2008); Paul Goring, *The Rhetoric of Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century Culture* (Cambridge, UK, 2005); Shearer West, *The Image of the Actor: Verbal and Visual Representation in the Age of Garrick and Kemble* (New York, 1991); Worthen, 1984; Sabine Chaouche, *La philosophie de l'acteur: la dialectique de l'intérieur et de l'extérieur dans les écrits sur l'art théâtral français, 1738-1801* (Paris, 2007).

[61] These terms belong to the English critic and dramatist William Archer, whose retrospective analysis of eighteenth-century acting treatises in *Masks or Faces?* (1888) still exerts a considerable influence over theatre scholarship's consensus knowledge of this body of theory. The intertextual spine of the "emotionalist"/"anti-emotionalist" debate is capably traced by Allison Grear. See Grear 1985:225-238. See also Edward Duerr, *The Length and Depth of Acting* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1962): 214-68.

how a culturally particular epistemology of emotion-as-motion informs theorizations of the actor's art and of the actor-spectator relationship during the period.

The first concern of this chapter will be to sketch a brief history of the kinetic dimension of passion theory from classical Greece and Rome through early modern Scholasticism and into Cartesian and post-Cartesian mechanism. My second objective will be to show how the model of a body kinetically activated by sensation and affect impacts eighteenth-century theories of theatrical experience. In this connection, I examine two key texts that exerted a powerful influence over eighteenth-century aesthetics: first, Nicolas Malebranche's *De la recherche de la vérité* (1675), which refines, extends, and revises Descartes's treatment of the passions, and, second, the abbé Jean-Baptiste Dubos's *Réflexions critiques sur la poesie et la peinture* (1719), which applies a mix of Scholastic and Cartesian passion theory to the production and reception of artworks. I then shift focus to Pierre Rémond de Sainte-Albine's *Le Comédien* (1747), the first practical-theoretical treatise in the French language devoted entirely to the art of the theatrical performer. *Le Comédien* represents the apex of influence of the model of a kinetically affected-and-affecting body on eighteenth-century discussions of acting practice. Finally, and perhaps most controversially, I will propose that eighteenth-century perspectives on the body in performance, carefully refreshed, might still hold value for contemporary theatrical aesthetics.

French philosophy and aesthetics of the period may have its own vocabulary for affective experience – a vocabulary of *émotion*, *mouvement intérieur*, *sentiment*, and *sensibilité* – but these terms are used to examine processes of affective transmission that the ancient Greeks broached under the terms *mimesis*, *ekstasis*, and *enthusiasmos*.

However, unlike the Greeks, eighteenth-century French aestheticians and theorists of the theatre articulated their views on emotion within an established ontology of *l'imitation de la nature*, laid down by Boileau in his *L'Art Poétique* (1674) and renewed by Batteux in his *Traité des Beaux Arts en Général ou Tous les Arts réduits à un seul Principe* (1746).[62] It is the interplay between mimesis as embodied attunement and mimesis as an assumed imitative ontology that this chapter will explore within acting theory's history of ideas during the period of its modern rebirth.

Though eighteenth-century theatrical theorists never question the classically derived doctrine that art's essential ontology and ultimate objective ought to be the "imitation of nature," reading their works within the framework of then-current models of psycho-physiology reveals another kind of mimesis at the heart of the theatre event: the physiological symmetry between performing and spectating bodies, affectively synchronized by precisely corresponding flows of interior motive force. In other words, for many eighteenth-century theorists, the truth of theatrical performance depended not upon a criterion of verisimilitude, but upon the *mimetic experience of passion*, modeled by the actor and undergone vicariously by the spectator. An attentive reading of eighteenth-century theories of theatrical experience (and their influences in classical and early modern philosophy) reveals that contemporary terms like "kinesthetic empathy"[63]

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[62] As Stephen Halliwell emphasizes, the neoclassical conception of the imitation of nature "was never a unitary principle but a formula interpreted in various, and sometimes incompatible, ways" (Halliwell 2002:352). In other words, critics like Boileau and Batteux might agree that art's essential operation was the "imitation of nature" without agreeing on what "imitation" meant or what "nature" ought to be imitated.

[63] The term "kinesthetic empathy," promoted by dance theorist Susan Leigh Foster, now circulates widely as a keyword within performance scholarship. See Susan Leigh Foster, "Movement's Contagion: The Kinesthetic Impact of Performance," in *The Cambridge Companion to Performance Studies*, ed. Tracy C. Davis (2008): 46-59; see also Foster's

and "embodied intersubjectivity" represent only the most recent articulations of a very ancient and powerful idea.

It must be acknowledged that eighteenth-century acting theory's focus on the affective and the corporeal over the contextual and the interpretative is often unsatisfyingly limited. We need not subscribe wholesale to every aspect of the period's theatrical aesthetics, however, to appreciate the continuing relevance of the central conviction of this corpus of intensely kinetic mimetic theory: that the movement of affect through the performing body, which sets spectating bodies into synchronous or reactive movement, ought to be recognized as a primary animator of theatrical experience.

The Psycho-Kinetics of Passion from Aristotle to Descartes[64]

Even the briefest sketch of the philosophy of the passions' long history must begin with a return to the classical world. Ancient Greek thought understood the soul (*psuchê*) to be the vital principle of living creatures, that which animates or moves their material bodies. In the dialogue *Phaedrus*, for example, Plato describes the soul as the immortal, self-moving "fountain and beginning of motion" for the human being (Plato 1937:250). Greek philosophy held the soul responsible for movement, thought, emotion, judgment, desire, perception, imagination, and even the basic processes of nutrition and digestion. Indeed, Aristotle's *On the Soul*, passion theory's foundational text, treats each of the

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Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance (2011). Foster references cognitive scientific studies of mirror neuron functioning, as does Bruce McConachie, in his recent *Engaging Audiences: A Cognitive Approach to Spectating in the Theatre* (2008).

[64] In tracing the philosophical history of the passions, I have relied heavily upon Simo Knuuttila's *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy* (2004), Anthony Levi's *French Moralists: The Theory of the Passions, 1585-1649* (1964), and Susan James's *Passion and Action: The Emotions in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy* (1997).

soul's powers – nutrition, desire, sensation, locomotion, and thinking – as species of psychic motion (*kinêsis*), also manifested as movements of specific parts of the body (such as the heart, the brain, or the eye).[65] Within the hylomorphic framework of Aristotelian thought, the soul's movements are the formal aspect of physiological changes in the corporeal substance. In some cases, the soul initiates its motions; in others, external objects in the surrounding world impress themselves upon the sensory organs, generating motions that find their way through the bodily medium to terminate at the soul.[66]

The Greek word that most closely corresponds to our present-day "emotion" in terms of its general applicability was *pathos* ("passion"), from the verb *paskhô*, "to suffer," "to experience," or "to undergo." Aristotle states that the soul experiences the *pathê* not in itself but through the internal motions and disturbances of the bodily medium.[67] For example, anger's physiological component is marked by the heating of blood around the heart.[68] In the *Problems*, Aristotle[69] postulates that the language used to describe the physiological operations of the passions is not simply metaphorical: when we describe anger "boiling up," "rising," or "being stirred up," we are describing the feeling of blood and heat surging upward toward the cardiac region.[70] Under this account, the sensation of inner movement makes up an integral part of emotional experience.

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[65] See Aristotle's *On the Soul (De Anima),* trans. Hippocrates G. Apostle (Grinnell, Iowa, 1981), sections 428b, 432b, 433a.
[66] Ibid. 408b.
[67] Ibid. 403a, 408b.
[68] Ibid. 403a.
[69] Aristotle's authorship of the *Problems* has been disputed.
[70] See Aristotle 1984:1488.

Stoic philosophy and Galenic physiology would deeply influence the development of passion theory over the ensuing centuries, and both schools of thought relied upon the psycho-kinetic understanding of emotion as *motus animi*.[71] The Aristotelian paradigm reasserted itself in the medieval period when *On the Soul* was translated into Latin around the midpoint of the twelfth century, eventually becoming the "dominant text in medieval philosophy of mind" (Knuuttila 2004:178). Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* (c. 1225-1274) followed Aristotle's view in defining passion as a motion of the soul's sensitive appetite. Aquinas also bolstered the literalness of passion theory's motive terminology by applying Aristotle's natural philosophy – in particular, his three-phase analysis of the *kinêsis* of natural phenomena in the *Physics* – to psychic processes (see Knuuttila 2004:243). Aquinas' twenty-seven *quaestiones* on the passions (*Summa Theologica* II.1, 22-48), eventually known as *De passionibus animae*, became the model for the vernacular *traité des passions* of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Scholastic philosophy.[72]

The philosophy of the passions was reshaped by the swelling current of mechanistic thinking in the early to mid-seventeenth century. The key figure responsible for this transformation was, of course, René Descartes. Though Descartes presented his

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[71] For more on Stoic passion theory, including its relationship with Galenic thought, see M.R. Graver, *Stoicism and Emotion* (2007).

[72] See Levi 1964:22. The vernacular development of the discourse on passion as psychic motion before the intervention of Descartes can be traced across the cleric and statesman Guillaume du Vair's *Philosophie morale des Stoïques* (1585), the Bishop of Belley Jean-Pierre Camus' *Traité des Passions* (1614), the Dominican bishop Nicolas Coëffeteau's *Tableau des passions humaines, de leurs causes et de leurs effets* (1620), and the Oratorian Jean-François Senault's *de l'usage des Passions* (1641). The *Traité de l'amour de Dieu* (1616) of Saint François de Sales, though thematically wide-ranging, also contains an account of the passions. Major English-language works on the passions of this period include Thomas Wright's *The Passions of the Mind in General* (1604) and Edward Reynolds' *Treatise of the Passions and Faculties of the Soul of Man* (1640).

own account of the psycho-physiology of the passions as an utter break from all previous accounts,[73] he retained the essentials of the Aristotelian-Thomistic view, for he still regarded the passions as arising from inclinational and aversive movements of the soul.[74] Descartes's innovation, however, was to provide a minutely detailed, phase-by-phase account of the physiological production of passion, as well as to situate his understanding of the internal dynamics of affect within a mechanistic universe governed by fixed laws of motion.

For Descartes, the universe is a plenum, full of homogenous matter, out of which various substances differentiate themselves on the basis of the size, shape, and – most crucially – the motion of their particles. "All the variety in matter, all the diversity of its forms, depends on motion," Descartes argued in the *Principia Philosophiae* (Descartes 1985:232). Within the Cartesian universe, the vast distances between the stars, the expanses of the terrestrial world, and the physical spaces between human bodies are teeming with invisible particles (*corpuscles*) in constant collisional movement. The motion of any body within such a universe requires the displacement of the bodies surrounding it, generating waves of propagative influence. For Descartes, the human organism was only one mechanical sub-system within a universe whose operations are sustained by the force of material bodies acting upon one another.[75] Descartes's mechanistic account of bodily functioning was the most prominent model within the seventeenth century's "proliferation of physiologies" (Koch 2008:3) marked by an

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[73] See Descartes 1649, Article 1.

[74] Even after Descartes's mechanization of passion theory, the Aristotelian-Thomistic paradigm continued to weigh heavily upon eighteenth-century theories of emotion.

[75] Descartes laid out his analysis of the nature of the soul-body interaction in a series of treatises: the *Discours de la méthode* and the *Dioptrique* (1637), *Les passions de l'âme* (1649), and *De l'homme* (written in 1632 and published posthumously in 1662).

iatromechanist tendency – that is, by the attempt to apply models drawn from physics and mathematics to corporeal processes. The central principle of the iatromechanist position held that "life is movement and the living being – even the human being – is a machine" (Moravia 1978:47).

Descartes's account of passion is explicitly mechano-physiological: in *Les passions de l'âme* (1649), Descartes states that he will approach the soul-body interactions that produce passion as a *physicien* – that is, as a mechanist physicist. He defines passions as "perceptions, sentiments, or motions of the soul" [*perceptions, ou des sentiments, ou des émotions de l'âme*], which are "caused, maintained, and strengthened by certain movements of the [animal] spirits."[76] The notion of "animal spirits" – *pneuma psychikon* in Greek, *spiritus anima* in Latin, *esprits animaux* in French – goes back as far as Greek Stoicism, Hellenistic medecine, and Galenic physiology. Stoic philosophy attributed the mental and physical experience of passion to the flows of *pneuma*, a life-giving, breath-like substance within the body. The Roman physician and anatomist Galen (c.130-c.200 BCE) postulated that the vaporous *pneuma* flowed through the nerves (which he imagined to be hollow) from the cavities of the brain to the muscles, or, in the other direction, from the sensory organs to the brain, serving as "the primary instrument of the soul," the "medium for the transmission of sensation and other psychological faculties" (Debru 2008:272). Descartes, however, abolishes all historical vagueness from this physiological hypothesis by definitively materializing the animal spirits: he conceives them as "the most agitated [*agitées*] and the most subtle" particles of the blood,

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[76] Descartes, *Passions*, Article 27.

heated to a state of high excitation by the heart.[77] The volatile animal spirits reside in the

cavities of the brain and course through the body's system of nerves, serving as the

medium of interaction between the brain's pineal gland, primary functional seat of the

soul, and the sensory organs and muscles.

Reviewing the vocabulary of passion handed down to him through Scholastic

philosophy, Descartes suggests that passions can indeed be accurately termed *sentiments*

"because they are received in the same way as the objects of the exterior senses, and they

are not known by it [the soul] in any other way."[78] For Descartes, as for his Aristotelian-

Thomistic predecessors, the term *sentiment* encompasses both sensation and affect.

Passion is understood as a *mode of sensation,* and passions impinge upon the soul in the

same way that external objects impress themselves upon the senses by mechanical action.

Descartes goes on to argue, however, that the best term for passion is in fact *émotion*:

> But we can still better name them the motions of the soul [*émotions de l'âme*], not
> only because this name can be applied to all the changes that occur within it, that
> is, to all the diverse thoughts that come to it, but particularly because, of all the
> kinds of thoughts that it can have, there are no others that agitate it [*l'agitent*] and
> shake it [*l'ébranlent*] so strongly as do these passions.[79]

Descartes's passions are literally kinetic and physiologically intense events in the inner

life of the human subject.

According to Descartes, passions may be excited in a variety of ways. First,

passions may be aroused by external objects, which strike the senses, generating

movements in the sensory organs. These movements travel via the animal spirits in the

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[77] Ibid., Article 10. Like the celestial motions of the Cartesian cosmos, the movement of
blood within the Cartesian body requires the contact of particles upon particles and their
sequential displacement by *la force de les pousser* (in Koch 2008:36).
[78] Ibid., Article 28.
[79] Ibid., Article 28.

nerves and represent the objects of perception to the soul on the surface of the brain's pineal gland.[80] If the soul holds a disposition toward a particular object, one of the six principle passions – wonder, love, hatred, desire, joy, and sadness – or some combination or variant thereof is excited. These excitations of the soul act reciprocally on the body: the animal spirits convey impulses to the muscles and internal systems, setting the body into interior and exterior movement.[81] Passions are thus perceived or sensed in the soul but also experienced in the body as movements of the animal sprits and the physiological alterations they produce. Passions can also be aroused by undirected imaginings, by willful thought-processes of the soul, or even through purely corporeal dispositions, when the body functions as an affective automaton, without regulation by the intellect.[82] Regardless of its source, however, Cartesian passion always involves the transmission of motive impulses across material substrates within the corporeal machine.

Descartes thus presents a mechanistic account of the total integration of emotion and sensation – of *pathos* and *aesthesis*, in the terminology of Greek philosophy. Indeed, literary historian Erec R. Koch locates in Descartes's writings on physiology the emergence of a new model of the body as an "aesthetic machine" (Koch 2008:24). Within the Cartesian physiological system, writes Koch,

> Sensibility and passion are stirred in the psyche by a force, matter in motion, that impresses itself on the body and initiates a chain of causal physiological action and reaction. […] The body here is aesthetic, in its etymological sense, since its physiological functioning is directed toward the production of sensibility, that is, to sensation and passion or affect. (12)

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[80] Ibid., Articles 23, 26.
[81] Ibid., Articles 43.
[82] Ibid., Articles 24, 25, 26, 38.

Moreover, the impassioned, aesthetically activated body that Descartes depicts in *Les passions de l'âme* grounds the human subject in the truth of experience. Descartes writes that we may confuse imaginations with perceptions, but "one cannot be [deceived] in the same way when it comes to the passions, in that they are so close and so interior to our soul that it is impossible that it should feel them without their being truly such as it feels them."[83] Within Cartesian psycho-physiology, there can be no such thing as a false passion, and the soul's experience of affective movements becomes a mode of self-knowing through the resources of the body. Or, as Koch puts it, the sensory, kinesthetic, and affective capacities of the Cartesian machine allow access to a "truth of the body and sensation" (Koch 2008:55). If this kind of thinking seem strangely at odds with that of the Descartes who proclaimed "*cogito ergo sum*" in the *Principia philosophiae* (1644), this is largely the result of superficial and reductive summaries of Cartesian thought. Though Descartes did indeed argue that the essence of the soul was to be found in its capacity for rational thought, he regards sense and affect as totally integrated with the functioning of the body. And if, as this unfamiliar Descartes contends, it is indeed through the *aesthesis* of the body that we apprehend human action, this capacity is also the means by which we apprehend theatrical performance. As we shall see, it is the "truth of the body and sensation" that serves as the measure of theatrical mimesis in the eighteenth-century theatre of passionate experience.

Sentiment Intérieur *and Passionate* Contagion *in Malebranche*

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[83] Ibid., Article 26.

The most important figure in the defense, extension, and revision of Cartesian philosophy in the latter half of the seventeenth century was the Oratorian Nicolas Malebranche (1638-1715), who corresponded with Leibniz, quarreled bitterly with Arnauld, and influenced Berkeley, Hume, and Locke. *De la recherche de la vérité* ["On the search for truth"] (1675), Malebranche's most influential work, lays out the most famous – and controversial – aspects of his philosophy: his theory of "occasionalism" and his "doctrine of the vision in God"[84] Malebranche also devotes the entirety of one of *De la recherche*'s six books to the subject of the passions and, in several scattered but provocative passages, provides a mechanistic model of passionate contagion (*contagion*) – a theme that Descartes himself never developed at length. It is to these passages I now turn.

Having presented a thoroughly Cartesian view of sense and imagination in the opening books of *De la recherche*, Malebranche begins Book V with an equally Cartesian definition of passion: "I here call passions all the motions [*émotions*] that the soul feels naturally on occasion of the extraordinary movements of the animal spirits and of the blood" (Malebranche 1958:127). As Book V continues, *émotion sensible* ("sensible motion," or "sensed motion") becomes a central term for Malebranche, referring to the sensation of reciprocal interaction between body and soul, when the soul feels itself moved by the physiological alterations accompanying passion. Another of Malebranche's keywords is *sentiment*, which would best be translated by some synthesis of the English terms "sense," "sensation," and "sentiment." There are two species of

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[84] Malebranche argued that god is the prime cause of all natural events and human actions and that human beings can only comprehend objects of vision and thoughts by means of divine, eternal, archetypal "ideas."

sentiment: the first involves purely "intellectual" (*intellectuelle*) perceptions of passion,

while the second includes the physiologically vivid experience of the different

ébranlements ("disturbances"; literally, "shakings") that the animal spirits cause in the

brain and body (155). Within Malebranchian thought, *sentiment* functions as a

"mechanism of natural judgment" that "endow[s] sensation with epistemic value,"[85] a

corporeally grounded mode of self-knowing.[86]

Malebranche asserts, following Descartes (and Cicero), that each passion

naturally manifests itself in a specific physical posture and facial expression.[87] A greater

concern for Malebranche than the production of passion in the individual, however, is the

role of affective contagion in society. For Malebranche, the divine creator has chosen to

"to link all His creatures with one another" by endowing human beings with a

"disposition to imitate others in all things" (Malebranche 1958:118, 161). For

Malebranche, like Aristotle, imitative processes sustain the life of society. However,

Malebranche goes further than Aristotle when he argues that instinctive compassion,

conscious emulation, and emotional contagion all find their source in the imitative-

affective disposition. When an individual lacks this inclination, states Malebranche, "he

is by his nature incapable of binding himself to us, and of *making up the same body with

us*" [emphasis added] (162). Malebranche thus provides an early version of one of the

central tenets of the eighteenth-century doctrine of *sensibilité*: that the physiological

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[85] In Thomas M. Lennon and Paul J. Olscamp's introduction to Nicolas Malebranche, *The Search After Truth*, trans. and ed. Thomas M. Lennon and Paul J. Olscamp (Cambridge, 1997), xxxviii.

[86] Malebranche's ideas would exert a powerful influence on the sensationist current of eighteenth century philosophy and aesthetics, which held that higher modes of cognition were based in the sensible authenticity of lived experience. See John C. O'Neal, *The Authority of Experience, Sensationist Theory in the French Enlightenment* (1996).

[87] See Malebranche 1958:348.

propensity for empathic excitation is essentially connected to the social virtues of self-sacrifice and compassion.

The capacity for passionate contagion depends both upon imitative "mechanisms" (*ressorts*) in the brain (236) as well as the "mutual correspondence" (*mutuelle correspondance*) between human bodies (321) – in particular, the way in which the movement of animal spirits through the bodies of others inevitably provokes a corresponding flow in our own. Malebranche writes that

> not only do the animal spirits propagate naturally into the parts of our bodies in order to carry out the same actions and the same movements that we see carried out by others, but also to undergo in some way their injuries and to take part in their miseries. […] This transport of spirits into the parts of our bodies that correspond to those we see injured in others makes itself felt particularly in delicate persons, who have a vivid imagination and very tender and soft flesh. (236-37)

For Malebranche as for Descartes, the imagination is a physical faculty; the intentional-and-affective synchrony he here describes is also profoundly kinesthetic and corporeal, depending on the structural symmetry of human bodies. Malebranche's account of how the "compassion in bodies produces a compassion in minds" (237) sounds remarkably like early twenty-first century "mirror neuron" theory, though Malebranche's understanding of kinesthetic empathy relies upon a mechanism specific to the physiology of his period: the spontaneously coordinated movements of animal spirits through the body's internal pathways (rather than mirror-matched neural activation-patterns and submotor impulses).[88]

As the magnitude of an individual's passionate experience increases, so does its tendency toward propagation. Malebranche states that emotional contagion "is even

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[88] For more on the mimeticism of mirror neuron theory, see the coda to this study.

greater and more remarkable when the passions are more violent, because then the animal

spirits are agitated [*agités*] with more force" (Malebranche 1958:191). What is more,

those individuals possessing a "strong imagination," which Malebranche defines as "a

disposition of the brain for receiving very deep traces [*traces*] from the weakest and least

active objects" (163) tend to "dominate" the imaginations of others and "impress" upon

them their own sensory traces (161-62). This endows the possessors of vivid

imaginations with a persuasive capacity that is essentially physiological rather than

rhetorical:

> Those who imagine things strongly express them with great force, and persuade
> all those who are convinced by them by their air [i.e., facial and postural
> expression] and by sensible impression [*impression sensible*] rather than by the
> force of their arguments. For the brain of those who have a strong imagination,
> receives, as has been said, these deep traces [*traces*] of the subjects that they
> imagine, and these traces are naturally followed by a great motion [*émotion*] of
> the spirits, which in a manner prompt and lively disposes their entire body to
> express their thoughts. Thus the air of their face, the tone of their voice, and their
> mode of speech, animating [*animant*] their expressions, prepares those listening
> and watching to come to attention, and to receive mechanically the impression of
> the image which agitates them [*recevoir machinalement l'impression de l'image
> qui les agite*]. For, in short, a man who is penetrated [*pénétré*] by that which he
> speaks usually penetrates others with it; an impassioned [*passionné*] man always
> moves [*émeut*] others, and though his rhetoric be irregular, it never ceases to be
> very persuasive, because his air and his manner make themselves felt, and thus
> agitate [*agissent*] the imagination of men more vividly than the strongest speeches
> pronounced in cold blood, because these speeches do not flatter their senses and
> do not strike [*frappent*] their imagination. (328-29)

The mechanism for contagion that Malebranche here describes can be clarified by

drawing upon his overall physiology: 1) in the process of imagining, physical traces in

the surface of the brain matter originally imprinted by external objects are re-opened; 2)

animal spirits flow through these traces, manifesting mental images to the imagination; 3)

these images stir passions and the corresponding movements of the animal spirits, which

produce vocal and physical expressions; 4) the motive waves of influence generated by

the speakers's body and voice propagate through space and impress themselves upon the sensory organs of the listener-spectator; 5) these impressions agitate the animal spirits in the beholder's nerves, which rush to the brain, there imprinting imagery corresponding to that in the mind of the speaker; 6) this imagery provokes a corresponding passion in the listener-spectator's soul, which manifests itself physiologically through the flow of animal spirits away from the brain and toward the muscles and circulatory system.

In sum, Malebranche's describes a psycho-physiological duplication of passion that proceeds via a mechanical chain of action and reaction. Motive flows of affect produce waves of expression and impression, linking individual bodies into the social corpus. As we shall see, Malebranche's portrait of the preternaturally imaginative and expressively animated individual foreshadows depictions of the ideal stage performer in the acting theory of the following century.

The Aesthetics of Passion: Dubos's Réflexions

Neither Descartes nor Malebranche showed anything more than a passing interest in artistic phenomena, but the Cartesian physiology of passion was to make a rapid incursion into the proto-aesthetic theory of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Perhaps the most influential site of impact was the abbé Jean-Baptiste Dubos's *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et la peinture* (1719). The ambitious, sprawling *Réflexions* treat a number of subjects over the course of their three-hundred pages: poetry, painting, sculpture, music, drama, acting, dance, and the nature of genius. The scope, complexity, and detail of the *Réflexions* would earn Dubos an esteem that lasted well into the eighteenth century in even the most erudite circles: Voltaire approved the *Réflexions*

in 1738 as "the most useful book on these matters which has ever been written in any one of the European nations" (in Saisselin 1966:193) and the scores of passages from the *Réflexions* excerpted in the *Encyclopédie* testify to the work's continued status among Diderot and his collaborators.[89]

Most relevant to the concerns of this study is Dubos's theorization of the role of affect within aesthetic experience and appraisal. In this connection, Dubos's debt to Descartes, whom he hails as "the father of the new philosophy" (Dubos 1733:461) is abundantly clear throughout the treatise. Dubos also seems to have been directly influenced by Malebranche's theory of *sentiment*,[90] and possibly by the sensationism of Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), whose translation into French Dubos facilitated. Whatever exact constellation of influences lies behind Dubos's thinking, the *Réflexions* usher the "aesthetic body" of seventeenth-century mechanical physiology – a body impassioned by sensory experience – into the realm of artistic production and reception.

The *Réflexions* open by arguing that human beings are drawn toward the performing and plastic arts primarily for their physiologically enlivening effects. Engagement with artworks "sets in movement the [animal] spirits, which tend to become sluggish" (Dubos 1733:9), thereby re-invigorating the imagination. For Dubos, the

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[89] For a fuller account of Dubos's influence on Diderot and the *encyclopédistes*, see Rémy G. Saisselin, "Genius," in *The Rule of Reason and the Ruses of the Heart: A Philosophical Dictionary of Classical French Criticism, Critics, and Aesthetic Issues* (Cleveland: Case Western Reserve University, 1970): 89-96. Translated into English in 1748, the *Réflexions* also exerted considerable influence on English criticism in the latter half of the century, famously serving as a powerful prompt to Hume's essay, "Of Tragedy" (1757).
[90] Anne Becq's *Genèse de l'esthétique française moderne, 1680-1814* (1994) makes a forceful case that Dubos's *Réflexions* introduce Malebranchian *sentiment* into French aesthetic theory (see Becq 1994:173-86).

appeal held by aesthetic experience is a sub-species of the more general "attraction that the movements of the passions have for men" (5). Dubos argues that humankind is so addicted to the enlivening effects of passionate movement that we prefer a tumultuous life of agitation (*agitation*) to a tranquil one: "men in general suffer even more from living without passions than the passions can make them suffer" (11). For this reason, all objects of artistic imitation are not equal: the subjects best suited to arousing passion are the most vivacious, energetic, and affectively charged aspects of human experience.[91]

Dubos's anti-Stoic – and, for that matter, anti-Platonic – position on the salutary effects of aesthetic invigoration points toward a conviction underlying the *Réflexions*: that aesthetic experience exists on an absolute continuum with lived experience. This position coexists – unproblematically for Dubos, but uneasily for a contemporary reader – with the then-prevailing artistic doctrine of the "imitation of nature." Dubos reconciles his mimetic assumptions with the affective thrust of his aesthetics through his theory of "artificial passions" (*passions artificielles*). According to Dubos, an artistic imitation "must excite in our soul a passion that resembles that which the imitated object would have been able to excite. The copy [*copie*] of the object must, in other words, excite in us a copy of the passion that the object would have excited" (26). Here a mimetic relationship between the "real and true passions" [*passions réelles et veritables*] (24) experienced in life and the "artificial" passions experienced under aesthetically produced conditions takes theoretical precedence over the verisimilar correspondence between the artistically rendered object and its real-world counterpart. In other words, the imitation

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[91] See Dubos 1733:55.

of worldly phenomena serves primarily as a means toward the aesthetic production of passion, which the receiver undergoes as a kind of mimetic experience.

Dubos goes on to state that the "impression" of an imitated object – that is, the forceful action of an aesthetic object upon the material organs of sense and subsequently upon the tissue of the brain via the animal spirits – is less "deep" (*profonde)*, or more "superficial" (*superficielle*), than the impressions of actual objects. Moreover, since the aesthetic impression "affects only the sensitive soul [i.e., leaving the rational soul unaffected], it dissipates without lasting consequences," unattended by the "unpleasantnesses" associated with the "serious motions" (*émotions serieuses*) evoked by actual objects (27-28). Note that there is no concept of "fiction" here, and Dubos dispenses quickly with the idea that aesthetic experience involves some kind of "illusion" (*illusion*) (27). It is only the relative superficiality of physiological impressure that permits the pleasure we take in artworks whose human content would otherwise disturb us greatly. Noting that the death of a young princess amid "horrible convulsions" would be "an object to flee," but that Racine's *Phédre* "moves us and touches us [*nous émeut et nous touché*] without leaving in us the seed of a lasting sadness," Dubos explains: "We joy in our emotion [*émotion*] without being alarmed by the fear that it will endure too long. Racine's play makes tears flow from our eyes without making us really sad [*attrister réellement*]" (29). The unreality of theatrical emotion, then, is not a matter of its not actually happening or its not corresponding to the sensation of affect in life, but of its having inlaid within it a sensation of pleasure enabled by the knowledge that it will have no lasting consequences. Again, this is a factor of the soul's rational faculty remaining

free from the impact of striking aesthetic objects – objects that would, in the case
mentioned above, be the tragic actors themselves.[92]

Dubos continues his analysis of "the power that imitations have over us" when
takes up the theme of "the natural sensibility [*sensibilité*] of the human heart" (34) and its
"disposition to be easily moved [*ému*]" (38). Following Malebranche, Dubos asserts that
human beings have been formed with an instinctive capacity to share in the "agitation"
(*agitation*) of all those we encounter: "The tears of a stranger move [*émeuvent*] us even
before we know the cause of his weeping. […] He who approaches us with joy painted
upon his face excites [*excite*] in us a sentiment [*sentiment*] of joy before we know its
cause" (39). Dubos's position on the direct, non-deliberative nature of empathic
connection is an extreme one: no context of understanding or previous relationship is
necessary for a human subject to be moved by another. Rather, the exterior symptoms of
impassioned individuals act directly upon the sensibly receptive bodies of those they
approach, producing sentimental contagion.

Dubos turns immediately to acting to illustrate how his theory of contagion might
apply to aesthetic phenomena. According to Dubos, the very same instinct that would
make us weep at a mother grieving over her dead son elicits our emotional response to

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[92] Though Dubos's resuscitation of the Scholastic distinction between the sensitive and
rational faculties of the soul in his account of "artificial passion" breaks with Cartesian
physiology, his position on the relative depth of theatrical emotion does align somewhat
with Descartes' fragmentary thoughts on the same issue. Descartes agrees that theatrical
emotions "penetrate" less deeply into our souls than do those felt in life (see Descartes
1991:283). However, as he makes clear in a letter to Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia of 6
October 1645, he believes that the pleasure we derive from theatrical performances lies
not in the secure knowledge of the ephemerality of our emotion, as it does for Dubos, but
in the soul's "impression that it is performing a virtuous action in having compassion for
the afflicted" (Descartes 1991:270).

the theatrical presentation of a similar scene (240). Dubos, simultaneously invoking the

classical orthodoxy of Quintilian and Horace and the Cartesian physiology of emotion,

states that "actors who truly impassion themselves" never fail to move their audiences,

for "men who are themselves touched touch us without difficulty" (39-40). For Dubos,

"it is the agitation of an actor that causes us to take pleasure in listening to him speak"

(44), and the very same physiological mechanism that affectively binds together human

beings within the world of lived experience also connects them with one another in the

theatre.

Dubos, however, refutes the wide commonplace notion that emotional contagion

in the theatre leads inevitably to delusion, and dismisses outright the idea that theatrical

pleasure depends upon deceptive appearance. Acting and spectacle never make us

believe that "we really see the action and not an imitation" (429), for, "though it is true

that all that we see at the theatre conspires to move us, nothing there deceives our senses,

for everything there shows itself as imitation" (429-30). Just as Dubos's individual at

large in society is directly moved by the passion of strangers without any knowledge of

their situation, his spectator's affective experience depends neither upon entering into the

interpretive-imaginative matrix provided by narrative context or the other given

circumstances of the theatre event. Instead, Dubos's spectator receives a direct,

physiological impression of passion without his understanding being deceived or

corrupted.

Dubos's convictions about direct impressibility also inform his discussions of artistic genius.[93] For Dubos, the physiological capacity for artistic creation arises from the same source as the propensity to be moved by artworks – in other words, the artist's capacity to conceive and execute "ideas and images capable of moving us" is the inverse side of a capacity for impressibility by such ideas and images (3-4), which itself depends upon "vivacity and delicacy of sentiment [*la vivacité et la délicatesse de sentiment*] (53). The power to infuse artworks with soul and motion as well as the facility to assimilate the technical devices of other artists are born from the same source as the propensity to be struck (*frappé*) by the excellence of others' works (50).

Dubos also applies his doctrine of the proportional relationship between impressibility and expressivity to the production and reception of gesture. Onstage as well as in society at large, "the same vivacity of spirit [*esprit*], the same fire in the imagination, that gives rise by a natural movement [*mouvement naturel*] to gestures animated, varied, expressive, and characterized also allows one to comprehend easily the meaning [*signification*] when one attends to the sense [*sens*] of others' gestures" (285). For Dubos, the formal, semiotic, affective, and kinesthetic dimensions of gesture are inseparable. Comprehension of gestural meaning is based not in interpretive "decoding" but in the impressibility of the receiver's mind and body – an impressibility that is essentially linked to an embodied, *expressive* impulse.

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[93] For Dubos, genius is a naturally endowed physiological capacity, which consists "in a happy arrangement of the organs of the brain" and a "quality of blood which disposes it to effervesce [*fermenter*] during work [i.e., artistic creation], so as to supply an abundance of spirits to the mechanisms [*ressorts*] that serve the functions of the imagination" (Dubos 1733:13).

The dynamism of theatrical gesture – in addition to the passionate agitation that drives it – therefore supplies a key source of theatrical attraction. Most of Dubos's thoughts on gesture come in part three of the *Réflexions*, which is largely taken up with a speculative reconstruction of ancient Greek and Roman performance (which Dubos tends to conflate). Dubos imagines a highly physical mode of classical performance in which the art of gesture was reduced to a science with its own system of notation, and which involved one actor reciting while the other enacted a gestural score. For Dubos, the infectious corporeal dynamism of these mute performers explains the "disorders" and "tumults" provoked by the Roman pantomimes in the accounts of Tacitus (224). Extending the theme of pantomimic action's potential to catalyze emotion among performers as well as to incite it in the audience, Dubos applauds a mute performance of a scene from Corneille's *Horatii*, in which two performers "animated each other [*s'animerent*] so well by means of their reciprocal gestures and movements [*démarches*]" that they wept, with corresponding effects upon the audience (290). The common etymological root of *animer* ("animate") and *âme* ("soul") in the Latin *anima* cannot be too much emphasized here: to "animate" something – or someone – is to infuse it with soul. Under Dubos's account, histrionic expressivity, itself driven by the motions of the soul, here provokes reciprocal movements in the soul of the acting partner as well as in the spectators.

Dubos's passion theory lays the basis for the most well-known and historically influential idea put forward by the *Réflexions*: that aesthetic appraisal consists in direct, immediate, sensorially based appreciation rather than reflective or comparative judgment.

Dubos argues that we judge the artistic imitations of "touching objects" (*objects touchans*) by means of what we might today call an aesthetic sense:

> When it comes to knowing if the imitation that we are presented with in a poem or in the composition of a painting is capable of exciting compassion or of touching [*attendrir*] us, the sense designed for judging is the same sense that would have been touched [*attendri*] if we would have judged the imitated object [itself]. It is this sixth sense that lies within us, without our seeing its organs. It is the part of ourselves that judges based on the impression that it feels [*qui juge sur l'impression qu'elle ressent*]. […] It is, in sum, that which we generally call sentiment [*sentiment*]. The heart is agitated in itself and by a movement that precedes all deliberation [*un mouvement qui precede toute deliberation*] when the object presented is really a touching object [*object touchant*], whether this object has received its being from nature or whether it holds its existence as an imitation that art has made. (326-27)

For Dubos, a sense of artistic truthfulness comes upon an artwork's beholder as a sudden "apprehension" (*apprehension*), which involves attending to the impact of artistic objects on one's corporeal being by means of the sensitivity supplied by inner sentiment. Dubos argues that reason *(raison)* should not intervene at all in the process of aesthetic apperception, unless retrospectively, to clarify the causes of our appreciation or antipathy. The *Réflexions* thus transform Malebranche's *sentiment intérieur* into a mode of embodied cognition – one equally reliable when attuned to the affective responses produced by artworks or to those provoked by the contingencies of daily life.

Theatre and performance theorist Erika Fischer-Lichte has argued that an "aesthetics of effect" governed seventeenth- and eighteenth-century thinking about performance, only to recede when the "postulate of the autonomy of art" rose to precedence at the turn of nineteenth century.[94] We might just as easily call the eighteenth century's "aesthetics of effect" an *affective aesthetics*, for the excitation of passionate movements was regarded as the prime means by which the performing, visual, and

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[94] See Fischer-Lichte 2008:192-93.

musical arts could transform the bodies and minds of their receivers. Dubos's *Réflexions* were a major force – perhaps *the* major force – in setting this affective and effective proto-aesthetics on its future course. Although the overwhelming emphasis on emotion over interpretation in Dubos's philosophy of art may leave the contemporary theorist of performance with grave reservations, the central principles of his aesthetics hold continued suggestiveness. While regarding artworks as "imitations" of natural objects, Dubos suggests that their verisimilar significance is not what strikes us most powerfully. Rather, it is the enlivening aspect of aesthetic experience, the aspect that feels – not "looks" – like life, that draws us to engage again and again with performances and plastic works. Applied to the art of the theatre, this view would suggest that the "truth" or "naturalness" of theatrical performance derives not from a conscious comparison of copy with original, but upon whether or not an actor's onstage doings – and the affective currents that animate them – *move through us*, as audience members, in a way that *feels truthful*. Under this view, aesthetic apprehension, even when it veers toward conscious assessment, cannot be disentangled from the kinesthetic and affective dimensions of spectatorship.

Affective Efficacy and Mimetic Perfection: Acting in the Theatre of Sentiment

I now shift focus away from philosophy and proto-aesthetics toward texts of acting theory proper, in which the aesthetically activated, affectively effective body of the performer takes center stage. Acting theory as a modern conversation is born out of the spirit of rhetoric in mid-eighteenth century France. Since the classical period, the passionately persuasive physicality of the orator and the histrionically expressive body of

the actor had been twinned in discussions of performance practice. The arousal of the passions is one of the great themes of classical rhetorical theory. During the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Quintilian's precept that "the prime essential for stirring the emotions of others is […] first to feel those emotions oneself" (Quintilian 1920:432-33), bolstered by Horace's famous credo from the *Ars Poetica*, "If you would have me weep, you yourself must first feel grief" [*Si vis me flere, dolendum est primum ipsi tibi*], acquired the force of orthodoxy for Scholastic rhetoricians and their successors. However, Quintilian, the main source of pragmatic performance advice for early modern theorists of declamation, offered no explanatory mechanism for the propagation of passion between speaker and listener; the direct and instantaneous transfer of affect from orator to auditor simply remained a foundational assumption of rhetorical theory. During the seventeenth century, this consensus position on the inevitability of affective transfer was first rearticulated within a post-Thomistic psycho-physiology of passion. Under the resulting view, the interior movements of genuine passion agitating a speaker's soul and body would naturally propagate across the materially suffused space between pulpit, bar, or stage and audience, inciting the very same motions in the bodies and souls of those listening. Thus arose what Joseph Roach has called "the rhetoric of the passions" (Roach 1993:26), a theory of performative persuasion that valorized above all the speaker's ability to deploy the emotionally driven resources of *actio* (vocal and physical expressivity) in fulfilling the rhetorical objective of *movere*: to move the auditor in mind, body, and soul. In short, mechanistic thought endowed the orator with the power to act directly, forcefully, and persuasively upon the physiology of the listener.

Between the middle of the seventeenth century and the end of the eighteenth century, French treatises on the subject of preacherly eloquence proliferated.[95] The theory of psychic movement seems have been transmitted to the discussion of secular declamatory practice in the Huguenot minister Michel le Faucheur's influential *Traitté de l'action de l'orateur, ou de la prononciation et du geste* (1657).[96] Le Faucheur wrote the posthumously published *Traitté* in the 1630s, while Descartes was still articulating his system of natural philosophy in *L'Homme* and *Le Monde* (published posthumously in 1662 and 1664) and before the impact of Descartes's major publications of the late 1630s and early 1640s. Though the *Traitté* still relies upon an Aristotelian-Thomist definition of passion as a movement of the soul's sensitive appetite, Le Faucheur's elevation of vocal and physical expressivity to prime place among the orator's resources clearly draws force from the early seventeenth-century's building current of mechanistic thought.

Le Faucheur notes that rhetoricians have traditionally placed invention, arrangement, and elocution as the first three parts of oratory, but that "because the sensitive appetite [of the soul] and the affections have a wondrous power over the understanding and over the will, and because these said affections are moved by things present, which strike our senses" (Le Faucheur 1657:2-3). Action, "which consists in

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[95] These include René Bary's *Nouveau Journal de conversations sur toutes les actions des prédicateurs (*1675) and *Méthode pour bien prononcer un discours et pour le bien animer* (1679), Bernard Lamy's *L'art de parler* (1675), Antoine Arnauld's *Réflexions sur l'eloquence des prédicateurs* (1694 or 1695), the anonymous *Règles de la bonne et solide predication* (1701), Dinouart's *L'Éloquence du corps, ou l'action du prédicateur* (1751), and Trublet's *Panégyriques des saints, suivis de Réflexions sur l'éloquence en général et sur celle de la chaire en particulier* (1764).

[96] Le Faucheur's treatise exerted a powerful and lasting influence on French rhetorical theory. It would exert an indirect influence on English acting theory after being plagiarized by Charles Gildon, author of *The Life of Mr. Thomas Betterton, The late Eminent Tragedian* (1710) (see Roach 1993:31).

Pronunciation and in Gesture," outweighs the orator's other resources when it comes to the performative dimension of persuasion: "when it comes to speaking in public, and of effectively touching the souls of those who listen to him, they [the orator's words] remain as if dead and without effect if [action] does not vivify them, and if it does not give to the discourse its final attraction" (3). The vocal-and-physical action of Le Faucheur's orator strikes the senses of his listener-spectators, vivifying their bodies and touching their souls with persuasive force.

According to Le Faucheur, the orator's voice must communicate "the diversity of movements that we feel inside us [*en nostre intérieur*], in order to excite [*exciter*] the same [movements] in those who listen to us" (90). This excitation is not to be achieved through artificial modulation of the voice, but through imaginative engagement with the fortunate and unfortunate happenstances of human life, the good and evil deeds of men. Le Faucheur advises the orator to "meditate" on these events and deeds and "impress" (*imprimez*) them in his imagination until they are "engraved" (*gravée*) in his soul, "in order to be most vividly touched" (*touché*) by their content." Thus moved (*émeu*), the orator will be able to "persuade the judges, and to cause to pass through their souls the same passions that he feels in his own" (111-12). When truly moved, the orator's voice will naturally and necessarily express the passion he feels: "Being so touched he will make appear easily the interior motion of his soul [*l'émotion intérieur de son ame*] [sic] through his Pronunciation, accommodating himself to each of these passions" (113). Although Le Faucheur's position on the imaginative arousal of emotions has much in

common with Quintilian's theory of *visiones* in the *Institutio Oratoria*,[97] his vocabulary

of *émotion* is unmistakably moored in the mid-seventeenth century.

The post-Scholastic rhetoric of the passions moves into the early eighteenth

century with Jean-Léonor Le Gallois Grimarest's *Traité du récitatif: dans la lecture, dans

l'action publique, dans la declamation et dans le chant* (1708) and the actor Jean

Poisson's already discussed *Réflexions sur l'art de parler en public* (1717). Grimarest's

Traité is the first work in French to include an extended discussion of acting in

connection with the various genres of public speaking. According to Grimarest, the

actor's two necessary attributes are *esprit* ("intellect"), necessary to put across the

meaning of a dramatic text and to appreciate the author's poetic devices, and *sentiment*,

the capacity for passion, seated in the entrails (*entrailles*), necessary to communicate the

passionate movements (*mouvements*) Grimarest regards as embedded in the dramatic text

(Grimarest 1708:190-91). As we shall see, the tension between *esprit* and *sentiment*

becomes a dominant theme within eighteenth-century acting theory. Although some

commentators have argued for a Cartesian influence on the *Traité du récitatif*, there is no

evidence for this claim: Grimarest seems instead to be working with a loose terminology

of passion-as-movement and a taxonomical approach available to anyone vaguely

familiar with Scholastic thought.

Though European acting theory in its modern form emerges gradually from

oratorical theory in the texts discussed above, as an ongoing conversation among

practitioners and theorists with a shared set of interests it is inaugurated by Luigi

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[97] For a discussion of Quintilian's *visiones* – mental images called up by the orator during
the act of delivery in order to incite his own emotions – see Roach 1993:24-28.

Riccoboni's short treatise, *Pensées sur la Déclamation* (1738).[98] If Diderot's *Paradoxe*

sur le comédian (written c. 1773, published 1830) would transform acting theory's

possible concerns and positions for the nineteenth century, as Joseph Roach has argued,[99]

Riccoboni's *Pensées* supplied a proto-paradigm – or, at least, the initial cluster of

provisional proposals necessary to launch a theoretical conversation. Contemporary

scholarship, however, has tended to pass over Riccoboni as little more than the first

"emotionalist" theorist of acting, later refuted by his "anti-emotionalist" son Antoine-

François Riccoboni in the latter's *L'Art du théâtre* (1750). In fact, Riccoboni's

contribution was far more complex: using the oratorical theorists of antiquity as his

primary interlocutors, Riccoboni brought the precepts of classical rhetoric into

combination with a post-Scholastic understanding of the passions in discussing a

specifically theatrical collection of concerns. More crucially, Riccoboni articulated what

is perhaps eighteenth-century acting theory's most extreme position on truthfulness of

emotionality and total spontaneity of expression – a highly provocative stance that invited

extension, qualification, and dissent from subsequent theorists.

Though Riccoboni strikes a pose of extreme deference to classical authority,

invoking Cicero and Quintilian as the "great Masters of antiquity," (Riccoboni 1738:4),

the *Pensées* actually present an idiosyncratic post-Scholastic understanding of

imagination, emotion, and physicality. For Riccoboni, the main objective of both the

actor and orator is to "animate himself" (*s'animer*) in order to "declaim with the tones of

the soul" (*les tons de l'ame*) (17). However, this aim runs up against a major obstacle:

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[98] Riccoboni headed the eighteenth-century Comédie Italienne, the troupe invited by
Philippe, duke of Orleans and regent to Louis XV, to relocate from Venice to Paris in
1716.
[99] See Roach 1993:157-159.

the imprisonment of the soul within corporeal matter.[100] Riccoboni's technical solution

to this dilemma is to "liberate our mind [*esprit*] from the slavery of our senses" (13)

through immersion in what Riccoboni terms a state of *enthousiasme*:

> The enthusiasm of Poets and the profound reflections of Sages in the moment of
> composing are nothing other than the effect of a great gathering of their mind
> [*esprit*], which examines the source of their interior sentiments and their passions
> of the soul [*des sentimens interieurs & des passions de l'ame*]; this is when they
> survey within themselves choler, compassion, vengeance, tenderness, and the rest
> of the passions […]. (13)

The rhetorician or actor, Riccoboni argues, must develop a similar capacity for

imaginative withdrawal: in his view, the greatest orators begin each speech with a

moment of *recüeillement* ("contemplation," "meditation"), briefly closing their eyes in

order to immerse themselves within imaginative reveries. This preparatory moment

allows their entrance into the state of *enthousiasme* necessary "to *animate* themselves

[s'*animer*], that is to say, to speak or to write following the sentiments of their soul

entirely pure and detached, so to say, from matter" (16-17). As in Dubos, to "animate

oneself" here means to infuse one's expression with soulful feeling.

When the soul drives the performer's doings, voice, gesture, and facial expression

manifest themselves spontaneously, without the need for conscious direction:

> He who will enter deeply into the necessary enthusiasm, and who will declaim in
> the tones of the soul, will bring it about that his face responds and accompanies
> the expressions of his speech with changes of color that the blood lends to him
> and with a range of movements that the muscles supply to him. (23)

Riccoboni's language lacks the physiological precision of a Cartesian physicist – there is

no talk of the movement of animal spirits, for example – but some mechanistic influence

on his doctrine of actorly spontaneism seems more than likely. Riccoboni goes so far as

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[100] See Riccoboni 1738:12-13.

to assert that "even thought is forbidden" within the declaimer's state of total, enthusiastic spontaneity, which approaches automatism: "What can we conclude, except that this Art that enchains (so to say) all our senses is an Art almost divine: that our soul is its only Artisan, and that our limbs and organs are only its Ministers" (28-9). Riccoboni, then, re-articulates the classical notion of *enthusiasmos*, the divinely inspired state of ecstatic self-abandonment, within an eighteenth-century theoretical framework. In the process, he posits the first modern acting theory centered on the principle of an ideal state of the performer's body and mind.

In the wake of Riccoboni's *Pensées* came the second canonical text of eighteenth-century acting theory in France, and the first to treat the actor's art as distinct from oratorical practice: Pierre Rémond de Sainte-Albine's *Le Comédian*. The treatise met with immediate success (including approval from the celebrated actress Dumesnil) upon its appearance in 1747, and a second edition was issued in 1749. Sainte-Albine, a sometime dramatist, contributor to the *Gazette de France*, and editor-in-chief of the *Mercure de France*, is best known to posterity through his brief appearance in Diderot's *Paradoxe sur le comédien*. Diderot dismisses him as the "middling man of letters" who sparked a debate over the authenticity of actorly emotion by wading out of his depth into unfamiliar theoretical waters.[101] However, Sainte-Albine's contribution deserves reappraisal: influenced by the proto-aesthetics of Dubos and the *sensationisme* of Condillac, *Le Comédien* moves acting theory beyond the declamatory paradigm and

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[101] See Diderot 1957:58.

harmonizes it with the developing eighteenth-century discourse of corporeal sentimentalism.[102]

For Sainte-Albine, the actor holds a twofold responsibility: to deceive (*tromper*) the minds and to move (*émouvoir*) the hearts of audience members. For Sainte-Albine, the actor's art of impassioning himself (*se passioner*) demands "the gift of bending his soul to contrary impressions [*impressions contraires*]" in order to generate contrasting passions in the sequence required by the dramatist. Sainte-Albine declares the "necessity of sentiment" in the actor and forwards the classical principle that "on the stage one only expresses a passion imperfectly if one does not feel it effectively" (Sainte-Albine 1971:33-39). Effective feeling necessitates that actors "abandon themselves to the movements [*s'abandonner aux mouvemens*] that their [fictional] situations require" (99). The actor's self-surrender to impassioned movement catalyzes a reciprocal, irresistible, and unreflective process in the spectator: at a tragic performance, writes Sainte-Albine, "we abandon ourselves to the movements which the actor excites [*On s'abandonne aux mouvemens que le Comédien excite*]" (30).

Sainte-Albine defines *sentiment*, in actors, as the "facility of having the diverse passions to which man is susceptible succeed [one other] within their souls" (32). For Sainte-Albine, *sentiment* is the most crucial attribute in the actor's makeup, one for which intellect or study cannot compensate. He endows *sentiment* with a physiological basis, stating that the capacity is "generally designated under the name of Entrails

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[102] Sainte-Albine references both Dubos and Condillac, though only in connection with the question of whether the actor ought to recite in keeping with a harmonically precise score. See Sainte-Albine 1971: 158-59. Condillac's *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines* (1746) was published one year prior to *Le Comédien*'s appearance in print.

[*Entrailles*]."[103] Moved by passion, Sainte-Albine's actor employs "agitation of the expression" to broadcast *sentiment* throughout the audience. Actors who possess *sentiment* are "Sovereigns, who rule in total mastery over our souls"; they are "enchanters, who know how to lend sensibility [*sensibilité*] to the most insensible beings" (49). In other words, such performers are capable of activating within others, at least momentarily, a physiological capacity for heightened affective experience similar to their own.

Though an argument for the necessity of genuine histrionic emotion occupies a central place in *Le Comédien*, Sainte-Albine also supplies a complementary theory of theatrical representation that assaults Plato's longstanding ontological argument against poetic performance. Sainte-Albine argues that painting brings before our eyes "only simple appearances" and "phantoms [*phantômes*] instead of real objects," while theatrical playing lends "speech and action" to "the beings it births. […] Painting can only represent events," Sainte-Albine states; "The Actor, in a way, reproduces them" (14-15). *Phantôme*, or, more usually, *fantôme,* was the standard French translation of the period for the Greek *phantasma*, which designates an unreal or illusory appearance within Plato's ontological hierarchy. Sainte-Albine directly refutes the account of imagistic mimesis provided in *Republic* X by arguing that dramatic poets are not in fact the paradigmatic producers of unreal objects, but rather the reproductive engenderers of

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[103] Saint-Albine 1971:91. Throughout the eighteenth century, *entrailles* could signify, literally, the organs of the abdomen and thorax as well as, figuratively, a capacity for affection (*affection*), or a "very tender and sensible heart" [*un coeur très-tendre & très-sensible*] (*Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 4th Edition, [Paris, 1762]). Accessed through ARTFL-FRANTEXT, Department of Romance Languages and Literatures, University of Chicago, http://artfl-project.uchicago.edu/node/17 (accessed 10 February 2010).

actual beings. Furthermore, the theatre is the most potent of all imitative arts, because the live presence of the actor "requires of us no [imaginative] supplement" (15). Dramatists and actors are indeed imitators of the highest order within Sainte-Albine's aesthetic framework, but this assessment comes as commendation rather than criticism. Saint-Albine celebrates the theatre's *imitative reality*.

Continuing in an anti-Platonic vein, Saint-Albine presents the totality of theatrical illusion as something to be celebrated and pursued rather than rejected. Prefacing himself by reminding his reader that theatrical "Spectacle draws all of its charms from imitation," Sainte-Albine exhorts actors aspire to make their "Representation" a "total truth," for "it is not sufficient that its fictions appear to us to resemble the events of which they are the image, […] we want to be able to persuade ourselves that the events themselves, and the principal actors in these events, are present to our eyes" (195). At first, Sainte-Albine seems to champion a verisimilar ideal when he defines theatrical "Truth" as "the concurrence of appearances, which can serve to deceive [*tromper*] the Spectators" (135). However, it soon becomes clear that, for Sainte-Albine, the "truth of Representation" depends entirely upon the actors' emotional engagement.

In order to present a true "image" of the character with which he has been charged, Sainte-Albine's actor must "faithfully paint" the passion appropriate to the character "of whom he undertakes to be the copy [*être la copie*]" (137). Sainte-Albine warns that "when one does not feel [*éprouver*] the movements that one intends to make appear, one presents to us only an imperfect image of them, and art can never substitute for *Sentiment*. As soon as an Actor lacks this quality […] He is as far from his character as a mask is from a face." Sainte-Albine's double imperatives – to move and to deceive –

are inextricably entangled: from the audience's perspective, actors "create illusion" by making us feel "those movements that must agitate [*agiter*] us" (36). Sainte-Albine's ideals of total illusion and mimetic perfection depend less on verisimilitude than on the affective efficacy of the performer. The actor's true feeling automatically and inevitably gives rise to mimetic precision, equated with total deception.[104]

How is the actor's self-impassioning to be achieved? Through an act of self-delusion, Sainte-Albine proposes, analogous to the actor's deceiving of the audience:

> Do Tragic Actors want us to partake in illusion? They must partake in it themselves. They must imagine themselves to be, so that they effectively are what they represent and a happy delirium [*heureux délire*] persuades them that they are those who are betrayed, persecuted. This mistaking [*erreur*] must pass through their minds and their hearts, and on several occasions a feigned misfortune must extract from them true tears. (91-2)

Once the "happy delirium" has been achieved and the actor is "inflamed" (*irrité*) and "touched" (*attendri*) by the impressions (*impressions*) made upon him by the imaginative situation of the character, passion "will paint itself without effort in [the actor's] eyes," manifesting itself without conscious control. The actor who attempts to simulate passionate experience through calculated means, however, will immediately betray "the forced state of [his] interior" and "will sooner resemble an invalid wracked by some strange fever than a man agitated [*agité*] by an ordinary passion" (149). The paradox of Sainte-Albine's actor, then, is that in order to present a perfect mimetic image – to "be the copy" of the character he is charged with embodying – he must forswear the conscious, artful construction of stage-images. Instead, like Luigi Riccoboni's

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[104] As Marian Hobson has noted, for Sainte-Albine and other theatrical theorists of his time the term *illusion* did not always categorize an ontological state but rather could designate a "mode of communication" between "actor's and audience's activity at a play," enabled by the "transmission of states of soul from identifying actor to identifying audience" (see Hobson 1982:196).

enthousiaste, he must enter into an ideal state of impassioned immersion in the situation of his character. The resultant embodied feeling will produce theatrical truth with an irresistible mimetic necessity.

A rebuttal of Sainte-Albine's position would come just three years later. *L'Art du théâtre, à Madame* *** (1750) by Antoine-François Riccoboni, actor at Paris' Théâtre-Italien and son of Luigi Riccoboni, voiced a dissenting view on histrionic emotion, though one articulated within the same psycho-physiological framework employed by Sainte-Albine. Riccoboni *fils* defines *sentimens* as "the movements that are born in the soul with the greatest suddenness, without the assistance of reflection, and which from the first instant dispose us almost despite ourselves" (Riccoboni 1750:45).[105] At first, Riccoboni tentatively counters his father's doctrine of *enthousiasme* by positing *intelligence* – rather than the capacity for genuine emotion or imaginative immersion – as "the highest talent in the Theatre" (31). The actor's main objective is still to move the audience, to generate a "perfect illusion" that will "carry away" (*entraine*) the spectators "in spite of themselves" by properly representing the "movements of nature" [*mouvemens de la nature*] (41). However, Riccoboni presents a radical and provocative account of how this feat is to be accomplished *without* the actor's genuine feeling:

> We call expression the skill by which one makes the Spectator feel all the movements by which one wishes to appear penetrated [*penetré*]. I say that one wishes to appear so, and not that one is truly penetrated. […] When an Actor renders with the necessary force the sentiments of his role, the Spectator sees in him the most perfect image of truth. […] Amazed by so perfect an imitation of truth, some have taken it for truth itself, and have believed the Actor affected by the sentiment that he represented. (36)

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[105] Riccoboni rehearses the Platonic and Scholastic distinction between concupiscible and irascible passions when he states that all sentiments arise out of two primary ones: love (*amour*) and anger (*colere*) (Riccoboni 1750:45).

Riccoboni refutes the longstanding idea, going back to Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*

and upheld in his father's *Pensées* as well as Sainte-Albine's Le Comédian, that the only

route toward truth in performance is the true experience of passion, and the only route

toward the experience of passion is immersion within imaginative circumstances.

Invoking the language of *imitation*, Riccoboni brings his argument that the actor must

present "the most perfect image of truth" into line with the aesthetic orthodoxy of his age.

However, as was the case under the declamatory paradigm (and within Sainte-Albine's

Le Comédian), the imitative illusionism of Riccoboni's actor is functional or instrumental

– that is, aimed toward provoking affect in the audience. It is not an aesthetic end in and

of itself.

Although Riccoboni states that genuine immersion in the emotions of the

character will disrupt the actor's control of his body and voice, he does not argue the

position, oft attributed to him, that the actor is entirely affectless while dispatching his

role. He instead asserts that the genuinely felt emotions of the actor are *not those of the

character but his own*:

> I do not say that in playing these pieces of great passion the Actor does not feel an
> extremely lively emotion [*une émotion très-vive*] […]. But this agitation
> [*agitation*] comes of the efforts that one is obliged to make in order to paint a
> passion that one does not feel, which gives the blood an extraordinary movement,
> by which the Actor himself can be deceived [*trompé*] if he has not examined with
> attention the true cause from whence it originates. (41)

The above passage contains a breakthrough notion in the intellectual conversation that is

modern acting theory. For the first time, a theorist of acting proposes that the

performer's emotional states arise primarily from the set of histrionic tasks that he must

execute within the actual theatrical situation, not from imaginative immersion in the

fictional circumstances of the character or self-abandonment to the sequence of passions

appropriate to the dramatic action. The actor's misattribution of the arousal he feels

represents a new, heretofore untheorized form of theatrical delusion.[106]

Riccoboni's position that emotions sparked by the act of performing are entirely

distinguishable in both theory and practice from the subjunctive emotions inspired by

fictional circumstance is an extreme one, and we need not subscribe to this extremity in

order to appreciate the basic insight. We should also keep in mind the bodily dimension

of the histrionic effort Riccoboni describes. Every theatrical genre has its own modes of

corporeal dynamism, through which performers seize hold of the attention of spectators

by means of their physical expressivity. Acting in eighteenth-century France and

England was marked by a dialectical tension between a mode of "formal, oratoric acting"

employing a style of vocal delivery and gesture that was conventional, stylized, and

consciously composed and a more spontaneous, "natural," and kinetically active style

ushered in by the likes of Garrick, Lekain, and, later, Siddons.[107] Whether capturing

interest by means of the sweeping arcs and codified hand movements of declamatory

delivery or by the violent gestures and sudden suspensions that made Garrick a sensation,

there is no question that eighteenth-century acting was more expressively "dilated"[108]

than the various theatres of twentieth- and twenty-first-century naturalism. The histrionic

exertion that agitated the blood of the actor of Riccoboni's day would therefore have

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[106] Riccoboni *fils'* insight that an actor's emotional arousal can arise from histrionic effort anticipates the conceptual nuance of William Archer's distinction, made over a century later, between "mimetic emotion" and "personal emotion" (Archer 1888:131). It also foreshadows Elly Konijn's recent *Acting Emotions: Shaping Emotions Onstage* (2000), which argues that the centrality of "task-emotions" – "the emotions actors experience as a result of performing their acting tasks in front of a critical audience, or with the demands arising from the theatre situation" – has been seriously neglected both by historical acting theories as well as contemporary scholarship (see Konijn 2000:17).
[107] See Duerr 1962:179.
[108] See Barba and Savarese 1991:54-63.

derived from at least two sources: first, the physical effort required to throw the body into movement, to arrest its gestural action,[109] and to project the voice; and, second, the basic excitation of the body and mind that arises from the psychic pressures of the theatrical situation – what we might call, quite simply, and invoking the phrase's popular connotations, "performance energy." The sweeping gestures of acting in the oratorical mode, the statuesque poses of tragic declamation, and the play between kinesis and stasis that developed as acting become more physically dynamic over the course of the century would have all held their own aesthetic efficacy – that is, their own way of striking the senses and engaging the attention of audiences. The infectious muscularity of histrionic gestures, animated by performance energy, surely drove many of the phenomena of passionate contagion described by eighteenth-century theatrical theorists.

Beyond the Impassioned Body: Diderot's **Modèle Idéal**

As had already been stated, Sainte-Albine's *Le Comédien* represents the mechanistically impassioned body's site of deepest impact upon the theory of the theatrical performer. The latter half of the eighteenth century brought a transition away from mechanistic thinking toward the theory of sensibility in scientific and aesthetic thought, with the physiological model of *homme machine* gradually giving way to that of *homme sensible*.[110] Joseph Roach has demonstrated how late eighteenth-century acting theory

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[109] The potential energy of a suspended gesture carries an inherent suspense for the spectator. For an analysis of the interplay between dynamic movement, "starts," and held attitudes in Garrick's personal performance style, see Todd Andrew Borlik, " 'Painting of a Sorrow': Visual Culture and the Performance of Stasis in David Garrick's Hamlet," *Shakespeare Bulletin* 25.1 (2007): 3-29.

[110] See Sergio Moravia, "From *Homme Machine* to *Homme Sensible*: Changing Eighteenth-Century Models of Man's Image," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 39.1

absorbs the "doctrine of sensibility" as a new principle of vitality derived from the

internal organization of the human nervous system.[111] The "shift from mechanism to

sensibility" (Roach 1996:96) was a gradual development rather than a sudden rupture: the

concept of sensibility is indisputably post-Cartesian, in the sense that its emergence

would have been inconceivable without the mechanistic model of the body that preceded

it. Both mechanism and sensibility place the sensitized human body within a field of

affecting stimuli, and the emotional volatility of the *homme sensible* shows considerable

continuity with the Cartesian subject's propensity for internal excitation by external

objects acting upon the senses. However, sensibility emphasizes the sympathetic

capacity of the body's nervous system, which extends itself out toward other human

subjects, rather than the forceful interaction of corporeal and extra-corporeal matter.

Despite this distinction, French aestheticians often used the term *sentiment,* which holds a

prime place in Scholastic as well as mechanistic psycho-physiologies, interchangeably

with the newly endowed *sensibilité* during the latter half of the eighteenth century. The

Encyclopédiste Louis de Jaucourt's definition of *sensibilité* as the "delicate and tender

disposition of the soul that makes it easily moved, touched" (Jaucourt 2004), for example,

still owes much to the long-prevailing understanding of affective and sensory experience

as belonging the soul's sensitive faculty.[112]

(1978): 45-60.

[111] See Roach 1996:94-98.

[112] Henri Fouquet's *Encycopédie* article on "*Sentiment, Sensibilité* (*Médecine*)" speaks to the considerable overlap between these two terms. Fouquet defines *sensibilité* as the living body's capacity "to perceive the impressions of external objects, and, consequently, to produce movements in proportion to the degree of intensity of these perceptions" (Fouquet ARTFL). Diderot's definition of *affection* as the "lively sentiment of pleasure or aversion" produced in us by the "impression" of external objects and

The doctrine of sensibility's enduring connection to earlier psycho-physiological frameworks can be traced in the two texts that directly provoked Diderot's refutation of emotionalism in his *Paradoxe*: the practicing doctor and sometime theatrical theorist John Hill's *The Actor* (written 1750, revised 1755) and the actor Antonio Fabio Sticotti's *Garrick, ou les acteurs anglois* (1769). Joseph Roach has shown how Hill's *The Actor*, a translation and vigorous remaking of Sainte-Albine's *Le Comédian*, is the main impact-point for sensibility's physiological discourse upon theatrical theory.[113] Sainte-Albine's affective keyword is *sentiment*, designating both an inner sensation and the general capacity for affective experience, and the term *sensibilité* crops up only occasionally in *Le Comédian*; in Hill's *The Actor*, however, "sensibility" becomes the standard term for the affective capacity.

Hill defines sensibility very simply as "the disposition to receive those impressions by which our own passions are affected" (Hill 1755:49). Unlike Sainte-Albine, Hill stresses over and over again the dangers of indulging in excessive passion, of being drawn into "the Charybdis of extravagant emotion" (80). He even goes so far as to invert Sainte-Albine's implicit hierarchy, elevating "understanding" or "judgment" over sensibility to the highest rank within the actor's set of natural gifts. Sharing with the physicians and novelists of his time a concern with the dangers of excessive sensibility, Hill has assigned the actor a twofold task: to stir up the sensible impression of passions in his audience but also to manage strictly the manifestation of passion within himself. At

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beings and dependent upon "the mechanism of the body" (Diderot ARTFL) points back to Scholastic and mechanistic vocabularies of emotion.

[113] Roach has suggested that Hill's medical background led him to assimilate principles from the evolving field of nerve physiology to his treatment of actorly emotion (see Roach 1996:100-109).

times, however, the emotionalist enthusiasm of Sainte-Albine remains vestigially present in *The Actor* (especially in those places where direct translation of *Le Comédian* is preserved), and the treatise veers schizophrenically between the unqualified celebration of passion in the French original and Hill's own, more temperate stance.

Conspicuously lacking from Hill's treatise are any remnants of Scholastic or Cartesian psycho-physiology: there is no talk of actor or spectator "abandoning" himself to *mouvemens intérieurs*, and whenever Hill uses the word "soul," he does so metonymically, to refer to the capacity for affect (and, occasionally, for noble thoughts and feelings). Nowhere in *The Actor* is the soul an entity with a motive function; nowhere is the precise nature of its relation to the body ever specified. The treatise as a whole seems to be informed by a particularly English version of the doctrine of sensibility, arising from the medical tradition founded by the doctor and anatomist Thomas Willis, which increasingly defined affective and sensory experience in terms of the operations of the brain and nerves (as opposed to perturbations in the psychic substance).[114]

As is now well known to scholarship, Antonio Fabio Sticotti's *Garrick, ou les acteurs anglois* (1769), a free translation of John Hill's *The Actor* into French, was the text that drew Diderot's attention and prompted a commentary in Grimm's *Correspondance littéraire*. This commentary, after revision and development during the 1770s, was to be published posthumously in 1830 as the *Paradoxe sur le comédian*. Sticotti, who was a member of the Comédiens du Roi de la Troupe Italienne and a

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[114] For a discussion of this English current of thought in connection with eighteenth-century novels of sentiment, see G.S. Rousseau, "Nerves, Spirits, and Fibres: Towards Defining the Origins of Sensibility," in *Studies in the Eighteenth Century* III (1976): 138-57.

popular figure in elevated social circles, clearly viewed himself as intervening in two ongoing intellectual conversations: first, the theoretical elucidation of the principles of the actor's art, and, second, the d'Alembert-Rousseau-Diderot debate over the establishment of a theatre in Geneva. Sticotti cites Luigi Riccoboni's *Réflexions* on the first subject and aligns himself with Diderot's position in the latter controversy.[115]

In *Garrick*, Sticotti preserves Hill's elevation of judgment – translated as *intelligence* – over feeling, but undoes his standardization of the term "sensibility" by using *sentiment* and *sensibilité* interchangeably throughout *Garrick*. He also sporadically re-introduces the familiar vocabulary of passion that marked earlier treatises on declamation. For example, he argues that the best actors will not find it difficult "to capture our imagination, to take hold of our soul, to move it [*l'émouvoir*] according to his will, to agitate it [*l'agiter*], to carry it into transports of joy, to afflict it and to pierce it to the quick" (Sticotti 1769:7). A long-established understanding of soul-body interactionism also resurfaces in Sticotti's phrase "organs of the soul" (*organes de l'âme*) (36), which he uses to describe the bodily basis of the affective capacity. As a result, when Diderot gave Sticotti's treatise a cursory reading, it would have seemed much more a rehashing of established orthodoxies than a more faithful translation of Hill would have done.

The radical impact of the *Paradoxe sur le comédien* on modern acting theory's development has been exhaustively treated by scholarship.[116] With iconoclastic

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[115] See Sticotti 1769:83, 3-4.

[116] For recent scholarly treatments of the *Paradoxe*, see Roach 1996: 116-59, Worthen 1984: 88-93; see also Graham Ley, *From Mimesis to Interculturalism: Readings of Theatrical Theory Before and After Modernism* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999): 74-107.

jubilance, Diderot's dialogue overturns the orthodoxy that the actor must possess

heightened *sensibilité* – nervous susceptibility to emotional excitation – in order to move

his audience. Diderot argues the very opposite: that *sensibilité* incapacitates the actor,

robbing him of his ability to deliver a controlled and composed performance. Diderot's

consummate performer is an unmoved mover, capable of provoking waves of affective

response in his audience while remaining unshaken by the perturbations of passion.

The above is the *Paradoxe*'s primary argument. However, in dismissing the

consensus view on the actor's genuine feeling, Diderot also dissolves the affective basis

of preceding theories of theatrical imitation. He must therefore redefine the nature of the

actor's mimesis and does so with his notion of the *modèle idéal* ("ideal model"): a fully

rendered conception of the role fabricated in the actor's imagination in advance of its

embodied actualization. The actor of genius develops his individual performance through

"constant imitation" of this *modèle idéal*, so that when he arrives onstage, "faithfully

copying of himself and the effects he has arrived at" during his period of study (Diderot

1957:15), he can turn out a performance with unfailing mimetic perfection. The *Paradoxe*

seizes upon the actress Clairon as exemplifying this technique of "pure imitation" or

"sublime aping" [*singerie sublime*] (Diderot 1959:312) and describes her pursuit of

fidelity to her imaginative model:

> When by force of work she has approached this idea the nearest that she can, all is
> finished; to hold firmly to it is purely a matter of exercise and memory. If you
> were to assist at her studies [of the part], how many times you would say to her:
> *you have it!* [*vous y êtes!*] … How many times she would answer you: *you are
> deceived!* [*vous vous trompez!*] (308)

Diderot's Clairon does not, like Riccoboni's *enthousiaste* or Sainte-Albine's *comédian*,

judge her performance by the passionate reactions it provokes in the spectator, but by its

relation to the *modèle idéal*. Like Plato's carpenter in *Republic* X, her eyes are fixed on an ideal form; she detaches her attention from her material surroundings. At one moment, Diderot seems to argue that the great actor or actress "has learnt before a mirror every particle of his despair" (Diderot 1957:19); at another, the ideal performer is himself likened to a mirror: "He will be invariable; a looking-glass, as it were, ready to reflect realities, and to reflect them ever with the same precision, the same strength, and the same truth" (Diderot 1957:15).

Diderot's *Paradoxe* is an outburst of ideas, full of "subsidiary paradoxes" (Roach 1996:148) and bursting with internal contradictions. As outlined above, the theory of the *modèle idéal* seems to deprives the spectator of his privilege of instantaneous aesthetic assessment by means of interior sentiment: the ideal model, which exists within the actress' imagination, is inaccessible to him, and he can offer only naively enthusiastic guesses – dismissed by Clairon – about the mimetic rightness of the actress's work. Late in the *Paradoxe*, however, Diderot does seem to provide the spectator with access to some version of the *modèle idéal* that informs the actor's performance – or, at least, a mode of aesthetic judgment shaped by the magnitude and ideality of this imaginative construct. Granting himself the right to speak for self-possessed performers everywhere in the first-person plural, Diderot asks:

> What therefore is the true talent? That of knowing well the exterior symptoms [*symptôms extérieurs*] of the soul we borrow, of addressing ourselves to the sensation [*sensation*] of those who listen to us and see us, and of deceiving [*tromper*] them through the imitation of these symptoms, through an imitation that magnifies everything in their heads and which becomes the criterion [*règle*] of their judgment; for it is otherwise impossible to appreciate that which passes within us. (Diderot 1959:358)

Symptôms extérieurs have replaced *mouvemens intérieurs* as the defining feature of the actor's art, and a phantasmic construct has entered the interrelational dynamics of theatrical performance: the imitation "in the heads" of the spectators, which mediates their appraisal of "what passes within" the actor. The primary axis of theatrical relation, which once connected actor and spectator through the motive force of shared passion, has been split in two; there now exists a triangular relation between actor, spectator, and *modèle idéal*. The actor's performing and the spectator's apprehending are now imbued with ideality, rather than fueled by the embodied experience of affect.

The *Paradoxe* thus re-conceives the ontology of theatrical performance by specifying how the art of acting might be properly described as the imitation of (an imaginatively idealized) nature. Diderot's chief concern, however, is conceptual completeness, not phenomenological precision. Posited as a technical device employed by actors, the *modèle idéal* is, in fact, a theoretical construct, developed at a philosophical remove from the actuality of performance practice and forcefully imported into the actor's consciousness. As Graham Ley has noted, Diderot developed the *modèle idéal* concept extensively – though not unproblematically – in the art criticism of his *Salons* during the 1760s and 1770s.[117] Diderot provides his most explicit formulation of the concept in the opening address to Grimm (his editor Friedrich Melchior) preceding his review of the Salon of 1767. In these passages, saturated with Platonism, Diderot expresses the opinion that only mediocre artists imitate the beautiful forms of nature. Painters of genius, on the other hand, take as their "primary model" the "true ideal model

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[117] See Ley 1999:96-107.

of beauty" (Diderot 1995:13), following the "true line in their imagination" (14) to create

archetypal masterpieces rather than particular portraits.

As Phoebe von Held points out, the concept of the *modèle idéal* "marks a turning-

point in the history of eighteenth-century aesthetics" (von Held 2011:99), for it replaces

the doctrine of the imitation of *la belle nature* laid down by Batteux with the claim that

the painter or sculptor aims at a model in the ideal realm of the imagination. Diderot's

Platonism becomes explicit when he when he condemns mere portraiture to occupying a

"third order of reality" while allowing that masterful painting might rise to "the second

order" (11). However, even as he takes up Plato's metaphysics, Diderot grants the

masters of visual art an ability that the Greek philosopher took pains to deny them: the

capacity to imitate directly ideal forms beyond those of the material world. Diderot

conceives as this capacity as a factor of the artistically refined imagination.

In a foreshadowing of his application of the *modèle idéal* concept to the art of

acting in the *Paradoxe*, Diderot bolsters his argument about the imaginative technique of

the visual artist by quoting David Garrick:

> The famous Garrick said to the Chevalier de Chastelux: "However sensitive
> nature may have made you, if you perform with reference only to yourself, or to
> the most perfect subsistent nature known to you, you can only be mediocre. […]
> Because for you, for me, and for the spectator there is an ideally possible man
> who, in a given circumstance, would respond differently from yourself. Such is
> the imaginary being you should take as your model. The more vivid your
> conception of him, the more extraordinary, marvellous, and sublime, the grander
> you will be. […] When I tear my guts apart, when I scream like an animal; these
> are not my own guts, nor my own cries, but rather the guts and cries of another
> I've imagined and who doesn't exist." (Diderot 1995:15-16)

Diderot's Garrick is not limited by the sentimental capacity of his *entrailles*; rather, the

affective viscerality of his performance emanates from the characteristics of an

imaginatively conceived being. However, there is nothing in Diderot's "quotation" of

Garrick that defines the mode of imagination in question as being specifically scopic –
that is, of involving an imagistic conception of the role called up before the "mind's eye."
This development comes later, in the *Paradoxe*, after Diderot has defined the *modèle
idéal* concept with respect to the art of painting.

It is worthwhile noting that, in the *Paradoxe*, Diderot introduces his dramatic
version of the *modèle idéal* in connection with the characters of Cornielle, Molière, and
Racine – all playwrights whose works had been in the repertoire of the French stage for a
hundred years or more. At the time of the *Paradoxe*'s composition, these characters
would have achieved larger-than-life dimensions in the popular imagination – dimensions
that mere mortal actors would need to strive to embody. Indeed, Diderot endows Cinna,
Cleopatra, Merope, and Agrippina – characters from the plays of Corneille, Racine, and
Voltaire – with ideal status when he calls them "phantoms fashioned from this or that
poet's special fantasy" (Diderot 1957:21). The actor who plays his own character will
fall far short of the dramatist's ideal type: he will play "a tartufe, a miser, a misanthrope,"
rather than "*the* Tartufe, *the* Miser, *the* Misanthrope" (39) conceived by Molière and now
leading a seemingly independent, exalted existence in the popular dramatic imagination.

It is no controversial claim to argue that the notion of "character" evolves along
with trends in dramatic literature and traditions of performance practice. The actor's task
can, it seems, more readily be conceived as a secondary process of "imitation" or
"representation" when certain sets of characters are well established in the imagination of
theatergoers. This establishment occurs through the circulation of dramatic texts as well
as their repeated re-performance as part of a given theatrical culture's repertoire. Marvin
Carlson has used the term "ghosting" to describe the cognitive phenomenon by which an

audience endows an actor with memories of past performances, and he notes that a young actor aspires to an iconic role like Hamlet because of "the density of its ghosting, culturally, theatrically, and academically" (Carlson 2001:79). We can say that, over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the "ghosts" of the characters of Molière, Corneille, and Racine achieved greater and greater phantasmic substance in the theatrical imagination, until they could be conceived by Diderot as pre-existing – and determining – an actor's performance.

Bodies are conspicuously absent from the *Paradoxe*. At times the dialogue's *homme sensible* is plagued by corporeal phenomena – a heaving diaphragm, trembling nerves, inopportune bursts of weeping – but even these appearances of the body are rare. The performing body thrown into expressive movement by internal flows of affect, which has held center stage in the *Paradoxe*'s precursor texts, has been disappeared. It is replaced by a confusingly abstract entity, fabricated by Diderot to complete his theory of the actor's mimesis: Diderot writes that the actor "shuts himself up in a great wicker mannequin of which he is the soul,"[118] and that the actor manipulates this apparatus like children who imitate a frightening "phantom" (*fantôme*) (Diderot 1959:376). Like a homunculus puppeteer, the "cold and tranquil spectator" residing within Diderot's insensible actor has become the motive principle of a hollow acting machine, whose surface is constructed for the display of *symptôms extérieurs* ("exterior symptoms"). The passionately moved and aesthetically striking body has been spirited out of the

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[118] The *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* of 1762 defines *mannequin* as "a human figure made of wood or wicker, which can bend all the joints of its limbs, and which Painters and Sculptors position as they please […] after the various attitudes of the figures they wish to depict" (DAF 1762 online).

Paradoxe's theoretical universe. Left in its place is a wickerwork puppet fashioned after a phantasmic model, into which the actor must disappear in order to make an appearance.

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The alienation of the actor from his body inaugurated by Diderot's *Paradoxe* has held an enduring influence over acting theory. Around the *fin de siècle*, the celebrated French actor Benoît-Constant Coquelin renewed Diderot's forceful analogizing of the actor's body with the mimetic media of the plastic arts and his notion that artistic creation occurred not in the act of doing but in the conception of an imaginative ideal.[119] In his essay "Actors and Acting,"[120] Coquelin divides his actor into an imaginative-cognitive "first self," which "sees" the "model" or "ideal" he must represent, and an embodied "second self," which gives physical form to "the being that [the first self] sees." Like the painter, the actor "seizes each salient feature [of his imagined model] and transfers it, not to his canvas, but to himself" (Coquelin 1887:163-64). "Art is," Coquelin insists, "not identification, but representation" (174). Under Coquelin's account, then, the actor's mimesis becomes a three-phase process: imaginative conception, transfer onto the bodily medium, and, finally, execution in performance. Even the relatively disinterested and entirely unpolemical William Archer, attempting to inject some empiricism into the controversy renewed by Coquelin, falls prey to a tendency of many would-be critics of the *Paradoxe*: to assimilate its basic conceptual schema even as they argue against its

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[119] Coquelin's *L'Art du comédien* (1894) will also be discussed in the following chapter of this study.

[120] The essay by Coquelin was published in *Harper's Monthly* in May 1887 and sparked the well-known debate between Coquelin, the English actor Henry Irving, and the playwright Dion Boucicault.

anti-emotionalism. From the actor's perspective, writes Archer, the character is "the superimposed phantom of his imagination" (Archer 1888:223).[121]

The phantom of an ideal other, born from a reflection in Plato's mirror, continues to "ghost" the figure of the actor throughout the twentieth century. Even a practitioner of the phenomenological method like Jean-Paul Sartre, engaging with Diderot, argued that the actor uses his own ego as an *"analogon"* for the manifestation of the "*imago*" of his character. Sartre's actor is "unrealized" as he "sacrifices himself to the existence of an *appearance*" and "becomes a medium for nonbeing" [emphasis in original] (Sartre 1976:163-65). Frederick Schyberg, writing in his three-part series on "The Art of Acting" in the *Tulane Drama Review*, is largely ventriloquized by Diderot and Coquelin when he states that the actor "stands *with* his person half-way between fiction and reality and, with the *help* of his person, will unite them both and incorporate them *in* a higher entirety in his person" (Schyberg 1962:111). More recently, theatre semiotics, with its essentially mimetic schema of signifier, signified, and referent, has been apt to renew the imitative-imagistic conception of acting. Semiotics often views the theatre as an "imagistic-iconic medium" in which human actors "convey images of human beings imprinted on human bodies" (Rozik 2002:123, 111-12). Finally, though performance studies has done much to highlight the role of embodiment in performance practice, much of the discipline's anti-mimetic impulse is, ironically if not paradoxically, fueled by mimeticist assumptions about the traditional theatre's supposedly characteristic mode of representation-as-reproduction.

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[121] Archer's actors, unlike Diderot's and Coquelin's, are indeed "susceptible to emotional contagion" from these imaginative "phantoms" (Archer 1888:223).

When it comes to the art of the actor, talk of copies and originals, of mannequins and ideal models, and of the performing body as a medium for representation is chiefly metaphorical. Mimetic theories, based as they are in rigid schemata of one-to-one correspondence, often mistake for realities the *imagos* and *analogons* they generate in the realm of theoretical discourse – the only realm in which a living, breathing, thinking, feeling, *acting* human being can become a "medium" for "nonbeing." For all their unexamined assumptions, critical blind-spots, and rhetorical indulgences, eighteenth-century theories of the performer before Diderot's intervention hold one great virtue: even when assuming an ontology of imitation, they keep the affectively charged relation between the performing body of the actor and the apprehending body of the spectator as the foundation of theatrical reality. The basic principles of eighteenth-century thinkers like Dubos and Sainte-Albine accord well with contemporary critics like Michael Goldman who argue that the theatre's "realism is not re-presentation of reality" but, rather, a form of "reality itself," embedded in the "real life" taking place beyond the boundaries of the performance venue (Goldman 1975:34). Eighteenth-century certainties about the radical continuity between lived experience and theatrical experience can help us appreciate that we go to the theatre to be enlivened – that is, to *live through* the emotions, expressive movements, and transitions of thought and intention we apprehend passing through performing bodies – rather than to see life "represented," "depicted," "portrayed," or "imitated."

The movement-based epistemologies of affect covered in this study can also help to re-embody theatrical aesthetics by reminding us that we monitor our emotions, principally, by attending to their physical symptoms. Our holistic awareness of

subjectively experienced bodily states (what psychologists sometimes call coenesthesia or coenaesthesis) is often dominated by a sensation of internal motion. In other words, we experience emotions kinesthetically – as heavings of the diaphragm, poundings of the heart, contractions in the chest, roilings of the viscera, and thrills that race along the skin-surface – and the sensation of these *mouvemens intérieures* comprises an essential dimension of our engagement with aesthetic phenomena. If we bracket off such meaningfully affective experiences as unworthy of interest or impossible to describe, we risk contributing to an apathetic critical discourse out of touch with the "truth of the body and sensation." Such a mode of discourse, unmoored from corporeal grounding, risks ascension into a Platonist "Intelligible Realm" of conceptual fantasy, where models, mannequins, and *imagos* gleam with cold ideality.

3. "I AM"; "I believe you":
Stanislavsky and the Oneness of Theatrical Subjectivity

Figure of a Monad from *A Series of Lessons in Raja Yoga* by Yogi Ramacharaka
(Chicago: Yogi Publication Society, 1911): 22.

The actor steps onto the stage. Leaving behind the sheltering darkness of the wings, he is momentarily dazzled by the bright theatrical lighting. The "black hole" of the auditorium yawns from beyond the proscenium arch. Out there in the darkness, a collective gaze made up of hundreds of pairs of eyes weighs upon his every word, gesture, and expression. Under these psychically pressurized conditions, pre-fabricated postures and conventional intonations seem to rise up in him unbidden, as if a part of his unconscious were desperately trying to meet some vague but terrible demand. He feels disoriented, empty, physically and emotionally contracted. He feels himself pulled, body and mind, into a "state of dislocation," a "sense of being forced, subjected to something alien" (AW 611) – required, that is, to embody something outside himself and beyond his reach. But this actor is no amateur, no dilettante. He has trained in Stanislavsky's art of "experiencing" (*perezhivanie*). He calms himself, relaxes his muscles, and calls upon the "psycho-technique" (*psikhotekhnika*) ingrained in his mind and body through dedicated practical study.

The actor now restricts his "circle of attention" (*krug vnimaniia*) solely to onstage objects, fellow actors, and images in his imagination. The presence of the audience recedes within his conscious awareness as the actor achieves a state of "public solitude" (*publichnoe odinochestvo*). The actor enters a subjunctive mode of imagination, doing what he would do "as if" ("*esli by*") he were required to act under the same "given circumstances" (*predlagaemye obstoiatelstva*) as the character. As he follows his "score" (*partitura*) of physical and psychological "actions" (*deistvii*), maintaining a "sense of truth and belief" (*chuvstvo pravdy i vera*) in these intentional strivings, he finds that emotions, thoughts, and impulses specific to the character arise spontaneously within

him. He may even enter into the "creative mood" (*tvorcheskoe nastroenie*), in which

inspiration fuels an almost effortless but emotionally full performance. Playing freely

with his fellow performers, theatrical truth emanates from his every action and he enters

"that pitch of enthusiasm, those high transports of passion, in which he is able to feel that

he and his part are inseparable and can boldly say to the spectator, 'I *am*'" [emphasis in

original] (SAS 113).

"I am": this declaration of oneness with oneself, which marks entrance into the

Stanislavskian actor's ideal creative state, is, of course, entirely metaphorical. Within

Stanislavsky's practical philosophy of acting, to acknowledge directly the presence of the

audience – let alone to rupture the dramatic fiction by addressing the assembled

spectators – would disrupt the very mode of consciousness that allows the actor to feel so

confident in his subjective wholeness. The "I am" of the Stanislavskian actor designates

feeling oneself as oneself while pursuing a sequence of actions inspired by the dramatic

text, "as if" immersed within the life conditions of another individual. This other

individual, the dramatic character, does not pre-exist the actor as an ideal entity to be

"copied" or "imitated" in rehearsal and performance. Stanislavsky's actor does not strain

after the phantasmic original that mimeticist theories of acting of the eighteenth and

nineteenth centuries had successfully fabricated as a theoretical construct. Rather, the

other who is the character emerges from the sequence of "other" doings – carried out

within imagined circumstances "other" to his own lived experiences – done by the actor

as himself. Otherness arises out of a state of the actor's artistic subjectivity – a state that

Stanislavsky conceives as both authentically actual and liberatingly subjunctive – that

need not diminish the feeling of oneness with oneself. Stanislavsky thus lays down a

powerful challenge to mimeticist conceptions of the actor's art, which require that the actor bridge some ontological gap, or drag an ideal model down from a realm of imagination to the material world of the stage.

The fact that Stanislavsky attends to the subjective experience of the actor – rather than simply accommodating the figure of the actor within some larger aesthetic framework – is due in large part to his own lived experiences as a theatre practitioner. Stanislavsky did not write about acting from a philosophical remove. Stanislavsky was an actor before he was a director, teacher, or theorist of acting, and, when he writes, he writes as an actor, from the perspective of the actor's "I." At roughly the same time that phenomenology was being developed as a rigorous philosophical methodology,[122] Stanislavsky posits the "I" of the actor as the first principle of a philosophy of theatrical practice, one that injects a nuanced experiential dimension into acting theory's history of ideas. It may be true that, even before Stanislavsky's writings, the "I" of the stage performer had held a prominent place in the in the genre of the actor's memoir (*a là* Garrick, Talma, and Salvini, for example), but there the "I" appeared at the center of anecdote or as the source of authority behind prescriptive precepts. Stanislavsky, on the other hand, radically *subjectivizes* the theory of the actor by writing from within the first-person consciousness of the acting subject.

In addition to a practical system of actor training, then, Stanislavsky offers his reader a philosophy of acting built, in large part, out of the richly subjective insights of a practitioner. However, we cannot attribute Stanislavsky's philosophy of the acting subject entirely to his practical work in the theatre and the introspective delving this work

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[122] Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) was an almost exact contemporary of Stanislavsky. His major publications came in the first three decades of the twentieth century.

required. The conditions necessary for a theory of acting that emphasized the oneness of the acting subject to arise were set by new accounts of subjectivity in philosophy and aesthetics across the span of the nineteenth century. Russian aesthetics of this period were dominated by German thought, which forwarded Idealist philosophies grounded in the self-consciousness of the human subject and Romantic theories of art based in a conception of the artwork as a self-generative organism. At the same time, European thought was increasingly exposed to the philosophies of South and East Asia, through new translations of ancient texts and the rise of modern Orientalist studies, as well as through syncretic religio-spiritualist movements, many of which appropriated the monistic metaphysics of Eastern thought-systems. All of these factors conspired to break the hold of mimetic thinking – of thinking about art in terms of one-to-one correspondences – over European (and Russian) aesthetics.

Mimetic thinking, though shaken by Romanticism and Idealism, was not entirely banished from the philosophy of art. At times, the mimetic paradigm was displaced by the new emphasis on personal subjectivity, organic development, and monistic ontology. At others, it was transformed by them – nowhere more strikingly than in the account of how idea becomes image offered by Idealist aesthetics. In the aesthetics of Schelling and Hegel, the artistic idea manifests itself as a material image through a process of organic becoming, often likened to the growth of a plant or the birth of a human being, rather than through the process of model-to-copy duplication so often associated with the mimesis concept. In general terms, however, we can say that the conceptual schema of the one-to-one, which had sustained mimetic thinking about art since classical antiquity, gives way in the nineteenth century to a new paradigm of oneness – and of oneness being

born out of oneness. Stanislavsky's writings carry this paradigm into theatrical theory by repudiating imitation in both theory and practice – as a way of thinking about and a way of going about the art of acting – and by situating the "I" of the actor at the center of a subjectivized aesthetics of theatrical experience.

In this chapter, I will lay out the above argument in five sections. First, I will situate Stanislavskian thought in the context of Romantic and Idealist aesthetics – in particular, in relation to the transformative explication of German thought by the prolific Russian literary critic Vissarion Belinsky (1811-1848), who presented a model of artistic creativity emphasizing spontaneity, immediacy, and organic wholeness. These Romantic values clash with the imitative precision celebrated by eighteenth-century aesthetics. I will also show that Stanislavsky may have taken indirect inspiration – again, via Belinsky – from Hegel's conception of drama in forwarding a theory of the theatre as actualized action, rather than the imitation of action.

The second and third sections of the chapter examine Stanislavsky's complex engagement with mimetic thinking and imitative acting practice. Here I discuss Stanislavsky's rejection of the accounts of the actor's creative process offered up by Diderot's *Paradoxe* and the French actor Benoît-Constant Coquelin's *L'Art du comédien* (1894). I also discuss the young Stanislavsky's struggles to overcome imitation as a basis for the work of the actor, director, and acting teacher. I then draw connections between Stanislavskian thought and nineteenth-century Russian aesthetics by tracing two of the acting theorist's key terms to specific source texts by the poet Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837) and the novelist, essayist, and social reformer Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910). The terminological borrowings are well known to scholarship, but I will explore the broader

content of the source texts – in particular, Pushkin's and Tolstoy's questioning of the "imitation of nature" orthodoxy – in relation to Stanislavsky's vision of the theatre. I will show that while Stanislavsky generally forwards metaphors of genesis and synthesis against those of representation and reproduction he sometimes relies upon a transformed mimeticist vocabulary and preserves a positive role for mimicry in the actor's creative process.

In section four, I examine Stanislavsky's borrowing of the phrase "I am" (*Ia esm'*) from a series of books on Hindu philosophy by "Yogi Ramacharaka." I use the key phrase "I am" as a marker in tracing an evolving account of subjectivity that emerged from Idealist philosophy's encounter with Eastern thought-systems – an encounter that often took the form of chaotic synthesis within the pseudoreligious and occultist movements of nineteenth-century Europe and America. Here I allow Stanislavskian acting theory to speak back to the philosophical systems that nourished its genesis. I argue that Stanislavsky's emphasis on the *inter*-subjectivity of theatrical experience – on how, in the theatre, "I am" can become "I am another" – challenges the monistic reductiveness of philosophies that seek their ultimate grounding in the ego's experience of itself. Finally, I conclude the chapter by arguing that Stanislavsky's conception of "organic truth" speaks more directly to how a spectating consciousness actually engages with the otherness presented onstage than do the notions of "representation" and "verisimilitude" forwarded by mimeticist theories of the theatre.

To situate Stanislavskian thought in the context of philosophy and aesthetics is an undertaking that Stanislavsky himself might well have rejected. Stanislavsky explicitly

forswears philosophy in *An Actor's Work*[123]: "The 'system' is a reference book, not a philosophy. Where philosophy begins the 'system' ends" (Stanislavski 1949:294). Stanislavsky thought of himself as a man of action, not of words, and he often voices a disdain for abstract conceptualizing and a distrust of "learned words, essays, lectures, elaborate, fashionable theories" (AW 157). Stanislavsky's alter ego in *An Actor's Work* tells his students: "I am a practitioner and I can help you to understand, that is feel, the nature of artistic truth, but not in words, in action" (192). Despite Stanislavsky's refusal of philosophy, however, and despite his insistence that *An Actor's Work* is first and foremost a practical manual, I will argue that this "Bible" of twentieth-century acting practice is also the magnum opus of a philosophical oeuvre. Stanislavsky's writings on acting lay out an aesthetics of theatrical subjectivity that, though at times marred by inconsistency, rhetorical vagueness, and speculative overreaching, is dense enough with introspective insight, keen observation, and provocative conceptualization to qualify Stanislavsky as a theorist of the theatre of the first order.

The Actor as Organism, the Actor as Agent: Romantic and Idealist Influences on Stanislavsky

While Stanislavsky's possible debts to previous theatrical theory and scientific discourse

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[123] The Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood translation of *An Actor Prepares* was published in 1936. With Stanislavsky's tacit approval, Hapgood had made extensive cuts and alterations to the manuscript. Stanislavsky reworked his magnum opus and published a Russian version in 1938, under the title *Rabota aktera nad soboi* ["An Actor's Work on Himself"], though this version was heavily edited by Soviet censors. For a discussion of this tangled translation and publication history, see Carnicke 2009:76-109. In this chapter, I will quote from Jean Benedetti's recent translation (2008) of Stanislavsky's Russian version of *An Actor's Work*.

have been extensively catalogued,[124] English-language scholarship has only recently

turned toward the task of situating Stanislavskian theory in relation to philosophy and

aesthetics.[125] Stanislavsky himself looked back on his formative years as coinciding with

"a great upsurge in art, science, and aesthetics" made possible by the patronage of

Moscow's industrialist class, to which Stanislavsky, the son of a prosperous textile

manufacturer, belonged (MLIA 21). Though Stanislavsky received no formal education

in philosophy or aesthetics,[126] he moved within an elite circle of artists, writers, and

connoisseurs. Within this intellectual milieu, writes Rose Whyman, "Stanislavsky

inherited ideas from Russian artists of the nineteenth-century golden age of Russian

literature, such as Alexander Pushkin and Nikolai Gogol, and also the ideas of such

thinkers as Vissarion Belinsky and Nikolai Chernyshevsky, all of whom continued to be

acclaimed after the revolution" (Whyman 2008:2).   One chief factor behind the

blossoming of this literary "golden age" was the transformative impact on Russian

thought by German Romanticism and Idealism during the early to middle decades of the

nineteenth century. As Turgenev wrote, Russian intellectuals of the period plunged into

the "German sea" of ideas (in Hamburg 2010:53), eagerly devouring the latest

translations of works by Germany's leading figures in philosophy and aesthetics.

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[124] See Roach 1996:195-217, Pitches 2006, Carnicke 2009, Whyman 2008.

[125] Comprehensive works made possible by freer access to the Stanislavsky archives in Moscow like Sharon Marie Carnicke's *Stanislavsky in Focus* (1998, second edition 2009) and Rose Whyman's *The Stanislavsky System of Acting* (2008) have begun this important scholarly endeavor.

[126] Stanislavsky was instructed by private tutors until age thirteen, when his parents placed him in grammar school in order to obtain a dispensation from military service (see MLIA 25). Stanislavsky describes his lessons as consisting mostly of rote memorization of Greek and Latin grammar and summarizes his Moscow schooldays as a time of "hard prison labour which can only be recalled as a nightmare" (MLIA 29). Of his period of official schooling, he concludes: "I learned nothing" (27). Stanislavsky did not attend university.

Evidence of firsthand engagement by Stanislavsky with German philosophy is sparse.[127] For the most part, German Romanticism and Idealism – filtered, from the 1830s onward, through the works of Russian writers, thinkers, and artist whom Stanislavsky esteemed – seem to have exerted a contextual rather than intertextual influence on Stanislavsky (1863-1938) by infusing the climate of ideas within which his artistic sensibility was shaped. In addition, as Russia's "Golden Age" of arts and ideas turned toward silver in the 1890s, a Neo-Idealist revival in Russian philosophy rose in reaction against the prevailing winds of positivism and materialism. This renewal of Idealist thought coincided with Stanislavsky's period of "artistic youth" as a novice actor. It also overlapped with the burgeoning interest in spiritualism, Eastern philosophy, and the occult among the Russian cultural intelligentsia.[128] Over the following pages, I will attempt to evoke briefly this intellectual climate.

The acting teacher Torstov has gathered his students for a theoretical explication of their practical work. He poses the question, "What is the nature of acting as we understand it?" and answers himself: "It is the conception and birth of a new living being, the human being/role. That is a natural creative act, like human birth" (AW 344). Torstov goes on to develop an elaborate analogy between the "organic growth of a role" and the sequence of insemination, pregnancy, birth, and development of a human being

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[127] While preparing the Norwegian novelist and playwright Knut Hamsun's *The Drama of Life* for production in 1907, Stanislavsky's interpretation of the play drew upon Idealist notions of artistic creation, although only in the broadest terms: "the dreamer and philosopher Kareno [the play's protagonist, whom Stanislavsky played] personifies the transcendent dream, the idea" (MLIA 263). In September 1919 Stanislavsky read and took notes on I.A. Ilin's *The Philosophy of Hegel as Doctrine of the Concrete Nature of God and Man* while preparing the Moscow Art Theatre's production of Byron's closet drama *Cain* (see Benedetti 1988:240).

[128] See White 2006:76-77; see also *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture*, ed. Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

(AW 344). For Tortsov, "the birth of a living theatrical being (the role) is a normal act of the actor's own creative nature," and proceeds according to the same natural laws that determine the appearance of a "biological phenomenon" (AW 345). "The birth of a child, the growing of a tree are manifestations of a single order," argues Tortsov (AW 612). And so is the actor's work on a role: "The creative process of living and experiencing a part is an organic one, founded on the physical and spiritual laws governing the nature of man" (CR: 44).

Tortsov, of course, is Stanislavsky's undisguised *alter ego*. Over the several hundred pages of *An Actor's Work*, Tortsov – whose name was Tvorstov ("Creator") in an earlier version of Stanislavsky's magnum opus[129] – leads his charges toward an organicist conception of theatrical creativity. Over and over again, the development of a role – or, indeed, an actor's career-long "life in art" – is likened to the birth of a child or the growth of a plant, processes of gradual self-evolution driven by the immanent productivity of nature. Although organicism has roots in the classical world – especially in Neoplatonism – the Romantic era was the "great day" of the organicist paradigm in European thought (Orsini 1969:28-29). Organicist thinking was central to the aesthetics of the most prominent German Romantic poets and Idealist philosophers: Schiller, Herder, Novalis, Friedrich and August Wilhelm Schlegel, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. Stanislavsky's thoroughgoing organicism reveals a deep source in Romantic thought. The Romantic overtones in Stanislavsky's writings have often been commented upon; his reliance on organicist concepts has also been pointed out, but less often.[130]

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[129] See Whyman 2008:xvi.

[130] See, for example, Gordon 2006, Worthen 1983. Robert Gordon notes Stanislavsky's "Romantic assumptions about the organic process of artistic creation" that "privileged the

The central principle of aesthetic organicism describes the *structure* of a work of art, viewing it as a holistic totality, like a living entity, of which one part cannot be altered without altering the fundamental nature of the whole.[131] An expanded version of the organic concept incorporates two additional principles defining the *process* of artistic production: 1) that the development of the artwork proceeds from within itself (like a plant growing from a seed); and 2) that the physiology of the artist as a biological creature is essential to the creative act.[132] Perhaps the most influential early definition of aesthetic organicism came in A.W. Schlegel's lectures *On Dramatic Art and Literature* (delivered 1808, published 1809-11), which gave the aesthetic thought of Kant, Herder, Friedrich Schlegel, and Schelling an accessible synthesis and became "the chief vehicle for acquainting Western Europe, at first hand, with the new German aesthetics" (Abrams 1975:213):

> Form is mechanical when it is imparted to any material through an external force, merely as an accidental addition, without reference to its character… *Organic form, on the contrary, is innate; it unfolds itself from within, and reaches its determination simultaneously with the fullest development of the seed*… In the fine arts, just as in the province of nature – the supreme artist – all genuine forms are organic…. [emphasis added] (in Abrams 1975:213)

The organic paradigm arose in reaction, at least in part, against the mechanistic worldview posited by Descartes and Newton, and Schlegel's concise articulation of organicism's seed principle and his opposition between "organic" and "mechanical" form

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emotional identification of actor, character, and spectator in a process that conceived the character not as an artifact but as a living creature engendered from the artistic inspiration of both actor and playwright" (Gordon 2006:57-58).

[131] See Orsini 1969:3, Terras 1974:10.

[132] Literary critic M.H. Abrams has pointed out that Kant, whose own aesthetics are scarcely organicist, provided one of the bases of organic art theory with his conception of a natural organism "as immanently but unconsciously teleological, a 'self-organising being' which […] develops from the inside out" (Abrams 1975:208).

highlights this fact. The shift from mechanism toward organicism around the turn of the nineteenth century "revers[ed] the mechanical metaphor of Cartesian physiology and biologiz[ed] the world picture" (Roach 1993:163). "[A]esthetic organologists" (Abrams 1975:206) like A.W. Schlegel and Schelling steered this biologizing impulse into the realm of art theory in order to secure the Romantic values of spontaneity, immediacy, and vivacity.

Conceptualizing the work of art as an organism represents a significant departure from the long-prevailing aesthetic doctrine of the "imitation of nature." Pushed to its extreme, the organic paradigm, with its governing schema of biological integrality, directly opposes the mimetic schema of duplicative doubling. Organicist creation is *genesis,* the arising of oneness out of oneness. The organic work of art develops or evolves; it is not fabricated through the combination of elements or through processes of model-to-copy reproduction. Within German aesthetics of the Romantic period, in particular, the doctrine of art as the "imitation" (*Nachahmung*) of nature gave way to an "expressive" view of artistic creation closely bound up with an organicist understanding of history and culture.[133]

In order to understand the values of oneness, wholeness, and integral self-evolution forwarded by Romanticism and Idealism, we need to appreciate the inspiration these movements found in certain mystical strands of European philosophy and theology. If Plato presides over mimetic theories of art from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, the organicist and idealist aesthetics of the nineteenth century found similar classical patronage in the Neoplatonist philosopher and mystic Plotinus (c. 204-270

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[133] See Abrams 1975:184-225. According to Abrams, expressive aesthetics sees the artwork as a product of the outpouring of an artist's individual creative energies.

C.E.). Although Plotinus's magnum opus, the *Enneads*, had been available in the Latin

translation of Marsilio Ficino since the end of the fifteenth century, it was German

philosophy of the latter half of the eighteenth century that re-evaluated the writings of

Plotinus and his successors Porphyry and Proclus as genuine extensions rather than

corruptions of Platonic thought.[134] In addition, the "Jena Circle" of authors, critics, and

philosophers[135] re-engaged enthusiastically with the German mystical tradition, including

the works of Meister Eckhart (c. 1260-1327) and Jakob Böhme (c. 1575-1624), which

show a deep Neoplatonist influence,[136] and the writings of more recent figures, such as

the Pietist theologian Friedrich Christoph Oetinger (1702-1782) and the Swedish

theologian Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772).[137] Friedrich Schlegel, leader of the Jena

Circle, speculated that a mystical philosophy whose core belief was the unity between the

human individual and the divine absolute had been passed down across the centuries,

traveling from ancient India to classical Greece, blossoming in Plotinus's Neoplatonism,

entering Christianity at the time of Augustine, and reviving in the theology of Eckhart

and Böhme.[138]

We find in Plotinus's writings, then, one of the deep sources for Idealist

philosophy's basic conceptual structures: oneness, originary indifference, and the unity of

opposites. In the metaphysics of Plotinus, "the One," or "the Good," is the first principle

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[134] See Gatti 1996:23.

[135] Tieck, Novalis, Schleiermacher, and both Friedrich and August Wilhelm Schlegel were based in Jena during the first decade of the nineteenth century, when Fichte, Schelling and, later, Hegel held appointments at the town's university.

[136] See Mojsisch and Summerell 2011.

[137] For a discussion of the influence of Eckhart and Böhme on the German Romantics – particularly Schelling, Hegel, and the philosopher of religion Franz von Baader – see Benz 1983, Mayer 1999. For a dicussion of Hegel's debt to the German mystical tradition, see Magee 2008.

[138] See Mayer 1999:152.

of all ideal and material being, the source of the unity of everything in the universe.[139]

The One of Plotinus exists as "free self-productive activity" (Gatti 1996:28), from which

all modes of being emanate, including that of physical reality and the realm of immaterial

intellect, which contains the Neoplatonist "forms" or "ideas" (*eide*). In attempting to

describe the boundless self-production whose origin is the One, Plotinus relies on three

key analogies: the flow of water from a source, the growth of a plant from its seed or

root, and the radiation of light from the sun. These metaphors of radiation, flow, and

organic growth will all be resuscitated in Romantic thought.

   The Plotinian philosopher strives to attain union with the One's divinity. In the

final passages of the *Enneads*, Plotinus describes the mystical experience of transcendent

oneness with the One as the "achievement of unity" between "seen and seer," of

"beholder" with "beheld":

> In this seeing, we neither hold an object nor trace distinction; *there is no two*. The
> man is changed, no longer himself nor self-belonging; he is merged with the
> Supreme, sunken into it, one with it: centre coincides with centre […]. The man
> formed by this mingling with the Supreme […] is become the Unity. (Plotinus
> 1992:708).

In this description of mystical oneness, of being-at-the-center, of the collapse of

distinctions between the knowing-and-seeing subject and the object of knowledge or

perception, Plotinus provides the metaphysical inspiration for German Idealist

epistemology. As the rest of this chapter will show, Plotinus's description of subjective

oneness stands behind the "I am" of Stanislavsky's actor – although via a confused

network of influences, of which Stanislavsky himself was only partially aware.

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[139] The underlying monism of Plotinian thought owes a great deal to the rise of
Neopythagoreanism in the first and second centuries C.E., which identified the
mathematical concept of the monad with the supreme divine power.

Also important to Idealist philosophy is the place Plotinus gives to the visual arts

within his discussion of natural and man-made beauty. Unlike Plato's artist, who can

only fabricate imitations of the objects of perception, the Plotinian artist has direct access

to the ideal archetypes through the "inner form" (*endon eidos*)[140] in his mind's eye and

strives, as best he can, to render this form in a material medium. Plotinus therefore

argues against denigrating the arts on the basis of their mimetic ontology: "the arts are

not to be slighted on the ground that they create by imitation of natural objects; […] we

must recognize that they give no bare reproduction of the thing seen but go back to the

Reason-Principles [*logoi*] from which Nature itself derives" (Plotinus 1992:486). For

Plotinus, the *logos* ("reason-principle," or "forming principle," among other possible

translations) is an ideal entity that functions as a causative principle in the world of

physical existence, spontaneously generating the unity and organization of its natural

products. Plotinus, who saw himself as an explicator rather than a re-interpreter of Plato,

still regards the images of art as imitations, but they no longer the debased reflections of

objects in the world of sense (as in the *Republic*). The images of art are now imitations

of *ideal visions in the mind of the artist*, who is granted some intuitive access to the

higher reality beyond the visible. Furthermore, the Plotinian artist wields a productive

power akin to that of nature itself – the power to put forms into matter – when he shapes

the artwork in accordance with the *logos*. He is not limited to the bare reproduction of

visual appearances. Plotinus's more expansive conception (relative to Plato's) of the

artist's imaginative powers and access to the truth of ideal forms foreshadows Romantic

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[140] Erwin Panofsky notes that Plotinus's term *eidos* ("image," "shape," "form")
encompasses both "form" in Aristotle's sense and "Idea" in Plato's sense. For Plotinus,
Panofsky argues, "art has the sublime task of 'injecting' an *eidos* into resistant matter"
(see Panofsky 1968:28-29).

theories of creativity.[141]

Neoplatonist metaphysics provides Idealist philosophy with its fundamental

conceptual structures: the unity of the subjective and the objective, a oneness that

precedes distinctions, and the originary union of opposites. The philosophical systems of

Schelling and Hegel are marked by all of the above conceptual characteristics. The first

principle of Schelling's "identity philosophy" (*Identitätsphilosophie*) is the absolute

identity of ideality and reality, of spirit and nature, of subjectivity and objectivity, of the

universal and the particular, of the conscious and the unconscious, of freedom and

necessity. In Schelling's view, it is the task of philosophy to explicate this ultimate

identity, which unites subject and object, knower and known, in an "indifference"

(*Indifferenz*) that precedes division. In his early works, Schelling follows Fichte in

suggesting that the primordial self is the source of ultimate unity, but after the year 1800

he moves closer to a Plotinian position by increasingly associating the absolute with

God.[142] Schelling's first principle of absolute identity generates the unconscious

creativity of nature as well as the conscious activity of mankind and prefigures Hegel's

Geist ("Mind," "Spirit"): divine, self-thinking thought, which manifests itself in the

activity of the universe and reaches its highest form in the self-conscious subjectivity of

humankind. In other words, for Schelling and Hegel, divine consciousness exists *in* and

through humankind. Man is not "made in God's image"; rather, humankind itself is the

manifestation of the divine Spirit evolving toward unity with itself out of the unconscious

medium of nature.

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[141] For a broad discussion of the Plotinian foundation of the Idealist understanding of art, see John Hendrix's *Aesthetics and The Philosophy Of Spirit: From Plotinus to Schelling and Hegel* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005).
[142] For a discussion of Schelling's engagement with Neoplatonism, see Mayer

Both Schelling and Hegel accord art an unprecedented place in their philosophical

systems as a medium through which subjectivity can be objectified to itself. For

Schelling, art can present sensuously and concretely truths that philosophy can only

render in the abstractions of language.[143] The work of art achieves a merger of the ideal

and the real, the subjective and the objective, the universal and the particular, and the

abstract and the concrete. Hegel's conception of art as "the sensuous presentation of the

Absolute itself" (Hegel 1975:70) accords almost precisely with Schelling's. In art, Hegel

argues, the Idea (*Idee*) is actualized, manifested, and objectified in sensuously concrete

form, and the beautiful is therefore understood as "the pure appearance of the Idea to

sense" (111). In the process of artistic production, the "sensuous aspect of art is

spiritualized" and its spiritual aspect "made sensuous" (39). Because of this

simultaneous and reciprocal process, art makes possible "an immediate and therefore

sensuous knowing […] in which the Absolute is presented to contemplation and feeling"

(101). Hegel repudiates "the formal aim of *mere* imitation" in artistic practice, which

produces coldly technical products carrying only "the pretence of life" (42). Lacking any

ideal content, the results of "purely mechanical imitation" can only be evaluated on the

basis of their "correctness" – that is, their formal resemblance to the imitated object (44-

45). Genuine artistic production, on the other hand, enacts the basic processual

movement of Hegelian philosophy – that of teleological self-becoming – as the Idea,

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[143] In a passage that borrows from Plotinus's conception of the *logos* (as what – the animating force behind material being), Schelling writes: "Just as reason becomes immediately objective only through the organism, and the eternal ideas of reason become objective in nature as the souls of organic bodies, so also does philosophy become objective through art, and the ideas of philosophy become objective through art as the souls of real things" (Schelling 1989:30). Thus, Schelling famously asserts in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, art can function as the "organ of philosophy."

which "carries within itself the principle of its mode of appearance" (75), expresses itself as objective form.

An examination of Idealist aesthetics confirms classicist Stephen Halliwell's claim that "at least some forms of romanticism and its aftermath mark a renegotiated or redefined mimeticism, rather than a clean break with the traditions of mimetic thought" (Halliwell 2002:365). Taken together, Schelling's frequent and varied usages of the German word *Bild* ("image," "form," "shape") constitute a particularly rich field for examining this transformed mimeticism. Schelling understands the imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) as "the power of mutually informing into unity [*Ineinsbildung*]" (Schelling 1989:32), so that the artist's creative imagination is able to infuse the ideal and universal into the real and particular, producing a reflected image (*Gegenbild*) in the form of an artwork in the same way that God creates an archetype (*Urbild*).[144] Moreover, Schelling sometimes refers to the living organism an immediate image [*Abbild*] of nature,[145] revealing his view that artistic creativity and natural productivity are essentially one in their processual movement. Within the Schellengian (and broader Idealist) conception of art, the artistic image does not exist at a "three-stage regress" (Abrams 1971:8) from the ideal archetype, across the ontological gaps produced by a static model-and-copy schema. Rather, the divine idea *in-forms* itself into concrete manifestation in the artistic work. The Idealist idea is a source or a seed, which produces its material manifestations through a process of emanation or becoming. For both Schelling and Hegel, art dynamically expresses the ideal in the substance of the real (an impossibility in

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[144] See Douglas W. Stott's discussion of Schelling's use of *Bild* terminology in Schelling 1989:xliii.
[145] See Matthews 2011:188.

Plato's metaphysics), so that art's productions cannot be confined within a degraded ontology of reflection.

Having made a necessarily brief survey of the Idealist aesthetics of Plotinus, Schelling, and Hegel, we are now ready to turn to their impact on the art criticism of Vissarion Belinsky, whose prolific writings dominated Russian aesthetic discourse during the nineteenth century and continued to exert an influence even after the Revolution. Stanislavsky refers to Belinsky a number of times in his writings, though he never explicitly engages with the critic's key positions, and Jean Benedetti and Rose Whyman argue that Belinsky exerted a significant influence on Stanislavsky's aesthetic notions and ethical ideals.[146] Belinsky was himself influenced in turn by Kant, Herder, and Schiller, and, during the 1830s, his literary production was fueled by successive enthusiasms for the philosophy of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. It was during his Schellingian period (the mid-1830s) and his Hegelian period (the late 1830s), however, that Belinsky's aesthetic thought crystallized. As the scholar of Slavic literature Victor Terras notes, Belinsky was hardly the first to introduce Idealism and organicism to Russian intellectual circles, but he was the primary proselytizer in spreading this complex of aesthetic notions to subsequent generations of writers and thinkers.[147]

"The Idea of Art" (1841), Belinsky's most generally argued aesthetic treatise, develops a broad Schellingian-Hegelian framework. Indeed, much of the essay functions as a primer in the basics of Idealist art theory, with lengthy sections appropriated wholesale from the Hegelian H.T. Rötscher's "On the Philosophic Criticism of a Work of

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[146] See Benedetti 1988:36-37, Whyman 2008:15-16, 26, 259.
[147] See Terras 1974:22.

Art."[148] The universal idea, Belinsky explains, is divine thought, which manifests itself

within the material forms of nature. Ideas can therefore be called the "mothers of life, its

substantial force and essence, the inexhaustible reservoir from which the waves of life

flow incessantly" (Belinsky 2001:185). Divine ideas become "embodied in form" as

their potentiality transforms into actuality (185). The concrete form that the idea takes in

physical matter "is not anything external to itself but the form of its development, of its

own essence" (183). Belinsky deploys the Idealist keyword "immanence" – along with

the organicist seed metaphor – in order to clarify the relationship between the idea and its

material manifestation:

> The evolution of the idea out of itself or from within itself is, in the language of
> philosophy, called *immanent*. The absence of all external auxiliary modes and
> impulses that experience might provide is a condition of immanent evolution; the
> vital essence of the idea itself contains the organic power of immanent evolution –
> as the vital grain contains within itself the potentiality of its growth into a plant
> […]. (170).

"Immanent evolution" describes the emergence of oneness out of oneness, without the

influence of external stimuli or the intervention of some orchestrating consciousness.

Ideality becomes materiality as waves flow from a source, or as a plant grows from a

seed.

"The Idea of Art" also puts forward Belinsky's oft-repeated maxim, "Art is the

immediate contemplation of truth, or a thinking in *images*" (168). This formulation can

be traced back to A.W. Schlegel[149] and is echoed in Schelling's and Hegel's conception

of art as the "sensuous appearance of the idea." Belinsky elaborates upon his central

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[148] Sections of Rötscher's essay appeared in Russian translation in *The Moscow Observer*
in May and June of 1838. Victor Terras calls Rötscher a "right-wing Hegelian" with
Neoplatonist leanings (see Terras 1974:45, 130, note 8).
[149] See Terras 1974:81.

maxim as well as his understanding of the artistic image in his essay "Woe from Wit,"
also written in 1841:

> The truth was revealed to mankind first of all in *Art*, which is *truth made sensible*
> […], that is, truth expressed not in an abstract idea but in an image [*obraz*], and
> moreover, in an image which is not a conventional symbol […], but an *idea-
> turned-flesh*, a full, organic, and immediate manifestation [of the idea] in the
> beauty of its form, with which it is fused as inseparably as the soul is with the
> body. (in Terras 1974:80)

This is Belinsky's central conception of the work of art, derived derived from Schelling
and Hegel: an "idea" (*ideia*) concretely objectified as an "artistic image" (*xudozestvennii
obraz*). The Russian word *obraz* functions similarly to the German *Bild*, carrying a
number of overlapping meanings: "form," "image," "shape," "structure," and
"picture."[150] Again, Belinsky's artistic *obraz* is not a mimetic copy of perceptual (or
even ideal) reality; it is an idea-*turned*-flesh, an ideal entity *become* material reality
without losing its essential ideality. The artistic image is a concrete "fusion of idea and
form."[151] As in Schelling and Hegel, artistic creativity is likened to natural productivity,
and the work of art comes into being in a fashion akin to a living entity. Like the
universe, the forces that move through it, and the organisms that populate it, the work of
art is "born from within itself" (Belinsky 2001:183); it is not created at a distance from
and in comparative relationship with an external model.

Belinsky's conception of the artist's creative process is a quintessentially
Romantic one, emphasizing inspiration and intuition over rational design. In this
connection, Belinsky makes liberal use of the Schellingian and Hegelian keyword
"immediacy" (in Russian, *neprosredstvennost*), which he defines in "The Idea of Art": "It

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[150] See Terras 1974:127, 137.
[151] The quotation is from Belinsky's 1838 review of Nikolai Polevoi's *Ugolino* (in Terras
1974: 139).

signifies both Being and action proceeding from within itself without the intervention of any medium" (176). According to Belinsky, an immediate action must be prompted by "an inspired impulse in which all the forces of man merge into one, in which his physical nature permeates his spiritual essence, which, in turn, illuminates his physical nature, rational action becomes an instinctive movement, and vice versa, thought becomes a fact" (178). Here we have a characteristically Idealist conception of a reciprocal process in which seemingly opposite principles suffuse one another.

Belinsky advances his discussion of immediacy and its outcome – total, spontaneous organization of form – by establishing two key oppositions: organism versus mechanism and nature versus craft. He writes:

> A condition of immediacy of every phenomenon is the élan of inspiration; the result of immediacy of every phenomenon is organization. Only that which is inspired can appear immediately, only that which appears immediately can be organic, and only the organic can be vital. Organism and mechanism, or nature and craft, are two antagonistic worlds. (Belinsky 2001:180)

Belinsky contrasts the "élan of inspiration," which gives rise to spontaneously and organically organized phenomena, with the "excogitation," "calculation," and "judgment" that accompany "craft" (180). He counterposes a human craftsman's invention of a mechanical clock, which requires the copious expenditure of rational energy and series of refinements in its design, with the natural growth of a flower, which achieves perfect symmetry, proportion, and function with "no labour, excogitation, or calculation whatever" (182). Elsewhere, Belinsky makes a distinction between artistic works that are "created" (or "born") and those that are "made" (181), and between "productions creative and productions mechanical" (180). Mechanical productions are constructed through rational, conscious design, or "invention"; creative productions arise

spontaneously and fully organized, through a process of "revelation" (180). Belinsky pushes his discourse on the "power" of nature and the "impotence" of "craft" still further, taking the example of a craftsman who attempts to copy the beauty of a rose by sewing together an artificial flower "from tissues dyed to imitate the colours of nature." Held up in comparison with an actual rose, the artificial flower appears as a "lifeless counterfeit," a "cold and motionless corpse" (182).[152]

At this point, a number of connections can be made between Belinsky's aesthetics and Stanislavsky's conception of theatrical art. Like Belinsky, Stanislavsky opposes genuine artistic activity against emptily formalistic "craft" or "craftsmanship" (*remeslo*). In theatrical practice, "craft" consists in assembling a sequence of time-worn theatrical clichés – for example, "'tearing' at one's heart in moments of despair, shaking one's fists in fury, or wringing one's hands in supplication" (AW 30). The craftsperson-actor rationally and deliberately constructs a crudely semiotic performance, rather than cultivating a genuine "creative mood" (331), which would allow free, impulsive, and *immediate* playing. Stanislavsky, like Belinsky, frequently uses the pejorative adjective "mechanical" – in Stanislavsky's case, to designate the purely physical, muscularly habituated repetition of a sequence of movements.

Stanislavsky presents his own version of Belinsky's "artificial flower" example as he contrasts the organic creative process of his school of acting with the imitative, "mechanical" approach. Stanislavsky's alter ego Tortsov warns his students that trying to

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[152] Belinsky's revelatory conception of the artist's creative process is essentially Romantic, but it also hearkens back to that of Plotinus: the artist's wisdom, writes Plotinus, like the wisdom of Nature, "is not a wisdom built up of theorems but one totality, not a wisdom consisting of manifold detail co-ordinated into a unity but rather a unity working out into detail" (Plotinus 1992:490).

re-create a successful moment of emotional experiencing by aiming at the final result, by

taking a "direct route to the feeling itself," is "the same as trying to create a flower

without the help of nature. That's impossible, and so there is nothing to do but substitute

a prop flower" (218). Tortsov tells his charges: "You have to be the gardener, so to

speak, of your own heart, one who know what grows from which seeds" (226), and offers

the advice: "[D]on't think about the flower itself but water its roots" (218).[153] The

tending of a flower is a radically different model of the creative process from those

presented by mimetic theories of acting. Using Diderot's conception of the artist's

process to push the analogy further, the artist as mimetic fabricator would first visualize

the flower's image, fully formed in the world of imagination, and then make a material

copy of this *modèle idéal*. The artist-as-gardener, on the other hand, does not attempt to

shape the flower toward a visualized model or end-state. She has no control over its

precise form of manifestation; she can only create favorable conditions for its growth,

which proceeds because of the flower's own biological impetus. In the same way,

Stanislavsky's actor does not construct a role from the perspective of external form;

rather, she attempts to set the right psychological and physical conditions for unconscious

creativity to arise.

Stanislavsky also holds a Belinskian position on the unrivalled status of natural

creativity: he calls nature "the supreme artist" (114) and states that "[t]he most perfect

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[153] Stanislavsky uses the keyword "seed" (*zerno*) in a number of connections: the "essential meaning of a [dramatic] work" is the "seed from which it springs" (MLIA 350); the director's task is to "sow new seeds" in the imagination of the actor (AW 79); "the germ, the seeds of almost all human virtues and vices" lie within every actor" (AW 210). Perhaps most revealing of the significance of the seed-metaphor's place in Stanislavskian thought comes in an injunction to his students at the Bolshoi Opera Studio: "[Y]ou must live in the germ of your part as though the germ of your soul" (SAS: 204).

technique cannot compare with the unattainable, unachievably subtle art of nature itself"

(201). However, the "Nature" of Idealist philosophy is not an entity that stands outside

the human subject; the individual is part of the ongoing movements of the divinely

inspirited cosmos. Within a strictly mimetic understanding of art, holding nature as

supreme and without rival would doom the artist to the production of inferior copies, but,

within the Idealist conception of artistic activity, natural productivity can flow through

the organism of the artist. When Stanislavsky demands that the actor follow the "organic

laws" of creativity – "to study how we are consciously to arouse our unconscious,

creative nature for superconscious, biological creation" (MLIA 348) – he means that the

actor must train his psycho-physical organism until it becomes as immediately expressive

as an unconstrained process of natural genesis. Entering the "creative mood," the

Stanislavsky's actor plays freely and impulsively, achieving a Belinskian immediacy of

action, within which "his physical nature permeates his spiritual essence," "rational

action becomes an instinctive movement," and "thought becomes a fact."

Furthermore, the central principle of Stanislavskian thought – that acting is

action, rather than the presentation of passion-states or the portrayal of character – may

take inspiration from Belinksy's writings on the theatre, which derive directly from

Schelling's and Hegel's discussions of dramatic art. Belinsky's unfinished essay, "The

Classification of Literature into Genera and Species" (1841), follows Schelling and Hegel

by anointing drama as "the highest stage of development in poetry and the crowning

glory of art" (Belinsky 1981:65), the medium in which self-conscious subjectivity most

successfully objectifies itself to itself. In drama, writes Belinsky, "the presence of the

Self […] emerges and itself becomes an object of contemplation within the objective and

actual world [...]. Drama does not admit of any lyrical effusions; the characters must express themselves in action" (60). In other words, the substance of drama is objectified subjectivity, and the medium of that objectification is action: the self is actualized as an agent, whose "vital action" (70) brings it into conflict with other agents and drives the evolution of the drama.

Belinsky's emphases on drama's generic identity (against epic and lyric), on its requisite teleological unity, and on *pathos* as the animating force of tragic character are all directly appropriated from Hegel's lectures on aesthetics, which themselves expand upon Schelling's analysis of drama in *The Philosophy of Art* (1802-03). Hegel's discussion of dramatic poetry is most remarkable in that it wholeheartedly preserves the *Poetics*' emphasis on teleological action while stripping away entirely the vocabulary of imitation that had dogged theatrical theory since the Renaissance rediscovery of Aristotle. Hegel accords with Schelling in emphasizing the *actuality* of dramatic presentation, which "displays a complete action as actually taking place before our eyes" (Hegel 1975:1158).[154] Drama, Hegel asserts, brings before us "a happening, a deed, an action" (1160), which comprises the strivings and collisions of its main characters, each of whom embodies a different *pathos* (for Hegel, a driving principle of subjective freedom). Unlike epic, in which objective events predominate, and lyric, which dwells upon the inner life of the individual subject, drama deals in the externalized realization of subjective aims:

> [I]n drama a specific attitude of mind passes into an impulse, next into its willed actualization, and then into an action; it externalizes and objectifies itself [...]. In

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[154] In the *Philosophy of Art*, Schelling describes drama as "action actually presented," which unites the freedom of subjectivity with the necessity of objectivity (see Schelling 1989:250).

> this way alone does the action appear an *action*, as the actual execution of inner intentions and aims. (1161)

It is clear here that Hegel uses the term action not only as a dramaturgical principle, but as something done (*an* action) by a dramatic hero. Rather than recapitulating the Aristotelian (and Platonic) formula of drama as the mimesis of action, Hegel argues that the essence of drama lies in the *actualization* of subjective intention and emotion *as action*. Within such a theory of the theatre, the actor – the one who acts, the one who carries out actions – can take a more central role.

Unlike Aristotle's *Poetics*, which clearly stands in the background of Hegelian dramatic theory, Hegel's lectures on aesthetics emphasize the aspect of "scenic production," which "give[s] real life to the whole work of art" by realizing "the action in the entirety of its mental and physical actuality" (1158). The public is confronted with a "living actuality of situations, circumstances, characters, and actions" (1177). This living actuality is, of course, embodied by human performers:

> The properly perceptible material of dramatic poetry […] is not merely the human voice and the spoken word but the whole man who does not merely express feelings, ideas, and thoughts, but is involved with his whole being in a concrete action […]. (1182).

This "whole man," spiritually immersed in vigorous action, is the actor-as-character. It would be wrong, however, to try to extrapolate from Hegel's rather cursory comments on acting a comprehensively worked out Idealist vision of the actor. Hegel's primary interest lies in drama as a poetic genre, not in the practice of acting. However, in his action-based, non-mimetic account of theatrical presentation, in his understanding of action as teleologically intentional, and in his view that drama unifies the subjective and the objective, the universal the particular, and the spiritual and the physical, Hegel in

many ways prefigures Stanislavsky's post-Romantic conception of acting, whose central aim is the "incarnation" or "embodiment" (*voploshchenie*) of the "life of the human spirit" (*zhizn' chelovecheskogo dukha*) in physical form, and not the portrayal of successive passion-states or the imitation of an ideal type.

The claim that Stanislavsky's paradigm of acting-as-action might derive, at least in part, from the enduring influence of Idealist philosophy on Russian thought is tempting to explore. Doing so, however, requires some clarification of Stanislavsky's keyword "action" (*deistvie*). "Action" for Stanislavsky is goal-oriented intention carried out by a subject upon an object; it is the mental-and-physical striving to effect some change in another entity. Action is "psycho-physical": the mind, soul, and body are together engaged in action's dynamically teleological striving. As Stanislavsky writes: "In every physical action there's something psychological, and there is something physical in every psychological action" (AW 180). Action can manifest itself in the most "precise, accessible, concrete, physical actions" (512) – such as counting money, lighting a fire, or searching for a brooch – but also in silent, motionless, "inner action" (180), which moves dynamically through the actor's psyche but reveals itself to the external eye in only the subtlest physical symptoms. It is possible to specify a character's action in a particular moment in a play by choosing for it a transitive verb – "I want to be near him," "I want to hold her to me" (150-51) – but, ultimately, human actions possess a degree of psycho-physiological complexity that language cannot capture. Verbs are preferable to nouns in specifying a character's tasks because "a noun is a representation, it expresses a certain state, an image, a simple occurrence," and defining objectives with nouns invites an actor "to play the image" rather than engaging in dynamic action (149).

It is impossible to "imitate" genuine action in Stanislavsky's sense; one can only

do actions. As soon as the actor enters a "stagey," "representational" mode of

consciousness – that is, when she "play[s] the image" of a character or an emotion rather

than engaging in "genuine, productive, fit for purpose action" (149) – action ceases to be

action and becomes activity, movement, gesture, lacking an intentional impetus within

the dramatic situation. The actor must not monitor the way in which the action is

unfolding, but rather place her concentration on the *object* of the action – usually, another

actor, but sometimes the self, a physical object, or an imaginary focus. Holding the

attention on this external object – rather than on the audience – fosters an immersive

mode of concentration, so that the Stanislavskian actor achieves a "reality of doing"[155]

within the subjunctive circumstances established by the dramatic fiction. In other words,

Stanislavsky's actor-in-action is capable of bringing into the theatre the elemental units of

social behavior – the *pragmata* that make up human life – without their being

ontologically transformed into "imitations" or "representations" of themselves.

A lengthy passage in *Creating a Role* provides the clearest articulation of

Stanislavsky's conviction that "[t]he art of the actor is the art of inner and outer action"

(AW 582):

> Life is action; that is why our lively art, which stems from life, is
> preponderantly active. […]
> '[A]ction' is not the same as 'miming,' it is not anything that the actor is
> pretending to present, not something external, but rather something internal,
> nonphysical, a *spiritual activity*. […]
> Scenic action is the movement from the soul to the body, from the center
> to the periphery, from the internal to the external, from the thing an actor feels to
> its physical form. [emphasis in original] (CR 48-49)

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[155] I borrow this apt phrase from David Z. Saltz, who borrows it from Sanford Meisner, in
his "The Reality of Doing: Real Speech Acts in the Theatre," in *Method Acting
Reconsidered*, ed. David Krasner (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002).

For Stanislavsky, then, action is not a dramaturgical concept, but a principle of life imported into theatrical circumstances. A similar, though shorter, passage defines action in *An Actor's Work*: "Acting is action. The basis of theatre is *doing, dynamism*. The word 'drama' itself in Ancient Greek means 'an action being performed.' […] So, drama is an action we can see being performed, and, when he comes on, the actor becomes an agent in that action" (AW 40). Here Stanislavsky seems to be directly referencing Aristotle's etymological speculation in the *Poetics*: that both tragedy and comedy "portray people in action," and "it is because of this that some people derive the term drama from the enactive mimesis of agents [*drontas*]" (Aristotle 1987:32-3). Stanislavsky's muted references to the *Poetics* in the passages cited above show that he is deliberately applying a fundamentally Aristotelian, teleological conception of action not to dramatic literature but to the actor's art.

Francis Fergusson astutely compares Stanislavskian action with the classicist S.H. Butcher's interpretation of Aristotelian *praxis*: as a "psychical energy working outwards" (in Aristotle 1951:123), or, in Fergusson's own rephrasing, as "the movement of the psyche toward the object of its desire" (Fergusson 1966:87). Fergusson numbers among several scholars who have tentatively proposed an Aristotle-Stanislavsky connection,[156] and a direct influence is certainly possible.[157] However, we should also consider another possibility: that Stanislavsky re-viewed Aristotle, at least in part, through the lens of

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[156] Stanislavsky scholars have recently suggested an affinity between Stanislavskian *deistvie* and Aristotelian *praxis* include Jonathan Pitches and Natalie Crohn Schmitt (see Crohn Schmitt 1990:95-7, Pitches 2006:11-3).

[157] A new Russian translation of the *Poetics of Aristotle* with commentary by B. Ordynsky appeared in 1854 and was prominently reviewed by Chernyshevsky in the literary magazine *Otechestvenniye Zapiski* ("Notes of the Fatherland").

Idealist dramatic theory, which strips away the mimetic aspect of Aristotle's formula, "the imitation of action," and emphasizes the actuality of scenic action. Idealist philosophy transformed the action concept, rendering it subjective, teleological, and processual, like all productive forces within a universe evolving itself from within. Hegel's contention that in drama "a specific attitude of mind passes into an impulse, next into its willed actualization," so that the action of a drama manifests itself as "an *action*, as the actual execution of inner intentions and aims," could be mistaken as being directly excerpted from Stanislavsky's *An Actor's Work*. Whatever the pathway of influence, Stanislavsky shares with Belinsky and his German influences a conception of dramatic action grounded in the impulse and intention of the actor-as-agent and, as we shall see in the following pages, wields it against mimetic theory's longstanding view of the actor-as-imitator.

Mimesis, Genesis, Indifference

Anti-mimetic rhetoric makes up an important strand of Stanislavsky's philosophy of acting. He defines his own "art of experiencing" against two spiritually impoverished modes of theatrical practice: the school of "craft," which, as already stated, constructs a role out of ready-made conventions, and the school of "representation" (*predstavlenie*) which sculpts emotional experience into an externally repeatable form.[158] "Craft" relies entirely upon "mimicry, copying, imitation" (AW 25), which Stanislavsky regards as being aimed directly – and illegitimately – at external form. The "mechanical" approach

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[158] Stanislavsky himself emphasized that these three "schools" of the actor's art could be separated only in theory and that, within any given performance, moments of "craft" and "representation" mix with those of genuine "experiencing" (see AW 35).

of craftsperson-actors requires them to "always have to begin from the end, that is from a bodily imitation of the outward results of feeling" (Stanislavsky 1984:152). Such actors never set the right conditions for the "seed" of the role to grow with organic unpredictability. Actors working within the "art of representation," on the other hand, convert once-felt emotion into a dependably repeatable, externally physical "scenic form of the role," which "illustrates," "explains," and "demonstrates" (rather than actualizes) the "life of the human spirit" (161). Stanislavsky formulates his condemnation of the "art of representation" in thoroughly mimeticist terms: this approach "shows the spectator not the original itself (created earlier in privacy), but merely a portrait of this original" (158).

Stanislavsky defined his "art of experiencing" against the mimeticist conceptions of the actor's creative process in two precursor texts of acting theory: Diderot's *Paradoxe* and the French actor Benoît-Constant Coquelin's *L'Art du comédien* (1894).[159] For the instigator of a grand practical-theoretical reform project like Stanislavsky's, it can come as a source of tremendous exhilaration to find a set of values and practices radically contrary to one's own neatly codified in a single text. This allows the reformer to dispute an opposing paradigm with great rhetorical economy. Brecht would later put Stanislavsky to such use, and it was to such use that Stanislavsky put "Coquelin's little book" (Stanislavski 2008:25), which forcefully renewed the mimetic paradigm within acting theory and recapitulated Diderot's position on the actor's need for emotionless

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[159] Stanislavsky made a study of historical acting theory – including treatises by the Riccobonis, Diderot, the French actor François Talma, and the German actors August Wilhelm Iffland and Konrad Ekhof – during the summer of 1914, while vacationing at Marienbad, Germany (see Magarshack 1986:335-37).

composure.[160]

L'Art du comédien opens with an attempt to define acting through the longstanding analogy between the theatrical and visual arts. Coquelin writes: "the actor's medium is – himself. His own face, his body, his life is the material of his art; the thing he works and moulds to draw out from it his creation" (Coquelin 1954:25). Coquelin argues that the chief characteristic of the actor's creative process is its "dualism": the mental-spiritual aspect of the actor's being fixes upon the "model" provided by the author (the dramatic character) and instantiates its "likeness" in his physical being. "[L]ike the painter," writes Coquelin, the actor "realises every feature [of his 'model'] and fixes the likeness not on canvas, but himself" (25-6). Furthering the artist-material analogy, Coquelin posits that "two beings […] co-exist within the mind of the actor" (28): "Number One," which is the "master," the "soul," the "seer," and "Number Two," which is the "slave," the "body," the "instrument," the "executant" of the master's directives (54). Coquelin alienates the actor from his organism, splitting the actor's organic unity into a dualistic relationship of mind-to-body, of "One"-to-"Two." Within Coquelin's radically dualistic scheme, the conscious mind always operates with complete control over bodily expression. (Indeed, Coquelin's is one of acting theory's fantasies of total control, along with that of Diderot's Paradoxe and Edward Gordon Craig's essay on the

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[160] Coquelin's work was an expansion of an earlier treatise, L'Art et le comédien (1880). Stanislavsky's personal notes on the later, more extensive treatise are now housed in the Moscow Art Theatre archives (see Whyman 2008:48). Coquelin's second treatise functioned as a position paper in a celebrated international debate on the nature of the actor's emotion, re-energized by the translation into English of Diderot's Paradoxe in 1883. Contributions to the debate from Henry Irving and Dion Boucicault prompted replies by Coquelin as well as William Archer's more searchingly penetrative Masks or Faces? (1888).

"Über-marionette"). Echoing Diderot, whose authority he invokes,[161] Coquelin

emphatically concludes that there is no place for powerfully genuine emotions on the

stage: "[T]he actor must always remain master of himself […]; he must see what he is

doing, judge himself, and retain his self-possession. […] Art, I repeat it, is not

identification but representation" (59). Hence the name of Stanislavsky's second

"school" or "trend" of acting practice: the "art of representation."

Coquelin conflates of the operations of the mind with the faculty of sight – a

hallmark of mimetic thinking since Plato. He also defines theatrical art as the "creation

of living types" (63) – a clear invocation of Diderot's ideal *type*, and, perhaps

unwittingly, Plato's *typos*. After this incursion into mimetic thinking, it is not surprising

that the scenario of the actor at the mirror arises prominently within *L'art du comédien*'s

early pages. This occurs when Coquelin describes the creative process of the nineteenth-

century actor François-Louis Lesueur, his chosen exemplar of diligence and creativity in

the art of "reproduction":

> He retired into a kind of 'dark-room' with closed and curtained windows
> surrounded by his paints, his wigs, all the tools of his trade; there, along, but
> artificial light in front of his mirrors he worked at his facial make-up; making for
> himself twenty-hundred different exteriors before arriving at the real thing he
> required; the one that satisfied his own mind and convinced him of its truth.
> When finally, with a last stroke of the pencil, he completed the likeness (he would
> spend hours on a single wrinkle) the result was marvellous. (32)

While Diderot mentions only in passing that his insensible actor studies his part in front

of a mirror, Coquelin puts the actor's faceoff with the reflected image at the heart of his

creative process. The mirror allows Coquelin's Lesueur to see himself outside himself, to

work upon the image of the self as an object-at-a-distance. Lesueur is for Coquelin what

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[161] See Coquelin 1954:68.

Clairon was for Diderot: a celebrated actor whose creative process could be forcefully imagined in terms of the theoretical model being articulated. The scenario of Lesueur at the mirror allows Coquelin to propose what Clairon in reverie, her *modèle idéal* hovering in her mind's eye, enabled Diderot to maintain: a theory of the actor's creation-at-a-distance, or creation across a mimetic gap, despite the fact of being and having a body.[162]

Both Coquelin and Diderot confine the actor to a relationship with some external model, reflected image, or imagined figure that exists outside and at a distance from his or her being. Clairon and Lesueur must therefore bridge an ontological divide as they strive to shape themselves into increasingly perfect copies of the original types they are required to represent. Diderot's is the most conceptually perfect (though still internally inconsistent) mimetic theory of acting ever produced, and Coquelin achieved an anachronistic renewal of the one-to-one schema at its core, long after the dominance of the "imitation of nature" as an aesthetic doctrine had been broken by Romantic thought. Stanislavsky's philosophy of acting radically undermines long-enduring mimetic theories of the theatre, which divide the actor against himself and situate performer and character at opposite poles of the one-to-one schema. Stanislavsky, on the other hand, places the actor at the center – at the center of the fictional circumstances, at the center of the theatre event, at the center of the circulation of energies between stage and auditorium. However, Stanislavsky's repudiation of the imitative techniques of "craft" and "representation" is not merely, or even primarily, a *theoretical* one. It is thoroughly

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[162] In his earlier *L'Art et le comédien* (1880), Coquelin also labors to establish a theoretical and affective distance between actor and character: the self-composure of the actor allows him "to assimilate [the] character, to dissect and analyze it at will, without ceasing to be for an instant distinctly himself, as separate a thing as the painter and his canvas" (Coquelin 1958:26-7).

practical in its intent and based in personal insights. Stanislavsky's understanding of –

and antipathy for – imitative acting was shaped by his own artistic struggles. Though

"Tortsov" describes "craft" and "representation" as rival "schools" of theatrical practice,

a reading of *My Life in Art* makes clear that Stanislavsky's understanding of these

approaches derives from his own youthful failures as an actor without a "system."

In the "Artistic Childhood" and "Artistic Adolescence" sections of *My Life in Art*,

the young Stanislavsky struggles to break free of the impulse to mimic the mannerisms of

celebrated performers, to strive to be an "exact copy" of his acting hero of the moment

(MLIA 36). This meant that the hero-worshipping Stanislavsky was limited to

"repeat[ing] something that had already been done and blindly copy[ing] the original"

(36).[163] Like Lesueur in his "dark-room," the young Stanislavsky spent days practicing

in front of a mirror in the dim hallway of his family's empty town house, while the rest of

its inhabitants were away in the country for the summer of 1884.[164] When actually

performing, confesses Stanislavsky, "I did not concentrate on what was happening

onstage at any given moment but on what was happening on stages elsewhere whence I

took my models" (MLIA 79). What mode of consciousness is actually being described

here? A kind of half-reverie, perhaps, in which schematic flashes of recalled

performances flash up before the "mind's eye" as the performer consciously attempts to

direct the modulations of his voice, the movements of his body, and the expressions of

his face into approximate correspondence with his absent model. Stanislavsky was not

referencing a *modèle idéal* in the way that Diderot describes in the *Paradoxe*, but he was

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[163] As Stanislavsky's theatrical taste advances, he shifts his identificatory allegiances
from the comedian Nikolai Musil, who played simpletons, to the famous Imperial theatre
actor Sadovsky (MLIA 44), and later to the visiting Italian star Ernesto Rossi (54).
[164] See MLIA 68.

summoning the habitual expressions of other actors though some mode of imaginative summoning.

A turning point in the young Stanislavsky's career came during his work on Pushkin's *The Miserly Knight* with the Society of Art and Literature, under the direction of Aleksandr Fedotov. Fedotov demonstrated his conception of the ageing knight for Stanislavsky to imitate, a directorial methodology typical of the period.[165] But Stanislavsky, then a self-titled "tasteless copycat," was drawn away from Fedotov's artistically rich conception and instead towards the narcissistic image of himself as an operatic baritone in tights and a swordbelt. "An agonizing split occurred," writes Stanislavsky. "I could not decide which of the two models it would be better for me to copy" (MLIA 92). While working on the role, Stanislavsky actually carried a photograph of a glamorous baritone hidden in his pocket, but made the mistake of showing the photograph to Fedotov and was viciously mocked for his "vulgar," "polluted" artistic sensibility (92-3). In a symbolically charged act of renunciation not unlike Plato's tragedy-burning in Diogenes Laertius,[166] the shamed Stanislavsky symbolically shuts the photograph of the baritone away in his desk and enters upon an unfamiliar pathway: the process of role-creation without a pre-existing, external model. This process will lead to the conviction of his mature theory: "The actor creates the life of the human spirit of the role from his own living soul and incarnates it in his own living body. There is no other material for the creation of a role" (in Carnicke 2009:133).

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[165] "Of course it is not good to teach by demonstrating because it leads to copying" (MLIA 98). Stanislavsky excuses Fedotov for his demonstrative approach, because the latter often had to work with amateurs under conditions of extremely limited rehearsal time.

[166] See chapter one of this study.

It was not until Stanislavsky's work on the role of Ananias in the realist playwright Aleksey Pisemsky's *Bitter Fate*, however, that Stanislavsky began to practice the "art of representation" proper: "Having recognized the character and begun to live it [that is, having achieved some moments of "experiencing" in rehearsals], nonetheless I started to copy it out of habit. Nonetheless I was copying a character I had created on my own rather than someone else's mannerisms or tricks" (MLIA 103). Despite sporadic breakthroughs, in the years that followed Stanislavsky repeatedly fell back on his habits of copying and external imitation, often falling into "mechanical outer acting" and the strained expressivity that often accompanies it (110). Major breakthroughs came in a dramatic adaption of Dostoyevsky's *The Village of Stepanchikovo and Its Inhabitants* and in Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*. In these productions, Stanislavsky "became" the roles of Rostanev and Stockmann – rather than "playing at" them by "mimicking" other actors' performances. However, lacking a firm basis in technique, the intuitive creativity that marked these successes eventually bleached away. In playing Stockmann over an extended period, Stanislavsky fell back into the "art of representation": "I imitated the external signs of feelings and actions but did not feel real experiences, or real urges to action" (254). This realization contributed to the artistic crisis that prompted Stanislavsky to re-evaluate his artistic career in Finland during the summer of 1906 and, subsequently, to seek out more systematic methods of creativity.

When he began to work as a director, Stanislavsky took up the dominant pedagogical and directorial methods of the turn-of-the-century Russian theatre, which relied heavily upon demonstration and copying.[167] While directing Leo Tolstoy's *The*

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[167] Drawing upon his very brief stint of formal study at a drama school, Stanislavsky

Fruits of Enlightenment in 1891, Stanislavsky followed the demonstrative-imitative

precedent of his directorial mentor Fedotov: "I showed the actors what I had seen in my

imagination and they copied me" (MLIA 118). He was still relying upon the technique of

demonstration in the early days of the Moscow Art Theatre (174-75), drawing up

complex production plans in the privacy of his study and demonstrating his conception of

each role to his actors: "I would write everything down in my study, and play all the parts

myself so that the young actors could go on copying me until they had fully absorbed

what I had done." Looking back on this period of the MAT's history, Stanislavsky

writes, critically: "we went straight for externals, the end results of the creative process,

ignoring its first, most important phase, the birth of feeling. In other words, we began

with the physical form and did not first experience the sprit, the inner content, which then

had to be given outward shape" (184). The attempt at one-to-one transmission of the

"form" of the role from the director's imaginative conception and demonstration to the

actor's copying and demonstration was not fueled by superconscious inspiration; rather

"[e]verything was always conscious" (191). In other words, the process of the MAT at

this time was based almost entirely upon what Belinsky would have called

"excogitation," "calculation," and "judgment" (Belinsky 2001:180), leaving no creative

space for organic impulsiveness and immediate action.

By the time he had reached "artistic maturity" (MLIA 251), however,

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categorizes the traditional mode of pedagogy within Russian acting companies as based
in the imitation of other actors as models: "The pupils were taught just to read and act
according to a demonstration, so that each of us copied his teacher." As a result of
emulating a fine actor with a characteristic idiosyncrasy – nodding his head while reciting
– "[w]hole classes of students graduated with nodding heads" (MLIA 61). Vasili
Toporkov also discusses the widespread practice of directorial demonstration before
Stanislavsky's theatrical reforms (see Toporkov 2004:2).

Stanislavsky had developed a number of practical techniques to shift the actor's

consciousness away from imitative modes. Imitative acting, as theorized by Diderot and

Coquelin, or as practiced by the youthful Stanislavsky, requires two modes of

consciousness in combination: attempting, as much as possible, to see oneself from the

perspective of an "outside eye," and comparing this conception of one's external aspect

against some form at a literal or cognitive distance from the self (another human being, a

reflection in a mirror, or a mental image of oneself or another human being). As we have

already seen, Stanislavsky's technique of acting as genuine action executed by a subject

(the actor) upon an object (another actor, the self, or an imagined other) disallows self-

monitoring and self-comparison as valid modes of the actor's consciousness.

Furthermore, the mature Stanislavsky forbid his actors to observe themselves in a mirror,

which "teaches an actor to watch the outside rather than the inside of his soul" (AP 19).

The mirror is, of course, a critical device in Diderot's and Coquelin's conceptions of

acting technique, and a key analogy in mimetic theories of art going back to Plato.

Finally, Stanislavsky forbids a mode of imagination that visualizes the self

"outside" the self: "Real acting begins […] when there is no character as yet, but an 'I' in

the hypothetical circumstances. If that is not the case, you lost contact with yourself, you

see the role from outside, you copy it" (in Toporkov 2004:107). Stanislavsky's warning

against "seeing the role from outside" might be read as a chiefly metaphorical way of

describing an unhelpful attitude or orientation in the actor, but this is not the case. It

should be understood as a quite literal injunction, given the phenomenology of the

imagination laid out in *An Actor's Work*. There Stanislavsky distinguishes between three

different modes of imagination available to an actor: a mode in which one watches

visualized events unfold as a "mere spectator"; a mode in which one observes a figure of the self within an imagined scene ("you are your own audience"); and a final mode in which one enters the life of the imagination as a "genuine participant" (AW 72), so that one no longer sees an image of the self, but rather the persons and objects surrounding one, within a kind of "virtual reality." Stanislavsky encourages the third, most "active" mode of imagination over and above the others. In this way, a mental image of the actor's onstage actions will never precede his actions-in-the-moment, and he will never attempt to embody a behavioral construct pre-imagined as being performed by a figure external to the self. The actor's action – a sincere and actual doing in the present moment – is a primary rather than secondary act, which happens for the first time in rehearsal, and then again and again "as if for the first time" (in Toporkov 2004:192) in subsequent rehearsals and performances.

Stanislavsky's rejection of imitation in theory and practice does not mean, however, that all vestiges of a mimetic vocabulary are banished from his theoretical works. At times, Stanislavskian thought reveals a "renegotiated or redefined mimeticism" (Halliwell 2002:365), within which the language of image and imitation is transformed by Stanislavsky's post-Idealist, neo-Romantic values. A prominent example: the actors of Stanislavsky's school aim to present "living, active human images" (in Gorchakov 1985:193), infused with emotion and intention. We can understand Stanislavsky's "living image" in the light of Belinsky's artistic *obraz* as well as the German Romantic-Idealist keyword *Bild* from which it was derived: as a nexus of spiritualized form and formalized spirit, which gives the life of the soul a physical manifestation. Stanislavskian thought endows the term "image" – often used to describe

an artwork's formal, objective, and external aspects – with a subjective dimension. Stanislavsky therefore writes: "I life the live of this different human being, the man of my part […] I, the actor, *live in his image*" [emphasis added] (SAS 223).

The view that actor and character are separate entities, occupying polar positions across an ontological divide, is the very essence of mimeticist theories of acting. There is an unresolved tension in Stanislavskian thought as to whether the character should be conceptualized as a being distinct from the actor. Typically, Stanislavsky holds to an organicist-expressive view that the character emerges as a factor of the actor's absorption in the intentions and conditions suggested by the dramatic fiction: "Real acting begins […] when there is no character as yet, but an 'I' in the hypothetical circumstances; "The character will emerge as a result of your performing truthful actions in the given circumstances" (in Toporkov 2004:107, 85). Stanislavsky repeatedly uses the hyphenated terms *chelovek-akter* ("human being-actor") and *artisto-rol'* ("artist-role") to signal that the actor does not leave behind his or her own identity when rehearsing or performing a part.[168]

At some moments, however, the character does appear as an entity separate from the actor, but usually when Stanislavsky is advocating the goal of "fusion" between performer and role. If the actor pursues the wants, visualizes the images, and carries out the physical actions appropriate to the character under the fictional given circumstances, "he will come close to the role and will begin to *feel as one with it*" [emphasis added] (AW 19). For the actor under such conditions, "'the part and I' no longer exist, but what exists is 'I-the part,' since his own individual 'I' has disappeared, leaving only the 'I' of

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[168] See Carnicke 2009:143.

his creative intuition" (SAS 174). Describing his own intuitive success in the role of

Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*, Stanislavsky writes: "Stockmann's and Stanislavsky's

body and soul fused organically with one another" (118). Stanislavsky splits actor and

character from each other in order to conceptualize their union, and we can perhaps best

understand Stanislavsky's conception of "fusion" in terms of the Idealist notion of

"indifference" (*Indifferenz*), which describes a unity of opposites without preliminary

separation. Stanislavsky's concept of "fusion" really points toward an experiential

transformation of the actor's body and consciousness, a shift toward a subjunctive mode

of being, rather than a literal synthesis of discrete entities. We may need to accept a

certain level of paradox as Stanislavsky mixes metaphors of synthesis and genesis:

through "fusion" with the role, a new being is "birthed" (the actor-role), and the

emergence of this hybrid entity is marked by the actor's feeling himself as himself within

the circumstances of the dramatic fiction.

  While Stanislavsky consistently conceptualizes his actor's process in terms of

genesis or synthesis, in certain, scattered passages he does suggest that the imitation of

living models can play a positive role in an actor's development. Of his youthful

infatuation with the Italian tragedian Ernesto Rossi, Stanislavsky writes that the

emulation of a great actor "can be both helpful and harmful. Harmful because copying is

a stumbling block to personal creativity, but helpful because by copying a great model we

grow accustomed to what is good" (MLIA 54). Taking into oneself the expressive

characteristics of a great actor, then, can never serve as the right road toward the creation

of a role, but it can, it seems, provide the mimic with some sense, however diminished, of

the great actor's way of being onstage – of the quality of his presence, concentration,

relaxation, sincerity, and emotional availability. Indeed, Stanislavsky often stresses that

the route toward "the internal through the external" – while not the "best approach in

acting" – can sometimes yield benefits (70).

An even more positive form of imitation – as an organic process, through which

otherness from an external source is unconsciously incorporated by the self – appears in a

brief anecdote from *My Life in Art*: while preparing to play the role of Othello in 1896,

Stanislavsky studies the bearing and gestures of an Arab gentleman he meets in a Parisian

restaurant. Stanislavsky recalls at his naïve enthusiasm at having discovered a living

model for his part:

> Back in my hotel room I spent half the night standing in front of the mirror draped
> in sheets and towels, to turn myself into an elegant Moor with swift turns of the
> head, movement of the hands and the body like a graceful deer, an imperious
> walk, slender arms with palms turned towards anyone speaking to me. (MLIA
> 144)

This anecdote resembles the episode in the first chapter of *An Actor's Work*, when the

student actor Kostya, also preparing to play a scene from *Othello*, spreads melted

chocolate across his face and experiments with animalistic movements in front of a

mirror.[169] Stanislavsky's approach, however, was based in actual observation – rather

than the gross, racist clichés of Kostya's posturing – and, over time, yields up unexpected

results: "I had made the sudden movements of the Arab, his flowing movements, the

open palms, so much mine that I could not always discard them in my private life. They

came spontaneously" (MLIA 146). The movements of Stanislavsky's model have been

so thoroughly incorporated – that is, absorbed into the body – that they arise unbidden,

spontaneously, organically. Stanislavsky's description of the movements of another

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[169] See AW 6-7.

become "so much mine" echoes the earliest meanings of mimesis in Greek poetry, drama, and philosophy discussed in chapter one of this study. A cryptic sentence from the unfinished, fragmentary conclusion to the Russian version of *An Actor's Work* suggests that Stanislavsky, felt this archaic understanding of mimesis – as the absorption and re-expression of otherness – to be central to the very nature of acting: "The sense of being forced, subjected to something alien can only disappear when actors have made something other than themselves their own" (AW 611). Despite his general repudiation of mimicry as a practical technique and of imitation as a conceptual schema, Stanislavsky's sometimes strained efforts at philosophical self-definition thus bring about, if only for fleeting theoretical moments, a reconciliation between mimesis and genesis as practical capacities of the human organism.

The "Truth of the Passions," "Communion," and the Oneness of Actor with Spectator

If an understanding of imitation as organic summoning rather than artificial copying arises, however infrequently, within Stanislavsky's discussion of acting practice, another meaning of mimesis, long established within theatrical theory, surfaces within his account of the theatre's dynamics of reception. This mimesis describes some kind of one-to-one correspondence between the experience of the performer and the experience of the audience member. Stanislavsky interweaves influential theories of aesthetic appreciation by Pushkin and Tolstoy with some basic tenets of Hindu philosophy in forging his own, idiosyncratic conception of the energetic oneness that unites stage with auditorium.

It has long been known that Stanislavsky derived his key term "given

circumstances" (*predlagaemye obstoiatelstva*) – one of the few Stanislavskian terms to survive its incorporation into the American "Method" almost unscathed – from Pushkin's unfinished "Notes on popular drama and on M.P. Pogodin's *Martha, the Governor's Wife*" (written in 1830 and published posthumously). In this essay, Pushkin offers a formula for dramatic art that would become a fundamental postulate of Stanislavskian theory and practice: "The truth concerning the passions, a verisimilitude *in the feelings experienced in given situations* – that is what our intelligence demands of a dramatist" [emphasis added] (Pushkin 1971:265). Stanislavsky himself dubbed the formula "Pushkin's Aphorism," repeated it constantly in his writings, and included it in his famous diagram of the "System," where it features as one of the three fundamental bases of his "art of experiencing."[170]

In the "Notes on popular drama," Pushkin stresses the inadequacy of mimetic and utilitarian theories of art, declaring that Russian aesthetics still labors under the notions that "the *beautiful* consists in the imitation of the beauties of nature and that the chief merit of art lies in its *usefulness*" (Pushkin 1971:264).[171] Rather than assuming "verisimilitude" to be "the principal condition of dramatic art," Pushkin poses the provocation: "What if it were to be proved to us that it is precisely verisimilitude which is excluded by the very essence of dramatic art? […] [W]herein lies the verisimilitude in a building, divided into two parts, of which one is filled with spectators?" (164). Pushkin,

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[170] For reproductions of Stanislavsky's diagram of the "System," see Carnicke 2009:123, Whyman 2008:40-41.

[171] Pushkin associates the "imitation of nature" doctrine in particular with the Enlightenment aesthetician Johann Christoph Gottsched, whom he calls a "ponderous pedant" (Pushkin 1971:264). Gottsched's *Versuch einer Critischen Dichtkunst vor die Deutschen* ("Attempt at a Critical Poetics for the Germans") of 1730 is heavily indebted to Boileau and "hold[s] fast to a strict conceptual interpretation of imitation in the sense of an act by which nature is depicted" (Gebauer and Wulf 1995:157).

like Stanislavsky after him, emphasizes the highly *unnatural* conditions of the basic theatrical situation, which architecturally and psychologically divides an assembly of human beings into those privileged to watch and those required to perform.

Rejecting the principle of "verisimilitude" as conventionally understood, Pushkin instead offers a robustly affective explanation for drama's basic appeal, function, and requirements: the theatre derives its fundamental interest by "working on the crowd and satisfying its curiosity" with "the presentation of passions" and "the outpourings of the human spirit" (265). It is in the course of arguing for this affective basis to theatrical art that Pushkin makes his demand for the "truth concerning the passions, a verisimilitude in the feelings experienced in given situations." Pushkin absolves dramatic artists from the need to pursue a verisimilar ideal of one-to-one correspondence between onstage scenes and worldly scenarios. Instead he requires, despite the architectural division that creates an asymmetrical dynamic of watching-and-performing, that the theatre provide a felt truthfulness of emotion, an experiential correspondence between the passions sparked by dramatic scenes and those undergone in lived situations. In other words, theatrical performances need not look like life, but they must feel like life. Although Stanislavsky draws more subtle distinctions about the nature of emotion in the theatre than does Pushkin, he adapts the poet's basic demand as a challenge to the actor: that he or she *actually experience* feelings analogous to those of the character within a fictional situation, in order to catalyze such *actually experienced* feelings in the spectator.

The second major Russian literary figure whose affectively based philosophy of art would exercise a decisive influence on Stanislavsky was Tolstoy. Tolstoy was "one

of Stanislavsky's icons" (Whyman 2008:2),[172] and both Sharon Marie Carnicke and Rose

Whyman suggest that Stanislavsky was inspired by the broad framework and specific

vocabulary of Tolstoy's late-career essay, "What is Art?" (1898). Tolstoy opens the

essay with a sweepingly dismissive summary of Germany aesthetics from Baumgarten

and Kant to Theodor Vischer and Herbart.[173] He also subjects the "mystical aesthetics"

of Hegel to particularly violent criticism, specifically rejecting the central notion of

Idealist art theory: "Art is not, as the metaphysicians say, the manifestation of some

mysterious idea, beauty, God" (Tolstoy 1995:30, 40). Instead of considering art in terms

of its formal properties, its verisimilar correspondence, or its ideal content, Tolstoy

asserts that art must be considered "one of the conditions of human life," and,

specifically, "a means of communion among people" (37). For Tolstoy, this mode of

communion (*obshchenie*) is primarily emotional: "The activity of art is based on the fact

that man, as he receives through hearing or sight the expressions of another man's

feelings, is capable of experiencing the same feelings as the man who expresses them"

(38). Artistic activity relies upon the basic "capacity of people to be infected by the

feelings of other people"; "a man laughs, and another feels merry; he weeps, and the man

who hears this weeping feels sad."

    Spontaneous emotional contagion does not, however, yet constitute artistic

activity: "Art begins when a man, with the purpose of communicating to other people a

feeling he once experienced, calls it up again within himself and expressing it by certain

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[172] Stanislavsky met Tolstoy personally on a number of occasions and describes being
over-awed in the presence of his moral and artistic idol (see MLIA 122-26).
Stanislavsky's personal assistant Leopold Sulerzhitsky (the model for Tortsov's assistant
"Rakhmanov" in *An Actor's Work*) was a fervent Tolstoyan.
[173] See Tolstoy 1995:17-30.

external signs" (38). Artistic production, therefore, requires a technique of re-experiencing emotion – what Stanislavsky, under the influence of the French psychologist Théodule Ribot, would later call "affective memory" – along with the capacity to express this emotion through externally comprehensible forms. Tolstoy re-states his definition in sum: "Art is that human activity which consists in one man's consciously conveying to others, by certain external signs, the feelings he has experienced, and in others being infected by those feelings and also experiencing them" (40). The fundamental relationship in art, according to Tolstoy, is not the conceptual one obtaining between copy and model, or artwork and idea, but rather the affectively rich human relationship between artist and receiver.

Despite Tolstoy's famous dislike for the theatre, Tolstoy's conception of art as affectively communicable experience is more directly applicable to the theatre than to any other art form of his time. Both Sharon Marie Carnicke and Rose Whyman suggest that Stanislavsky drew the affective keywords "infection" (*zarazhenie*) and "experiencing" (*perezhivanie*) directly from Tolstoy's essay.[174] If this in indeed the case, then Stanislavsky would have named his approach to acting – the "art of experiencing" (AW 16) – with direct reference to Tolstoy's aesthetics.[175] Reading Stanislavsky with reference to Tolstoy's "What is Art?" makes clear that *perezhivanie* not only designates the actor's ideal state of body-and-consciousness but also the shared emotional

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[174] See Carnicke 2009:133-34, Whyman 2008:13-16, 49-50.

[175] Carnicke has dubbed "experiencing" (*perezhivanie*) Stanislavsky's "lost term" (Carnicke 2009:129) and her avid championing of a refreshed understanding of Stanislavskian theory over the last decade has done much to re-establish the term as a Stanislavskian keyword, at least in academic circles. *Perezhivanie* is translated variously by Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood as "the art of living a part," "to live the scene," "living and experiencing," "experience," "emotional experience," and "creation" (see Carnicke 2009:132).

experience of the actor and the spectator.

The intersubjective dimension of "experiencing" in Stanislavsky's theatre becomes clearest in those moments when Stanislavsky takes up Tolstoy's term "communion" (*obshchenie*), a borrowing that neither Carnicke nor Whyman comments upon. An entire chapter of *An Actor's Work* is devoted to the phenomenon of "communion," a spiritual bond forged between members of an acting ensemble, in which the audience is able to participate indirectly but palpably. Stanislavsky describes communion with one's acting partner as a mode of "surrender" (AW 231) to full presence in the here-and-now with one's fellow actor: "now, in our scene there are only you and I, and no one else in the world except you and I" (SAS 242). This powerful spiritual linkage between actors will naturally extend itself into a bond of communion with the audience: "the spectator takes silent part in [the actors'] communication [or "communion"[176]], sees, recognizes, understands, and is infected with their experiencing" (in Carnicke 2009:133-34). Despite the actor's indirect mode of relation with the audience – his primary object of concentration is his fellow actor – he can receive direct feedback from the assembly of souls in the auditorium, who provide "spiritual acoustics" (AP 204), receiving and reinforcing the affective currents flowing between the actors onstage. Only the "art of experiencing," Stanislavsky declares with total confidence, "enriched with the actor's own experiences as a living organism […] can fully capture an audience and bring them to a point where they not only comprehend but, more importantly, *experience everything done onstage*, and so enrich their own inner lives" [emphasis added] (AW 20-21). In other words, the Stanislavskian ensemble's

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[176] *Obshchenie* can also be translated as "communication," the choice made by Benedetti and Carnicke.

accomplishment of productive intentional actions, their immersion in the fictional circumstances provided by the dramatist, and their absorptive communion with their scene partners generate an irresistible experiential reality. The audience partakes in this reality and leaves the auditorium having *lived through* an affectively charged event (though as witnesses rather than participants).

Although theories of the theatre based in passionate "contagion" had been prominent since the birth of modern Western acting theory in eighteenth-century France (as the second chapter of this study has shown), Stanislavsky breaks with the likes of Luigi Riccoboni and Rémond de Sainte-Albine by refusing to situate his conception of experiential communion within an ontology of "illusion" or "imitation." Although the governing paradigm of Stanislavskian aesthetics is indeed an expressive-organic one, which views the actor's creative work as "the expression of the *organic* life of human hearts" [emphasis in original] (Stanislavsky 1961:233), mimetic thinking also asserts itself in certain moments when Stanislavsky attempts to articulate the relation between the stage and life beyond it. In particular, he occasionally adopts the language of "reflection": "The theatre […] is the art of reflecting life" (92). This reflection, however, is not formally verisimilar; following the gist of Pushkin's Aphorism, Stanislavsky sees the correspondence between life onstage and life offstage as primarily affective: the "creative art of the stage" supplies "a reflection of life in human passions" (228). In other instances, Stanislavsky mixes the relatively static notion of reflection with dynamic metaphors of flow more typical of Romantic thought: the theatre becomes "a sea of human forces" that "reflects human forces through itself" (92). The actor is a "force that reflects life" (195), or a "force which acts as beauty" (99), and must "become the current

which conducts to the hearts of the spectators those forces which open up new vistas of beauty for them" (251).

Beauty, for Stanislavsky, is not a principle of ideal or verisimilar correspondence, but a physiologically intensified and spiritually ennobling experience catalyzed by live performers, who serve as "conductors of energy and beauty to all those who come to the theatre as spectators" (SAS 106). Thus, actors must train their psycho-physical instruments "so as to enable the living forces of life within them to unite with the same living forces of life in each spectator," so as "to achieve through the stage a *union in beauty* […] among all who take part in a performance on both sides of the footlights" [emphasis added] (163). At times, Stanislavsky speculates that this energetic union, or "complete fusion of the stage and the auditorium" (119), is brought about by circulating currents of *prana*, the vital force described by Vedantic philosophy.[177] Stanislavsky imagines these flows of *prana* as "rays" that stream out of the eyes of actors, and which "engulf" their acting partners along with the spectators (AW 250).[178] Acting, then, under Stanislavsky's conception, is not a formally representative art, but an energetically-and-affectively catalytic one. The actor's work on the self ultimately enables the spectator to enter into higher, purer psycho-physical states through the co-experiencing of theatrical actuality.

The Actor at the Center:

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[177] See White 2006:79-81, Carnicke 2009:178-79.

[178] Stanislavsky conceives the circulation of *prana* as a potentially measurable phenomenon, "If only we had some gadget which would enable us to see this process of emitting and receiving, the exchange that takes place between the state and the auditorium at moments of creative intensity, we would be amazed to see how our nerves bear up under the pressure of the stream of rays which we are emitting to the auditorium and are receiving back from the thousand living organisms sitting out front!" (AW 253).

Hindu Philosophy, Idealism, and the State of "I AM"

The first chapter of *An Actor's Work* plunges its reader into the consciousness of the

young actor Kostya Nazvanov, an alter ego for Stanislavsky's younger self ("Kostya" is

the diminutive for "Konstantin"). Throughout Stanislavsky's *Bildungsroman*-style acting

manual, we take Kostya's first-person perspective as he carries out a series of

experiments with attention and imagination, onstage and in the world beyond the theatre,

in order to discover and solidify those modes of consciousness that are most useful for

acting practice. Here, at the beginning of his journey as an actor-in-training, Kostya is

charged with preparing a short excerpt from *Othello*. Stanislavsky renders Kostya's

interior monologue as he steps onstage to present his work on the Shakespearean role:

> When I stepped out of the darkness of the wings into the full glare of the
> footlights, the overhead spotlights, and the flood-lights from the wings, I was
> stunned and blinded. […] But my eyes soon became accustomed to the lights and
> then the blackness of the auditorium became even more frightening, and the pull
> of the audience even stronger. […] I felt I was the slave of that huge crowd and
> became servile, lacking all principle, ready for any kind of compromise. I was
> ready to turn myself inside out, to lick their boots, to give them more than I
> genuinely had or was capable of. […]
> After a superhuman effort to squeeze feelings out of myself and my
> incapacity to achieve the impossible, tension invaded my entire body, ending as
> cramp which gripped my face, my hands, the whole of me, paralysing all
> movement, all motion. […]
> I had to do more physically. But I was no longer in a fit state to control
> my hands, legs, my gabbling, and all this was heightened by my overall tension. I
> was ashamed of every word I uttered, of every gesture I made and immediately
> found wanting. (AW 13-14)

Kostya does manage to translate his psycho-physical turmoil into one successful moment

of instinctive brilliance, but his overall performance is a failure. He is thwarted by the

disoriented mode of body and consciousness that Stanislavsky calls the "actor's state"

(MLIA 256), brought about by the "painful duty" of having "to embody, come what may,

something alien, vague, something that is always outside you" (36). The organic functioning of the actor's body and mind are thrown into disarray by this sense of being deficient in relation to a vague something outside the self – a sensation that Stanislavsky calls the "state of dislocation." Elsewhere, Stanislavsky describes this state as a disjuncture between the contents of the actor's consciousness and his outward physicality: "the mind [of the actor] lives its own day-to-day life, his mundane concerns for his family, his daily bread, the minor grievances, the successes or failures, while the body is obliged to express the most elevated heroic feelings and passions of the superconscious" (MLIA 256). In other words, within the state of dislocation, the actor presents external behavior radically disconnected from the subjective life of his consciousness.

Stanislavsky's "art of experiencing" helps the actor overcome the "state of dislocation" and achieve an organically unified state of body and consciousness. As already shown, Stanislavsky designates this oneness with oneself with the phrase *Ia esm'* ("I am," or "I am being"). When Tortsov first uses the term in *An Actor's Work*, his students are puzzled, and the acting teacher explains:

> In our vocabulary, 'I am being' refers to the fact that I have put myself *in the centre* of a situation I have invented, that I feel I am really *inside* it, that I really *exist at its very heart*, in a world of imaginary objects, and that I am beginning to act *as me*, with full responsibility for myself. [emphasis added] (AW 70)

Here the actor's state of "I am being" emerges as a factor of imaginative immersion – of feeling oneself as an acting subject at the center of an imaginative scenario – and of not taking the self (or an image of the self) as an object of consciousness. Later in *An Actor's Work*, Torstov equates "I am being" with the ideal creative state itself: "'I am being' means I am, I live, I feel, I think as one with the role. […] 'I am being' is distilled,

almost absolute truth onstage" (AW 186). The state of "I am being" thus designates

oneness, organic integrality, and – again borrowing Schelling's term for fusion without

preliminary separation – "indifference" between the actor and the role.

If Torstov at first perplexes his students with the mystical-sounding *Ia esm',* the

phrase has also proven a point of intrigue to recent Stanislavsky scholarship. R. Andrew

White and Sharon Marie Carnicke have shown that Stanislavsky's probable source for the

phrase – along with other key ideas – was a series of books on yogic philosophy and

practice by "Yogi Ramacharaka," translated into Russian from English and recommended

to Stanislavsky by his son's tutor Nikolai Demidov in 1911.[179] Ramacharaka presents the

principles and exercises contained within his popularizing books as a means toward

approaching "the Consciousness of the 'I AM'": "consciousness of one's identity with

the Universal Life, and [one's] relationship to, and 'in-touchness' with all life"

(Ramacharaka 1911:vi). Meditating upon the meaning of the phrase "I AM" will lead

the contemplator to the realization

> that the 'I' is a part of that great One Reality which pervades all the Universe; that
> it is connected with all other forms of life by countless ties, mental and spiritual
> filaments and relations; that the 'I' is a Centre of Consciousness in that great One
> Reality or Spirit, which is behind and back of all Life and Existence, the Centre of
> which Reality or Existence, is the Absolute or God; that the sense of Reality that
> is inherent in the 'I,' is really the reflection of the sense of Reality inherent in the
> Whole – the Great 'I' of the Universe. (74)

Differently phrased, this insight amounts to the realization "that under all the forms and

names of the visible world, there is to be found One Life – One Force – One Substance –

One Existence – One Reality – ONE" (64). Ramacharaka here summarizes the

fundamental doctrine of the *Upanishads*, Hinduism's text of primary philosophy: that the

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[179] See White 2006, Carnicke 2009:167-184.

self (*atman*) is fundamentally identical with the absolute ground of all being

(*brahman*).[180] Ramacharaka's tone of rapturously blunt assertion is, however, highly at

odds with the aphoristic, parabolic style of the *Upanishads* as well as the argumentative

mode of the Vedic commentaries.

Ramacharaka explains that attaining "the Consciousness of the 'I AM'" involves

distinguishing between the "I" and those phenomena that are "not I," which include the

body and its instincts, desires, and emotions, and even thought-processes and spiritual

sentiments. The basis for this distinction is a fundamental structure of consciousness: the

highest "I" cannot contemplate itself – it cannot hold itself "at mental arm's length" – for

it is itself an indivisible contemplating entity (34). Ramacharaka writes:

> Can you not see that the "I" cannot be both the *considerer* and the thing
> considered – the *examiner* and the thing examined? Can the sun shine upon itself
> by its own light? You may consider the "I" of some other person, but it is your
> "I" that is considering. But you cannot, as an "I," stand aside and see yourself as
> an "I." (38)

Ramacharaka's technique of distinction between perceiver and object of perception

seems to be drawn directly from the Advaita Vedanta school of Hindu philosophy.

Advaita means "non-dualism," and the school's founder Sankara (c. 788-820 CE)

presents a logical method of undoing the erroneous "superimposition" (*adhyasa*) of

objects that are "not-I" upon the "I." This method of regressive dis-identification leads to

the realization that the ontology of the self is identical with that of the absolute. The self

cannot be an object of perception like external objects because, as the ground of all being,

it depends upon nothing else and exists for the sake of nothing else: "the knower itself

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[180] Two of the *Upanishads*' "Great Sayings" (*mahavakyas*), profound truths to be
meditated upon, explicitly state this doctrine: "I am *brahman*" (*aham brahmasmi*), and
"This Self is the Ultimate" (*ayam atma brahma*) (in Klostermaier 1998:94).

cannot be the object to be known."[181] The principles of the Advaita Vedanta school, however, are not in universal accordance with the metaphysics of yoga's governing philosophical system.[182] Their inclusion in a treatise titled *Raja Yoga* therefore arouses suspicion over Ramacharaka's willingness to blend together distinct schools of Hindu philosophy for a popular English-language readership.

There is no reason to assume that the Ramacharaka books were Stanislavsky's only source of information on yoga and Hindu philosophy. The artistic and intellectual elite of Silver Age Russia seized enthusiastically upon new translations of classic Hindu texts like the *Rig Veda* and the *Uphanishads* as well as the doctrines of new mystical movements like Spiritualism, Theosophy, Hermeticism, and Anthroposophy.[183] Tenets of Hindu thought were very much in the air within Russia's "culture of the occult" (Carlson 1997:136) around the turn of the century, although often diluted or distorted by the "comparative esotericism" of the new pseudoreligious thought-systems (140). Although R. Andrew White has convincingly highlighted passages of the Ramacharaka books that seem to have directly influenced Stanislavsky,[184] the Russian theatrical reformer, as a member of Moscow's creative intelligentsia, would have absorbed the broad wave of influence of Eastern thought on the Russian occultist vogue in a fashion that precise textual correlations might not reveal.[185] The last years of the nineteen-teens

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[181] In Deutsch and van Buitenen 1971:145.

[182] See Klostermaier 1998:103.

[183] See White 2006:76-77, Carlson 1997:135-52, Maydell 1997:153-67.

[184] See White 2006:83-88.

[185] One example of a personal – rather than intertextual – connection with mystical thought was Stanislavsky's acquaintance with the neo-Kantian philosopher Ivan Ivanovich Lapshin, author of quasi-mystical treatises on "universal feeling." Rose Whyman asserts that Stanislavsky corresponded with Lapshin and read the latter's *Mystic Knowledge and the Universal Feeling* (1905) and his essay "The Universal Feeling"

seem to have been Stanislavsky's phase of highest enthusiasm for Eastern thought: his

rehearsal notebooks from the years 1919 to 1920 suggest that he was still directly

referencing the *Hatha Yoga* volume almost a decade after his first exposure to it.[186]

Stanislavsky's lectures to the Bolshoi Opera Studio, given between 1919 and 1922,[187]

stress over and over again that acting begins with a disciplining of the mind and uses a

vocabulary resonant with Hindu philosophy and meditational practice.[188]

The most significant revelation of R. Andrew White's groundbreaking essay on

the influence of yoga and occultism on Stanislavsky's "System" is that "Yogi

Ramacharaka" was in fact the pen name of William Walker Atkinson, a Chicago-based

author and journalist. Atkinson was a leading figure within "New Thought," an

American pseudoreligious movement concerned with healing psychological and physical

ills through the power of the mind.[189] While White notes that Atkinson writes about

Hindu thought "from a distinctly Western point of view," presenting "a diluted version of

Yoga aimed at a curious but largely uninformed readership" (White 2006:82-83), neither

White nor Sharon Marie Carnicke, in her important discussion of Stanislavsky's

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(1911) in the year 1912 (see Whyman 2008:52-61, 86). Stanislavsky cites Lapshin's
Artistic Creation (1923) in the Russian version of *An Actor's Work* (see AW 111).
[186] See White 2006:83.
[187] Stanislavsky's lectures were transcribed by a student and later translated by David
Magarshack as *Stanislavsky on the Art of the Stage* (1961).
[188] In the lectures, Stanislavsky argues that "[t]he centre of man's creative work is his
attention," and the focusing of attention allows the actor to "change [his] habits of mind"
(SAS 142, 102). There is evidence that Stanislavsky and his actors experimented with
yogic techniques of concentration as early as 1906, while working on Chekhov's *Uncle
Vanya*, and that by 1912 students at the MAT's First Studio were carrying out exercises
in radiating and receiving "'prana' rays of communion" (see White 2006:78-79).
[189] The Christian Science movement, which still shares these goals, was founded by Mary
Baker Eddy (1821-1910), also a major figure within New Thought's early development.

borrowings from yoga,[190] has shown the extent to which Atkinson accommodates Hindu notions to a New Thought worldview. In order to understand Ramacharaka's (and Stanislavsky's) "I AM," therefore, we must uncover the constellation of influences that New Thought brought into often reductive synthesis. This effort throws us back once again across the history of ideas to German Romanticism and Idealism.

The prominence of the key phrase "I am" in Idealist philosophy prominence has its roots in Kant's epistemological project: to ground truth in subjectivity by proving that the perceiving subject constitutes the perceptual world. Fichte, responding to Kant, pushes the principle of subjectivity much further: he proposes the self-positing "I" as the grounding of all reality and the first principle his system of transcendental idealism. "I am absolutely because I am," Fichte asserts with provocative bluntness (Fichte 1868:71).[191] Although Schelling and Hegel would depart significantly from Fichte's account of subjectivity, both would have to engage with Fichte's dramatic proposal of the "I am" as a philosophical first principle.[192]

The striking parallels between Fichte's account of subjectivity and the Hindu philosopher Sankara's monistic ontology have been noted by a number of scholars. It seems impossible to argue for a direct influence, although Fichte and Schelling, along

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[190] See Carnicke 2009: 167-84.

[191] Hölderlin and Novalis both voiced famous critiques of the reductiveness of Fichte's logic, arguing that the very proposition "I am I" implied a splitting of the self into subject and object (see Bowie 1990:82-99).

[192] In Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), what was Fichte's "absolute I" becomes an unconscious form of infinite activity that *cannot* be grasped by reflective awareness, even in philosophical discourse, but can be accessed within the intuitive medium of art. Though Hegel's conception of human history and art's place within it is highly indebted to Schelling's, as already stated, Hegel distances himself from Fichte: Hegel cites Fichte's "I am I" in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) only to critique and complicate its pure assertion of subjectivity.

with their Romantic contemporaries, were writing at a moment when Hinduism's sacred texts were being read in European languages for the first time. The French scholar Abraham Hyacinth Anquetil-Duperron and the English philologist William Jones, along with other members of Jones's Asiatic Society of Bengal, produced translations of major Vedic texts during the last decades of the eighteenth century. These publications were rapidly translated into or summarized in German, igniting an explosion of interest among scholars, poets, and philosophers of the Romantic era and prompting the emergence of "Oriental Studies" as an academic discipline. Chief among the enthusiastic parties in Germany were Herder, Friedrich Schlegel (who learned Sanskrit), and August Wilhelm Schlegel, eventual occupant of the first chair of Indology in Germany. The burst of translation also made it possible for Schelling and Hegel to include discussions of Hindu art and philosophy within their trans-historical narratives about the evolution of divine consciousness through human culture. The engagement by German intellectuals with Hinduism, Buddhism, and other Asian thought-systems during this period, which outstripped that of other European nations in its systematic rigor as well as its enthusiasm, has been called "the preeminent reaction to Eastern thought in the West until the mid-nineteenth century" (Versluis 1993:16).

Certain Hindu doctrines hold a basic compatibility with the mystic strands of European philosophy – Neoplatonism and Christian mysticism – that fed into German Romanticism and Idealism, but despite a historically recurring impulse to construe congruity as proof of common origins or historical contact, no proof has been found for a transformative confluence of Indic thought and European philosophy before the turn of the nineteenth century. Debates over whether the philosophy of European antiquity

either derives from or draws from the same source as Hindu thought go back as least as far as the third century C.E.,[193] and a number of apocryphal stories tell of meetings between Greek and Hindu philosophers. The claims for shared origins were renewed by the eighteenth-century Indologists and their German Romantic successors: William Jones argued that "Pythagoras and Plato derived their sublime theories from the same fountain with the sages of India";[194] Herder, Friedrich Schlegel, Schleiermacher, and Novalis were able to find compatibilities between Hinduism and Buddhism and the mystic doctrines of Plotinus, Eckhart, Böhme, and Tieck;[195] Herder and Friedrich Schlegel were particularly influential in asserting that "Everything, yes, everything without exception has its origin in India."[196] Schlegel believed that Indic philosophy would have as transformative an impact on European thought as the rediscovery of classical antiquity during the Renaissance.[197]

Whether or not some buried pathways of influence between Hindu thought and European philosophy actually exist, we can conservatively conclude that the writings of figures like the Schlegels and Schelling "were to a considerable degree sparked and reinforced by their contacts with Oriental doctrines, even if these were limited" (Versluis 1993:24). The poetry, philosophy, and philology of Germany's Romantic era also set the conditions for the chaotically enthusiastic absorption of Hindu thought by less systematic intellectual movements of the nineteenth century. Coleridge, for example, who was deeply influenced by Schelling and had read the *Bhagavad Gita* in English translation,

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[193] See Halbfass 1988:2-23.
[194] In Halbfass 1988:63.
[195] See Versluis 1993:19-24.
[196] In Schwab 1984:71.
[197] See Benz 1983:17.

conceived the human imagination as "a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM" (Coleridge 1834:172). The notion that human creativity echoes nature's productivity is Schellingian, but Coleridge's "infinite I AM" fuses an Idealist notion of subjectivity with Hinduism's *atman-brahman* identity.

The kind of synthesizing impulse that marked Coleridge's thought would also fuel American Transcendentalism, born in the 1830s and 1840s out of the encounter between Unitarian "liberal Christianity," Neoplatonism and Christian mysticism, German Romanticism and Idealist thought, and a gradually expanding understanding of Eastern religions (Versluis 1993:6-7). Ralph Waldo Emerson, founding figure of Transcendentalism, was deeply influenced by Romantic and Idealist sources (Herder, Schleiermacher, Schelling, Hegel), and, in addition, by Neoplatonism and the works of Coleridge.[198] Emerson was also familiar with a number of the major Hindu religious-philosophical texts and found a basic compatibility between Neoplatonism and the teachings of the *Upanishads*.[199] In a journal entry from 1837, Emerson writes:

> Who shall define me as an Individual? I behold with awe & delight many illustrations of the One Universal Mind. I see my being imbedded in it. I am only a form of him. He is the soul of Me. I can even with a mountainous aspiring say, *I am God*. (in Versluis 1993:55)

Versluis sees in the above passage "a merging of both German mystical Christian and Hindu Concepts" (55), within which the Vedantic principle *aham brahmasmi* ("I am the Absolute") is assimilated and transformed by "Emersonian literary religion" (66).

The New Thought movement, to which William Walker Atkinson (aka "Yogi Ramacharaka") belonged, was "a popular outgrowth of Transcendentalism, German

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[198] See Richardson 1995:347-48, 470-73.
[199] See Versluis 1993:66.

Idealist Philosophy, and liberal Protestantism" that emerged in the 1850s and 1860s (Satter 1999:15).[200] Leading figures in New Thought often cited Emerson as the movement's inspirational "Father" (Braden 1963: 35) as they continued the Transcendentalist's practice of appropriating key principles of Romanticism, Idealism, and Hinduism. The designation of an inner "God-Self" with the phrase "I Am" features prominently in the writings of Warren Felt Evans and Emma Curtis Hopkins, two early articulators of New Thought doctrine. In Hopkins's affirmational treatise *The Radiant 'I AM'* (n.d.), the "I AM" phrase no longer designates the bare perception of one's own subjectivity as the ground of all experience. Now it serves as a formula for rhetorical anaphora, inaugurating ever-more-grandiose affirmations of individual potency that dwarf Emerson's "mountainous aspiring": "I AM the power of strength to the universe. Because I AM unalterable, I AM omnipotence. […] I AM the power of Mind to my universe" (Hopkins 2008). In the closing passages of Hopkins's text, the Vedic saying "I am *brahman*" has inflated itself into self-identification with the Christian messiah: "I AM what I AM… I do what I AM by knowing my Self as Jesus Christ the Heaven-sending Center of Being, the Heaven-sending Me" (Hopkins 2008). The "I AM" declaration here becomes an assertion of confidence, power, and exceptionalism, serving an agenda of self-aggrandizing individuation.

Hopkins, sometimes called the "mother of New Thought,"[201] provided the philosophical framework for the "spectacular late-nineteenth-century growth" of her

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[200] Beryl Satter's *Each Mind a Kingdom: American Women, Sexual Purity, and the New Thought Movement, 1875-1920* (1999) has been my main source for the history of New Thought's early development.

[201] See "A Brief Look at the History of New Thought." *The International New Thought Learning Center*. <http://www.new-thought-center.com/new-thought-history/> (Accessed 20 July 2011).

movement (Satter 1999:80). William Walker Atkinson (a.k.a. "Yogi Ramacharaka") would have encountered Hopkins's teachings either firsthand or re-articulated by his own mentor, Helen Wilmans, one of Hopkins's first students.[202] Atkinson edited the journals *Suggestion* and *New Thought* between 1900 and 1905 and popularized New Thought teachings through his prolific publications.[203] Atkinson's first stand-alone publication, a pamphlet entitled "The Secret of the I AM," was followed by ten books of New Thought philosophy and "practical psychology" written between 1901 and 1911. Between 1903 and 1912, Atkinson also began to write under the pseudonym Ramacharaka, publishing over a dozen books on Hindu thought. Atkinson's New Thought and yogic publications were produced concurrently, and a heavy cross-bleeding of ideas from the former into the latter is easily detectable. Comparing the content and vocabulary of Atkinson's first monograph, *The Law of the New Thought: A Study of Fundamental Principles and Their Application* (1902) with those of the Ramacharaka books reveals the extent of Atkinson's laxity in matters of intellectual compartmentalization.

The Law of New Thought explains to its reader that a "central thought" has been handed down from ancient philosophies both Eastern and Western through the great literary works of the Western tradition and via the more recent writings of Emerson and Thoreau: "the Oneness of All" (Atkinson 1902:10). Once an individual becomes aware of this "Oneness," Atkinson explains, the illusion of "Separateness" dissipates. But this does not mean, Atkinson makes sure to emphasize, that "the consciousness of Individuality" decreases; on the contrary, it "enlarges – grows – takes on more substance" (71). Atkinson thus preserves a place for the aspirational Western ego, which is situated

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[202] See Satter 1999:150-180, 233.
[203] See Melton 1986:14-15.

at the "Center" of New Thought's monistic philosophy, superimposed with the presence

of God. The egoistic sentiment of *The Law of New Thought* carries over directly into

Raja Yoga, where Atkinson (as Ramacharaka) defines "THE REALIZATION OF THE

'I'": "that YOU are a great Centre of Consciousness – a Centre of Power – a Centre of

Influence – a Centre of Thought. And that like the planets circling around the sun, so

does your world revolve around YOU who are at its centre" (Ramacharaka 1911:11-12).

Atkinson/Ramacharaka continues: "After the first dawn of the 'I' consciousness has been

attained, the Candidate [...] is more able to use the powers latent within him […]; to

manifest a Centre of Consciousness and Influence that will radiate into the outer world

which is always striving and hunting for such centres around which it may revolve"

(Ramacharaka 1911: 9). Mutated by New Thought's aspirational scheme, self-awakening

here becomes a precondition for self-advancement, and the "realization of the 'I'" allows

the individual to become more influential, desirable, and powerful. In Atkinson's

writings, as in Emma Curtis Hopkins's, the "I AM" does not signify a yielding up of

fixed notions of the self when faced with the vastness of the absolute. Rather, its egoistic

self-assertion corrupts the fundamental import of the Hindu philosophy it claims to

explain.[204]

Stanislavsky's *Ia esm'* at first seems to mark a "crossroads of East and West"

(Carnicke 2009:167) or a new point of synthesis between a Western understanding of

psychology and yoga's practice-based spirituality. However, as shown above, a deeper

look into the history of ideas reveals that Stanislavsky's philosophy of performance

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[204] Almost unbelievably, the Ramacharaka books continue to circulate today, spreading their reductive summaries and serious distortions of Hindu thought to a twenty-first-century readership.

crystallized at the end of a century of discovery, comparison, and assimilation in religious and philosophical thought, and that Stanislavsky drew upon sources (like the writings of Belinsky, Tolstoy, and Atkinson) that were already thoroughly hybridized. This is not to deride or devalue the uniqueness of the Stanislavsky's syncretic philosophy of acting. Stanislavsky's *Ia esm'* marks Western theatrical thought's first positing of the "I" of the experiencing actor as the source, center, and ground of theatrical reality. Stanislavsky's is an energetic and dynamic – rather than statically mimeticist – vision of the theatre, but it is also a monistic one, within which the actor serves as an energetically enlivening force, a center of emanation for the energy flows that draw performers and spectators into a circle of communion. Stanislavsky attempts to repair the longstanding theoretical division between the "I" of the actor and the "not-I" of the character that mimeticist theories of the theatre have long maintained.

This is the theoretical import of Stanislavsky's *Ia esm'*. For Stanislavsky himself, however, its *practical* import is paramount: the phrase denotes an actual state of consciousness, within which the self is experienced as integrally unified – in opposition to the existential agony of the "state of dislocation." The Stanislavskian actor does not shape herself into correspondence with an external model – another actor, an ideal archetype, a *modèle ideal*, or an imaginative "analogon."[205] Instead, she stands at the center of the theatrical experience, giving expression to the unconscious impulses of her organism, living intentionally *as* another, and that other (the character) exists nowhere except as manifested in the actor's actions. Her actions are not experienced as being in relation to other actions. Her "now" is not experienced as being in relation to some other

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[205] See my discussion of Diderot and Sartre in chapter two of this study.

"now." She does not feel an imperative to graft onto herself an entity existing somehow outside, at a distance from, or at odds with herself. For Stanislavsky, the theatrical work of art is the actor's organism in a state of imaginative, intentional, and emotional activation.

Secure at the center of his "creative circle," protected by his "circle of public solitude" (SAS 136, 142), the Stanislavskian actor lives *as* himself *as if* he were another. He avoids approaching the role as "not-I," and therefore he experiences no mimetic gap opening up within the "I" of his consciousness. Quite to the contrary, Stanislavsky's actor enjoys a liberating experience of wholeness, of oneness, of what Grotowski would later call "organicity." Prefiguring Grotowski's conception of acting as ecstatic self-revelation, Stanislavsky believes that the actor's "whole inner man, pure and joyous," can be revealed through a line of actions and within given circumstances belonging to a fictional being (213). This has always been, and will always continue to be, one of acting practice's greatest – and most paradoxical – potentials: the possibility for self-discovery as another. This often exhilarating process can sometimes mean that "it is in the theatre alone that [the actor's] life finds its full expression" (100).

Perhaps we ought to push the above paradox further than Stanislavsky does himself, in aiming to achieve a rapprochement between identification and expression in the theory of the theatre. Instead of the "I AM," we might posit the "I AM ANOTHER" as the first principle of a philosophy of acting. This phrase would mark a unity of selfhood and otherness that precedes the binaristic distinctions so often applied to the figure of the actor, especially by mimeticist treatments of his art. The "I AM ANOTHER" would describe an experiential mode of consciousness – a subjunctive mode

as real, actual, and immediate as the indicative in which we live much of our daily lives.

Acting onstage and acting in life are, as Stanislavsky emphasizes over and over again,

practices that overlap at least as much as they differ. We enter various modes of "I AM

ANOTHER" with frequency in our everyday experience: when we mimic an observed

gesture or intonation, or when someone tells a story and we spontaneously take the

perspective of the teller or one of the story's characters. The "I AM ANOTHER"

becomes even stronger – and more theatrical –when, in moments of intensely absorbed

spectatorship on a streetcorner or through the proscenium arch of an open window, we

give ourselves over to vicarious connection with another human being intensely absorbed

in genuine, fit, and productive action.

"I believe you" / "I don't believe you": The Watcher as "Mirror"

"I don't believe you!" Stanislavsky calls out from the darkness of the auditorium. This

confidently authoritative judgment upon the struggling actor's performance is entirely

subjective, and its subjectivity is the very source of its confident authority. For

Stanislavsky, the quotient of truth within theatrical experience is not ontologically given,

but depends upon the "sense of belief and truth" (*chuvstvo pravdy i vera*) of each member

of the acting ensemble.[206] Stanislavskian truth is not verisimilar correspondence, but an

immanent quality of the actor's actions. The actor feels – and assesses – this immanent

quality using what Stanislavsky calls a "tuning fork,"[207] an organic capacity to judge the

rightness of his action. This sense of rightness is a subjective, embodied, and experiential

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[206] See Carnicke 2009:224.
[207] See AW 159, 338; MLIA 260.

dimension of the actor's performance itself: "You believe in [your life onstage] not with your intelligence but with the things your own nature as an organism senses" (AW 186).

This immanent quality – the "organic truth" of the actor's performance (171) can be sensed and assessed by the actor herself, but also by practiced observers: "*Truth on the stage is whatever we can believe in with sincerity, whether in ourselves or in our colleagues*" [emphasis in original] (Stanislavski 1936:129). Hence Stanislavsky's cry, "I don't believe you!" which appears in both *An Actor's Work* (AW 174) and *My Life in Art* (MLIA 58).[208] The criterion of "I believe" – and the negative appraisal "I don't believe you!" – became famously identified with Stanislavsky's approach. The criterion was mocked by Sergei Eisenstein, critiqued by Bertolt Brecht, and adopted by Lee Strasberg and Jerzy Grotowski.[209] It has retained far greater prominence in the Stanislavsky tradition's verbal lore and practical jargon than in Stanislavsky's writings or academic commentaries upon them.

The "I believe" suggests that the actor's "sense of belief and truth" can be both subjectively and intersubjectively assessed – by other actors, by the directors, and, finally and most crucially, by the members of the audience. Stanislavsky tells his students at the Bolshoi Opera Studio: "If your various 'I want to's' are properly fused with your correct physical actions, it is not only my heart that will say to you 'I believe,' but all the hearts in the auditorium will identify their own feelings with certain feelings of the people you are representing on the stage and *become one* with them" [emphasis added] (SAS 174). The actor's personal sense of "sense of belief and truth" and the sincerity of her

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[208] The passage in which the phrase appears in *My Life in Art* suggests that Stanislavsky's criterion of subjective belief may derive from the tradition of Shchepkin and the Maly Theatre.
[209] See Law and Gordon 1996:209, Brecht 1966:131.

communion with her scene partners combine to bring about not only a "union in beauty" but a oneness of belief in the actor's experiencing.

As has already been discussed, Stanislavsky forbids his actors to use a mirror for self-assessment, for it encourages visualizing the role from an external perspective and "teaches an actor to watch the outside rather than the inside of his soul." In one special case, however, employing a mirror's feedback is acceptable: when that "mirror" is another human subject. In *An Actor's Work*, the acting teacher Tortsov outlines a brief ethics of "mirroring": "Those who are monitoring other people's work should confine themselves to serving as a mirror and to saying honestly, without nit-picking, *whether or not you believe* what you are seeing and hearing and to indicating those moments which convince you" [emphasis added] (AW 176). These living, breathing mirrors do not "reflect" an actor's performance but apprehend it as another human subject, and this apprehension carries within it an immediate, instinctive assessment of the other's sincerity.

Mimetic theories of the theatre tend to fabricate models or originals in order to explain the sensation of rightness that is one of the theatre's basic pleasures. Aristotle, who claims that "the pleasure felt in things imitated" is art's fundamental source of interest, explains that "the reason why men enjoy seeing a likeness is, that in contemplating it they find themselves learning or inferring, and saying perhaps, 'Ah, that is he'" (Aristotle 1951:15). But what process of the mind enables this assessment of rightness? In the theatre, does the spectator judge the rightness of an actor's performance – the rightness that produces the satisfied murmur, "Ah, that is he" – by constantly comparing the actor to some other "he" – perhaps the phantasmic character, or a vaguely

analogous individual once encountered in life and now called up in memory? Or is the perception of rightness *immanent* within the act of spectatorship?

Let us take a simple instance, drawn from everyday life, in pursuing this question of rightness: the face of someone we care about deeply seems troubled, and we blurt out the question, "What's wrong?" When this happens, do we see another face – a face of happiness or equanimity – against which we compare the worried face? No, the awareness of difference is integral to our perception of the face. Perhaps, on the level of brain activity, there is some neurological process occurring that we could label as "reference" or "comparison," but no act of setting-one-thing-in-relation-to-another is present to our consciousness. Similarly, when we have the feeling that someone is lying to us, we do not derive this suspicion from a comparison between a lying face and an imagined or remembered truthful face, but from a sense of *wrongness* in the liar's behavior.

In the same way, when it comes to theatrical perception, it may be that a sense of truthfulness has some grounding in what Francis Fergusson called the "mimetic perception of action" (Fergusson 1949:250): the way that we, as human agents-become-observers, as subjective "mirrors" of the actor's subjectivity, apprehend the actor's action.   The danger of talking about the theatre in terms of "representation," "reference," and "reproduction" is that these words put two things in relation to one another in a way that the consciousness of the spectating subject typically does not. This does not mean, of course, that our own personal histories or knowledge of the world have no bearing upon onstage events. The words and actions of actors may spark specific associations with our lived experiences; memories may flash up before us as mental images as we sit

in the auditorium; a dramatic event may suddenly resonate with the "given circumstances" of our own lives. These associations are not evidence, however, that we understand the import of onstage events through one-to-one comparison with our past experiences – that is, through a cognitive process of holding-X-up-against-Y.

Through his criterion of "I believe" and his conception of the watcher as subjective "mirror," Stanislavsky adds an intersubjective dimension to his subjectively based conception of theatrical truth. As the first writings in the Western tradition that begin to do justice to the complex inner lives of the "I" of the actor and the "I" of the spectator, Stanislavskian theory speaks back to philosophers of theatre like Diderot who attempt to make the complex psycho-physical processes of acting and spectating conform to prefabricated conceptual models. Stanislavsky's philosophy of acting also speaks back to thought-systems that strive to erect themselves on a first principle of pure subjectivity. Against the solipsistic perspective of the lone contemplator, Stanislavsky forwards the inter-relational perspective of a man of the theatre, whose views on social being and doing are profoundly theatrical. Although Stanislavsky makes place in his theatrical philosophy for the actor's pleasurable experience of the truth and integrity of his individual technique – and for the euphoric experience of oneness with the self that such technique can, at rare and precious moments, enable – he also proposes the intersubjective truth of "I believe you."

In life, as in the theatre, we come to know ourselves by coming to know others, and we can know others better by coming to know ourselves more deeply. For most of us, who lack the privilege or desire to spend our lives immersed in ascetic or meditational practices, the relation between our "I" and the "I" of another is as fundamental to our

existence as is the bare experience of the self. Since its emergence as a form of cultural performance, the theatre has provided a site in which the intersubjective phenomena of the "I-I" relationship can rise to an exceptional level of intensity. We might even think of the theatre as a collective meditational practice, in which the "I-I" relation allows the spectator to feel currents of "experiencing" moving through him even as he follows the actor's "experiencing" from a distance. Sensing this process in the auditorium, the actor simultaneously adjusts her performance to the shifts in the spectator's vicarious experience, completing the "autopoetic feedback loop" (Fischer-Lichte 2008:50) that defines the experience of live performance.

Drawing upon many sources, under pressure from a host of influences, Stanislavsky's philosophy of acting broaches new phenomenological territory, but leaves much of the realm of theatrical (inter)subjectivity, within which both actor and spectator experience otherness as themselves, for future phenomenologists of performance to describe. As these philosophers of the theatre go about their work of observation, introspection, and reflection, they will need to guard against the pull of one-to-one thinking, lest they be seduced by the fantasy of exact correspondence that has long dogged theories of the actor's mimesis.

4. Mimesis with an Attitude:
Einfühlung, Lightness, and the Freedom of the Brechtian Body

If the actor doesn't take it easy he makes it impossible for the audience to do so.

– Bertolt Brecht, *Theaterarbeit*

Hitler as **Führer**

"*Es spricht der Führer*!" (The Leader speaks!). Deputy *Führer* Rudolf Hess makes the

declaration at gives over the stage at Nuremberg to Adolf Hitler.[210] Hitler approaches the

podium and arranges the pages of his speech with unassuming matter-of-factness. As he

stares forward, waiting for the audience's applause to die down, his face betrays the

symptoms of mild performance anxiety: repeated swallowing, clenching of the jaw

muscles, pupils flitting sideways. He composes himself with a downward glance into

empty space – a glance that, though brief, holds a quality of entrancement – and begins to

speak in measured tones. A slight shifting of weight from one leg to another is the only

forewarning of the strikingly rapid transformation about to take place.

As he moves from recounting the difficult, early days of Nazism to glorying in the

party's present supremacy, Hitler begins to warm up, and the characteristic gestures begin

to unleash themselves: he beats his right fist against his chest; he plunges his clenched

right hand downward for repeated emphasis; he grasps the air and shakes both fists; his

right hand, stiffened into a plane, punctures and slashes the air in front of him; his tensed

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[210] The speech under analysis is Hitler's address to the Nazi Party Congress at Nuremberg on 8 September 1934. My performance analysis is based on Leni Riefenstahl's propagandist documentation of that speech in *Triumph des Willens* (Triumph of the Will, released 1935).

fingers seem to clutch invisible orbs from beneath; he presses the knuckles of his fists against one another and suddenly raises his arms over his shoulders in a pose not unlike a strongman's showing off his biceps. The gestures are predominantly but by no means entirely of the tautly aggressive kind: Hitler also wags his index finger with a gesture of instruction or scolding; he passes his palms through the air with an undulating raconteurial sweep; he spreads his arms wide in a messianic gesture of embrace; he shakes his open hands, fingers spread wide, as if invoking the heavens, and concludes this series of gesticulations with hands crossed over his sternum. How much of this is rehearsed, how much spontaneous, is impossible to know. And then there are the odd, reflexive mannerisms: both hands spring to his hips with elbows at a ninety-degree angle; he folds his arms in toward his chest with hands clasped around the elbows or forearms in a gesture of self-containment; his bent-wristed personal salute erupts at an incongruous moment; he rises on tiptoe as he approaches the end of a phrase, as if squeezing the last ounce of breath from his lungs, before dropping back onto the soles of his feet with a punctuating jolt.

I am less interested in the semiotics of Hitlerian oratorical performance than I am in the effort-qualities of its characteristic gestures – gestures of clutching, grasping, punching, striking, slashing, clasping, pounding, crushing, and pressing. We can describe these qualities – the *how* rather than the *what* of Hitler's most histrionic gestures – as tense, taut, rigid, constrictive, and strained. Or, to employ Rudolf von Laban's basic categories for effort dynamics, Hitler's movements are "Strong" (rather than "Light"),

"Sudden" (rather than "Sustained"), "Direct" (rather than "Indirect," or "Flexible"), "Bound" (rather than "Free").[211]

The effort-qualities of Hitler's movements themselves carry embodied meaning and are crucial to their performative *function*: sometimes they achieve rhythmic and rhetorical punctuation; at other times they seem to do violence to an invisible entity standing before him; at all times, however, they seem also to be working upon Hitler himself, as he rises into a state of frenzy. Hitler's physical labor of working-himself-up also works with remarkable efficacy upon the hall full of Nazi partisans seated before him. Hitler's histrionic movements are agitated and agitating, excited and excitational. As his effort of self-galvanization – which is at the same time one of collective excitation – succeeds, one can see that Hitler begins to enjoy himself. Perspiration runs down his brows and his voice rises to stentorian stridency; his eyes gleam and a hint of smile plays around the usually contracted lips. When he shrieks his final words, "*Es lebe Deutschland*!" (Long live Germany!), and unleashes one last salute, synchronized ecstatic cries of "*Sieg Heil*!" emanate from the sea of pulsating right arms thrust diagonally toward him. Hitler himself, however, collects his papers and turns from the podium with an office clerk's manner, as if instantly purged of the psycho-physiological frenzy that has held him – and his auditors – so tightly in its grip.

Brecht on Hitler as **Führer**

Brecht didn't think much of Hitler's acting. Or, rather, he thought Hitlerian solo performance utterly ridiculous from one point of view and thoroughly effective from

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[211] See Laban 1988.

another. It was all a matter of the attitude one brought to bear upon it. For a critical

observer (like Brecht, Theodor Adorno, or Charlie Chaplin), troubled by Hitler's politics

and revulsed by his personal mannerisms, Hitler was an alternately ridiculous, grotesque,

and terrifying figure. Brecht's characteristic attitude toward Hitler was indeed one of

aggressive derision: in his essays and journal entries Brecht insistently refers to Hitler

with the mocking nickname "the housepainter,"[212] denying him both his proper name and

the honorific title *Führer*. At the same time, Hitler the political entity fascinated Brecht.

Numerous photographs of Hitler found among Brecht's personal papers after his death

speak to the intensity of this fascination.[213]

Brecht seized upon the anecdote – apparently a true one – that Hitler had taken

lessons in declamation from Fritz Basil (1862-1938), an actor of the court theatre in

Hanover, and parodied the incident in *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*. In that play, Ui is

coached by an ageing classical actor in how to walk with the toes landing first

(reminiscent of the goose-stepping marching style of the *Wehrmacht*), stand with arms

crossed so that the backs of his hands remain visible, and sit with hands on thighs and

elbows turned outward for an indefinite period – all, to Brecht, characteristic of the Nazi

leader's concocted physicality. Ui incorporates these theatrical postures in order to shape

himself into "the little man's image of his master" (Brecht 2002:45). Re-viewing Hitler's

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[212] Brecht seems to have concocted the nickname "*der Anstreicher*" in sardonic
commentary on Hitler's youthful artistic aspirations, his metaphorical ability to "paint
over the cracks" in the Nazi political program, and an early Nazi work-creation scheme
involving building repairs (see Brecht 2003:129).

[213] See Brecht 2003:129. Brecht pasted into his journal on 17 June 1940 a photographic
sequence taken from a German newsreel and subsequently reproduced in *Life* magazine,
which shows Hitler doing a jig of victory after hearing that France is about to surrender
after the occupation of Paris. The *Life* commentator writes: "[Hitler] is in an ecstasy of
joy. Keeping his heels smartly together, he clenches his fists and jerks his arms stiffly up
and down, grinning in tense prim jubilation" (in Brecht 1993:61-62).

performance at Nuremberg in light of the Basil anecdote and the *Ui* scene, one begins to

see in the Nazi leader's fervid gesticulations the traces of the exaggerated conventions of

nineteenth-century German stage declamation.[214]

While *Arturo Ui* presents Hitlerian histrionics as an object of scorn, Brecht argued

elsewhere that it was the Nazi leader's overt theatricality that made his oratorical style

dangerously compelling. In "On the Theatricality of Fascism" (1939), Brecht concedes

that Hitler's imitating the "affectation and pomposity" of an actor (Basil) working within

an outdated tradition contains an element of the ridiculous (Brecht 2003:195), but he goes

on to warn that Hitler possesses a dangerously powerful capacity to generate that nemesis

of Brecht's "critical attitude": empathy (in German, *Einfühlung*). Hitlerian oratory

induces "that empathy of the public for the protagonists," "that feeling of being swept

along, that transformation of the spectators into a unified mass" upon which the

"dramatic" theatre of "Aristotelian" dramaturgy relies (197). The rest of Brecht's

dialogic essay analyzes how Hitler "makes use of the artistic means of empathy" for

political ends (197-98). Brecht argues that, unlike most politicians, who cultivate

composure in their public appearances, Hitler the orator

> submits himself, in order to facilitate empathy, to intensely personal feelings,
> feelings which are readily accessible to the private individual. […] He's an
> individual, a hero in the drama, and it's his purpose to make the people (or rather
> the audience) say what he says. Or more precisely, *feel what he feels*. […] He
> loses himself in furious tirades like some Homeric hero, insists on his innocence,
> implies that he can only barely stop himself leaping at his opponent's throat,
> addresses him [his political opponent] directly, flings challenges at him, ridicules
> him, and so on. In all this, his audience *follow him emotionally*, they participate
> in the speaker's triumphs, *adopt his attitudes*. Without doubt, the house painter

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[214] Somewhat ironically, because the Ui role is typically approached by contemporary actors as a Hitler parody, the *Führer*'s histrionic gestures have been resuscitated again and again on the stages of the late twentieth century.

> […] has taken up a theatrical method, by which he can persuade his audience to follow him almost blindly. [emphasis added] (198)

Not only do Hitler's auditors participate in his emotions, they "adopt his attitudes" – that is, the postures that organize the *Führer*'s body and instantiate its dispositions toward the world. The keyword in question here is *Haltung* ("attitude," "stance," "bearing"), which, as we shall see, brings together the physical, the psychological, and the social in Brechtian thought.

"On the Theatricality of Fascism" then moves beyond the instance of Hitler and Nazism to make an objection against empathy/*Einfühlung* itself, regardless of the emotions, attitudes, and doctrines modeled by any given "protagonist," dramatic or political. In other words, empathizing with a protagonist is not only dangerous when that protagonist is Hitler; the empathic state is inherently perilous. It is, of course, a matter of serious concern whether a political leader leads his public along a "right path" or a "dangerous path," concedes Brecht, but, ultimately: "The concept of the right path is less appropriate than the right way of walking." Brecht continues: "A right path can never be followed on a harness" (200). Empathy/*Einfühlung*, as understood by Brecht, straps the political and theatrical spectator into a harness of the emotional-and-perceptual kind:

> Whoever empathises with someone, and does so completely, relinquishes criticism both of the object of their empathy and of themselves. Instead of awakening, they sleepwalk. Instead of doing something, they let something be done with them. […] They have only the illusion that they are living, in reality they are vegetating. They are, so to speak, passively lived. (Brecht 2003:201)

Hitler "involves his audience in himself, implicates them in his movements, lets them 'participate' in his troubles and his triumphs, and dissuades them from any criticism, even from a fleeting glance at their surroundings from their own viewpoint" (199). Brechtian criticism requires a free and mobile body, a free and mobile gaze, and a free

and mobile intellect. As a state of psycho-physiological connection, empathy/*Einfühlung*

does away with all three, producing "vegetating bodies" without agency or animus.

Hitler follows his path toward global conflagration "like a sleepwalker" (Brecht

2003:199), and his followers, their critical faculties neutralized by feeling what Hitler

feels, stumble blindly toward their destruction in his wake.[215]

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"On the Theatricality of Fascism" covers Brecht's objections to the total identification of

spectator with performer more comprehensively than do any of his purely theatrical

essays. English-language readers will associate these objections with Brecht's theoretical

onslaught against "empathy," but, in fact, Brecht never objected to "empathy" *per se*, or

to the term's contemporary German analog, *Empathie*. The state of psycho-physiological

participation against which Brecht inveighed was *Einfühlung,* a term whose provenance

lies in nineteenth-century German philosophy and turn-of-the-century psychology.

Coined by the aesthetician Robert Vischer in 1873 and influentially developed by the

psychologically oriented philosophers Theodor Lipps and Karl Groos, the term

Einfühlung – literally, "in-feeling," or "feeling-into," with the double meaning "one-

feeling" – designated the projection of a viewing subject's ego into a object of aesthetic

contemplation. The early theorists of *Einfühlung* held that perceiving subjects felt-

themselves-into the animate and inanimate forms surrounding them, unconsciously

investing these objects and figures with their own inner impulses, volitions, and strivings.

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[215] Brecht's *War Primer* displays a newspaper cutting of a glassy-eyed Hitler at a
microphone stand, with the caption: "Like one who dreams the road ahead is steep / I
know the way Fate has prescribed for us / That narrow way towards a precipice. / Just
follow. I can find it in my sleep" (Brecht 1998:1b).

Einfühlung was first translated into English as "empathy" in Edward Titchener's *Psychology of Thought Processes* (1909). The British-born Titchener had studied under the pioneering German experimental psychologist Wilhelm Wundt, and would have been exposed to the *Einfühlung* concept during his time at Wundt's laboratory at the University of Leipzig during the 1890s. Titchener's neo-Greek coinage combined the roots *em-* ("into") and *pathein* ("to feel") in roughly the same way that Robert Vischer assembled the term *Einfühlung* almost four decades earlier.[216] "Empathy," then, as a theoretical term coined by the inchoate discipline of Anglo-American psychology, is scarcely a century old, and its predecessor term *Einfühlung* dates back less than fifty years earlier.

Over the past few decades, the early history of the *Einfühlung* concept has been extensively rehearsed by scholars interested in psychology's and aesthetic theory's histories of ideas.[217] *Einfühlung*'s phases of conceptual development are now well marked out. Much more recently, a historicist approach to the question of what precisely we might mean when we talk about "empathy" has surfaced within the field of theatre and performance studies: David Krasner has provided a useful overview of the empathy concept's history and continued relevance to theatre scholarship and Susan Leigh Foster

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[216] The ancient Greeks did use the term *empatheia*, but, in the classical term, the prefix *em-* functioned as an intensifier. *Empatheia* therefore signified a state of heightened passion in the individual, and not a mode of connection with the emotional experience of another. Whereas the contemporary connotations of the term "sympathy" have much in common with those of the ancient Greek *sumpatheia*, grafting a modern conception of "empathy" onto Greek usages of *empatheia* can only lead to serious confusion. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to attempt an untangling of the terms "empathy" and "sympathy," which have come to hold considerable overlap since "empathy" entered popular discourse on our mental and emotional life.

[217] See Hunsdahl 1967, Gladstein 1984, Pigman 1995, Jahoda 2005, Stueber 2008, Lanzoni 2009.

has given a partial summary of *Einfühlung*'s origins as part of a broader exploration of

the kinesthetic connection between dancing and spectating bodies.[218] My project in this

chapter, however, is one not yet undertaken: to put Brechtian theory, theatrical thought's

most influential – and polemical – treatment of the "the empathy operation" (Brecht

1964:136), back into contact with the physiological specifics of the *Einfühlung* state as

characterized by its early theorists. I will not argue that Brecht came into direct contact

with the ideas of Vischer, Groos, or Lipps – although, as will be shown, this is highly

possible, even likely. Neither will I argue that Brecht's understanding of *Einfühlung*

preserves the precise details of Vischer's or Lipps's treatment. Brecht took pride in a

personal commitment to "crude thinking" (*plumpes Denken*), and his thinking about

Einfühlung is indisputably crude. I will argue, however, that without a period-specific

knowledge of *Einfühlung*'s connotations during the first decades of the twentieth century

Brecht's position on feeling in the theatre becomes severely distorted indeed.

This chapter also aims to undo some of the unwittingly revisionist over-writing of

the "empathy" concept back across the history of theatrical thought. Edward Titchener's

choice of Greek as his language for neologism, combined with the translation into

English of Brecht's "anti-Aristotelian" writings, has had unfortunate repercussions for

theatre scholarship. Theatrical theory's foundational text is, of course, Aristotle's

Poetics, a work in which the term *empatheia* never arises.[219] The tragic theatre, as

analyzed in the *Poetics*, is a theatre of pity (*eleos*), fear (*phobos*), and affective purgation

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[218] See Krasner 2006, Foster 2011.

[219] Aristotle does use the verb-form *empathein* in his *Rhetoric* (1411b 32), but in describing the function of metaphor, which he deems a device for "making the lifeless living," of endowing the objects and figures of poetic description with "activity" or "actuality" (*energeia*) (Aristotle 2007:222).

(*katharsis*), but it is not a theatre of empathy. Nevertheless, Brecht writes authoritatively in *The Messingkauf Dialogues*: "The theatrical experience comes about by means of an act of empathy; this is established in Aristotle's *Poetics*" (Brecht 1965:101). This is, in fact, the foundational postulate of Brecht's theory of theatrical emotion: in order to construct a model for a socially productive theatre in which emotions have a radically alternative function, Brecht must first define – swiftly and crudely – the affective dynamics of the traditional theatre he is attacking. John Willett, the principal English-language translator of Brecht's theatrical essays, consistently renders Brecht's *Einfühlung* as "empathy," and the term's apparently Greek etymology falsely suggests to readers of Brecht in English translation that it might be an Aristotelian keyword. It is a grand irony that Brecht's objections to *Einfühlung* have, in English translation, fed the misconception that the theatre's affective dynamics have always been held, from classical Greece to the present, to be dominated by "empathy."

The chief objective of this chapter, however, is to show the powerful corporeal emphasis of the *Einfühlung* concept's early articulations carries over into Brechtian theory. After demonstrating that Brecht does indeed – at least at certain theoretical moments – conceive *Einfühlung* as an embodied attunement between actor and spectator, I will explore how this mode of one-feeling participates in the epic theatre's mimesis of social action. Although the key source behind Brecht's one-to-one thinking is clearly Aristotle's *Poetics*, I will show that a strand of mimeticism also ran through the philosophical accounts of *Einfühlung* to which Brecht was responding. Probing Brecht's philosophy of the body, and drawing upon the recent work of Darko Suvin and Rainer Nägele on Brecht's key corporeal concepts *gestus* and *Haltung*, I attempt to reach a

clearer understanding of the bodily mission of the actor in the epic theatre.

I argue that, rather than rejecting *Einfühlung* outright, Brecht preserves a positive role for the process of one-feeling, through which the actor can model for the spectator a specific set of physical-and-cognitive states based in lightness, easefulness, and adaptability. In other words, the Brechtian actor need not show the spectator the precise route toward truth, but must demonstrate, with resources of both body and mind, a productive way of walking – or, to put things more literally, a way of acting that is also an embodied mode of critical thought. Rejecting Stanislavsky's Romantic vision of the "experiencing" actor, who galvanizes vicarious experience in the spectator, Brecht renews the mimetic paradigm in service of Marxist social criticism. Within Brechtian thought, however, the one-to-one of mimetic thinking tangles with the one-against-another of dialectics to produce a new conception of theatrical mimesis: one in which the theatre can realistically imitate human action while at the same time taking up a critical attitude toward that action. While the attitude of criticism frees the epic theatre from a purely duplicative obligation, its actor extends this critical freedom to the spectator through what Brecht conceives as a one-to-one process of embodied attunement. Brechtian thought is thus marked by a struggle between two conceptual schemata: the one-against-another of dialectics and the one-as-another of *Einfühlung* (or mimesis). The mature Brecht notes these tendencies and attempts to bring them into reconciliation – an attempt that I hope to further in this chapter's conclusion.

The Origins of Einfühlung

My goal over the following few pages will be to "defamiliarize" or "alienate" the empathy/*Einfühlung* concept, to render it strange and thereby, hopefully, to refresh its interest. Every theoretical innovation functions best in the immediate aftermath of its coinage, when those who encounter it do not assume they know what it means. True to Brechtian method, I will accomplish this act of theoretical *Verfremdungs* by historicizing the concept – that is, by drawing attention to the fact that how we think of "empathy" today is not at all how it was thought of a century or a century-and-a-half ago.

Einfühlung theory emerged from a diverse set of attempts in nineteenth-century German aesthetics, philosophy, and psychology to come to terms with our subjective response to the formal properties of artworks and natural phenomena.[220] The question of the relation between the subjectivity of the observer and the objective characteristics of the work of art had been influentially broached by Kant and Schopenhauer and taken up by Johann Friedrich Herbart, Robert Zimmerman, and the pioneering empirical psychologist Wilhelm Wundt. By the latter half of the nineteenth century, the subjective apprehension of form had become the central problem of German aesthetics – a problem that was generating increasingly detailed accounts of the psychological and physiological processes of the perceiving subject.

The history of the *Einfühlung* concept proper begins with the exploration of the role of feeling (*Gefühl*) and sensation (*Empfindung*) in aesthetic apprehension by the philosopher of art Friedrich Theodor Vischer, Robert Vischer's more famous father. F.T. Vischer's monumental *Aesthetik; oder, Wissenschaft des Schönen* [Aesthetics; or, The

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[220] In laying out the pre-history of *Einfühlung* theory that follows, I have relied heavily on Harry Francis Mallgrave and Eleftherios Ikonomou's *Empathy, Form, and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics, 1873-1893* (Santa Monica: The Getty Center, 1994).

Science of the Beautiful] (1846-1857) and his later essay, "Kritik meiner Aesthetik"
[Critique of My Aesthetics] (1866), proposed a new theory of artistic symbolism, arguing
that our mode of relation with art-objects depends upon the "symbolic interjection of
emotions into objective forms" (in Mallgrave and Ikonomou 1994:20). Vischer senior's
"symbol" is therefore not an abstract or arbitrary signifier, but a locus "in which image
and content are immediately felt as one [*ineinsgefühlt*]" (in Pigman 1995:239). Vischer
contends that the human inclination toward "symbolic interjection" is produced by a
"pantheistic urge to merge our spirit with the sensuous world" that persists as a remnant
of humankind's primordial existence (in Mallgrave and Ikonomou 1994:20). In the
psychology of aesthetic experience, then, the philosopher finds evidence that "the
universe, nature and spirit at their root must be *one*" (in Pigman 1995:239). In light of
F.T. Vischer's work on aesthetic symbolism, the double meaning of his son Robert's
Einfühlung becomes clearer: the term designates the process of "in-feeling" or "feeling-
into" through which the aesthetic contemplator engages with the object of perception, but
also a spiritual "one-feeling" that unites the human being with the cosmos.[221]

Karl Köstlin, Friedrich Vischer's colleague and collaborator (and, later, his son
Robert's dissertation adviser), extended Vischer's "symbolism of form" (*Formsymbolik*)
into an account of visual-imaginative associations. At the same time, though working
independently of Vischer and Köstlin, the philosopher Hermann Lotze had produced his
highly influential and sprawlingly ambitious work of speculative anthropology,

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[221] After his son Robert's coinage of *Einfühlung*, F.T. Vischer took up the term in his
discussion of aesthetic symbolism in his *Kritische Gänge* ["Critical Paths"] (1887).

Mikrokosmos [Microcosm] (1856-64).[222] In a famous discussion of human sentience,

Lotze argued that our cognitive life is thoroughly infused with "sensations" that

constantly remind us "of the contour of our bodily frame" and of "what fullness of

muscular power, what delicate susceptibility or patient strength, what graceful frailty or

iron rigidity, is latent in each several part of that frame" (Lotze 1885:585). "Every

movement which we execute, every attitude in which we repose," writes Lotze, "has its

meaning rendered plain to us by the feeling of exertion or of enjoyment" (585).

According to Lotze, we apply this kinesthetically experienced meaning to the world of

natural phenomena – animate and inanimate – that surrounds us. For Lotze, "the world

becomes alive to us" through "aesthetic enjoyment," when "we sympathetically expand

our sentience beyond the limits of our body" and invest organic and man-made forms

with our own "kinetic energy" (584-86). Like F.T. Vischer and the other aestheticians of

his era, Lotze attempted to trace a correlation between the formal characteristics and

motive properties of worldly phenomena and the subjective states of their human

apprehenders.

It was into this lively theoretical conversation on subjective engagement with

animate and inanimate form – a conversation rich with introspective insight as well as

speculative overreaching – that Robert Vischer, a precocious doctoral candidate in

philosophy at the University of Tübingen and the son of F.T. Vischer, was to enter

decisively with his doctoral thesis, *Über das optische Formgefühl* ["On the Optical

Feeling of Form"] (1873). Extending his father's pursuit of "a pure symbolism of form,"

Vischer took inspiration from the philosopher Karl Albert Scherner's *Das Leben des*

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[222] Lotze's volume was much cited by later theorists of *Einfühlung*, including Johannes
Volkelt, Karl Groos, and Vernon Lee.

Traums ["The Life of Dreams"] (1861), in which Scherner describes how the dreaming body "unconsciously projects its own bodily form" into other objects within the dreamscape. Vischer derived his own theory of the "wonderful ability to project and incorporate our own physical form into an objective form" in waking aesthetic activity from Scherner's text (Vischer 1994:104) and coined the term *Einfühlung* to denote this spontaneous injection of subjective experience into the external world.

The psycho-physiological basis for Vischer's *Einfühlung* is the way in which the symmetrical structure of the human body imposes an "organic norm" on the objects of vision. Pleasure taken in the forms of these objects depends upon the capacity of the imagination to "insinuate itself into the forms as a kinetic, volitional, empathetic sensation" [*Einempfindung*] (102). Vision itself, when active and intentional, brings about "an impelling animation of the dead phenomenon, a rhythmic enlivening and revitalization of it" (94). In other words, we perceive in inanimate objects impulsions, movements, and rhythms that correspond to our own, internal "self-motions" (97). "We move in and with the forms" we see, writes Vischer: we are carried along by floating clouds, we undulate along a mountain range in the distance, we scale the rising form of a fir tree, and imaginatively plunge into a valley below us (101).

If, as above, we experience a powerful feeling of kinesthetic enlivening even when apprehending inanimate nature, the sight of another human form produces "an immediate spiritual empathy" (120), resulting from the "pure and complete union between the subjective and objective imagination" (103). *Einfühlung* animates lifeless forms and anthropomorphizes animals, but directed toward other human beings it produces a "doubling of self" (106) within which the subject is "mysteriously

transplanted and magically transformed into [the] Other" (104). For Vischer, the

Mitempfindung and *Mitgefühl* (literally, "with-sensation" and "with-feeling") we have for

a single human form like our own can expand into a felt connection with the species as a

whole, and *Einfühlung* takes on a morally uplifting, quasi-spiritual power.

Beyond its account of aesthetic self-objectivation, Vischer's *Über das optische*

Formgefühl also contains an implicit theory of mimesis, as a principle of both artistic

form and human physiology. When pressing his discussion of *Einfühlung* into the

phenomenologically difficult realm of the imagination, Vischer contends that the state

arises when an imaginative idea of the self's bodily form is brought into relation with a

real or imagined object. This object provokes "a related idea of the self in sensory or

motor form," and the phenomenon becomes an "analogy," or roughly mimetic

counterpart, for the bodily structure (101). The process of *Einfühlung* thus involves

bringing the "image of our own [human, bodily] perfection" into mental relation with the

"image presented by nature" (114). For Vischer, *Einfühlung* is therefore based in

"imitation" (*Nachahmung*), but not in "simple mimicry of a living form or action" (114).

Instead, the imitation that characterizes *Einfühlung* consists in the repetition of the

contours and movements of the object in another, radically different medium: that of

human feeling (*Fühlung*). Feelings provoked in response to the form of an object are

therefore "already imitations, or better said, mediations between subject and object"

(114).

When it comes to artistic creation, feeling-as-imitation-as-mediation unites the

inner experience of the artist and the form of the artwork. According to Vischer, the truly

creative artist does not concern himself with the "slavish imitation" of a "model found in

nature"; instead, he "transposes the intuitive and rational human norm to the object," describing "in everything his own facial expression as it is transfigured in the illusionary splendor of the world" (114-15). A relationship of one-to-one correspondence connects the inner experience of the artist with the formal properties of the artwork and displaces the verisimilar relation between work and world. Furthermore, the "rhythmic motion" of the act of creation itself – the application of paint to canvas, or chisel to stone – has a dynamic residue in the art object, producing what Vischer calls the "symbolism of the presentation" (117-18). The contemplator of the art object can therefore experience feelings evoked by the formal properties of the represented object or figure itself but also impulses stimulated by traces of the artistic act left in the medium of the artwork. According to Vischer, then, the artist's mimesis is not that of the external world, but of his own dynamically subjective experience, pulsating with "the energy of a living act" (121), which is endowed with sensuous form and offered up to the perception of viewers.

Vischer's account of *Einfühlung* would provoke vigorous debates across the emerging boundaries between philosophy, psychology, and physiology in Germany during the last decades of the nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth centuries. The concept was taken up, critiqued, and elaborated upon by a number of theorists working in the domain of psychological aesthetics as well as psychology proper.[223] The

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[223] The summary treatment of Robert Vischer (and Lotze) in the philosopher Johannes Volkelt's influential *Der Symbol-Begriff in der neuesten Aesthetik* ["The Concept of the Symbol in the Most Recent Aesthetics"] (1876) did much to diffuse and popularize the *Einfühlung* concept. Other early studies taking up Vischer's term *Einfühlung* include Hermann Siebeck's *Das Wesen der ästhetischen Anschauung* (1875), Karl Groos's *Einleitung in die Aesthetik* (1892), and Paul Stern's *Einfühlung und Association in der neueren Ästhetik* (1898). During this period of diffusion, Vischer's own conception of *Einfühlung* was "eclipsed" by the psychological accounts it birthed and his essay "largely forgotten" (see Mallgrave and Ikonomou 1994:2).

two most important figures in the spread and elaboration of *Einfühlung* theory were the evolutionary psychologist Karl Groos and the philosopher Theodor Lipps. Groos advanced a highly physiological version of *Einfühlung* based in "inner mimicry" or "inner imitation" (*innere Nachahmung*), which consisted in "actual motor processes" – "movement and postural sensations, […] light muscular innervation, together with visual and respiratory movement" – called forth by the object of perception (Groos 1913:330, 328).[224] It was Lipps, however, whose work transformed *Einfühlung* "from a concept of philosophical aesthetics into a central category of the philosophy of the social and human sciences" (Stueber 2008). Indeed, Lipps's prolific and influential writings on *Einfühlung* led many subsequent theorists to presume that he had originated the concept. Lipps forwarded *Einfühlung* not simply as a psychological mechanism driving aesthetic activity but as the basic means by which we comprehend the inner experience of other human beings.

Lipps defines the very essence of human life as "activity" – "power, inner working, striving, achieving" (Lipps 1965:404) – and argues that we engage with the world around us through this inner activity. In Lipps's terms, we "grasp" or "apperceive" the forms of nature by endowing them with the dynamic volitional impulses of human life:

> The striving in nature is my striving, the activity in it is my activity, the power in it is my power […]. In grasping things with the understanding, I permeate them with such striving, activity, and power, and these are part of their essence. Insofar as things are my 'objects' [of perception], they are part of my very being. (409)

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[224] Groos developed his conception of "inner imitation"-based *Einfühlung* across a number of works: *Einleitung in die Aesthetik* ["Introduction to Aesthetics"] (1893), *Der Ästhetische Genuss* ["Aesthetic Pleasure"] (1902), and his two influential works on the play instinct, *Die Spiele der Tiere* ["The Play of Animals"] (1896) and *Die Spiele der Menschen* ["The Play of Man"] (1899).

This projection or "objectivation" of one's "inner motion of striving" into a sensuous object is for Lipps the basic form of *Einfühlung* (405). Lipps writes of the relation between subject and object at the heart of his definition of *Einfühlung*: "Empathy is the fact here established, that the object is myself and by the very same token this self of mine is the object" (Lipps 1935:376).

Lipps's phenomenology of *Einfühlung* is actually rather simple but requires clarification: the subject does *not* experience vicariously the energetic or motive qualities belonging to the external object *itself*; rather, the external object elicits a feeling of inner activity *in the ego*, which the subject *experiences as projected into* that object. The feeling of striving therefore belongs to the ego, but the ego experiences this striving *within the object of perception*. Lipps therefore writes: "Empathy means, not a sensation in one's body, but feeling something, namely, oneself, into the esthetic object" (Lipps 1935:381). Were the subject's own bodily sensations to become an object of conscious awareness, aesthetic contemplation would immediately cease, for the state of in-feeling/one-feeling requires that inner strivings felt-into the object of perception occupy entirely the contemplator's consciousness. In his earlier works, Lipps, like Groos, sometimes discusses *Einfühlung* in terms of unconscious and involuntary processes of "inner imitation" (*innere Nachahmung*). However, Lipps would eventually abandon the terminology of "inner imitation" as misleading,[225] for imitation implies a model and Lipps's conception of *Einfühlung* holds that the external object is not a model but a site for the ego's self-projection.

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[225] See Jahoda 2005:155.

For Lipps, like Vischer, the "highest evocation" of *Einfühlung* is stimulated by the "sensuous appearance of the human being" (Lipps 1965:409). When confronted by a laughing or grief-stricken face, we immediately assume a corresponding "inner attitude" and "surrender to this inner activity or to the action of the whole inner being" (409). The facial expression of another "awakens [in us] impulses to such movements that are suited to call just this expression into existence"; these movement-impulses "form a psychic unity" with the emotional state itself, so that our automatic tendency to imitate facial emotion in another evokes a corresponding emotion within us (in Pigman 1995:242).[226] Indeed, contemplation of the human form holds a central place throughout Lipps's writings on "esthetic empathy," which for Lipps is not confined to the engagement with works of art but occurs regularly in everyday experience. In "esthetic empathy," writes Lipps:

> I feel active in the movement or in the moving figure, and through projecting myself into it I feel myself striving and performing this same movement. […] I am now with my feeling of activity entirely and wholly in the moving figure. […] I am transported into it. I am, so far as my consciousness is concerned, entirely and wholly identical with it. (Lipps 1935:379)

For Lipps, then, *Einfühlung* enables a "free inner participation" (*freies inneres Mitmachen*) in the external world of objects and others (in Jahoda 2005:158). This participation is typically presented as being pleasurable, expansive, even joyous: the projection of our "active or vital feeling" into external objects leads to "objectivated self-enjoyment" (Lipps 1965:403), and we feel "free, light, proud" as a result (in Jahoda 2005:155). Aesthetic *Einfühlung* liberates the experiencing subject, and "apperceptive

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[226] Lipps's introspective and speculative conclusions thus foreshadow the findings of the pioneering psychologist of facial expressions Paul Ekman, who since the 1970s has argued for the transcultural universality of basic emotional expressions and their capacity to evoke emotions through feedback.

surrender" to this state produces an intense feeling of pleasure – "the feeling of freedom and unconstricted ease in the activity which the thing elicits from me" (Lipps 1965:407-8).

As one might expect from the above account of *Einfühlung*'s centrality to human experience of the world, Lipps argues that *Einfühlung* is the very basis of artistic production and reception. Art satisfies our "yearning to live" by allowing us to experience the essence of human life – "vitality, strength, power of volition, in short, activity" (Lipps 1965:412) – through our subjective projection into objective artworks. As one might expect, Lipps dwells most often on works that depict the human form. For Lipps, however, the work of art is more "ideal" than an accidentally encountered object, and therefore compels a more heightened mode of aesthetic engagement:

> [The] work of art leads me and forces me, the observer, to step out of and beyond myself, and the more it deserves the name of a work of art the more *forcibly* it does so, immersing me and *confining* me in an ideal world. [emphasis added] (412)

For Lipps, it is no paradox that the subject's feelings of vital expansion and energetic liberation, of "freedom and unconstricted ease," come through total surrender to the artwork's coercive power. Uncontrolled self-abandon to the object of aesthetic contemplation, to the extent that one loses oneself – or, perhaps better, finds oneself – within it, lies at the very heart of the *Einfühlung* experience. As we shall see, the forcible immersion and confinement that Lipps celebrates in the passage above receives a very different valuation in Brechtian thought.

Writing in 1905, Lipps declared confidently that *Einfühlung* was "the basic idea of present-day aesthetics" (Lipps 1965:403), and, indeed, by this time, the concept had permeated German intellectual culture. A bibliography of writings on *Einfühlung* in

psychology and aesthetics compiled in 1911 lists 161 works (see Pigman 1995: 237).

However, *Einfühlung*'s process of theoretical diffusion was not without controversy.[227]

Diffusion, elaboration, and debate thus led to the kind of mutation that critical keywords

inevitably undergo. By 1910, *Einfühlung* was being used to refer to a variety of modes of

psychic participation and intersubjective connection, and the term began to take on the

semantic amorphousness that characterizes the present-day usage of the term

"empathy."[228] As the *Einfühlung* concept continued to diffuse through German and

eventually Anglo-American philosophic and psychological discourse, even more of its

original specificity was lost.

Brecht on Einfühlung

In October 1917, the nineteen-year-old Eugen Bertolt Brecht enrolled at the Ludwig-

Maximilians-Universität in Munich as a student in the Faculty of Philosophy. Brecht

registered for lectures in philosophy and natural science as well as a course in literary

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[227] Konrad Lange and Max Scheler were sharply critical of *Einfühlung* theory. Antonin
Prandtl, Edith Stein, and Johannes Volkelt accepted much of Lipps's thought while
disputing and extending other aspects. Wilhelm Worringer wove *Einfühlung* theory into
a speculative history of art that would become an inspirational text for Expressionist
aesthetics. Edmund Husserl embedded the term within his own, highly original
phenomenological meditations. The works in question here are: Konrad Lange, *Das
Wesen der Kunst* (1901); Johannes Volkelt, *System der Aesthetik* (1905); Antonin
Prantl/Prandtl, *Die Einfühlung* (1910); Max Scheler, *Zur Phänomenologie und Theorie
der Sympathiegefühle* (1913); Edith Stein, *Zum Problem der Einfühlung* ["On The
Problem of Empathy"] (1917); Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung*
["Abstraction and Empathy"] (1907); Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen
Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie* ["Ideas for a Pure
Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy"] (1913). For a more comprehensive
survey of *Einfühlung* theory in the wake of Lipps, see Jahoda 2005 and Hunsdahl 1967.
[228] For example, Freud, who admired Lipps a great deal and was familiar with the work
of Groos, used the term *Einfühlung* across several works to describe a largely intellectual
process of perspective-taking (see Pigman 1995:244-51).

criticism, all of which, according to Klaus Völker, "he attended with varying regularity" (Völker 1978:6-17). Here at Munich, Theodor Lipps had recently stepped down from the chair of "Systematic Philosophy" after a two-decade-long tenure (1894-1913), during which he had championed a psychological approach to philosophy as a science of consciousness. Most formative among the young Brecht's university experiences was his participation in Artur Kutscher's theatre seminar at the university. Kutscher, one of the founding figures of German *Theaterwissenschaft*, had taken up his academic post at Munich in 1915. Despite his contentious relationship with his professor and the other seminar participants, Kutscher's emphasis on *Mimus*, the physicality of acting, as the essence of theatrical art,[229] seems to have had some lasting influence on his intractable pupil's vision of the epic theatre as a material, corporeal, and gestural apparatus for the mimesis of social actions.

It seems likely that Brecht's first sustained contact with the *Einfühlung* concept came during his university days, though whether this contact came through curricular encounter, in philosophy lectures or the Kutscher seminar,[230] or simply through participation in the university's intellectual culture is unclear. Brecht's university experience ended in 1921; he did not attend the summer term of classes and his name was removed from the student register in November, possibly for non-payment of fees (see Völker 1978: 43). Though Brecht's investment in his university studies was sporadic, it brought him into contact with the then-current terminologies of literary and theatrical

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[229] See Melnitz 1951:136.

[230] Kutscher's two-volume magnum opus, *Grundriss der Theaterwissenschaft* (1932-36), cites the work of F.T. Vischer, Groos, and Lipps, though never with reference to their treatments of *Einfühlung*.

criticism. These may have included the terms *episches* ("epic")[231] and *Einfühlung* as well

as Aristotelian terminology – terms that, like almost everything that stimulated him

intellectually, Brecht appropriated and transformed.

As already mentioned, by the end of the twentieth century's first decade, the

Einfühlung concept had undergone considerable semantic loosening, and Brecht's

writings, with their crude thinking and absolutist claims, would further this trend. In the

following pages, I will survey Brecht's thinking on *Einfühlung* without attempting to

reconcile his various positions into an internally consistent theoretical doctrine. As Sean

Carney rightly warns, "The last thing we should look for in Brecht is consistency of

thinking" (Carney 2005:6). Brecht was always experimenting with ideas, and he

discarded maxims and jargon as soon as they had outlived their usefulness.

Most of the time, Brecht uses the term *Einfühlung* to refer to a vaguely defined

mode of "self-identification with the character" (Brecht 1964:195), which can take place

either between actor and character or spectator and actor-as-character. In the latter case,

Einfühlung is a prime obstacle for the Brechtian theatre of criticism because it results in

the "automatic transfer of emotions" between stage and auditorium, through which the

spectator is "carried away" into an affectively arousing "experience" (94). Brecht's late-

career theatrical dialogue, "Conversation about being Forced into Empathy" [*Gespräch*

über die Nötigung zur Einfühlung], re-rehearses Horace's famous injunction from the *Ars*

Poetica, a passage long embedded in acting theory's history of ideas: "So, if you want me

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[231] As a term used in German dramaturgical analysis, *episches* ("epic") dates back at least
as far as Schiller's correspondence with Goethe (see Brecht 1964:210). Brecht's use of
the term also owes a well-known debt to Erwin Piscator, as well as to Aristotle's
discussions of epic narrative and episodic plot-structure, "in which the episodes follow in
a succession which is neither probable nor necessary" (see Aristotle 1987:41).

to weep / First show me your own eye full of tears" (Brecht 1964:270). Brecht posits *Einfühlung* as *the* psychological mechanism behind the direct transmission of passion, a *sine qua non* of classical oratory, seventeenth-century declamation, eighteenth-century acting practice, and the nineteenth century's romantic stages. While the discourses surrounding these historical stage practices celebrated the actor's enlivening the spectator with the vicarious experience of passion, Brecht frames this process as a coercive act: in the conventional theatre, the actor "force[s] me to surrender at all costs to his sorrow, which he wants me at all costs to feel" (271). Audience members submit passively to this process, which results in their total identification with a play's protagonists. Brecht argues: "in a performance of *Oedipus* once has for all practical purposes an auditorium full of little Oedipuses, an auditorium full of Emperor Joneses for a performance of *The Emperor Jones*" (87). This is crude thinking indeed, but Brecht's basic point is clear: *Einfühlung* leads to spectators' assimilation to the actions, emotions, and interests of fictional characters (and, therefore, to a diminished connection to their own).

If Brecht often writes as if *Einfühlung* is the sole means of contact between actor and spectator in the traditional theatre, he also frequently lets himself imagine that all actors are fanatical disciples of Stanislavsky, totally immersed in the "given circumstances" of their characters' lives. When discussing acting technique, Brecht often equates the actor's *Einfühlung* with the process of the Stanislavskian performer, which he describes as a "complete conversion operation" (Brecht 1964:93),[232] and when he uses the word "experience" derogatively, he seems to be citing Stanislavsky's key term

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[232] At times, especially in his later writings while based in the GDR, where cultural policy mandated an attitude of at least grudging respect toward Stanislavsky, Brecht conceded that such a summary account reduces the complexity of the Russian acting reformer's "System" (see Brecht 1966:131-33).

perezhivanie ("experiencing").[233] For Brecht, the "crudest form of empathy" begins with

the actor's asking, "What should I be like if this or that were to happen to me?" (195) –

the psychological departure-point of the Stanislavskian approach. The highest form of

Einfühlung comes in the "complete transformation" of actor into character, by means of

which "the actor eliminates his own consciousness and replaces it with that of the

character" (Brecht 1966:133-34). Brecht usually writes about the actor's *Einfühlung* as

an emotionally subjunctive – rather than a kinesthetically projective – process of entering

into the fictional life-circumstances of a role. A nuanced first-person account of the

actor's imaginative process, however, is by no means a strong point of Brechtian

theatrical theory. As Grotowski comments, "Brecht did study the technique of the actor

in great detail, but always from the standpoint of the producer [i.e., director] observing

the actor" (Grotowski 1969:173). Though Brecht himself might have responded that his

primary perspective was that of a playwright, Grotowski's basic criticism holds: as a

playwright-and-director with little experience in feeling-himself-into a dramatic

character, Brecht wrote authoritatively on the actor's process in order to demand that the

actor become more like him: a distanced observer of theatrical action.

At subtler theoretical moments, however, Brecht concedes that total immersion by

the actor within the character's imaginative-and-emotional life may be a theoretical

fantasy. The Actor in *The Messingkauf Dialogues*, for example, puts dialectical pressure

on the Brechtian Philosopher's understanding of acting practice, saying: "I fancy you've

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[233] The term "experience" sometimes appears in quotation marks in the essays collected
in *Brecht on Theatre* (see, for example, Brecht 1964:25, 35, 126), but John Willett offers
no opinion on Brecht's source. Understanding that Stanislavsky may sometimes be in the
background of Brecht's "experience" (in German, *Erlebnis*) significantly clarifies
Brecht's use of the term.

got an exaggerated view, which amounts to almost an illusion, of the degree to which we old-fashioned actors identify ourselves with our parts. I may as well tell you that when we play King Lear we think of all kinds of things that would hardly have entered Lear's mind." The Philosopher counters that this may well be true, but that these performance-specific thought processes – about the placement of props or adjustments to other actors, for example – "may interfere with [the actor's] empathy, but they only add to that of the audience" (Brecht 1965:55). Here the spectator's *Einfühlung* is depicted not as a state of feeling-into the actor's actually experienced emotions and their physical manifestation in histrionic gestures, but as a mode of psychological identification with the character as an illusory – but still emotionally provocative – construct (as in the Oedipus/Emperor Jones example).

The tendency to accommodate oneself to the ethical decisions and emotional responses of onstage figures that *Einfühlung* promotes in an audience is a serious problem for a theatre of social critique, argues Brecht, because the state of one-feeling with the character leads the spectator into taking historically and societally contingent forms of behavior as natural and unchangeable. *Einfühlung* is totally incompatible with the "critical attitude" (*kritische Haltung*) so valued by Brecht both in theatre and in life. The "Aristotelian" theatre only provokes criticism when its attempts at empathy-generation fall short – that is, when the production fails to capture its audience through under-rehearsal, bad acting, or poor dramatic material. Such a theatre does not possess the means to stimulate criticism of the presented "incidents" themselves – that is, the social actions that it puts before the spectator's view. Whether elaborated under the

rubric of "epic" theatre, "theatre of a scientific age," or "dialectical" theatre,"[234] Brecht's

theatrical reform project remained remarkably constant: to depict "happenings between

humans," or "men's life together" (Brecht 1964:182, 185) with accuracy, while pointing

out that these happenings are contingent and alterable. Brecht, an ethicist even before he

became a Marxist, envisions his theatre as a laboratory for experimenting with the

conditions under which acts of goodness, kindness, and compassion become more and

more possible. *Einfühlung* subverts this project by making the happenings between these

figures seem natural, universal, and unalterable; the state of one-feeling encourages the

uncritical assessment, "that is how it is" (Brecht 1964:188), which closes down

awareness of contradictions and the entertaining of alternatives.

The Brechtian theatre must therefore deploy an array of devices aimed at the

disruption of *Einfühlung*. Each of these devices is aimed at generating *Verfremdung*

("defamiliarization," "making-strange," "alienation"),[235] a mode of consciousness that

Brecht places in direct opposition to *Einfühlung*: "If empathy makes something ordinary

of a special event, alienation makes something special of an ordinary event" (Brecht

1965:76). The *Einfühlung* process depends upon instinctive modes of seeing and a lack

of self-awareness; Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* is, on the other hand, a means for

refreshing perception and bringing phenomena into consciousness. If classical

Einfühlung theory rests on the principles of union, merger, and oneness, Brecht's

theatrical philosophy is one of gaps, distances, juxtapositions, contradictions, and

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[234] Brecht experimented with alternative terms for his ideal theatre from the late 1940s onward.
[235] John Willett's decision to translate *Verfremdungs* consistently as "alienation" has been much criticized. I deem the terms "defamiliarization" or "making-strange" more appropriate, but will preserve "alienation" when quoting from Willett's translations.

comparisons. For Brecht, the most productive attitude is always the critical one, and criticism can only work across the cognitive distance opened up by the *Vefremdungseffekt*. From a cognitive perspective, the epic theatre is a theatre of the two-as-two, not the two-as-one of the *Einfühlung* state. At times, Brechtian theatrical philosophy even moves toward encouraging the one-as-two: "Spectator and actor ought to move apart. Each ought to move away from himself" (Brecht 1964:26). Brecht is describing a mitosis of consciousness that promotes reflection, self-observation, and self-analysis.

For Brecht, "the smallest social unit is not the single person but two people" (197). This principle holds as much in the theatrical auditorium as it does on the street corner, on the factory floor, or in the halls of power. The epic theatre does not attempt to close the gap between social agents, to effect the "fusion" between spectator and actor-as-character that the "dramatic" theatre of contagious emotions compels.[236] In the dramatic theatre, the spectator is "involved," "in the thick of it, shares the experience"; in the epic theatre the spectator "stands outside," "*is made to face something*" [emphasis added] (37). Brecht might as well have written that the epic theater's spectator is *made to face someone* – that is, not to merge with the actor-as-character as another self, but to face the character as another social agent, whose actions might have some relevance when held up in comparison with one's own life-decisions. The two-as-two of Brechtian theatre – sometimes the actor and spectator, sometimes the actor and character – are, like the episodes of epic dramaturgy, "set off against one against another" (201). What each individual undergoes is of less consequence that the mode of active betweenness that

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[236] See Brecht 1964:125, 235, and elsewhere. Brecht's pejorative use of the term "fusion" may reference Stanislavsky's positive use of the term.

holds them apart. Against the two-as-one of *Einfühlung*, Brecht mobilizes an

intersubjective counterpoising that we might call *Gegenfühlung* ("against-feeling").

        Brecht's arguments against *Einfühlung* do not, however, amount to a rejection of

emotion in the theatre. Brecht calls this misinterpretation of his theatrical project "a

frequently occurring mistake" (Brecht 1964:88). Even his earliest articulations of "epic"

theory preserve an important place for emotion in a theatre of social criticism and rational

activation. Brecht writes that the epic theatre often aims to "arouse" or "reinforce"

certain affective states – in particular, the "sense of justice, the urge to freedom, and

righteous anger" (227) – and that these affective upsurges need not interfere with the

operation of the rational faculty. While Brecht demands rather than rejects powerful

emotion in the theatre, he does discourage the spectator's following a shared or parallel

emotional process to that of the actor-as-character. In the "dramatic" theatre, the

spectator says, "I weep when they weep, I laugh when they laugh"; in the epic theatre of

Verfremdung, the motto instead goes: "I laugh when they weep, I weep when they laugh"

(71). When the Brechtian actor looks out at the audience, observing himself even as he

acknowledges his being observing by others, he knows: "We are not feeling the same

thing and / We are not feeling it at the same time" (342). Looking back over his early

career while in exile from Hitler's Germany, Brecht summarized in the third-person

dialogic mode of the *Messingkauf* one of the most pervasive misunderstandings about his

theatrical sensibility: "his objections to empathy in art were taken as objections to feeling

in art" [*daß man seine Einwände gegen die Einfühlung in der Kunst für Einwände gegen*

die Gefühle in der Kunst hielt].[237] A more literal translation of the German would render

the point much more clearly: *that Brecht's objections to one-feeling were taken as*

objections to feelings themselves. In other words, the epic theatre never renounced the

spectator's feeling-toward or feeling-in-response-to the figures populating the stage, but

it did deploy a host of devices to disrupt the spectator's feeling-into or feeling-at-one-

with these figures.

Brecht's theoretical oeuvre has been described as a sustained "critique of

empathic aesthetics" (Adorno 1997:243) and a "systematic attack on *Einfühlung*

(empathy) as the central bourgeois aesthetic category" (Nägele 1991:65). Even more

dramatically, Brecht has been said to have waged "a lifelong battle against hegemonic

empathy" (Suvin 2008:64). It is certainly true that, most of the time, intent on breaking

Einfühlung's dominance, Brecht depicts the state of one-feeling as the poisonous nemesis

of *Verfremdung*. At other theoretical moments, however, Brecht preserves a positive

function for one-feeling in the epic theatre. By the early to mid-1930s Brecht was writing

that the epic theatre "makes nothing like such a free use as does the aristotelian [sic] of

the passive empathy of the spectator," that it "*more or less* renounces empathy"

[emphasis added] (Brecht 1964:57, 101). This qualified phrasing acknowledges that

subjective experience in the theatre can never be as monolithic as Brecht was sometimes

wont to argue. Later in his career, Brecht also conceded that many moments in his plays

written after the *Lehrstücke* phase were indeed stirringly emotional, inciting strong

identification with one of the main characters. For example, Brecht wrote of the scene in

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[237] The German quoted here is excerpted from Brecht 1963:165; the English translation is
Willett's, in Brecht 1965:83.

Mother Courage in which Courage's daughter Kattrin beats the drum to warn the

inhabitants of a nearby town of impending attack:

> Members of the audience may identify themselves with dumb Kattrin in this scene; they may get into her skin by empathy and enjoy feeling that they themselves have the same latent strength. But they will not have experienced empathy throughout the whole play, hardly in the opening scenes for instance. (221)

Brecht's choice of the act of drumming for this climactic scene is hardly arbitrary.

Kattrin's manifestation of "latent strength" cannot be held separate from the act of

drumming itself, either dramaturgically or experientially. A spectator's emotional

response to Kattrin's act of heroism will certainly arises out of an understanding of the

life-or-death stakes of her decision, but this response will also by evoked by the effortful

tension in the actress's arms as she strikes the drum. The ferocity of Kattrin's intention –

to save the townspeople, to deny the soldiers who threaten her – is channeled into a

robustly physical action. The spectators' identification with Kattrin's intention will be

informed by the way they apprehend, and perhaps feel-themselves-into, the kinetic

qualities of the actress's rhythmic pounding.

Brecht's mature theory further acknowledges *Einfühlung* as an inescapable – and

even embraceable – theatrical dynamic. By 1940 Brecht was encouraging actors to make

use of the "psychological operation" of feeling-into during the process of preparing a

role. They were to do so in the same way that witnesses, demonstrators, and mimics do

in everyday life, in order to "feel their way into their characters' skins with a view to

acquiring their characteristics" (137). The actor seeking to produce the

Verfremdungseffekt might make use of *Einfühlung* in rehearsals, but would forswear it in

performance. [238] The posthumously discovered "Appendices to the Short Organum," in which Brecht discards the term "epic theatre" in favor of "dialectical theatre," offer an even more radical revision of Brecht's stance toward *Einfühlung* in acting. In the "Appendices," "acting (demonstration)" and "experience (empathy)" become dialectically contradictory principles of the actor's art. These "two mutually hostile processes […] fuse in the actor's work," and the actor's "particular effectiveness comes from the tussle and tension of the two opposites" (277). The mature Brecht concedes that presentation of behavior for a set of observers and subjunctive engagement with fictional circumstances are both essential elements of the actor's artform, inextricable from one another in practice. The total extermination of *Einfühlung*, which was always more a rhetorical pose than an actual project, is no longer seen as necessary, or even possible.

The real positive function of *Einfühlung* in the epic theatre, however, comes when the spectator feels-himself-at-one-with the experiences of the *actor-as-actor* rather than the subjunctive states specific to the character. In the epic theatre, as in the "Chinese theatre" (Beijing opera), "the spectator's empathy [is] not entirely rejected. The audience identifies itself with the actor as being an observer, and accordingly develops his attitude of observing or looking on" (93). Here *Einfühlung* is indeed the psychological mechanism driving the spectator's vicarious connection with the performer, but the spectator does not partake in the actor-as-character's emotional movements; instead, she

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[238] In his later writings, Brecht often describes the rehearsal methods of the Berliner Ensemble actors as involving three distinct phases: 1) first contact with the character, during which the actor's reactions of surprise or astonishment at the character's behavior are noted and preserved; 2) a second phase in which *Einfühlung* is permitted, enabling "the search for the character's truth in the subjective sense"; 3) a final phase, during which the actor relinquishes identification with the character and submits it to a social critique. See Brecht's "Building a Character" (Brecht 1966:128-29).

feels-herself-into the performer-as-demonstrator's attitude of observational criticism.

Crude mimetic thinking and *Einfühlung* theory combine, allowing the epic actor-as-actor

to become a positive model for spectatorial *Einfühlung*. Furthermore, epic actors may

model for the spectators not only the role of observer, as above, but also that of someone

observed: *The Messingkauf Dialogues* hold that the actor can also serve as "a model to be

imitated" by showing the spectator how "to behave in everyday life like a man under

observation" – something beneficial both to the individual and society (Brecht 1965:47).

This proposal is drawn from a short fragment of the unfinished *Messingkauf*, and Brecht

does not spell out precisely what the social benefits of self-observation might be, but they

seem to involve reflection upon one's actions in the moment of doing, which brings

social behavior into conscious awareness. In Brecht's famous first treatment of the

Verfremdungseffekt, "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting," the Chinese actor's mode of

self-observation is explicitly defamiliarizing, so that he models an estranging gaze for the

spectator: "The artist's object is to appear strange and even surprising to the audience.

He achieves this by looking strangely at himself and his work" (Brecht 1964:92).

At other moments in Brechtian theory, the actor also models for the spectator a

mode of *emotional* relation to the character – for, as has already been shown, Brechtian

thought sees no incompatibility between emotion and criticism. Writing late in his

career, Brecht encourages the actors of the Berliner Ensemble to approach their

character's emotions "with an emotion of some force: thus, the character's despair with

genuine anger on our part, or his anger with genuine despair" (248-49). Even if the

specific combination of contradictory emotions modeled by the Ensemble actor – anger at

despair, or despair at anger – is not taken up by the spectator, the element of emotional

contradiction itself is. In other words, the Ensemble actor models a mode of emotional relation toward the character – a dialectical mode of feeling-against – that Brecht imagines the spectator will spontaneously reproduce. Over and over again, Brecht's tendency toward one-to-one thinking leads him to argue that the primary way for performers to lead spectators toward certain modes of consciousness – whether observational, self-observational, defamiliarizing, or emotionally contradictory – is to model those modes themselves.

The Body in Brechtian Einfühlung

As we have seen, Brecht's *Einfühlung* is a loosely defined concept, one that encompasses both the actor's immersion within the fictional circumstances of the character and the spectator's following-along-with or being-carried-away-by the actor's or character's emotional processes. In other words, Brechtian one-feeling includes both imaginative identification and emotional synchrony, which Brecht usually discusses as predominantly psychological – rather than physiological – processes. Nevertheless, the instances in which the body does enter into Brecht's treatment of *Einfühlung* are significant and point toward a connection with classical *Einfühlung* theory's positions on the embodied correspondence between perceiver and aesthetic object.

I will deal at length with Brecht's prescriptions about the physicality of the actor, but will first examine his treatment of the physicality of the spectator, a topic that takes us more directly into Brecht's crude account of *Einfühlung*'s bodily basis. The spectating body appears most prominently in Brecht's vivid depictions of the mental-and-physical state of audience members in the traditional theatre of Aristotelian dramaturgy and

identification-based acting practices. Brecht's *Short Organum* invites its reader into one of the auditoria of the conventional theatre and summons a dream-vision of *Einfühlung*'s virulent effects on spectating bodies:

> Looking about us, we see somewhat motionless figures in a peculiar condition: they seem strenuously to be tensing all their muscles, except where these are flabby and exhausted. They scarcely communicate with each other; their relations are those of a lot of sleepers, though of such as dream restlessly [...]. They look at the stage as if in a trance: an expression which comes from the Middle Ages, they days of witches and priests. Seeing and hearing are activities, and can be pleasant ones, but these people seem relieved of activity and like men to whom something is being done. (187)

Like Vergil shepherding Dante through one of the circles of hell, or Socrates describing the prisoners in the subterranean cave of *Republic* VII, Brecht conjures a nightmarish vision of bodily and perceptual thralldom. We could compare Brecht's "cowed, credulous, hypnotized mass" of theatergoers (188) to addicts in an opium den, except that their bodies are not languid: rather, "*they seem strenuously to be tensing all their muscles.*" Brecht's spectator-prisoners are held fast in a straightjacket – or harness – of unrelenting muscular contraction, which produces a contracted way of seeing. This trance-like gaze at the stage also arises in Brecht's theatre poem, "Speech to Danish Working-Class Actors on the Art of Observation," in which Brecht addresses actors accustomed to practicing a technique of emotional immersion. Brecht imagines himself as a victimized audience member, who goes to the theatre seeking "a little tautening / Of slackened nerves," and accuses the performers: "we, the spectators [...] sit with glassy eyes and goggle / Fixed in your grip, at your grimaces and convulsions" (Brecht 1976:234-35).

To this point, Brecht's visions of one-feeling have resonated with classical *Einfühlung* theory, insofar as the affective connection between spectators and observers

has been a passive, unconscious, and corporeally grounded one. A rhetorical question

within the *Short Organum*, however, brings the intersubjective dynamic behind Brechtian

Einfühlung into closest alignment with the projective or introjective process described by

Vischer and Lipps. Brecht asks:

> How much longer are our souls, leaving our 'mere' bodies under cover of the
> darkness, to plunge into those dreamlike figures up on the stage, there to take part
> in the crescendos and climaxes which 'normal' life denies us? (Brecht 1964:189)

Brecht's vision of onstage figures – that is, actors-as-characters – as dreamlike entities,

into which the souls of audience members plunge, summons the scenario of projection

laid out in Scherner's *Das Leben des Traums,* original inspiration for Robert Vischer's

theory of aesthetic *Einfühlung*. Brechtian one-feeling, however, is not the liberating,

euphoric, expansive state described by Vischer and Lipps. Instead of "the feeling of

freedom and unconstricted ease" of the aesthetic contemplator that Lipps describes

(Lipps 1965:407-8), Brecht's *Einfühlung* is a nightmare-state of muscularly constricted

self-negation that only the *Verfremdungseffekt* can dispel.

If the audience members in the conventional theatre are typically "relieved of

activity," "like men to whom something is being done," the actors who appear before

them are the perpetrators of the "something" that subjugates and enervates them.

Brecht's poem, "Theatre of Emotions," attacks the actors of the dramatic theatre for their

complicity in establishing *Einfühlung*'s oppressive regime:

> The emotions you manufacture are turbid and impure
> General and blurred, no less false
> Than thoughts can be. Dull blows on the backbone
> Cause the dregs of the soul to rise to the surface.
> With glassy eyes
> Sweaty brow and tightened calves
> The poisoned audience follows
> Your exhibitions. (Brecht 1976:309)

Brecht would certainly have agreed that the *Einfühlung*-experience is sustained by the entire theatrical "apparatus" – the institutions, protocols, and functions of the theatre at any given historical-cultural moment – but here he lays blame squarely with the actors who serve this apparatus. Brecht sees the theatre as part of the social world, not a place apart for aesthetic contemplation. The actors who actively collaborate in the emotional poisoning of those who pay to see them are therefore social agents, no different from dealers in narcotics, pamphleteers for a perverse ideology, or thugs bludgeoning the political opponents of their boss. As a final note, pay close attention to Brecht's key symptoms of emotional immersion and affective victimization: the sweaty brow and the tightened calf. We have already seen how the sweaty brow signaled the heights of Hitlerian frenzy. The tightened calf-muscle will have further significance later on in this chapter.

How do actors in the dramatic theatre take captive the bodies, minds, and gazes of their audiences so effectively? According to Brecht, they rely first and foremost upon "that so-called temperament which is mechanically switched on, quite independently of the meaning of any scene, as soon as the curtain goes up – representing an attempt on the actor's part, which has usually by now become unconscious, to excite the audience by means of his own excitement" (Brecht 1964:244). According to Brecht, an actor seeking affective immersion often uses purely physical means to "infect himself" with the emotions appropriate to his character: "thus, by letting his voice rise, holding his breath and tightening his neck muscles so that the blood shoots to his head, the actor can easily conjure up a rage" (94). Brecht presents this process as physically taxing and emotionally exhausting for the actor. By working up this "purely external temperament,"

the actor is able to produce a "'magnetic' way of acting" (219), which takes a "grip on the audience's nerves" (132). This way of acting also takes hold of the audience's musculature: the actor's displays of histrionic affect mean that the spectators are "'worked up' by a display of temperament" and "'swept away' by acting with tautened muscles." Muscularly overtaxed acting sets up "hypnotic tensions" between stage and auditorium (136) – tensions sustained by the corresponding tautness of acting and spectating bodies. Brecht puts this view most bluntly in his early essay, "Emphasis on Sport": the actor in the dramatic theatre exhausts himself with "feigned intensity," in the process exhausting those who watch him, for "*a man who strains himself on the stage is bound, if he is any good, to strain all the people sitting in the stalls*" [emphasis in original] (8). This embodied mimesis of strain, enabled by the psycho-physical operation that is *Einfühlung*, enervates even as it innervates, but its addicts still crave the tensile stimulations it provides.

Brecht sees the "dramatic" actor's act of emotional exploitation as one of physical coercion. The performer aiming at the *Verfremdungseffekt* must therefore guard against the emotional actor's characteristic state of body-and-consciousness:

> Aiming not to put his audience into a trance, he must not go into a trance himself. *His muscles must remain loose*, for a turn of the head, e.g. with tautened neck muscles, will 'magically' lead the spectators eyes to and even their heads to turn with it, and this can only detract from any speculation or reaction which the gesture may bring about. [emphasis added] (193)

By turning his head with tautened neck muscles, the actor forcefully focalizes the spectator's attention, locking his audience into a coercive corporeal apparatus. The vision of hundreds of heads turning, tautly and simultaneously, at an actor's physical cue, conjures the uniformity of a fascist mass rally. It also summons once again the delusional

shadow-world of the prisoners in Plato's cave, who "are in it [the cave] from childhood with their legs and necks in bonds so that they are fixed, seeing only in front of them, unable because of the bond to turn their heads all the way around" (Plato 1968:193, *Rep.* 514a-b).[239]

At his most coarse, Brecht describes the emotional actor's excitation of the audience as an act of physical violation, in contrast with the affective freedom allowed by the epic actor's detachment: by "holding himself remote from the character portrayed," the epic actor "is careful not to make its sensations into those of the spectator. Nobody gets raped by the individual he portrays" (Brecht 1964:93). Here as elsewhere, Brecht reverses the directionality of the *Einfühlung* process by placing initiative and agency in the performer rather that the spectator. The spontaneous and impulsive feeling-into-another of the aesthetic observer within classical *Einfühlung* theory becomes, in Brechtian theatrical thought, that other's forced introjection of his subjectivity into the observer – an act of aesthetic rape.

Excessive muscularity, rigidity, and physical strain appear as negative values across Brechtian thought, not just as undesired qualities of theatrical performance. Strain, tautness, and over-exertion signal something amiss in social relationships just as they do in the theatrical relation between actor and spectator. In particular, strain and its affiliated corporeal qualities are associated with the dominators and exploiters within the capitalist system (and its precursors) and their character-analogues in Brechtian drama.

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[239] In the *Messingkauf* fragments, Brecht experimented with a new terminology of visual focalization in the theatre. A rigid fixity and uniformity of gazes was, according to Brecht, typical of theatre of the "roundabout" or "merry-go-round type" (*K-Typus*), which sweeps the audience member forward like the rider of a carousel horse. The epic theatre, on the other hand, is a theatre of the "planetarium type" (*P-Typus*), within which the spectatorial gaze is free to roam as it pleases (see Brecht 1965:106-107).

Brecht describes how the facial makeup for the nobles in his *Antigone* adaptation was intended to communicate "the ravages left on the face by the habit of commanding" (214) – the wrinkles, creases, and points of permanent contraction wrought by the habitual contortions of a superior social class. Late plays like *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and *The Good Person of Szechuan* explicitly thematize the monstrous self-transformation that human beings undergo when granted wealth, privilege, and command by birth or circumstance. For Brecht, this transformation is a psychological as well as physical one, as his poem "The Mask of Evil" makes clear:

> On my wall hangs a Japanese carving
> The mask of an evil demon, decorated with gold lacquer,
> Sympathetically [*Mitfühlend*] I observe
> The swollen veins of the forehead, indicating
> What a strain it is to be evil. (Brecht 1976:383)

Brecht's *Mitfühlend*, an adverb used liberally by the early philosophers of *Einfühlung*, and which is today typically translated either as "sympathetically" or "empathetically," may convey a double meaning: that Brecht pities (feels-for) the Noh demon's facially manifested plight[240] but also that he feels-along-with the grotesque topography of the demon mask's features, entering into a Lippsian "psychic unity" with the anger made manifest in their contours. The face of the *Führer*, glaring fixedly out of staged photographs and propaganda posters, looms in the background of "The Mask of Evil" (written c. 1942). Hitler's permanently contracted brow, with its deep creases above the bridge of the nose, and forward-staring gaze signal an inflexibly confrontational attitude toward political opponents at home and the purported enemies of Nazi Germany abroad –

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[240] This compassion for the demon-face, which is quite at odds with Brecht's typical coldness toward dominators, exploiters, and other doers of evil deeds, can perhaps be attributed to the element of fear embedded within the angry countenances of many Noh demon-masks.

a rigidity read as heroically stalwart by his supporters, as sinister or even maniacal by his detractors.[241] Hitler's public face, held in tensed impassivity until declamatory contortions animate it, models inflexibility and narrowness of purpose as virtues, in radical opposition to the Brechtian virtues of ease, adaptability, and openness to multiple possibilities.

In Praise of Leichtigkeit

If strain, tautness, and rigidity are consistently derogated in Brecht's philosophy of life and theatre, Brecht pits against them the positive values of lightness, malleability, and deftness. These are qualities of the intellect as well as the body – or, better, of the embodied intellect – across Brechtian thought. For Brecht, thinking is "a way of behaving, and behaving socially at that. It's something that the whole body takes part in, with all its senses" (Brecht 1964:90). As we shall see, the "free and highly mobile" intellect necessary for criticism (191) arises out of an easeful and adaptable body. The keyword around which the various attributes of the Brechtian body accrue is *Leichtigkeit* ("lightness," "ease"). For Brecht, lightness is more than a quality of theatrical performance; it is a mode of bodily being in the social world that he celebrates and encourages throughout his prose, poetry, and drama. We find *Leichtigkeit* in the young Brecht's enthusiasm over the corporeal qualities of "elegance, lightness, dryness, objectivity" (8) he sees in cabaret and vaudeville performers (Frank Wedekind and Karl

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[241] Adorno and Horkheimer comment at length on Hitler's "grimace," which they deem a "manipulated expression," like those of "the film actor, the lynch mob," and of "fascist rabble-rousers and camp commanders" (149-50). For an extensive analysis of the manifold political uses to which images of Hitler's face were put during the years 1913 to 1949, see Claudia Schmölders, *Hitler's Face: The Biography of an Image*, Trans. Adrian Daub (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

Valentin), cinematic comedians (Charlie Chaplin), and professional athletes (the boxer

Paul Samson-Körner). We also find it in the mature Brecht's poetry: Antigone moves

with "the light step / Of total certainty," and Helene Weigel, appearing as Mother

Courage at the Deutsches Theater in 1949, is encouraged to "step in your easy way / On

to the old stage in our demolished city" (Brecht 1976:414, 415).

It is within the *Messingkauf* fragments, however, that Brecht gives *Leichtigkeit* his

most concentrated attention. The *Messingkauf*'s Philosopher makes an eloquent case for

lightness as an intrinsic theatrical quality:

> However much of what's considered essential to the art of the theatre we may
> wish to abandon for the sake of our new aims, there is one thing which we must,
> in my view, preserve at all costs, and that's its quality of ease. It can't be any
> handicap to us, and if we gave it up it would mean straining and spoiling our
> resources. There is something naturally light and easy about the theatre. […] The
> surgeon who has heavy responsibilities needs the little scalpel to lie lightly and
> easily in his hand. The world is out of joint, certainly, and it will take powerful
> movements to manipulate it all back again. But among the various relevant
> instruments there can be one that is slight and delicate and needs to be handled
> with ease. (Brecht 1965:94)

Despite its weighty social objectives – or, better, precisely because of their weightiness –

the builders of the epic theatre must maintain a deft-and-easy touch in embodying the

momentous human incidents they are given to portray. The image of the scalpel lying

lightly and easily in the surgeon's hand activates the reader's kinesthetic imagination;

achieving some bodily sense of the deft-and-easy performance quality under description

is as vital in understanding Brecht's theatrical sensibility as is a conceptual understanding

of a key term like *Verfremdung*.

Brecht's poem, "In Praise of Lightness," destined for inclusion in the unfinished

Messingkauf, extends the quality of lightness to the natural world in the register of

anthropomorphizing rhapsody:

> Observe the ease
> With which the mighty
> River tears down its banks!
> The earthquake
> Shakes the ground with relaxed hand.
> The dreadful fire
> Cheerfully reaches for the many-housed city
> And devours it in comfort:
> A practised consumer. (Brecht 1964:174-75)

Brecht, always an enthusiast over modern man's capacity to transform the natural world on a massive scale, here projects a human movement-quality of lightness onto nature's most powerfully obliterative forces. Faced with a raging torrent, the shaking earth, or a flaming conflagration, Robert Vischer's aesthetic contemplator might well project human impulses of angry violence, or at least reckless ferocity, into the observed natural phenomenon. Brecht's poem, on the other hand, invites us into an unconventional way of anthropomorphizing nature, in keeping with his own sociological aesthetics, which values ease over agitation. The poem arouses our interest through defamiliarization: a set of physical actions – tearing down, shaking, reaching, and devouring – generally seen as vigorous if not violent are estranged by Brecht's attribution to them of an unfamiliar, even counter-intuitive, set of performance-qualities.

Brecht does not, however, champion lightness only in the mode of generalized poetic exhortation and philosophical musing. Lightness is a performance quality that must be concretely – that is, corporeally – achieved, by those invested in the art of the stage as well as those, like Brecht, for whom living is an art whose practice can be progressively improved.[242] If Brecht places blame for the histrionically muscular tensions connecting stage and auditorium squarely at the feet of the actors of the

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[242] "Every art contributes to the greatest art of all, the art of living" (Brecht 1964:277).

conventional theatre, he makes the actors of the epic theatre responsible for the

achievement of lightness:

> When your work is complete, it must look light, easy. The ease must recall effort; it is effort conquered or effort victorious. From the outset of our work you must adopt the attitude that aims at achieving ease. You mustn't leave out the difficulties, but must collect them and make them come easy through your work. For the only worthwhile kind of ease is that which is a victory of effort. (Brecht 1964:174)

For Brecht, however, lightness is not only an end-result, a quality of the finished

performance; it is also something to be cultivated at every phase of theatrical preparation.

Effort-qualities of strain block its ultimate achievement. In other words, lightness is a

right "way of walking" – or, in the theatre, a right way of stepping onto the stage –

regardless of the obstacles encountered. Brecht therefore enjoins the actor: "If you want

to master something difficult, take it easy" (Brecht 1964:243), and encourages being

"economical" in one's efforts, guarding against "undue strain" (175). This light touch in

role-preparation allows the actor to take sensual pleasure in rehearsals: Brecht writes that

the actor "must 'arrange' his movements […] in such a way that he gets fun out of their

sweep and rhythm. All these are tasks for the senses, and his training is of a physical

kind" (243). Lest this attitude of taking-one's-ease seem merely a nice idea, rather than a

principle of performance practice, it should be emphasized that the lightness of effort

victorious was a quality made concrete in the bodies of the Berliner Ensemble's

performers under Brecht's direction,[243] and one often commented upon by reviewers.

Kenneth Tynan, for example, wrote of the Ensemble's "light, relaxed, and aesthetically

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[243] Tynan saw this style of playing as depending on rehearsal conditions that promoted easeful creativity. Writing of a rehearsal after Brecht's death, Tynan recounted: "[Erich] Engel and two young assistants interrupted from time to time, talking with the easy, probing frankness that comes of no haste, no pressure, no need to worry about publicity, deadlines, or out-of-town reviews" (Tynan 1959:104).

spare" style of playing (Tynan 1959:113). Brecht's final message for the Berliner

Ensemble rehearsal board at the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm, written nine days before

his death on 14 August 1956, reads: "So our playing needs to be quick, light, strong.

This is not a question of hurry, but of speed, not simply of quick playing, but of quick

thinking" (Brecht 1964:283). Lightness in the body, lightness of thought: for Brecht, the

two were inextricable.

The Body of Criticism

Pressing further my investigation of the epic theatre's embodied mimesis requires

stepping back for a moment from the line of this chapter's argument in order to achieve a

better grasp of the relationship between the physical, the psychological, and the social in

Brechtian thought. Key to such an understanding is a nuanced appreciation for two

Brechtian keywords, *gestus* and *Haltung*, both of which are as applicable to behavior in

the social world as they are to an actor's re-performance of such behavior onstage. For

Brecht, social bodies are always making *gesten* and taking up *Haltungen* toward one

another. The actor's task is to observe and reproduce these gestures and stances

accurately, while retaining the epic theatre's underlying *gestus* of showing and *Haltung*

of criticism.

English-language scholarship has capably emphasized the importance of the term

gestus in understanding Brecht's theatrical thought. John Willett, whose editions of

Brecht's plays and theatre essays have made Brecht accessible to several generations of

English-language readers, glosses *gestus* as "both gist and gesture; an attitude or single

aspect of an attitude, expressible in words or actions" (in Brecht 1964:42). Willett

provides a slightly longer definition of *gestus* in his study *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht*, calling it "at once gesture and gist, attitude or point: one aspect of the relation between two people, studied singly, cut to essentials and physically or verbally expressed" (Willett 1959:173). Both of these excellent definitions omit, somewhat surprisingly, the socially habituated element of Brechtian *gestus*, which is fundamental to its meaning. Brecht himself writes: "By social gest [*gestus*] is meant the mimetic and gestural expression of the social relationships prevailing within people of a given period" (Brecht 1964:139). Brecht is interested in *typical* gestures that replay themselves over and over again between bodies within a given social formation.

Willett's definition of *gestus* points the way toward another Brechtian keyword: *Haltung* ("attitude," "bearing," "stance"). The importance of this concept has only recently been highlighted in English-language Brecht scholarship. Reading the work of Darko Suvin, Frederic Jameson, and Rainer Nägele together[244] makes it clear that *Haltung* ought to be accorded a place among the most important of Brechtian keywords, along with *gestus* and *Verfremdung*. Suvin calls *Haltung* "a fruitful polysemy or pun meaning bearing, stance, attitude, posture, behavior, and also poise or self-control." Nägele highlights the prominence of the term *Haltung* in the writings of Brecht's friend, colleague, and confidante Walter Benjamin and notes the word's close relation to "the three major German verbs of position – *setzen*, *stellen*, *legen* – and their intransitive counterparts – *sitzen*, *stehen*, *liegen* (to sit, to stand, to lie)" (Nägele 1991:140). As a way of sitting, standing, or lying – that is, as way of organizing and orienting the body –

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[244] See Suvin 1990 and 1999, Nägele 1991, Jameson 1998.

Haltung is "a kind of *Verhalten* (behavior) compacted into a certain degree of permanence and firmness," one which "guarantees a physiognomy and a face" (147).

The relationship between *gestus* and *Haltung* is a variable one in Brecht's and Benjamin's writings. In some instances, the terms seem virtually interchangeable: "The realm of attitudes adopted by the characters toward one another is what we call the realm of gest [*gestus*]" (Brecht 1964:198). At other moments, *gestus* appears as "the smallest element of a *Haltung*" (Nägele 1991:152), capturing the varied momentary manifestations of a more enduring stance toward existence with a kind of photographic freeze-frame effect. Such is the opinion of Benjamin, for whom *gestus* functions dialectically by spotlighting the "strict, frame-like, enclosed nature of each moment of an attitude which, after all, is as a whole in a state of living flux" (Benjamin 1988:13). Taken together, then, *gestus* and *Haltung* unite the physical, psychological, and the sociological in Brechtian theory.

Both Willett and Suvin rightly note the principle of externalization in a theatre that makes meaning by staging stance and gesture.[245] Nägele also writes: "As a physiognomic force, *Haltung* replaces interiority, the constitutive space of the bourgeois subject" (Nägele 1991:148). The groupings, gestures, and postures of the actors on the epic stage comprise a series of "moral tableaux" (Brecht 1964:38) that communicate social decisions ranging from the unthinkingly habitual to the agonizingly impossible. The goal of the Brechtian ensemble is to supplement the dramatic *Fabel* ("story," "plot") with shifting constellations of *gesten* and *Haltungen*, which tell a story of human relationships and decisions in corporeal form. The essential Brechtian attitudes of greed,

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[245] See Willett 1959:173, Suvin 1999:47.

appetite, predation, survival, skepticism, curiosity, instruction, resistance, endurance, protection, and altruism manifest themselves in concrete gestures, specific to moment and motive: Grusha picks up the abandoned child to save its life; Azdak extends his open palms to receive bribes; Galileo carries the boy Andrea around a washstand to demonstrate the movement of the earth around the sun; Mother Courage hitches herself to her wagon and trundles forward into the only future she can imagine. Brechtian psycho-sociality is always already physicalized, exteriorized, and inter-relational. In the epic theatre, thought, emotion, and intention manifest themselves as *gesten* and *Haltungen*, shaping and being shaped by the body's social morphologies.

How are *gestus* and *Haltung* employed by the actors in the epic theatre? As has already been discussed, epic actors performers are responsible for observing carefully the gestures and attitudes of the social world that surrounds them so that they may accurately reproduce them onstage. These reproductions will not be exact replicas, however, because they will contain an element of "quotation" or "underlining."[246] More importantly, they will be defamiliarized by the actors' "general gest[us] of showing, which always underlies that which is being shown" (Brecht 1964:203), even as the actors re-present the diverse gestures, postures, and expressions that make up the life of society. Brecht's theatre poem, "Showing Has to be Shown," makes this point most emphatically:

> Show that you are showing! Among all the varied attitudes
> Which you show when showing how men play their parts
> The attitude of showing must never be forgotten.
> All attitudes must be based on the attitude of showing. (Brecht 1976:341)

Individuals "play parts" in social life as much as actors do onstage, and these social roles involve consciously and unconsciously presented attitudes toward one another. When

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[246] See Brecht 1964:138, 142, 245.

placed on a theatrical stage, however, a *gestus* or *Haltung* is always a hybrid of performance qualities – qualities that capture how the gesture or attitude would be embodied in its original social context, as well as qualities specific to its theatrical re-performance. A theatrical performance quality of lightness is especially efficacious because it can defamiliarize social behavior. Brecht writes: "Special elegance, power, and grace of gesture bring about the A-effect" (Brecht 1964:139), and "the achievement of an A-effect absolutely depends on lightness and naturalness of performance" (95). Brecht often compares such qualities of re-performance with the deft, light, and purposeful matter-of-factness of a skilled craftsperson at work, or, work completed, presenting a finished article to the customer for inspection (see Brecht 1976: 341, and elsewhere). The professional polish of the craftsperson's demonstration – of showing how it's done, or showing off the finished item to best effect – provides a basic model for the epic actor's relationship with gesture, just as the street-corner testimonial provides a basic model for his relationship with text and character.[247]

We now come to the very crux of lightness's function in the epic theatre: Brecht's crudely mimetic thinking combines with *Einfühlung* theory's doctrine of bodily correspondence to enable the spectator's participation in the corporeal lightness of the actor. The epic actor's easeful quality of physical-and-vocal delivery "make[s] it possible for the audience to take [the actor's] art, his mastery of technique, lightly too" (Brecht 1964:139). The epic actor's detached stance toward his character finds tensile manifestation in the lightness with which he presents the social gestures appropriate to this character, and this attitude of "taking it lightly" allows the spectator the freedom of

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[247] See "The Street Scene," in Brecht 1964:121-29.

mind and body to adopt the same attitude toward the character's actions. Unlike the emotional actor of the dramatic theatre, who compels the spectator into an affectively taut identification with onstage happenings, the epic actor models for the spectator an easeful and critical orientation toward the decisions and statements of the characters presented. Audience members in the epic theatre may indeed feel-themselves-into onstage actions, but these actions are the light-and-easy demonstrations carried out by a team of sociological experimenters (the epic acting ensemble), not the emotionally intense experiences of their experimental subjects (the characters of the dramatic fiction).

To further trace the connection between bodily lightness and intellectual freedom within Brechtian thought requires re-engagement with the *Haltung* concept. For Brecht, thought shapes the body and the body gives shape to thought, and this shape is *Haltung*. Brecht, along with his alter egos Galileo and Azdak, approaches thinking as a bodily process – like eating, drinking, and working – that provides sensual pleasure. As Suvin and Nägele note, the anecdotes, proverbs, and parables of Mr. Keuner, "the thinking man" (another of Brecht's many alter egos), provide a rich site for understanding Brechtian *Haltung*. In the terse anecdote "What's wise about the wise man is his stance," Keuner meets a professor of philosophy. After listening to the philosopher speak for a while, Keuner comments: "You sit uncomfortably, you talk uncomfortably, you think uncomfortably." The philosopher protests angrily: "I didn't want to hear anything about myself but about the substance of what I was saying." "It has no substance," Keuner responds. "Seeing your stance, I'm not interested in what you're getting at." In this anecdote, as elsewhere in Brechtian theory, intellectual content and physical bearing are

inseparable. Bodily substance supports productive intellectual inquiry and exchange –

and, in the negative case of the philosopher, for the awkward discharge of empty words.

A related incident occurs in *The Messingkauf Dialogues*, when the Actor, a

sentimental but not entirely dim-witted ham, having newly glimpsed the theatre's

potential as a philosophic art, "strikes an attitude" of thinking. (We can perhaps imagine

him inclining his head downward with knuckles supporting his chin, in the manner of

Rodin's *The Thinker*, or gazing into the distance with an earnestly furrowed brow). The

Philosopher, "feeling his [the actor's] calf muscles," critiques his pose: "No. Your

muscles aren't relaxed enough" (Brecht 1965:20). The actor's *Haltung* is a histrionically

stereotyped and overly contracted one, bearing no resemblance to the easeful,

comfortable, and malleable thinking body of Brechtian philosophy. We have already

noted the tensed calf muscle as a symptom of the spectator's psycho-physiological

entrancement in the dramatic theatre. Here it crops up again, as a muscular contraction

that obstructs the free flow of thought.

The most valued *Haltung* within Brechtian thought is the productively critical

one. Brecht's enthusiasm for the idea of a "smoker's theatre," in which spectators are

encouraged to smoke and comment upon the onstage action, can only be understood in

relation to his valuation of the *Haltung* of easeful criticism (*kritische Haltung*). Both

acting and mise-en-scène in the epic theatre are intended to facilitate in the spectator an

"attitude of smoking-and-watching" (see Brecht 1964:44), which involves the act of

smoking itself, but also the way of sitting and inclining the head that the act of smoking

encourages: "As you know, a man smoking is in an attitude highly conducive to

observation. He leans back, thinks his own thoughts, relaxes in his seat, enjoys

everything from an assured position, is only half with it" (Brecht 1965:19). The easy,
relaxed posture of leaning-back, along with the raising and lowering of a cigarette or
cigar to the mouth, immunizes the smoker-and-watcher against the "hypnotic tensions" of
the "dramatic" theatre. Instead of the self-opening or self-surrender required to attain the
heights of aesthetic *Einfühlung*, the Brechtian spectator occupies a posture of self-
withdrawal. His leaning-back sets him at a distance from the onstage action; the raising
and lowering of his cigarette is an activity that reminds him of his own body; the slight
turn of the head toward the cigarette, or towards his companion to whisper a comment,
disrupts the coercive focalization of his gaze.

Understanding the *Haltung* concept helps one better appreciate the literalness –
which is also the materiality and corporeality – of Brechtian theory. Brecht is not calling
for a metaphorical "smoker's theatre." He is calling for a theatre in which the theatrical
spectacle promotes the actual bodily qualities of the smoker-and-watcher in its audience
members, regardless of whether these audience members are actually smoking. We
should also appreciate that Brecht's ideal smoker is Brecht himself, iconic cigar in
mouth. Brecht's personal biography from his schooldays onward embodies his maxim
that "the right attitude to any really important phenomenon is a casual (contemptuous)
one, because it is the only one which permits complete concentration and real alertness,"
as well as a high degree of "personal freedom" (Brecht 1964:10). The casually
concentrated, contemptuously free and alert attitude that Brecht encourages is one with
which he is intimately and corporeally familiar. It is a mark of Brecht's imperturbable
egoism that he theorizes the epic theatre as a means for disseminating his personal mode
of physical being into the bodies of other social actors.

To summarize: while demonstrating the varied *gesten* and *Haltungen* of their dramatic characters, the epic ensemble never ceases to occupy the *Haltung* of criticism or employ the *gestus* of showing, made manifest in their corporeal qualities of lightness, ease, deftness, alertness, and adaptability. By feeling-himself-into these performance qualities, the spectator adopts the attitude of the actor. As a result, actor and spectator share an attitude of observing-and-criticizing and a bodily quality of lightness, even though their bodies occupy different postures (the actor standing and gesturing, the spectator sitting back in his seat). Through sustained engagement with the corporeal attitudes and gestures that comprise what Robert Vischer might have called the "symbolism" of epic presentation – the dynamism of the artistic medium rather than the artistic content – the audience member leaves the auditorium "productively disposed" (Brecht 1964:205) toward criticism.

Mimesis with an Attitude

Brecht's conception of how the world onstage relates to the social world offstage is heavily mimeticist. Brecht's mimetic thinking derives from the fundamentally Aristotelian grounding of his theatrical thought (despite his objections to the affective dynamics he deems "Aristotelian") as well as from his Marxist orientation toward aesthetics. It is within the unfinished fragments of the *Messingkauf Dialogues*, which Brecht plundered in composing the *Short Organum*, that Brecht's outlines his theory of mimesis most comprehensively. The *Messingkauf*'s Philosopher defines art – theatrical, visual, or literary – as "skill in preparing reproductions of human beings' life together such as lead people to a particular kind of feeling, thought, and action that would not be

stimulated in the same way or to the same extent by seeing or experiencing the reality produced" (Brecht 1965:95). Artistic representation is thus never politically neutral; it always leads to some transformation of the observer's relationship with social reality.

The "Aristotelian" theatre, argues the *Messingkauf*'s Philosopher, has for millennia been using "imitations of reality" to "release all sorts of emotions and passions" (97); its agenda has been an emotionalist one, and its primary source of pleasure has been affective arousal. The Philosopher is out to reform this longstanding agenda, but requires some raw material upon which to work. Like the scrap metal dealer who buys a trumpet for its brass content, he is out to "ransack" the conventional theatre for its "imitations"[248]: "I'm looking for a way of getting incidents between people imitated for certain purposes; I've heard that you supply such imitations; and now I hope to find out if they are the kind of imitations I can use" (16). The accuracy of these "imitations" must first be improved by being "checked against reality" (Brecht 1964:114), and then re-deployed toward the Philosopher's "certain purposes": to represent social actions "for perfectly practical ends, simply in order to find out the best way to behave" (Brecht 1965:17). The Philosopher's theatre will present accurate imitations of "men's life together in society" (Brecht 1964:205) with a view toward ethical improvement.

The *Messingkauf* calls the "imitations" in which the theatre traffics "representations" and "reproductions," but also, as Brecht tries on the vocabulary of Platonism, as "images" and "pictures." When Brecht claims that the epic theatre offers not an "experience" but a "picture of the world" (Brecht 1964:37), Brecht is forcefully

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[248] Hence the *Messingkauf* of Brecht's title, which means, literally, "Buying Brass" (Willett, in Brecht 1964:169).

renewing the mimetic paradigm against Stanislavsky's theatre of organicist "experiencing" [*perezhivanie*]. Though the accuracy of its "images" is of profound import, the Brechtian theatre is not purely reduplicative. If it holds a mirror up to nature, it is a "special mirror," shaped by Brecht's Marxist agenda.[249] Rather, epic theatrical praxis undertakes the "representation of reality with a view to influencing it" (227). In other words, its mimesis must have an ethical payoff; it must promote "applicable conclusions about human actions" (Brecht 1964:48) and does not satisfy itself with simply presenting the actions themselves. The *Messingkauf*'s philosopher therefore requires that "something equivalent to comment [be] incorporated" within his theatre's representations of human behavior (Brecht 1965:32). The necessary element of "comment" is supplied by the *gestus* of showing and the *Haltung* of critique, which animate epic acting and define the curvature of the mirror of Brechtian mimesis. In the epic theatre, writes Brecht, "The gestic principle takes over, as it were, from the principle of imitation" (Brecht 1964:86). In Brecht's theatre, the critical attitude of the ensemble is manifested as an embedded part of the "happenings between humans" taking place onstage, so that the audience perceives the represented content and the attitude of its presentation simultaneously, in the performance qualities of the gestures, movements, and postures of the acting bodies who inhabit the stage.[250]

In the epic theatre, a gestic relationship operates across the divide between stage and auditorium: the spectators hold a critical attitude toward the presented actions; the

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[249] Brecht in the *Short Organum*: "If art reflects life it does so with special mirrors" (Brecht 1964:204).
[250] The paradigm of imitation shaped by a critical attention is also forwarded in Brecht's "The Street Scene": "The demonstrator's purpose determines how thoroughly he has to imitate" (Brecht 1964:123).

actor also holds a critical attitude toward the actions of the character he presents, while at the same time directing his underlying *gestus* of showing toward the spectator. Like the individual scenes of epic dramaturgy, actor and spectator are "set off against" one other by their attitudes. *Einfühlung*, on the other hand, lacks attitude. In the theatre of one-feeling, the spectator becomes one with the actor through a fusion that requires a loss of self-awareness, becoming (within the spectator's consciousness) an experiencing monad. In the epic theatre, actor and spectator also form a unit, but it is a Brechtian unit of the two-as-two: "not the single person but two people." Like the interrelational dynamics of street corner and factory floor that caught Brecht's sociologist's eye, the epic theatre's social dynamic is that of one-against-the-other. But the quality of this feeling- or being-against arises from the attitude of criticism, and not from the exploitative, transactional, and predatory ways of being-against that, for Brecht the Marxist, drive so much of our social existence.

Beneath this attitudinal counter-poising, I would like to argue, can exist synchrony. This chapter's chief argument is that the Brechtian theatre's critical-and-productive stance of feeling-against is not incompatible with a corporeally grounded mode of feeling-at-one-with-another. A dually operational mimesis drives the operations of the Brechtian theatre: the mimesis of the social world, which produces accurate images of human interactions, co-exists with an embodied mimesis connecting acting bodies with spectating bodies. The spectator feels-himself-into the performance qualities of the epic actor – ease, deftness, and alertness – and in the process is relieved of the constrictual urge toward *Einfühlung* and the tightening of thought it entails. The images of social action composed out of the bodies of the epic theatre's actors contain an inherent "refusal

to be taut" (Brecht 1964:194); consequently, these images "leave the spectator's intellect free and highly mobile" (Brecht 1964:191). If Hitler's effort at putting across the "little man's image of his master" left him and his audience strained to exhaustion, the epic theatre's theatrical mimesis promotes an attitude of easeful resistance that can inoculate the spectator against the corporeal regimes of the dramatic theatre – and perhaps, by extension, the fascist spectacle that co-opts its devices.

In sum, Brechtian mimesis demands an attitude, and this attitude is a bodily one. Brechtian mimesis relies most of all upon the *Mimus* of the performing body, and it is through engagement with the performance qualities of this body that the spectator is primed to take up a productive attitude toward embodied social actions presented by this body. The lightness of the Brechtian actor frees the in-feeling spectator from his rigidly held, upright posture, with calf-muscles tensed and perspiration trickling down his brow, and invites him to lean back in his seat, narrow his eyes, cast his gaze around the stage, and perhaps murmur a comment or a joke to his companion. The epic actor's demonstration of social behavior is therefore an act of liberation, like the transformation of nature, or that of society, and the spectator, inoculated against one-feeling, is left free to partake in "the joys of liberation" conveyed by "the theatre of a scientific age" (Brecht 1964:196). This freedom requires the uninhibited wielding of the critical faculty, which the early theorists of *Einfühlung* argued was disruptive – and, indeed, antithetical – to the "the feeling of freedom and unconstricted ease"[251] that aesthetic experience allows.

Of course, subscribing to the above account of epic theatre as a critically attitudinal, corporeally grounded mimetic apparatus requires accepting that Brechtian

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[251] See, again, Lipps 1965:407-8.

praxis does what Brecht says it does – something that Brecht's critics, past and present, have been reluctant to grant. Perhaps the most trenchant critique of the intellectually liberatory potential of Brecht's theatre comes from Theodor Adorno, who writes:

> [Brecht's] theater of alienation intended to motivate the viewer to think. […] His didactic style, however, is intolerant of the ambiguity in which thought originates: It is authoritarian. This may have been Brecht's response to the ineffectuality of his didactic plays: As a virtuoso of manipulative technique, he wanted to coerce the desired effect just as he once planned to organize his rise to fame. (Adorno 1997:242)

It may be true that Brecht's plays sometimes disguise didacticism as entertainment by representing prefabricated processes of learning instead of promoting such processes in their audiences, or staging debates in which one voice holds authorially sanctioned positions, and that these devices contain an element of intellectual coercion. However, we can find considerable good faith in Brecht's injunctions regarding the organization of the performing body – in particular, in his renunciation of the hypnotically tense histrionics that work so effectively upon the bodies of spectators in the "dramatic" theatre. A performance quality of ease can be deployed for invitation, seduction, perhaps even manipulation, but it is damnably difficult to deploy it toward coercion or violent galvanization. Even if we accept Adorno's critique of the Brechtian project, we can perhaps allow that, by championing *Leichtigkeit*, Brecht grants his spectator at least a measure of corporeal freedom – and that this freedom in the body allows at least some space for undirected intellectual impulses.

Sean Carney argues convincingly that Brecht's theatrical theory cannot be separated from its Marxist project.[252] Likewise, we cannot understand the mimesis undertaken by Brecht's theatre unless we hold it up in opposition to the forms of mimetic

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[252] See Carney 2005:8-44.

behavior sweeping Germany in the decades leading up to the second World War. Brecht denies himself the devices that support the ritualized organization of mimesis in service of political domination that Adorno and Horkheimer attribute to European fascism in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Fascism's rigidifying corporeal regimes, argue Adorno and Horkheimer, exploit "the organic adaptation to otherness" that is "mimetic behavior proper," as a result "automating mental processes, turning them into blind sequences" (Adorno and Horkheimer 2002:148-49). There is a world of difference between the fascist way of walking – with its tautly percussive, machine-like, lock-step strutting – and the light step of Helene Weigel. This difference ought not to be overlooked by critics attempting to paint Brecht's epic theatre as disingenuously totalitarian. Like the rise of Arturo Ui or Adolf Hitler, *Einfühlung* is for Brecht an eminently resistible process, and the epic actor models a mode of resistance against its "hypnotic tensions" that may carry over into the spectator's engagement with social performances beyond the walls of the theatre.

We may ordinarily think of resistance as requiring the meeting of force with force, of tension with tension, of pressure with counter-pressure, but an equally effective mode of resistance – and one championed across Brecht's oeuvre – is to meet force with lightness. The attitude of "taking it lightly" allows its possessor to sidestep collision and enables evasion, absorption, equivocation, misdirection, and, as a last resort, escape. Brecht, who fled Nazi Germany the day after the burning of the Reichstag in 1933 and boarded a transatlantic flight to Europe the day after his hearing before the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1947, knew well the virtues of *Leichtigkeit*:

> Early on I learned to change everything quickly
> The ground on which I walked, the air I was breathing

> Lightly I do so, yet still I see
> How others want to take too much with them.
>   Leave your ship light, leave lightly behind
>   Leave too your ship lightly behind when they tell you
> To take the road inland.[253]

Lightness is a way of walking, a quality of performance. For Brecht, it is the right way of walking the "road inland" into the unknown future. Brecht and the early theorists of *Einfühlung* would agree that lightness can be appreciated – and even learned – by watching and feeling-ourselves-into the way others walk, lightly, and that this process of apperceptive attunement can occur both in the social world and in the social world that is the theatre.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

In concluding, I would like to take a cue from Brecht's passion for dialectics – in particular, from his late view that the "tussle and tension" between "acting (demonstration)" and "experience (empathy)" generates much of the "particular effectiveness" of the actor's art. I would like to push Brecht's thinking about *Einfühlung*'s role in the epic theatre's critical mimesis a step further, in order to broker a more general, dialectical reconciliation between correspondence and contradiction in theatrical theory – that is, to argue that feeling-with and feeling-against are not as mutually exclusive as we might often think, either in social relations or their theatrical variants.

When I find that my opinions differ from yours, I can disagree with you lightly or I can disagree with you heavily. You can argue with me easefully or you can argue with

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[253] From Brecht's poem, "Early on I Learned" (Brecht 1976:357-58).

me tensely. We can be "against" each other in our point of view but "with" each other in

our way of being. We can both take pleasure in an argument, in the vivacious exchange

of contradictory views, because we have agreed – probably implicitly rather than

explicitly – to take things lightly. Our voices will not rise to stridency; we will not jerk

pointed index-fingers at each other; we will not shift uncomfortably in our seats; our

faces will not flush, beads of sweat will not run down our brows, and the veins of our

temples will not swell with strain. An agreement to lightness can serve as the basis for an

ethics of mutual respect. Physical performance-qualities infuse everything we do, and the

courses and outcomes of our social interactions, both on the street corner and in the

theatrical auditorium, depend as much on the *how* as the *what* of our attitudes, actions,

and words.

The above description of agreement-within-argument attempts to summon, with

the efficiency of abstraction, qualities of dialectical engagement made corporeal in

countless meetings between Brecht and his friends, confidantes, and collaborators over a

lifetime of energetic conversation and collective artistic activity.[254] Brecht's lightness

made him well loved, as well as giving him some measure of freedom from the shocks of

an often inhospitable world. A little story recounted by the playwright Erwin Strittmatter

renders Brecht's *Haltung* of taking-things-lightly amusingly concrete:

> [Brecht's] understanding relationship with assistants and actors is well known. Of
> course there were rows, even "fearful rows." […] But secretly I doubt that they
> were "genuine." In a "Katzgraben" rehearsal one point would simply not go right.
> Brecht continued rehearsing with a lot of patience, but I could not go on. He
> tapped my shoulder and said: "Don't say anything or there will be a genuine row.

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[254] My understanding of Brecht's personality and its characteristic attitudes – his
gentleness, politeness, and fastidiousness – is drawn from a number of biographical
works, chiefly: Esslin 1959, Witt 1974, Völker 1978, and Hayman 1983.

I'll make a theatre row and not get excited." He made the row. It worked. He smiled: "That's the way to do it."[255]

Brecht's "theatre row" may present an accurate "image" or "imitation" of a row, but what makes it theatrical – in a thoroughly Brechtian sense – is its embedded lightness, along with the clarity of intent infusing this performance quality. Brecht argues lightly to avoid poisoning the atmosphere of collaboration with strain: a tautened neck muscle or a clenched fist could quickly promote emotional contractions in all assembled, through the swift and uncritical attunement with otherness that Plato once attacked under the rubric of mimesis, and which the younger Brecht objected to under the name of *Einfühlung*.

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[255] From Erwin Strittmatter, "Journeyman Years with Brecht" (in Witt 1974:163).

Coda:

Beyond the One-to-One

This study of mimesis within acting theory's history of ideas cannot be exhaustive. It has left many strands of one-to-one conceptualization untraced, many pockets of mimeticist thinking unprobed. In expanding its scope, one might, for example examine Vsevolod Meyerhold's and Sergei Eisenstein's writings on "Biomechanics," a system of body-based actor-training whose theoretical articulations, as is well known, were harmonized with Soviet materialist ideology. However, biomechanical thought also draws upon the psychology of William James, Theodor Lipps's conception of *Einfühlung* (discussed in chapter four of this study), and the Russian "Objective Psychology" of Pavlov, Sechenov, and Bekhterev. All of these bodies of thought analyze imitation as a social phenomenon: James's *Principles of Psychology* examined the instinctive "imitative tendency" among children and adults (James 1890:408), Lipps at first theorized *Einfühlung* in terms of "inner imitation,"[256] and Bekhterev argued that a "mimico-somatic association reflex" provides the primary mechanism for empathy (Bechterev 1933:240).

The political objective of Biomechanical training is the development of the actor's physical capacity to trigger spectatorial "arousal" in the service of the Soviet state. In his late essay, "The Reconstruction of the Theatre" (1930), Meyerhold envisions of tens of thousands of human bodies within a stadium-theatre of the future, vibrating at the same physical-emotional frequency, galvanized in their commitment to cultural reformation by the "invigorating shock" delivered by the actor's physical expressivity (Meyerhold 1969:270). This is embodied mimesis on a mass scale. According to

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[256] See chapter four of this study.

Eisenstein, Meyerhold's protégé and the chief theoretician of Biomechanics in written form, "arousal" spreads between actor and spectator through the "imitative, mimical infectiousness" of the former's expressive movement – in other words, its capacity to provoke "direct or reverse imitation in the auditorium" (in Law and Gordon 1996:187, 206). Gripped by a physiological mimetic drive, the spectator "in turn reflexively repeats in weakened form the entire system of the actor's movements: as a result of the produced movements, the spectator's incipient muscular tensions are released in the desired emotion" (187). Giving over even further to one-to-one conceptualization, Eisenstein suggests that the Biomechanical actor reproduces in physical form the intellectual movement of dialectics, which proceeds through negation and counter-negation. Eisenstein conceives this reproduction of thought in movement as quite literal, but a less ideologically driven reader will almost certainly take it as largely metaphorical, metaphysically materialist kind of mimesis.

Expanding the scope of this study even further, one could also pursue mimesis into the theory and practice of the Polish director and "theatre guru" Jerzy Grotowski. In his early career, Grotowski extends Stanislavsky technique of acting as action in pursuing the performer's real act of self-revelation before an audience. This act is not an imitation of action, or even action in the fictionally informed mood of Stanislavsky's "as if." For Grotowski, it is action itself – a "total act" of "self-penetration" (34) carried out by the actor upon him- or herself (Grotowski 1968:212, 34). Whether such an action takes place within rather than without the walls of a performance venue is irrelevant with respect to its realness. Grotowski's turn away from the "Theatre of Productions" toward facilitated group happenings ("Paratheatre") in the 1970s, and then toward experiments with ritual

practices toward the end of that decade, has often been discussed as a movement "beyond representation" or one of "abandoning mimesis."[257] It is certainly true that Grotowski held no interest in the realistic representation of social behavior at this phase of his career. But as someone who trained for two months at the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards in Pontedera, Italy, during the summer of 2008, I can state my belief that the "other mimesis" explored in this study – mimesis as embodied attunement – powerfully sustains processes of contagion and transmission within current Workcenter practice, which centers on the creation of performances using songs of ritual traditions.

Mimesis also makes explicit or disguised appearances in theoretical articulations of this practice: for example, when Thomas Richards, artistic director of the Workcenter, discusses imitation as a sometimes valid strategy for new members of his Workcenter ensemble: "in part, through imitating they can learn to do" (Richards 2008:114). Mimetic thinking also pushes itself upward beneath the surface of Richards's explanation of the term "induction," which Grotowski used to describe the flow of energy between performers (or "doers") as well as between performers and witnesses:

> If you have an electrical wire with current flowing through it, and you take another without current in it and put it nearby, traces of an electrical current may appear in this second wire. This is the phenomenon of induction, and it can also happen when someone is witnessing the performing structure in which the doers are approaching [a] transformation of energy. As they're watching, witnesses might begin to perceive inside themselves something of what is happening in the doers […] and afterwards in the analysis someone says, for example, 'Ah, when performing, you were singing. And I don't know what exactly happened, but it

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[257] See Wolford 1996:10. Wolford also classifies the work within Grotowski's late-career phase of "Art as Vehicle" as "nonmimetic, nonrepresentational, in the sense that it is not something that exists in order to be seen, nor does it take as a point of reference something outside itself of which it is an imitation or copy" (Wolford 1997:426).

was almost like a movement inside me – inside my body? I was just sitting, watching.' We can see, ah, there was induction. (14)

In the image of two wire filaments held up in parallel, we have a hieroglyph of the one-to-one schema itself. But the play of electricity within and between these filaments – and the fact that the energetic fluctuations of one wire can participate in without replicating those of the other – adds a further dimension of conceptual nuance, one that moves us beyond the one-to-one. In addition, the properties of electricity are, for most of us, as mysterious as the mechanisms behind affective contagion or kinesthetic response, and Grotowski and Richards are gesturing toward an experiential phenomenon with an image rather than seeking a conceptually perfect analogy.

To bring this study of one-to-one thinking about the actor's art up to the very present, one would have examine the application of cognitive neuroscience's "mirror neuron" theory to theatre scholarship. One would also have to reckon with the enthusiastic reception that the notion of the mirror neuron has received within popular culture – and, more generally, within the artistic sub-cultures of the professional theatre and dance world. During the early 1990s, a group of neuroscientists at the University of Parma discovered that certain neurons in the premotor cortex of macaque monkeys activated both when a monkey *performed* a physical action – like grasping, holding, or tearing – and when that monkey *observed* the action being carried out by a human experimenter. This was taken as evidence that macaques – and, by extension, other primates and humans – might comprehend the behavior of other agents through "action understanding,"[258] some form of vicarious experience of the purposive behavior of those agents. In other words, there might be a secret dimension of doing – often undetectable

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[258] See Gallese et al. 1996.

to the conscious mind – in one's observation of the doings of others. Vittorio Gallese, one of the Parma scientists responsible for the discovery of mirror neurons, writes of this shared embodiment of intention:

> Although we do not overtly reproduce the observed action, nevertheless our motor system becomes active *as if* we were executing that very same action that we are observing. To spell it out in different words, action observation implies *action simulation*. (Gallese 2001:37)

The subjunctive mode, so central to theories of performance from Stanislavsky to Richard Schechner, here appears as a state of the human organism, a condition of psycho-motor activation pulsing through the neural networks of the observer as he or she watches an agent in action.

While experimental studies have so far focused almost entirely on physical activities and movements, Gallese, the most philosophically minded of the Parma scientists, speculates that there may exist in the brain a whole array of "mirror matching mechanisms" governing attitudes, emotions, and other contagious forms of subjectivity (see Gallese 2001:46). Gallese has even proposed the mirror neuron system may be *the* primary mechanism behind the human capacity for "simulation": the basic ability to know other minds from a first-person perspective.[259] Under this view, our sensitivity to the motivations and sensations of others would derive not from the observation and interpretation of behavioral data, but from our placing ourselves – or, better, finding ourselves – "inside" the experience of the other. Gallese argues that the coordinated firing of mirror neurons in interactions between an agent and an observer brings into

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[259] See Gallese, Vittorio and Alvin Goldman, "Mirror neurons and the simulation theory of mind-reading," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 2.12 (1998); Goldman, Alvin, *Simulating Minds: The Philosophy, Psychology, and Neuroscience of Mindreading* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006).

being a "shared manifold of intersubjectivity" that enables a cognitive "self-other identity" (Gallese 2005:104). Neural synchronization produces a "'we' centric" intentional space governed by a "'being like me' analogy" (111). The polar positions "self" and "other" are correlative and exchangeable within this "dynamic system governed by reversibility rules" (114). Rational thought and hypothesis formation in our relations with others are pre-empted and rendered unnecessary by a form of intersubjective knowing-as-doing.

In essence, mirror neuron theory provides a "hard science" version of Francis Fergusson's conception of the "mimetic perception of action" (Fergusson 1949:250) – Fergusson's poetically expressed notion that some form of subconscious attunement with the actor's action must inform the spectator's experience. There is little wonder that the mirror neuron data and the speculative extrapolations it has provoked have been embraced by theatre and performance scholarship: Bruce McConachie's *Engaging Audiences: A Cognitive Approach to Spectating in the Theatre* (2008) applies mirror neuron theory to the dynamics of spectatorship; Susan Leigh Foster touches briefly upon the science of mirror neurons in exploring the role of "kinesthetic empathy" and "kinesthetic impact" in dance spectatorship;[260] and Rhonda Blair's *The Actor, Image, and Action* (2008) uses mirror neuron theory to blur rhetorically "the boundaries between your feelings and mine, your actions and mine" (Blair 2008:14). McConachie employs

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[260] See Foster, Susan Leigh, "Movement's contagion: the kinesthetic impact of performance," in *The Cambridge Companion to Performance Studies*, ed. Tracy C. Davis (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008). In this article, Foster builds upon her earlier "Kinesthetic Empathies and the Politics of Compassion, " in *Critical Theory and Performance*, eds. Janelle G. Reinelt and Joseph R. Roach (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan Press, 2007).

the mirror neuron concept to import – as did Fergusson, writing more than half a century

earlier – an Aristotelian *mimesis* of *praxis* into the mind and body of the spectator:

> In conventional mimetic theory, playwrights and actors do the imitating. Cognitive scientists and philosophers, in contrast, have strong evidence that it is audiences who mirror the actions of those they watch on stage; cognitive imitation is a crucial part of spectating. (McConachie 2008:72)

The excitement of theatre scholars over the findings and hypotheses of cognitive

science is genuine, and the implications of the mirror neuron data are indeed provocative.

There is serious reason to question, however, the evidence upon which these implications

are based. Mirror neuron theory has come under attack from a series of scientists,

psychologists, and philosophers since the earliest publications of the Parma

neuroscientists in the mid-1990s, with the main charges being laid that:

> "Mirror neuron" activity has been definitively measured only in macaque monkeys, and all discussion of such activity in humans is overreachingly speculative;

> "Mirror neuron" activity need not depend upon a particular class of neurons, but might be a neural phenomenon associated with particular kinds of mental-and-physical activity;

> "Mirror neurons" may not be "hard-wired" into the monkey brain; rather, their "mirroring" function may emerge out of social interactions – in particular, the unnaturally repetitive interactions between monkey and human experimenter within a laboratory environment.[261]

Perhaps the most damning piece of evidence – at least, from a layperson's perspective –

is that macaque monkeys *do not imitate each other*.[262] This fact seems to throw cold

water over the claim that mirror neurons may be responsible for social learning,

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[261] See Hickok 2008, Heyes 2009.
[262] See Hickok 2008:1231.

emotional contagion, and interpersonal understanding in the human being, often dubbed

Homo imitans.[263]

An additional – and much more basic – critique can be leveled against mirror

neuron theory: that its basic assumptions and methodologies privilege correspondence

over difference. The superstructure of mirror neuron theory is built upon a familiar

conceptual schema: the one-to-one. In its most ridigly skeletal form, this schema cannot

accommodate difference, and must discard differentials in measured neural activity as

irrelevant to the mirror neuron hypothesis. This methodology can only generate the kind

of speculative one-to-one thinking about human experience that this study has traced

through the intertwined histories of philosophy, aesthetics, and acting theory. As

evidenced by its rapid diffusion through popular discourse, the "mirror neuron" notion

relies upon a seductively simple conceptual schema – and several scientific critics of

mirror neuron theory have argued as much.[264]

Mirror neuron theory, as the latest manifestation of one-to-one thinking about

theatrical experience, is therefore dangerous. It is only dangerous, however, when its

hypothesis of intentional synchrony is taken as a definitive answer rather than a

provocation to thought. A public conversation between Vittorio Gallese and a handful of

theatre professionals on the subject of "Acting and Mirror Neurons" held at New York's

Philoctetes Center for the Multidisciplinary Study of the Imagination in 2007 reveals the

perils of indiscriminately applying a new conceptual toy: the conversants speculate

loosely that mirror neurons may be responsible for processes as diverse as subjunctive

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[263] This phrase has been recently employed by the developmental psychologist Andrew Meltzoff and the social theorist Leandro Herrero.

[264] See, for example, Hickok 2008:1229, Churchland 2011:142

imagination, spectator-actor empathy, the suspense generated by gestural incompletion, and a director's identification with an ensemble of actors.[265] For practitioners, scholars, and lovers of the theatre, however, there is an easy and effective way to resist the pull of one-to-one conceptualization, to scramble free of the parallel grooves of mimetic thinking: this is, quite simply, is to refer back to the complexity of our own theatrical experiences. In other words, in testing the validity of the one-to-one, we can call ourselves back in memory into the material locale of the theatre, or we can carry one-to-one hypotheses with us to a live performance and test them against our experiences-in-the-moment. In bringing this study to a close, I offer a case study for overcoming the compelling insufficiency of the one-to-one – an example that brings both retrospection and introspection to bear upon a textual anecdote.

Stanislavsky as "Mirror"

Giving in to the impulses of an admiring disciple, Nikolai Gorchakov[266] steals furtive glances at the great man Stanislavsky during a Moscow Art Theatre dress rehearsal in 1920:

> From my seat in the auditorium I could observe Stanislavsky and at the same time watch the performance on the stage. On the stage I saw the scenes of Byron's tragedy *Cain* as they were played one after another, and I also saw how every move and every word of the actors was reflected on Stanislavsky's face. I have never seen a more mobile, a more expressive, or a more impressionable face. What childish joy it reflected when the actors worked well! When they did not, his hands wrote rapidly on the paper in front of him and his lips moved impatiently, whispering something. The change in expression on his face was instantaneous. It was alive every minute, either nervous or happy or sad,

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[265] See Ludwig 2007.

[266] In 1920, Gorchakov was a student actor at Evgeny Vakhtangov's acting studio. He would later become a member of the Moscow Art Theatre company and, eventually, a renowned director.

reflecting whatever experience the actors on stage were going through.
(Gorchakov 1954:4)

The mode of invested spectatorship described by Gorchakov seems to have been characteristic rather than unusual for Stanislavsky. In 1935, a decade and a half after the production of Byron's *Cain* Gorchakov describes, American theatre scholar Norris Houghton observed an aging and infirm Stanislavsky at a rehearsal of Bizet's *Carmen*:

> For two and a half hours [the rehearsal] lasted, the maestro completely lost in the work. As the action progressed his whole body was thrown into the action – he leaned forward in his chair, his hands alternately clutching its arms and relaxing, his face working with excitement. (Houghton 1936:84)[267]

According to Gorchakov, Stanislavsky's face "reflect[ed] whatever experience the actors on stage were going through," and it would be no great leap to say that Stanislavsky was "mirroring" the emotional processes of his performers. Stanislavsky himself might have accepted this metaphor, given his belief that the observer could serve as a subjective "mirror" for the actor, assessing the latter's "sense of truth and belief."[268] A mirror neuron enthusiast, reading the passages above, might be convinced that Stanislavsky entered a "'we' centric" space of total identification – one that allowed a "self-other identity" between him and any given actor within his gaze.

Referring to my own experiences as an actor and director, however, I would argue that the intersubjective situation above is one much more complicated than the language of "mirroring" allows us to describe. As a young actor, I witnessed the above symptoms – the muscularly engaged body, the over-active facial expressions – in several of my acting teachers, and, as a director of young actors, I have noticed them arise in myself. As a result, I can offer the following observations: first of all, Stanislavsky is no typical

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[267] This rehearsal took place at the studio of the Stanislavsky Opera Theatre.
[268] See chapter three of this study.

spectator. As a director and pedagogue, Stanislavsky's relationship with the human strivings carried out by his actors is powerfully shaped by his personal "tasks" or "objectives" (*zadachi*): to ready the production for opening, to give his actors constructive feedback, to lead his students toward improving their technique of body and consciousness. Stanislavsky watches his actors work with more appraisal and investment than would a "disinterested" spectator. His way of watching also holds more "dynamism" or "activeness" (*aktivnost'*) than that of an ordinary spectator: as he observes his actors, he is acting upon them – or trying to act upon them – with a series of "inner" or "silent" actions (*deisvtii*): he *praises*, *celebrates,* and *encourages* his actors when they work well (his face expressing "childish joy"); he suffers the actors' mistakes and oversights, perhaps *chastising* them or himself (muttering "impatiently"); he *analyzes* what is lacking and *decides* what needs to be done (as he scribbles his notes). In other words, at those moments when his actors are playing well, Stanislavsky may slide into a more identificatory way of watching, but, generally, his objectives and actions will be specific to the psychically pressurized "given circumstances" (*predlagaemye obstoiatelstva*) of a director during the leadup to opening night.

Stanislavsky as an experiencing human subject passes through a series of states that we can only point toward with terms like "identification," "empathy," "appreciation," "appraisal," and "critique." At any given theatrical performance, an audience member will also pass through a variety of these same states, though their sequence, duration, and modality will both upon onstage events and events in the spectator's mental life. In order to understand acting and spectating as complex multi-modal process of mind and body, the one-to-one of mimetic thinking may get us

somewhere, but it cannot get us all the way across our desired distance.   When we pick

up the mimesis concept – and give over to the one-to-one thinking it inspires – we must

use it, as Plato did, as a provocation to dialectical exploration rather than a rigid

conceptual template that closes down thought. Human beings, whether acting onstage or

in the world, whether observing from an auditorium or from behind the heads of a crowd

in a public square, are infinitely complex entities. When it functions at is best, mimesis

can serve as a vehicle that takes us into the thick of the subjective and intersubjective

complexity of human experience, but there will come a point at which we must abandon

it, and forge ahead using our own resources of perspicacity and reflectiveness.

Theatre scholars who decide to take up, dust off, and retool the mimesis concept

two and a half millennia after its philosophical rebirth will do well to call to mind the

image of the ageing Stanislavsky, inclining toward his actors with wide eyes, smiling,

frowning, muttering, and gesturing like a madman in the darkness of the Moscow Art

Theatre auditorium. We will do well to recall his image because it will keep us from

neglecting the "other mimesis": mimesis as embodied attunement, a form of the one-to-

one that, in the theatre, always exists alongside the one-to-one of ideal or empirical

verisimilitude, and which brings self and other into affective relation without collapsing

identity and alterity into sameness. At other times, we must call to mind our own

memories of acting and spectating, or take our philosophical questions with us into

performance venues, in order to delve into the complexity of theatrical experience.

Doing so will help us resist the aesthetic orthodoxies, physiological models, political

agendae, metaphysical assumptions, and theoretical enthusiasms that proclaim the one-to-

one as a solution rather than a starting point for the philosophy of acting.

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