

David Roesner (05/11/2012) Comment on

E. T. Hetzler, 'Actor Self vs. Character Self: An Empirical Exploration', *Journal for Artistic Research*, 2 (2012) <http://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/15971/15972/0/0> [accessed 15/04/2015]

I should start by saying that I have thoroughly enjoyed reading Eric Hetzler's submission and watching the rich material he provides. I find this research highly interesting, and it is conducted with a great amount of insight and integrity.

Hetzler tackles an age-old question in a new original way. Most often we find 'acting' to be described and interrogated in one of three ways: (1) in general theories on the cultural phenomenon of acting exploring what it means to act – these can be philosophically interesting, but often quite removed from day to day acting reality; (2) in instruction manuals on 'how to act', which seek to provide a tool-kit, often for *one* approach singled out as the 'right' one, (3) through biographies and anecdotes, usually with an air of reverence and celebration of the star actor. Hetzler, however, uses empirical evidence – both through a quantitative study of questionnaires as well as a qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews – to dig deeper and to provide much more accurate insights on what actually happens during acting and how actors reflect on the relationship between themselves and their characters.

The way this is conducted is thorough and it produces interesting results and access to a wide range of views and practices – a quarry for actors and theatre scholars alike.

Hetzler's submission does leave me with two open questions, however:

Does his research not challenge or at least stretch the idea of JAR as an online journal committed to practice as research? The research is – in a good way – traditional, both in its methods and form of dissemination and while Hetzler's findings are highly *relevant* for practice and practitioners, I would perhaps not call it 'artistic research'. It is research *about* practice, not *through* practice. Or do we need to redefine practice to include field research, interviewing, empirical research?

My second question is where Hetzler's research stands in relation to the more current (and perhaps more European) discourse on acting which documents an overwhelming trend towards the dissolution or redefinition of the actor's task in the contexts of devising, postdramatic theatre, presentation vs. representational acting, acting as task performance, etc. This goes back at least to Brecht's notion of acting as "showing that you are showing" (Street Scene) and has recently led to a number of publications interrogating conventions of acting [Rey, Anton, Kurzenberger, Hajo & Müller, Stephan, *Wirkungsmaschine Schauspieler – Vom Menschendarsteller zum multifunktionalen Spielmacher* (Berlin/Köln, 2011); Roselt, Jens & Weiler, Christel (eds.), *Schauspielen heute* (Bielefeld, 2011); Zarrilli, Phillip, *Acting (Re)considered* (London & New York, 2002), Philip Auslander, *From Acting to Performance* (London, 1997) to name but a few].

I do think Hetzler's research is important and relevant since – quantitatively speaking – a lot of acting (particularly in the UK and US) probably still finds itself within the naturalist/realist paradigm, which

means that the reality of most actors is creating fictional characters on stage based on dramatic writing. There are, however, strong and hugely influential trends in theatre and its scholarship / theorization, which question this very paradigm and debate whether for example Iffland's notion of acting as *Menschen-darstellung* (representations of man) is still current.

Hetzler gets a lot out of his premise and his methods of enquiry and has managed to synthesize what must be a larger piece of work into a succinct, accessible and well-presented online exposition, which will complement JAR's range of topics and forms of submission.