

**Towards an Enactive Paradigm:
A Cognitive Approach to Naomi Wallace's Spectator.**

Rovie Herrera Medalle

Director: Dr. Bárbara Ozieblo RajKowska

Tutor: Dr. Rosario Arias Doblas

Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

English Studies

Universidad de Málaga (UMA)

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Málaga a Viernes de 28 de junio de 2019

Bárbara Ozieblo Rajkowska, profesora de la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras (Universidad de Málaga),

HACE CONSTAR

Que Rovie Herrera Medalle es estudiante de doctorado del Programa de Doctorado en “Lingüística, Literatura y Traducción”, con matrícula activa, y que ha realizado bajo mi dirección, la Tesis Doctoral titulada

“Towards an Enactive Paradigm: A Cognitive Approach to Naomi Wallace's Spectator”

Revisado el presente trabajo estimo que reúne los requisitos establecidos según la normativa vigente. Por lo tanto, **AUTORIZO** la admisión a trámite y defensa pública de esta Tesis Doctoral para optar al grado de Doctor en la Universidad de Málaga.

Y para que así conste, lo firmo en Málaga a Viernes de 28 de junio de 2019.

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Documentación en español.

Resumen en español.

Como parte del amplio ámbito filológico, la presente investigación se enmarca en el estudio de las dramaturgias estadounidenses contemporáneas, en concreto en la obra de Naomi Wallace. No siendo sólo su obra el único objeto de estudio en este trabajo, esta investigación doctoral trata de analizar la ausencia de una epistemología sólida y certera en el fenómeno de las audiencias teatrales. Como marco de investigación, se podría considerar que la presente tesis doctoral alberga una aproximación interdisciplinar, ya que se toma como referencia el movimiento académico estadounidense de estudios cognitivos aplicados a las humanidades. Tras la observación y estudio de la obra de Naomi Wallace, concluyo que la complejidad de sus representaciones teatrales no dejan indiferente al espectador. Con la intención de entender dicha experiencia del espectador al que Wallace intenta dejar perplejo, exploro la teoría del espectador bajo el marco de los estudios cognitivos, que me lleva al uso del paradigma “Enaction”.

La presente tesis pretende ilustrar la necesidad de una nueva epistemología en el estudio del espectador en teatro, puesto que en numerosas investigaciones se ha tratado de profundizar en el análisis del espectador pero no se ha llegado a obtener la certeza de un análisis que vaya más allá de lo textual. Por ello, sugiero que el estudio de la mente del espectador, es la puerta de acceso que lleva a entender el fenómeno de la audiencia. Para ello propongo un enfoque cognitivo acorde con la tendencia cognitiva que las humanidades han experimentado en los últimos diez años. Centrándome en los trabajos de la dramaturga Naomi Wallace como representación de un modelo complejo de audiencia en la esfera teatral del Off-Broadway. Las obras de Wallace tratan de impactar al espectador y de romper con los estereotipos enmarcados en la temática de la política, aspectos de razas, aspectos familiares y

sociales. La dramaturga, considerada por algunos críticos una autora neo-Brechtiana, cuestiona el sistema capitalista estadounidense y los valores tradicionales. Debido a que las obras de Wallace prestan especial atención a las emociones del espectador y al impacto de sus obras más allá de la propia función teatral, creo firmemente que una aproximación cognitiva para analizar al espectador reportará beneficio tanto al entendimiento de la experiencia del espectador así como a un análisis profundo de sus obras. En la esfera de la aproximación cognitiva al teatro, los estudios recientes de Bruce McConachie sobre teatro y evolución apuntan hacia el paradigma de “Enaction”, el cual va más allá de aspectos que conciernen a la mente, y contempla otros conceptos tales como “embodiment, environment, and experience”. Por consiguiente, la presente tesis se centra en la aproximación cognitiva hacia el espectador y progresivamente desemboca en un análisis “Enactive” de la obra de Naomi Wallace.

La obra de Naomi Wallace se compone primariamente de obras de teatro aunque también escribe poesía. La temática de su obra—aspectos sociopolíticos y conflictos de género—junto con su proyección internacional—escritora sureña, Kentucky, con visibilidad en la escena teatral británica. Esta pluralidad, me llevó a elegir su obra ya que no podría adscribirla en ninguna categoría específica. Por este motivo, en ocasiones me refiero a su obra con el apelativo de “compleja”, ya que dicha complejidad es el principal elemento que destaca por encima de otros aspectos. En el capítulo primero incluyo un análisis crítico de la obra de Naomi Wallace, concentrándome particularmente en el efecto que intenta crear en el espectador. Algunas reseñas indican que las obras de teatro de Wallace parecen inacabas, hecho que en mi opinión se debe a su interés en provocar preguntas antes que proveer respuestas. Además, comento en el capítulo el aspecto político y la influencia que la obra de Brecht ejerce sobre Wallace. Dedico también un apartado a explorar sus personajes creados para romper con los estereotipos impuestos por la sociedad y, a su vez, desestabilizar las

expectativas del espectador. A través de breves, secciones trato temas como la técnica, la puesta en escena y el lenguaje empleado, con la intención de proveer al lector de esta tesis con una panorámica del estilo de Wallace. El propósito de este capítulo es servir de introducción a las obras de teatro de Wallace, y con ello contribuir a un análisis profundo de su obra. Esta panorámica pone de manifiesto la necesidad de prestar especial atención al impacto que sus obras crean en el espectador.

El segundo capítulo, “The development of Spectatorship Theory”, comienza con una cita de Grotowski en la que se demuestra el papel relevante del espectador. Asimismo, explico que, desde tiempos inmemoriales, se han llevado a cabo análisis del espectador; pero dichos análisis no suponen un profundo estudio de la materia en cuestión. Contemplo por ello la obra de Susan Bennett *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception* (1997), la cual ha sido uno de los análisis más completos en dicha materia hasta la fecha. Bennett acoge y estudia en *Theatre Audiences* los monográficos sobre el análisis del espectador, tales como *Distance in the Theatre: The Aesthetic of Audience Response* (1984) de Daphna Ben Chaim, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (1988) de Jill Dolan, o las publicaciones de Patrice Pavis en la aproximación semiótica al teatro. Bennett observa, que, en contraposición a estos estudios, algunos críticos tratan de innovar con el uso de estudios interdisciplinarios, tales como el trabajo de Richard Schechner y Mady Schuman en la colección de ensayos *Readings, Ritual, Play, and Performance* (1976); por lo que considero que es de suma relevancia producir nuevas líneas de investigación en el análisis del espectador, ya que, desde el siglo XX, se ha carecido de relevante innovación. Además de la obra referente de Bennett, exploro el trabajo de Augusto Boal en *Theater of the Oppressed* (1979), o Jacques Rancière en *The Emancipated Spectator* (2009). Ambos trabajos señalan el rol activo del espectador, pero dichas obras aportan un carácter descriptivo al análisis del espectador y carecen de una metodología bien definida. Además, analizo brevemente en este capítulo la aproximación

semiótica al teatro, ya que se considera el modelo principal para el análisis del espectador en las últimas décadas del siglo XX; en el que destacan los trabajos realizados por Pavis, tal y como he señalado anteriormente, y el trabajo de Keir Elam en *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (1980), aunque este último dedica escasamente unas páginas al análisis del espectador. Por el contrario, el ensayo de Anne Ubersfeld, “The Pleasure of the Spectator” (1982), que también explora el teatro bajo el paradigma semiótico, en el que el teatro se visualiza como un sistema de signos, se centra en el espectador. Aunque algunos investigadores, como Bruce McConachie, contradicen esta visión, alegando que es muy reduccionista ver el teatro como un mero sistema de signos.

En la sección 2.1 “The Cognitive Approach: Analyzing a New Paradigm”, presento lo que McConachie y Elizabeth Hart definen como el “cognitive turn” y los principales aspectos de este paradigma emergente. Esta sección de la tesis desarrolla los aspectos esenciales que motivaron el giro cognitivo en los estudios sobre el teatro en Estados Unidos, los cuales se ponen de manifiesto en la edición especial “Performance and Cognition” publicada en *Theatre Journal* en (2007). Pese a que la presente tesis utiliza la aproximación cognitiva al teatro, en concreto al estudio del espectador, en este capítulo comento brevemente las diferentes publicaciones que avalan la interdisciplinariedad de los estudios cognitivos. Presento así las teorías de Bruce McConachie en teatro y ciencia cognitiva, ya que ha estado al frente de este movimiento y puede ser considerado el padre de los estudios cognitivos enfocados al teatro. La colección de Palgrave, editada por McConachie sobre literatura y ciencia cognitiva, incluye diversos aspectos como *Shakespearean Neuroplay: Reinvigorating the Study of Dramatic Texts and Performance through Cognitive Science* (2010) de Amy Cook, o *Graphing Jane Austen: The Evolutionary Basis of Literary Meaning* (2012) de Joseph Carroll, Jonathan Gottschall, John A. Johnson, and Daniel J. Kruger’s. Exploro también en este aspecto el trabajo de Schechner “Rasaesthetics” o *Why We Read Fiction:*

Theory of Mind and the Novel (2006) de Lisa Zunshine. La revisión de estas aproximaciones hacia el espectador y la introducción de la nueva metodología de aproximación cognitiva a los estudios de teatro que figuran en este capítulo pretenden poner de manifiesto la necesidad de nuevas metodologías para el análisis del espectador.

Dejando a un lado el debate de la metodología, recapacito sobre el aspecto que poseen las representaciones teatrales que han sido definidas como algo místico, creando lo que se puede entender como una ilusión. Para llegar al fondo de esta cuestión, trazo así los orígenes de ese aspecto del teatro en la cognición, ya que, como espectadores podemos imaginar, fantaseas, creer, experimentar, considerar alternativas y proponer hipótesis, por otro lado, los actores imitan, simulan y también imaginan. Todas estas acciones descritas están subordinadas a nuestra capacidad de “conceptual integration”. En el capítulo tercero “The Centrality of Conceptual Integration in Theater: A Network Model for the Scene” me centro en la teoría “conceptual blending”, o también llamada “conceptual integration”. Como demuestro en esta sección, “conceptual integration” es la base de las operaciones cognitivas en teatro. Gracias a “conceptual integration”, los actores pueden representar personajes; y los espectadores son capaces de entender a los actores a la vez que discernir argumentos de complejidad, lo cual es particularmente relevante en la obra de Naomi Wallace. Esta capacidad es también crucial a la hora de distinguir entre realidad y ficción. Tal y como Bruce McConachie explica, visión que personalmente comparto, dicha teoría contradice la perspectiva de Coleridge sobre la voluntad de la audiencia de suspender la incredulidad y perder la autonomía. Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner exploran esta capacidad cognitiva en *The Way we Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities* (2002), capacidad que nuestros ancestros adquirieron en el Paleolítico para desarrollar lo que es hoy nuestro concepto de imaginación. Los espacios mentales son la representación esquemática de lo que Fauconnier y Turner proponen para entender “conceptual integration”. El

espectador de Wallace tiene que unir lo que se conoce como “counterfactual” y “counterparts”, que serían las distintas partes de una situación hipotética o ficción y, que en el caso del teatro, sirve al espectador para entender las escenas. Es importante señalar que Fauconnier y Turner son científicos cognitivos, y que su trabajo se basa principalmente en cognición, aun así, en su estudio en *The Way we Think*, contemplan lo que llaman “drama connectors” (266), en el que los espectadores ven un personaje en el espacio ficcional como un sujeto vivo. Estudio en este capítulo el caso de la obra de Wallace *Night is a Room* (2015) donde la experiencia de percibir los actores como sujetos en un plano real provoca emociones intensas en el espectador. Exploro también los espacios mentales propuestos por Fauconnier y Turner aplicados a la obra *And I and Silence* (2010), y a su vez diseño y proporciono un modelo de espacio mental de la obra. Con la ayuda de la teoría “conceptual blending”, analizo la técnica de Wallace, que acuño como “stream of personae” y que aparece en ambas obras estudiadas en este capítulo *The War Boys* (1993) y *And I and Silence* (2010), donde el espectador tiene que unir escenarios diferentes para poder entender la escena. Creo que la teoría “conceptual blending” es un buen ejemplo de los beneficios que las teorías cognitivas pueden reportar al análisis del espectador y, en un ámbito más general, a los estudios de teatro.

El siguiente paso para entender la experiencia del espectador en la obra de Wallace va de la mano de la capacidad “conceptual blending”, y esta es la capacidad para experimentar la empatía. La empatía es un aspecto fundamental en el análisis del espectador. El problema viene dado en la categorización de la empatía como una emoción o confusión con el sentimiento de simpatía. Considero fundamental explorar cómo funciona la empatía y las emociones para poder llevar a cabo el análisis de la obra de Wallace y su espectador. Es de suma relevancia el hecho de que Naomi Wallace intenta crear un impacto en la sociedad, hecho que queda reflejado a través de la reacción emocional de sus obras. Por ello, en el

capítulo cuarto “Understanding Empathy and Emotions: Behind Laughter, Sadness, and Rapport” estudio la empatía y las emociones a través de las teorías cognitivas. En la sección 4.1 “The Potential of Understanding Empathy through a Phenomenological and Cognitive Approach” presento la corriente fenomenológica que Evan Thompson utiliza para analizar la empatía en *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology, and the Sciences of Mind* (2007). Thompson distingue entre cuatro procesos de empatía, los cuales discuto en relación a la experiencia de la audiencia, que en términos cognitivos se entiende como experiencia intersubjetiva.

Puesto que la empatía es un aspecto esencial para el análisis del espectador, y por ello pienso que es de suma importancia estudiar cómo funciona en todos sus niveles, comento brevemente el estudio de Vittorio Gallese, Christian Keysers, and Giacomo Rizzolatti titulado “A Unifying View of the Basis of Social Cognition” (2004), en el cual versa sobre el descubrimiento de las neuronas espejo. Dicho estudio supone la explicación física sobre cómo funciona la empatía y cómo el espectador está en sintonía con el actor, compartiendo así una actividad cerebral paralela. Dichos descubrimientos sirven para poner de manifiesto que la empatía no se puede controlar, ya que opera en el subconsciente. Además de las teorías sobre la empatía de Thompson, incluyo otros estudios como el de Giovanna Colombetti, que define la categoría de “empatía básica” (176), o la visión evolucionaria de McConachie. Debido a que la empatía no es un emoción pero puede llevar al desarrollo de las emociones, en la sección 4.2 “Affective Science and the Enactive Approach: the Reconfiguration of Emotions” explico la propuesta de Colombetti sobre los sistemas dinámicos para el estudio de las emociones. Colombetti investiga sobre lo que se conoce como “affective science” y se dedica a estudiar aspectos tales como las emociones, percepción, atención y memoria. Al igual que Fauconnier y Turner, Colombetti investiga en su estudio cognitivo el “performative body” (117) que toma el teatro como ejemplo para su análisis.

Teniendo en cuenta que algunos críticos consideran a Wallace una autora neo-Brechtiana, no puedo obviar las teorías de Brecht sobre la empatía, que estudio basándome en el ensayo de McConachie, “Moving Spectators Towards Progressive Politics by Combining Brechtian Theory with Cognitive Science” (2012), donde indaga sobre el concepto de empatía de Brecht bajo un enfoque cognitivo. Tras analizar la empatía Brechtiana que es de suma relevancia en la obra de Wallace, en la sección 4.4. “Two Monologues on Thompsonian Empathy: “Standard Time” (2002) and “The Retreating World” (2008), estudio dos de los pocos monólogos que figuran entre las obras de Wallace. A través de los cuatro procesos empáticos de la teoría de Thompson, exploro las obras con un novedoso enfoque. Gracias a la teoría sobre las emociones de Colombetti en la sección 4.5 “A Room for Affective Phenomena: Emotional Episodes in *In the Heart of America* (1994) and *The Hard Weather Boating Party* (2009)”, analizo dos obras de Wallace en los parámetros cognitivos observando las emociones del espectador. Ambos, Thompson y Colombetti, no sólo son científicos cognitivos sino que se debe especificar que pertenecen a la vertiente del paradigma “Enactive”, el cual analizo en el último capítulo.

Puesto que Wallace tiene especial interés en crear un impacto en la sociedad, en el capítulo “An Evolutionary Approach to Ethics in Wallace” estudio lo que puede ser considerado como el siguiente paso que sigue al cuarto proceso empático de Thompson: “el concepto de moralidad” (393), en relación a la ética. Para el análisis de la ética en las obras de Wallace, empleo el estudio de Philip Kitcher’s *The Ethical Project* (2011), en el que debate el término “psychological altruism”, al igual que el capítulo de McConachie sobre la ética en su *Evolution, Cognition, and Performance* (2015), dónde examina el término “groupishness”. La cuestión de la ética es un aspecto presente en la obra de Wallace por ello no puedo obviar que es un factor determinante en su dramaturgia. En este capítulo estudio dos de sus obras de teatro más sociopolíticas: *Slaughter City* (1996) y *Things of Dry Hours*

(2007). McConachie afirma que la figura del abusón y del lobo solitario (“the bully and the free rider”) representan una amenaza para el equilibrio del sistema social. Por ello, analizo en las obras de teatro de Wallace su denuncia frente a la injusticia social y la falta de ética en los sistemas descritos en ambos trabajos. La ética pertenece así al ámbito de la evolución y de lo que se conoce como ecosistema, una noción que estudio en el capítulo sexto a través del paradigma de “Enaction” donde la cognición forma parte del sistema que le rodea.

En el último capítulo “Enaction as an Approach To Biocultural Performance”, realizo una compilación sobre las premisas presentadas en los capítulos anteriores, las cuales se acogen dentro de los principios que rigen “Enaction”, que son “autonomy, embodiment, emergence, experience, and sense-making”. Para ello, comento los paradigmas que precedieron a “Enaction”, los cuales figuran en la sección 6.1 “The Study of the Mind: Review of the Major Cognitive Science Paradigms”, que servirá para ilustrar las principales diferencias con el paradigma de “Enaction”. En la sección 6.2. “Towards Enaction: Main Claims”, me centro en el propio paradigma de “Enaction” y sus aspectos fundamentales. La siguiente sección, 6.3 “McConachie’s Proposal of Enaction in Performance Studies”, se centra en un plano más reducido: en la aplicación de “Enaction” a la teoría de teatro. McConachie analiza y desmiente algunas de las teorías actuales sobre teatro, tales como el discurso de Foucault, el psicoanálisis o el materialismo marxista. Tras especificar el aporte del paradigma “Enaction” a los estudios de teatro, en la sección 6.4 “An Enactive Analysis of the Spectatorial Experience in *Night is a Room* (2015)”, analizo la controvertida obra de teatro de Wallace *Night is a Room* (2015), la cual estudio bajo los parámetros de “Enaction” “autonomy, embodiment, emergence, experience, and sense-making”, en conjunto con las teorías cognitivas ya presentadas en capítulos anteriores, las cuales se enmarcan en estos parámetros. En la primera subsección, 6.4.1. “The Pre/Performance and the Spectator’s Environment: Autonomy and Emergence at The Signature Theater, New York”, estudio la

autonomía del espectador y el ecosistema cultural que representa el teatro dentro de los parámetros de “Enaction”. En la siguiente sección, 6.4.2. “Act One: The Spectator’s Embodied Empathy and Emotional Episodes”, comienzo el análisis de la obra en el que no sólo presento un análisis textual, sino que incluyo mi experiencia fenomenológica como espectadora. En dicha sección estudio los aspectos ya anticipados en el capítulo cuatro junto con las teorías de Thompson sobre la empatía y las teorías de Colombetti sobre las emociones. En la subsección 6.4.3. “Act Two: Troubling Sense Making and Conceptual Blending”, analizo el segundo acto de la obra en referencia al aspecto de “sense-making”, y a la teoría de “conceptual blending”, la cual tiene un papel imprescindible en esta parte de la obra con respecto al análisis del espectador. Finalmente, en 6.4.4. titulada “Act Three: A Comment on Experience and Ethics towards Social Cohesion”, analizo el tercer acto bajo la ética en relación al concepto de “experience” en “Enaction”, el cual se entiende como la interacción de organismos vivos, que en términos éticos y evolutivos se podría interpretar como la colaboración del grupo para la supervivencia. Creo firmemente que bajo este punto de vista la obra cobra sentido para un mejor análisis.

En la última sección, “Conclusions”, indico los resultados del presente estudio interdisciplinario y el desarrollo de cómo la presente tesis empezó como un estudio cognitivo de la obra de Naomi Wallace, y progresivamente va convirtiéndose en una propuesta de una teoría unificada para los estudios de teatro bajo el paradigma de “Enaction”.

Como conclusión de este estudio debo indicar que me aproximé a los trabajos de Naomi Wallace con un interés por la experiencia del espectador, ya que descubrí que su obra se centra en crear un impacto en el espectador, y con ello, contribuir a una sociedad mejor. El ambicioso proyecto de Wallace consiste en la creación de obras experimentales que producen una compleja experiencia teatral. Por ello, busqué paradigmas que me ayudaran a analizar y comprender plenamente la experiencia del espectador en las obras de Wallace. Encontré que

la mayoría de los trabajos actuales disponibles sobre el análisis del espectador presentan una naturaleza heterogénea y en muchos casos una metodología incierta. Además, me percaté de que la mayoría de las publicaciones son del siglo XX, y que la tendencia predominante es la de un análisis textual. En muchos de los casos se utiliza un análisis basado en la semiótica, que en mi opinión está obsoleta y es insuficiente para el análisis de las obras de Naomi Wallace. En este panorama del análisis del espectador, la obra de Bruce McConachie destaca presentando un enfoque audaz basado en la ciencia cognitiva. Al investigar la propuesta de McConachie me percaté de que su publicación *Engaging Audiences: A Cognitive Approach to Spectating in the Theatre* (2008) me proporcionaría la metodología innovadora que necesitaba para entender el fenómeno del espectador en la obra de Wallace, para poder ir más allá de un texto análisis.

La presente tesis se inició como una obra sobre el análisis del espectador donde el enfoque cognitivo a los estudios de teatro parecía ser la clave para entender la mente del espectador. Después de estudiar aspectos de la cognición, como la teoría “conceptual blending”, la empatía cognitiva, las emociones y la ética, creo firmemente que entender cómo funciona la cognición es esencial para interpretar la experiencia del espectador y, por tanto, las obras. Las teorías cognitivas presentadas no deben ser entendidas como ideas aisladas, por el contrario, estos descubrimientos sobre los estudios cognitivos están integrados en un solo paradigma, que es “Enaction”. Los principios de la “Enaction” son el instrumento que nos puede ayudar a explicar el fenómeno del espectador y nos puede proporcionar una teoría unificada que tanto los estudios sobre el teatro como el análisis del espectador particularmente carecen hoy en día.

Puedo afirmar que la teoría “conceptual blending” supone un enfoque cognitivo extremadamente útil para entender al espectador de Wallace como también sus obras. Estoy convencida de que es un aspecto esencial del análisis del espectador y creo que debería ser

parte de cualquier investigación sobre el análisis del espectador, ya que ayuda a comprender la dinámica del teatro y la capacidad cognitiva de “blending”, que se obvió con la hipótesis de Coleridge “suspensión of disbelief”. Gracias “conceptual blending” pude entender los aspectos más complejos de la técnica de Wallace de tener sólo unos cuantos personajes en el escenario donde a veces el rol de sus personajes fluyen, lo que me llamó particularmente la atención. Analizo esta técnica en varias de sus obras, y ya que es un elemento recurrente que acuñé el término “stream of personae”. Esta técnica, “stream of personae”, me hace cuestionar cómo el espectador procesa, en medio de la escena, un cambio súbito y arbitrario de un personaje distinto al que debe interpretar el actor. Concluí que el espectador es capaz de “blend” al actor y al actor como “counterparts” en un espacio “counterfactual” de ficción/realidad. Con la finalidad de ilustrar este proceso, presento en el apéndice “a network model” de una escena de la obra teatral *And I and Silence* (2010) siguiendo el modelo de Fauconnier y Turner. Otro aspecto importante que apoya la integración conceptual es mi visión sobre la autonomía del espectador.

La autonomía del espectador es uno de los aspectos que he defendido, y creo que la presente tesis incluye pruebas suficientes para rechazar la imagen del espectador pasivo. Naomi Wallace, como escritora política, hace hincapié en la importancia de las preguntas y anima al espectador a ser proactivo al estilo Brechtiano. Analizo así la empatía a través de las teorías de Evan Thompson, lo que también reafirma mi observación de considerar la autonomía como parte de la experiencia del espectador. El espectador es capaz de adoptar la perspectiva del otro a través de esta capacidad y sin perder su opinión. Creo que mi análisis de los monólogos de Wallace *Standard Time* (2002) y *The Retreating World* (2008) sirven para resumir los procesos empáticos cognitivos, esta modalidad del teatro se manifiesta como la más parecida a una conversación cara a cara. Para el estudio de las emociones utilizo la “affective science” de Giovana Colombetti donde utiliza la teoría de sistemas dinámicos para

explicar episodios emocionales. Las teorías de Colombetti me ayudaron a comprender que las emociones en el teatro son mucho más complejas que las simples respuestas del espectador, las emociones son parte de un sistema que el espectador experimenta “embodied”. Este enfoque me ayudó a analizar las emociones del espectador en *In the Heart of America* (1994) y en *The Hard Weather Boating Party* (2009) bajo un nuevo prisma, más como un “ecosystem” y menos como un patrón de “input/output”.

En el “ecosystem” del teatro encuentro que la ética es la clave del progreso social, que es uno de los aspectos que Wallace enfatiza en sus obras. *The Ethical Project* (2011) de Philip Kitcher (2011) y el capítulo de Bruce McConachie’s en *Evolution, Cognition, and Performance* (2015) discuten ideas pertinentes sobre el progreso evolutivo como el estudio del concepto de “groupishness”, que contradice la supervivencia darwiniana del más fuerte y por el contrario apoya el progreso a través del trabajo en grupo, lo cual es particularmente relevante en las obras de Wallace, *Slaughter City* (1996) y *Things of Dry Hours* (2007). Como explico en el primer capítulo, Wallace tiene la ambiciosa idea de crear impacto en la comunidad. Según la teoría ética de Dewey, una comunidad pluralista debe incluir la figura de los solucionadores de problemas. Considero que Wallace como artista es parte de estas figuras que trabajan para obtener progreso social. A partir de 2010 el “cognitive turn” ha consolidado su posición en la academia y puedo afirmar que la división inicial dentro del enfoque cognitivo ha desaparecido. Hoy en día los académicos que adoptaron el enfoque cognitivo y el enfoque cognitivo evolutivo son parte de la misma rama, que estudia la cognición, la evolución y los aspectos bioculturales en teatro. En el curso de mi investigación sobre Wallace me di cuenta de aspectos como la empatía y la emoción son particularmente pertinentes en su obra, y por ello, la necesidad de un análisis cognitivo para comprender dichos aspectos. Me parece que es el único método para entender completamente al espectador era entender cómo procesa y experimenta la experiencia teatral. Por ello me

sumergí en el enfoque cognitivo y los últimos descubrimientos sobre la cognición y en muchas ocasiones me encontré investigando exclusivamente paradigmas cognitivos que fueron útiles para mi propósito de comprender la experiencia del espectador. La suma de los capítulos presentados en esta tesis refleja mi propio camino para comprender el enfoque cognitivo, el cual progresó tremendamente en los últimos años de la investigación al adoptar el nuevo paradigma de la “Enaction”. Como se muestra en el capítulo anterior, se puede realizar un análisis del espectador a través de los parámetros de “Enaction”, que creo que presentan una epistemología sólida para entender lo que ocurre en la mente del espectador de Wallace.

Espero haber proporcionado un estudio exhaustivo de las obras de Wallace, que era uno de los aspectos fundamentales de esta tesis. Cuando empecé esta investigación sobre Naomi Wallace en 2012, había poca información sobre sus obras en el ámbito académico, y el acceso a sus obras impresas era limitado. Recopilando información de diversas fuentes, pude componer una cronología de sus obras (véase el apéndice), que no estaba disponible en ese momento. En los últimos años, Wallace ha ganado prominencia en el escenario americano con varias producciones, pero también en la academia con la publicación de Scott T. Cummings y Erica Abbitt Stevens *The Theatre of Naomi Wallace: Embodied Dialogues* (2013), que entre otros aspectos interesantes, compila por primera vez una bibliografía completa de las obras y producciones de Wallace. El último capítulo se centra en la teoría de “Enaction”. Cabe señalar que sirve como culminación a mi investigación y compila las teorías presentadas en los capítulos anteriores, que están bajo el paradigma de “Enaction”. Estudio los paradigmas anteriores y sus fallos en términos cognitivos, lo que me hace percatarme de que “Enaction” es el único paradigma cognitivo cualificado para llevar a cabo un análisis exhaustivo del espectador. Sus principios fundamentales de “autonomy, emergence, embodiment, sense-making, and experience” hacen de “Enaction” una teoría no

textual completa que ayuda a comprender cómo funciona la mente del espectador. Creo que esta teoría es el futuro de los estudios cognitivos puesto que coloca la cognición “embedded in an environment”. “Enaction” ve que la cognición está en relación al entorno, de la misma manera que la mente del espectador está dentro de un evento social, que es la representación teatral. Creo que el estudio de las relaciones entre la mente y su entorno sirve de base para las investigaciones futuras no sólo en los estudios de teatro sino también en muchos otros campos como la cognición, la neurociencia, o la lingüística.

Usando el paradigma de “Enaction”, analizo la última obra de Naomi Wallace *Night is a Room* (2015), donde los cinco principios de “Enaction” resultaron ser una base sólida y útil para entender la experiencia del espectador. Espero que esta tesis contribuya a los estudios sobre teatro y su enfoque cognitivo a futuras investigaciones bajo el paradigma de “Enaction”. Estoy satisfecha con los resultados, ya que uno de los objetivos iniciales fue analizar el espectador de Naomi Wallace desde una epistemología fidedigna y creo que el método de análisis empleado ha demostrado ser sólido, ya que como he observado, se utiliza en muchos otros campos de investigación como metodología de vanguardia. El enfoque cognitivo de las obras de Wallace proporcionó una comprensión profunda de la experiencia del espectador. Puedo concluir que su obra sirve no sólo como entretenimiento sino también como una herramienta para el progreso que hace visibles los conflictos políticos, sociales y raciales contemporáneos de nuestro tiempo a través de su audaz imaginación. Naomi Wallace, que una vez fue elogiada en Europa, está ganando reconocimiento en su tierra natal, donde sus obras seguirán sacudiendo a las mentes más conservadoras de los Estados Unidos para seguir adelante.



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Towards an Enactive Paradigm: A Cognitive Approach to Naomi Wallace's Spectator.



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To my beloved mother



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We live in an interdependent and unavoidably intimate world: Yorkshire, where I live in England, is closer to Baghdad than we are led to believe. And Kentucky, where I was born, is closer to Gaza or Jerusalem; London is closer to Burna (Myanmar) and Jena, La.; New York closer to Colombia and Congo. The distance between us is and ingenious fabrication that it is worth spending our lives, as teachers and writers, tearing down.

Let us transgress together—and by this heat, by the sparks that are generated,
make a light to see by, for all of us.

(Naomi Wallace, “On Writing as Transgression”)

The understanding of basic aspects of social cognition depends on activation of neural structures normally involved in our own personally experienced actions or emotions. By means of this activation, a bridge is created between others and ourselves.

(Vittorio Gallese, Christian Keysers, and Giacomo Rizzolatti,
“A unifying view of the basis of social cognition”)

The Brain—is wider than the Sky—
For—put them side by side—
The one the other will contain
With ease—and You—beside—

(Emily Dickinson, “The Brain is Wider than the Sky”)



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Introduction.



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Introduction.

This thesis started as a means to illustrate the necessity of new epistemologies in spectatorship analysis of theater. Numerous studies have attempted to approach spectatorship, however, a non-textual analysis is lacking in most of them. In this research, I suggest that the study of the spectator's mind is the gate that leads towards understanding the spectatorial phenomenon. Therefore, I propose a cognitive approach to spectatorship, in accordance with the growth of neuroscience that the humanities are experiencing in the last ten years. I focus on the works of the contemporary American dramatist Naomi Wallace as a complex model for spectatorship in the current Off-Broadway theater. Wallace's plays intend to shock the spectator and to undermine stereotypes related to politics, social issues, race, and family. The playwright, who is considered by some critics a neo-Brechtian writer, questions the American capitalistic system and traditional values. Since Wallace pays special attention to the spectator's emotions and the impact of theater beyond the performance, I believe that a cognitive approach to study spectatorship will not only enhance the understanding of the experience but also will help to elaborate a deep analysis of her plays. Within the cognitive approach to theater, Bruce McConachie's recent studies on performance and evolution point towards the Enactive approach, which—more than paying attention exclusively to the mind—contemplates other concepts such as embodiment, environment, and experience. According to this breakthrough and the interdisciplinary pathways that are open nowadays in the humanities, this thesis relies on such theories, and therefore, focuses on a cognitive approach to spectatorship that progressively moves towards an Enactive analysis of Naomi Wallace's work.

Naomi Wallace's works are primarily plays although she also writes poetry; she deals with sociopolitical issues, as well as gender conflicts, and she is a southern writer (born in Kentucky) although the British also include her as part of their contemporary theater scene; I specifically selected her work because it is not reductionist; I cannot simply label it as Marxist, Brechtian, or feminist. Thus, in several significant moments of the analysis of her oeuvre I refer to some aspects as "complex" since the density of Wallace's plays is the principal element that drew my attention to her work in the first place. In Chapter One, I include a critical approach to Naomi Wallace's work and I concentrate particularly on the effect she tries to accomplish on the spectator. Some reviewers are under the impression that Wallace's work lacks closure, which, as I will discuss, is due to her interest in provoking questions rather than giving answers. Moreover, I briefly comment on the question of politics and her Brechtian influence, since many critics consider Wallace a political writer, which is another aspect that makes her works controversial. This chapter also serves to concisely explore some of her characters, created to break the stereotypes with the purpose of playing with the spectators' expectations. In order to illustrate this, I devote brief sections to review elements such as her technique, *mise en scène*, and language, which hopefully also help to provide an overview of her style. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to serve as an introduction to Wallace's plays that contributes an understanding of her dramaturgy through a further analysis of the dramatist's works in the subsequent chapters. A critical review of her work evidences the necessity of paying special attention to her spectator, since she emphasizes the importance of creating an impact on the audience.

Chapter Two, "The development of Spectatorship Theory" opens with a quotation from Grotowski that asserts the centrality of the spectator. As this is the case, since ancient times and throughout history, spectatorship has been analyzed, however, these analyses do not offer a profound and definitive study. I comment on some canonical works on the

analysis of the spectator such as Susan Bennett's *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception* (1997), which remained one of the most comprehensive analyses on spectatorship until not long ago. At the same time, Bennett gathers and reviews in her *Theatre Audiences* previous monographs on spectatorship such as Daphna Ben Chaim's *Distance in the Theatre: The Aesthetic of Audience Response* (1984), Jill Dolan's *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (1988) or Patrice Pavis's publications on the semiotic approach. She observes that some critics tried to innovate by using interdisciplinary approaches: for example, Richard Schechner and Mady Schuman with the collection of essays *Readings, Ritual, Play, and Performance* (1976). In the view of the state-of-the-art of the subject, I claim in this chapter the importance of providing new studies on the analysis of spectatorship, since from the end of the 20th century there has been little innovation. In addition to the works compiled in Bennett's *Theatre Audiences* I also comment on other works on spectatorship such as Augusto Boal's *Theater of the Oppressed* (1979) or Jacques Rancière's *The Emancipated Spectator* (2009), which interestingly point towards an active spectator, but play a descriptive role in the study of the spectator and do not provide a well-defined methodology. I briefly analyze the semiotic approach as a model for the analysis of spectatorship inasmuch as during the last decades of the 20th century semiotics was the leading theory to approach theater. As I point out, in this sphere of semiotic approach to theater the influence of Patrice Pavis and also Keir Elam with his work *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (1980) is remarkable, although the latter practically dismisses the role of the spectator from the semiotic approach. Anne Ubersfeld, on the other hand, focuses on the spectator from a semiotic approach in her essay "The Pleasure of the Spectator" (1982) as she explores theater as a sign system. Nevertheless, some researches of the cognitive approach, such as that conducted by Bruce McConachie, argue that theater cannot merely be reduced to

a sign system. The negation of the mainstream epistemology to analyze theater leads to a subsection that serves as an introduction to the cognitive approach.

In the section “2.1. The Cognitive Approach: Analyzing A New Paradigm,” I comment on what has been defined by McConachie and Hart as the cognitive turn and the main claims of the emergent paradigm. This passage of the thesis presents the key issues that motivated the incorporation of cognitive science to performance studies, which concur with the evident claims of the monographic “Performance and Cognition” published in *Theatre Journal* in (2007). Although in the present thesis I use the cognitive approach to performance and precisely to spectatorship, in this chapter, I briefly comment on the different and recent publications that endorse the interdisciplinary approach on cognition. I also introduce Bruce McConachie’s theories on performance and cognition, since he has been at the forefront of this movement during the last ten years and he could be considered the father of the movement of performance and cognition in the United States. McConachie’s Palgrave series on literature and cognition includes a wide range of topics in the different titles, such as Amy Cook’s *Shakespearean Neuroplay: Reinvigorating the Study of Dramatic Texts and Performance through Cognitive Science* (2010) or Joseph Carroll, Jonathan Gottschall, John A. Johnson, and Daniel J. Kruger’s *Graphing Jane Austen: The Evolutionary Basis of Literary Meaning* (2012). I briefly explore other issues related to cognition perhaps in a more oblique way such as Schechner’s “Rasaesthetics” or Lisa Zunshine, in *Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel* (2006) which relies on theory of mind. The overview of these approaches to spectatorship and the introduction of the new approach of cognitive studies to performance discussed I hope evidence not only the necessity of new methods of analysis in spectatorship but also the well founded argument of this movement.

Leaving the debate of methodology and theory aside, I move into the analysis of the fact that theatrical representations have been described as mystical in many aspects, and I

claim that what has been understood as the magic/illusion of theater has its root in cognition; as spectators, we imagine, fantasize, believe, experience, consider alternatives, and propose hypotheses, on the other hand, the performers imitate, simulate, and also imagine. All these actions are subordinated to our conceptual integration capability. Hence, in Chapter Three, “The Centrality of Conceptual Integration in Theater: A Network Model for the Scene,” I focus on conceptual integration theory, also known as conceptual blending. This section aims to demonstrate that conceptual integration is the basis of cognitive operations in theater. Thanks to conceptual integration the performers are able to act as characters, the spectators are capable of understanding the performers as well as the complexity of plots, which is particularly relevant in Naomi Wallace’s plays. This ability is also the key to distinguish between fiction and reality, which as Bruce McConachie claims, and I agree with his claim, undermines Coleridge’s insights about an audience’s will to suspend their disbelief and lose their agency. In *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind’s Hidden Complexities* (2002), Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner explore in depth this cognitive capability, which our ancestors acquired during the Upper Paleolithic Age developing what we know as modern imagination. Mental spaces are the schematic representations that Fauconnier and Turner propose to understand the process of conceptual integration. Applying this insight to the plays of my analysis, I realized that in the case of Wallace’s spectator, she/he has to blend several counterfactuals and counterparts in order to understand the scenes. It should be noted that although Fauconnier and Turner are cognitive scientists and their work is primarily focused on cognition, they also study in *The Way we Think* what they call “drama connectors” (266), where they claim that even though the spectator sees the character in a fictional space, she/he sees the characters as alive and attributes to them features of real living beings. I comment on the particular case of Wallace’s *Night is a Room* (2015), where the aliveness of the characters provokes intense emotions in the spectators. In

this chapter, I also explore and analyze the play *And I and Silence* (2010) where I provide a mental space according to Fauconnier and Turner's model. Furthermore, with the help of conceptual blending theory I analyze Wallace's technique, which I called "stream of personae" both in *The War Boys* (1993) and in *And I and Silence* (2010) where the spectator has to blend several scenarios or counterfactuals in order to understand the scene. I think that conceptual blending serves as an outstanding example of the benefits that cognitive theories provide in the analysis of spectatorship, as well as performance studies in a bigger picture.

Conceptual blending is the necessary previous step that leads to empathy; the spectator uses her/his conceptual blending capability to experience empathy. Empathy has been studied as one of the basic aspects to understand the spectatorial experience; however, empathy is frequently mistaken as an emotion or even as sympathy. Therefore, I consider that it is essential to explore and distinguish how this phenomenon works and set a clear distinction between empathy and emotions before moving into an analysis of Wallace's spectatorship. Moreover, due to Naomi Wallace's purpose of making an impact on the community, it has to be noted that her plays provoke a strong emotional component in her audience. Thus, in Chapter Four, "Understanding Empathy and Emotions: Behind Laughter, Sadness, and Rapport," I explore both subject matters from the point of view of different cognitive theories. In section 4.1. "The Potential of Understanding Empathy through a Phenomenological and Cognitive Approach" I introduce the phenomenological approach of Evan Thompson included in his *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology, and the Sciences of Mind* (2007). Thompson distinguishes four empathetic processes that I discuss in connection with the spectatorial experience, which in cognitive terms is understood as an intersubjective experience and consequently leads to cognitive empathy.

Since, as is evidenced above, empathy is a central element of spectatorship and I find it extremely relevant to understand how it operates on all levels, I briefly comment on a

different approach to empathy through the work of Vittorio Gallese, Christian Keysers, and Giacomo Rizzolatti in “A Unifying View of the Basis of Social Cognition” (2004) in which their groundbreaking research brings to light the discovery of mirror neurons. This study is the physical aspect of how empathy functions and it will serve to illustrate how the observer/spectator couples with the performer. These findings will also evidence that, contrary to the general knowledge, we are not in control of empathy and that it operates on a subconscious level, which refutes previous theories where the spectator allegedly is capable of suppressing her/his empathy at theatrical events. Apart from Thompson’s study on empathy I include other perspectives—such as Giovanna Colombetti’s “basic empathy” (176) or McConachie’s evolutionary approach to empathy—which will be useful to offer a wider point of view on the definition of empathy. Inasmuch as empathy can lead to emotions, I deal with the analysis of emotions in section 4.2. “Affective Science and the Enactive Approach: the Reconfiguration of Emotions” where I discuss Colombetti’s proposal of dynamic systems to study how emotional episodes operate. Colombetti studies affective science, which is concerned with the study of emotions, perception, attention, and memory. I find particularly interesting that as Fauconnier and Turner did, Colombetti also contemplates in her cognitive research the “performative body” (117) studying performing arts as an example and part of her theories.

Bearing in mind that some critics consider Wallace a neo-Brechtian writer, I could not dismiss Brechtian theories on empathy. In the section 4.3 “Empathy, Passivity, and the Brechtian Tradition Optimization” I draw on McConachie’s essay “Moving Spectators Towards Progressive Politics by Combining Brechtian Theory with Cognitive Science” (2012) where he theorizes about a Brechtian approach to cognitive empathy. After the clarification of Brechtian empathy, which is relevant to Wallace’s works, in section 4.4. “Two Monologues on Thompsonian Empathy: “Standard Time” (2002) and “The Retreating

World” (2008) I study two of the few self-standing monologues that Wallace has written through the theories discussed previously in the chapter. Using Thompson’s four processes of empathy I explore the empathetic rhetoric, which allows new insights on the analysis of the plays. My focus on emotions in this chapter, based on Colombetti’s approach, is studied in section 4.5. “A Room for Affective Phenomena: Emotional Episodes in *In the Heart of America* (1994) and *The Hard Weather Boating Party* (2009)” where I analyze two plays of Wallace’s within these parameters and focus on emotional episodes. Most importantly this chapter contributes to demystify some conceptions about the spectator’s empathy and emotions; Thompson’s and Colombetti’s theories should not be only regarded as part of the cognitive science movement since both scientists belong to the Enactive paradigm, which I recapitulate in the final chapter where I explain and expand on the new model for cognition that serves as a centralized theory to analyze spectatorship. However, before moving on to Enaction, I find it essential to deal with an aspect that is connected to the study of the emotions and morality, and this is the study of ethics.

Based on the fact that Wallace is deeply concerned with her impact on society, in Chapter Five “An Evolutionary Approach to Ethics in Wallace,” I study what can be considered the subsequent dimension that follows Thompson’s fourth process of empathy concerning “the moral conception” (393), which has an inextricable relation with the ethical issue; in the particular case of theater it is related to the plot and how this plot is received by the audience. For the ethical analysis of Wallace’s works I study Philip Kitcher’s *The Ethical Project* (2011), which provides the concept of psychological altruism, and Bruce McConachie’s chapter on ethics in his *Evolution, Cognition, and Performance* (2015), a discussion of the concept of groupishness. It should be noted that I cannot dismiss ethics in a comprehensive analysis of Naomi Wallace’s works, since ethics is an issue that is much present in all her plays. For this chapter I study two of her most sociopolitical works,

Slaughter City (1996) and *Things of Dry Hours* (2007). McConachie points out that the figures of the bullies and the free riders present a threat to the equilibrium of the social system. I identify those figures, which might as well accurately define some of Wallace's characters, and I study how she denounces injustice within the unethical systems portrayed in her plays. Ethics comes in the interplay of evolution and the ecosystem, which is a notion that I study in Chapter Six as part of the Enactive paradigm where cognition is not isolated but embedded in an environment.

The final chapter, "Enaction as an Approach To Biocultural Performance" serves as a compilation of the premises presented in the previous chapters where I vindicate the paradigm of Enaction, which encompasses these theories under the principles of autonomy, embodiment, emergence, experience, and sense-making. I introduce the previous paradigms that lead to Enaction in section 6.1. "The Study of the Mind: A Review of the Major Cognitive Science Paradigms" since I consider it is fundamental to understand the major paradigms of cognition and how Enaction differs from them. In section 6.2. "Towards Enaction: Main Claims" I focus on Enaction and its key aspects. The subsequent section, 6.3. "Bruce McConachie's Proposal of Enaction in Performance Studies," narrows down the scope to a view on Enaction and performance. McConachie presents some theories of performance—such as psychoanalysis, Foucauldian discourse, or Marxist materialism—under the scrutiny of Enactive claims. After considering the insights of the Enactive paradigm, in section 6.4. "An Enactive Analysis of the Spectatorial Experience in *Night is a Room* (2015)" I produce an analysis of Wallace's recent and controversial play *Night is a Room* (2015). I study the play from the parameters of autonomy, embodiment, emergence, experience, and sense-making, as well as the cognitive theories framed by Enaction that I discuss in the previous chapters. The analysis of *Night is a Room* is conducted in four subsections. In the first section, 6.4.1. "The Pre/Performance and the Spectator's

Environment: Autonomy and Emergence at The Signature Theater, New York,” I contemplate the spectator’s agency and the cultural ecosystem, which is theater, as part of the parameters of Enaction. In the following section, 6.4.2. “Act One: The Spectator’s Embodied Empathy and Emotional Episodes” I begin the analysis of the play that I conduct not only as a textual analysis but also as a phenomenological approach from my own experience as a spectator. This section examines the aspect already anticipated with Thompson’s and Colombetti’s theories that point towards the embodiment of empathy and emotions. In the subsequent subsection, 6.4.3. “Act Two: Troubling Sense-Making and Conceptual Blending,” I analyze the second act of the play focusing on the element of sense-making, which is central to performance and I use conceptual blending theory to study the spectator’s experience in this intense second act of the play. Finally, in the following subsection, 6.4.4. “Act Three: A Comment on Experience and Ethics towards Social Cohesion” I deal with the ethical approach to the third act connected to the Enactive concept of experience. Experience in Enaction is understood as the interaction of living organisms, which in ethical and evolutionary claims could be interpreted as the collaboration of the group to achieve survival. I believe that from this point of view the end of the play makes sense and becomes easier to understand.

In the last section, “Conclusions,” I state the results of this interdisciplinary research and I develop how this thesis started as a cognitive approach on Naomi Wallace’s plays and progressively moves towards the proposal of an integrated theory for performance under the paradigm of Enaction and the value that cognitive theory provides to performance studies and the analysis of Wallace’s plays.



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Chapter One.
Disturbed and Yet Coming Back for More: A
Critical View of Naomi Wallace's Drama.



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Disturbed and Yet Coming Back for More: A Critical View of Naomi Wallace's Drama.

I write plays that I hope will disturb the public, yet disturb it in such a way that it will want to come back for more. And even though I believe that theater must entertain above all else, this entertainment should be challenging and dangerous. I myself am most impassioned by a theater that puts us all at risk. I am not as interested in answers as I am in questions. When a playwright gives an audience an answer, the story is, in a way, finished, closed down. I am interested in conflict, questions, contradictions, and the different possibilities for the transformation of ourselves and our communities. (Wallace, "Introduction" 426-7)

Naomi Wallace provides a definition of her own plays that is highly complex, and yet, in every word one finds meaning which contributes to an accurate explanation of her work. This self-portrayal of her writing is familiar to those who have approached her plays; therefore, I believe that it serves as an appropriate starting point to understand her drama and experimental style. Some of her plays, such as *In the Fields of Aceldama* (1993), *One Flea Spare* (1995), her triptych *The Fever Chart: Three Visions from the Middle East* (2009), or *Night is a Room* (2015) are a good example of the disturbing aspect of her drama. However, it should be taken into account that the dramatist does not pursue disturbance for the sake of disturbing, Wallace endeavors to engage the public "to come back for more" (see quotation above). In every performance, the playwright triggers a daring maneuver which is engaging the audience by challenging and putting the spectators' expectations, values, and ideas at risk. Throughout the performance Wallace gives the spectator an important role, that is, not only to observe but also to be a bearer of the story presented on stage. As stated above, her main

purpose is that the spectators continue the story presented through the questions and debate that can emerge from the subject matter presented on stage. Given the fact that answers are synonyms with closure, Wallace stresses the importance of questions above all; in her plays the spectator might find herself/himself wondering about the actions of the characters, puzzled by the dialogues, and expecting answers and closeness that never arrives with the last scene. The spectators are entitled to be part of the process, whether they are engaged or not depends on other factors that I will briefly examine further on this chapter. Nonetheless, she wants the audience to go beyond the experience of catharsis, inviting the spectator to undergo a process that contributes to a bigger project, an ethical project; her objective is to be a factor in the transformation of theatergoers, and by extension, communities, and society. As a consequence of this affinity she attempts to attain with her spectator, added to the experimental theater that Wallace produces, I find that her drama constitute substantial domain of research for the analysis of spectatorship. In the present chapter, I will introduce Naomi Wallace's dramaturgy, which will evidence the necessity of a cognitive approach to analyze her plays.

Naomi Wallace has built an accomplished career as a dramatist with several recognitions and awards such as the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize (1994 and 1996), an Obie award (1997), the MacArthur genius fellowship (1999), and the Horton Foote Prize (2012) among others¹. The public, journalists, and academics have given her excellent reviews since her earliest plays. Her writing is difficult to designate as part of one particular style, one cannot consider her plays only as feminist although she deals with feminism and women's empowerment. Moreover, her male characters are also powerful and she has been praised for accomplishing excellent portraits of masculinity². Wallace's drama usually deals with war and political conflicts although it is not her only theme. She is concerned with the dialectics

¹ See <https://www.signaturetheatre.org/About/playwrights-residencies/Naomi-Wallace.aspx> for further information.

² See section 1.3 of this thesis.

of power connected to labor exploitation, race, and identity. Additionally, she deals with dysfunctional families in some of her plays such as *In the Fields* or *Night is a Room*. Her most well-known play, *In the Heart of America* (1994), was acclaimed in the United Kingdom and some of her plays have also become popular in France. Her rebellious and radical style had a better acceptance in Europe; as a consequence of this, nowadays she combines her residency between England and the United States. As Barbara Ozieblo points out Wallace is “more frequently performed in England than in America where certainly her earlier plays have been considered too serious and ideologically committed” (“From Shirtwaist” 117). Nevertheless, Wallace is gaining more acceptances in her homeland in the past few years due to her success in Europe.³

1.1. Critical View: Effect on the Spectator.

When approaching Wallace’s work, one has to bear in mind that her plays are not suitable for all spectators; some spectators find Wallace’s plays confusing and difficult to understand, as a consequence, some do not engage with her artistic portrayals. Therefore, in order to have a better understanding of her audience’s experience, it seems necessary to briefly illustrate this aspect of her drama; for instance, in a review on the website CurtainUp.com (*The Internet Theater Magazine of Reviews, Features, Annotated Listings*) of the Philadelphia premier of *In the Heart of America* (1994) Kathryn Osenlund states: “Most of all *In the Heart of America* is disappointing because it lacks clarity, with nothing fully realized. The problem is not so much the murk of war or memory, but the murk of muddled writing.” Another online review comments on Wallace’s play *And I and Silence* (2011) as follows: “My problem with the piece is that it seems unfinished, lacking substance with

³ I have to update that particularly in the last two years, Wallace have increased her activity in the USA, with a good reception, several productions and more presence in academia.

obtuse dialogue. It tells you a story but not the background to the story [...] I felt as if it was work in progress rather than the finished article” (James). These statements denote that spectator’s confusion derives from Wallace’s unconventional method of telling a story, which is marked by her experimental aesthetics. Both reviewers have the feeling that something is missing in the plays; James is apparently confused declaring that it seems a “work in progress,” which to a certain extent it is. This absence of some details and lack of closure in her stories that the reviewers are pointing out have their purpose; as argued earlier, spectators are the ones who have to fill those gaps with their thoughts and questions. Wallace creates a work that apparently does not finish on stage but in the spectator’s mind. The spectator has also to acknowledge that regarding aesthetics Wallace has a minimalistic style; the audience should not expect that all the physical, as well as metaphysical, elements involved in the action of the play would appear on stage. Nevertheless, it is interesting and worthy of comment from a cognitive point of view, to note the spectators’ necessity to fill the gap of ‘missing information;’ at this point, the problem is that some spectators can figure out how to fill it by themselves and others cannot. Osenlund’s and Jame’s harsh reviews above represent those critics and spectators that do not understand or do not take pleasure in Wallace’s work. In the light of the existence of this group, I wondered if by analyzing some of the factors that are misunderstood by this part of the audience, one could have a better comprehension of her plays and the spectator’s experience. In fact, I believe these elements—such as style, mise en scène, discourse, and/or form—are the devices that make her spectators come back for more. As this is the case, Wallace’s vindication of questions rather than focusing on providing answers to the audience can leave the spectator with a sense of incompleteness. However, I do believe that this unfinished scope expedites a forum for discussion that shakes the foundations of our conventions as a society.

Wallace says, “entertainment should be challenging and dangerous” (“Introduction” 426); as demonstrated above through the reviews, this could remain an obstacle in the pathway to engagement because not all spectators are willing to take up the challenge. Antonin Artaud points out the importance of danger in theater; in *Theatre and Its Double* (1958) Artaud defines his Theater of Cruelty, as Wallace does, paying attention to the factor of danger, and he states: “[t]he best way, it seems to me, to realize the idea of danger on the stage is by the *objective* unforeseen, the unforeseen not in situations but in things, the abrupt, untimely transition from an intellectual image to a true image” (44, author’s emphasis). In order to illustrate his idea, he uses the example of a man who is blaspheming and he “sees suddenly and realistically materialized before him the image of his blasphemy (always on condition, I would add, that such an image is not entirely gratuitous but engenders in its turn other images in the same spiritual vein, etc.)” (44). Similarly, Wallace uses this device in some of her plays, such as in *In the Heart of America* where the soldier confronts his victim years after he had killed her. As Artaud states, ‘danger’—and I will also add ‘challenge’ borrowing Wallace’s words—is essential; I believe that both writers have in mind the importance of these aspects that might expedite an awakening of the spectator, which I recognize as Wallace’s main aim. Awareness is also illustrated in her plots and presented through some of her characters, which invite the spectator to mirror the revelations on stage. An example of this would be the insight provided by Dalton in *The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek* (1998) where he explains to Pace that they do not learn subjects at the school, instead, they learn to speak about things (309). These epiphanies and significant moments have an impact on the spectator, who as I said, is being invited to experience the same emotions. From a cognitive point of view, the spectators couple with the performer and their brains unconsciously mirror and experience these performances.⁴ Similarly, Wallace’s collages—

⁴ I fully develop this issue in Chapter Four through the study of cognitive empathy and mirror neurons.

influenced by Brechtian montages—provide an intense experience where the spectator has to pay attention to different details of the performance rather than to the literal meaning of the performers’ dialogues. For instance, in *The Fever Chart: Three Visions from the Middle East* (2009) “Vision One: A state of Innocence” a young Israeli soldier, Yuval, speaks with a Palestinian woman, Um Hisham, about how a porcupine winks, which on the surface might be interpreted by the spectator as a surrealist moment, even on the verge of Dadaism. However, on a deeper level, the topic of the conversation is not relevant, the animal is not relevant, even the characters are not relevant to a certain extent, but the combination of all elements is what gives meaning to the scene like in a collage; a Palestinian woman is speaking with an Israeli soldier amid the chaos of a war, thus the aforementioned elements deem and function as background. As Dalton in *The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek* (1998), the spectators have to be inquisitive about the action on stage in order to understand the different layers of Wallace’s theatricality and discourse. As an artist, Wallace crafts a singular structure to engage the spectator, nevertheless the essence of her drama is the implicit content, which, sometimes in Brechtian style, calls for critical thought.

Obviously, Wallace is not a formalist, she pays attention to the form as an artist should but the content and the message of her plays are extremely important elements for her in order to achieve an affinity with the spectator. The dichotomy of form and content has been widely debated within Marxist literary criticism. Some Marxist critics, not only literary critics, believe that form is subjugated to the content because the material content determines the form of the superstructure and structure. Nevertheless, Marxist critics have also paid attention to form because they believe that through form the author is defined. Some Western Marxists influenced by Hegel such as György Lukács support naturalistic and formalistic expressions in aesthetics and they collide with other authors such as Brecht. Wallace, influenced by Brechtian drama, rejects realism and searches for a more experimental style of

performance. Terry Eagleton analyzes the conflict of form and content in *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (1976) as follows:

Just as for Marxist economic theory each economic formation tends to contain traces of the older, superseded modes of production, so traces of older literary forms survive within the new ones. Form, I would suggest, is always a complex unity of at least three elements: it is partly shaped by a ‘relatively autonomous’ literary history of forms; it crystallizes out of certain dominant ideological structures, as we shall see later, it embodies a specific set of relations between author and audience. It is the dialectical unity between these elements that Marxist criticism is concerned to analyse. In selecting form, then, the writer finds his choice already ideologically circumscribed. (330)

The quotation above implies that ideology is a key feature for the arts and evidently this aspect is relevant in Wallace’s plays as well, it should be noted the social and political commitment reflected in her plays. Hence, when dealing with her plays the spectator not only engages in a leisurely activity, instead she/he is invited to think about sociopolitical issues. Eagleton states that the material theory of history recognized that art in itself cannot change the course of history but it can be an active element in the change (144). However, Wallace’s vision is more straightforward, since she believes in the possibility of changing society by denouncing injustice on stage, she draws the spectator’s attention to issues such as class conflicts, gender, or race. In order to stage these concerns the playwright chooses to stage real events, such as gay bashing in the USA army, segregation in the fifties, or the hunting of illegal immigrants on the Texas-Mexico border. Since the content of her drama is usually concerned with social issues, her plays could be uncomfortable for some spectators because she exposes unpleasant situations, although she firmly believes that “theater must entertain above all else” (“Introduction” 426) as stated in the quotation opening this chapter. Needless

to say, Wallace's political work does not try to indoctrinate the audience, she does not use propaganda; as this is the case, the fact that her pieces seem incomplete (see the reviews commented above) for some spectators evidences her interest in encouraging the audience to reach their own conclusions. Her audience takes pleasure in her audacious drama, which presents a different experience from other, more commercial, theatrical forms. These commercial genres of theater can feed the masses by producing answers and closure, following a 'logical' chronologic timeline, realistic scenery, or using stereotypical characters as is the case of melodrama or Broadway for instance. Contrary to this, Wallace opts for putting forward a much more elaborated drama which stimulates the spectator. After studying Wallace's drama, I find that Marxist literary criticism does not help to analyze Wallace's drama in depth since I believe that it cannot be compressed within the structures presented by such a critical analysis that Eagleton expounds. Wallace drama contains ideology, but I believe that it is not circumscribed by it. Dealing with her political facet, the next brief section discusses Wallace's theatricalization of political issues.

1.2. Politics in Wallace's drama.

In many interviews Wallace states that she considers herself "a political artist" or "an unabashedly political writer" (see Istel and Margulies). Furthermore, in an interview with Alexis Greene she states: "I'm happy to be called that. I don't think there's anything more exciting to write about than history and society and negotiations of power. If people want a label, they can call me a socialist. I write about capitalism, because that is how our society is organized" (Greene, 451). This feature of her drama is one of the reasons that make her plays collide with some spectators who disagree with the affairs she denounces on stage. The disadvantage—or the added value depending on the viewpoint—of dealing with politics is

the controversy that it generates since it would logically involve at least two opposing stands. As far as I am concerned, the most important aspect of her inclination as a political artist is that, as Brecht was doing in his time, she tries to accomplish a change in society by encouraging critical thought; whether she accomplishes it or not is different matter to debate that I find irrelevant to discuss here, since it would be a scope that would diverge from the purpose of this research. On a different note, I do find relevant the fact that in order to achieve a unique composition in her plays that can express her progressive view on politics, for instance, Wallace uses some experimental techniques, which allows her to revisit the past; as she asserts:

There was a time when I believed that linear structures were inherently oppressive, but having seen work that is completely non-linear, completely avant-garde and yet has the most reactionary politics, I don't go for that anymore. There are some things to be said for Aristotelian drama and how it reinforces order and does away with resistance. There is a certain truth to some of that because a lot of the work was written to support the order at the time. But for me, what I like about non-linear time schemes is that I've always felt that not only is the past not over, but that the present is also history. History is always rupturing the present. It's just a matter of recognizing that and realising that in order to change our future we have to deal with our past. (Stephenson and Langridge 170)

I find significant the fact that Wallace's theater contains the notion of "life" that Artaud defines in his "Theater of Cruelty." Artaud argues that theater is not about humankind but about life, he does not believe in mimesis or at least not in the same way that Aristotle does. As Wallace comments in the quotation above, Aristotelian drama is exceedingly restrictive for her; in the case of mimesis, I would affirm that she does not mirror life but imitates it in all its bizarreness. This would lead us back to Artaud's theories and his paradox

of the double. Artaud, in order to analyze the aspects of the double uses the metaphor of alchemy, which illustrates the similarities of this process with the essence of theater. As he points out: “Where alchemy, through its symbols, is the spiritual Double of an operation which functions only on the level of real matter, the theater must also be considered as the Double” (48). He believes that theater, as the alchemical symbol, is a mirage; therefore, both are emplaced in a virtual reality, an illusion. Wallace puts on stage virtual realities by portraying real events such as conflicts, war, and social injustice, as is the case of the representation of the Gulf War in *In the Heart of America*, or Afghanistan war in *No Such a Cold Thing* (2009). However, Artaud does not explain how this mirage is possible, which is something that the cognitive approach accounts for; as a matter of fact, the conceptual blending theory accounts for how the illusion of theater is understood and processed by the spectator, which I discuss in Chapter Three. Significantly, in Wallace’s plays this double reality is seen by the spectator and it entails a political rhetoric; nonetheless, Wallace is deeply concerned to communicate these facts without losing theatricality. As she explains, the difficulty of portraying politics relies on the theatricality of the subject matter and how she has to solve this conflict with her own resources as a playwright. In “When Bad Things Happen: A Conversation between Donald Margulies and Naomi Wallace” she states:

The main challenge for me was: How does one capture the political rhetoric and present it on stage in a way that makes it theatrical? How do you creatively say, “5,000 children are dying a month”? [in her triptych] What does that statistic mean? [...] the lists of weapons and the number of bombs [in *In the Heart*]—represents my own struggle as a playwright. (Margullies and Wallace 36)

Due to the political content, characters in Wallace’s plays speak about their own experiences as members of society, their inner world—which sometimes is unpleasant with deterministic visions—and their intense and extreme emotions in an expressionistic fashion;

as Wallace explains, she has to use different techniques to preserve the aesthetics within her political discourse. The statistic that she provides in the quotation above is solved with a metaphor in her play “Vision Three: The Retreating World.” The short play—which I analyze in terms of empathy in Chapter Four— is a monologue of a young Iraqi man. Ali explains that five thousand pigeons/children died because of the USA’s blockade. Another example can be found in the list of weapons and bombs of in *In the Heart of America* are incorporated to the soldiers dialogue as sexual allusions and similes, which I analyze in depth in Chapter Four. Another resource that Wallace uses to stage political rhetoric is to bring together entities and concepts that are conflict: topics such us war and love, race issues, opposed political stands, or class struggle. These concepts in conflict are the vehicle for the political discourse and at the same time constitute the plot, as in Brechtian dialectics; Brechtian *gestus* illustrates dialectics, which serves as a technique to claim the rights denied to the oppressed and to denounce bias against minorities.⁵ Other techniques and devices of her style such as the construction of paradoxical characters, the surrealistic portrayal of families, or the social interaction of characters are analyzed in the following sections in order to shed light on her work and to have a better understanding of her drama before moving to an extensive and more theoretical analysis of her plays.

1.3. Wallace’s Characters: Strange, Imprisoned, Wounded, Abused, and Empowered.

One of the most appealing elements of Wallace’s dramaturgy is rendered through the construction of her characters. Her characters could be described as better than round, they

⁵ Meg Mumford, in *Bertolt Brecht* (2009), discusses the relevance of dialectics in Brecht’s drama, as she asserts: “contradictions are the source of change and progressive development. Brecht’s fascination with the dynamics of dialogue and debate [...] is an example of his interest in dialectical logic” (85-86). He was particularly fascinated with Engels’s dialectical laws of motion and development. Mumford asserts that “opposite sides of a contradiction –say master and slave – cannot exist independently” (86). This is illustrated in some of Wallace’s plays as well, such as *One Flea Spare* where Mr. Snelgrave (the master) cannot exist without Bunce (the servant) and vice versa as we will see in the next section.

are highly complex, depicted in detail—not necessarily physically but certainly psychologically—and sometimes they retain an aura of mystery, which can disconcert the spectator. In this section I will briefly comment on different characters that appear in plays such as *One Flea Spare* (1995), *Slaughter City* (1996), *The War Boys* (1993), and *In the Fields of Aceldama* (1993). As stated before, Wallace deals with gender issues and it should be noted that her characters are well balanced, regardless the gender she is committed to create complex portraits. However, she has been praised for creating excellent portraits of masculinity, as Alexis Greene points out in an interview with the dramatist “You write men well” (466), to this Wallace answers:

I have no problem in writing men. It’s probably more challenging for me to write women. But I don’t especially want to write positive roles for women. I want to write complicated roles; none of those boring stereotypes. Sometimes I’ll challenge other writers, but it’s not because a role is sexist; it’s because a role is boring. You want to make the character a bitch and a murderer, that’s fine with me. But make her interesting. That’s what I try to do with my women characters. It’s not about them being positive role models; it’s about their being complicated agents. (Greene 467)

Morse, the twelve-year-old girl of *One Flea Spare*, constitutes one of the finest examples of the aspect mentioned in the quotation above. Morse is extremely confusing and interesting as well as mysterious; her monologues and dialogues about death and destruction in a sordid and grotesque tone are meant to shock the spectator. Characters such as Morse enthrall the spectator, independently if they arouse sympathy or not, her speech is so passionate as a mean to call the spectator’s attention. Moreover, Wallace influenced by Brecht’s estrangement technique provides oddity to the character with the purpose to contribute to arise questions. An example of these features mentioned and the attempt to puzzle the spectators over the character’s nature is the opening monologue of the play:

MORSE: What are you doing out of your grave? [...] A summer so hot vegetables stewed in their crates. The old and the sick melted like snow in the streets. At night the rats came out in twos and threes to drink the sweat from our faces. *(Beat)* And it had finally come. *(Beat)* The Visitation. We all went to sleep one morning and when we awoke the whole city was aglow with fever. Sparrows fell dead from the sky into the hands of beggars. Dogs walked in robes of dying men, slipped into the beds of their masters' wives. Children were born with the beards of old men. *(Beat)* They were locked in their own house, the two of them. All the windows, but one, nailed shut from the outside. They'd waited out their time of confinement. (7-8)

Even though Morse's narration of the raw events that she witnesses during the bubonic plague in the 17th century is disturbing, her prose can be appealing due to the detail description and the storytelling tone she provides. Furthermore, the distortion of the natural course of city life in London engages the spectator in a way that intends to both perturb and fascinate the audience. Wallace not only uses Brechtian estrangement but she also resorts to historicization, since, in addition to the enigmatic monologue we should acknowledge the distance that it denotes; the plague in London is seen through the audience's contemporary eyes, for as the dramatist explains, it is important to deal with the past in order to change the present. Similar to Morse, in *In the Heart of America* the character of Lue Ming also possesses the aura of mystery, a recurrent attribute in some of Wallace's character. She describes Lue Ming in her stage directions as "a ghost but more solid" (80), a fine example of a subject that comes from the past to disrupt the present as commented in the previous section related to (see Stephenson and Langridge 170 quotation). Lue Ming, as a spectral entity, wanders in time dwelling in the different wars in which the USA was involved; as in *One Flea Spare*, Wallace echoes Brechtian estrangement portraying a haunting presence who

personifies the opposite side of conflict and embodies the other, the alien. Some dramatists make use of Brechtian estrangement aiming to achieve distance and to prevent the spectator's empathy in order to provoke critical thought.⁶ Furthermore, the setting in *In the Heart of America* establishes a parallelism between contemporary society and the past; Wallace points towards the similarities between the Vietnam War and the Iraq War, which is another example of Brechtian historicization and her use of the past to review the present once more with the purpose to achieve the spectator's awareness.

Interestingly, the behavior of Wallace's characters can be shocking for the spectator, since amid the chaos represented in the plays, life and relationships between the characters go on at their own pace—I will explore the character's interaction as a cluster in Chapter Five through the analysis of groupishness—and in a very postmodernist style the characters celebrate chaos and take advantage of it. It could be said that characters follow their own rules creating their particular universe, such as the visions or dreamscapes of *The Fever Chart* where the spectator is under the impression that the characters' reality is less real. This microcosm—or ecosystem as it is called in the Enactive paradigm analyzed in Chapter Six—provides a sense of imprisonment stressing how characters relate to each other and their positions of power, which are crucial aspects in her plays to represent social struggle. The sense of entrapment and symbolism related to entrapment and prison is a recurrent motif in Wallace's plays. Claudia Barnett studies it in “Physical Prisons: Naomi Wallace's Drama of Captivity” and she points out: [Wallace] “questions definitions of crime and punishment in our gender and class-oriented society. She does so in such a physical manner in order to appeal to the audience members, who sympathetically align themselves with the prisoners” (149). Space, in many of Wallace's plays, functions as a prison portraying the oppressed and denouncing the oppressors. This happens in *One Flea Spare* (1995) where the characters are

⁶ However, as I discuss in Chapter Four through the analysis of empathy, the spectator's mind functions with a very different schema.

confined in a house as a consequence of the plague; *Things of Dry Hours* (2007) is set inside the house, as well as *Birdy* (1997)—an adaptation of William Wharton’s novel—which takes place in a mental asylum. In *Slaughter City* (1996) a sense of imprisonment is also reproduced with the workers spending countless hours working in a meatpacking house under inhumane conditions; part of *The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek* (1998) denounces labor exploitation as well and part takes place in a prison. Even the young men in *The War Boys* (1993) are behind a fence, though they are on the privilege side of the conflict, they are also prisoners of their fears and their quest for identity. One of her most recent examples *And I and Silence* (2011) has a stronger sense of confinement because the moments of relief of the two female characters take place inside prison and outside prison they are prisoners of the segregated community of 1950s USA.

The affinity with the spectator that Barnett points out is particularly evident in *One Flea Spare* where some situations of the trapped characters arouse the audience’s sympathies. At the beginning of the play Bunce and Morse break into the Snelgraves’ house; Morse lies when identifying herself as the daughter of a wealthy family, the Braithwaites, while Bunce introduces himself as the sailor he is. From this precise moment the differences of social status and the roles are settled; particularly for Mr. Snelgrave whose class-conscious disposition make him receive Morse as an equal and to consider Bunce as inferior. However, Darcy Snelgrave, Mr. Snelgrave’s wife, blurs these boundaries; Darcy—fascinated by the figure of Bunce, who is confined to the kitchen as a servant—finds in this space some intimacy. Ironically, the kitchen, symbolically conceived as the women’s space in the 17th century where women were trapped, serves as an escape from her unsatisfactory marriage. Darcy literally penetrates Bunce by putting her finger in the sailor’s unhealed wound, and at the same time Bunce caresses Darcy’s scars in a sensual gesture. Darcy, in a Brechtian *gestus*, says “My finger. I’ve put my finger. Inside. It’s warm (*Beat*) It feels like I’m inside

you” (53) and then the stage directions are as follow “*After some moments, Darcy takes her hand out from under his bandage. There is blood on her fingers. She looks at her hand as though it might have changed*” (54). The scene deals with Brechtian dialectics though it also involves gender, which is different from the classical Brechtian *gestus* where only class is involved. The roles are reversed and Darcy is the one who “ravishes” (*One Flea*, 54) Bunce by penetrating him and immediately after this erotic and strange gesture, Darcy confesses her desire to Bunce. Nevertheless, their relationship comes down to the terms of class since Bunce replies: “It’s nothing to worry over, Mrs. Snelgrave. You people always want to fuck your servants” (54). Barnett makes an accurate analysis of this scene, as she states:

Darcy and Bunce’s relationship reaches dialectical extremes when she later puts her charred hand beneath his shirt to feel his wound [...] This *gestus* provides the most alienating moment of the play—not only for the cringing audience but for the characters. [...] Sex draws them together, but class divides them. [...] In spite of moments of passion and warmth, trust between classes is impossible. (“Dialectic” 162)

According to Scott T. Cummings, most characters in Wallace’s plays have a wound, as he observes, “A character defined by social or demographic type is often individuated by a singular history that includes illness, injury, or some form of physical violation that has resulted in permanent scars, a wound that will not heal, or other lasting effects” (37). This assertion called my attention since I can corroborate by analyzing Wallace’s plays that many characters are wounded in many different ways; this is particularly evident in in *Slaughter City* where she stresses the wounded body in labor exploitation, thereby most of the characters have injuries. Cummings studies with detail how the wounded bodies are linked to social injustice, as he affirms:

They gravitate towards each other with sexual longing that is conditioned by a history of violence, complicated by social and political divisions, and in some instances gratified in startling and theatrical ways. Their wounds—and there are more of them in these and other plays—are the outward physical signs of a legacy of pain and a life of oppression. In Wallace, the body is poked, prodded, pierced, penetrated, and pulverized, revealing a vulnerability that is reinforced by gruesome imagery and a general air of carnage. (38)

These wounded bodies are frequently represented at first imbedded in gender and/or class as structures in terms of opposite sides of a conflict—for instance mistress and servant, men and women—and afterwards, Wallace destroys these conventional and restrictive structures where entities are more fluid and subject to be renegotiated. For instance, Bunce addresses Darcy as “Mrs. Snelgrave” because he follows the convention showing respect for a lady member of a higher class. However, his tone is not the one of a servant, in the scene, Bunce speaks as a man, because he knows that 17th century society is ruled by men. Furthermore, he knows that in the end, with the fall of Mr. Snelgrave’s dominance, he will gain control, which he foresees due to the dynamic of their tense situation in the first scenes. In addition, Darcy grants him authority by revealing her feelings towards him, and therefore they make an alliance to rebel against the patriarchal figure. Certainly, Brecht could not posit this use of his dialectics when he formulated it. Nevertheless, sometimes his theater devices suit the necessities of contemporary playwrights who hold high his theories and have appropriated and reformulated them in a neobrechtian wave. The *gestus* performed by Darcy penetrating Bunce’s wound is the central image of the play as Wallace states:

The play was partly written around this image. But the moment is not about this older woman and this young guy. They are from two classes, and they experience life differently; she was damaged by an accident, he was damaged through resistance and

labor. That influences the moment of touch, which cannot be isolated from who they are or were supposed to be. In that moment they are stepping across a class boundary.

(Greene, 461)

Mr. Snelgrave neglects Darcy due to an accident that left her body covered in scars, she rediscovers sexuality thanks to the fortuitous appearance of Bunce in her life. They intimate and break the social establishment, which prompts Darcy, Bunce, and Morse's rebellion against Mr. Snelgrave; who as I said above represents the patriarchal figure of authority and the controlling power of the higher classes, as well as oppressors of women. The following fragment, which foresees the development of events in the play, points towards the role exchange between Mr. Snelgrave and Bunce and the dialectics of power:

SNELGRAVE: A little learning, Bunce: patterns will have it that you, a poor sailor, will never wear such shoes as these. And yet, the movement of history, which is as inflexible as stone, can suddenly change. With a flick of a wrist. Or I might say, an ankle. Watch while I demonstrate. (*Slips out of his shoes*) Put them on, Bunce. [...] Historically speaking, the poor do not take to fine shoes. They never have and they never will.

BUNCE: I'm wearing fine shoes now.

SNELGRAVE: Yes but only because I allow it. I have given history a wee slap on the buttocks and for a moment something terribly strange has happened: you in my shoes. However, what we see here is not real. It's an illusion because I can't change the fact that you'll never wear fine shoes. [...] In a moment I am going to take them back, and then history will be on course, because what we're doing here is just a little game. (*One Flea*, Act I Sc. VI. 25-6)

In this scene, the wealthy man is aiming to indoctrinate his new servant regarding the differences between them in personal ground, and by extension, in a more universal ground

between social classes. Mr. Snelgrave feels superior and powerful towards Bunce; his ego even makes him believe that he has the power to challenge the course of what he considers history. As a matter of fact, in this scene he embodies the old patriarchal values where upper-class men try not only to appropriate history but also to control it. Consequently, Bunce, aware of his class, acts passively and obeys Mr. Snelgrave's instructions to carry on his game.

The condescending abusive treatment of those in control and the tension between characters who try to subjugate and characters who resist are patterns present in many other of her plays. In *Slaughter City*, Wallace represents not only the inequities of social class but also the differences suffered because of race and gender; Baquin the white manager of the slaughterhouse continuously exploits his workers and his supervisor. The supervisor, Tuck, is a male African-American who tries to scale the social ladder, and in order to do so, Baquin forces him to renounce his own principles. A similar moral dilemma of a character is also depicted in *The War Boys* where three characters with different backgrounds are brought together. David is "college-educated, white, privileged", Greg is a "working-class Mexican-American" and George is a "home boy, white" (145); George is mistreated for being regarded as "white trash" (145) while Greg is mistreated for being half Mexican. David, who represents the American 'majority:' the WASP, humiliates Greg and George repeatedly throughout the play; although they passively accept to be part of games that put them on the verge of disrespect. These characters develop an odd relationship as a consequence of their different social status and the activity they carry out, hunting illegal immigrants on the Texas-Mexico border. Furthermore, Greg who is half Mexican faces a paradoxical situation chasing immigrants; he is passing for white in order to fit in, and to do so, he follows David in his mock war against the alien subject, the enemy, the other, the immigrant. However, David is

aware of the necessity of immigrant labor to maintain the country's prosperity. The following fragment shows David's hypocrisy in his crusade against illegal immigrants:

GREG: And you know why? Because he gets paid not only for the beaners he turns in, but for the ones he lets cross. [...] As a matter of fact, he gets paid a bonus for the athletic types he lets through. The ones that can do the hard labor. [...] Because David knows he's got to let in just enough beaners to work dead cheap so he can—

DAVID: —maintain my standard of living? It's a very good standard too. Don't forget it. (*The War Boys*, 183)

The young men discuss the double standard of society that rejects immigrants and at the same time profits from their uncertain situation, which can be understood as an echo of the slave trade. David, as Mr. Snelgrave, takes advantage of the rest of the characters by using his authority and his privilege position,⁷ and at the same time, Greg and George take advantage of their situation as American citizens by persecuting and abusing illegal immigrants who cross the border. The different social statuses generate a chain of command in this “War Boys game” (232) and its subsequent assignation of power can be disconcerting for the spectator when trying to feel sympathy towards the characters.

The characters perform the piece as if they were running a show, addressing the public while they narrate their story as in Brechtian Epic theater. David is in charge of the situation during almost the entire ‘show,’ however—in accordance to Wallace propensity to play with the spectator's expectation—at the very end of the final scene, an exchange of roles takes place similar to the one in *One Flea Spare*. Greg stays true to his Mexican roots paying homage to his mother and reclaiming his agency to take control of the situation; Greg pulls a gun and threatens David, by performing this action he disrupts the atmosphere of the play in

⁷ I come back to the figure of the bully and explore it in ethical terms in Chapter Five.

two different senses. In the first place, Greg becomes a real threat with this act of violence; the situation is not passive-aggressive as the ones in the previous scenes where the young men slap each other emotionless just for sport. In the second place, Greg takes control of the situation, and therefore, the underdog becomes the topdog. Although the spectator experiences different and extreme emotions Wallace is very cautious when it comes to violence and she refuses to directly deal with it; therefore, in this scene Greg also rejects violence and throws the gun away, disrupting the stereotype of the violent alien subject.

Apart from the clash between characters from different social positions, racial discrimination is also frequent issue in Wallace's plays. For instance, her play *In the Heart of America* denounces, together with other subjects matter, bias towards the Americans who are hyphenated, such as Remzi who is humiliated for being a Palestinian-American. Considered by many as her masterpiece, and introduced by Tony Kushner direction at the Long Wharf Theater (Cummings 4) the play deals with prejudice—concealed from other highlighted elements of war such as patriotism or fighting for the country's principles—where immigrants or descendants of immigrants are dying on behalf of a country that does not accept them as equals, as well as it is focused on the homophobia within the US army. Wallace criticizes society's proclivity to label and to stress differences, which causes a natural quest of identity. Characters such as Remzi or Greg in *The War Boys* represent the contradiction of being American citizens identified as alien subjects. Both plays, *In the Heart of America* and *The War Boys*, denounce the objectification of subjects within society and the dehumanization of its individuals by turning them into profit. There are scenes in the play where the dramatist mocks this unnecessary categorization through the characters; Craver, Remzi's lover, tries to downplay the situation when he states: "I'm a White Trash. River Boy. Arab-kissing Faggot" (114). Therefore, it is not surprising to find that Wallace comments about detachment in terms of language as follows: "I was trying to show how we use

language to dehumanize people, whether at home or abroad, in order to kill them with less guilt” (Greene 459). Wallace also depicts the reality of the USA in her plays as a melting pot and rejects whitewashing cast; she rather presents America as a multicultural society.

Within this melting pot in which people from many nationalities coexist Wallace also analyzes universal relationships such as the ones within the family. As she explains:

I set myself to write [...] against the myth of the dysfunctional family onstage in America—the idea that what goes on in a family is divorced from class, or that it doesn’t matter what class a family is in or what color, this story is just about Ma and Pa and how the kids get along with them. American drama is not only extremely sexist when it deals with the dysfunctional family—you’ll always find the raging mother who has destroyed everyone’s lives—but also there’s no real look at why that mother became the way she did. Why she takes things out on her children, why she feels trapped. What, in society, contributed? (Greene, 451)

Besides, binaries such as father-daughter, mother-daughter, and husband-wife are deconstructed to give the spectator a depiction that, as she says, “disturb and put us all at risk” (“Introduction” 426). The conflict arrives when the dramatist uses these universal relationships, which are well known by the spectator, and she reverses the standards and crosses the boundaries of the politically correct. She re/presents the deconstruction of traditional values, which fail to preserve stability for the members of the families. The title of *One Flea Spare* alludes to John Donne’s metaphysical poem “The Flea” (1633). In Donne’s poem a couple is bitten by a flea mingling their blood in itself and creating an abnormal symbol of their union. In Wallace’s play, Morse personifies the flea representing the offspring the Snelgraves never had, however, Morse’s mysterious behavior—commented at the beginning of this section—causes disagreement between the couple. As Donne’s poem, *One Flea Spare* is a play highly symbolical and intricate; the metaphysical allusions that

establish a parallelism with the poem could confuse the spectator if she/he is not familiarized with the references presented onstage.

In *In the Fields of Aceldama* the spectator finds a similar situation where an unconventional family is portrayed. It should be noted that the structure of *In the Fields of Aceldama*, although the plot is very different, shares similarities with *One Flea Spare*; the play is built around a couple and their relationship with their daughter Annie. Annie functions as a bond between her parents, Henry and Mattie, however, once she dies they do not have anything left to keep them together. Families are depicted in Wallace's plays in an unconventional manner, the dramatist does not conceal the vices and disturbed social behavior of the members; such as other dramatists like Sam Shepard, Wallace deals openly with dysfunctional families. Henry is an ambiguous character, who suggests ambiguous behavior as well with an undertone of incest and pedophilia. Sometimes these deviant behaviors are implicitly addressed and the spectator cannot be absolutely certain about what happen between the characters. Although paying attention to all the details and using her/his memory the spectator can have some clues to interpret certain behaviors, as the following scene shows:

HENRY Let me smell you, Mattie. [...]

MATTIE (*laughs*) Where I pee?

HENRY I bet you're smooth as a girl down there.

MATTIE Am not.

HENRY Bet you are.

MATTIE I'm not a girl, Henry.

HENRY I bet you got buttercups on your panties.

MATTIE You're not marrying a girl. (231)

Although *In the Fields of Aceldama* is one of Wallace's earliest plays, the spectator faces extreme situations that provoke extreme emotions, which makes her/him pose some questions. Analyzing the play one comes to the conclusion that Mattie suffered from her family's deviant sexual behavior when she was a child. Mattie explains—addressing the audience instead of recreating on stage the abuses—how her sister masturbates in front of her and how her father makes her watch as he too masturbated. Studying the mother, the spectator wonders in which way these episodes affect her relationship with her daughter; one might think about the possibility of Mattie abusing Annie as a consequence of her trauma. Nevertheless, the dramatist does not reveal those aspects; Wallace merely portrays Mattie as an anguished character who embodies both positive and negative sides of motherhood. Wallace comments on Tony Kushner's construction of the character Roy Cohn in *Angels in America* (1993), explaining that “if you put the good politics in the mouth of the goodies, no one wants to hear it, but if you give it a twist and put it in the mouth of the baddies, as I call them, we suddenly hear it in a different way” (Julian). In her play *The War Boys*, she deconstructs characters such as David, who is an “intellectual bully” as the interviewer Connie Julian points out. Julian and Wallace comment on the scene where David describes his abuse of his sister in order to obtain social power or recognition among a children's group. Wallace explains how she wants to go further in the “character-building” and she tries to limit the trauma in the psychological reconstruction of the characters. She believes that although traumatic experiences are relevant, to say that “our character pivots around” this particular moment is too simple, and she adds, “people are far more complicated than that” (Julian).

Nevertheless, in *In the Fields of Aceldama* the character's trauma is present as in many of her plays; especially through the abusive figure of Henry. He is surely dysfunctional regarding sexuality and represents the decline of patriarchal figures and women's

empowerment. Henry affirms that he did not molest the girl: “I never touched the child. But a person has a right you know. She was mine too. This is my leg (*clutches leg*). I have a right. This is my ear (*pulls it*). She was my kid. (*beat*) This is my land” (222-3). As in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* patriarchal values failed, Henry claimed his rights over the members of his family and his state; he wants to control them and to objectify them in order to own them. However, on second thoughts the spectator cannot be completely sure if he abuses Annie, if he lies, or if he wanted to. As I said above, Wallace gives the spectator some clues, in one of the scenes, Henry calls the woman he is humiliating “grass-hopper” and then in a different scene he calls Annie this as well. Although there is a recurring threat of pedophilia the play does not openly answer this question, which may annoy some spectators who can point the lack of closure. Instead, the plot focuses on several topics such as trauma, loss, family, the fall of the patriarchy. Wallace subverts the character of Henry; he goes from the father who loses his daughter to the unreliable possible pedophile figure, who ends abandoned by his wife. Nevertheless, nothing is enacted on stage, Wallace manages to evade the most sordid aspects of the story by allowing the characters to narrate their traumas and secrets in Brechtian epic style, as happens in *The War Boys*. Taking into account that these are two of her first plays, it makes sense that they have a similar structure and use of devices. The playwright also uses other resources such as disembodiment of the victims and leaving the aggressors on the first line to be judged by the audience, as in the following fragment:

HENRY [...] Ah, come on you sweet, green thing. Mattie knows. She doesn’t mind, ever since the accident. Ten dollars? That’s money I don’t have. Alright. Alright, you pretty, little green bean, get in. (*he swings up on the block as though it were a truck and helps imaginary lady up on his lap. He pretends to drive a while, whispering in her ear, laughing. Then breaks suddenly. Sternly*) Get out. I said: Get out. [...] Take off your clothes. Go on. I paid you. (*shouts*)

Do it! [...] See you in town, grass-hopper. Have a nice walk. (*In the Fields*, Sc. 1, 229-30)

Marriage is also portrayed as a distortional union in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *In the Fields of Aceldama*. Both women, Darcy and Mattie, are unhappy in their marriages and the dramatist represents how the characters evolve into free women. While Darcy is repudiated mainly for her scarred body, as a consequence of a fire accident, Mattie is rejected for her independent behavior and her masculine appearance. Both women suffer a transformation of their selves towards the end of the play but in different ways. On the one hand, Darcy releases herself from the restrictions of her marriage and she experiences sexual, emotional, and personal growth. On the other hand Mattie, who after her daughter's death is in charge of her life and her husband's life, becomes aware of her strength and independence, which helps her to abandon her passive attitude and to adopt a different perspective as a new independent woman. Both of them make their own decisions and they do not fear to challenge the patriarchal order in amid the 17th century in the chaos of the European plague, or in the 20th century in the conservative and rural life of a southern state in the USA. Wallace takes into account the voices of female characters and feminist discourses in most of her plays in order to contribute to "different possibilities for the transformation of ourselves and our communities" ("Introduction" 426-7). Her characters transform themselves and by extension they share this experience with the spectator in order to spread a message of empowerment and create an impact on society, which are ethical aspects I deal with in Chapter Five. The next section is about Wallace's use of different devices in he plays, particularly the one I call "stream of personae."

1.4. A Brief Comment on Stream of Personae: a Technical Device.

Wallace previous works in poetry have deeply influenced her playwriting where the splendor of symbols, metaphors, and images along with a careful consideration of plain aesthetics comprise her drama. As Wallace explains:

A lot of my poetry is what they call ‘persona poetry.’ I take different voices. I found poetry an isolating endeavor after a while. Nor was the American poetry circle very open to me. If there’s one place where being a political poet puts you in a ‘B’ class, it’s American poetry. (Greene 454)

The polyphony of voices in her plays is also introduced through a recurrent device where she uses the same actor/actress to embody other characters in order to shift the point of view. In other words, the actor/actress momentarily leaves her/his main role and enact as other character, this allows a metanarrative frame where the actor/actress playing a somewhat charade in form but introducing a significant solemn moment. There is a constant flow of selves allowing us to infiltrate in the introspection of the beings that are performing. This change of persona is sometimes the consciousness of the character speaking out trying to release repressed feelings or to purge herself/himself, which is interesting in connection with the element of catharsis.⁸ I will call this device in the present thesis “stream of personae.” I believe that this device is sometimes used as a resource to focus action on a few performers providing with more intense scenes; this happens in *In the Fields of Aceldama* where Mattie is the same actress on stage when she relives her traumas as a child and at the same time her experiences intertwined with her daughter’s experiences. Other uses of this resource could be the representation of an exchange of power between characters when they impersonate

⁸ In my opinion, since Wallace as a Brechtian author does not seek catharsis; in her plays, the spectator sees catharsis rather than experience it. Characters such as the ones in the *The War Boys* are the ones who experience a purge and the spectator witnesses this purge in the characters that imitate an unfamiliar nature.

another role such as in *The War Boys* when David and George pretend that they are interrogating a woman who crossed the border. Greg impersonates the woman, then he switches with David, all of them behave aggressively but they do not have a fixed target. Moreover, the social status of David is somehow disrupted by this action and he is being humiliated as are the rest of the boys.

As Barbara Ozieblo explains in ““Pornography of Violence”: Strategies of Representation in Plays by Naomi Wallace, Stefanie Zdravec, and Lynn Nottage” the spectator focuses on the perpetrators since the victim is physically absent and this stresses the violence that result from a perverted society affected by racism. As Ozieblo observes:

The acts of violence the three men indulge in are not shown as happening to an actual victim or in the present of the play: although they are violent, in-yer-face episodes that undoubtedly discomfort the spectator, she/he is distanced by the role-playing [...] The spoken or enacted monologues serve to distance the events and to draw attention away from the women while giving them a voice and presence they are denied by society [...] Her strategy in *The War Boys* of not giving presence to the victims forces the spectator to concentrate on the perpetrators of the acts of violence and on the ways in which the expectations of their families and of society have twisted them into seeking a sense of community in the hunting down of the Other on the frontier of experience from which they cannot escape. (“Pornography of Violence” 71-2)

Importantly, Wallace mechanism to stage violence introduces a paradoxical state of the victim who is at the same time present and absent. This situation gives the victims a voice through their presence but it does not place the victim amid the grotesque violent actions. Furthermore, it can be said that the spectator is informed by the testimony without being the witness of a gender violence episode because, borrowing Ozieblo’s words Wallace “deals with women victims in an oblique way” (“Pornography of Violence” 70). I will analyze her

stream of personae in the plays *And I and Silence* *The War Boys* in Chapter Three. Undoubtedly, *The War Boys* is one of Wallace's masterpieces, even though it has a different structure from the rest of her plays that nowadays should be revisited due to the immigration politics in the USA.

As this is the case, the transformation that Wallace yearns to accomplish starts with the doubts and the thoughts of the audience. The spectator, ideally, faces Wallace's plays ready to leave the theater without the answers to questions that emerge. If the spectator undergoes this process of awareness, the playwright will fulfill her aim of contributing to improve society, at the same time as audiences enjoy her artistic creation. However, the spectator wants more not only because she/he is curious about contemporary relevant topics; the audience wants to be entertained and people go to the theater as a social ritual to be amused. Bearing in mind the social dimension of theater and its ritualistic structure—to go out to interact with other individuals before, during, and after the play⁹—some theorists of performance studies such as Richard Schechner focus on the development of theater from the study of ancient rituals, as he debates in *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (2013) while others focus on the social dimension such as Dwight Conquergood's approach performance through ethnography that he studies in *Cultural Struggles: Performance, Ethnography, Praxis* (2013). I believe that Wallace takes into account the social aspect over the ritualistic facet of theater, since some of Wallace plays deal with social contemporary issues by revisiting the past. Wallace's widely acclaimed play *In the Heart of America* was accomplished through the theatricality of a social problem especially notorious at the time, which was gay bashing. The play denounces the politics of the army as a highly regarded institution in the USA by putting onstage queer bashing. The play presents Wallace's awareness of this social issue that was publicly debated after the real case of the murder of

⁹ See Susan Harris Smith's *American Drama: The Bastard Art* (2006).

Allen R. Schindler in the USA Navy, which brought about the policy “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” repealed by President Obama in July 2011.¹⁰ *In the Heart of America* deals with aspects that interest the public, an ingredient that ensures the success of productions and at the same time captures the audience’s attention. If the spectator is engaged with the performance one assumes that she/he will come back for more, or else, we can conclude that Wallace’s experimental theater is not for all spectators. Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind those cases, such as Osenlund’s review of *In the Heart of America*, commented at the beginning of this chapter, are a consequence of issues that are beyond the dramatist’s control. Osenlund bases her argument on the lack of engagement with what happens on stage. The reviewer did not understand Wallace’s technical devices; the play is composed of several allegorical elements and symbols. On the one hand, the spectral figures that haunt the present and come from the past with the purpose to warn about the horrors of war. On the other hand, the relationship that Wallace establishes between war and love, showing her most optimistic facet.

Wallace has been described as extremely optimistic by playwrights such as Tony Kushner. She defends herself stating: “I am an optimist, an angry optimist” (Gardner, *Enemy*). Focusing on the tension and interaction of the characters, we do realize that Wallace’s plays regularly include characters that connect and have an intimate experience regardless of their differences; for instance an Israeli soldier and a Palestinian woman, a college educated and a “white trash” young man, a servant’s daughter and a wealthy man, or the manager of a meatpacking and workers. These characters establish unusual bonds showing Wallace’s desire to understand and find solution to socio-political problems. Besides, her characters interact in a bizarre way and sometimes with a touch of surrealism. This surrealism exists in some of the stories narrated by the characters such as the hump and

¹⁰ See <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2010/12/22/president-signs-repeal-dont-ask-dont-tell-out-many-we-are-one>

the camel story in *The War Boys*¹¹ or Shlomo's speech about the Homa Umigdal¹² in "Vision One: A State of Innocence." Sometimes surrealism is present when the scene goes backwards or forwards in time and includes characters from different periods breaking the linear progression of the timeline as happens in *In the Heart of America*. Wallace also brings in figures that are mysterious or allegorical such as Sausage Man in her play *Slaughter City*, who is a devilish figure on earth. The 'irrational' juxtaposition of images makes sense since she is displaying her own vision of society as an artist; however, this juxtaposition might be confusing for some part of the audience. Consequently, her style is complex as is also her *mise en scène* that I analyze in the next section.

1.5. Wallace's *Mise en Scène*: "Minimal and not Realistic."

In *The War Boys*, Wallace's setting "minimal and not realistic" (145) set a precedent for her bare stages in future plays. Wallace uses empty settings since her first play *The War Boys* (1993) until her most recent works such as *And I and Silence* (2011), and her stage directions regarding this respect vary only slightly. Bare settings require the spectator's effort to take part in the story told, and differ from more commercial realistic or naturalistic plays where the setting is an illusion of reality. Consequently, the spectator's imagination and engagement are relevant matters to interpret the story on stage; similar to her characters, Wallace's *mise en scène* is not elaborated from a material and physical point of view but psychological. The performers' bodies recreate and enact the giving situations in order to fill the stage and counterbalance the lack of scenery; actors put together the *mise en scène* with their intonation, gestures, and postures. Besides, they act as creators of their

¹¹ George's story is about how as a child he saw a billboard with the picture of a camel smoking and he believes he has a hump (see *The War Boys* 181-186).

¹² Homa Umigdal or the wall and tower is a symbol of Zionist architecture, Shlomo is an architect obsessed with this structure (see *Vision One* 11-12).

microcosm/ecosystem, since there is not an extensive display or at least not a significant one in terms of scenery. In addition, the spectator's attention is focused on their performance; bare stages are designed to capture the nature of the conflicts between characters to give the actors the sole instrument of their bodies to perform a naked story.

As a matter of fact, performativity is a crucial element of the *mise en scène*; as Artaud points out that the *mise en scène* is what makes theater something else than a written and/or spoken work. He passionately observes that “a theater which subordinates the *mise en scène* and production, i.e., everything in itself that is specifically theatrical, to the text, is a theater of idiots, madmen, inverters, grammarians, grocers, antipoets and positivists, i.e., Occidentals” (41). As he explains his in *Theater of Cruelty*, speech and the written word limit theater and consequently he explores other options like Balinese theatre because it stresses physical and nonverbal ideas (68). He emphasizes his repulsion towards Occidental theater as a consequence of the “supremacy of speech” (68) where the theater is just a reflection of the text. The same happens when Patrice Pavis analyzes the postmodernist *mise en scène* from a semiotic point of view, he revises this critical view of logocentrism in *Analyzing Performance: Theater, Dance, and Film* (2003), as he explains: “Postmodern criticism mistrusts any notion of language, fearing that language could reintroduce a subject as its origin, which could erect a screen or filter between the spectator and the materiality of theatrical signifiers” (308). Although, conversely, some scholars of the cognitive approach find that some aspects analyzed, such as the scenery, from a semiotic point of view are mistaken. According to McConachie “semiotics makes no foundational distinctions between looking at the physical world and watching intentional human action” (*Engaging* 57).

Leaving aside the debate of semiotic and cognitive science schools, I find thought provoking that Pavis establishes a typology and categories of the *mise en scène*. Pavis distinguishes five different typologies of the *mise en scène* with its correspondent categories:

“Historical typology,” “Mise-en-scènes of Classic Texts,” “Auto-, Ideo- and Intertextual Dimensions,” “Metaphor, Scenography, Event,” and a typology close to Robert Abirached’s classification (metaphoric, scenographic, and eventlike) (211-215). Obviously, Wallace’s mise en scène is sometimes, but not always, close to Brecht’s mise en scène. Furthermore, within the first of the typologies presented by Pavis, Historical typology, he locates Brecht’s drama in the ‘Realist mise en scène’ category. He defines this category asserting that “the real is no longer rendered photographically [...] but is codified in an ensemble of signs that are deemed to be pertinent; mimesis is selective, critical, inclusive and systematic; for example, the mise-en-scènes of Brecht, or of Planchon in the 1960s and 1970s” (211). In this particular case the label of ‘realist’ can be misleading, since the definition states that reality is not represented photographically. Nevertheless, I find this definition somehow appropriate for Wallace’s mise en scène since as I stated before in this chapter, mimesis does play a role in Wallace’s works, even though she does it in an unconventional manner: the dramatist imitates life in a bizarre way. In the same typology Pavis also includes Brecht in the category ‘Epic mise- en-scène’ evidently for the episodic narration with the help of scenography and plot. Some of Wallace’s plays have this episodic structure that is reflected in the scenography, for instance *And I and Silence* or *Slaughter City*. However, Wallace uses the episodic structure to mark the difference between past and present as well since the action goes backwards and forwards in time whereas the case of Brecht episodes do not necessarily have to be marking the distance in time from one scene to another. In addition, another category of Pavis’s typology could be used to describe Wallace’s drama; ‘Theatricalized mise-en-scène’ is described by Pavis as the “acceptance of theater as fiction” (212). This category could be useful to analyze the mise en scène of *The War Boys* for instance where the performers break the fourth wall convention. As is demonstrated, with this brief attempt to categorize Wallace’s mise en scène through Pavis’s typologies, Wallace’s mise en scène is

complex and cannot be defined with one single typology or category. Besides, more typologies and categories than the above can be used to describe Wallace's mise en scène, such as Historicization or Ideotextual defined by Pavis as the mise en scène connected to the external world that alludes to social reality (214). I believe that Pavis's categorization of the mise en scène cannot provide a thorough analysis of Wallace's mise en scene, since it is too restrictive and superficial. Wallace describes the mise en scène of the London production of *Slaughter City* and explains:

Bare, minimal. Which most of my work is. There's always a struggle over that. Some of the action in *Slaughter City* is obviously mimed, but in London, the actors used actual knives, because you had to have the feeling of danger there [...] that's part of what the play is about—the realism and the not. You can do very different productions of that play, but if you go for total realism and try to build a meatpacking company, you're in trouble. But the London production looked beautiful and classical and very bare actually. (Greene 469)

Analyzing scenery in Wallace's plays we have to bear in mind, as I emphasize throughout this chapter, that Wallace's plays call the spectator's attention to the characters' presence and absence, their behavior, and their bodies. Furthermore, other elements such as scenery are less significant, which does not mean insignificant, in most of her plays. As the Wallace explains "You have the bodies and the language. The language of my plays is pared to the bone, but there's a lot of it, so if you load the stage with 'things,' a production becomes cluttered. It can become suffocating. The language needs all the space it can collect" (Greene 470). Two plays are especially remarkable when analyzing Wallace in connection with visual information provided by scenery: *Slaughter City*, as I commented above, with the meatpacking company and its carcasses, commented before, a bleak scene that can be portrayed as bleak or not, and *The Hard Weather Boating Party* (2009)—which I analyze in

Chapter Four—where a boat emerges from a crack in the floor. The process of visual information, stated above in McConachie’s assertion, is relevant not only when analyzing architecture, scenery, or props but also the costumes, characters’ appearances, or even the actual stage of the different theaters where the play is performed. In addition, not only physical objects compose the *mise en scène*; following Artaud’s definition of *mise en scène* in his chapter “Metaphysics and the *Mise en Scène*” (38) we must bear in mind attitudes, intonations, postures, gestures. Artaud explains that these elements correspond to the “language of the stage” (38). This language of the stage in Wallace’s plays is often related to class issues, since this element of her drama has to do with her Brechtian facet; I comment on this aspect in the last section. The language of the stage, as Artaud points out, is a key aspect of drama; furthermore, he believes that there is where the real essence of theater resides. Nevertheless, it is important to distinguish the analysis of the physical elements of the play from the living performers and cognitive studies do point towards this distinction when processing the elements of performance, which semiotic approach does not. Since the language of the stage has been study in this section, I have to move to the literal sense of language in the next section where I briefly comment on Wallace’s poetic/prosaic usage.

1.6. Wallace’s Use of Poetics vs. Prosaic Language.

I find it necessary to analyze spoken language in Wallace’s drama, since it is also an important feature of her plays. As I commented before in this chapter, she is also a poet and critics assume that this facet influences her language. Most critics have pointed out that Wallace’s language is poetic; Gardner in “The Enemy Within” describes her writing as “poetic, sensual language” (2); in “The Mythic and the Marxist” she adds “Wallace’s language is both poetic and raw”(2); and Vivian Gornick in the *New York Times* says “[a]ll

made to serve a language, rich and poetic.” In spite of the fact that several critics have define her language as such, I do not consider Wallace’s language of her plays as poetic. Evidently, her poetry influences her style and she explains that she usually writes a poem about an issue before transforming it into a play. As she states, the poem is a small canvas and the play is a bigger canvas (Greene 453). Perhaps some critics recognized as poetic language the use of poetical and oneiric landscapes in some of her plays but I firmly believe that the language Wallace uses is everyday language. Unquestionably, Wallace uses some metaphors and symbols but as she explains people speak the way she writes. I was surprised when I repeatedly found references to a poetic language that in my opinion is not revealed in her texts. Fortunately, during this research on her works I find that Wallace clarifies it in an interview with the French media where she states: “Actually, when I hear that there is a play, a good, play in New York or London is very poetic I run in the opposite direction. *So even though people said my work is poetic*, I like to think it is a very tough poetry and not at all decorative” (Fousdetheatre, my emphasis). Furthermore, a more recent proof of this question is answered through Dagmara Domińczyk’s comments, the actress who plays Liana in her last play *Night is a Room* (2015) states in an interview “I loved the writing, I loved how fearless it was. And Naomi would hate me saying this, because *she hates the word poetic*, but it was! With the punctuation, and the breath, it's almost Shakespearian in its own small-scale way. Or like a Greek tragedy. And I thought the character was wonderful” (Gawlak, my emphasis). In the interview with Fousdetheatre Wallace comments that she was raised in Prospect, Kentucky and this fact has a big impact on her writings. Moreover, she describes her situation within the different communities in her hometown; even though she belonged to a privileged family, she lived near a working class black and white community. She affirms that these childhood experiences allow her to use the language that is nowadays on the street. Wallace also describes her language as not “straight realism” (Fousdetheatre) and she adds

that language is something that is “obviously fabricated” (Fousdetheatre) as everything on the stage. Therefore, I hope I have clarified the usage of language in Wallace’s plays with these brief comments. I move from language to a factor that is also relevant in her plays—I have already studied in this chapter some examples of Brechtian influence in Wallace’s plays—the next section exclusively focuses on the facet of Wallace as a neo-Brechtian author.

1.7. Brechtian Impact in Wallace’s Drama.

Wallace frequently declares that she avoids realism on stage; the category realist writer makes some female playwrights feel uncomfortable since it has been associated with patriarchal traditional drama. The paradox of analyzing Wallace’s plays relies on her style; she is a political artist, and that means her plays incorporate a dash of reality since many of her plays are based on or inspired by real facts. In fact, she includes bibliographies at the end of some of her published plays, as a means of let the sociopolitical realities to prevail on the spectator and to keep informing the audience about the subject. Nevertheless, it should be noted that those real facts that she deals with are subverted and represented in a non-realistic manner; as happens in Brechtian and neo-Brechtian theater, the dramatists represents reality, to be more specific social reality, through a non-realistic approach to depart from bourgeoisie theater. *The War Boys* serves as an example of Brecht’s influence on Wallace’s forms since the play breaks the fourth wall convention; all the characters address the public throughout the play in order to narrate their stories. This storytelling is arranged as a show, as I explained previously in this chapter, the three characters introduce themselves and share some live experiences with the audience. The boys David, George, and Greg are patrolling in “A place that could be the Mexico/Texas border” (145) due to their agreement with the federal authority. While two of them keep the area under surveillance, one of them narrates his story

as Wallace explains: (*During Greg's monologue, George and David carry on in and around the car area. They are not unaware of Greg's performance, but they are not really interested in it. At times, however, they intervene. Greg addresses the border*) (155). David and George interrupt Greg who breaks the flow of the narration¹³ and invites them into the metanarrative frame:

GREG: I mean, *mi padre*, he was a strict man sometimes, but he looked out for me.

[...] You two baboon asses are fuckin' up my thing. (*Pushes George back*)

Can't you shut up just a few more seconds until I'm done?

(*George and David mock-freeze. For some seconds Greg doesn't know where to pick up again.*)

I suppose Evalina got her teeth fixed. I don't know. She wouldn't see me after that...

DAVID (*Interrupts*): No, no. You left off at (*Mocks Greg's voice*), "He was a strict man, but he looked out for me."

GREG: Yeah. Thanks. (*Beat*) But he looked out for me. It was about a year later [...] (*The War Boys 158*)

These interruptions are also part of the epic theater techniques to avoid what Brecht understood as passive empathy, which I analyze in Chapter Four. Concerning the spectator's experience, this play requires an effort in terms of imagination; the spectator has to have in mind an outdoor landscape, a desert with different elements, such as the fence with the barbwire although the car and none of them appear on stage. Moreover, Wallace explains in her stage directions that these elements should not be on stage and the car should be only suggested with a raised area.

¹³ I will comment in the Chapter Three the conceptual blending theory related to this scene.

Brechtian theater pursues the spectator's scientific observation of the action on stage and in order to achieve it Brecht resorts not only to non-realism, he has other techniques such as estrangement. As he states:

You mean that when one observes an amoeba it does nothing to offer to the human observer. He can't get inside its skin by empathy. Yet the scientific observer does try to understand it [...] What I mean is: if I choose to see Richard III I don't want to feel myself to be Richard III, but to glimpse this phenomenon in all its strangeness and incomprehensibility. (Brecht 27)

According to Brecht, estrangement provokes distance; in other words, we cannot speak about *Verfremdung* without *Entfremdung*.¹⁴ Naomi Wallace asserts that among her techniques, distance is an important resource. As she states: "My approach is to step back far enough so that I can see more clearly. Similar perhaps to what Brecht calls 'making strange'" (Intimate 97). As we have seen, Wallace uses unorthodox and/or surrealist characters, for example Morse in *One Flea Spare*, Sami in *Vision Two: Between this Breath and You*, or George in *The War Boys*, which provoke spectator's distance and estrangement. Additionally, she represents other periods of history such as *One Flea Spare*, which represents 17th century London or *Slaughter City*, which jumps from past to present. The non-linear course of time and the representation of the past is also a mechanism to accomplish distance, which is an

¹⁴ The term *Verfremdung* first appears in 1936 in his essay "Verfremdungseffekte in der Chinesischen Schauspielkunst" translated by John Willett as "Alienation effects in Chinese Acting." *Verfremdung* has been translated as alienation, V-Effect, estrangement, or defamiliarization. Some scholars have criticized Willett's translation of *Verfremdung* as "alienation." There is a controversy regarding the term and academics have different opinions about the translation of Brecht's *Verfremdung*. Moreover, some scholars such as John Fuegi are of the opinion that the term should not be translated, or as he asserts in *Bertolt Brecht: Chaos, According to Plan* (1987) we may simply speak about this technique as the V-Effect (84). When referring to Wallace's plays, I will use for this thesis the term *estrangement*, firstly because I think it suits the desired effect that Brecht seeks in his plays. Secondly, because I distinguish between "alienation" and "estrangement" the former being a word used in Marxist terms, associated with Marx and Engels's *Communist Manifesto* and their discourse about alienation in labor. Thirdly, I do not consider the term alienation appropriate for Brecht technique since alienation for me has the connotation of the etymological Latin origin "alienus" (belonging to another) and not "alienare" (estrangle). Furthermore, I do not understand *Entfremdung* as Alienation either, since I understand *Entfremdung* as "distancing". On the contrary, Marx's term *Entausserung* will serve as alienation or dispossession at work.

objective of Brecht's *historicization*. Brecht not only pursues a scientific observation, but also aims at generating critical thought, through his *Verfremdung* (estrangement) and *Entfremdung* (distance). In *Saint Joan of the Stockyards* Brecht comments on the impossibility to sympathize with the characters completely. As he explains:

[T]he spectator should not get too involved in the clash between them. For instance he must not approve Joan and reject the apparat [Black Straw Hats], nor vice versa. He must make his criticisms of the totality of the institution, for it is as a totality that the social process encounters it along with its inherent contradictions. Neither Joan nor the apparat in isolation could bring about those effects which are to be felt in reality. Similarly the 'other world' of the stockyards forms a self-contradictory whole, and there is a sense in which Joan and Mauler, particularly when confronted with the locked-out workers—which is where the play first establishes its main critical point about the intolerable nature of our conditions—join with the Black Straw Hats and the owners of the chief means of production to form a single unit. (Collected Plays: Three 412)

Although Brecht's play helps to question the condition of the humanity in social terms, these inquiries do not lead to taking one stand or another; they only serve as an observation and as an instrument for critical thought. These contradictions that Brecht uses to portray the system intend to help the spectators to be more objective. One can find these patterns in Wallace's plays as well; for example, in plays such as *One Flea Spare*, *Vision Two: Between this Breath and You*, or *In the Fields of Aceldama* she portrays characters that do not provoke sympathy. Wallace's characters are not presented as heroes; they are merely common subjects with both virtues and vices. Wallace is influenced by some of Brecht's plays such as *Saint Joan of the Stockyards*, *Mother Courage and her Children*, or *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*. As I will illustrate in some analyses of her plays

throughout this thesis, Wallace frequently plays with the spectator's assumptions; for instance Barnett explains how a *gestic* moment in *One Flea Spare* shocks the spectator; Bunce approaches as if he is going to kiss Snelgrave but instead he spits water in Snelgrave's face. According to Barnett:

The audience is forced into a horrible identification based on the physical action: we are arrested, like Snelgrave, by the audacity and sensuality of the act, which is not merely an act. And we are simultaneously repulsed by the character who would do this to another character, to an actor, to us. We are misaligned in our loyalties and hatreds, finding ourselves momentarily on the side of Snelgrave, whom we pity because the man playing Bunce has spit on him. ("Dialectic" 160)

With this use of Brecht's *gestus* Wallace confuses the spectator, she discloses other features of the character; Bunce is depicted by taking into account the complexity of the human subject that is neither flat nor simple. She challenges the spectator, who as Barnett says misaligns "loyalties and hatreds" (160). The audience cannot disregard sympathy towards Snelgrave—who can be plainly defined at first sight as the villain character—as a consequence of this *gestus* that turns him into a victim who is being humiliated. Barnett also comments on Elin Diamond's theories regarding Brechtian techniques and feminism explained in *Unmaking Mimesis: Essays on Feminism and Theater* (1997). Barnett asserts that the *gestus* commented above is the visual representation of the 'not, but.' Diamond explains the significance of the 'not, but,' as she points out: it "is the theatrical and theoretical analogue to 'differences within.' As such it ruins classical mimesis: the truth-modeling that produces self-identical subjects in coherent plots gives way utterly to the pleasure and significance of contradiction" (49). Brechtian dramatists use this device in which not only gestures are significant but also what is not explicitly represented on stage. The 'not, but' are the actions that are not enacted against the action performed. In *One Flea*

Spare Darcy says to Bunce “I don’t want my husband to hear us” and the stage directions are as follows “*wanting Snelgrave to hear them*” (160); Barnett explains Darcy says ‘not’ while she means ‘but.’ Diamond in “Brechtian Theory/Feminist Theory: Towards a Gestic Feminist Criticism” (1996) asserts that the ‘not, but’ “is the theatrical and theoretical analogue to the subversiveness of sexual difference” (125). According to Diamond each action contains a trace of the action it represses, hence the ‘not, but’ is the product of a dialectical tension. Furthermore, Diamond conceives the Brechtian *gestus* as a “synthesis of alienation, historicization, and the ‘not, but’” (129).

After briefly dissecting several dimensions of Wallace’s oeuvre throughout this chapter, I feel that the analysis of the spectator’s experience would seem incomplete if I only use the viewpoint of feminist theories, semiotics, Marxist materialism, or Brechtian theory; although these theories served to review many specific insightful aspects, I would search for a more homogeneous and less restrictive epistemology to approach the spectatorial phenomenon in Wallace. I firmly believe that the essence of her plays— in which she intends to shock the spectator and calls the audience’s attention towards social issues in order to contribute to create a better society—are in need of other parameters that fully describe and explain the spectatorial experience. In order to understand spectatorship in Wallace’s drama, this chapter has presented a brief critical view of Wallace’s drama, studying various features of some of her most representative plays. Her complex style has been analyzed through different details of her drama such as Brechtian techniques, political discourse, intricate characters, language style, and *mise en scène* among other illustrative aspects of her experimental theater. Naomi Wallace’s plays will be analyzed and will serve as ground for the application of the cognitive approach to spectatorship in the present thesis providing a different perspective through the new epistemology for theater and drama studies. The next chapters illustrate the benefits and the need of an innovative method for the analysis of

spectatorship encompassing a study of Naomi Wallace's plays. The following chapter studies spectatorship analysis and its principal theories that lead to the search for new epistemologies and prompted the cognitive turn in the humanities and particularly in performance studies.



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Chapter Two.

The Development of Spectatorship Theory.



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The Development of Spectatorship Theory.

Can theatre exist without an audience? At least one spectator is needed to make it a performance. So we are left with the actor and spectator. We can thus define the theatre as “what take place between spectator and actor”. All the other things are supplementary – perhaps necessary, but nevertheless supplementary. (Grotowski 32-3)

It could be said that across cultures and throughout time, the audience has always been an essential part of theatrical representation. As Jerzy Grotowski implies in the quotation above, the spectator and the performers are prime elements to define theater; it is an indisputably fact that theater cannot exist without spectators. Several aspects concerning the audience have evolved throughout the years; nowadays, we find a wide spectrum of the audience members regardless their condition, male and female, privilege and working class, or audience looking both popular and intellectual theater. Nevertheless, the spectators’ purpose has remained the same; spectators went—and today still go—to theater primarily to be entertained. However, it should be observed that, within the study of theater, the interest in the spectator have changed dramatically over the last thirty years; Susan Bennet in *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception* (1997) accounts for the different analyses of theater and affirms that during the 1960’s and 1970’s “[c]riticism has remained, by and large, text-oriented” (7). This chapter briefly analyzes how some theorists and practitioners have gradually turned their attention to the spectator, and as a result of this focus, several theories of spectatorship were developed leading to a better understanding of the audience. However, regardless of the progress, today there is still a niche concerning the analysis of spectatorship; therefore, one of

the purposes of this thesis is to attempt to fill it discussing recent discoveries in the cognitive approach to theater, which help to clarify some of the intricate mechanisms that take place on spectatorship. The some theoretical approaches to spectatorship and the introduction of the cognitive approach to spectatorship will be discuss in this chapter as a prelude to the analysis of the different theories studied in the subsequent chapters.

Although relevant figures of authority in literature, philosophy, or aesthetics such as Coleridge, Wittgenstein, Aristotle, or Plato have tackled the subject of audience reception, most critics did not take heed of this fundamental aspect until recently. Academic research on spectatorship in theater during the 20th century led to a few noteworthy contemporary works such as Susan Bennett's *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception* (1997), which remains one of the most extensive studies of the time. Her research is a primary source for those who approach spectatorship and the centrality of her work is evidenced by the numerous references that came after the publication. In *Theatre Audiences*, Bennett deals with other studies focused on specific areas such as Daphna Ben Chaim's *Distance in the Theatre: The Aesthetic of Audience Response* (1984), Jill Dolan's *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (1988), or Patrice Pavis's numerous works on semiology. Apart from these studies on spectatorship, one finds a small amount of research done in this area compared with others such as the *mise en scène*; hence, one might assume that it has been a neglected subject within academia.

As Bruce McConachie points out, perhaps the lack of a solid epistemology, which could make possible accurate and falsifiable assertions about spectating, is one of the main reasons of this absence within theater studies at the end of 20th century (*Engaging* 9). Another hypothesis about such disregard for spectatorship has its roots within the very essence of spectatorship and the misconception of pairing spectating with passivity; spectators are subjects who are nonaligned with the action, which misplaces them outside the theatrical

frame. From this perspective, spectators never become agents, and therefore, they are uninteresting to study. However, as I will demonstrate and illustrate throughout this thesis through several approaches, this assumption about the spectator being a passive subject is incorrect. Numerous concepts that have been misunderstood or disregarded have been brought to light thanks to McConachie's research on spectatorship and the cognitive approach. In order to walk through the process and evolution on spectatorship, I devote this chapter mostly to earlier academic theories (20th century onwards) of the analysis of spectatorship, this is, semiotics and performance theory, considering that it leads to the 21st century cognitive turn in the second section of the chapter in which the cognitive approach is introduced.

In order to trace the origin of the theory of spectatorship in American drama, Susan Bennett points out that since the 1980's two elements helped to bring about the development of the subject matter: the beginning of performance theory and the semiotic approach. Many influential dramatists and performance theorists claimed the importance of a performative analysis instead of a textual analysis.¹⁵ The first hint of a change of paradigm can be found towards the end of the 1970's, some performance theorists—wary of the text-oriented approach that American mainstream theater offered—tried to find alternative theories. Richard Schechner has been one of the most outspoken proponents of performance theory in recent years. Schechner and Mady Schuman published the collection of essays *Readings, Ritual, Play, and Performance* (1976), which as Bennett points out, comprehends

¹⁵ One of the most critical attitudes against a text-oriented approach to theater can be found in Antonin Artaud's *Theater and its Double* (1958) where he states: "This idea of the supremacy of speech in the theater is so deeply rooted in us, and the theater seems to such a degree merely the material reflection of the text, that everything in the theater that exceeds this text, that is not kept within its limits and strictly conditioned by it, seems to us purely a matter of *mise en scene*, and quite inferior in comparison with the text" (68). Although performance theory was formulated years after, Artaud's comments serve to evidence the discontentment of some theorists in previous decades, which foresees future critics towards logocentrism.

[t]heory from non-literary studies—as diverse as Huizinga’s writings on the significance of play, Victor Turner’s work on social dramas and ritual, and Jane Goodall’s research on the behavioral patterns of chimpanzees—is investigated in an attempt to replace paradigms for dramatic theory that are seen as outmoded. (9)

I believe that the complexity of studying spectatorship dwells upon the difficulty of studying the spectators’ minds, emotions, and how they experience a performance. In order to solve the burden imposed by this circumscription, the theory used by Schechner and Schuman tried to construct an approach to performance that was established by borrowing concepts from the social sciences; therefore, performance theory was created as an interdisciplinary study from its very birth. Hence, it follows that the present thesis will be formulated following the interdisciplinary pathway of cognitive studies and performance for the same reasons. Manifestly, on account of the different analyses to theater, which reject text-oriented approaches and understand the subject as a performing art, performance theory served to re-examine several aspects of theater and this made the audience more and more visible.

Resuming Grotowski’s quotation, which opens this chapter, and going back to the issue of the centrality of the spectator, one finds that some contemporary critics such as Jacques Rancière also contemplate the idea of spectator as an essential part of theater. Rancière in *The Emancipated Spectator* (2009) ponders on the spectator and formulates “the paradox of the spectator,” as he states: “there is no theatre without spectator” (2). As he explains this is a paradox easily formulated, but going beyond the obviousness of his statement, he develops and debates on the real meaning of being a spectator. According to Rancière, being a spectator has been considered a negative attribute for two main reasons. The first is the assumption that viewing is the opposite of knowing; the spectator is usually in the dark about the course and process of the performance. The second states that the spectator/observer represents the opposite of acting since she or he usually remains immobile

in her/his seat, therefore, a passive subject. Thus, Rancière affirms that the spectator can be considered “separated from both the capacity to know and the power to act” (2). This assumption would lead us to the conclusion that theater is an illusion, which involves passivity and serves as a preventer of both knowledge and action. These assumptions also derive from Plato’s interpretation of the *pathos* in theater.¹⁶ In order to clarify the role of the spectator in theater Rancière proposes an emancipated spectator who is part of a community in which she/he becomes an agent of an in-group practice. This understanding of theater as a collective spectrum is heir of German Romanticism where a sense of community is emphasized. In this ideal model of spectatorship Rancière suggests that spectators discard passive voyeurism and become active participants. As he states:

Theatre is an assembly in which ordinary people become aware of their situation and discuss their interests, says Brecht following Piscator. It is, claims Artaud, the purifying ritual in which a community is put in possession of its own energies. If theatre thus embodies the living community, as opposed to the illusion of mimesis, it is not surprising that the desire to restore theatre to its essence can draw on the critique of the spectacle. (6)

I consider that Rancière’s thoughts about the spectator will be better designated as ‘audience’ one entity, since he speaks about community. His theory constitutes a paradox since it deals with a complex issue based on some simple premises and general understanding of theater. I use the word ‘simple’ because as he himself states, the paradox of the spectator is based on a simple assumption, and borrowing Christopher B. Balme’s words, “claims regarding the spectator’s centrality are ubiquitous in most fields of theatre studies” (34). Nevertheless, the issue of participation of the spectator in the performance is much more intricate. Rancière believes that drama is action and “emancipation begins when we challenge

¹⁶Plato understands theater as “the place where ignoramuses are invited to see people suffering” (qtd. in Rancière 3).

the opposition between viewing and acting” (13). He understands spectating as an action because the spectator composes and refashions the performance in her/his own way, and therefore, takes the course of action. In this sense, the spectator—as do the actors, playwrights, and directors—sees, feels, and understands the performance. In a similar manner in which Rancière points at the active role of the spectator, cognitive scientists have discovered how empathy operates when viewing actions, such as a performance. Some theories of cognitive science challenge the conceptions of spectator as a passive subject; cognitive empathy demonstrates that the spectator is not that passive, contrary to previous understanding, her/his experience watching a performance is similar to the one experienced by the performer. I will fully develop this cognitive operation in Chapter Four through the analysis of cognitive empathy in performance. Rancière poses another question—which is still studied today through performance theory and also through the recent findings of the cognitive approach—the study of live performance and mediated performance is also used to emphasize his idea of community in theater. He states:

It is high time we examine this idea that the theatre is, in and of itself, a community site. Because living bodies onstage address bodies assembled in the same place, it seems that that is enough to make theatre the vehicle for a sense of community, radically different from the situation of individuals seated in front of a television, or film spectators in front of projected shadows. (16)

The implication of the spectator as an active/passive subject within the performance has been studied by several critics, and towards the end of the 20th century, some unconventional roles for the audience appeared with the study of performance theory. For instance, some theorists following performance theory have affirmed that the audience is an active part of the performance; Jerome Rothenberg explained that “the audience enters the performance arena as participant—or, ideally, the audience disappears as the distinction

between doer and viewer...begins to blur” (qtd. in Bennett 9). Rothenberg’s observation suits those cases such as the community model of Rancière where the involvement of the audience is evident or from a more contemporary point of view, productions such as the *Blue Man Group*, invite the spectator to become part of the performance and actively engage the spectator. Before that, the increased interest in drama and its audience during the 1970s and 1980s was also related to the democratization of the arts. Many theater groups believed in the possibilities of theater as a source of empowerment; theatrical representations were a way to connect people who expressed publicly their ideas in order to urge for political, social, and individual changes. In addition, many spectators got involved in theater groups, such as *At the Foot of the Mountain*, and they shift their position from spectators to performers.¹⁷ This shift from passive spectator to active participant is also manifested in Augusto Boal’s *Theater of the Oppressed* (1979) where he calls for action through the “the *poetics of oppression*” (135, author’s emphasis). As did Rancière, Boal believes that “[s]pectator’ is a bad word!” (134), a consequence of Aristotle’s *Poetics* and dogmatic values imposed on the spectator. Boal affirms: “the spectator no longer delegates power to the characters either to think or to act in his place. The spectator frees himself; he thinks and acts for himself! Theatre is action!” (135).

Theater in the 1970s was starting to be considered a much more complex activity since it involved aspects such as denouncement, enlightenment, or politics and in order to analyze these cultural aspects performance theory made use of sociological studies; other fields that were incorporated into performance theory were anthropology, philosophy, and psychology. Richard Schechner observed that works such as Victor Turner’s essay “Frame, Flow and Reflection: Ritual and Drama as Public Liminality” (1977) or Erving Goffman’s

¹⁷ *At the Foot of the Mountain* was founded and run by Martha Boesing from the 1970’s until the 1980’s. Boesing defines it as “a women’s theater collective” (1011). The theater group was interested not only in representing gender issues but also minorities; they held auditions in black, Asian, and Latino community centers.

The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1959) served to find universal parameters for theater, which illustrated the parallel course of theater and society.¹⁸ It should be noted that the quest for universal parameters is one of the objectives that contemporary cognitive evolutionary critics share with the founders of performance theory and I will discuss this aspect in depth in the next section. From 1967 until 1980 Schechner was the director of “The Performance Group” (TGP) and he conducted sociological experiments in their rehearsals; he states “Rehearsals have become centers of psycho-physical, sociological, and personal research” (Schechner, *Performance* 239). However, from a more updated view of his works, I see that Schechner’s experiments in sociology have evolved and at some point, exploring embodied performance and the interplay between emotions and theater; see a more recent Schechner’s essay “Rasaesthetics” (2001) influenced by Hindu culture involves the study of the Enteric Nervous System, which some researchers considered ‘a second brain,’ located in the stomach, linked to emotions.

Long before the cognitive turn and Schechner’s engagement with the spectator’s and the performer’s emotions, performance theory began to deal—among other issues—with liminality and doubleness of theater. Both aspects provided a different view to the study of theater and to the spectator’s role in the performance. Spectators and performers are involved in what Schechner defines as ‘theatrical frame.’ He explains the idea as follows:

The “theatrical frame” allows spectators to enjoy deep feelings without feeling compelled either to intervene or to avoid witnessing the actions that arouse those feelings. A spectator better not prevent the murders occurring in *Hamlet*. Yet these stage murders are not “less real” but “differently real” than what happens in everyday life. Theater, to be effective, must maintain its double or incomplete presence, as a

¹⁸ In *Performance Theory* (1997) Schechner asserts: “[s]tudies by Victor Turner (1985), Frederick Turner (1985), Melvin Konner (1982), and d’Aquili, Laughlin, and McManus (1979) signal a convergence of anthropological, biological, and aesthetic theory. The focus of this convergence is ritual” (323).

here-and-now performance of there-and-then events. The gap between “here and now” and “there and then” allows an audience to contemplate the action, and to entertain alternatives. Theater is the art of enacting only one of a range of virtual alternatives. It is a luxury unaffordable in ordinary life. (*Performance* 190, author’s emphasis.)

In Chapter Three I will develop this matter and explore conceptual blending theory, which will shed light on doubleness and illusion in theater. What I find most relevant in Schechner’s definition of theatrical frame for the current chapter is the spectator’s role in the performance. Schechner locates the spectator *inside* this frame and consequently claims centrality not only for the performers but also for the spectators.

As well as the studies commented above on performance theory, the semiotic approach to theater also helped to build a central role of the spectator within theater studies; if theater is a sign system, one assumes that someone must read those signs, and this logic places the spectator within the semiotic structure. As I said before, Bennet, in *Theatre Audiences*, considers that semiology, together with performance theory, is one of the crucial aspects that contributed to the development of the analysis of spectatorship. As she points out:

[P]erformance theorists have broadened the scope of what we might consider theatre, a second area of dramatic theory has, in recent years, paid a new attention to the multivalent components of theatre. Semiology has considered these components (not simply what takes place on the stage, or even in the auditorium) and their interaction in the signifying process. (11-2)

Notwithstanding the inclusion of the analysis of the spectator in the semiotic approach, there was still a lack of an extensive theory in early researches; critics focused mainly on dramatic

text and *mise en scène*.¹⁹ As Bennett explains, during the late 1970s and early 1980s several studies of drama such as J.L. Stylan's *Drama, Stage and Audience* (1975) or Keir Elam *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (1980) devoted only a few pages to discuss spectatorship. According to Marvin Carlson, the situation changed from the 1980s onwards with publications such as Régis Durand's collection of essays "*La relation Théâtrale*" (1981) or the special issue of *Poetics Today* "Drama, Theater, Performance: A Semiotic Perspective" (1981) Vol.2 spring 1-272. Both collections of essays are based on Patrice Pavis's *Language of the Stage* (1982) where he explores theatrical reception and reading (see Carlson 507).

Elam's work on semiotics of theater and also drama serves to unify several theories of the field and to trace the origins of this approach. According to him, Otakar Zich's and Jan Mukarovsky's publications of 1931 (see Elam 4) together with the works of some other structuralists, such as members of the Prague School—heir of Russian formalism and Saussurian structural linguistics—laid the foundations of the semiotic approach in the 1930s and 1940s. Ferdinand de Saussure together with Charles Sanders Peirce are considered the fathers of a "comprehensive science of signs" (Elam 1) which deeply influenced literary studies. The main purpose of Elam's research is to include theater and drama within these new parameters, as he states:

The fortunes of the semiotic enterprise in recent years have been especially high in the field of literary studies, above all with regards to poetry and the narrative [...] Theatre and drama, meanwhile, have received considerably less attention, despite the peculiar richness of theatrical communication as a potential area of semiotic investigation. (1)

Mukarovsky and Zich understand performance as a sign system of communication. Although one cannot consider Zich a structuralist, he influenced the work of future semioticians. Mukarovsky makes a structural analysis of the gestures in Charlie Chaplin's performance in

¹⁹ For a more detailed account of the development on the semiotic approach see (Bennett 68).

his essay “An Attempted Structural Analysis of the Phenomenon of the actor” (1931); this analysis points towards a semiotic approach to performance. In the case of Zich’s *Aesthetics of the Art of Drama* (1931) he poses the issue of the interdependent systems that compose theater and refuses to accept the hegemony of the written text.

The semiotic approach, as do performance studies, tries to overcome the supremacy of the text and to distinguish between theater and drama. In order to identify the analytic corpus that she/he is going to study, the semiotician differentiates the performance text from the dramatic text. In this sense, theater is related to the sphere of the performer and the audience while drama is understood as the fiction designed for stage, which is a textual material; thus, the theater sphere is related to the aspects that are “produced *in* the theatre” and drama is related to the aspects that are “composed *for* the theatre” (Elam 2 author’s emphasis). Following Saussurian structural analysis the semiotician identifies the sign as a binary structure composed by the vehicle or signifier and concept or signified. Therefore, as Elam explains, the performance text becomes a macro-sign constituted by little units, this is a network of semiotic units of different cooperative systems. According to him, “The performance text becomes, in this view, a macro-sign, its meaning constituted by its total effect. This approach has the advantages of emphasizing the subordination of all contributory elements to a unified textual whole and of giving due weight to the audience as the ultimate maker of its own meanings.” (5)

Semiotics in theater is based on a hierarchical structure; the Prague theorists agreed that there is a fluidity of this hierarchy. Veltrusky considers that the higher the sign is in this hierarchy the more appealing it is for the spectator. Consequently, the apex of the hierarchy is materialized through the performers, for instance through their gestures. After considering the structural analysis of performance semioticians were concerned with the typology of the signs. Roland Barthes considers theater as a polyphony of voices but it was Tadeus Kowzan

who distinguishes for the first time between ‘natural’ and ‘artificial’ signs based on ‘motivation’. As Elam explains:

[N]atural signs are determined by strictly physical laws whereby signifier and signified are bound in a direct cause-and-effect relationship [...] ‘Artificial’ signs depend upon the intervention of human volition (in the various languages man creates for signaling purposes). The opposition is by no means absolute, since even so-called natural signs require the observer’s ‘motivated’ act of inference in making the link between sign-vehicle and signified. It serves Kowzan, however, in the formulation of a further principle, namely the ‘artificialization’ of the apparently natural sign on stage. [...] This is, in effect, a refinement on the semiotization law: phenomena assume a signifying function on stage to the extent that their relation to what they signify is perceived as being deliberately intended. (13)

Consequently, volition is an essential aspect that semiotics takes into account to analyze the performer’s gestures.

Further studies on the semiotic approach to theater were developed with Pierce’s distinction of icon, index and symbol, which was analyzed later by scholars such as Pavis or Anne Ubersfeld. Ubersfeld explains in her essay “The Pleasure of the Spectator” that many signs are opaque and as a result of this, the spectator does not take pleasure in the spectacle. As Ubersfeld states:

When he is faced with signs which he does not understand, to which he cannot give name (objects, gestures, discourse), which do not refer to anything in his experience, or, more simply, which pose a problem for him, the spectator’s own inventiveness is stimulated: it is up to him to manufacture the relationship between the sign and its intelligibility, or its relationship to the world, even to the point where the spectator has too many demands made on him and withdraws his participation. (133)

As Ubersfeld claims, the communication between spectator and performance on stage can be broken by the obscurity of the signs; as a consequence of this, the spectator cannot take pleasure in the performance and disengage herself/himself. In the hypothetical case of an unsuccessful performance the spectator finds language and discourse obscure perhaps because it is highly symbolic, or the plot line is disrupted confusing her/him. Nevertheless, I understand that the spectator has to possess a certain predisposition, common background, interest, and/or even capacity to find the signs transparent. However, some scholars that analyze audiences using a cognitive approach, reject semiotic analysis for spectatorship. Semiotic theories serve to pave the way to the study of performance; nevertheless, other scholars believe that the semiotic approach is outmoded and based in suppositions that cannot be falsified.

In other words, in the realm of the theatrical spectacle the audience is an essential part of drama, and although it has been studied under different points of view, we still know very little about spectatorship. It is outrageous that in spite of the relevance of theatrical audiences within performance, the spectator's experience is almost an uncharted territory in contrast with other aspects of theater such as acting, directing, or playwriting. The aim of this thesis is to analyze and study the spectators' experience in theater through an examination of how do their minds work and how do they experience performance. In order to accomplish such examination, I will study the theater of Naomi Wallace, since she is one of the leading exponents of contemporary experimental theater. The final purpose of this analysis is to move towards an integrated theory of spectatorship with the paradigm of Enaction. The next section introduces the cognitive approach and the cognitive turn for performance studies, which is the vehicle to reach a more comprehensive understanding the spectatorship.

2.1. The Cognitive Approach: Analyzing A New Paradigm.

Scholars are growing restless or disenchanted with critical and theoretical paradigms that have dominated the field since the 1980s. The field appears to be at a crossroads, with no clear consensus about what rigorous scholarship looks like. The pool of submissions we received, however, suggested that a consensus of sorts does seem to be emerging among a large and diverse group of scholars. We received an outpouring of papers espousing cognitive approaches rooted in scientific research. (Saltz, ix)

As noted in David Z. Saltz's "Editorial Comment: Performance and Cognition," in *Theatre Journal*, a new paradigm has emerged in the field of performance studies. "Performance and Cognition" (2007) is an example of the early repercussions of the cognitive approach. Although Saltz's comments only refer to theater, the cognitive approach is used as a framework for literary studies as well. In theater and performance studies this approach is especially highly regarded by some scholars and practitioners because, apart from representing a change of paradigm, it allows to explore different dimensions of performance. According to Bruce McConachie "Cognitive studies provides a valid framework for understanding the potential truth value of many theories and practices that we presently deploy in theatre and performance studies" (*Performance and Cognition* ix).

Before the introduction of the new paradigm of cognitive science in academia, theories such as semiotics or structuralism were basically the ones preferred to approach theater studies and spectatorship, as seen in the previous section. However, some hypotheses, which involve both lines of thought, have been refuted recently, highlighting the necessity of a new approach to the subject. Since the late 90s some scholars are more and more concerned with the need of a new perspective that brings empirical evidence to the field of humanities or, borrowing Saltz word's in the quotation above, "rigorous scholarship" (ix). Diverse

publications by scholars—such as Bruce McConachie, Rhonda Blair, John Lutterbie, Mick Gordon, Amy Cook, Angus Fletcher, or Naomi Rokotnitz among others—who are using cognitive theories to analyze drama and performance, serve as a starting point to understand the foundations of this new paradigm.

This chapter describes briefly some aspects of “the cognitive turn”—as McConachie and Hart called it in *Performance and Cognition: Theatre Studies and the Cognitive Turn* (2006)—in theater studies, the value of this new approach, an overview of the development of the epistemology, the different uses of this new frame of theory, and some observations on this association between humanists and cognitive scientists. Although, I mainly focus on the analysis of spectatorship for this thesis, there are many other uses of cognitive science in performance studies, which I also mention here such as different analyses of drama or the use of these theories for acting. At the end of this chapter I will also introduce the necessity of establishing a homogeneous paradigm to go towards a more unified theory spectatorship, which I believe it can be provided through Enaction.

At first sight, the combination of cognitive science and drama could seem far-fetched. I agree with McConachie’s observation that the two cultures, humanities and sciences, have been regarding each other with skepticism for many years (*Performance and Cognition* x). Nevertheless, in the past few years we are witnessing a profusion of interdisciplinary studies in several fields. The dialogue between different disciplines has, in some cases, become productive. This is not surprising; as recent theories of anthropology and evolution proved, cooperation is the fastest path to progress and scholars are becoming more aware of this fact. Apart from the benefits of interdisciplinary studies, an intricate question arises when merging disciplines from the so-called two cultures²⁰: where do the researchers set the limits? Some associations can prove to be more *productive* and/or *necessary* than others, these two being

²⁰ C.P Snow defines humanities and sciences as the two cultures.

good criteria to evaluate the adequacy of the study. In the case of theater studies, there was an obvious need of epistemology before the 80s in spectatorship regards, as I stated in the last section. In addition to this emptiness in terms of reliable epistemology, scholars seem to find valuable information and an instrument that opens a wide range of possibilities in the case of literary studies and cognition, as I said at the beginning of this chapter. These studies have served not only for the purpose of future research but also for revisiting the past and making alternative postulations. Furthermore, these interdisciplinary studies, in some cases, work in both ways. Some research conducted in cognitive science used theater or film as a practical domain to develop the theories; this can be noted in the conceptual blending theory of cognitive scientists Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner.²¹ Analyzing spectatorship using concepts developed by cognitive science allows us to access and understand, at least to a limited extent, the spectator's mind, and consequently, to have a better view and understanding of the spectatorial phenomenon.

In spite of the benefits of the new paradigm, change does not come without debate, and the 'incursion' of cognitive science into literary studies generates a wide variety of standpoints. The prospect of a new epistemology shakes the foundations of previous ones; therefore, some scholars might show a cautious distrust towards the cognitive approach. Undoubtedly, changing the paradigms and epistemologies might create a fragile ground for researchers that can be driven to uncertain territories. As Saltz points out:

When celebrating the untapped potential of empirical research, one should be wary of falling into the trap of physicalism, or scientism, which reduces all phenomena to physical facts and privileges scientific methods as the *only* legitimate means of accessing truth. (xii)

²¹ Fauconnier and Turner categorize theater as a case of "representation" in *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities* (2002).

Saltz not only identifies scientism as a common problem for this interdisciplinary pathway but he also believes that some of the “early adopters” of the cognitive approach incurred in what Mikael Stenmark understands as “methodological scientism” (xii). Methodological scientism is “the attempt to extend the use of the methods of natural science to other academic disciplines in such a way that they exclude (or marginalize) previously used methods considered central to these disciplines” (Stenmark qtd. in Saltz, xii). Although one have to bear in mind that any new methodology—relying on science or not—will always challenge the old ones.

In the interdisciplinary postulation of cognitive science and performance studies, the factors noted above—this is, the fragile ground and the limits to be set—are some of the reasons why scholars do not reach an agreement. For instance, according to McConachie, using the cognitive approach “does not mean [that] we must turn ourselves into cognitive scientists” (*Performance and Cognition* xiv). On the contrary, Saltz’s opinion is quite different; although he warns of the dangers of scientism, he believes that scholars at some point will have to rely a great deal on science. As Saltz states:

Theatre and performance studies would need to become, in part, an experimental enterprise—and that would mean some of us would need to become not just admirers of the science, but *scientists in our own right*. We need to learn how to formulate our own research designs and to take responsibility for the results. We do not leave theatre history scholarship to scholars in history departments; why should we leave research into issues of theatrical cognition to neuroscientists or psychologists? This paradigm shift in research method has radical implications for the training we provide our graduate students, and for the sort of work we accept as doctoral dissertations and in our academic journals (xiii, emphasis mine).

These opinions, Saltz's and McConachie's, appear to be opposed, but still, I consider that a plausible solution and reconciliation of both stances is possible. I believe that the recognition of the interconnection of performance studies and cognition is a considerable step forward and it should be incorporated progressively to the curriculum of the academia as Saltz suggests. I also agree with McConachie's observation that we do not have to turn ourselves into cognitive scientists to obtain the answers cognitive science can provide. Regarding Saltz's observations of embracing science and avoid dependability on scientists in order to become scientists "in our own right" (xiv), I do not entirely agree with this vision though I do think there must be a development in humanities research that will require a much more empirical approach, as Saltz states in the quotation above, "a paradigm shift in research" (xiv). I believe that humanists do not have to turn into scientists but we have to resort more frequently to science and get accustomed to work with scientific paradigms and question the theory that has been presented to us.

Some part of the researchers that adopted the cognitive approach do indeed agree in questioning the validity of some premises of semiotics or poststructuralism. Critics such as McConachie started to feel distant from the Continental Philosophical tradition. They urge for change and propose an empirical updated model that conforms to the necessities of contemporary research. As McConachie observes:

In the past, the academy viewed several of our current approaches to knowledge as scientific. Psychologists spoke confidently of the science of Freudian psychoanalysis in the 1950s, and many European semioticians indebted to Saussure referred to their trade as scientific in the 1970s. (Despite the two-cultures divide, we have often depended on the science of strangers.) While these and other questionable methods may still yield some valuable insights, we believe it is time to recognize that

psychoanalysis and semiology are both based in scientifically outmoded assumptions.

(*Performance and Cognition* xiii)

The semiotic approach, as seen in the previous section, analyzes theater as a sign system; some of the adopters of the cognitive approach are at odds with this theory and they believe that to reduce all the aspects of theater into a sign system appears to be unreasonable and simple, as I have already commented. In addition, the binary structure of signifier and signified has reminiscences of structuralism, which some of these scholars prefer to avoid. These critics find in the cognitive approach an adequate system to understand and analyze theater, thus they are moving way from structuralism and poststructuralism. Cognitive science in theater stands against those approaches that cannot be tested and proved.

In addition to the falsifiability in humanist theories, the issue of ‘theory’—or Theory with capital T as some scholars have called it (see Saltz)—in humanist studies has been questioned. Saltz believes the publication of *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* (1996) to be a turning point in the supposed “end of the age of theory” (x), since this publication of essays generated much controversy, as he states:

The essays draw on the philosophy of mind and cognitive science to critique key tenets of Lacanian and Marxists film theory. While Carroll and Bordwell reject many of the premises underlying poststructuralist theories, their brief against theory goes far beyond a quibble with this or that particular unassailable articles of faith without critically interrogating the premises underlying the theories in any systematic way.

(xi)

Saltz’s editorial comment supports the new paradigm by arguing that scholars should not agree with previous theories that have become dogmatic. Certainly, the statement is highly controversial since scholars from several schools have supported and are still strongly relying on a theoretical research. My first impression, as I immerse myself in the new approach, is

that some scholars are discontented with current the panorama in humanities. If one contrasts humanities with other academic fields, the method that most researchers use nowadays is obsolete, as McConachie points out in the quotation above (see *Performance and Cognition* xiii). In other words, some scholars arrived at the conclusion that to add theory on top of more theory could educate scholars and serve as a basis for knowledge, however, it seems ineffective for progressing and contributing to the development of performance studies. All these feelings and perceptions are present in McConachie's statements in the introduction of *Performance and Cognition*, as he states:

Why should we turn to cognitive studies for epistemological justification? Isn't this framework just as good as any other as a road to truth? We argue that it is better. The validity of cognitive studies rests on the empirical assumptions and self-correcting procedures of cognitive science. Like other science, the sciences of the mind and brain offer conclusions that are based on years of experimentation and research. (x)

Nevertheless, among the supporters of cognitive science there was not homogeneity at the beginning of the turn; it was common to encounter different stances concerning the use of the new approach. For instance, in the *Theatre Journal's* monographic "Performance and Cognition," Philip Zarrilli offers an intermediate position where he reconciles phenomenology and cognitive science (see Saltz). Others, as F. Elizabeth Hart, acknowledge the importance of Judith Butler's gender theory as she states, it has generated "fresh and useful analyses of the mechanisms governing processes of cultural construction" (*Performance and Cognition* 30). However, she also understands that since these theories come from poststructuralism they "are predicated on an outmoded and untenable science of language, the Saussurean semiotics that undergirds each of her poststructuralist influences" (*Performance and Cognition* 30-31).

Hart's essay "The Epistemology of Cognitive Studies" (2001) it is a thorough analysis of cognitive literary studies and it serves as a good departing point to understand the cognitive approach to literary studies. In the essay, Hart explains the foundations of the cognitive turn and also comments on different concerns of cognitive criticism. According to Hart, there is a division in cognitive literary studies distinguishing cognitive critics from cognitive evolutionary critics. In the beginning they seem to have had much in common but as Hart explains, "*we can also see how and why they differ*" (328, author's emphasis), as she states:

[S]ome critics, generally those among the cognitive-evolutionary critics, have tended toward epistemological exclusivity, leaning more heavily toward realism and thus more towards essentialism; while others, generally the cognitive critics, have tended toward an integration of viewpoints, leaning closer to relativism or toward the middle of the continuum and thus more toward social constructivity. (328-329)

According to Hart, more critics fall under the category of cognitive literary criticism, as the quotation above reflects, than the cognitive-evolutionary criticism. Furthermore, most cognitive evolutionary critics are against postmodernist and poststructuralist literary theory (see Hart, "The Epistemology of Cognitive Studies"). Hart poses a question about cognitive-evolutionary approach by analyzing what does the designation of 'cognitive' means for several critics; as she explains, cognitive psychology marks the difference between Skinnerian behavioral psychology and cognitive linguistics that differ from generative linguistics.

Apart from these branches of the cognitive approaches, one can also find different concerns which encompass traditional and contemporary approach. As Hart explains:

Some critics, for instance, have chosen to maintain the priorities of earlier literary formalisms with applications of cognitive research to poetics (e.g., Reuven Tsur,

Margaret Freeman, David Miall) and aesthetics (e.g., Elaine Scarry, Patrick Hogan, Ellen Esrock); while others apply this research to the more theory-driven fields of narrative studies (e.g., Mark Turner, David Herman, Robert Storey), rhetoric and composition studies (e.g., Turner, Todd Oakley, Vimala Herman), and historicist and materialist theoretical approaches loosely gathered under the disciplinary rubric of postmodernism (e.g., Ellen Spolsky, Mary Thomas Crane, Lisa Zunshine). (316)

Critics, such as Patrick Hogan, David Miall, or Alan Richardson search for what Hart calls “universal literary practices” (316). Critics like Mark Turner, and Reuven Tsur look for the incorporation of cognitive findings to “mainstream literary discourses” (Hart, Epistemology, 326). Hart includes herself among those critics—like Ellen Spolsky, Mary Thomas Crane, and Lisa Zunshine—who use cognitive and linguistic “to support and refine” (Hart, The Epistemology, 326) postmodernist and poststructuralist literary theory. I understand some of the critics that Hart mentioned in the quotation above can be considered as the founders of the cognitive approach to literary studies as everyday more scholars join them in their interdisciplinary approach.²²

As a result of the aforementioned critics’ works that incorporated cognitive theories to their own field, many scholars have published works on cognition and literature during the last few years. Recent works on cognitive science and literary studies cover a large array of different periods of the history of literature, movements, and places. The authors subject of study are also diverse; from the study of Shakespeare’s plays in works such as Amy Cook’s *Shakespearean Neuroplay: Reinvigorating the Study of Dramatic Texts and Performance through Cognitive Science* (2010), Angus Fletcher’s *Evolving Hamlet: Seventeenth-century English Tragedy and the Ethics of Natural Selection* (2011), or Evelyn B. Tribble’s *Cognition in the Globe: Attention and Memory in Shakespeare’s Theatre* (2011), including Jane Austen

²² It should be noted that in the recent years the cognitive approach to performance studies has united since 2010 because most of these critics have embraced a cognitive approach linked to evolution and culture, as I will discuss in this thesis.

in Joseph Carroll, Jonathan Gottschall, John A. Johnson, and Daniel J. Kruger's *Graphing Jane Austen: The Evolutionary Basis of Literary Meaning* (2012) or Michael A. Winkelman's *A Cognitive Approach to John Donne's Songs and Sonnets* (2013). Other aspects such as performance are analyzed under the cognitive approach in works such as John Lutterbie's *Toward a General Theory of Acting* (2011) or Rhonda Blair's *The Actor, Image, and action: Acting and Cognitive Neuroscience* (2008). Several investigations of drama can be found in works such as Mick Gordon's *Theatre and the Mind* (2010) or Naomi Rokotnitz's *Trusting Performance: A Cognitive Approach to Embodiment in Drama* (2011). Spectatorship is analyzed from a cognitive approach in Bruce McConachie's groundbreaking work *Engaging Audiences: A Cognitive Approach to Spectating in the Theatre* (2008).

I find interesting that among these publications I have not found a cognitive analysis of contemporary American women playwrights. Consequently, I believe that there is a niche for Naomi Wallace's work in the cognitive approach to theater. I also observed that there are not many works on spectatorship apart from McConachie's publications. I find that spectatorship is the aspect of theater that requires most the use of this approach, since it is almost impossible to analyze spectatorship without knowing what happens in the spectators' minds. The study of consciousness, the brain/mind, and the emotions appears as a crucial instrument to understand theatrical reception.

Theater is also a sensuous experience; hence, it involves the senses. In the case of complex plays, such as Naomi Wallace's drama, to give rise to an intellectual and challenging experience is essential to comply with the spectator's expectations. The terms 'sensuous' and 'intellectual' could be seen as irreconcilable in other contexts but this not the case of theater. Cognition comprises both the senses (perception, intuition, and sensation) and the intellect (knowledge, understanding, experience, and thought); these cognitive abilities play a pivotal role when watching a theatrical representation. Besides, other aspects such as

visual recognition, memory, consciousness, or empathy—which can seem a matter of study only reserved for neuropsychologists—are crucial to understanding several aspects of spectatorship. The spectator’s position is not a passive one; despite the fact that she/he has to remain silent, the spectator confronts stimuli and produces diverse neural activity patterns while watching a play. Theater resembles, in cognitive terms, other daily activities; as Bruce McConachie explains, “[because] this engagement happens among live participants in the same space and during the same time, theatre usually has more in common with face-to-face conversations than do other mediated events” (*Engaging Audiences* 1). McConachie also asserts that the spectators are proactive during the performance; according to him, they act and interact more “than the traditions of semiotics, behaviorism, and Freudianism have generally understood” (*Engaging Audiences* 3-4).

The cognitive approach to spectatorship helps us to understand a spectator’s action and interaction when watching a play. Some of this action, in which the spectator is involved, can be involuntary. For instance, the spectator that is engaged by the play is undoubtedly paying attention to the action on stage, however, is she/he doing it consciously? According to some cognitive scientist she/he is not. Attention is a property of consciousness and it cannot be controlled: “Some view consciousness as epiphenomenal—a characteristic of minding that is determined by processes over which we have no control” says McConachie (*Engaging Audiences* 25). McConachie’s postulation goes even further, he states that “perhaps conscious control is simply an illusion” (*Engaging Audiences* 25). Gerald Edelman and Giulio Tononi state that conscious attention is limited—the so-called capacity limitation—since it can only comprehend four to seven pieces of information in a single conscious state (Edelman and Tononi 26). As they explain:

[P]sychologists have shown that [...] we can accurately report just four to seven independent features or “chunks.” For example, if we are shown twelve digits

arranged in four rows of three for fewer than 150 milliseconds, we believe we see all digits, and our retina respond to them, but we can consciously report only four at a time. (26)

Owing to findings in cognitive science, we have a better understanding of how the spectator processes the information that is in front of her/him. Empathy is another cognitive capacity that is highly related to spectatorship, inasmuch as many dramatists tried ‘to avoid’ it; for instance those dramatists who follow the tradition of Bertolt Brecht. As we will see, there is a common misconception of the term ‘empathy,’ which can be clarified thanks to recent studies in neuroscience. More than a decade ago, Vittorio Gallese, Christian Keysers, and Giacomo Rizzolatti published, “A Unifying View of the Basis of Social Cognition” (2004), a revealing study involving the analysis of mirror neurons. They discovered the parallel processes that the brain undergoes when watching an action performed and performing the action itself. Their findings are enormously helpful to understanding spectatorship, since they bring to light the neural experience of auditors and give another perspective on mimesis. I will fully develop and illustrate cognitive empathy in Chapter Four.

Theater is understood as a ‘sensuous experience’ and this assumption provoked different reactions throughout history and some groups even manifested against performances. Mostly, these claims have to do with morality; from Plato’s perception of theater as a representation of feelings, the prohibition of theater claimed by puritans, to the Comstock Law in 1872. However, since the 20th century onwards many producers and playwrights started to challenge the bourgeois moral standards.²³ Morality is also present in several works of the cognitive approach; for instance, Mick Gordon addresses the issue in *Theater and the Mind* (2010). The audience goes to theater to have a pleasurable experience and amuse themselves and this process is carried through the imaginative play of their minds.

²³ For more information see John H. Houchin’s “Overture: Theatrical Censorship from the Puritans to Anthony Comstock” in *Censorship of the American Theatre in the Twentieth Century* (2003).

According to Gordon “all theatre is fundamentally an exploration of human desire [...] Our minds value and rationalise our desires but they also intuit that desire, when unmitigated, is dangerous to life” (48). The mind deals with the information displayed, assimilating the content; as Gordon explains our minds possess “an intuitive sense of right or wrong” (49). Our mind’s urge for narration is regulated through morality, which at the same time is processed through the mechanism of empathy. As Gordon states:

So by presenting characters that personify the many competing voices within our mind, in relation to a motivating theme, and subject to a dominant environment, the theater can offer us a tool in the management of our desires. And it can therefore assist in the maturing of our intuitive, but susceptible, moral minds. (53-3)

McConachie also deals with morality in *Engaging Audiences*; he explains that morality is linked to metaphoric concepts. McConachie comments on evolutionary research that evidences similar foundations of morality across cultures.²⁴ The evolutionary aspect of the cognitive approach also provides an answer to this ethical claims as I study in Chapter Five.

As I stated above, apart from spectatorship, acting is one of the aspects that also benefited from the cognitive approach. Theories such as “Conceptual Blending” proposed by Fauconnier and Turner in *The Way We Think* help to understand, among other issues, the dynamics of acting. Conceptual blending also allows scholars to see how the spectators process the duality of actor/character when watching a play. I agree with McConachie on the complexity of conceptual blending; as he points out, it is a more accurate term to describe the doubleness of theatre than Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s suspension of disbelief (McConachie, *Engaging Audiences* 43); owing to the fact that Coleridge’s term involves a voluntary act of faith and conceptual blending is an unconscious mechanism. I will analyze conceptual

²⁴ For practical examples and detailed information see McConachie’s “Ethics in the Theatre” in *Engaging Audiences*, 151-163.

blending in Chapter Three since this theory helps to enlighten theatrical illusion in spectatorship.

The doubleness of conceptual blending can be explained through our ability to understand many concepts in pairs. The cognitive scientist David R. Olson and Ellen Bialystock assert that many cognitive spatial concepts come in pairs (see McConachie 39). In my opinion, this might be also the reason why we tend to divide mind from body. Traditionally, Cartesian philosophy divided mind and body as separated entities and this convention is still alive in our contemporary society. Nonetheless, some thinkers, such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, recognized that this division was mistaken. The phenomenological philosopher Merleau-Ponty reunited consciousness and body years ago; now, recent cognitive findings—those that reject the theory of the brain/mind as a computer for an embodied mind—have arrived at a similar conclusion. As Hart explains in her essay “Performance, Phenomenology, and the Cognitive Turn” included in *Performance and Cognition*, Merleau-Ponty’s insights are “clearly useful for performance theorists as they strive to conceptualize the *thingness* of theatre and of performance in general” (30, author’s emphasis).

The idea of the embodied mind is a central aspect of the cognitive approach to theater; the mind is part of the body that performs, as a result of this, the mind is directly embedded in both the body and the performance. The notion of the embodied mind is especially relevant to those scholars who analyze acting. John Lutterbie explains that several dramatists also conceived this idea for acting: “Neither Brecht nor Artaud nor Grotowski are invested in maintaining Descartes’ mind/body split. They conceive of the body organically, as an interconnected web of potentials that can be exploited differently for different aims” (*Performance and Cognition* 150). From a cognitive point of view, all the processes that the mind experiences have their corresponding materialization in the body. As Rhonda Blair points out:



What the cognitive sciences ultimately provide is a way of rethinking basic categories such as self, mind, feeling/emotion, narrative, memory, imagination, and the body by demonstrating how all of these are manifestations or aspects of the body. It is all the body, or at least all *of* and *from* the body, and the science provides both material information about how we work and new ways of understanding what it means to be human, thus freeing our imaginations from outmoded or limiting ways of thinking about what it is we do when we perform or make art. (20, author's emphasis)

Blair mentions emotion in the quotation above, some dramatists like Brecht tried to avoid empathy, which he understand as an emotion as I said before, in order to appeal to reason. Emotion is directly linked to the spectator, hence, it is also a subject of study in cognitive science and I study in depth in Chapter Four. According to McConachie "There is now widespread recognition that emotions regulate thinking and behavior in numerous ways, but its precise causes and effects are subject to wide debate" (*Engaging Audiences* 92). As I will explain emotions are an essential part of the analysis of spectatorship.

Guessing the emotion of others is something that we do instinctively, according to some cognitive evolutionary psychologists who study the ability of mind-reading or theory of mind. Lisa Zunshine, in *Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel* (2006), defines theory of mind as "our ability to explain people's behavior in terms of their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and desires" (6). Although Zunshine uses theory of mind to analyze the reader of fiction, some cognitive scientist believe that theory of mind is extensible to theater. The spectator uses this ability, when she/he goes to theater, in order to understand the action that takes place on stage. Zunshine states that "[a]ttributing states of mind is the default way by which we construct and navigate our social environment, incorrect though our attributions frequently are" (6). Zunshine uses the example of seeing a woman who reaches for a glass of water, and owing to our theory of mind, we assume that she is thirsty. However, this person

might not have been thirsty and she just wants to give us this impression. In theater, dramatists know that we have this capacity of inferring—even if they have never heard about the term theory of mind—and they use it to introduce shocking elements in their plays or to distort the plot; for instance, in Zunshine’s example the woman uses her thirst as an excuse to pretend to get more water and to be able to make a phone call. Playing with the spectator’s expectations or taking advantage of our narrative fictional minds are complex processes that seem natural in theater. In the illusion of theater, we attribute to actors—as well as we do with fictional characters in novels— “an inexhaustible repertoire of states of mind” (Zunshine 20). Zunshine points out that theory of mind allows us to understand how these abilities work, which not only enhance our perspective of spectating but also contribute to improving acting, playwriting, or criticism.

Nevertheless, a much more recent approach to cognitive studies contradicts theory of mind. According to McConachie, Enactive theory goes beyond the theory of mind and offers a much more integrated theory of mind and body, and ecology. These three aspects interact continuously in order to make meaning. The new paradigm within the cognitive approach is related to the idea I noted above, where the mind is seen as part of the body. Borrowing Lutterbie’s words, the body is conceived as organically, therefore, there is an embodiment of the mind and the disconnection of the both components together with ecology is no longer contemplated. As McConachie asserts:

In contrast, the Enactive scientists in *The Shared Mind* present compelling evidence that human evolution and psychology already interconnect our species through many shared cognitive and affective processes that make such complex bridging unnecessary. This is because our culture and evolution as a species during the hunter-gatherer era of our history selected for groups and individuals who could “read” each other’s minds easily and instantly to facilitate group cooperation. Primarily through

visual cues, embodied interactions, and straightforward projections, our species can usually understand – or believe that it understands – what conspecifics in homogeneous social groups are intending, doing, and feeling. Likewise, we do not need the mental gymnastics of theories and simulations to understand most of what is going on in a hip-hop piece of music, a baseball game, or even a production of *Waiting for Godot*. (*Evolution*, 103)

Cultural factors—like those studied by social anthropology—are defining features of society, and by extension, of an individual. The world that surrounds us is directly linked to our inner world; even though as subjects we supposedly think subjectively and we try to differentiate our own selves from others, we are not so different from them. Even nowadays, immersed in a globalized culture; we try to preserve our uniqueness-special-different-oneself. Theater, as a socialized and cultural event, can be understood in different terms; the different subjects involved have different cultures and ergo would have different experiences in theater. Logically, when analyzing spectatorship, diversity comes to our mind; we find great evidence of diversity in spectatorship analyses by using the points of view of gender, race, culture, or history. However, as I just stated, we are not so different and when it comes to biological differences the distance among individuals is reduced even more. I am aware that different auditors watching for instance Naomi Wallace's *And I and Silence* will have different experiences. However, I am more interested in similar experiences; that is, not what makes us different but what makes us alike. Some theories of the cognitive approach, such as the study of mirror neurons, manifest that we are connected in a way that we do not fully comprehend yet, but we are beginning to understand.

Thanks to neuropsychology and neuroscience, the functioning of brain and mind is becoming clearer. In addition, cognitive science has been improving in the last years and researchers discovered several revealing findings about communication and social

interaction. This framework is invaluable for performance studies and particularly relevant for the analysis of spectatorship. In the next chapters I will make use of these theories and try to establish a comprehensive view in spectatorship. I want to move away from poststructuralism—the vision and division of the different layers and structures of society and the human being—by providing a unifying approach with Enaction. As I stated above, from a biological perspective the spectators have much more in common than they can perceive, therefore, an analysis within these principles will be one of the purposes of my research.

Spectatorship will be analyzed through Enactive parameters present in theater, taking into account how the spectators process and experience Wallace's plays through conceptual blending capability, empathy, and emotions. One of the failures that McConachie attributes to semiotics is that the analysis under this approach does not distinguish between objects and people; cognitive science has demonstrated that we possess two visual systems, one for the inanimate world and one for human action. Consequently, the spectator does not process 'watching the actors perform' and 'looking at scenery and costuming' in the same way (McConachie 57). The same happens with aural stimuli, which is also embodied and produces neurological responses, thus it cannot be thoroughly analyzed in different terms that do not include cognition. However, visually and sonically are not the only way to experience theatrical representations, as claimed by Richard Schechner, this is a western convention. In "Rasaesthetics" (2001) Schechner studies the emotions that appear in Indian Rasically performances; these emotions are "oral" because they are related to the second brain located in the guts. According to recent studies conducted by Dr. Michael D. Gershon the enteric nervous system [ENS] functions as a brain and possesses its own nervous system.

Consciousness is a central element in the analysis of the spectator for obvious reasons; as I stated above, the study of the spectator's cognitive capabilities will serve as a gate to the inner world of the auditors and it will clarify how the spectators experience a theatrical event.

In the case of the analysis of consciousness, I find the use of empirical sources especially justified. The understanding of foundational cognitive processes, such as attention, memory, and imaginative play, unravel—at least to some extent—the complexity of the spectator’s mind. These universal parameters have been proved to be ubiquitous and global regardless of cultural differences. Another inborn capacity that involves the theater is the experience of emotions. Interestingly, some psychologists affirm that there is a clear distinction of the basic emotions in humans. According to Paul Ekman some facial expressions can be also universally recognized (see Rokotnitz). However, to analyze emotions, in Chapter Four I will draw on Giovanna Colombetti’s affective science and study of emotional episodes, which is a recent study within the parameters of Enaction.

In order to have an overall impression of the recent findings of the cognitive approach to performance literature studies, this chapter has analyzed the current approaches to the subject of cognition and performance. As I explained above, the cognitive approach to literature and performance studies emerged to renew the paradigm and epistemology of the humanities. Some scholars believe that the cognitive turn will provide the falsifiability that current humanist studies lack. Furthermore, the debate about the hegemony of theory and the search for empiric paradigms that can facilitate research contribute to the development of this paradigm, which should be approached carefully in order to avoid scientism. The new postulations of cognitive science open an interdisciplinary pathway. The cognitive approach introduced evidence, which for some scholars jeopardizes hypothesis based on semiotics and poststructuralism. Critics, like F. Elizabeth Hart, find balance between old frameworks and contemporary discoveries. As I briefly schematize in this chapter, the cognitive approach has been used to analyze drama, acting, spectatorship, and several aspects of performance. Though the cognitive approach has been used in different fields, this thesis will focus on the theories that concern the analysis of spectatorship. Bruce McConachie’s works on

spectatorship will be the main basis for this thesis. I find that McConachie opens the path to further research in the field, which as a new pathway is almost an uncharted territory. Additionally, I consider that in this cognitive turn, plays of contemporary American women playwrights, such as Naomi Wallace, have to be represented. The next chapter is an introduction to the conceptual integration theory, which will serve as a theoretical ground of cognitive approach to spectatorship and basis for Naomi Wallace's plays analysis. The study of conceptual blending is one of the most significant aspects of cognition that help to analyze and understand how theatrical reception works.



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Chapter Three. The Centrality of Conceptual Integration in Theater: A Network Model for the Scene.



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The Centrality of Conceptual Integration in Theater: A Network Model for the Scene.

Contemporary audiences have the opportunity to choose within a wide range of very different experiences on American theater, from the most mainstream performances to the most experimental theater. For that reason, off-Broadway theater often exceeds the expectations of those spectators who are not familiarized with this kind of experience. As seen in Chapter One, not all spectators understand Naomi Wallace's drama; this may be seen as a consequence of several aspects that derive from the plots of her plays or her *mise en scène* that I have already explored in the critical analysis of some of her plays. One of my suggestions, among other hypotheses I formulate in the next chapters, is that in order to understand what is happening on stage the spectator has to blend many different realities in her/his mind. In this regard, the spectator might find herself/himself lost in the blends due to Wallace's innovative dramatic techniques.

Theater, as a performed piece of fiction, cannot be conceived without the spectators' cognitive capability that enables them to distinguish between fiction and reality. Furthermore, this capability plays a crucial role in the spectator's engagement, where the audience, as traditionally understood in Coleridge's terms, suspends its disbelief. However, recent discoveries in the field of cognitive science point towards Coleridge's assumption, of the audience's will to suspend its disbelief, as an inaccurate answer to describe the process that takes place in audience reception. The cognitive scientists Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner study this insight, as well as other concerns, and develop their Conceptual Blending theory explained in *The Way we Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities* (2002). Fauconnier and Turner explain how blending operates and the relevance

of this cognitive unconscious operation used extensively in our daily basic experience. This chapter will illustrate an understanding of how Wallace's vision of complex characters portraying chaos is processed in the spectators' minds through the lens of cognitive science and Fauconnier and Turner's theories about blends and embodied experiences.

Fauconnier and Turner comment in the "Preface" of the *The Way We Think* the turning point in the history of evolution that enabled the cognitive ability of conceptual blending. As they state:

FIFTY THOUSAND YEARS AGO,²⁵ more or less, during the Upper Paleolithic Age, our ancestors began the most spectacular advance in human history [...] The archeological record suggests that during the Upper Paleolithic, humans developed an unprecedented ability to innovate. They acquired a modern human imagination, which gave them the ability to invent new concepts and to assemble new and dynamic mental patterns [...] Human beings developed art, science, religion, culture, sophisticated tools, and language. (v, authors' capital letters.)

As stated above, the emergence of culture has its roots in the development of the ability to innovate, as well as other biocultural factors like play,²⁶ which are essential to performance. According to Fauconnier and Turner, a significant evolutionary change that led to conceptual blending was the human capability of running off-line cognitive simulations. This capability functions as an economical resource of the mind, and thanks to it, evolution does not rely on natural selection every time a choice is in the path of a subject. As Fauconnier and Turner explain:

²⁵ The date is approximate as some researchers have pointed out; Bruce McConachie states that "the dating is still being worked out in the archaeological record" (see McConachie's *Evolution, Cognition, and Performance* (2015) pp. 45.

²⁶ For an evolutionary approach on play and performance see Bruce McConachie's *Evolution, Cognition, and Performance* (2015) pp. 35-44. The term bioculture appears in McConachie's evolutionary study of performance where culture and biological studies integrate.

Human beings can run several scenarios, mentally check the outcomes, and make choices, all in minutes rather than generations. Conceiving complicated new scenarios in nearly any domain while making complicated new inferences and choices is now something that can be run as part of mental and cultural life. (217)

Conceptual blending, also known as conceptual integration, is fundamental to everyday mental actions; as the fathers of this theory suggest, in most of the cases, operations that can be simple at first sight—such as analogies or mental images—are the hardest to explain. In performance all these operations take place, and I would dare to affirm that this theory is the cornerstone of analysis of spectatorship in theater.

In order to illustrate how conceptual blending operates, Fauconnier and Turner include the descriptive narration of the Buddhist Monk riddle.²⁷ The different stages involved in solving the following riddle show how our mind blends when we formulate a hypothesis. As they state:

A Buddhist Monk begins at dawn one day walking up a mountain, reaches the top at sunset, meditates at the top for several days until one dawn when he begins to walk back to the foot of the mountain, which he reaches at sunset. Make no assumptions about his starting or stopping or about his pace during the trips. Riddle: Is there a place on the path that the monk occupies at the same hour of the day on the two separate journeys? (39)

The authors advise to try to solve the riddle first of all, and then read the explanation since this facilitates a phenomenological approach for the reader. If one has tried to solve the riddle realizes that it is necessary to run several scenarios to reach the solution. Fauconnier and Turner designate those scenarios that help us to walk through the different stages and finally unravel the enigma as “Mental Spaces.” The definition given by the cognitive scientists is

²⁷ The Buddhist Monk riddle is presented by Arthur Koestler in *The Act of Creation* (1964), but he attributes the origin to Carl Dunker. Fauconnier and Turner present a shorter version of the riddle in the quotation above.

that mental spaces “are small conceptual packets constructed as we think and talk, for purposes of local understanding and action” (40).

The first mental space one will formulate in this riddle is composed of two input spaces; this is what I shall call ‘scenario a’ with the monk going upwards and ‘scenario b’ with the monk going downwards. The second logical mental space is the one where both counterparts are connecting the information given, elements such as space, time, individual, which Fauconnier and Turner call “Cross-Space Mapping.” The third mental space created is the “Generic Space,” which connects both inputs with the elements that the previous stages have in common and those are analyzed and compared in parallel. Eventually, both input spaces will blend in the fourth mental space, logically called “the blend,” where each of the inputs are projected; for instance into one mountain, one journey, and one path. In this blend, the monk is not projected as only one person but as two different entities, this is called “Selective Projection.” The projection is understood as selective because the blend can include elements of both counterparts or discards some other elements from the inputs as means to make the blend work. One is able to solve the riddle by picturing a monk going downwards and another monk going upwards on the same mountain, consequently, they have to meet at some point. I present here this sample of a “Conceptual integration network” with two purposes: the first one is to illustrate and introduce the basic mental spaces of conceptual blending theory and the second one is to establish an analogy further in this chapter of how these spaces operate in spectators. It should be noted that these mental spaces have the same schema as if we analyze how spectators experience performance, which I will illustrate later on the present chapter.

Conceptual blending theory, as I indicated at the beginning of this chapter, is a much more accurate answer to spectating than the one provided by Coleridge in his theory of suspension of disbelief. In *Engaging Audiences* Bruce McConachie points out the differences

between Coleridge's theory and Fauconnier and Turner's findings. McConachie approaches the issue taking into account a significant aspect of spectating, which is the audience's agency. I agree with McConachie and my view is that Coleridge's approach reduces the spectator/reader's agency. Coleridge gives the spectator a role that relies on acceptance or even passivity, and as we will see, spectating is not a matter of willing to believe or disbelieve. On the contrary, it is a matter of the spectator's capability to be inside the blend and outside the blend voluntarily. As McConachie affirms:

Coleridge telling us to momentarily suspend our skepticism that Edmund Kean or Kenneth Branagh cannot really be Hamlet suggests that theatrical believability occurs when the spectator willingly surrenders a part of his/her agency. This leaves the impression that involvement in a good performance is akin to a religious experience touched by God. [...] According to Coleridge, spectators oscillate between faith and skepticism while watching a performance. [...] Spectators are active agents in the process of combining actors and characters into blended actor/characters. This is not an extraordinary ability involving a leap of faith; children playing house have the same capability. (*Engaging Audiences* 43-4)

As McConachie ponders, Coleridge's logic cannot be applied to theater, besides, I believe that this reasoning is obsolete and nowadays scholars have access to some more accurate theories to analyze the phenomenon of spectating. Even so, in order to be fair, we have to acknowledge that this is a 19th century model of analysis, which worked according to the standards of the time. However, I have a problem in seeing this theory working in a secular and skeptical contemporary society. Thus, I consider that conceptual blending is extremely valuable to comprehend the phenomenon of spectating because it offers a solid epistemology.

Fauconnier and Turner assert that every time we "PRETEND, IMITATE, LIE, fantasize, deceive, delude, consider alternatives, simulate, make models, and propose

hypotheses” (authors’ capital letters, 217), we rely on our capacity for advanced conceptual integration. Furthermore, this proves that “our species has an extraordinary ability to operate mentally on the unreal” (Fauconnier and Turner, 217). If we look closer to those conceptual integration abilities, we will find that several of the aforementioned operations are required to make and experience theater. With this purpose, Fauconnier and Turner’s theory on the conceptual integration can be narrowed down and applied specifically to performance. McConachie explains that “[e]mbodiment, rehearsing, performing, and enjoying an imagined action as a part of play makes performance part of a larger cognitive category that has been termed *subjunctive action*” (*Evolution* 44, emphasis mine). ‘Play’ is understood in this quotation from an evolutionary point of view, that is, how our ancestors moved from ‘play’ to ‘performance’ and that resulted in theater, among other forms of performances. According to Gerald Edelman, engaging in a subjunctive action can only be possible for animals with a high-order of consciousness such as humans. As McConachie adds:

Whenever people construct conditional phrases, consider alternative possibilities, fantasize about the past or the future, build models to explore how something might work, propose hypotheses about a scientific experiment, or perform a dramatic fiction for an audience, they are engaging in subjunctive action. (*Evolution* 44)

Subjunctive action in theater is not exclusively limited to the performance in the show; for instance, Stanislavsky also uses “the magic if” for rehearsals, where the actors think about how would the characters behave under certain circumstances in order to invest in their acting (see McConachie, *Evolution* 45). Subjunctive performance is possible thanks to our cognitive capability of blending; as we will see, conceptual blending plays an essential role in the different events that compose theater as performance, rehearsals, and spectating. Moreover, beyond this fact, McConachie asserts that even culture, as we know it, would be impossible without subjunctive thought.

Evidently, subjunctive thought is a key element to analyze the spectator's understanding of theater; if the spectator could not use her/his imagination to see further than the non-fictional elements of the performance, theater would simply not make sense. Taking into account that the subjunctive thought in performance operates through the cognitive capability of conceptual blending, when the audience blends several aspects of the performance, we have to acknowledge that those blends are possible thanks to what Fauconnier and Turner understand as 'counterfactual thinking.' As I suggest in Chapter One, the illusion of theater is one of the most analyzed aspects of theater by several renowned critics such as Artaud. However, leaving aside the phenomenological or theoretical approach of earlier critical analysis, I believe that such doubleness can be accurately analyzed and explained in terms of conceptual integration. Traditionally, theater has been understood as an event where the spectator moves within different frames: one of them is the fiction (fictional world), in which she/he is engaged, and the other is the event that takes place (real/actual world). In cognitive terms we might ask ourselves how is such a thing possible and what is the process that enables the spectator to handle this complicated structure. The answer to these questions relies on human's capability to play with counterfactuals.

The cognitive capacity of modern humans beings is the means that allows us to run counterfactual thinking and operate on the unreal. The Buddhist Monk riddle commented on before is an example of a counterfactual where we consider a hypothesis and evaluate the different scenarios. In the theater we use exactly the same mechanism; as spectators we blend the actual performance with a fictional world, an enacted story. Our capability of counterfactual thinking enables us to distinguish between facts and counterfactuals and to live in the blend during the performance; note McConachie's assertion "theatre audiences oscillate between counterfactual blends and perceptions of their actual, material circumstances" (*Engaging* 50).

In fact, theater is composed of several blends, from the facts and the counterfactuals of the event and the performance respectively which I just commented, through the duplicity of the actors and the characters, to the different blends required by the configuration of the plot and/or *mise en scène*, etcetera, our mind is constantly blending. There are particular cases such as the one in McConachie's quotation about Coleridge's theory commented before, where a performance by Kenneth Branagh will mean that the spectator is able to recognize both a well-known actor and his character. In this example, we understand that Branagh and Hamlet are counterparts in what Fauconnier and Turner understand as a case of representation; this is when the spectator blends the identity of Branagh/Hamlet or actor/character during the counterfactual scenario, which is the performance. We should observe that the spectator can only "see" one counterpart or the other but not both at the same time, in other words, our brain will process one at a time. Also, it should be noted that the blend is made on a subconscious level but the spectator can voluntarily shift from one counterpart to the other making use of her/his agency. As Fauconnier and Turner state "[t]he spectator can decompress the blend to recognize outer-space relations between these input spaces. As when we notice that the actor has not quite got the accent right or Hamlet trips over the stage lights" (266). The spectator's ability to decompress the blend validates the fact that the audience is not passive in cognitive terms.²⁸ Besides, in the next chapter I will explain how cognitive empathy works in the spectator's mind, which will reinforce this point.

Fauconnier and Turner consider the case of dramatic performance in their section "Drama Connectors," and they explain this phenomenon:

Dramatic performances are deliberate blends of a living person with an identity. They give us a living person in one input and a different living person, an actor, in another.

The person on stage is a blend of these two. The character portrayed may of course be

²⁸ See an overview of some previous theories in Chapter One of this thesis.

entirely fictional, but *there is still a space, a fictional one, in which that person is alive*. In the blend, the person sounds and moves like the actor and is where the actor is, but the actor in her performance tries to accept projections from the character portrayed, and so modifies her language, appearance, dress, attitudes, and gestures. (266, my emphasis)

Fauconnier and Turner's definition of the dramatic performance shows that the spectator sees the counterfactual phenomenon by blending the characters and the performers. Beyond this statement, it should be noted that although the character is moving within a fictional space, the character is recognized as "alive" by the audience and I believe that owing to this fact, some spectators are unable to sympathize with Naomi Wallace's drama. Her characters are usually controversial, which generates a conflict in the way spectators understand them; taking for granted that her characters are alive is paradoxical for the spectator, who cannot cope with such 'aliveness' and a tendentious experience of the play.

One of the strongest examples can be found in her last play *Night is a Room* (2015). *Night* opens with the promise of a meeting between an elderly mother, Doré, and the son she gave for adoption forty years previously, Marcus. In this first scene we only see the conversation between Doré and Marcus's wife Liana. Liana is a wealthy, successful, condescending businesswoman who wants to arrange a meeting between Doré and Marcus. There is a leap ahead in time in the next scene where the married couple is waiting for Doré's visit. The spectator is supposed to fill the gap and to take for granted that they are on good terms now since it can be noted that the reunited mother and son are close now and visit each other frequently. This ellipsis between the scenes and the beginning of the second scene, where the married couple have sexual intercourse, speak with their daughter on the phone, and prepare the visit of Doré, are used by Wallace to play with spectators' expectations. With such a familiar setting, the spectator is not ready for the events that come about in this scene;

Doré and Marcus announce that they are having an affair. The affair between mother and son is extremely shocking for the audience; I personally attended the production of the Signature Theater in New York in December 2015 and I witnessed how several members of the audience were commenting at the end of the first act that they could not believe what had just happened on stage and some felt extremely overwhelmed. I will come back to this particular moment in the Chapter Six to discuss an Enactive approach to Wallace's plays.

Nevertheless, in the present chapter the most relevant aspect for an analysis of the spectator's conceptual integration is the concept that places characters as 'alive' in the spectator's mind. The turning point of *Night is a Room* disturbed some members of the audience that could not cope with the circumstances of a mother having a sexual relationship with her son, even though they were perfectly aware of their position as spectators and fictionality of the situation. Perhaps there are some other circumstances of the play, besides the mother-son's love affair, upsetting part of the audience. Wallace builds the first scene to induce the audience to have certain impressions, she creates the character of Liana as a young sophisticated, attractive, controlling, and sexual woman to create an impact that contrasts with the character of Doré, a plain, old woman, and mistakenly assumed as asexual. My analysis of the audience's reaction is based on the shock effect on some spectators, which I suppose, derives from the incestuous relationship, however, I found myself questioning if it has also something to do with the fact that Marcus is leaving his young wife for an older woman. At a certain point, I wonder what would be the audience's standpoint if the mother were not only a stranger to Marcus but also a stereotypical, highly sexual and attractive femme fatale—commonly known as a “cougar”—instead of a naïve British granny who takes care of her garden. In that case, for all I know, it is plausible that in our patriarchal, sexually political, and narcissistic society maybe the incest angle would partially fade away, but that is a different matter. The most revealing angle on the plot is how Wallace wittily manages to

disturb the audience. Regardless of which of the reasons discomfort the audience the most, the perspective on the spectator's reaction is conspicuous; the spectator is upset because she/he has understood and has experienced for a moment the performance as real, which consequently awakes an emotional response to it. If one scrutinizes the event/play out of the blend and the fictional situation created/performed, there is no actual incest neither is an apparently perfect marriage broken in real life, so it follows that one might wonder why the spectator experiences such a strong disconcertion even knowing that she/he is witnessing fiction.

The spectator cannot avoid living in the blend of the performance, which causes the emotions mentioned above and/or even other different emotions that can vary depending on the subject/spectator. Living in the blend goes beyond recognizing the aforementioned duality of character/performer or fact/fiction; it involves a much more active role towards the play and it requires a greater level of engagement than merely compressing and decompressing the blend. As Fauconnier and Turner explain, the power of living in the blend has a central role in theatrical performance. As they state:

The importance and power of living in the blend would be hard to overestimate. [...] We also live in the blend when we use watches and gauges and complex numbers, but in these cases the blend is a product of cultural evolution, and the inputs and their outer-space relations are much more accessible. In drama, the ability to live in the blend provides motive for the entire activity. These advanced double-scope blends, perfectly natural for human beings but apparently unavailable to other species. (267)

Thanks to this capability of double-scope, the spectator is at this point completely engaged with the performance and consequently emotionally affected; this emotion can be positive or negative; as I will explain in the next chapter, empathy is not always the result of a positive feeling. Thus, one cannot deny the participation in the event on the part of the spectator, as

stated in Chapter Two of this thesis, there is no theater without a spectator and these evidences show not only a pivotal role in performance but also an active position towards the performance. Counterfactuals play an important role in the spectator's reality; this is what Fauconnier and Turner understand as the double scope of the blending. They analyze a case of study conducted in Britain in the 1980s, in which the emotion studied was depression. The subjects of study purchased lottery tickets expressing "no hope of winning and rationally declared that they were buying the ticket just for fun" (231). Once they lost, the victims of 'lottery depression' experienced those symptoms of severe loss, such as those of a destruction of a house or similar. The therapists concluded that during the two week period between the purchase of the ticket and the announcement of the winner they had been fantasizing consciously or unconsciously about what they will do with the prize. Thereafter, the drawing of the winner makes them lose everything they had in their fantasy. Fauconnier and Turner explain that "[t]he amazing thing is that the fantasy world seems to have had profound effects on the psychological reality of the real world, given that the patients had no delusions about the odds of winning, and said so clearly" (231). The subjects constructed a hypothetical blend and they lived in the blend for several weeks. Living in the blend and the engagement of the audience are also part of their cognitive capability of empathy; empathy and conceptual integration are intertwined and help the spectator to experience the performance. If the spectator would lack the cognitive capability of empathy, I assume that conceptual integration at this level cannot take place, in other words, one facilitates the other.

3.1. Conceptual Blends in *And I and Silence* (2010) and *The War Boys* (1993).

Apart from the spectator's capability to live in the blend, the subject has to make sense of what is happening on stage. Conceptual blending or conceptual integration²⁹ enables the spectator to understand the performance. Naomi Wallace's drama, as I have already studied in Chapter One, is highly complex in some aspects, as her theatrical devices are experimental and sometimes shocking for the audience; in those cases conceptual integration is crucial to understand her drama. *Night is a Room* (2015) is controversial and difficult for the audience to process, but it is not an exception; her plays *And I and Silence* (2010) and *The War Boys* (1993) portray certain elements that are highly symbolic, as well as, abstract concepts that can be misunderstood. I find both of the plays useful to illustrate the functioning of conceptual blending. As far as we know, the use of the experimental techniques is related to imagination, in the case of conceptual integration, as I have pointed out, this imaginary spectrum take place when we pretend, imitate, fantasize, and simulate among other cognitive operations that involve subjunctive thought.

Comparing the opening scene of *And I and Silence*, I find that the piece plays with the spectator's expectations in a different way than *Night is a Room*. The stage directions are as follows:

In a small room. Jamie and Dee are facing one another, poised, serious. Their room is made up of a minimum of furniture. Jamie is holding a rolled-up newspaper [...]

²⁹ I use both terms indistinctively throughout this thesis. I find that it is helpful to use conceptual blending when we are specifically speaking about a blend, nevertheless, the term integration is very elucidating since our mind integrates in order to make meaning in terms of sense making.

Suddenly Dee attacks Jaime. At first it seems Dee wants to hurt her, but then we realize she wants to tickle her. (And I and Silence 8)

The audience probably expects an act of aggression towards Jaime, even knowing the key details of the plot—segregation, racial tension, two women in jail, etc.—can be misleading and the spectators trying to fill the gaps of this first scene would probably think that the two women are about to fight in the prison and they will witness of an act of aggression. In terms of scenery it is important to acknowledge that the timeline of the play moves backwards and forwards and the last scene runs parallel; Wallace uses the space as an aesthetical resource, the room that the women share in the present is similar to the cell that they have in the past. The terms chosen by the playwright should be also noted “poised,” “serious,” “minimum of furniture;” the spectator, knowing some aspects of the play, probably assumes that these women are in a cell. In order to understand the very beginning of the play, the spectator has to use her/his imagination, fantasize, and use subjunctive thought; some questions might come into place such as what if she hits her? Are they in prison? Is this the consequence of the racial tension inside prison? among other concerns.

Subjunctive thought is an essential parte of the play not only because its importance in audience reception; the protagonists are constantly using their imagination and hypothesizing. Jamie and Dee become close friends in prison and several scenes reveal how the young women forge their plan to survive outside. They decided that they would become “parlourmaids” (27) once they are out, that being so, they spend their time inside training for their future position. This training is presented more as a charade, a game or playing house; they sing songs, use rhythmical movements, impersonate the employers, and dream about the future. As I stated above, conceptual blending runs every time we fantasize, pretend or consider hypothesis, thus most of the scenes that take place in the past rely heavily on blending. As the following scene shows:

The bell sound sharply

Young Dee Next time I come, can we polish the silver?

Young Jamie Sure.

Young Dee Is it beautiful, the silver?

Young Jamie Vases and mirrors and candelabras.

Young Dee Can-del-a ... bras.

Young Jamie You'll have to know how to say it. 'Ma'am, I've finished polishing the candelabras. [...]

Young Dee Jamie. I've never been so -

Young Jamie Me either.

Young Dee Even when I was out there.

Young Jamie Me either.

Young Dee In here it's like hell but all I feel now is –

Young Jamie – happy. (52)

Ironically, the characters' life outside is more complicated than their time in prison and the fairy tale is over once they are force to contemplate a life in the segregated USA of the 1950s. The women encounter many troubles on account of racism and their friendship is not well regarded by society. Moreover, their position as servants also contributes to their precarious and isolated existence. Jamie and Dee suffer abuse from their employers. Jamie puts an emphasis on what she calls "the line" (22) and encourages Dee to respect this limit, even though she undergoes abuse both in jail and the outside. In the play, such moments of abuse are a part of the story told but they are not staged, instead they are avoided through several theatrical devices. Wallace, as many other contemporary women playwrights, uses the narration of the character abused to communicate to the audience what happened without enacting the abuse on stage. There are several conversations of the women throughout the

play commenting on their previous experiences. In some scenes they are remembering, such as when the guard throws Jamie's food to the floor, young Dee says "Me. I would have let it lay. Eight times he knocked that bowl outta your hands. I counted. And you picked it up eight times till Mr. Crackle gave in. That's the kind of friend I want" (14). Other uses of this device are when the characters are having a conversation and this also reveals new details to the audience, as we heard when Jamie's employer molested her, Dee says "yes you did. You let them touch you [...] they squeezed you [...] they rubbed you" and Jamie responds "Only on top of my dress. Not even under it [...] Under the cloth I was safe" (57). As a consequence of this ellipsis, in both of these examples the spectator has to use her/his imagination to fill the gap in the timeline of the play; this absence is processed through conceptual integration by virtually putting on stage a subjunctive scene that does not appear at all. However, the most challenging part for spectators in these terms is when Wallace uses what I call "stream of personae" (see definition explained in Chapter One). This theatrical device is also used to avoid directly enacting the abuses, instead, it consists in reenacting; the abuse is in fact present on stage but the method to not directly deal with it is to reenact it by characters that are different than the abusers and it is also represented in a different and abstract way. The problem for the average spectator is that this experimental device requires understanding several blends and some spectators at a certain level lost the point. One of the many examples in her drama is "Scene Nine" of *And I and Silence*, where Dee explains how her master abused her because she was afraid to lose her job, since the women are on the verge of starvation. Jamie takes the role of the master and they both reenact the episode of the abuse:

Jamie You tell me how [...] Show me how, Miss Dee. You damn well show me.

Dee slowly sinks to her knees.

Dee No, sir

Jamie hits her again with the stick.

Jamie I only take yes in this house. [...] This is the last time I'm asking you.

Dee I need this job, sir.

Jamie Then do as I say. [...] Do as I say!

Dee But there's a line. Years and years we learn it. Me and Jamie. [...]

Jamie Open my damn belt!

Dee Yes.

Jamie strikes her again, harder. After a moment. Dee very slowly begins to open the belt on Jamie's dress. Now Jamie speaks as herself. (58-9)

In order to understand this scene, the spectator has to use her/his cognitive capability of conceptual blending, moreover, the spectator will not encounter one blend but several blends. In the first place, the spectator is involved in the reception of a theatrical performance with all the mental activity that this involves concerning the blends: fact/fiction, performers/characters, props/actual objects, etcetera. In the second place, this particular scene prompts that the spectators to find themselves entangled in a complicated form of expression to portray the abuse, such as the timeline disruption by the reenacting of a previous event. In the third place, inside the fiction, the characters are imitating, which is part of the actions Fauconnier and Turner consider to be dependent on our conceptual blending capability. It follows that this scene takes me back to the Buddhist Monk riddle and the schema of its mental spaces. As we will see, there is a substantial similarity in the schema of the riddle proposed by Fauconnier and Tuner and the schema of our playwright's scene. The first mental space, as happens in the riddle, is composed of two input spaces; 'scenario a' has Jamie and Dee at home after the latter returns from her work as a maid and 'scenario b' is the reenactment of the abuse where the master abuses Dee. The second mental space is where the counterparts are connected and we see the differences and sameness of both spaces, such as two people in a room but different gender and social status in scenario b. The third mental

space, the generic space is when the spectator connects both inputs of the previous mental space and analyzes them in parallel; that is, as spectators we know that Jamie is reenacting, she is both the master and Jamie. The fourth mental space is the blend, where we in truth see what is happening on stage, the purpose of the performance; the spectator process the scene as a fusion of the two mental spaces we find at first, and turns them into one, one scene, one thread of action, one story; although its nature is metanarrative and it is making reference to a previous event. The conceptual integration network we found here, logically shares the structure of the Buddhist monk riddle proposed by Fauconnier and Turner, since it is all reduced to the same capability, which is used to understand both the riddle and Wallace's scene.

Despite the fact that the conceptual integration network presented above is the ideal case in which the spectator fully engages and understands the scene of the play, I find it necessary to analyze to what extent this felicitous scenario is always possible. As I analyze in Chapter One, not all the spectators of Wallace's plays experience a positive reaction towards the plays; I quote some reviews (see James and Oselund in Chapter One): one is a review of *And I and Silence* where the reviewer states that the play seems unfinished and that there is a lack of background. If we ask the dramatist about her play, I assume she would state that—although she wants the audience to keep on thinking about the play—her work is finished and closed; otherwise she would not send it to production, or indeed, started a new play. Most likely, her intention was to present *And I and Silence* as it is now being performed and published. In that case, it is understandable to assume that the reviewer did not fully comprehend all the elements that were relevant to the story. The situation is logical, inasmuch as we have seen above; the conceptual network integration is complex because it intertwines with other blends. Fauconnier and Turner explain that “creating advanced blends typically requires decompressing intermediate ones” (393). If the spectator does not

decompress those intermediate blends, understanding is impossible. In the case of Dee's abuse scene, there is a blend that involves different elements, time, space, and identity, if the reviewer fails in locating one of those the meaning of the piece seems obscure. The conceptual integration network of this scene is highly advanced, since Wallace's stream of personae involves a polyphony of voices at relevant moments of the performance, and this intense introspection of the characters is not easily understood by the average spectator. Moreover, the fact that the scene moves backwards in both time and space brings about an intricate analysis for the spectator. Hence, the previous part of the story is not in the spectators' mind, that is, is not part of their memories, which causes some members of the audience to be unable to make the connections and blends. If there were a previous scene with the master personified and behaving abusively or at least hinting towards inappropriate behavior, the spectator most likely would be able to make the connections. Filling the gaps is what can be troublesome for some, and as stated earlier, the abusers in Wallace's plays are left frequently offstage. As Fauconnier and Turner explain:

To do advanced conceptual integration, we need the ability to integrate and compress over inputs that are often very different and highly separated in time and space. [...] Human memory appears to be superb both at providing simultaneous activation of quite different inputs and offering good provisional connections between them. (317)

It also must be noted that Fauconnier and Turner shed light on the aspect of character as part of identity. They point out that frames³⁰ and characters are interconnected as part of human reality. It is very interesting to consider that in the relationship between character and frame the emphasis can change; in some cases it falls more on the character and in other cases on the frame (253). In terms of a blend the character can be all behaviors in all kind of frames. In "Scene Nine," Jamie is in a frame of an upper-class member and enacting a

³⁰ Fauconnier and Turner's notion of frame is relatively flexible; they understand frame as simple networks, to value connections representing the organizing nature, or in relation with character where it functions as a background input (see 120, 164, 251 in *The Way we Think*).

character that is not befitting her, which complicates even more the blend and the spectator's theatrical experience.

In the same way as in *And I and Silence*, Wallace's *The War Boys* illustrates how pertinent is the capacity of the spectator to decompress elaborated blends in order to become engaged. The stage directions the playwright offers in the opening scene are a call for imagination and cooperation on the spectator's end. As the vast majority of Wallace's plays, *War Boys* has minimal scenery, as for example: "[p]art of a barb wire fence to suggest a "border" is invisible" (147). In addition, the action is defined in ambiguous terms: "They are going to "play" the War Boys game" (147). The characters are chasing invisible immigrants throughout the play as part of the purpose of their game. The immigrants the young men are hunting are victims of abusive behavior, mocking, and belittling and in the same way as in *And I and Silence*. Wallace tells the story of these abuses through two main methods; the narration to make the abuses invisible with the purpose of avoiding recreation, or the reenactment where the roles and the figures of authority are inverted. Stream of personae is also used in the play—the three boys impersonate the victims—however, it is done differently from *And I and Silence* because they take turns to act as the victim. Different from Jamie and Dee, the boys have different social status and this turn-taking represents the struggle between classes and a shifting of power among David, Greg, and George whereas Jamie and Dee, members of the working classes, represent the oppressive upper class in their impersonation of the employers.

The spectator must act as if that those absent characters are in fact on stage and acknowledge the characters' interaction with them, as the following fragment shows: "*George gazes across the public then begins to crawl closer as he "sees" the woman nearing the border [...] George begins to caress the stage floor as he stares out at the woman. He does this sensually, carefully*" (160-1). This scene requires an additional effort by both the

actor and the spectator since the two of them are pretending and using their cognitive capabilities to fill the gap, blend, and capture the essence of the performance. *The War Boys* was better received by the audience than *And I and Silence*, perhaps because the tone of the latter is much more serious taking into account it deals with the segregation in the 50s . Nonetheless, *War Boys* focuses as well on an important concern of American society, this is immigration, although the play takes a much more contemporary point of view. It should be noted that the play has a different tone with parody, satiric scenes, humor, which helps to masquerade the serious undertone and concerns on sociopolitical issues such as inequality, immigration, racism, and the failure of the capitalist system. The young men pretend that they are running a show where they take turns and alternate between narrations to tell their life stories. However, this is not done in way to call for sympathy, the audience is the one to judge and observe of the whole situation: “GEORGE (*To Greg*): How much you think they’re paying for this peep show? (167).”

The performers address the public during their show but they do not physically interact with the spectators or have face-to-face communication, such as the one we can see in contemporary performances shows like the Blue Man Group for instance. The spectator should be considered as an essential part of the theatrical frame, as I have already stated in the previous chapters. As McConachie explains, the spectator is involved on the performance through her/his emotions. The performer tries to provoke an emotion on the spectator, and whatever the effect may be, I believe that the main aim is to create an impact, a reaction, or even a memory. In this sense, as seen in *Night is a Room* the emotion can be ‘disgust’ towards the incest or ‘laughter’ in terms of humor, or ‘surprise,’ but never mind which of those emotions it is the one prompted, a reaction is always welcome. As demonstrated in Chapter One, the dramatist aspires to give rise to thought and emotion. Accounting for spectators’ interactions with performance McConachie affirms:

[S]pectators are always invited to respond to events that have been framed to evoke their emotions. Spectators go to entertainments knowing and desiring strong emotional engagement [...] the agonistic structure of sports, music, and other performances heightens the emotions of spectators within that cultural-cognitive network. Audiences engage performances through voluntary, intentional action and their attention to and occasional immersion in its image schemas and consequent emotions is a part of their activity. (*Evolution 99*)

The spectator is the one who willingly decides to engage, in my opinion this is the central reason to discard the hypothesis of the passive audience. The low-key conduct of the spectator that McConachie notes is an element that must not mislead us, since the spectator is constantly blending during the performance. I believe that the view of the spectator as a passive subject must be rejected at this point. The spectator is inside the theatrical frame and is an essential agent of the theatrical performance that contributes to the event through not only physical presence but more importantly through emotional and, of course, cognitive engagement. McConachie continues:

In addition to emotional involvement, spectator actions include making decisions that put them in front of a performance event (either live or mediated), paying attention to the event by moving their bodies (which includes focusing their eyes and attuning their ears), integrating the players they watch into discrete person/role blends, and blending all of those actions together (plus the actions of other spectators) into a performance event. (*Evolution 99*)

Importantly, this observation on mediated events, which are usually categorized apart from theatrical performance, is a groundbreaking approach to theater, since, only a few critics dare to pair mediated events and live events. It goes without saying that mediated and live events have different dynamics but according to some of the studies in the field of cognitive science

both events must be regarded in the same way because there is no difference for the human brain to process them. I will develop this aspect in the last chapter under the analysis of the Enactive paradigm and how it applies to theater.

War Boys is masterly written in terms of calling the audience's attention, apart from the references and recurrent acknowledgement of the audience, Wallace introduces interruptions of the main action of the boys' show, as well as action in the background, usually referring to patrolling or the boys' games.

GEORGE (*Shouts*): This is my story. Mine. Get the fuck out!

GREG (*To David*): You know, David, this is what gets me. How come you always get to interrupt? Whenever you want?

DAVID: Because you let me (286)

In Chapter One, we have seen a scene where Greg is narrating his story and the action in the background interrupts him, after that, he does not know where to pick up the thread and David mocks him: "DAVID (*Interrupts*): No, no. You left off at (Mocks Greg's voice), "He was a strict man, but he looked out for me"" (158). In order to follow the scene, the spectator's close attention is required inasmuch as these interruptions move the viewers from one frame to another. It has been demonstrated that younger generations have lower attention spans for performance, due to the fact that we are surrounded by many distracting factors. Nevertheless, McConachie asserts that "[a]lthough having to decouple and recouple attention from performances on home entertainment systems can be frustrating, most spectators are now accustomed to such interruptions" (*Evolution*, 135). Interestingly, in theater the spectator does not have the interruption of commercials as in some mediated events but Wallace introduces this commercial factor; in the play the boys constantly sing tunes of advertisements; "DAVID: I mean, when you grow up you've got choices to make in life. So you choose: Johnny Carson or Hee-Haw, Seven-Up or Sprite, CBS or NBC, Beechnut or

Juicy Fruit, Trident or Dentine [...] (*Sings:*) Wrigley Spearmint gum, gum, gum” (269); or make references to different brands; “DAVID: Come back, Marlboro Man. Come back to the Marlboro Land!” (233). The spectator in live or mediated events can distract his/herself seeking for more stimulation, therefore, Wallace includes these interruptions that provide dynamism and are a technical device to capture the spectator’s attention.

Wallace takes into account the spectator in many different ways, not only when she tries to engage and call the spectator’s attention but also in the message that she sends; Wallace avoids to be over sentimental when portraying her stories. As Ozieblo notes, during the boys’ narrations we get to know the victims that appear in oblique ways (“Pornography of Violence” 70). It could be said that as spectators we may call these virtual or spectral subjects ‘victims’ because they suffer from different kinds of abuse, nevertheless, as an spectator I appreciate that she deals with victims in her plays and she does not victimize the subjects. For instance in *And I and Silence*, although we witness that the women’s situation is full of despair verging on the suicidal in some scenes, this line is always followed by sequences displaying intimacy and love that change the tone of the performance. Moreover, at the end, when Jamie and Dee decide to take their lives, it is staged as their final decision—although a social pressure exists—they are the ones who exert their agency. Similarly, in *War Boys* Greg decides to honor his Mexican roots and values; by taking the gun and threatening David, Greg confronts the symbolic figure of immigrants’ oppression, even though at the very end Greg refuses to make use of violence:

Escucha, David. With all that inteligente you bought—(Holds the gun up in front of David’s face) Can you read this? Right here? Can you read it? It doesn’t say Taiwan or Japan this time. On the barrel, you can read it if you squint. You see what it says? (Steps back) It says: MADE IN USA. (Beat) Here. (Holds out gun to David and George) You can have it back.

(Neither George nor David moves. Greg drops the gun at their feet. He begins to exit. As he leaves the stage, blackout.) (Author's italics, 196)

As seen in the critical analysis of Wallace's plays, the position of the victims is extremely fluid in her works. During the final moments *War Boys* deconstructs the social ladder and places the wealthy bully in the place of a victim. This change of hierarchy, in my opinion, should be approached through Fauconnier and Turner's analysis of frame and identity, where as I explained before (see Fauconnier and Turner 253), the character can demonstrate all kinds of behaviors in all kinds of frames as it is connected to human experience.

It should be acknowledged that blending is also based on imagination, when David, Greg, and George narrate their stories the spectator merges in this subjunctive thought. The narration of the boys is not only showing their background and their life stories but also their secrets and most extreme feelings. Sometimes, as the spectators may notice, we do not have all the keys to their stories; for example I find the angle of Greg's parents confusing at some points of the play. Greg explains that he brings home a Chicana girlfriend and his father humiliates and assaults her, although he narrates all this and we do not see anything of this action onstage. After that, Greg tells his mother, who is Mexican, about the aggression. Greg argues "When my father walked through the door that night, "bang," she hit him over the head with a dinner plate. *(Raises arms slowly as though holding a gun and fires)* Bang...bang...bang...A few years later my father *se murio*" (author's italics, 159). After this, the spectator does not have a clear version of the facts, however, in order to clarify the situation David asks "And your dad, beaned to death with a dinner plate?" And Greg answers "Nope. Cholesterol got him" (164). Greg also hints that his father probably raped his girlfriend as well. As spectators we are not certain about the facts but we are able to picture in our mind's eye the whole situation. While as seen earlier in the scene, Greg changes his version again towards the end of the play. He explains that he was going to marry Evalina

because she was pregnant, his father beat her to have a miscarriage and then his mother shot his father (*War Boys*, 192). The pace in *War Boys* is extremely fast, after scenes like the one I have just commented on, the spectator does not have time to dwell on the barbaric story. I believe that Wallace invites the spectator to use her/his imagination in order to avoid representation and at the same time to leave the grotesque offstage but she does not want the spectator to live in such blends. Wallace's vision of a perverted, twisted, and gloomy society portrayed in her plays always has a chance of redemption and hope. Some critics, such as Kushner, have already noticed Wallace's tendency towards optimism. As Helen Huff explains:

In *The War Boys*, Wallace literally stages a landscape of “crossing borders” in the formation of contemporary American male identity. Wallace uses violence, played out against the body in a series of role-playing scenarios, to explore the American male psyche's interplay with the constructs of class, race, sex, and privilege. Yet, even in this early play, Wallace plants a seed of change that offers hope and possibility. (Huff, 56)

Regarding the violence of the play, Huff states that Wallace's use of Brechtian *gestus* and alienation is meant “to distance the characters to transpose sexual violence” (55). As seen in Chapter One of this thesis, Wallace feels close to Brechtian drama and she uses several of his techniques, nevertheless, I believe, and this could be questioned by some critics, that as a dramatist she transcends the label of Brechtian or neo-Brechtian, although we cannot deny that Brecht is one of her major inspirations. Huff also notices the relevance of the roles of both victims and aggressors in *The War Boys*, which she addresses as “victimizers”, and she states: “The acts of transgressive and sexualized violence in the play push at the boundaries of class and ethnic identity as the boys act out both victim and victimizer. To use Dolan's terminology, they become the “other”” (55). Bearing in mind that the play deals with

immigration, I find Huff's view of the "other" extremely interesting. The boundaries/frontiers are trespassed/crossed by the foreign/alien view as the other in *War Boys*. The dehumanization of the immigrants is part of the process the boys experience in order to hunt them and play the war boys' game. Nevertheless, from the spectator's point of view this dehumanization is not possible because the boys' tone is extremely absurd at some points and prevents sympathy. If anything, in the play the dehumanization of the immigrants evidences the lack of morals of the boys in their crusade against the illegal immigrants.

Wallace's technique of stream of personae serves to reenact a violent episode of the boys towards a Mexican Woman. Greg impersonates the woman and it is fascinating to notice the spectator's conceptual network, since he/she has to blend the actor/character Greg/character woman. The actor who plays the role of Greg should keep a part of Greg's identity and do not change his voice, as is clear from the stage directions:

(Greg crawls from the border. Through he pretends to be a Mexican woman, it is important that his voice is not affected. He does not try to "sound" like a woman, instead he speaks with his own voice. He may affect a slight accent but then drop it when the action gets more violent) (185)

In this scene, David and George humiliate Greg/the woman forcing some dirt in his mouth, ripping his shirt as he/she struggles. They interrogate her/him about the need of a job in the USA. As noted before, the turn taking of the boys enacting the victim of this fight is meaningful in socio political terms, the boys renegotiate their status during this struggle, and this is a glimpse of the situation at the very end of the play:

(Greg struggles and manages to throw David off of him. Now Greg sits on David. George has backed off. Greg spits out the bills on David's face. There are some moments of silence as David and Greg become aware of their new positions.) (187)

The operations that the spectator's mind blends in this reenacting of the woman are incredible. The scene once understood could seem easy and the whole process can be taken for granted, but meanwhile, in order to apprehend meaning behind all these switches the cognitive abilities of the spectator are running wild. The whole conceptual integration network of this scene is huge, we have several counterfactuals, different subjects in one action. Selective projection of the spectator is also crucial, since the spectator chooses to see how the boys humiliate the woman or how Greg is humiliated by George and David. Furthermore, as in the case of Hamlet, commented before, we are the one to choose who are we looking at, Kenneth Branagh or Hamlet. Wallace's productions are mostly off-Broadway but if we think for a moment of this scene if played by well-known Hollywood actors, the conceptual integration network expands even more (see appendix 1). As Fauconnier and Turner explain, the blends are processed gradually and we take into account the easiest one first and then move to the next level:

Blending creates emergent structure, but it is also conservative, working from inputs that it has. In this way, conceptual knowledge develops step by step, through the cascade of blends. So does cultural and scientific knowledge. Firm intermediate blends are needed before the advanced ones can be created. Creating the advanced blends typically requires decompressing the intermediate ones. (393)

The way the spectator thinks should be central to the study of spectatorship. I firmly believe that conceptual blending is fundamental to analyze and understand a spectator's experience. As we have seen in this chapter, many of the operations that are needed to understand scenes are unnoticed, however, if we analyze in depth how we process information we come to realize that a complex net of operations intervenes in audience reception. The "body" is one of the main focuses in the analysis of performance; however, "mind" has been neglected in comparison. The mind has to be studied under the rubric of the

body, because contrary to what most people think the mind is embodied, the brain is embodied; in other words, our brains are part of our bodies and mind is what brains do. The traditional division of mind and body—as we will see in the final chapter—is erroneous. Since mind is embodied, cognition is also embodied as part of thoughts, emotions, and senses. As Fauconier and Turner explain “Cognition is embodied, and the spectacular intellectual feats that human beings perform depend upon being able to anchor the integration networks in blends at human scale, using the vital relations that are employed in perception and action” (319). Blending is the corollary of our environment that we embodied through perception and action. Our perception and action are part of our way to experience life, which is the vehicle of culture. As I explained at the beginning of this chapter there was a point in evolution where culture was created, despite this fact, the biological approach to culture has been disregarded in the analysis of the spectator and sometimes even the other way around. I believe that culture is more than a legacy of humanity, it is biologically founded and so corroborates the cognitive theories of a biocultural approach to the study of mind. Fauconier and Turner also consider the relevance of culture for the way we think:

Culture elaborates blends that are complex and hard to discover but relatively easy to manipulate and learn. The cultural search for an optimal blend, which can last for many years or even centuries, explores huge numbers of possibilities and retains only those that fit the governing principles optimally for the purpose at hand. This ensures that conceptual blends transmitted culturally to a new generation have excellent design, from the culture’s point of view, but also that the culture will regard them as difficult (393)

Naomi Wallace’s plays present a challenge for the spectators with extremely difficult blends, and it is the audience’s task to compress and decompress those blends in order to have a meaningful experience at theater. The role of conceptual blending is crucial not only

to have an accurate perspective on the analysis of spectatorship but it is especially useful in the analysis of Wallace's drama. Her techniques, such as stream of personae, metaphors, identity, and fluidity are well suited to conceptual integration analysis. Additionally, it is possible to analyze her audience's reactions, emotions, processing of the play without understanding what is in fact happening in their minds.

The next chapter analyzes cognitive empathy and emotions theories applied to spectatorship in a selection of Wallace's plays.



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Chapter Four. Understanding Empathy and Emotions: Behind Laughter, Sadness, and Rapport.



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Understanding Empathy and Emotions: Behind Laughter, Sadness, and Rapport.

Theater is much more than entertainment, theatrical performances provide the stimuli that undoubtedly give rise to emotions in the spectator, which, as seen in the previous chapters, can be diverse. In order to study the spectator's experience, scholars may base their analysis on different aspects such as how the spectators feel, what is in their minds, or how are they processing the information displayed in front of them. As a means to answer these questions many critics and scholars have already considered the study of empathy and/or emotions as pivotal elements to understand the essence of this phenomenon. As far as we know, the spectators' empathy allows them to engage with and to understand the performance, also the spectators' emotions are key to comprehend how the audience feels and reacts towards the performance. Even though it is an appropriate starting point, when one researches the subject one finds that many assumptions can be questioned due to the lack of solid epistemologies. In my opinion we must not speak lightly about empathy and emotions—because they are far more complicated than they look at first sight—without possessing some basic knowledge; such as understanding how empathy operates or what the emotions are and how they work in actual fact. I found out that many of these features cannot be answered with some other approaches used in this field during the last decades, as is the case of semiotics or structuralism. I believe that a biocultural approach provides a valuable alternative to make overtures to empathy and emotions, since, on the one hand, culture—as stated in the previous chapter—shapes the way we think and on the other hand, the arts are the most primitive application of human skills and imagination conveying emotions. Some

scholars, proponents of the Enactive approach, have already suggested this link between biology and culture.³¹

Therefore, as stated above, the significance of both empathy and emotions as decisive factors for the analysis of spectatorship is beyond question. In the view of this fact, I find that in order to understand Naomi Wallace's spectator and by extension the theatrical experience of a paradigmatic spectator, it is essential that I analyze in this chapter the basis of empathy and emotions. Nevertheless, it should be acknowledged the fact that Wallace's plays produce an intense spectatorial experience; therefore, I use what I believe it is the most satisfactory and complete approach accessible to analyze a complex phenomenon of spectatorship. Before going deeper and more specifically into the analysis of empathy and emotions in Wallace's plays, one of the purposes of this chapter is to pave the way for a better understanding of both concepts and to clarify misinterpretations or mistakes that are deep-rooted in the analysis of spectatorship theory. I draw on the cognitive approach to empathy, particularly in Evan Thompson's definition and Vittorio Gallese's findings on mirror neurons, trying to define how the brain and mind work when seeing a performed action. In order to analyze emotions I take Giovanna Colombetti's affective science approach, which adds new insights on the matter by defining how we feel towards our environment.

4.1. The Potential of Understanding Empathy through a Phenomenological and Cognitive Approach.

Evan Thompson in *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology, and the Sciences of Mind* (2007) affirms that "human mental activity is fundamentally social and cultural" (403)—as

³¹ I will address this aspect in Chapter Six. For a more detailed analysis on biology and culture see John Stewart, Olivier Gapenne, and Ezequiel A. Di Paolo's *Enaction: Towards a New Paradigm for Cognitive Science* (2010). For a more specific view on the biocultural approach to theater see Bruce McConachie's *Evolution, Cognition, and Performance* (2015).

we have seen in the previous chapter through McConachie's insight on subjunctive thought and as we will also see in Chapter Six—the adopters of the enactivist approach take into account culture as the fundamental element for the mind's work. In theater both subjunctive thought and culture come into play on that account, to me it seems logical to study performance through these theories. As Thompson explains, “[s]ymbolic culture in particular shapes the ‘cognitive architecture’ of the human mind. Stripped of culture, we simply would not have the cognitive capacities that make us human” (403). Within this cognitive architecture that he points out, empathy is one of the most intricate and recently studied aspects. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, empathy is one of the gates to access and understand the spectator's mind, therefore I will adopt Thompson's phenomenological definition of empathy, which questions the common known concept of empathy and explains in four stages how empathy operates.

Thompson legitimately argues with the concept of empathy corresponding to psychology, which is probably the definition of empathy that most people would have in mind; according to him:

Psychologists use the term *empathy* to describe three distinguishable and interrelated affective and cognitive processes involving self and other (Levenson and Reuf 1992). The first is feeling what another person is feeling: the second is knowing what another person is feeling: and the third is responding compassionately to another person's distress—a response better described as sympathy (Eisemberg 2000). (Author's italics, qtd. in Thompson 386)

In other words, the definition above might be summarized as understanding the other and her/his situation, but empathy is far more complex than that as we will see. Interestingly, Thompson corrects and contemplates the difference between empathy and sympathy; as I explain latter on in this chapter when analyzing Brechtian theory, sympathy is commonly

mistaken for empathy. Furthermore, empathy is occasionally misunderstood as a feeling; for instance, I feel sorry for you therefore I empathize with you and/or your situation. This is a wrong scheme to interpret how we empathize because in the first place, it functions other way around; in the example mentioned empathy must come first. That is, I empathize with you and that makes me feel sorry. In the second place, although it might seem awkward, you can empathize with someone and then not share the feelings of the other. The explanation of this is justified by the fact that empathy can lead to sympathy or antipathy, since empathy is what primarily makes us understand the other. Another frequent mistake opposed to the general knowledge of empathy is to assume that empathy can be controlled, which is totally erroneous; according to some observations of cognitive science empathy operates in the unconscious. The reasons that explain the last two misconceptions are better illustrated by the explanation of Vittorio Gallese's experiment and the discovery of mirror neurons.

The discovery of mirror neurons is not only a breakthrough in the understanding of how our brain works, but also serves to explain how we understand and read others' performances. In order to determine the relevance of these findings Vittorio Gallese, Christian Keysers, and Giacomo Rizzolatti's statement should be quoted in full:

In recent years, a different proposal has been advanced on how others' actions can be understood. This proposal is mostly based on the discovery of a set of neurons called 'mirror neurons'. These neurons, originally found in the ventral premotor cortex (area F5) of the macaque monkey, respond both when the monkey performs a particular goal-directed action, and when it observes another individual performing a similar action [3,4]. The core of the proposal is that the observation of an action leads to the activation of parts of the same cortical neural network that is active during its execution. The observer understands the action because he knows its outcomes when he does it. Action understanding [depends on] the 'penetration' of visual information

into the experiential ('first person') motor knowledge of the observer. (Gallese, Keysers, and Rizzolatti 396)

To outline the fundamental observations of the neuroscientists in the quotation above it could be said that the experiment results in the statement that the viewer of an action performed experiences this action in a similar way to the performer, thanks to the mirror neurons. In terms of performance theory we might wonder how this discovery affects the analysis of theater, and I would say that there are many more aspects than may appear at first sight in which performance studies are affected by these findings. Firstly, in theater the spectator as an observer of the performance is truly experiencing the performance in her/his body as a consequence of this paired neural activity. Secondly, another revealing side of this experience is that it is allowing her/him to be inside the theatrical frame, since both performer and spectator are connected, which is something that is extensively debated in performance studies. Moreover, and thirdly, I should point out that the last assumption is an additional reason to forget about the passive role of the spectator. Finally, apart from experiencing what happens on stage, understanding the performance is also linked to the spectator's capability to empathize. The spectator undergoes a process of coupling and thanks to it she/he is capable not only of experiencing the performance but also of primarily understanding it. Once the spectator understands the performance it will provoke either sympathy or antipathy.

As I said above, Thompson questions the concept of empathy in psychology, and instead, he takes a phenomenological approach in which he discards the reductionist view of empathy as a mode of perception and inference. As he explains "[t]he phenomenological conception of empathy thus stands opposed to any theory according to which we understand others by first perceiving their bodily behavior" (386). Apart from perception Thompson points towards other factors such as memory, imagination, and expectation since he considers that they share structural features with empathy. However, he ultimately explains that they

are not parallel and memory operates sometimes in a different way; when one remembers a joy, the joy is not there but it is there and it is given through memory, then it is both at the same time present and absent. As Thompson explains: “the parallel or analogy only goes so far. In the case of memory, the subject who is remembering is the same as the subject remembered. In the case of empathy, however, the subject who is empathizing is not the same as the subject empathized” (387-8), as a result empathy should be analyzed by itself.

Under the phenomenological approach Thompson distinguishes not only one kind of empathy but different empathetic processes or types of empathy. From these processes he creates a framework that draws on cognitive and affective neuroscience. As he affirms, the distinctions of the empathetic process are as follows:

1. The passive or involuntary coupling or pairing of my living body with your living body in perception and action.
2. The imaginary movement or transposition of myself into your place.
3. The understanding of you as an other to me, and of me as an other to you.
4. The moral perception of you as a person. (392-3)

Coupling or pairing as part of the empathetic process reveals the involuntary or unconscious feature of empathy. This is related with Gallese, Keysers, and Rizzolatti’s observations that pointed out the mirroring and resonance of the observer. As seen before, the viewer experiences the performer’s action and of course this produces the effect described upon her/him. Thompson asserts that resonance can occur linked to emotions. He states that “[i]n addition to sensorimotor coupling, emotive coupling and affective resonance also occur between the self and the other” (395). The process of coupling and affective resonance is commonly known as emotional contagion,³² and a recurrent example of this affective resonance is the newborn’s response to another baby crying by coupling and crying. While

³² Thompson considers the term “emotional contagion” misleading since according to him “Affective resonance also occurs when two individuals engage in direct interaction and one actively seeks to affect the other” (395)

Thompson does not consider theater in his explanation of coupling and pairing, evidently, affective resonance is a response that takes place in the theater, where many spectators laugh at the same time or cry in response to the actor's performance but also due to the coupling with their fellow spectators. It could be said that the same mechanism comes into play when listening to music and the body tunes in the rhythm, such as the almost unconscious reaction when moving the feet to the beat.

The imaginary transposition of the self for Thompson represents a full accomplishment of empathy, as he says: “[it] is achieved when one individual can mentally adopt the other's perspective by exchanging places with the other in imagination” (396-7). This cognitive capability is achieved through joint attention, where the subjects experience engagement observing shared objects or events.³³ It goes without saying that, in theater, a social event, spectators are using their cognitive capability to engage in joint attention. The spectator experiences as a first person in the first place and then this knowledge helps her/him to understand the other; for instance, comparing or understanding the performer's circumstance in a universal context such as loss or joy. The spectator understands the character's loss because she/he can transpose herself/himself to the position of the other. The spectator ultimately knows the feeling because she/he has experienced loss before, and therefore, she/he also understands the character's behavior and reactions. The third process of empathy refers to the mutual self and understanding of the other, as Thompson states it is also related to Tomasello's theories of joint attention:

[T]he cognitive achievement he [Tomasello] describes of being able to conceptualize oneself from the perspective of another person corresponds to what Edith Stein calls “reiterated empathy.” In reiterated empathy, one sees oneself from the perspective of

³³ In order to vindicate joint attention Thompson makes references to Michael Tomasello's theories where “Joint attention” is a cognitive ability acquired around twelve months of age where child, adult, and object share attention. According to Tomasello “infants begin to engage in joint attentional interactions when they begin to understand other persons as intentional agents like the self” (qtd. in Thompson, 397).

another and thereby grasps oneself as one individual participant in an intersubjective world. (399)

At this stage empathy is analyzed as reciprocal activity, both subjects establish a connection where mutual understanding exists, and because of this, I have to insist on the crucial component of ‘understanding’ in the process of empathy. Two subjects can engage in what is called reiterated empathy, that is “I see myself from your perspective. Stated more precisely, I empathetically grasp your empathetic experience of me” (Thompson 392); in this way the subject sees herself/himself as an empathetically perceivable living bodily subject. Similarly, in theater, the performer recognizes that the spectator empathetically perceives her/him as a person through several aspects, not only body movement and gestures, and then she or he is aware of her/his personal selfhood as a living bodily subject.

According to Thompson, phenomenologists “draw attention to the first-person/third-person ambiguity of the lived body in reiterated empathy” (400). He differentiates between first-person as “proprioceptive” and third-person as “exteroceptive” concerning cognitive formats in social interaction. As he argues:

If the “I” were to appear only in a first-person singular format, then it would not be possible to have any nonegocentric understanding of the “I” as a bodily individual in a public intentional world that transcends the self. My egocentric (proprioceptive and kinesthetic) experience of myself does not present my body to me as a perceptual thing equivalent to other perceptual things that stand before me—for my body does not stand before me in this way. (400)

Thompson describes that through empathy, in particular reiterated empathy and joint attention, “one can gain a nonegocentric and intersubjective view of one’s own lived body as an individual intentional agent in a public world” (400). This aspect is extremely important for the performer, since their lived body is exposed in front of an audience and she/he must

have the view of her/himself perceived by others. Furthermore, theater as I stated before is an intersubjectivity experience where, in this particular case, using Thompson's words, the spectators are the exteroceptive and the performer is the proprioceptive and both make use of this cognitive empathy for the performance to be understood and to communicate.

The moral perception of the other is the last process that Thompson proposes; he defines it as "the underlying capacity to have other-directed and other-regarding feelings of concern" (401). According to his approach, empathy is the source of moral sentiments and emotions, therefore, it opposes the traditional Kantian notion of prioritizing reason over feeling. However, the dual division of rationality over feelings is debated regarding morality in the phenomenological approach. The Kantian claim of treating the other as one would treat her/himself is questioned, since in order to respect the other's demands one should be able to be in the other's position and experience the other. I am not developing moral perception in depth in this chapter because it is connected to the idea of ethics that will be discussed in the next chapter through Kitcher's theory.

Before moving into the next section, I would like to briefly comment here on other approaches and remarks about empathy that I find extremely valuable and that contribute to complete the understanding of empathy. Colombetti has delved into the definition of empathy in a slightly different form from Thompson's approach, Colombetti distinguishes a category that she coins as basic empathy, as Colombetti states:

I shall call the phenomenological notion of directly perceiving the other's subjectivity, including sensing-in, *basic empathy*, to distinguish it from other more elaborate and mediated ways of grasping how others feel—like when I need also to recur to my knowledge of the other and to imagination. (176)

Colombetti differentiates between direct and indirect sense making of the other's behavior. Basic empathy takes into consideration direct perception of the other, thus, empathy at this

level works as a capability to understand the situation. If a character is crying I directly assume that she/he is in pain, I understand directly the character's mental state. If the character is gasping looking at a picture I can indirectly infer that she/he is nostalgic, about a person, a time, or a circumstance.

Furthermore, another relevant analysis done in completely different terms is provided by McConachie's insights about empathy. McConachie analyzes empathy focusing on a more social and cultural approach. I find McConachie's evolutionary approach to culture and empathy very enlightening since he considers the arts and performing arts; he explains that "[t]he arts helped evolving hominids to pattern their lives, coordinating curiosity, memory, attention, empathy, and other cognitive capabilities in socially engaged and open-ended ways" (*Evolution* 38). It is important to stress that in theater all these cognitive capabilities that McConachie points out come into play provoking the spectator to be socially and actively engaged. Nevertheless, the scope of my research should be limited to certain aspects, and I cannot thoroughly review all the different cognitive capabilities that are involved in a theatrical representation. Therefore, a range of the most relevant issues in the analysis of spectatorship has been selected to provide an as exhaustive as possible study of the subject matter. McConachie's observation about empathy and emotions is also worthy of mention, since he states that although empathy is not an emotion, it can lead to emotional engagements (*Evolution* 119). Hence, I analyze emotions in the next section to have a deeper understanding of emotions. For the study of emotions I will primarily use Giovanna Colombetti's approach to dissect how emotions function in an Enactive frame combined with affective science.

4.2. Affective Science and the Enactive Approach: The Reconfiguration of Emotions.

A rough analysis of the dynamics taking place during a performance will lead us to the conclusion that—as I stated at the beginning of this chapter—theater is a stimulus and when the spectator goes to the theater and engages with a play, the story staged provokes responses and emotions. However, some of the recent findings in cognitive science can contradict this basic dynamic. Being such a central aspect in the study of spectatorship, I find it interesting to deal exclusively with this subject here, since empathy and emotions, as seen before, are sometimes conflated. Affective science studies emotions through a cognitive approach, Giovanna Colombetti as part of the enactivist paradigm and as an affective scientist focuses her research on this aspect. She deals with emotions through this prism in *The Feeling Body: Affective Science Meets the Enactive Mind* (2013). Her research is centered on the body in relation with emotion, that is, how the body is affected by emotion and the processes involved in emotional episodes; Colombetti sees that,

[a]ffective scientists, as their name implies, study affective phenomena [...] they focus especially on *emotion*, understood as a psychological faculty of its own, distinct from but also importantly linked to other faculties, such as perception, attention, memory, and so on. This emotional faculty manifests itself in a variety of different and primarily short-lived *emotions*—sadness, fear, happiness, guilt, pride, shame, and many others. Affective scientists also [...] study *moods*, which they see as differing from emotions mainly in intensity and duration, in particular as being less intense and longer lasting than emotions. (1)

Before plunging ahead into Colombetti's models of affective science I have to take a step back to overview the origin of dynamic systems in cognition, which provide a base for her argument rooted in the Enactive mind. Among the different theoretical frames of the

cognitive science that Thompson examines at the beginning of *Mind in Life*, he approaches the ‘embodied dynamicism’ focused on dynamic systems, in which “[t]he central metaphor for this approach is the mind as embodied dynamic system in the world, rather than the mind as neural network in the head” (11). Therefore, this approach of cognitive science is rooted in two essential concepts, the embodied feature of cognition and dynamic systems. An embodied approach, as seen before throughout this thesis, draws on the concept of mind inside the body and discards the classical Cartesian distinction. A dynamic system model is described by Thompson as the one taking “the form of a set of evolution equations that describe how the state of system changes over time” (11). The systems consider internal and external forces and therefore take shape through all forces involved. According to Thompson this approach appears in the 1990s to bridge the gap between human subjectivity and human experience.³⁴ The Enactive approach that I will discuss in Chapter Six is the heir of the embodied dynamicism, which is rooted in the phenomenological experience and cognition. Colombetti’s theories on emotion are based on dynamic systems; she extrapolates the dynamical cognitive science into dynamical affective science to use those concepts to examine the emotional phenomena.

I will briefly sketch here the basic concepts of dynamic systems theory that Colombetti addresses, in order to understand her insights on the matter. As she states, “DTS³⁵ is a branch of mathematics that describes the temporal evolution of dynamical systems, namely, systems that change over time” (54). Colombetti explains that those systems that undergo several changes take the form of differential equations, on the contrary, the systems that do not change continuously are represented through difference equations. It should be taken into consideration that two important characteristics define the dynamic systems, the first one is that “[t]wo or more dynamical systems are said to be *coupled* when they

³⁴ See Thompson (10-13) for further details of the embodied dynamicism approach.

³⁵ Dynamical Systems Theory.

reciprocally influence and constrain their behavior over time, such that they can be modeled as one system” (Colombetti 55, author’s emphasis). The second characteristic is the property of being self-organizing systems, they are not only coupled but they are also influenced by their own constituent processes, as I have already sketched above through Thompson’s observation of the forces involved. Colombetti accounts for the different uses of dynamical systems theory nowadays in disciplines related to physical, biological, ecological, and social systems to explore aspects such as ant colonies, bird flocking, climate changes, or economic behavior among others (57). However, the multipurpose and resourceful nature of dynamical systems theory are not the most appealing parts of the theory for cognitive scientists in the first place. The key resides in the fact that dynamical systems theory is, as I already said, a self-organized system, which is very interesting for cognition since the brain shares the same attribute. Furthermore, adopters of the embodied dynamicism approach and the enactivist approach are interested in the relationship between brain and body, (and also environment especially in the case of enactivism as we will see in Chapter Six) and how these systems set the limits of each other and adapt their behavior.

In dynamic affective science Colombetti works with three strands that according to her share the following common characteristics “the organism as complex, self-organizing, open, and plastic, realizing emotional episodes that are softly assembled, context dependent, and highly variable, yet patterned and recurrent” (58). Those strands include different stages, one is concerned with physical response, this is the coordinative muscular structures and preferential linkages, another is concerned with neural self-organization of the emotional episodes, and the last one is about the interpersonal relations, patterns of emotional behavior between agents. In order to encapsulate a theoretical approach that is valuable to spectatorship analysis, I develop here the neural self-organization, which seem to contribute to conceptualize how the phenomenon functions. Furthermore, interpersonal relations,

interactions and the expression of emotions are, from my point of view, less foreign aspects to approach in cognitive science and also in theatrical performances.

In the neural self-organization of the emotional episodes, Colombetti draws on W. J. Freeman's studies, who divides the analysis of emotion in either a 'passivist cognitivist' model or an 'activist-pragmatist' model. Freeman defines passivist cognitivism with the following process:

[I]n the first step, sensory stimulation provides information that goes from the sensory receptors to perceptual representations in the thalamus and sensory cortex; from there it is transmitted to the frontal lobes and motor cortex, where it is further processed before being passed on to the muscles to initiate action. (Colombetti 63)

If we apply this approach to the theater the spectator receives sensory stimulation from the play and then there is some action in the muscles prompted by this brain activity. However, Freeman asserts that sensory stimulation is not the initial step of the sequence that prompts perception and action, instead, he explains that "sensory stimulation reaches a brain that is already motivated and action oriented and uses information about the world to modulate motor activity relative to its intentional orientation" (Colombetti 63). Therefore, contrary to our logical schema, in theatrical representation we have also to acknowledge a different mapping of cognitive activity, since spectators' emotion is conditioned by a "premotor activity corresponding to action preparation and sustains actual motor action as this unfolds" (Colombetti 63). In other words, spectators and spectators' brains are arranged and motivated to engage and experience emotional episodes. This view on how emotions are triggered complies with the dynamic sensorimotor approach, which advocates for the reciprocal constitution of action and perception, and as Colombetti points out, "acknowledges the embodied and active nature of the mind, and in particular it reconceptualizes perception in terms of embodied action" (64). These findings are one of the reasons why in the present

thesis I addressed the spectator's activity in theater through the term "experience." I believe that the spectator *experiences* the performance, not only as a practical contact or observation of the performance but rather as a fully embodied experience. As Colombetti demonstrates, emotion is far more complex than an activated part of the brain that switches on a mechanism, which provokes a response; as we will see in Chapter Six, there is a whole 'ecosystem' connected and enacted. Colombetti observes:

According to the dynamical sensorimotor approach, sensory information thus impinges on an active organism that is already furnished with knowledge and expectations about how the world changes in relation to movement; perceiving is, then better characterized as the exercise of this practical knowledge, rather than the representation of sensory information in a dedicated part of the brain. (64)

The nature of emotions in Colombetti's view is the cause "of evolutionary and developmental factors that shape the organism in a certain way" (70), which makes the emotional episodes flexible structures in dynamical emotion systems. Affective scientists, such as Colombetti, refer to 'emotional episodes,' since they understand the process of emotions as short-lived episodes, which are flexible, as I have just explained, and they are also variable. As a result of this, affective scientists reject the conventional division of basic emotions. Basic emotions are understood as building-block categories, which is a very restrictive notion in order to define an emotional episode. Another characteristic of emotional episodes is that they are also sense-making systems as part of the evolutionary process. Hence, the performer gathers the feeling of the audience through their expressions as part of their emotions, consequently making sense and communicating at the same time.

Concerning response, Colombetti centers her position in the redefinition of appraisal, since she believes that the bodily aspects of emotion have been dismissed as noncognitive aspects usually defined as responses, which are external to the process of appraising. She

affirms, “in psychology, appraisal has typically been characterized as a factor or component of emotion neatly *distinct* from these bodily aspects [...] appraisal has been characterized as a *disembodied* cognitive phenomenon” (author’s emphasis, 83). Her whole redefinition of appraisal is a phenomenological examination of the body where, among many other observations, she distinguishes between the body as an intentional object of experience and the body as the medium at the margin of attention. Interestingly, Colombetti pays attention to the body that performs and defines it as the performative body, she explains:

The performative body is neither transparent nor an intentional object of awareness; it is the body as experienced during the skillful performance of a specific activity, when one need not attend to one’s body but is nevertheless very much aware of its presence and activity. [...] The performative body is mainly constituted by prereflective proprioceptive and kinesthetic sensations, namely, sensations of bodily position and movement that are not attended. (117-8)

Colombetti’s statement above confirms what I have explained in the previous section through the analysis of the third process of empathy where the performer should be viewed as proprioceptive in Thompson’s approach. Colombetti uses the example of a professional dancer who does not need to attend to the body to control the moves during the dance but is aware of the body and in control of it all the time.

A very revealing aspect that Colombetti points out in her the Enactive mind theory is the localization of sensation of the body such as tingling in the stomach, throat contraction for disgust, warm face as a consequence of embarrassment (118). Spectators experience these sensations in their bodies linked to the emotions appraised³⁶ by the spectacle. Nevertheless, I will not elaborate further the details of her analysis, since I will only take into account those aspects that I find relevant for the analysis of spectatorship in Wallace’s plays. One of those

³⁶ Colombetti uses the term “appraisal” as part of the embodied emotions, which are not merely responses (84).

relevant aspects is the study of emotions and kinetics, already mentioned in the quotation above. Colombetti takes theater into consideration when she analyzes this feature using as an example the arts, she states:

In dance and theater, the same movement, such as a head lift, can have very different qualities, depending, for example, on the speed at which it is executed (paintings and sculptures can also evoke movement by representing, e.g., humans and animals, but also objects, in specific actions and by exploiting light and texture). Arguably, these portrayals can effectively evoke specific emotions because they reproduce bodily movements analogous to those we often experience in our body when we feel the portrayed emotions. (119-20)

As Colombetti suggests, in theater gestures are meaningful and evoke different emotions that lead the spectators to perceive the performers and evoke emotional episodes; this is especially notable in the case of comedy where sometimes a posture or even a facial expression can provoke laughter. With reference to facial expression and muscular activity, she addresses the muscular bonding phenomenon where subjects involved in social events, such as ritual, community, and different types of performance, experience coupling. Colombetti explains:

[T]hroughout human history, moving together in coordination has contributed to creating and maintaining social cohesion, fostering feelings of togetherness and reciprocity. That these experiences feel good is also shown by the existence of collective chanting and moving together during the performance of otherwise strenuous or boring activities. We can speculate that these practices not only generate feelings of closeness but also allow people to follow through their natural tendency to do as others do, without inhibitions or restraints. In other words, contexts of muscular bonding may well be contexts in which imitating motor tendencies are allowed to “go wild,” thus contributing to a feeling of exhilaration. (197)

This muscular bonding is also part of performances that invite the public to join and participate in the physical activity taking place on stage. We do not have this direct form of invitation in Wallace's plays; nevertheless, I believe that emotional episodes can lead to a sort of muscular bonding if we take into consideration Thompson's theories of empathy and coupling.

Therefore, from Colombetti's approach we arrive to the conclusion that emotional episodes are short, temporal, and variable (thus, basic emotions theory cannot account for the phenomenon); they are self-organized, sense-making, and embodied. In terms of spectatorship this gives us a quite different perspective from the stimulus-response pattern. Emotional episodes in theater are part of a whole—governed by coordinative physical structures, neural structures, and interpersonal relations—in which the embodied mind/brain or mind/brain as part of the body are key to the spectator's experience.

4.3. Empathy, Passivity, and the Brechtian Tradition Optimization.

In political theater empathy is regarded as an important means to persuade the audience, although some dramatists such as Bertolt Brecht state that they avoid empathy and prefer to give rise to critical thought. As we have seen in this chapter, from a cognitive point of view this is impossible, since we are not in control of empathy. Our mirror neurons work independently of our will and/or the dramatist's will to distance our selves from what happens on stage. The main reason for this false assumption is that empathy is commonly mistaken for sympathy; sometimes they are used indistinctly, which is incorrect.

Naomi Wallace's plays—as seen in the first chapter of this thesis—are political, and she usually dedicated to denouncing social injustice. Wallace directly points towards these situations and her way to do it is by blurring the boundaries, for instance of social class in

One Flea Spare, racial such as in *Things of Dry Hours*, or political as *In the Heart of America*. She subverts the roles of the abusers and abused, as illustrated in several examples throughout this thesis, and as I develop later on this chapter empathy plays an essential role in these exchanges. Given Wallace's commitment to political theater, it is hardly surprising that Brecht is a major inspiration for her; she recognizes that she steps back and makes use of this Brechtian technique (Intimate 97). Therefore, I find it interesting to briefly explore Brechtian theory using the cognitive approach.

Bruce McConachie has studied the subject and some of his insights are expressed in the essay "Moving Spectators Towards Progressive Politics by Combining Brechtian Theory with Cognitive Science" (2012). McConachie's essay hypothesizes on Brecht's position towards recent discoveries on cognitive science and the cognitive approach to performance. According to him, if he were alive, Brecht would follow the path of these new findings to achieve his political and theatrical purposes. McConachie affirms:

[R]ecent insights into conceptual blending, empathy, emotion, and natural behavior are often at odds with Brecht's theories of acting and audience response. I think it is worthwhile asking how the savvy Marxist theatre artist might respond to this new science, were he alive today. Would he reject the new science out of hand and hold tight to his old theories? Or would he embrace the insights of the new cognitive sciences and try to understand how he might use this knowledge to advance his goals for progressive, revolutionary theatre? (149)

I cannot hypothesize and affirm for certain that Brecht would follow the cognitive approach if he had had access to the recent discoveries. However, I find that McConachie poses compelling evidences on what Brecht was trying to accomplish with his theater and how cognitive science will meet his requirements³⁷. In addition, as I stated in Chapter One, Brecht

³⁷ See the interview with McConachie as part of the Appendix of this thesis.

was invested in achieving what he calls a scientific observation (see Chapter One) of the spectator and I would dare to say that nowadays, this would mean to draw into science and its most recent findings. According to McConachie “If empathy were what Brecht believed it to be, his strategies to counter empathetic identification (like his general goal of dispelling dramatic illusionism) would probably have been effective” (153). As McConachie points out, Brecht’s notion of empathy is very different from the contemporary notion of empathy and, concerning agency, McConachie adds: “one that does not entail the loss of agency in a mystical merging with some Other and actually holds the promise of enhancing a person’s rationality in social situations like the theatre” (153-4). I completely agree with McConachie’s view on the spectator’s agency, as I emphasized in the previous chapters the role of the passive spectator must be abandoned.

McConachie explains that the spectators of *The Threepenny Opera* (1928) empathize with the characters on stage. Some of the characters would provoke sympathy and in the case of the character of Mackie the spectators would feel antipathy. Nevertheless, in both of the cases, McConachie assures that Brecht would welcome those responses but in contemporary cognitive terms he would not call them empathy; as McConachie explains:

Most spectators at performances of *The Threepenny Opera* in 1928 probably empathized with the Ballad Singer performing “The Ballad of Mack the Knife” at the top of the show to catch his attitude toward Mackie and his opinions about the criminal underworld of London around 1900. Few spectators likely sympathized with this cynical figure, but they needed to pay attention to his face, voice, and movements. (155)

Bearing in mind that Wallace asserts that she steps back far enough in order to see more clearly following Brechtian estrangement, it can be assumed that she also understands empathy in the same terms that Brecht does. Therefore, this induces us to consider that they

would retroactively mistaken in the use of the term and the purpose would be to avoid sympathy in order to be critical and create an active spectator; although as I stated before, the spectator is always an active spectator even when she/he is absorbed by the play. As I analyzed in Chapter One, Wallace's characters are rounded and she believes that people are far more complicated than the stereotypical characters. Therefore, Wallace is trying to accomplish an artistic portrait of society where the spectator will empathize with the character, and then, draw her/his own conclusions.

4.4. Two Monologues on Thompsonian Empathy: "Standard Time" (2002) and "The Retreating World" (2008).

As has been demonstrated in the first part of this chapter, empathy is crucial to analyze the spectator's experience. In this section, I would like to narrow down this statement and focus on Naomi Wallace's monologues, which in the light of Thompson's approach to empathy I see with new eyes. I find it interesting to analyze Wallace's plays "Standard Time" (2002) and "The Retreating World" (2008) since she has not written many self-standing monologues.³⁸ In terms of empathy, in theater I find the monologue as the form that best functions as a face-to-face conversation. As demonstrated by Gallese's findings, the viewer of a performed action experiences in her/his brain and mind this action in a similar way; furthermore, I find even more engaging the monologue form since the performer is directly addressing the audience, and therefore, inviting the spectator to be aware of the performance.

In "Standard Time" the protagonist, a young man, is given a voice but not a name.

³⁸ Apart from "Standard Time" (2002), Wallace wrote "The Retreating World" (2009) and "One Short Sleeper" (2009). One can probably count "The Fish Story" (1994) as a monologue but bearing in mind that it was published both as a monologue and as part of a character's dialogue in *Slaughter City* (1996).

Wallace's stage directions do not provide much information about the character: "*A working-class man, perhaps nineteen, on a bare stage, in a cell or room of confinement. The only object is a saddle on the floor, covered with a cloth so that its shape is not discernible. He is flipping a coin, slowly, casually*" (346). Depending on the production the "cell or room of confinement" would be suggested or not, since the stage directions also indicate that the stage must be bare as happens in most of her plays; if so, the spectator would be in the dark about the character's confinement. In spite of the bareness of the stage, the protagonist packs the whole monologue with plentiful imagery, which fills the absence of props. Obviously, both aspects—the absence, as well as the speech—enhance the spectator's use of her/his imagination to understand and engage with the story. The man explains how he and Tally, his girlfriend, ride in her car and experience the rush of youth and hope for a better future. He says:

[W]hen Tally was mine it was our car together. It was a wreck but we rode it. Didn't have a back seat so we didn't need one. We threw down a sheet of plastic and piled it with dirt to keep the rear low so we could floor it. And the wind from the open windows took ahold of our throats and made us gag with the thrust of it. (Standard 346)

The objectification and possessive behavior towards Tally expressed in the quotation above could be either a red flag for the spectator or his comment could also be ignored. Wallace gives only a few cues throughout the man's narration about what will happen in the end. Another hint towards his chauvinistic and self-centered nature is revealed through the image of the Marlboro cowboy, he narrates:

And one night Tally stole a saddle from a saddler barn on the Pop-side of town and we strapped it to the roof of the car and while she drove, I rode, with the wind

brushing my teeth into the kind of smile I couldn't make my own. I was the Marlboro Man and I swept over that highway like I was sweeping plains while the other cars scattered like cattle in front of my wheels. (Standard 374)

The spectator can interpret this image as inoffensive and/or foolish, since there is not much context at this point of the monologue, and the tone of the narration is nostalgic and not aggressive at all. The young couple longs to move somewhere else in the USA; their location, which does not figure in the description, is supposed to be a small town where they are seen as second class citizens “we couldn't stop being junk. That's what they called us in our hometown: J-town junk” (Standard 374). In his narration the American dream is part of the imaginary, and the play underlines the influence of materialism and capitalism, which are both dangerously fed by the American dream.

When the young man realizes that their dream is not attainable and they do not have a future everything collapses. Poverty prompts the fall of all their future plans, the tone of the monologue changes into a much more gloomy as well as sorrowful tone; the turning point can be noted when he states, “even the Marlboro man needs some spare change” (Standard 347). The man is self-aware of his situation, he states that “I was an idiot on a wet saddle, tied to the top of a wreck and the grass was starting to grow up through the dirt in the back seat” (Standard 347). The spectator progressively experiences this change in the narration as Tally breaks up their relationship and he becomes a threat. The protagonist grows obsessed with his girlfriend's car, which is obviously a symbol of the materialism that drives him, and claims his right upon it. The final twist of the story comes at the end of the monologue where the spectator is shocked to discover that he has shot her in the head and justifies it affirming, “I just. Wanted the car” (Standard 347). At this point, most certainly, the spectator does not feel any sympathy towards the protagonist but she/he does experience empathy, as I will

explain.

The first process³⁹ in empathy that Thompson acknowledges is mostly unconscious; therefore, in the case of Standard Time's spectators a process of coupling their bodies with the performer/character also takes place. This is a phase of perception, during which the spectator is unconsciously aware of the movements, facial expression, tone, physical appearance, or body movements. In this phase, the spectator is aware of the subject and tries to understand him. It could appear to be sensorimotor coupling where the performer grins and so does the spectator, for instance when the young man explains about the plastic piled with dirt on the back seat, or when he explains how he rides the car on the saddle. This coupling will provoke a direct interaction of the performer with the spectator. Of course in cognitive and neuroscientific terms, if we were able to map the spectator's brain, we would discover that the ventral premotor cortex, known as area F5 would have neural patterns of activation in common with those of the performer. In other words, a connection has been made at this stage between performer and spectator, where both subjects are experiencing the performance.

The second process that Thompson suggests is the imaginary transposition of oneself into the other's place. Once the spectator understands the character and the character's behavior and is engaged with the story, the spectator is able to see herself/himself in the position of the young man, and then is also able to attribute mental states of the other. For instance, when the winter comes and the man feels ridiculous riding on top of the car all wet and full of dirt, the spectator can attribute to the protagonist the mental state of distress, shame, and anger. The transposition is done through imagination, that is, I can imagine you

³⁹ Thompson's phenomenological approach to empathy is defined as follows: "Implicit in the foregoing account three distinguishable empathetic *processes or types* of empathy, to which we can also add a fourth" (emphasis mine, 392). I believe this point should have been specified distinguishing between processes or types to be in accordance with his definition that is detailed and has an excellent theoretical foundation. I personally refer to processes of empathy since it has the connotation of the different stages that the subject experiences.

are ashamed because I can imagine myself in your position in your circumstances. According to Thompson the cognitive empathy is at its fullest when the individual can mentally adopt the perspective of the other (Standard 396-7). However, this fact does not mean that the spectator sympathizes with the performer/character, as in the given situation the spectator does not lose her/his agency and has her/his own opinion; for example, if the spectator believes that riding on top of the car under the rain is enjoyable or completely absurd. The central aspect of this matter lays on the spectator's capability to imagine herself/himself in the character's circumstances, regardless of an alignment of her/his opinion about the character.

The third process of empathy is about the “mutual self and other understanding” (Thompson, 398). As explained before, empathy becomes reiterated, in other words, not only I am capable to see myself in your place, as in the second process, but I also understand that you see me as an other—foreign to your own self—which involves an intersubjectivity experience. In “Standard Time,” as well as any other theatrical performance, the spectator perceives how the performer ‘sees’ the audience. Particularly in the case of the monologue or other scenes in plays that break the imaginary fourth wall and allow a more direct face-to-face communication enabling the subjects involved to perceive the emotion of the other. At the same time, all the spectators experience joint attention of the scene paying attention to the young man's story. Although “Standard Time” is a short play one can clearly distinguish between three different sections where, as I indicated, the tone changes. The audience understands the character's circumstance, at the beginning of the monologue the spectator laughs with the young man recalling his adventures with his girlfriend and their drives in the car and at the same time the performer is aware of the public reactions towards his performance (ideally laughter, engagement, interest). After the change of tone in the discourse, the spectator knows that the protagonist is upset and the performer once again is

aware of it; understanding the man's emotions of frustration, embarrassment, being overwhelmed. In the last section of the play, the spectator realizes that tragedy is approaching, the performer then should adapt his movements, tone, and gestures to agree with the tension that it is escalating through the narration in accordance with the plot and the public reactions; with the end of the play the spectator can experience the emotions of surprise, pity, anger, rejection among others. In this process of empathy both the performer and the spectator are aware of each other in order to interact and create an appropriate association.

The fourth process, which corresponds to the moral perception, is a consequence of the different processes of empathy that the spectator has experienced. In the play, the moral conundrum takes place at the very end, where the spectator realizes that the young man has murdered Tally with the feeble excuse of wanting to have her car. The spectator feels repulsion towards the character because of his violent act. However, we have to bear in mind that this repulsion towards the violence perpetuated by the young man is processed through the conceptual blending capability, when the spectators live in the blend and 'sees' the character and that is what provokes an emotion; in this blend the spectator of course does not 'see' the performer but the character.

The second play I analyze in this section, "The Retreating World" (2008), is a monologue of a young Iraqi man, Ali, in the International Pigeon Convention in 2000. The play is part of Wallace's triptych *The Fever Chart: Three Visions of The Middle East* (2008) and it appears under the section "Vision Three." The protagonist narrates the embargo against Iraq and the assault on the Iraqi retreating troops in 1991. Ali is a bird collector who also has a passion for books, such as Shakespeare's and Hart Crane's. In the opening of the monologue "*Ali enters, balancing a book on his head*" (*Fever* 57), he starts talking about

books and how they have been devaluated since the blockade. In order to symbolize the current worth of the books in his country he plays with one; the stage directions indicate how he has to move and act with it. The performer moves around the stage in this playful explanation of the possible uses for a book, as follows:

Books can be used for many things besides reading (*Gives the book a couple of short, quick kicks*) For exercising the ankles and toes with short, controlled burst of movement. Or (*Snatches up the book*) a book can be used to create a man with a bookish face. It can be done. (*Hold the book to hide his face for a moment*) (*Fever 57*)

According to Thompson's empathy processes, Ali's opening, in particular the gestures and the movements described in the quotation above, draws the spectator's attention to the performance and activates the coupling process of spectator and performer, perhaps laughing or smiling to the performer's lighthearted tone of the first part of the play. Therefore, the spectator experiences the performance in her/his brain/mind and mirrors it thanks to her/his mirror neurons. Every time we watch a performed action; in this case, body expression is significant and helps the spectator even more to be attuned with the character. Our cognitive capability to empathize helps us to attune with the performance.

In the play, Ali expresses his admiration for the Anglo-Saxon culture and language, he shares this with his family that watches old Hollywood movies "[m]y father he loved movies, and so my mother named my sister Greta, after Garbo" (60) and elements of American consumerism; "[n]ow my grandmother [...] liked everything American. She drank coffee from a Campbell's soup can [...] wearing a set of trainers from a Sears" (*Fever 59*). Ali experiences a paradox when the culture that he looks up to becomes the alien invader of his country destroying everything he knows; he states: "I remember. I remember. Everything we say these days begins with "I remember"" (61); with this statement he is appealing to the

spectator's conscience. The spectator relates to Ali and his family and understands them easily because of their naïveté and uncomplicated life described at the beginning of the play; Ali gives details of their longing for an American way of life, or at least the global concept of an utopic life style promoted by the mass media. Ali's family could be as any other standard family, which the spectator definitely recognizes, if their country had not experienced the political conflict. Similarly to "Standard Time", the play changes its tone, which marks the imaginary transposition of the spectator into Ali's place. He states:

After the war, I sold them one by one, all twelve of them. For food. For aspirin. I sold them. But not before I sold the watch my great-uncle gave me, the spoon my aunt gave my mother, with my name inscribed the day I was born. Not before I sold my Shakespeare, in Arabic, first, then my copies in English. Because I knew. I knew. That my birds would not be shown at the next convention. (61)

The spectator is capable of transposing herself/himself to Ali's circumstances and sympathizes with him, because probably members of the audience would sacrifice their belongings for a greater good to their loved ones. Ali exchanges his possessions in order to help his family. His grandmother dies because they did not have access to medicines, he explains: "[I]ittle pink pills of penicillin were all she needed. But these were prohibited by the blockade, prohibited for import, as are chemotherapy drugs and painkillers" (*Fever* 61-2). Everyone around Ali dies as a consequence of the attack or because of the blockade. In addition, the play shows that not only the people are dying but also the country is dying at the same pace, which he accounts for in parallel explaining the morbid landscape:

That was all we need to save Lak'aa Faseeh Zayerm, my grandmother. She lay in my mother's arms, rotting from the avenues because the trees had died. And this was the land of dates. How many dates? How many birds? The sadness of numbers is that

they do not stop and there is always one more to follow. Just like birds. (62)

As explained in Chapter One, the references to the birds are meaningful in the play; when Ali speaks about the birds he makes a parallelism with his dearest relatives and/or civilians in general. This metaphor is not obvious from the very beginning, but as the play progresses, the spectator becomes more and more aware of it. He begins with the advice “never name a pigeon after a member of your family or a dear friend” and continues with a more evident reference “[p]arents were fined for not sending their pigeons to school” (59). In the end, he speaks openly “Five thousand pigeons die a month because of this blockade. No (*Beat*) Five thousand children die a month because of this blockade” (62). The birds metaphor serves as a device for Wallace to portray loss and despair, which are very present in the middle and last sections of the monologue. The protagonist comments on the paradoxical situation of the living and the dead picturing a landscape of dystopia, he states: “I lived. Funny. That I am still here. The dead are dead. The living, we are the ghosts” (66). The setting of the play is the International Pigeon Convention, Ali is allegedly addressing the public of the convention. At this point the spectator experiences reiterated empathy; after the transposition into Ali’s situation the spectator can feel guilt for being in such a privileged position drastically contrasted to the one of the character. As McConachie asserts: “Reiterated empathy centers on ethical self-reflection; having stepped into another’s shoes, people turn the imagined gaze of the other toward themselves to discern how well they might measure up to the other’s expectations” (*Evolution* 126).

Ali sells the birds primarily to people who would eat them. He cannot eat them himself because of the personal attachment he has to the creatures; he even speaks about cannibalism because his birds share names with his relatives. The last section of the monologue he carries a prop, a bucket and he explains what it contains, he states:

I sold my last bird a few days ago. Tomorrow I will sell the cage. The day after that I will have nothing more to sell. But I keep track of the buyers, and who the buyers sell to. I go to their homes and ask for the bones. Usually the family is kind, or frightened of me, and they give me the bones after the meal. I boil the bones and keep them in a bucket. (67)

Wallace is building up the spectator's sympathy towards the character who has lost it all in the war. Nevertheless, Wallace's message goes beyond that, since she is trying to recover and stage a part of history in a feminist Brechtian fashion; she narrates 'herstory' and personal vision of the facts. However, one has to also bear in mind that Wallace documents her plays through a bibliography given in some of her published plays, which sometimes is printed and handed over to the audience.⁴⁰ Wallace speaks through Ali when he states "[a]nd this, my friends, is documented. Fact. Fact. By the European Parliament, 1991" (65).

There is a remarkable difference between both monologues, that is, the factuality of the reality described by this character. I believe it is an added aspect, which helps the imaginary transposition of the spectator who is immersed in a complex blend. Ali story is based in facts; therefore, the spectator probably knows that the character is narrating the events of a real war, whereas in *Standard Time* the spectator is immersed in a blend that is less complex. If we analyze the mental space of the *Retreating World* we will have the performance as scenario a (fiction), the reality of a performance as scenario b (event reality), and the real war described as scenario c (historical reality). This complex blend engages the spectator who can easily live momentarily in the blend and experience complex emotional episodes.

The very end of the play is also influenced by Brechtian Theater, because Wallace

⁴⁰ See the appendix 2.

decides in the most tense moment of the monologue to finish with a *gestus*:⁴¹

These are the bones of those have died [...] I have come here to give them to you for safekeeping. (*Beat*) Catch them. If you can.

(*He throws the contents of the bucket at the audience. Instead of bones, into the air and across the audience, spill hundreds of white feathers.*) (67-8)

Ali is directly addressing and blaming his audience of the situation, this reminds the spectator that we all have a part in society, and the victims of the war are sometimes isolated, neglected or just ignored by other countries. Sometimes our well-being is subject to the suffering of others and the character of Ali represents the voice of the other, who stages the inconvenient truth and the repercussion of our existence. This situation corresponds to the ethical aspect Thompson's points out in the fourth process of empathy, that is the moral perception of you as a person.

Using McConachie's terminology, we can say that Wallace accomplishes "empathetic rhetoric" (*Evolution* 127). Both *Standard Time* and *The Retreating World* are presented as the perfect scenario to illustrate Thompson's four processes of empathy. Nevertheless, one should acknowledge that any performance could be part of the first type of empathy, which is held by our cognitive capability of coupling and mirroring unconsciously. *Standard Time* introduces a character that is the recipient of antipathy and the second monologue stages a character that is the recipient of sympathy. As explained above, the fact that *The Retreating World* is based on real events bring about intense emotions to the spectator who moves in an imaginary transposition of a real event. However, both of them are regarded in terms of empathetic rhetoric, therefore, the spectator will experience empathy towards both of them;

⁴¹ For a more clear picture of the gesture and an account of the audience's reaction towards the different sections of the monologue, a production of the play can be watched in the following link to a YouTube clip: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_vUSbC3XqxE

although her/his feelings towards the characters vary thanks to the moral perception of them. I analyze the moral and ethical aspects of Wallace's works in the next chapter.

4.5. A Room for Affective Phenomena: Emotional Episodes in *In the Heart of America* (1994) and *The Hard Weather Boating Party* (2009).

Lyn Gardner defines Naomi Wallace as “a deeply political US playwright who unashamedly writes about ideas rather than *feelings*” (“Enemy Within,” emphasis mine). I believe that Wallace does not dwell on sentimentalism when she writes her plays, however, to reduce her plays to ideas discarding feelings and emotions would be similar to analyzing a sculpture only by the composition of its materials. The essence of Wallace's plays is rooted in the emotions that her works entails; obviously the political ideas are a strong element of her plays but they are not the one and only aspect that should be considered. As seen in this chapter, emotional episodes have a more profound meaning than simple responses to a stimulus. According to Colombetti's Enactive approach they also convey meaning and they are embodied, which challenges the traditional conception of emotions. If we narrow down the scope to analyze a theatrical production, we find that the performance is part of the spectator's body, since she/he couples with the performer and so of that mind-in-body, experience. According to the Dynamic Systems Theory and the affective science approach, there is a *synchronicity* and *disposition* on the part of the spectator to experience emotional episodes. In this section, I analyze two plays by Naomi Wallace, *In the Heart of America* (1994) and *The Hard Weather Boating Party* (2009), placing them under the lens of the affective science and the Enactive theory that Colombetti proposes.

I have to return to the first quotation in Chapter One, which reminds us of the playwright's intention related to the spectator's experience. Wallace is passionate about putting the spectator at risk, her statement conveys pushing the boundaries of what is politically correct and blurring the limit of the spectator's comfort zone. Evidently, these aspects generate different experiences during her theatrical productions and also involve diverse emotional episodes. Wallace is especially interested in contradictions, which sometimes are the product of her political disposition; the spectators should certainly find topics that delve into socialism as part of her plots. As I have indicated through some examples in this thesis, the clash depicted in most of her plays is related either to social class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, or gender. Dealing with one of her most recurrent topics, war, Wallace explores in *In the Heart of America* the dynamics of two conflicting issues, love and war. In order to look into this conflict, the playwright approaches war with an interest in how the human body is capable of both killing and loving.

The battlefield, an unusual scenario for love, serves as the setting of the play where two young soldiers, Remzi and Craver, fall in love and have to fight additional battles against prejudice, racism, and homophobia. Wallace explores the balance that these young men try to attain in order to serve their country and at the same time discover and experience love. Remzi is conflicted not only by his feelings towards a fellow soldier, but also in terms of war, he is struggling with his own identity throughout the play; he is a Palestinian-American.

REMZI: Why are we here (*Beat*) killing Arabs?

CRAVER: For love? Say it's for love. Don't say for oil. Don't say for freedom. Don't say for world power. I'm sick of that. I'm so fucking sick of that. It's true, isn't it? We're here for love. Say it just once. For me.

REMZI: We're here for love.

(They kiss.) (In the Heart 124)

In the previous section, I discussed the spectator's empathetic experience and its processes in Wallace's monologues. As McConachie asserts, and I explained earlier in this chapter, empathy is not a feeling but it can lead to feelings. The dialogue above is appealing to imaginary transposition and inviting the spectator to experience sympathy towards the characters. The audience understands how the young soldiers have been lured into the military life and once in the battlefield, they question the purpose of their mission. Memory also plays an important part in the spectator's emotional episodes; witnessing the fictional—but at the same time hypothetical bordering reality—of these two young soldiers' situation in the Gulf War, brings back the spectator's experiences and feelings towards the conflict. Those feelings that perhaps put into the spectator's mind the rumors of economic interest of the parties involved in war. The performance would encompass different emotions—which according to Colombetti is one of the primary reasons to discard Basic Emotions Theory in order to analyze emotional episodes—watching the performance of the fragment above, the spectator might feel pity, anger, frustration all at the same time, being all these feelings being part of a single emotional episode.

I find that Colombetti's theory on emotional episodes is an appropriate approach to performance because, among several other reasons explained above such as embodiment, it helps as a means to understand and study emotions in Wallace's plays where the complexity of the spectatorial experience should be acknowledged. This theory makes room for different nuances and does not oversimplify the character of emotions. The example of an emotional episode such as the one that goes with the dialogue above, where the spectator experiences pity, anger, and frustration has also an embodied experience; which can be part of the facial and muscular expression, such as frowning; Colombetti calls this the coordinative structures and preferential linkages among muscles (58). Dynamic Theory System in affective science

also takes into account, as seen before, the interpersonal relationships, which in this case is related to coupling; the spectator couples with the character/performer and thanks to her/his cognitive empathy experiences the performance in a similar way to the performer. Apart from Colombetti's Enactive paradigm, some insights derived from psychology also justify this behavior, such as projection. McConachie draws a parallelism of spectatorship in theater and sports, he states:

When the heroes and villains of the performance can be personified, the action of picking a desired winner usually leads to two other major emotional investments – condemning the undesirables and celebrating your own players. Again, this is most apparent in sports events, but it also occurs when spectators respond with **anger, fear,** and/or derisive laughter to the negative characters in dramas and dances. The **antipathy** that results from this cognitive-affective process (and the **sympathy** inspired by positive actor/role-players) is a mode of psychological projection. That is, spectators project their own emotions, values, and desires onto blended players in a performance. (*Evolution* 100, author's bold type emphasis)

The spectator in Wallace's plays typically is unable to clearly distinguish between heroes and villains; in most of her plays, the hero is a hero only in some scenes or the victim is a victim only until she/he turns into the aggressor. Nevertheless, in *In the Heart of America* she does not follow this pattern and introduces a character that is undoubtedly worthy of antipathy, Boxler. He is described as "the soul of Lieutenant Calley" (80).⁴² Wallace is fond of spectral characters and Boxler is one of those wanderer dramatis personae that move across time and space, similar to Sausage Man in *Slaughter City*. Boxler is Remzi and Craver's lieutenant in the Gulf War but in some scenes, he interacts, as Calley, such as when

⁴² Lieutenant Calley was convicted over the killings at My Lai where around 400 unarmed civilians were killed indiscriminately. He was sentenced to life in prison, later reduced to 20 years and house arrest. For more information see <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/6072064/My-Lai-massacre-Lt-William-Calley-apologises-more-than-40-years-after-Vietnam.html>

he speaks with Lue Ming, who is described as “a ghost but more solid” (80); these characters have a common history related to the Vietnam War which belongs to the past. Wallace establishes the parallelism between the Vietnam War and the Gulf War with the intention of denouncing the very recent war (considering that the play was published in 1994 and Gulf War ended in 1991) by contrasting it with the more distant Vietnam War, which was very controversial and had its detractors that have already recognized it as unnecessary and a failure.

One of the most aggressive scenes depicting the character of Boxler consists in his attempt to provoke an explosion of fury between the soldiers. Boxler repeatedly insults Craver and encourages him to fight against Remzi and, as a consequence, Craver, possessed the rage and frustration starts to choke Remzi. During the scene Boxler taunts the soldier and expresses his satisfaction with the aggressiveness by stimulating Craver:

BOXLER: Sodomite. Fairy. *(Beat)* Feel it? Feel it inside you, Mr. Perry? Now grab hold of it.

(Boxler finally pulls Craver off of Remzi)

Catch it. Hold it like a bullet between your teeth. And when the right moment comes, when you’ve spotted your enemy, let it rip, my son. (101)

This scene represents different extreme emotions such as rage, anger, pain, fear, or hate. The spectator is entitled to have a short emotional episode, since she/he is immersed in all this action as well as the performers/characters. Physical reactions are part of the spectators’ emotional episodes, coordinative structures among the muscles are not restrained to facial muscles, for example squinting; the body also feels the tension, perhaps in the back or the limbs become stiff. Furthermore, some other reactions such as tickling in the stomach as a consequence of nervousness can also take place. The phenomenological approach to

emotional episodes contemplates all these embodied aspects, which are fundamental to enaction, as we will see in Chapter Six.

In order to engage the spectator and attract her/his attention, Wallace disrupts the setting in space and time. The timeline of the play moves between the present where Fairouz is looking for answers because her brother Remzi has been reported missing and the past in the battlefield where the young soldiers are. The place is a motel room in Saudi Arabia and a room in the Iraqi desert. Wallace indicates that in some scenes past and present collide. The characters of Lue Ming and Boxler are spectral entities, hence they wander, interact, and intervene with characters from the central plot line but they also interact between themselves, as in the following scene:

LUE MING: What is it like to kill a child? [...]

Why did you have to shoot her twice? Three times? Just to make sure?

BOXLER: Just to make sure, I did it four times. And shooting a child, if you must know, is rather exceptional. It's like shooting an angel. There's something religious about it. (131)

Both character are part of a subplot that supposedly make allusions to the Vietnam War. Lue Ming confronts Boxler in different scenes of the play, and in the end, the spectator discovers that Boxler, as Lieutenant Calley, had killed Lue Ming's daughter. Although Wallace is interested in contradictions, Boxler is presented as responsible of war crimes and there is no place for ambiguity in this character. His lines above, justify the antipathy the spectator experiences towards this character; analyzing the spectator's emotional episode we might find antipathy, disgust, anger, and sadness for instance. Furthermore, as explained in the section dealing with Colombetti's theory, this emotional episode is part of a relationship between the spectator and the performance, where the spectator puts in motion her/his

practical knowledge in relation to this ecosystem, or perhaps should I say ‘micro ecosystem’ since the theater can be considered a small unit.

In the same way that Lue Ming confronts Boxler, Fairouz arrives in Saudi Arabia to speak with Craver and cast some light on her brother disappearance. Craver is reluctant to share anything with Fairouz at first. However, after several scenes and having conversations about personal anecdotes concerning their relationship with Remzi, Craver and Fairouz bond together and he agrees to explain to her the details of his absence:

CRAVER: They caught us together, out behind the barracks. They were lower ranks, Just kids. Like me. [...] Handed us over to an upper rank. There was a British officer and an Iraqi prisoner in there too, and they were laughing and saying: “Sandnigger. Indian. Gook.” *(Beat)* Remzi. Well He went wild. He jumped one of those officers. I was standing there. I couldn’t move. I couldn’t...Then someone hit me over the head, and I went out. *(Beat)* [...] They were all over him [Remzi] and having a good time at it. Like kids in the snow. *(Beat)* Do you want to know how you died, Remzi?

REMZI: Friendly fire. (135)

Remzi was beaten to death by his own colleagues; Wallace denounces with this play how gay bashing in the US army became a state issue in the 90s. The Clinton administration issued the policy “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” (DADT) in 1994 with the intention of avoiding gay discrimination, harassing, and bashing in the defense forces. *In the Heart of America* is a play about feelings and emotions, which in a bigger picture are connected with love and hate. It has been seen as a political story but I firmly believe that the playwright’s central idea is to represent a love story amidst hate. The spectator follows the performers through this journey from hate to love, which is woven through with some aspects of military rhetoric with sexual innuendos—“Have you ever run your face over a wing of an A-6 Intruder, or opened your

mouth into the tail of a AV-8B Harrier II?” (113)—with the names of the bombs, such as “Sad Eyes” (87), to the search for identity “I’m a White Trash, River Boy, Arab-kissing Faggot” (114). *In the Heart of America* after more than 20 years is still recognized as Wallace’s masterpiece, which I believe is owing to the fact that she offers an intense experience to the spectator who undergoes different emotional episodes throughout the play.

A completely different experience is presented in *The Hard Weather Boating Party*; in this play, Wallace presents an issue she knows well, which is exploitation of labor in factories. Different from *In the Heart*, this play focuses on the body that is wounded by a chemical industrial force. As a child, Wallace lived in Kentucky where she was deeply aware of the damage the factories cause to both the environment and its workers. This is a recurrent topic in her plays, she had already dealt with it in *Slaughter City* (1996) and in *The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek* (1998), however, in *The Hard Weather Boating Party* the workers are mortally injured due to the chemical compounds. In a dark comic tone, the play explores how three workers on the verge of despair decided to murder their chief executive officer; Staddon Vance, “fifty years old, white man” (339), is the brains of the plan who chooses Coyle Forester, a “late forties, African-American” (339), and Lex Nadal, an “early twenties, Latino” (339), to get involved in the murder.

Emotional episodes in the play are intricate due to the nature of the tragicomic approach to the subject. The three characters have been exposed several times to contamination episodes, as a consequence of this, they are terminally ill, which is their motif to murder their factory owner. The spectator does not experience sadness, as she/he would usually do witnessing a story of three terminal people who, in addition to this circumstance, are going to assassinate a fourth one. Wallace approach is peculiar since there are many comic scenes in the play, although it presents a tough story. Comic elements, such as their

sloppiness and narrow-mindedness, are their reason to interact with suspicion, although they tried to build trust through personal questions and playing the game of dare or truth.

LEX. Bang. Ker-pow. Smash, splinter, splinter. The door breaks open and we're in.

STADDON. I have a key.

LEX. Oh.

COYLE. You ever killed anyone, Lex?

LEX. I don't think so.

COYLE. What the hell does that mean?

STADDON. I HAVE NOT.

LEX. (*To COYLE.*) Have you?

COYLE. I'm a fucking vegetarian. No.

On the other hand, the most notorious tragic element is that their symptoms are very visual and they break out the middle of the action, such as coughs of blood or fluorescent phlegm, smoking feet, cold hands, loss of touch, and they are impotent:

STADDON. I oversaw the workforce on level three through seven for years... I'd say you were exposed to general concentrated chemical contamination at the workplace...nine times. Exactly. [...]

COYLE. What is this? Fucking doc time? (374)

The performers have short dialogues where they interrupt each other, the action has an exceedingly fast pace compared to her other works. As Ozieblo points out "It is an almost realistic, 'talky' play – that is, there is more talk than action; Wallace gradually reveals the circumstances [...] as she steadily moves from realism to surrealism" ("From Shirtwaist" 118). Several aspects of the play motivate the spectator's engagement; the fast pace, which demands special attention, the mysterious setting providing little information on the background, and the expectancy of a crime. The set is ambiguously described, it suggests the

possibility of a dream; as “[a] sparse, simple Motel 6 room, or a dream Motel 6 room had about itself” (339). The air of realism that Ozieblo points out is also reinforced through the setting, the motel, the scenery, which is not as minimal as Wallace usually chooses for her plays, and the heavy rain; “*Hard rain is heard on the roof of the motel room. No lighting, but steadily hard rain*” (341).

Borrowing Ozieblo’s words the “talky” aspect of the play attends to the characters’ need to pose a great deal of questions because although they work together, they are not close. The spectator discovers the nature of the characters at the same time as the men get to know their coworkers. Therefore, the spectator shares the perception of two of the men towards the third one whenever they reveal something about themselves. Wallace intentionally makes the three of them different in race, social status, and age, as a means to explore the differences that separate them but also to acknowledge the things that bring them together, such as dealing with the hazardous work environment.

COYLE. I know you don’t live in Rubbertown.

STADDON. No. Across the river. In Clarksville.

LEX. Of course. Like to keep your distance.

COYLE. From people like us. What’s it like in your neighborhood? In
(*Emphasizing.*) Clarks-ville?

STADDON. It’s—

COYLE. clean.

STADDON. It’s—

LEX. quiet.

COYLE. Safe.

STADDON. I was going to say it’s got trees. (345)

Although the play mostly resorts to comic relief to narrate the story, the first act ends with the men ready to go to the factory owner's house Chelton Steff to kill him, and the comic tone fades with the following stage direction: "*Easily, surely, the men put the stockings on their heads. STADDON pulls his stocking completely over his face. They stand in a row, and they no longer look uncertain, but professional and frightening*" (368). The spectator perhaps feels disturbed by the look of the men—as Wallace specifies this gesture of the gang in a row with the faces covered ready to commit a crime—she/he experiences a mixture of emotions that immediately go from sympathizing with the performance to distancing herself/himself from the evil plan. However, during the second act the spectator discovers that they could not carry out the killing, because they did not have the determination they needed to make it. The weather becomes more intense in the second act according to the feelings that the characters express. Staddon confesses that he voluntarily exposed himself to the chemical contamination, Coyle feels insulted and says, "Well if that isn't the most distorted, disgusting, sentimental piece of solidarity bullshit I have ever heard. Well. I got news for you Staddon Vance. You are not like us" (384).

Nevertheless, as Ozieblo points out, Staddon by the end of the play becomes one of them (From *Shirtwaist* 125); the second act is where the surrealism comes into play, Staddon asks Lex and Coyle to kill him since he has not the guts to commit suicide. After several bizarre attempts Lex ends Staddon's life and the men begin to pray. To the confusion of the spectator the playwright adds a huge visual element: "the floor of the motel room cracks open and the hull of a boat breaks up through the floor behind the praying men. LEX and COYLE begin to slowly turn around as the rest of the boat appears [...] It is a beautiful, classic 1960s speedboat" (390). This prop adds to the spectator's emotional episode, surprise, excitement, and confusion closing the play with a lot of questions and certainly diverse and mixed feelings. Some spectators might understand this end as a sign of freedom, redemption or a

divine response, however, the playwright does not give the answers, which as Ozieblo points out, “Wallace leaves the ending open, so forcing us to participate and think out our own ending” (“From Shirtwaist” 126). The genre of tragicomedy can be confusing to the spectator who finds herself/himself immersed in opposite emotional episodes from laughter to tears. However, I believe that Wallace is able to provide a satisfactory experience to the spectator in *The Hard Weather Boating Party* through devices such as fast pace, surprising element, and most important avoiding mawkish sentimentality to deal with death.

The theories presented in this chapter belong to the new paradigm of Enactive approach to cognition; as I will explain in Chapter Six some cognitive scientists are advocating towards this new vision of cognition. Colombetti’s and Thompson’s approach to cognitive aspects such as empathy and emotions are extremely valuable to understand the intricate plays that Naomi Wallace present to the spectator, as well as to analyze the spectatorial experience. The following chapter can be seen as a continuation of Thompson’s four empathetic process—that is the moral perception—where I deal with a cognitive, and more specifically evolutionary, approach to ethics, which I find essential to understand Wallace’s oeuvre and the repercussion on the spectator.



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Chapter Five. An Evolutionary Approach to Ethics in Wallace.



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Chapter Five.

An Evolutionary Approach to Ethics in Wallace.

Naomi Wallace as a politically committed writer analyzes humankind as a social conundrum where ethical questions come into play, as seen in several examples throughout this thesis; if one studies her works, one realizes that ethics is a question repeatedly present in her plays from the plots, the dialogues, to the essence of the characters. Since ethics is such a recurrent and constituent part of her plays, in this chapter I analyze how Wallace introduces ethical issues in a selection of two plays: *Things of Dry Hours* (2007) and *Slaughter City* (1996). In order to understand the grounds of ethics based in cultural, cognitive, and evolutionary aspects, I will adopt Kitcher's theories of *The Ethical Project* and follow the model that McConachie presents in "A Deweyan Ethics for Performance Studies" a chapter of his *Evolution, Cognition, and Performance* (2015). I demonstrate in this chapter that Wallace would agree with the vision of the Deweyan ethics that McConachie proposes—in accordance with what I explained at the beginning of Chapter One, she aspires to contribute to "the transformation of ourselves and our communities" (Wallace, "Introduction" 427). As I commented in the previous chapters, Wallace presents characters that are exploited and subjugated; thus, she denounces in her plays the lack of altruism and the consequences of it, such as in *The Hard Weather Boating Party* (2009), *The Retreating World* as part of *The Fever Chart: Three Visions of the Middle East* (2008) where she gives voice to the collateral victims of capitalism and the foreign policy of the USA, or plays like *Standard Time* (2000) and *One Flea Spare* (1995) pointing to the social differences. In most of Wallace's plays the spectator sees how the empowered oppressors subjugate those characters in a vulnerable position; some of the unethical aspects of the plays analyzed in this chapter relates to the

exploitation of workers by the system where economical and historical deterministic forces rule their fate. Wallace's intentions to contribute to the community are evident through the analysis of the two plays; in *Things of Dry Hours* (2007) she deals with the situation of a Communist African-American in the early 1930s in Alabama and in *Slaughter City* (1996), a play written almost a decade earlier, Wallace depicts the working conditions of a slaughterhouse and the class struggle in connection with the Triangle Shirtwaist fire in New York City in 1911. As a continuation of Thompson's fourth process of empathy studied in the previous chapter—that is, the moral perception where the subject has “the underlying capacity to have such other-directed and other regarding feelings of concern” (Thompson 401)—this chapter explores the ethical aspect of Wallace's plays, which comes in the interplay of evolution and ecosystem as part of the Enactive vision analyzed in the next chapter.

5.1. An approach to Ethics and Evolution.

Ethics emerges as a human phenomenon, permanently unfinished. We, collectively, made it up, and have developed, refined, and distorted it, generation by generation. Ethics should be understood as a *project*—the ethical project—in which we have been engaged for most of our history as a species. (Kitcher 2)

With this statement Philip Kitcher introduces us to his ethical project, for him, ethics must be seen as a work in progress, which began with the rise of humanity and it will continue evolving throughout history. Moreover, Kitcher's *The Ethical Project* (2011) analyzes the root of ethics focusing on evolutionary, cultural, and biological aspects. Kitcher, as stated in the quotation above, understands ethics as an unfinished project, he believes that the best

approach to fulfill progress and proceed with the phenomenon relies on “pragmatic naturalism” (3); that is, a combination of both pragmatics and naturalism. As he asserts:

Pragmatic naturalism engages with the religious entanglement of ethics more extensively than is usual in secular philosophical discussion—for the pragmatist reason that the entanglement pervades almost all versions of ethical life. Yet, in accordance with its naturalist scruples, it cannot maintain the image favored by those who would ground ethics in the divine will [...] there are powerful reasons to suppose, even if there were any deity, ethics could not be fixed by its (his? her?) tastes. (4)

Kitcher rejects the idea of ethics founded and/or moved exclusively by religion. According to pragmatic naturalism even though “religion is understood as a historically evolving practice” (4) and it can bring social benefits, it also creates different and/or diverse doctrines, and also, sometimes contradictory insights. In the light of that, Kitcher proposes what he calls “a secular renewal of the ethical project” (5). As Kitcher explains drawing on pragmatic naturalism:

Pragmatic naturalism’s normative stance consists in an egalitarian conception of the good, focusing on equal opportunity for a worthwhile life, and a method for ethical discussion in terms of mutual engagement within a comprehensive population; both proposals advocate disentangling our ethical practices from myths about supernatural beings. Neither religion nor philosophy can pronounce with authority. Ethics is something people work out together, and, in the end, the only authority is that of their conversation. (409-10)

At this point I would like to examine the concept of ethics in order to pose some questions. Ethics is understood as the moral principles by which a person or a group of persons are governed. If we consider Kitcher’s position towards those principles, we might ask: what

rules ethics in a secular sphere? Even nowadays, many people understand ethics to be linked to their religious beliefs, then, would it be possible for the spectator—educated in a deeply ingrained Judeo-Christian faith, just to name one—to see moral principles from differently than Kitcher proposes? What role do theatrical performances play in the ethics domain?

The key to some of these questions introduced from a secular foundation of ethics resides in evolution and the human capacity of altruism. As McConachie explains in his chapter on ethics (*Evolution* 168), Kitcher “speculates that our ancestors were probably able to build upon the fragile friendships and coalitions of early hominid life to move beyond the biological altruism of proto-chimps in order to sustain longer-term cooperation among members of the same band” (173). Therefore, the mind of our ancestors was shaped through these alliances and cooperation giving rise to principles and social norms such as groupishness or normative guidance. In *The Ethical Project*, Kitcher revisits some ideas of Darwinism, mainly through John Dewey’s approach to evolution. According to Dewey the evolution of the mind was motivated to give rise to the survival of the species; as Bruce McConachie explains, Dewey “held that our body-minds worked best when trying to solve our own and others’ practical problems” (*Evolution* 170). Interestingly, as McConachie indicates, Kitcher’s ideas concur with Jonathan Haidt’s earlier concept of “groupishness” (*Evolution* 54).⁴³ Groupishness proposes that progress is accomplished through the work of the group and obviously works within the parameters of social interaction.

Concerning Darwin’s theories, McConachie points towards the anticipation of some of those ideas in Peter Singer in *A Darwinian Left: Politics, Evolution, and Cooperation* (2000). As he explains, some of the recent findings in evolutionary and cognitive sciences contradict the Darwinian theory of the survival of the fittest (*The Roots* 123). Furthermore, Singer suggests that,

⁴³ McConachie extracts this concept from Jonathan Haidt’s *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion* (2012)—also see <http://righteousmind.com/> for further information—he explains how Homo Sapiens promoted the group’s interests to compete with other groups.

a Darwinian Left would promote structures that foster cooperation rather than competition, and attempt to channel competition into socially desirable ends; stand by the traditional values of the left by being on the side of the weak, poor, and oppressed, but think very carefully about what social and economic changes will really work to benefit them. (qtd. in McConachie, *The Roots* 123)

Singer ethical statement of the traditional values of the left is relevant to Wallace aspect as “socialist writer” that I commented in Chapter One. Moreover, McConachie’s observation stating that “[i]n the midst of what remains a poor world economy perpetuated, in part, by reactionary political propaganda paid for by a corporate elite, Singer’s fifteen-year old call-to-action is both more radical and more commonsensical now than when he wrote it” (*The Roots* 123) is also relevant to the analysis of Naomi Wallace’s plays in this chapter and reaffirms even more the cognitive evolutionary approach to the ethics explored in her plays.

McConachie further observes that Dewey reaches a similar conclusion where pluralism is an instrument “for ameliorating social problems” (*Evolution* 170). Nowadays, I see groupishness as a principle of culture where we as members of social circles gather together with common interests. If we dismiss the threats and exposure that our ancestors suffered in a hostile environment, we are able to see how traces of our communal and social nature are manifested today; for instance, through cultural events. Instead of seeking protection with its ultimate goal to enjoy the benefit of remaining alive, now we enjoy social interaction and leisure activities, such as visiting museums or going to the theater. However, McConachie studies other implications of groupishness, which are much more relevant especially in a bigger picture and which impact on performance studies; he approaches social progress and the evolution of ethics, which is the logical course of action bearing in mind Kitcher’s concept of ethics as a project in motion. As McConachie observes:

This led the pragmatist to champion secular democracy, communities of scientific inquiry, and student-centered learning. Given historical change and the inevitable emergence of new problems for our species, however, Dewey also recognized that all solutions to society's problems must always be temporary. Drawing on Darwin, he understood that the only ethical stance possible was to begin with the recognition of change. With no final fix possible for human society, Dewey implicitly promised steady work for his pluralistic community of problem-solvers, which included artists as well as politicians, scientists, and educators. (170)

Kitcher explains that there is archaeological evidence, which posits that the root of altruism can be traced to hominid and early humans periods (18). He also differentiates between three types of altruism, which is key, since, not all of them are relevant to the ethical project: biological altruism, behavioral altruism, and psychological altruism. Kitcher asserts that biological altruism is not exclusively a human capability since it “requires no perceptive or cognitive abilities. Even plants can have traits that make them biologically altruistic, for their propensities to form roots or to set seeds can limit individual reproductive success and facilitate the reproduction of neighbors” (19). He also explains that in behavioral altruism the species “do what they take the animals around them to want. They may act in this way not out of any particular concern for those other animals, but because they think that some of their own wishes will ultimately be well served by doing as they do” (19). Kitcher states that both biological and behavioral altruism does not contribute to an understanding of the origins of the ethical project (19); rather the notion of psychological altruism is central to understanding an evolutionary perspective of ethics. As he explains:

Psychological altruism has everything to do with the intentions of the agent and nothing to do with the spread of genes, or even the successful satisfaction of the wishes of others. Assuming for the moment that there have been human beings who

are psychological altruists, the vast majority of them have not known much about heredity, and even those who have were rarely concerned with spreading genes. *They acted to promote what they took to be the wishes, or the interests, of other people.* Sometimes they succeeded. Yet, even when they did not, their serious efforts to do so qualified them as psychological altruists. (19, my emphasis)

Psychological altruism has evolved from kin selection,⁴⁴ which he hypothesizes comes from neural pairing, already studied it in the previous chapter. He exemplifies psychological altruism through the experience of parenting, where the parents nurture and bond with the infant altruistically, considered as the “most basic and primitive type of altruism” (Kitcher 42).

As I introduced above, my standpoint is that Kitcher’s theory is appropriate to analyze Naomi Wallace’s works, inasmuch as most of his claims seem extremely pertinent to the plot of her plays. Moreover, ethics is clearly entwined with central ideas on Wallace’s works, since the spectator frequently witnesses how her characters deal with moral dilemmas related to class, gender, and/or politics. Furthermore, I see a parallelism in the way both Kitcher and Wallace deal with those ideas that might seem utopic at first sight, particularly for the most skeptical critics. For instance, in an interview Claire MacDonald poses the question of faith in the future and its complexity regarding Wallace’s *Things of Dry Hours*, and Wallace answers alluding to those utopian ideas that may lead to a different and a better America. As she asserts:

If one pursues a vision of a truly different America, one is labeled naïve. These folks in the Communist party, in the 1930s, what vision of America did they yearn for? At the core of this vision were black folks. Today, a dream of a truly different America is either ridiculed or disparaged. What fascinates me are the ingredients that made it possible to envision another America, an alternative utopia. I’m also lit up by this

⁴⁴ The debate of kin selection can be traced back to Charles Darwin’s discussion of kin selection in *On the Origin of Species: by Means of Natural Selection or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (1859).

very buried history, which is the relationship of African American communities to the Communist party. This relationship not only transformed some African American communities, but it changed the American Communist party, right down to its core. (98)

Some critics categorize her plays as utopian, because she deals with Marxist and Communist ideals in her works, or unsuitable for contemporary politics; for instance, Buell Wisner in “‘Waiting in the Angel’s Wings:’ Marxist Fantasia in Naomi Wallace’s *Slaughter City*” (2006) states that “this discourse no longer seems a vital part of revolutionary writing [...] which seems at this historical moment unsuitable for realistic politics” (57). Wisner alludes to *Slaughter City*, he sees that not only Marxism is unsuitable, he also critiques the fact that the play is a factory drama, he explains: “[w]hen Wallace writes a play about a factory, then social realism does not provide the appropriate medium nor represent the realities of labor and class today” (58). I believe that *Slaughter City* is innovative in many aspects—such as the construction of the characters and the array of scenes—where the setting, a meatpacking house, fades. In my opinion, the sociopolitical discourse and the fact that it is a factory drama are two irrelevant aspects,⁴⁵ since *Slaughter City* transmits an ethical predicament and the urge for progress. Nevertheless, Wallace does not fear to deal with Marxism in her plays⁴⁶—although she defines herself specifically as a socialist writer—she seems to concur with some ideas of Marxist ideology, which considers the artist should work as a social enlightener; the philosopher and revolutionary Friedrich Engels affirms that art cannot change the course of history by itself, however, it can be an active element for the change (Eagleton, *Marxism* loc.144). Many dramatists, practitioners, critics and scholars agree with this idea and—regardless of the possibility that some critics might disagree with

⁴⁵ I will return to this point later on this chapter, discussing my vision on her choice of factory drama.

⁴⁶ Apparently, Wallace is not afraid to question capitalism in the USA and she speaks openly about Communism and Marxism. She was detained for breaking the ban on visiting Cuba, see <<http://wfpl.org/playwriting-and-palestine-kentuckian-naomi-wallace-to-sail-to-gaza/>>

me, I would take the risk and concur with this idea—it could be said that in the realm of performance, ‘theater people’ often believe in being an active instrument to prompt change. Other studies about spectating, such as the cognitive approach of Mick Gordon in *Theatre and the Mind* (2010), point out that the change theater might prompt has no evident effect in the theatrical event per se; however, the effects are visible in the long-term. Gordon believes that theater creates a safe environment, since the spectator is under the assumption that the performance is not going to change her/his life. As a consequence of this, the spectator receives the performance in a much more receptive way and extrapolates the fiction to herself/himself undergoing situations that would not usually be a part of her/his everyday experience (44). However, Wallace’s vision is quite the opposite, as seen in the first chapter; she believes that theater should be challenging and dangerous in order to question the subjunctive realities on stage. Regardless of the plurality of opinions about how safe the theater environment might be, a great deal of critics and practitioners agree on an essential idea and aim: theater must be an instigator of awareness and social change; this brings me back to Dewey’s argument alluding to the problem-solvers within a community. I believe that the consequence of Dewey’s argument is that as problem-solvers the arts find their niche and demonstrate their noteworthy pragmatic value for society.

McConachie poses an interesting premise about social arrangements for ethical progress and the threats towards it; he explains that “[a]s Kitcher and others understand, all social systems built partly upon altruism must guard against bullies and free riders” (*Evolution* 175). Evidently, in *Angels in America*, McConachie—and so does the spectator of the play—recognizes Roy Cohn as a bully and, perhaps not as evidently, Joe Pitt and Louis Ironson as free riders. As McConachie explains:

Bullies take advantage of the expectation of trust that emerges when societies attempt to practice modes of cooperation through egalitarian norms and the internalization of

altruistic values. [...] Free riders, the second general problem for all societies that attempt to honor altruistic values, are people who benefit from egalitarian practices and values, but do not do the economic, social, and/or emotional work to ensure that the ethical norms and actions necessary for the practice of social harmony are maintained and continued. (175)

As Kitcher explains, ethical progress is possible and there are several times throughout history humanity has experienced important advances in terms of ethics; he states “it is hard to resist the recognition of occasional progress in the evolution of ethics: perhaps ethical progress is rare, but there are transitions (like the repudiation of slavery) in which it seems to occur” (6). For some people Kitcher’s project might seem utopic, he defends that utopic ideas have been responsible for some moments of progress in human history, such as that time when abolition was not seen so much as a choice. Psychological altruism is key to humanity’s ethical progress, but there are other factors that intervene in the process. According to Kitcher, altruistic emotional responses to others are probably mediated by perception and cognition (25). McConachie observes and develops Kitcher’s assumption on cognition further by drawing on cognitive empathy, he asserts:

The intention to act altruistically often begins interpersonally with perception, empathy, and emotion. Typically, the altruist takes the perspective of the other person, including an understanding of that person’s emotions, **sympathizes** with what the other person is experiencing, changes her or his own emotions to assist the other, and then acts appropriately. Kitcher also insists that our altruistic proclivities can help us to establish norms and institutions that allow us to reach across racial, class, and other socially defined lines to eventually include all of humanity as our in-group. (172, author’s bold type)

As seen in the previous chapter on Thompson's analysis of empathy, the fourth process or type of empathy that he proposes is the moral perception. He explains that this type of empathy appears as the infant starts to understand others' intentions. Therefore, Thompson affirms that this capacity derives from empathizing with the other (401). As he states "[w]ithout empathy, concern and respect for others as persons in the moral sense—as ends-in themselves—would be greatly impoverished" (401). Hence, we can deduce that Kitcher's ethical project is also subjected to the cognitive capability of moral perception reached through the previous processes; imaginary transposition and understanding of the other.

5.2. Altruism, Groupishness, and Ethical Progress in *Things of Dry Hours* (2007) and *Slaughter City* (1996).

As a potential problem-solver or contributor to a better society Wallace creates a particular aesthetics because as seen in some examples of this thesis, she prioritizes certain elements such as the language and the discourse over the *mise en scène*. The setting of *Things of Dry Hours* is "[m]inimal and not 'realistic' bare, enough to suggest" (1) and the same happens in *Slaughter City* where she specifies "Setting. Should be minimal and not realistic" (201). As seen throughout the plays analyzed in this thesis, Wallace rarely uses props in her plays, she prefers to focus on her characters and the setting is usually simple and allegorical. Another recurrent non-realistic element used in both plays—as well as in many other plays—is the inclusion of ghosts and spectral presences haunting the scene, as Wallace explains:

I have an animosity towards "realism" on stage. It recreates the lie that a particular space is only *now*, that things *are* this way, always have been, always were. I don't trust that. For me, pretty much a bare stage and bodies and the language is all you

need in theatre, because it allows enough ventilation for ghosts to walk freely. And with the ghost come the clumps of buried histories, still stinking and vital and wild. (MacDonald 100)

In the particular case of *Things of Dry Hours* a ghost welcomes the spectators in the opening of the play; this is Tice Hogan an African-American member of the Alabama Communist party in the 1930s. Tice is posing an ethical dilemma and he narrates his own story to transmit his faith in humanity and the possibility of its redemption. Tice represents the real psychologically altruistic character in the play and he truly believes in progress as Kitcher proposes in his ethical project. Kitcher measures altruism represented in the following rule: “One obvious style of altruism is *golden-rule altruism*, distinguished by its equal weighing of the solitary desires and those attributed to the beneficiary” (24), as we will see, in *Things of Dry Hours* Tice altruistically helps other character and he pays a high price with his life. In the beginning of the play, the altruistic Tice contrasts with his daughter Cali, who is a widow of twenty-nine years and lives with her father in a small cabin. Cali, unlike her father, has lost her faith in humanity:

Cali I don't ask to be happy. Be happy for that. I just want to be left. Alone. Here with you. It's all right. The world's out there. Hungry, it can stay there.

Tice Things could be different.

Cali Old man. Now you make me sad.

Tice The party could put a skip in your step.

Cali I don't need a skip in my step. (8-9)

Things of Dry Hours is based on Wallace's subjunctive⁴⁷ view of the communist party in Alabama; while researching to write her play, she acknowledges that some members of the

⁴⁷ I explore the concept of subjunctive throughout in Chapter Three.

party were African-American.⁴⁸ The implication of this fact changes her concept of the communist party at the time, since it was much more progressive than other parties; particularly, considering their standard in racial matters, which is represented in the play by one of the character's statement; "**Corbin** [...]the Party's the only place in Birmingham where men like me and you sit at the same table. Where colored man speak against the white man if he's done wrong, even kick him out the Party if he acts with disrespect" (*Things* 21-2).

It could be said that Cali and Tice are captive in their "small cabin," (Wallace, *Things* 1) and the space functions as a prison; as explained before in this chapter, they do not respond to the knock at the door in the first place as a consequence of the threat, of being exposed and judged as a communist. Claudia Barnett studies this aspect, which appears in some of Wallace's plays; in "Physical Prisons: Naomi Wallace's Drama of Captivity" (2003), she points out that "[w]hile Wallace works within such metaphors, she also literalizes them, creating physical prisons on stage" (148). I agree with Barnett's statement and I see that both in *Slaughter City* and *Things of Dry Hours* this entrapment emphasizes the subjugation of workers under the capitalist order, as the prisoners of the system. Wallace explores Black communist America of the thirties and the contrast in its society ruled by an unequal segregated system. However, in such a hostile environment Tice is on board for Haidt's groupishness, he works with his comrades of the party and believes in the "help thy neighbor" spirit. Tice enjoys reading his two books *The Bible* and *The Communist Manifesto*—it should be noted that the books are a statement of his ethical concerns—which he believes can help to heal people's broken minds and put "the pieces back together" (32). The books also serve as means to teach Corbin, the white man how asks for shelter in their house, to read.

⁴⁸ The play is inspired by Robin D.G. Kelley's *Hammer and Hoe* (1990). Wallace commented in an interview about her research process that "*Things of Dry Hours* probably took me the longest from research to page, because it was the first time I'd written a role for an African-American man. That took over four years [...] I don't do any of the actual writing until my research is complete" (Murray, "Radical Vision").

Cali's behavior towards their unexpected guest is more suspicious as a consequence of the abuse she suffered from her white employers. When Corbin Teel, appears on the scene—claiming to be a member of the communist party—Tice trusts him and altruistically gives him shelter in their home. Cali is more cautious and sees the white man, who is disturbing the peace and isolation of their home, as a threat. Moreover, Corbin's appearance on the scene has an undertone of disruption; they receive a knock on the door after midnight, they decide to ignore it due to the risk—as a member of the party Tice is in danger of being executed—and the next morning there is also a knock on the door by Corbin. Wallace makes several references throughout the play to the knock at the door; “**Tice** [...] the knock at the door. Because there is always a knock at the door. And you know it's the knock at the door that you've been telling yourself you haven't been waiting for all your life, that it's just like yesterday's knock on the door, or the day before. But this knock is different” (3).

However, after a few days Cali also yields to the presence of Corbin and there is a scene where they interact closely. Cali stands out as a strong woman, she wants to have the upper hand and to rule over him in an attempt to atone for the behavior of the white rich folks who abused her, and subvert the established white supremacy. The exchange of roles, close to Wallace's stream of personae, explained in Chapter Three, takes place in a scene with powerful images; the shocking visual effects and the unfamiliar bizarre gestures are centered in the nature of race and gender. Cali covers Corbin's face with shoe polish and wraps him in a sheet so he cannot move, and then she smears porridge onto her own face. She adopts the role of the bully and predatory figure giving Corbin the role of the victim. Cali harasses Corbin in a sort of twisted game trying to put him under strain:

Corbin I don't think I'm liking this game.

[...] *Cali suddenly shoves Corbin back against the wall. She puts her arm across his throat and pins him there, so he cannot speak. As she speaks, now with menace, she increases the pressure in his throat so he begins to struggle.*

Cali [...] Corbin Teel. Now I see you. All these days I wasn't sure but now I see you clear: a decent man [...] There are parts of me you can't know. No matter I lay down with you or not. (56-7)

The scene represents a surrealist vision of the racial tension that Cali suffers just for being an African American woman; as explained earlier in this chapter, Wallace rejects realism and this scene has the aesthetics that she accustoms her public to. The spectator might feel discomfort watching this scene, since the topic is controversial and Cali's subversion of the roles might confuse the spectator who is lost in terms of misplaced alliances and the ethical impact; however, this discomfort and/or confusion is intended by the playwright.

Slaughter City is deeply and clearly influenced by Brechtian Theater, since, it has reminiscent elements of Brecht's *Saint Joan of the Stockyards*; such as the setting and the political discourse, that is, Marxist discourse, the social struggle, the strikes, and the representation of an oppressive upper class that acts for its own benefit practicing an unethical behavior. In the same line of non-realism aesthetics, Wallace introduces in *Slaughter City* some characters—such as Tice in *Things of Dry Hours*—that play the role of ghosts; in those scenes that recreate the past, the spectator sees the Textile worker, a victim of the Triangle Shirtwaist fire. In addition to the Textile worker, travelling forwards and backwards in time, two characters serve as spectral figures in the play; Cod who is an Irish worker—first, mistakenly labelled as a scab, and then, revealed as a committed social activist—and his antagonist, Sausage Man, a tyrannous old man, the embodiment of a devilish being. Wallace's description of Sausage Man gives the spectator an image of perversion: “*He is turning what looks like a small musical organ, but it's a hand grinder for*

sausages that is hung about his neck. He speaks to the space around him” (Wallace, *Slaughter* 216). Sausage Man not only is in control of Cod’s life but also he represents an oppressive force for the workers.

In *Slaughter City*, the character of Sausage Man can be in between of these two categories since he bullies the workers, but he might be better defined as a free rider who works individually for his own profit:

SAUSAGE MAN: I came across the ocean, from Zweibrucken, in the late 1800s. I ground meat in my own backyard. I didn’t have a pot to piss in. Sausages. I made sausages. All the little bits of bone and gut and cartilage that the rest of the world threw away. I made into something useful. Something edible. (216)

As Wisner points out this scene works as a parallelism on how capitalism uses its workers, and he adds “[t]his bits and pieces of flesh advance Wallace’s notion of the human body in all of its multiple pluralistic sexuality. When Sausage Man grinds up these bits and pieces, he treats non-normative pleasure as refuse, to be recycled into a more holistic, homogeneous form” (262). Sausage Man, as a free rider takes the pieces that are useful to him and discards the rest, in the same way the meatpacking house uses the workers. Baquin is a clear example of how a bully operates; he has no concern about the workers and he exerts his authority to take advantage of the rest of the characters.

TUCK: You’ve got two Mercedes.

BAQUIN: That’s what I mean. Fellow that runs IBP’s got three. (*Laughs*)

TUCK: They won’t go easy for the mechanical sharpener, and seniority rights are still top of the list.

BAQUIN: Seniority rights. I need capable workers. [...] What do you expect me to do? Be their grandmother and carry out their snot rags in their old age? (207)

It could be said that Kushner acts as Wallace's mentor and is she is aware of the necessity of introducing characters such as Roy Cohn. Wallace explains in an interview that Kushner is frequently one of her consultants, she states: "Tony Kushner kept bugging me about this one section in *In the Heart of America* and finally I said, "Just write the dialogue yourself." So he wrote a couple of lines into the script, and I was thrilled" (Murray). Wallace was part of a theater workshop in Iowa and Kushner recognized her talent when she handed over *War Boys* (1993) he affirms: "'She gave me 'War Boys' to read, and I was blown away. The power of language in it! And the way she thought, the things she was thinking about.' Kushner laughs at the recollection. 'I said to myself: 'Now, take it slow. Don't overwhelm her.' Then she walked into class the next day and I gushed: 'This is one of the most astonishing play by a student I've ever read'" (Gornick). As we have seen in Chapter One, she believes that, although unethical, those characters have a role; such as when she puts the truth in the mouth of the baddies (see Julian). In this subjunctive reality, the spectator witnesses the unethical behavior of those character and identifies them as a threat for the group, that is, the other characters. However, in the case of the scene between Cali and Corbin where Cali—as a victim of abuse at the hands of the white folk—turns into a bully when she interacts with Corbin, the spectator's ethical concerns might be more complicated due to the fluidity of the roles.

Identity—as seen in the scene I have just commented, and in many examples of Wallace's plays throughout this thesis—is not fixed, she opts for giving characters a sense of fluidity. In *Slaughter City*, Cod disguises herself as a man in order to avoid being treated in the same way as the other female workers. At the end of the play the spectator discovers that Cod is the daughter of the textile worker—who makes a pact with the devil, Sausage Man—in order to keep Cod safe from the fire. Cod's cross-dressing is not an element that appears in the play by chance, Wallace stresses interchangeability as a means to illustrate—borrowing

McConachie's use of groupishness—that we are all part of the same group, therefore, the playwright incorporates changes of roles according to different attributes, black and white, women and men, and also between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat; several representative examples of fluidity can be found in *The War Boys* (1993) and *One Flea Spare* (1995) where those exchanges are stressed and specially relevant to the plot.

Another aspect particularly relevant in *Slaughter City* is the timeline and although it might seem disconnected from ethics at first sight, a deeper analysis reveals that it also plays a role in the ethical spectrum. Wallace invites her audience to follow a sequence that does not work in a chronological order, she goes back and forth in time also as part of the non-realistic aesthetics; in the stage directions she explains that time in *Slaughter City* is set in “Now and then” (201). Wallace accomplishes the disruption of the time line through Cod and Sausage Man who are able to travel through time. Moreover, this technique serves to repress the effect of violence, as Ozieblo explains “[t]he Historical and socio-political reality and the mixture of past and present can be disconcerting, but they do conspire to subdue the effect of violence, establishing a strangeness that provokes thought” (“Pornography of Violence” 72). Cod and Sausage Man's travels help to illustrate the exploitation of workers in the past, in 1911, in the present, and throughout history, which gives the spectator a sense of lack of progress. Since *Things of Dry Hours* is set in the past, in the early thirties, in this particular case the spectator does not have this experience of contrasting past and present within the play. However, the spectator is able to contemplate the past depicted in the play and contrast it with the present circumstances; although abolition and the Civil Rights Movement imply a significant advance and progress in human history, present-day denunciations, such as the contemporary activist movement Black Lives Matters, give consideration to the need of further ethical progress. I firmly believe that Wallace's main concern is contrasting and

exposing past and present in the plays urging the spectator to work towards progress. Some critics see some of her plots as part of an old rhetoric, quoting a review Wisner explains:

On one level, *Slaughter City* might seem tired. In a laudatory review, Benedict Nightingale nevertheless notes the conventional themes and rhetoric which inform Wallace's play: "At root [*Slaughter City*] is a traditional Marxist protest-play....All this could have been written by Odets for New York's Group Theatre in the 1930's."

(57)

I completely disagree with the statement above for various reasons but mainly because the ethical approach is disregarded in this analysis of *Slaughter City*. I understand how some critics might see how Marxist discourse has gone stale. I do see how some of the psychological altruistic values of communism have turned into the worse nightmare of some populations over the years. However, I believe that Wallace is appealing to the root of these Marxist values where the worker regains control over her/his work and body, claims her/his rights and does not stand still against injustice. Although factories are not the most common working environments in our twenty-first century, I believe that we cannot take for granted the fact that most present-day companies do not respect gender equality and that there are still some racial issues to work out in the USA. I see how Wallace aims to contribute to a more progressive and ethical society, using theater in a historical fashion to stress that the spectator has to persevere in claiming fairer conditions at the workplace. Additionally, in dramatic terms, I find that her use of experimental theater cannot not be paired with that of Odets in the 1930s, since, although the message is similar, the forms completely different shaped to innovate in both cases but with different styles.

Slaughter City stresses exploitation at work in several scenes. In the prelude, Wallace describes the Textile worker's condition as follows: "a woman textile worker, her back to us, working over her cloth. She speaks as if in trance" (203). In the same manner, in the present

at the meatpacking house, she states: “*When the workers work, the feeling should be one of the intensity of industrial labor here on earth and perhaps also in hell*” (204). The packinghouse is portrayed as place in need of psychological altruism since not only the carcasses are sundered but also the bodies and souls of the workers. According to Kitcher, we have the ability to follow orders, which he defines as ‘normative guidance’. As he explains:

An ability to apprehend and obey commands changed the preferences and intentions of some ancestral hominids, leading them to act in greater harmony with their fellows and thus creating a more smoothly cooperative society. A capacity for following orders can be expressed in all sorts of actions, many of which have nothing directly to do with making up for the limitations of altruism. (74)

However, this normative guidance can be used against the members of a group, therefore, the emphasis on the danger of bullies who can manipulate this ability for their own purposes. The exploitation of the workers in the play is a direct consequence of the manipulation of normative guidance. For the same reason, Kitcher does not contemplate religion as an approach to ethics because as he sees “it threatens the equality that originally reigned in normative deliberations. Those who can convincingly claim to have special access to the will of the transcendent policeman— shamans, priests, and saints—come to have an ethical authority others lack” (115). Borrowing McConachie’s and Kitcher’s terminology I see *Slaughter City* as the story of a group that rebels against the bully, Baquin, and the free rider, Sausage Man, in order to restore the balance that can lead to a more progressive working environment. *Things of Dry Hours* is a good example of how groupishness is a beneficial instrument to achieve progress; the three characters rebel against the system and find their strength by being part of a group were they support each other exercising psychological altruism.

Evidently, both plays transmit to the audience the need for change and the hope for a better future, and it is important to notice that the playwright suggests how this progress should be accomplished; that is, getting all the characters involved and working as a group against injustice, and specifically, against those subjects who endanger the prospect of ethical progress. Interestingly, in *Slaughter City* not only the workers confront the powers of the factory by going on strike, the figure of Tuck, as the supervisor, standing for the rights of the workers gives the spectator the notion that an organized group is the key to success. The scene where Baquin forces Tuck to turn his back on his values in order to work for the interests of the company prompts a change in Tuck's attitude. Tuck is compelled to fire Cod on the pretext of "an unnatural behavior" alluding to her cross-gender disguise, and as a consequence of Brandon's death—the worker who dies as a consequence of the inhuman working conditions—Tuck raises his voice to rebel against Baquin:

TUCK (*Interrupts*): But what's really unnatural, Mr. Baquin, is for a twenty-two-year-old boy to have his lungs burned out of his chest. [...] I changed three of those lines myself. It could've been me instead of him.

BAQUIN: Nonsense. You would have been wearing our safety equipment.

TUCK: That's the truth of it. It could've been anybody in this fucking packhouse. Anybody but you, 'cause you don't change lines. No. You'll never change lines. (266)

Apart from Brandon the characters on the lowest rung of the slaughterhouse are the two women Roach, African American, and Maggot, white, both in their mid-thirties. Roach and Maggot suffer the inhumane working conditions that deform their bodies—they comment on several injuries they suffer as a consequence of labor—and as well as Cali in *Things of Dry Hours*, they also suffer sexual assaults. In a previous scene to the one commented above, Baquin, the manager, humiliates Maggot, and particularly bullies Roach for being an African-American. Roach is forced to undress in front of Tuck, the supervisor, and Baquin.

Furthermore, Baquin orders Tuck to wash Roach to fulfill his twisted erotic fantasy but also to take advantage of the two African Americans and display his power. Wallace comments on the capitalistic system and the privileges of being white; I believe that the following statement should be quoted in full since it is very enlightening, as she states:

There are powerful industries down there. At night it's all lit up and it looks like the Greek Acropolis, and it's so beautiful, and that too is fascinating—the corruption and the sensual power and promise of capitalism. But lately I have become more egotistical in the purpose of my writing, in seeing that the writing I do for the stage has everything to do with the maintenance of my own humanity. I have been doing some hard thinking—and this is something I treat in *Things of Dry Hours*—about what it means to be white, about the almost invisible privileges of whiteness, the power and corruption of it, how the social systems of racism diminish all of us [...] Living in the U.S (and to a large extent in the UK as well), in a racist, homophobic, capitalist system, how does one maintains one's humanity? (MacDonald 101)

Both plays I am dealing with here cope with the dehumanization of the workers and the alienation they suffer as a consequence of labor. In *Slaughter City* it is especially explicit; the spectator is a witness *in the field*—since the setting is always their place at work—of the unfair working conditions of the characters. However, in *Things of Dry Hours*, exploitation is implicit and not staged—because the play takes place in a more private scene, the characters' home—it is only suggested by the characters' testimonies and it emphasizes not only capitalism but also racism.

As I said before, the characters in *Things of Dry Hours* join in an attempt to fight against the system. Although Corbin in the first place felt seduced by the chiefs of Tennessee Coal and Iron to obtain information about Tice and the Communist party, in the end he does not betray Tice and he is killed as a consequence of his refusal. Tice is also murdered some

years after by a hired gun “[w]e’d just got a union started at the new plant. A few cents more’s all we got. But it was worth it. They were thugs for the management, and some officers too, and they made no knock at my door” (92). However, hope in the play is finally achieved through the character of Cali. At the beginning of the play, Cali is not politically committed, she lives aside from her father’s activism, but in the end she joins the Communist Party. In the epilogue Tice says:

My daughter was always up and gone, travelling with those mettlesome women, delirious comrades carrying sticks and beatin’ back the smothering world. And Cali forgot to chop the wood for fire. So I went back over to Tucker’s house. He always had it roaring. And from there, all those years went flashing past us, sparked up in jail time, hiding under floorboards and always. Always. That deeply underrated and American phenomenon: the persistent murdering of resistance. (91)

Tice carries an apple at the end of the play, which as Helen Huff observes in her essay “A land of Despair and Change: Landscapes of Wealth and Poverty in Selected Plays of Naomi Wallace” serves as a metaphor for a better future, as Huff explains: “For Wallace, the apple is a romantic metaphor of hope. The possible flowering of racial harmony is possible [...] It is the seeds that carry the future of the tree and ensure the continuation of the species” (66). Cali is part of the better future suggested in the play, she has begun a new life involved in political protests, which can be seen as a utopic end, as Huff observes, “Wallace’s plays contain those “little black seeds” that offer a new beginning, a utopian possibility of hope and change for all” (66). Other critics, as Wisner, are more skeptical on the possibilities of revolution presented in the play; Wisner states “however, the possibilities of revolution as messianic redemption promise as much hope for radical change, Wallace would suggest, as does a postmodern materialism bereft of a macro-politics and historical certainty” (70). However, I see Tice’s optimism as reasonable, since there is a better future landscape for the

two African American characters, which is the Civil Rights Movement. Wisner also believes that Wallace make use of the “sensationalism of bleeding flesh” (60). I do not completely agree with this view since my understanding of the play and is that although there is direct impact of industrialization on the workers’ bodies, this aspect is only suggested in the play; I believe that most productions would use a subtle fashion, since Wallace is not fond of props and she does not specify that the performance must be bloody. For instance, the Jackalope Theatre in Chicago used clothes to make the carcasses on stage in their 2011 production.⁴⁹

Evidently, creativity is not only present in theatrical aesthetics McConachie emphasizes the need of building alliances to reinforce our principle of groupishness in other creative ways, such as using the resources that the twenty-first century put in our hands, for instance the Internet. Perhaps the key to finish Kitcher’s ethical progress relies on technology. As McConachie explains:

Can we build stronger alliances, help to raise the necessary funds, and find performative strategies – perhaps through new ways of deploying Internet communication – that are commensurate with the global threat we face? Perhaps, but we’ll need to start right away. May Kitcher’s substantial evidence of past ethical progress for humanity give us hope and stamina (*Evolution* 201).

I believe that regardless of the medium used, the fundamental aspect to take into consideration is to take advantage of the strengths we own as members of the same group. The stories of *Things of Dry Hours* and *Slaughter City* are the stories of ethical progress where individuals, forced by the lack of altruism, rebel against social injustice. Wallace accepts the challenge, posed by Dewey, where artists work as problem-solvers of community issues. Her plays are a contemplation of injustice that invites the spectator to long for ethical progress. Wallace believes in the power of the word to change society and its individuals,

⁴⁹ See <<http://timeoutchicago.com/arts-culture/theater/14773647/slaughter-city-at-jackalope-theatre-company-theater-review>>.

although the struggle and the ethical project has not finished yet, but in their own way, both Kitcher and Wallace have already succeeded in planting the seed of optimism. The next chapter explores the proto/paradigm of Enaction and the meaning of this approach to performance studies. The theories analyzed in the previous chapters of this thesis are pieces of a bigger movement, which is the Enactive paradigm. Enaction contemplates key aspects such as the embodiment of cognition or the relationship between cognition and the environment in which it is embedded. The Enactive approach explains the foundational aspects of cognition that will help to understand the spectatorial experience in Wallace's plays.



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Chapter Six. Enaction as an Approach To Biocultural Performance.



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Chapter Six.

Enaction as an Approach To Biocultural Performance.

Further, while rejecting in this way all those things which we can somehow doubt, and even imagining them to be false, we can indeed easily suppose that there is no God, no heaven, no material bodies; and even that we ourselves have no hands, or feet, in short, no body; yet we do not on that account suppose that we, who are thinking such things, are nothing: for it is contradictory for us to believe that that which thinks, at the very time when it is thinking, does not exist. And accordingly, this knowledge, *I think, therefore I am*, is the first and most certain to be acquired by and present itself to anyone who is philosophizing in correct order. (Descartes 5, translator's emphasis)

With this statement Descartes changed our conception of the mind, his original sentence in Latin “*cogito ergo sum*” as part of his *Principles of Philosophy* (1644) is the cornerstone of the mind-body dualism. Perhaps without knowing the implication of his statement during the following six centuries, Descartes gave us what he thought was the “correct order” to approach our material (physical) state and immaterial (mental) state, that is, the genesis of Cartesian dualism. Nowadays, Cartesian dualism, or philosophy of the mind, studies the relationship between the mind and the body.

However, recently some cognitive scientists claimed that this approach is mistaken and that the mind should not be disembodied. This conception of the embodied mind gave rise to the cognitive theory of embodied dynamicism in the 1990s, challenging previous theories such as connectionism or cognitivism. Nowadays, some cognitive scientists have

taken the paradigm one step further and have moved towards a new proto/paradigm⁵⁰ called enaction. The Enactive approach contemplates the mind as embodied, as well as other ideas such as the interactions with the environment.

The Enactive approach provides an inestimably valuable source of information to understand performance such as illustrating how the embodied emotions or the cognitive coupling of the spectators with the characters work during a performance. In this chapter, I briefly explain the earliest cognitive theories that paved the way to enaction, as well as the basic principles of enaction. Furthermore, I include McConachie's proposal for its application to performance and in order to illustrate the theories reviewed with practical examples I take Wallace's play *Night is a Room* (2015). My intention in this chapter is to provide an integrated perspective on an Enactive approach to spectatorship in Wallace.

6.1. The Study of the Mind: A Review of the Major Cognitive Science Paradigms.

As commented above, enaction emerges relatively recently compared to other paradigms that preceded it. Therefore, in this section, I briefly explain those approaches—through Evan Thompson's view—in order to have an overview of those cognitive theories that paved the way to enaction, which will be explained in the next section. It should be noted that in Chapter Two I included a section on the cognitive approach, which should not be understood as the present section; although some of the theories might sound familiar, Chapter Two deals with the cognitive approach to humanities while in this section I explain the cognitive theories in the field of cognition. In this section, I overview the cognitive

⁵⁰ I refer to 'Enation' or 'Enactive' approach as both a proto-paradigm and paradigm, since there is not an agreement on the term due to its novelty. In 2015, I attended Bruce McConachie's seminar on Biocultural Studies (THEA2216) at the University of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and the term was debated without reaching a conclusion. I believe that the proto-paradigm now is eventually becoming a major paradigm due to the repercussion of the different publications that I mention in this chapter and numerous publications published in 2016.

science paradigms with the purpose of introducing the proto/paradigm of enaction, whereas in Chapter Two I overview the interdisciplinary approach to humanities to acknowledge the state of the art in the analysis of spectatorship. Evan Thompson starts his *Mind in Life* commenting on all the major cognitive approaches for the study of the mind. As he explains, the study of the mind can be traced back to the first philosophers—with those theories about the mind proposed by Plato and Aristotle—however, the term cognitive science does not appear until the late twentieth century “as a name for the new, modern, scientific research program that integrated psychology, neuroscience, linguistics, computer science, artificial intelligence (AI), and philosophy” (3). The purpose of this new hybrid discipline was to explain the mechanisms of cognition. In the field of cognitive science, one can distinguish three major approaches to the study of the mind; cognitivism, connectionism, and embodied dynamicism.

Cognitivism started to forge a revolution against behaviorist psychology in the 1950s. As Thompson observes “[a]t the center of this revolution was the computer model of mind, now known as the classical conception of cognitive processes” (4). Contrary to the behaviorist pattern of sensory-stimuli and input-output, the new model refers to “internal states legitimate” (4). Thus, cognitivism understands the mind using the same pattern as a computer, which understands hardware, code, and software; and in this case, the pattern is the coordination between the physical aspect, the symbol, and the system. However, for some critics this early approach of cognitivism presents several problems, Thompson identifies three main sets of conflicts with this mind-body approach:

1. The phenomenological mind-body problem: How can a brain have experiences?
2. The computational mind-body problem: How can a brain accomplish reasoning?
3. The mind-mind problem: What is the relation between computational states and experience? (6-7)

One of the major arguments against this model is the abstraction of the human mind away from a sociocultural system. Some cognitive scientists did not agree with cognitivism as a suitable model to study the mind since it has the notorious flaw of exploring the mind in isolation. As a result of this, connectionism appears on the scene of cognitive studies to challenge the physical-symbol-system model.

Connectionism was developed in the early 1980s and it understands the mind as a massive interactive neural network. Thompson asserts that it was an attempt at “revisiting and revitalizing ideas from the precognitivist era of cybernetics” (8). This approach is close to the computational model, but it differs from cognitivism in the pattern used; therefore, it presents the same problem, it does not deal with the link between the mind and the experience of the subject. As Thompson observes, in this new model “[s]ubjectivity still had no place in the sciences of the mind, and the explanatory gap remained unaddressed” (10), which leads to the need to address the detachment of the mind in embodied dynamicism.

The most recent of the three major approaches, embodied dynamicism, appears in the 1990s with the purpose of providing an alternative stance to the computationalism model in both cognitivist and connectionist forms. Embodied dynamicism, as the name indicates, attempts to mend the void of the earlier disembodied models and to observe the mind as a dynamic system. As I explained in Chapter Four—through Colombetti’s approach to emotions—dynamic systems work as a model that changes over time. As Thompson asserts in embodied dynamicism:

Cognitive structures and processes emerge from recurrent sensorimotor patterns that govern perception and action in autonomous and situated agents. Cognition as skillful know-how is not reducible to prespecified problem solving, because the cognitive system both poses the problems and specifies what actions need to be taken for their solution.

Strictly speaking, dynamicism and embodiment are logically independent theoretical commitments. (11)

Furthermore, Thompson observes that in this approach the unconscious is not seen as a disembodied entity apart from “emotion and motor action in the world” (12). From the point of view of performance studies, understanding emotions as a part of the body and not in conjunction with an isolated mind is crucial to analyzing spectatorship. As explained before in this thesis, the spectator experiences performance in the body, and by extension in her/his mind. As seen in Chapter Four, the spectator couples with the performer and their neural activity is paired through empathy, that is, sensorimotor coupling. Empathy leads to experience of emotions, which have an essential part in the spectator’s event. Nevertheless, embodied dynamicism as stated in the quotation above has independent theoretical arrangements; it functions in these two parameters, embodied theory and dynamicism, which are useful to understand cognition. However, for some cognitive scientists those parameters are not sufficient to fully understand cognition and they go one step further with enaction attempting to provide a more solid and unified theory.

6.2. Towards Enaction: Main Claims.

Enaction means the action of enacting a law, but also connotes the performance or carrying out of an action more generally. Borrowing the words of the poet Antonio Machado, Varela described enaction as the laying down of a path in the walking: “Wanderer the road is your footsteps, nothing else; you lay down a path in walking.”⁵¹ (Thompson 13)

⁵¹ Antonio Machado’s poem is part of *Campos de Castilla* (1912) “Caminante, son tus huellas/el camino y nada más;/caminante, no hay camino,/se hace camino al andar.”

As explained in the previous section, embodied dynamicism changes the scope of how the mind works in the 1990s by challenging Cartesian dualism. For the first time the mind was studied as part of the body and not in isolation, which brought about other claims; for instance performance and action as seen in the quotation above. In order to answer some of those claims Francisco J. Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch propose in *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (1991) a phenomenological approach to investigate human experience of cognition. Furthermore, in *The Embodied Mind*, they coined the term “Enactive” and explain:

We propose as a name the term *Enactive* to emphasize the growing conviction that cognition is not the representation of a pregiven world by a pregiven mind but is rather the enactment of a world and a mind on the basis of a history of the variety of actions that a being in the world performs. (9, authors’ emphasis)

Enaction, different from embodied dynamicism, introduces other aspects—apart from autonomy and embodiment already explored in the previous paradigm—of cognition such as sense making, emergence, and experience.

Enactive approach or enactivism states that the mind is not only embodied but also embedded; a living subject interacts and performs in an environment, which evidently influences and shapes cognition, therefore enactivists understand that cognition emerges from a system. At the same time, these cognitive scientists state that cognition should be analyzed through the subject’s experience, since “the fundamental insight of the Enactive approach [...] is to be able to see our activities as reflections of a structure without losing sight of the directness of our own experience” (Varela, Thompson, and Roach 12).

Perception is a relevant aspect of enaction, thus after studying this approach I cannot dismiss it because I became aware of the fact that fundamental components of this paradigm come into play in spectatorship: such as emotions, embodiment, perception, and the

experience of the subject within an environment. Bruce McConachie considers some of the theories of enaction the key to understanding performance; his approach is deemed to be regarded as ground breaking, inasmuch as he is a pioneer in seeing the potential of an Enactive approach to performance studies. It also should be noted that the Enactive paradigm is gaining strength and is considered in approaches to many different themes, such as language, sociology, mathematics, or consciousness. Thus, it is evident that enaction has undergone a great development during the last decade; for instance, in the first work (*The Embodied Mind*) the authors sketched enaction based on two premises “the Enactive approach consists of two points: (1) perception consists in perceptually guided action and (2) cognitive structures emerge from the recurrent sensorimotor patterns that enable action to be perceptually guided” (Varela, Thompson, and Roach 173). More than a decade after, the work of Thompson in *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology, and the Sciences of Mind* (2007) served as a continuation of the project started in the 1990’s with *The Embodied Mind*.

Thompson focuses on the subject’s experience towards life and develops several aspects of enaction in *Mind in Life*; this deep study on subjectivity deals with empathy (as already seen in Chapter Four), autopoiesis⁵² and enculturation⁵³ among other theories under the umbrella of the Enactive approach. In order to conduct this study, he draws on phenomenology but also on neuroscience, biology, psychology, and philosophy. In his section “The Enactive Approach” (13) he states:

For the Enactive approach, autonomy is a fundamental characteristic of biological life, and there is a deep continuity of life and mind. For phenomenology, intentionality is a fundamental characteristic of the lived body. The Enactive approach and

⁵² Autopoiesis is related to enaction characteristic of autonomy. Thompson devotes an entire chapter to analyze autopoiesis since it is a complex aspect proposed by Varela to account for the organization of life. Thompson concludes that in a wide meaning of the term, that is, “internal self-production sufficient for constructive and interactive processes in relation to the environment” (127) autopoiesis entails cognition.

⁵³ Thompson sees enculturation as the dependence of social cognition on human culture; he states that culture “is woven into the very fabric of each human mind from the beginning. Symbolic culture in particular shapes the ‘cognitive architecture’ of the human mind” (403).

phenomenology thus converge on the proposition that subjectivity and consciousness have to be explicated in relation to the autonomy and intentionality of life, in a full sense of “life” that encompasses [...] the organism, one’s subjectively lived body, and the life-world. (15)

This observation also evidences that the Enactive approach focuses on the experience of the body, which is what happens in the theater, where the body occupies the space and enacts in a live experience within an environment. In the quotation above, Thompson also alludes to phenomenology, as a methodology for enaction. The phenomenological tradition—founded by the German philosopher Edmund Husserl and continued by the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty—functions as the research method of enactivists who try to “naturalize phenomenology” (Thompson 14). McConachie, as well as Thompson, comments on this aspect of naturalism asserting that several scientists associated with the ideas of Darwin and Dewey called themselves naturalists, such as Peter Godfrey-Smith who justifies naturalism as follows:

Naturalism in philosophy requires that we begin our philosophical investigations from the standpoint provided by our best current scientific picture of human beings and their place in the universe [...] The questions we try to answer, however, need not be derived from the sciences; our questions will often be rather traditional philosophical questions about the nature of belief, justification, and knowledge. Science is a resource for settling philosophical questions, rather than a replacement for philosophy or the source of philosophy’s agenda. (Godfrey-Smith qtd. in McConachie *Evolution* 19)

Moreover, McConachie states: “replace ‘philosophy’ with ‘performance studies’ in the quotation above and the general aim of my project becomes clear. I am asking ‘traditional’ questions about performance studies and using science as a ‘resource’ to settle them”

(*Evolution* 19). I will expand on McConachie's view in the next section where I analyze how performance studies are framed within an Enactive approach.

In the most extensive and recent publication on the Enactive paradigm—*Enaction: Towards a New Paradigm for Cognitive Science* (2010) by John Stewart, Olivier Gapenne, and Ezequiel A. Di Paolo—the editors explain how enaction was developed in the first place to understand cognition and how it became a much larger project, experiencing remarkable theoretical and empirical advances in the last twenty years. One of their major claims deals with the fact that “cognition is grounded in the sensorimotor dynamics of the interactions between a living organism and its environment” (vii). As explained in the previous section, behaviorism studies the mind in an input/output pattern and cognitivism focuses on the channel between the input and output, as Stewart, Gapenne, and Di Paolo explains:

In the classical scheme, perception is relegated to a preliminary “module” based on sensory input alone, to be followed in a linear sequence by “cognitive” planning and representations of goals, and culminating in a decision to act. In this scheme, “cognition” is thus sandwiched between two layers—sensory input and motor output—which are not themselves considered as properly cognitive. (vii)

As a means to return cognition into a cognitive domain, they change the point of view and propose a completely different pattern, which considers cognition as an embedded part of life. They visualize it as follows: “[t]he perspective of enaction overturns this scheme quite radically. A living organism *enacts* the world it lives in; its effective, embodied action in the world actually constitutes its perception and thereby grounds its cognition” (vii). In other words, cognition is exerted by a living organism that through perception enacts with the environment, which is an ample definition of the human experience as an extensive theoretical ground such as cognition requires. Once more, I cannot take for granted the parallelism with the analysis of performance, and to be more specific, with the spectator who,

as a living organism, perceives and enacts with the performance. I firmly believe that to understand the root of cognition is an extremely valuable exercise in any attempt to achieve a reliable theory of spectatorship. As we will see in the next section, performance studies have progressed within the cognitive turn and after a decade of humanities and cognition, the discipline has found its position within the Enactive paradigm through the work of scholars such as Bruce McConachie.

6.3. Bruce McConachie's Proposal of Enaction in Performance Studies.

In the introduction of *Evolution, Cognition, and Performance* McConachie states that,

[r]ecognizing that humanists require a level of synthesis to do their work, I have adopted the Enaction paradigm as a productive roadmap for performance studies. Because the option of taking the “cognitive turn” has only recently become available to many scholars, driving into the vastness of “cognitive territory” without some kind of GPS opens up research choices that can be as much bewildering as they are inviting. (*Evolution* 23)

I agree with McConachie's observation that the vastness of the cognitive turn can be confusing at first, in particular when searching for a place where the humanities and sciences are able to go shoulder to shoulder. However, nowadays, interdisciplinary approaches are more frequent in the academia, and as he points out, now is the time to move “Beyond the Two Cultures” distinguished by C.P Snow (*Evolution* 6).⁵⁴ If enaction provides a solid

⁵⁴ McConachie refers to the division in academia between humanities and sciences asserts that “[a]n introduction to our difficulties properly begins by recalling a lecture given at Cambridge University by British novelist and scientist C.P Snow in 1959, entitled, ‘The Two Cultures.’ Snow later published an expanded version of his talk entitled *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution*. As we will see, the ability to maintain clear divisions between the cultures of science and the humanities [...] is fast eroding” (*Evolution* 6).

foundation for performance studies, it is the scholars' responsibility to delve into it. According to McConachie:

Enaction offers performance studies the kind of ontological and epistemological rigor that it has lacked since its origins. A general definition of performance that borrowed from competing ideas and moved carelessly among several paradigms of knowledge could not be coherent; in the end, it could not be confirmed. (*Evolution* 25)

In Chapter Two of this thesis, I have already addressed the need of a solid epistemology for spectatorship; as McConachie suggests in the quotation above, the need of a coherent paradigm in performance studies—and I would also add by extension, in spectatorship theory—is evident. I cannot deny that at the beginning of this research I was deeply concerned with the lack of a homogeneous analysis towards spectatorship. I believe that throughout the research and analysis elaborated in this thesis I can affirm that the cognitive turn brings some new and compelling insights to the field, as demonstrated below in McConachie's approach to performance and Enaction, as well as by the analysis of *Night is a Room* later in this chapter.

Furthermore, in order to prove the validity of this approach, McConachie denominates some of the most relevant aspects of enaction regarding performance studies. In the first place, he addresses one of the issues that I debate recurrently throughout this dissertation, which is agency. McConachie's scope is much broader than mine, since I focus primarily on the spectator and he is invested in evolutionary claims, such as autonomy and autopoiesis. McConachie questions Foucault's vision of *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975); he bases his argument opposed to Foucault's idea in evolutionary research of the human species and states that “[h]uman animals are neither the playthings of internal drives and repressions (à la psychoanalysis) nor are they wholly manipulated by external demands (social conditioning) or arrangements of power (Foucauldian discourses)” (*Evolution* 31). It

should be noted that according to the Enactive paradigm humans have agency, which is one of the focuses of study of the cognitive scientist Ezequiel Di Paolo. In “Defining Agency: Individuality, Normativity, Asymmetry and Spatio-temporality in Action” (2009) Barandiaran, Di Paolo, and Rohde define the basic parameters of agency: identifying individuality, interactional asymmetry, and normativity. In the second place, McConachie addresses the human condition of making meaning as an evolutionary mechanism of survival and as a source of interaction, which questions other paradigms such as semiotics; he affirms,

human animals seek to make meaning in the world primarily for action and survival, not for objective understanding. Embodied meanings emerge for individual agents in moments of interaction with animate and inanimate elements in situations and environments; “meaning” is not available for discovery in internal subjectivities (conditioned identity formations) or in either stable or unstable external representations, such as language (Saussurean semiotics and deconstruction).
(*Evolution* 31)

In the third place, as already stated in Chapter Four of this thesis, culture must be placed at the root of cognition, as part of the environment, in which the mind is embedded. McConachie asserts that culture cannot be reduced to facts or subjective interpretations, as some theories of sociology and anthropology have posed. Instead, he explains that “culture is both institutional and cognitive; it is an intertwined and mutually supportive network of habitual practices coupled with fairly stable cognitive structures for a group of people over several generations” (*Evolution* 31). In the fourth place, McConachie alludes to ethical progress already studied in the previous chapter, discarding approaches such as Marxist materialism:

historical change emerges from many factors, including the tensions within cultures and from human learning and memory. Given the kind of animals we are, the flow of

history is not overdetermined from the past (the recursive mentalities of new historicism) nor is it predetermined by an inevitable future (orthodox Marxist materialism or, for that matter, apocalyptic Christianity). (*Evolution* 31)

McConachie's claims shake the foundations of most of the theories used during the last century to approach humanities and the novel discipline of performance studies. However, the incorporation of the Enactive paradigm to approach performance is not the central point of his proposal in *Evolution, Cognition, and Performance* (2015), enaction is seen as a tool to achieve significant purposes. McConachie explains that "'performance' is the foundational activity from which theater, rituals, sports, and other performative activities emerged in the course of our *biocultural* evolution and upon which a coherent performance studies should be built" (*Evolution* 18, my emphasis). Therefore, his publication offers a biocultural approach to performance, rather than a straightforward approach to an Enactive paradigm. Nevertheless, his first intention was to frame this biocultural analysis within enaction, as he states:

When I began this book project, I had hoped [...] for writing history and criticism within the Enaction paradigm. Realizing those goals within the confines of this monograph has proven impossible, however [...] Nonetheless, I do believe that future evolutionary and cognitive approaches should include an emphasis on spectators as the co-makers of "meaning" in performance criticism and that historians must venture into "deep" evolutionary history if they are to discover how performances work. On the whole, though, it is too early in the development of this new paradigm to settle on preferred methods to follow in the future.

This thesis aims to evidence the potential aspects of enaction and to illustrate the theories through an endeavor to understand Naomi Wallace's spectator as an archetype of contemporary American theater. Works published in the recent years within the Enactive

approach, such as Colombetti's analysis of emotions, make it possible to continue the lead that McConachie opened with *Evolution, Cognition, and Performance* in the frame of enaction. As he explains, "I would encourage others to extend some of the approaches I am using and to try out others that may help us to elaborate the promise of Enaction for scholarly work in performance studies" (*Evolution* 26), and this is one of the purposes of this thesis.

In order to culminate this research on Naomi Wallace's plays, spectatorship, and enaction, I analyze in the next section Wallace's last play *Night is Room* (2015) using an Enactive approach to spectatorship. Previous aspects debated in this thesis will be incorporated to illustrate how an Enactive approach to spectatorship operates in Wallace's plays.

6.4. An Enactive Analysis of the Spectatorial Experience in *Night is a Room* (2015).

Naomi Wallace's last play *Night is a Room* (2015)⁵⁵ can be considered one of her most controversial—I would even dare to affirm the most controversial—plays. I believe that this unconventional family drama particularly strikes the spectator because it deconstructs the traditional notion of family. Emily Gawlak—in an interview with the actress Dagmara Domińczyk in the role of Liana—also notices complexities of the play that I will analyze in the following subsections:

[A] disturbing twist that throws into flux traditional conceptions of love, family, and fidelity. Suffice to say, the play is not one to strike audience members with lukewarm feelings, and whether audience members walk out or jump out of their seats in applause varies show by show. But if you're willing to offer yourself up to the story,

⁵⁵ It was premiered in New York at the Signature Theater, November 3rd 2015.

and open your mind and heart, you are likely to come out of the theater profoundly challenged and moved. (Gawlak)

The intricate plot and the emotional component that *Night is a Room* provides makes it difficult to analyze the play, therefore, an effective paradigm must be applied to the spectatorial experience. Prior to approaching this play from the Enactive paradigm, I have discussed in this chapter and the previous ones the different theories I have applied; in this section I use the cognitive science approach to study emotions, the cognitive notion of empathy, conceptual blending/integration, and an evolutionary ethical approach within the paradigm of enaction and its essential concepts: autonomy, sense making, emergence, embodiment, and experience.

6.4.1. The Pre/Performance and the Spectator's Environment: Autonomy and Emergence at The Signature Theater, New York.

In this brief subsection I would like to devote some lines to two principles of enaction, autonomy and emergence, and how they come into play in terms of spectatorship. It could be said that the spectatorial experience is autonomous; as much discussed throughout this thesis, the spectator's autonomy is related to her/his agency. Some theater critics such as those I cite in Chapter Two—Boal and Rancière—became aware of the active role of the spectator. Nevertheless, I believe that a further explanation on the subject was needed, thus, I introduced some examples throughout this thesis based on cognition; such as spectator capability to engage and disengage during the performance, to see the counterparts performer/character, or through empathy mentally adopt a position towards the action on stage. As this is the case, autopoiesis in Enactive terms is connected to autonomy;

McConachie states that performers and spectators are a consequence of autopoiesis in humans, he affirms:

All animals also generate actions to maintain and advance their survival. Machines, on the other hand – from primitive spears to modern computers – can neither play nor act once they are detached from human agency; from an Enaction perspective, including the operation of machines as performances *per se* is simply wrong-headed. Machines lack autopoiesis. While humans may engage other animals and machines as a part of their performing, this human ability simply renders animals and machines extensions of human acts; it does not turn them into performers (or spectators).
(*Evolution* 63)

Emergence, in Enactive theory terms, refers to the product that arises as part of the system. Di Paolo, Rohde, and De Jaeger explain, in *Enaction: Toward a New Paradigm for Cognitive Science*, that emergence belongs to the dynamic interplay of autonomy and sense making (40). In order to identify an emergent process they distinguish two characteristics: “(1) the emergent process must have its own autonomous identity, and (2) the sustaining of this identity and the interaction between the emergent process and its context must lead to constraints and modulation to the operation of the underlying levels” (40). In theater, autopoiesis is part of the autonomous identity in performance, therefore, the emerged aspects of performance regulate performance in itself.

In a particular example such as is the case of the production of *Night is a Room*, in the Signature Theater, an analysis of these parameters would easily evidence the dynamics of both autonomy and emergence. Taking the point of view of the spectators is related to agency. First, the spectator exerts her/his agency before the performance; she/he becomes a spectator by her/his choice and this can be prompted by different reasons; leisure, work, research or all these as in my own case. Secondly, this hypothetical spectator chooses to attend

the Signature Theater and watch the performance of *Night is a Room* and no other play. Once the spectator is part of the event and blends herself/himself seated among the audience, the spectator is also able to exert her/his agency; for instance, after Act Two, perhaps some spectators decided that the play is not to their taste and exit during the interlude. Of course if they decide to stay until the end of the play, their cognitive capability of conceptual integration will allow them to continue making use of their agency in numerous ways, which I comment later in this chapter. The spectator, before becoming a spectator, faces different choices and decides to be part of the audience, thus as an autonomous agent decides to be part of the group or borrowing McConachie's words to exercise her/his principle of groupishness, as explained in the previous chapter, and being part of the event.

As I have remarked above, emergence arises as interplay of agency and sense making; at this point, we should not mistake the system, which is the event/ the play, for the emergence. The spectator thanks to her/his agency and evolutionary ability of sense-making creates a context, which is embedded in the system/event/play. For instance, while watching *Night is a Room* the spectator might be suspicious about the character of Liana and choose to mistrust the character. As analyzed above, emergence is regulated by the event, if Liana does a good deed the spectator might adapt her/his opinion about this character. In the same way as dynamic systems are self-regulated, the spectator is part of an ecosystem that is self-regulated, as well as autonomous; and thanks to human interaction on the side of the performers and the spectators autopoiesis becomes relevant. Spectatorship is part of the cultural-ecosystem framed by the theatrical event. McConachie explains that Edwin Hutchins explores the implications of culture as “‘a complex cognitive ecosystem’ (Hutchins 1995: xiv)” (qtd. in *Evolution* 93). Close to Thompson's claims of enculturation, McConachie observes the relevance of culture within cognition and states “[n]etworks of cultural-cognitive ecosystems can also be extended historically to understand major shifts in

communication and performance history” (*Evolution* 96). In the next subsections I analyze aspects of the play concerning other fundamental characteristics of enaction—embodied, sense-making, and experience—where every act of the play will serve to illustrate different principles.

6.4.2. Act One: The Spectator’s Embodied Empathy and Emotional Episodes.

Enaction considers that cognition is embodied; rejecting the traditional Cartesian dualism this new approach sees the brain and the mind as part of the body. This simple concept has many implications, not long ago the body was envisioned as a puppet of the mind that ruled over it. Assuming that cognition is embodied changes the old conception of the spectacle and opens a world of possibilities to explore performance and spectatorship. I analyze in this section the first act of *Night is a Room* focusing on empathy and emotions without losing sight of the embodied aspect of cognition.

Night is a Room opens with a setting where the spectator finds a “small, neglected garden” (ix), belonging to Doré’s house, where she and Liana have their first meeting. Wallace emphasizes the difference between the two women, in terms of age, (Liana is forty-three and Doré is fifty-five), socioeconomical (one is a senior account director at an advertisement agency, the other is a domestic worker), and character (Liana is talkative and assertive while Doré is shy and introspective). It might seem that Doré is in an unfavorable position, however, the stage directions warn about Doré’s intelligence: “*Doré has put on her better clothes for the occasion, which also have a 1970s feel. Doré is shy and subdued, which almost hides her quick intelligence*” (1). Liana’s tone towards Doré is condescending; during their first conversation she shows Doré some balloons she brings with her, Liana even uses a childish enthusiastic tone to call Doré’s attention: “Ah, these are fancy! One color inside

another. A two-layer balloon. Red inside yellow. Blue inside green. And even a few with tiny bells inside so when you blow them up and flick them, you hear bells. (*Beat*) Shall I blow one up?" (1). This enthusiasm contrasts with Doré's behavior, who is absorbed in her thoughts and in a way—the same as the spectator—is trying to make sense of Liana's intentions, since at this point of the play Wallace does not give many clues about these two women's relationship.

The spectator understands the dynamics of the conversation since the tone, appearance, and other elements of performance point towards the aspects commented above. After those first impressions where the spectator couples with the performers through neural patterns which evidently involve body and sensorimotor impressions, the spectator experiences performance. The spectator through her/his ability of making-sense engages in a deeper analysis of the performance and exercises the capability of empathetical imaginary transposition of herself/himself into that of the performer. Since I attended a performance of *Night is a Room* at the Signature Theater in 2015, I will at some points include my phenomenological experience and analysis as a spectator of the play, since enaction emphasizes the experience component ascribed to the phenomenological approach. When Liana confesses that she paid a substantial amount and hired a private investigator to find Doré, I could not help but wonder what was the interest of this character to get in contact with the other character. Following a chronological order of the events in the play, Liana asks Doré about her house and the conversation is as follows:

(Liana is not really listening but rather eyeing up the surroundings, though it seems she might be also replying to Doré)

LIANA (*Almost to herself*): Depressing.

DORÉ: I don't like paying for it [newspaper]

LIANA: Gloomy.

DORÉ: TV is worse.

LIANA: Almost sinister, definitely ominous.

DORÉ: Never any good news.

LIANA: One would be hard-pressed to make anything of it. [...] (*To herself*) Though I could get decorators in— (2-3)

This order of events might point towards Liana's interest in Dore's home, which is contradictory since Liana is upper-middle class. Nevertheless, the spectator discovers that Liana is trying to reunite her husband, Marcus, with his biological mother, Doré, who gave him in adoption at birth. Although Liana's actions are apparently righteous, her conduct provokes little sympathy from the spectator; in spite of the fact that Doré is reluctant to agree to this meeting, Liana patronizes the older woman and forces her to meet her son on his fortieth birthday. The actress who plays Liana, Dagmara Domińczyk, confesses that she sympathizes with the character in some aspects but "a lot of her was just not who I am at all - the station in life and the way that she orchestrated the whole reunion [...] is something that I would never dream of." (Gawlak). Moreover, Wallace obliquely introduces one of her recurring themes, class awareness, when Doré draws attention to Liana's class-conscious nature by stressing how she objectifies their domestic worker.

DORÉ: [P]erhaps I worked in your home once [...] It's hard to remember our faces because we're mostly turned to the floor.

LIANA: [...] Cleaner comes to our home.

DORÉ: What does she look like?

LIANA: She's twenty-nine. She is tall! From Poland. She snorts when she laughs.

[...] It's quite original, the sound our Kasia makes.

DORÉ: Our Kasia. (4)

At this point of the play the spectator might experience Thompson's fourth empathetic process, that is, the moral perception of Liana as a person, which may vary in intensity depending on the spectator's emotions. In this scene, emotional episodes of the spectators would range from indifference to indignation. However, it should be noted that the emotional episodes that Liana provokes in the spectator radically shift from one scene to another; according to the timeline of the play, the spectator's attitude towards Liana might be antipathy in Act One, followed by sympathy in Act Two, and ending with feeling pity in Act Three. Colombetti's distinction between emotional episodes and moods are useful at this point since emotional episodes are short, and not long enough to affect the spectator's opinion drastically from one scene to the other. Domińczyk comments on the different response of the audience; the actress notices that audiences tend to have diversified reactions in theater:

The audiences are so interesting [...] There have been shows that are dead silent, and [...] then at the end we get raucous applause. There have been shows that start off, 'Oh my god, they're laughing and they're with us,' and then really heavy silence. There have been people saying things out loud that we hear! They're moved! And then there are some nights when we look down and the whole front row is asleep. (Gawlak)

Domińczyk also recognizes that some spectators exited the theater and she attributes this to the spectator's emotional and ideological baggage, she explains "everyone brings to it their own life experience. And so some people will totally go along for the ride, and some people will resist and some people will walk out" (Gawlak). An artistic work should by all means provoke emotion, which as I insist throughout this thesis is Wallace's purpose.

According to enaction and Colombetti's theories, those emotional episodes of the spectator are embodied; she explains that "appraisal is experientially integrated with arousal, in the sense that I appraise the meaning of a situation *through* my being embodied and

situated in it, and through the specific state of my body. In other words, bodily arousal seems to me to be part of the experience of appraisal” (Steward, Gapenne, and Di Paolo 155 authors’ emphasis). Some of the aspects that the play deals with make some spectators uncomfortable, in an emotional way and therefore, physical. Those spectators that decided to leave the theater might experience disgust, or disappointment, and as a consequence of embodying this experience, they take physical action and decide to leave. This example demonstrates that the emotional episode goes beyond a mental state and is manifested through action and that the spectator is not a corollary of the performance and has autonomy within the cultural ecosystem.

However, in this first act, nothing appears extremely shocking to the spectator, the emotional episodes that the spectator might experience are probably in the range of like or dislike, that is, through the spectator’s cognitive capability of empathy resulting in sympathy or antipathy. Perhaps the spectator’s experience is tinged with sadness as a consequence of Doré’s situation, or on the contrary, the spectator might experience rage towards Doré’s abandonment of her child. Either way, this first act situates the spectator in context for the action staged in Act Two. Liana finally has her way and convinces Doré to meet Marcus for his fortieth birthday by playing with Doré’s expectations of introducing her to her granddaughter:

(Liana uses her last card.)

And then perhaps one day soon. You can meet. Your granddaughter.

(Doré makes a small sound, as though to catch her breath.)

Her name is Dominique. (8)

The final lines of this act are key to the development of the play; in what seems to be a generous act by Liana stating “[y]ou don’t have to be without your son any longer” (10), Doré firmly states “I’ve never been without my son” (10). For the spectator, perhaps the act

ends with some kind of nostalgia provoking sympathy and/or sorrow. However, the most important emotion at this point of the play is expectancy towards the reunion. Wallace creates expectation and then jeopardizes the spectator's suppositions in Act Two. I am confident in affirming that the second act the spectators have in mind does not correspond to the second act of the play in a hundred percent of the cases. Even though there are minor hints pointing towards it—such as when Doré ask Liana if the couple has been faithful to each other all these years, and she confesses that neither of them have—the audience has no clue about the following affairs or when Doré asks for privacy and requests to met her son alone. Domińczyk explains that a close friend of hers has seen the play three times and after the first “she says her favorite part now is watching people around her watch it for the first time” (Gawlak). Analyzing my own experience through the spectators' reactions and comments I hear on during the interval, I affirm that the emotion that prevails after this first act is betrayal; for some moments, the spectator feels betrayed by the dramatist as the promised joyful and emotional family reunion is frustrated in the second act. Therefore, as indicated before, this act serves as the prelude of an emotional roller coaster that the spectator is about to experience.

6.4.3. Act Two: Troubling Sense Making and Conceptual Blending.

The second act takes place in Liana and Marcus's house described as a “living room space in an upper-middle-class household” (ix). Wallace purposely introduces an ellipsis of three weeks in the timeline, where the spectator misses the mother-son reunion. At the beginning of the act Liana and Marcus are waiting for Doré for an afternoon tea party. While the couple waits, they engage in sexual play:

(Marcus manages to thrust his hands into Liana's trousers. She resists again, but not enough to dislodge him. He touches her. She grips his arm to try and stop him, but then, after some moments, she is helping him.) (12)

This act is first described as *(they are both laughing and struggling with each other)* (11); the very first image, as happens in *And I and Silence*, as analyzed in Chapter Three, does not give the spectator all the details. Wallace uses this interesting dramatic technique that, as commented in the previous section, ultimately intends to play with the spectator's expectations at the beginning of the act. However, as sense-making agent, the spectator tries to understand this action and she/he would have a hypothesis of what is happening on stage: Are they playing? Are they fighting? Are they going to have sex? In the same way that the opening scene of *And I and Silence*, this scene provokes the spectator's subjunctive thought where she/he gives meaning to Liana's "No. No! Quit. Quit it" (11).

A similar exercise of sense-making on the part of the spectator occurs when the couple is interrupted by a phone call; the audience's capability of subjunctive thought and conceptual blending help them to reach the conclusion that the "darling" (12) Liana is referring to is their daughter Dominique. After this call, the couple speaks about Doré where Marcus expresses his admiration towards his mother, giving some hints to the spectator about the close relationship that Marcus and his mother forged in the last three weeks:

MARCUS: She's very smart, you know.

LIANA: Is she? Oh. I hadn't—Okay.

MARCUS: She's never had a proper education but she reads an enormous amount.

LIANA: Does she?

MARCUS: And quite widely too. Not the good stuff, but with a little careful guidance she could be persuaded. And she does watercolors on the weekends. Birds.

Trees. You can definitely see there's a bit of talent there. She's very precise.

(14)

The scene also serves to indicate to the spectator that Liana has underestimated her mother-in-law. Doré arrives and her behavior is similar to that of the previous act: “*She is still shy, though perhaps a little less so. She is initially uncomfortable in the unfamiliar surroundings, and still rarely looks either Marcus or Liana in the face*” (14). After some light talk with the couple, during which Liana maintains her condescending tone towards her mother in law, Doré starts a profound narration of her recurrent dream about a tree; trees are a repeated element in the play symbolizing a connection between Marcus—who now is called Jonathan by his mother, since it was the name she chose for him—and Doré. Furthermore, when Liana and Marcus met for the first time he was resting in a tree. Marcus explains that he did not dream but felt a maple tree, as well as, Doré’s dream is about a maple tree. In her dream, Doré explains, she climbs a tree and tries to reach something, and as “it falls I reach out my hand and grab whatever I can and I got it I got it I’m so happy I forget to look at what I’ve got when I do look in my hand there is something small and wet and jelly and warm it’s a piece of flesh and—” (17). Liana interrupts her stating “[h]ow awful” (17), during the conversation Liana tries to minimize the relevance of the dream and mocks Doré. However, as the woman progresses in her narration, Liana—as well as the spectators—soon realizes that the connection between Doré and Marcus is more intense than she thought in the first place. After the interruption Doré continues her story in a more sordid tone:

[...] I lift my dress and there’s a gash a wound the size of a lemon and then I just do it the most natural thing in the world I slide the piece of meat because that is what it now seems like into the wound in my thigh it fits perfectly it melds into me melts into me and the pain stops there’s a lightness in me of my floating among the branches as the leaves do I don’t come down ‘til I wake. (17)

Although as stated in the analysis of Act One, the character of Liana does not arouse many sympathies, in this act Liana's point of view is similar to that of the spectators; during Doré's visit she progressively gathers the pieces of a bigger picture and tries to apprehend the meaning of the circumstances. The situation is ruptured after Doré statement: "We're going to be living together from now on Jonathan and I he won't be coming home anymore after tonight to you" (20). At first Liana thinks that she is delusional but the statement turns into a more serious and profound declaration; Doré says "balloons are nothing bells celebrations couldn't touch me but now in here—*(She lightly touches her chest)*" (20). I believe that at this point the spectator might also change her/his alliances and feel sympathy/pity towards Liana, since both the character and the spectator are trying to convey the meaning of this reunion and both are taken aback at the same time. The cognitive capability of the spectator, as analyzed in Chapter Three, enables her/him to not only make sense but also to produce a hypothesis with different scenarios and counterparts. In this journey from mother-son reunion to incest, both the spectator and Liana are now companions searching for answers:

LIANA *(To Marcus)*: Darling, what is she saying?

(Silence. Marcus looks away.)

Marcus. Tell me what. What is she. You need to. *(Beat)*

Marcus? [...]

(Suddenly Liana understands, with her gut more than her head. But it is as though this understanding is still very far away. There is a long, awkward silence.) (20)

The whole scene is not only confusing for the character but also for the spectator once they reach the understanding that mother and son are stating their intention of living together as a couple. The character of Liana personifies on stage the spectator's suppositions; in order to understand the action on stage, she speculates with a series of reasons to convey some

meaning about the situation. Liana suggested that they are plotting to keep the house or they are looking for some financial profit, which is denied:

MARCUS: We don't want money.

LIANA: We. (Beat) Say it again.

MARCUS: We don't want money.

LIANA: We.

MARCUS: Yes. (20)

Marcus, who works as a schoolteacher, is frustrated with his work because his pupils demand facts instead of learning about the subjects “imploring me begging me to feed them the facts, to give them the answers, no questions asked, just the answers; it doesn't matter to them if they can use what I give them because they don't want to think or take a position: *Please sir, just gives us the facts*” (12). As I remarked in Chapter One Wallace is interested in provoking questions with her plays; she does not give all the answers on purpose, thus, the spectator is able to draw her/his own conclusions. I see Marcus's statement as a representation of the dramatist's own frustration with those spectators who demand facts, information, and closure over questioning the action on stage. In the play ‘the facts’ stand for Marcus's frustration, but they also represent Liana's character, she is not as passionate as Marcus and she tends to obsess with exercising control over the situation and others. Therefore, Marcus and Doré's relationship escapes her control and tears her apart; Liana says “[l]eaving aside that you're his mother, you are. An old woman. (*To Marcus*) She's an old woman. [...] (*Liana returns to the facts.*) *The facts are. The facts are my husband is still in his prime. You are. Rotting*” (21, my emphasis).

As I already pointed out in Chapter Three, I believe that the indignation of some part of the audience was prompted by the fact that the character of Doré is regarded as asexual, which made those spectators see the relationship as implausible, as Liana remarks “(*To*

Doré): You. You are certainly not. Sex! Sexy. Your skin is. Floppy. Your buttocks. Well. I have a tight ass—” (21), and perhaps some spectators agree with her. In this counterfactual scenario the spectator cannot blend the character of Doré as someone Marcus would be sexually attracted to, moreover, someone that would make him abandon his wife. The spectator does not believe in this relationship although I personally think that Wallace managed to make it plausible; she depicts a transcendental connection but also, and more precisely, she does not leave the highly sexual language of the play outside of the picture when it comes to describe Doré’s and Marcus’s relationship. There is a great deal of examples of dialogues in the play where the characters talk about sex bluntly. “LIANA: I’m going to suck your cock. I won’t tire; my tongue never does. I’ll tease you until you’re furious and rigid in my mouth. When you finally cum I want you to cum so hard—MARCUS:—that I knock out the back of your throat—LIANA:—and scramble my brains!” (14). The surprising element is that Marcus’s relationship with Doré is not excluded from those explicit descriptions in the dialogues “LIANA: No. (Beat) I will never say, ‘Dominique, my only child, my treasure, when he kissed her I could see his cock hard through his trousers.’” (23) Sexuality, I believe, is also an aspect that might make some spectators uncomfortable, the most conservative part of the audience will also feel offended not only by the incestuous relationship but also because of the graphic sexually explicit language used. Nevertheless, as I just commented, Wallace justifies the abandonment with several elements such as Marcus’s feeling of constraint in his life. Doré asks, “[d]o you still love your wife, Jonathan, your sad beautiful wife?” Marcus responds, “Yes, I do” giving a thread of hope to Liana who relies again on the facts and says “There. Those are the facts. Ha. He loves me. Fact” (23). As I observed earlier, Marcus and Doré’s physical attraction is not ignored in the play, and I wonder if Wallace felt compelled to materialize it on stage for

two main reasons: to make it real and to shock the spectator and dissipate any doubts or speculations of a retraction in the third act:

DORÉ: Then you must free her from you. From us. [...] You owe her. If you still care for Liana don't leave her with hope.

(Marcus nod slightly, then kisses Doré, lightly at first, then more deeply, and she responds. He envelops her in his arms like a lover. It is a quiet, focused moment of passion, restrained but therefore the desire all the more evident. Liana watches them, frozen, mesmerized. She watches long enough until all doubt is erased and the image of their embrace is burned into her mind and body.) (23)

The scene quoted above does not leave the spectator without an opinion and an emotional episode. Taking into account my observations of the audience, I have to admit that some were laughing, while others thought it was beyond the absurd, and the rest were surprised and expectant to see what was going to happen next (I include myself in this group); however, I believe that none of us foresaw this scene. The act ends with a farewell between Marcus and Liana, leading to a brief intermission before the third act. During the interval the spectators were commenting on the scene and most people state that they did not understand why this relationship happened, culturally speaking they could not blend this fiction and accept it as a counterfactual. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that one woman in the public was trying to explain to her companion that “Wallace deconstructs the traditional family.” However, I believe that only a few in the public shared that feeling. The Signature Theater in New York is a small off-Broadway theater designed by the renowned architect Frank Gehry, the fact that the venue is small provides an interesting point of view, since a sense of communal experience is felt during the intermission. In the next section I analyze the third act in terms of experience and ethics.

6.4.4. Act Three: A Comment on Experience and Ethics towards Social Cohesion.

Act Three takes place six years later in a church chapel, before the stage is lit up, the spectators can see a coffin. As in the previous act, Wallace plays with the spectator's expectations; the person seated behind me said that although she did not enjoy the previous act, she wonders and wants to know who died in this act. If we follow our logic we might think that Doré passed away since she is the oldest. However, we might also think about Liana's reaction in the previous act and the consequences, perhaps she committed suicide. The stage directions indicate,

There is a plain rough-wood coffin. Doré is standing, calmly looking at the coffin. Strangely, Doré looks more youthful, even taller. She is elegant, fashionably though subtly dressed in black. [...] Liana enters, but stays near the edge. She watches Doré's back, which is to her. Liana looks to have aged beyond her years and has a slight limp. Her hair tied back from her face. She is not dressed in black. Though her clothes are worn, they still retain a sense of flair. Liana carries an old leather suitcase. (30)

The conversation between Doré and Liana serves to fill the gap for the spectator who is in the dark about these six years. As the stage directions indicate, Doré had some prosperous years; Marcus quits his work and becomes an online tutor so he can stay at home with Doré, who also quits since her son earns a substantial salary. Liana on the contrary loses her position, lives in a bedsit, and explains that she limps as a consequence of a self-injury trying to acquire social benefits. At the beginning of the scene Liana's tone is remorseful but she is morbidly curious about Marcus's death. As a consequence of six years of suffering, Liana has turned into a free rider who acts for her own benefit and seeks revenge in order to get some comfort. On the contrary, Doré is calm most of the time, as she was in the second act, and

speaks naturally and casually; she has turned into a psychological altruistic figure in this act, passively accepting punishment and trying to help Liana.

In this act sexuality appears again, when Doré explains that they sexually grew apart in the last couple of years, “[w]ith that kind of heat, well, it began to corrode us that’s the word Marcus used corrode my arm that was his arm became mine again [...] our single block became two bodies again we lost the strength of our grappling and could only lay side by side” (37-8). Liana attends the funeral not only out of curiosity about Marcus’s death but also to give Doré notice that she has to move out from her own apartment. Doré gave the apartment to Marcus and he assumed that Doré would die in the first place, which turns Liana and Dominique into his heir. The tension of the scene escalates and Liana tries to choke Doré, who passes out. Once Liana has vented her rage on Doré, and both pull themselves together, they start to have a conversation about Marcus. Doré states:

We no longer slept in the same room. It had been almost two years. That night we lay together our bodies touching but not using our hands. There was no arousal. Our skin was between us like cool water. He lay his head on my chest and for the first time he was truly my sin again. And I his mother. We lay like that all night, our skin circulating back and forth between us like liquid. Three days later he was dead. His death was not a suicide. He died of an aneurysm. (39)

After a long talk Liana understand that although what happened between Marcus and Doré is abnormal, she cannot live blaming them for the failure of her marriage and her current situation. Doré altruistically apologizes and the play ends with the women in peace. Doré invites Liana to stay with her that night and perhaps they stay together permanently.

DORÉ: You’re cold.

LIANA: So cold I’m quite sure I’ll never warm up again.

DORÉ: You need a hot cup of soup. Steaming. And a lie-down. (*Beat*) I've got a spare room[...]

LIANA: The facts are: I don't like crumpets. I never have...If you try and get to bed with me.

DORÉ: Don't be silly. You're not my type.

(*Liana laughs easily for the first time.*) (41-2)

The two women realize that they could benefit from the company of each other and they accept the long journey that brought them to this moment in their lives. It could be said that they embraced the concept of groupishness; although the conditions that Wallace presents in the play are not ideal they get together in order to survive, which evidences the primary characteristic of evolution. The Enactive approach considers the relationship between the live organism and its environment, which is understood as 'experience.' Once they have evaluated their options, both Liana and Doré decide that their possibilities of survival are related to finding an ally who will help overcome a son's/lover's death rather than living a vagabond life. Although this end might not completely make sense to some spectators, from an evolutionary and Enactive analysis it is completely justifiable. This last act demonstrates ethical progress, where the characters make the best of their circumstances. As McConachie explains:

If we can say that performance functioned evolutionarily, at least in part, as a means of exploring the problems and possibilities of social cohesion, its focus on agonistic action is not surprising. The notion that social conflict generates rituals and other kinds of agonistic performances is an old one in anthropology and performance studies, dating from Arnold van Gennep's early twentieth-century work on rites of passage, Victor Turner's incorporation of van Gennep's idea into his theory of social drama, and Schechner's use of social drama as a contrast (and continuation) of

western aesthetic theater in the 1970s. In each of these models, performance is a means of addressing the problems caused by social conflict. (*Evolution* 91)

Naomi Wallace explores social conflict in her plays with the intention to contribute to social cohesion. *Night is a Room* is bold, experimental, and disconcerting but in the end ethically progressive and the scenario of the spectators' perplexity and questioning.



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Conclusion.



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Conclusion.

I approached Naomi Wallace's works with an interest in the spectatorial experience, since I found that her oeuvre focuses on creating an impact on the spectator and contributing to a better society. Wallace's ambitious project involves the creation of experimental plays that produce a complex theatrical experience. Thus, I searched for paradigms that would help me to analyze and fully understand the spectator's experience in Wallace's plays. I found that the majority of the current works available on spectatorship present a heterogeneous nature and in many cases an uncertain methodology. In terms of spectatorship I realized that most of the publications are from the 20th century; in addition, the predominant tendency was a textual analysis in most cases relying on semiotics, which I believe is obsolete and insufficient for the analysis of Naomi Wallace's plays. Therefore, with this panorama of spectatorial analysis, the work of Bruce McConachie presents a bold approach based on cognitive science. Researching McConachie's proposal I become aware of the fact that his publication of *Engaging Audiences: A Cognitive Approach to Spectating in the Theatre* (2008) provides the insightful groundbreaking methodology that I needed in order to understand the spectatorial phenomenon in Wallace and go beyond a textual analysis.

The present thesis started as a work on spectatorship where the cognitive approach to performance seemed to be the key to understand the spectator's mind. After studying aspects of cognition, such as conceptual blending, cognitive empathy, emotions, and ethics, I firmly believe that to understand cognition it is essential to interpret the spectator's experience, and therefore the plays. The cognitive theories should not be understood as isolated ideas, on the contrary, these discoveries on cognition are integrated in one single paradigm, which is Enaction. The principles of Enaction are the instrument that can help us to explain the

phenomenon of spectatorship and can provide us with a unified theory that both performance studies and particularly spectatorship analysis lack nowadays.

I can affirm now that the theory of conceptual integration that the cognitive approach entails is extremely helpful to understand Wallace's spectator as also her plays. I am quite convinced this is a central aspect of spectatorship and I believe that conceptual integration should be part of any analysis of spectatorship since it helps to understand the dynamics of theater and the ability of blending, which was taken for granted through Coleridge's hypothesis of suspension of disbelief. Thanks to conceptual blending I was able to understand the most intricate aspects of Wallace's technique, such as having only a few characters on stage where the roles and/or personae of her characters flow and provide a captivating introspection. I analyze this technique in several of her plays, and since it is a recurrent element I coined the term *stream of personae*. This *stream of personae* makes me question how the spectator processes, in the middle of the scene, a sudden arbitrary change of the character different than the one the actress/actor should perform. I concluded that the spectator is able to blend the performer and the actor as counterparts in a counterfactual space of fiction/reality. To illustrate this, I present in the appendix a network model of a scene from *And I and Silence* (2010) following Fauconnier and Turner's model. Other important aspects that conceptual integration supports are my insights about a spectator's agency.

The spectator's agency is one of the aspects that I have defended, and I think this thesis includes sufficient evidence to reject the image of the passive spectator. Naomi Wallace as a political writer emphasizes the importance of questions and she encourages the spectator to be active towards the works on stage in a Brechtian fashion. I analyzed empathy through Evan Thompson's theories, which also supports my claim of regarding agency as part of the spectatorial experience. The spectator is able to adopt the perspective of the other through this capacity and without losing her/his judgment. I think that my analysis of

Wallace's self-standing monologues *Standard Time* (2002) and *The Retreating World* (2008) serve to epitomize the cognitive empathetic processes that make this form of theater to be the closest manifestation to a face-to-face conversation. For the study of emotions I use Giovana Colombetti's affective science where she uses dynamics systems theory to explain emotional episodes. Colombetti's theories helped me to understand that emotions in theater are far more complex than simple responses of the spectator, emotions are part of a system, which the spectator experiences as embodied. This approach helped me to analyze the spectator's emotions in *In the Heart of America* (1994) and *The Hard Weather Boating Party* (2009) under a brand new prism, more as an ecosystem and less as an input/output pattern.

In the ecosystem of theater I find that ethics is the key to social progress, which is one of the aspects that Wallace emphasizes in her plays. Philip Kitcher's *The Ethical Project* (2011) and Bruce McConachie's chapter on ethics in *Evolution, Cognition, and Performance* (2015) discuss pertinent ideas about evolutionary progress such as the study of the concept of groupishness, which contradicts the Darwinian survival of the fittest and encourages the work of the group, which is particularly relevant in Wallace's plays *Slaughter City* (1996) and *Things of Dry Hours* (2007). As explained in the first chapter, Wallace has an ambitious idea of changing the community; according to Dewey's ethical theory, a pluralistic community should include the figure of the problem solvers. I consider that Wallace as an artist is part of these figures working for social progress.

Some years after the cognitive turn evolved, as I discussed with McConachie during my stay as a visiting researcher at the University of Pittsburgh some scholars in favor of the cognitive approach focus on the recently developed scope of Biocultural Studies under the paradigm of Enaction, which was also very enlightening for my research. As McConachie evidences in his seminar Thea2216, this interplay between culture and biological studies brings about some new and exciting claims to performance studies. From 2010 onwards the

cognitive turn has consolidated its position in academia and I can affirm that the initial division within the cognitive approach has disappeared. Nowadays those scholars who adopted the cognitive approach and the cognitive evolutionary approach are part of the same branch which studies cognition, evolution, and biocultural aspects of performance.

In the course of my research on Wallace I became aware of those aspects such as empathy and emotion—which are particularly pertinent in her works—and the need of a cognitive analysis for those aspects. It seems to me that the only method to fully understand the spectator was to understand how she/he processes and experiences performance. Thus, I rely on the cognitive approach and the latest discoveries on performance and cognition and at many times I found myself researching exclusively cognitive paradigms that were useful for my purpose of understanding the spectatorial experience. The sum of the chapters presented in this dissertation reflects my own journey to understand cognition, which progressed tremendously in the last years of the research by embracing the new paradigm of Enaction. As shown in the last chapter, an analysis of spectatorship can be accomplished through the parameters of Enaction, which I believe present a reliable epistemology to understand what happens in the mind of Wallace’s spectator.

I hope that I have provided a comprehensive study of Wallace’s plays, which was one of the necessary aspects of this thesis. When I started this research on Naomi Wallace in 2012, there was little information about her plays in the academic sphere, and access to her printed plays was limited. Gathering pieces of information from different and scattered sources I was able to compose a chronology of her plays (see appendix), which was not available at that time. In the last few years, Wallace has come to prominence on the American stage with several productions but also in academia with the publication by Scott T. Cummings and Erica Abbitt Stevens of *The Theatre of Naomi Wallace: Embodied Dialogues* (2013), which among other interesting aspects, compiles for the first time a

complete bibliography of Wallace's works and productions, something that I had already done in this thesis.

The last chapter focuses on Enaction; it should be noted that it serves as a culmination of my research and compiles the theories presented in the previous chapters, which are under the umbrella of Enaction. I study the previous paradigms and their failures in cognitive terms, which make me realize that Enaction is the only cognitive paradigm qualified to bring about a comprehensive analysis of spectatorship. Based on the principles of autonomy, emergence, embodiment, sense-making, and experience Enaction provides a comprehensive non-textual theory, which as a matter of fact, elucidates how the spectator's mind works. I believe that this theory is the future of cognition since it places cognition within an environment; Enaction sees that cognition is embedded in an environment, in the same way that the spectator's mind is embedded in a social event, which is the theatrical representation. I believe that the study of the relationships between the mind and its environment serves as a basis for future research not only in performance studies but also in many other fields such as cognition, neuroscience, linguistics, computer science, artificial intelligence, and philosophy.

Using the Enactive paradigm I analyzed Naomi Wallace latest play *Night is a Room* (2015), where the five principles of Enaction proved to be a helpful solid base to analyze the spectatorial experience. I hope this thesis contributes to cognitive studies and to further investigations on Enaction and performance. I am satisfied with the results since one of the initial goals was to analyze Naomi Wallace's spectator from a reliable epistemology and I believe that the method of analysis has been proved as solid since as I remarked it is being used in many other fields of research as cutting edge methodology. The cognitive approach to Wallace's plays provided a deep understanding of the spectator's experience. I can conclude that her work serves not only as entertainment but also as a tool for social progress, which makes visible the political, social, and racial contemporary conflicts of our time through her

bold imagination. Naomi Wallace who once was majorly praised in Europe is gaining recognition back in her homeland where her plays will continue rattling the most conservative minds in the United States to move forward in progress.



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Appendix.



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Appendix

A Compilation of Naomi Wallace's plays.

- *The War Boys* (1993).
- *In The Fields of Aceldama* (1993).
- *In the Heart of America* (1994).
- *The Fish Story* (1994).
- *The Girl who Fell through a Hole in her Sweater* (1995).
- *One Flea Spare* (1995).
- *Birdy* (1996).
- *Slaughter City* (1996).
- *In the Sweat* (1997).
- *The Trestle at the Pope Lick Creek* (1998).
- *Manifesto* (1999).
- *Standard Time* (2000).
- *The Inland Sea* (2002).
- *The Fever Chart: Three Visions of the Middle East* (2006).
 - *The Retreating World* (2006).
 - *A State of Innocence* (2006).
 - *Between this Breath and you* (2006).
- *Things of Dry Hours* (2004).
- *One Short Sleepe* (2008).
- *The Hard Weather Boating Party* (2009).
- *No Such a Cold Thing* (2004).

- *And I and Silence* (2010).

- *The Liquid Plain* (2015).

- *Night is a Room* (2015).

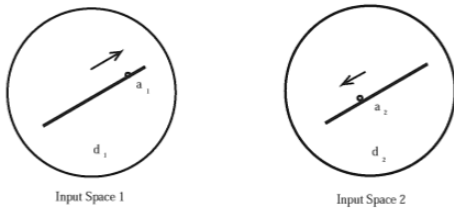


FIGURE 3.1 INPUT MENTAL SPACES

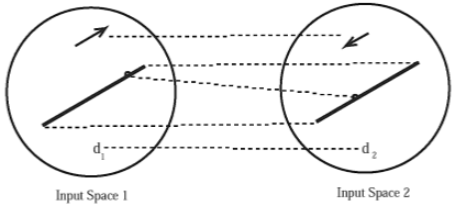
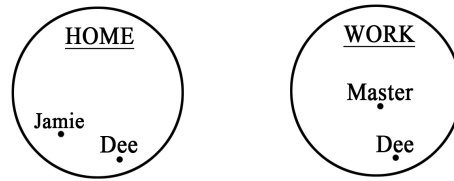


FIGURE 3.2 CROSS-SPACE MAPPING

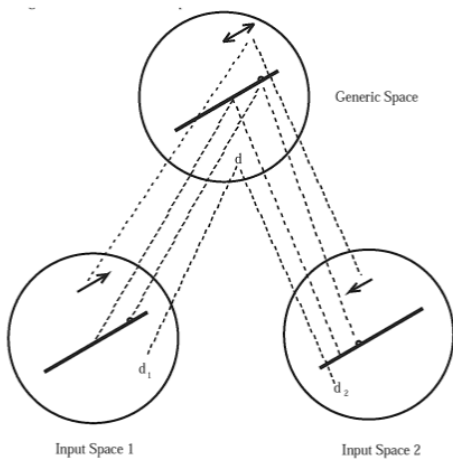
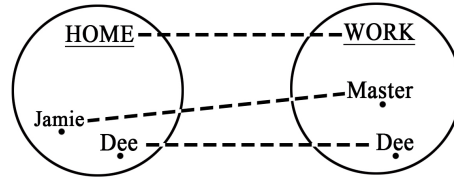
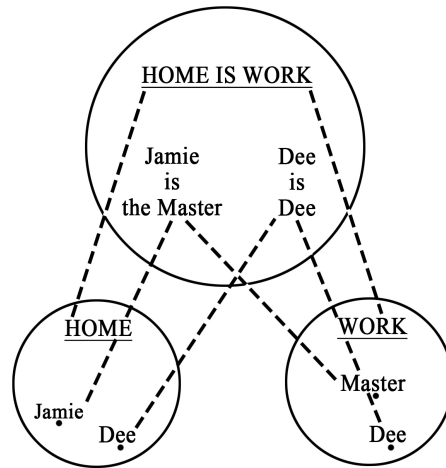


FIGURE 3.3 GENERIC MENTAL SPACE



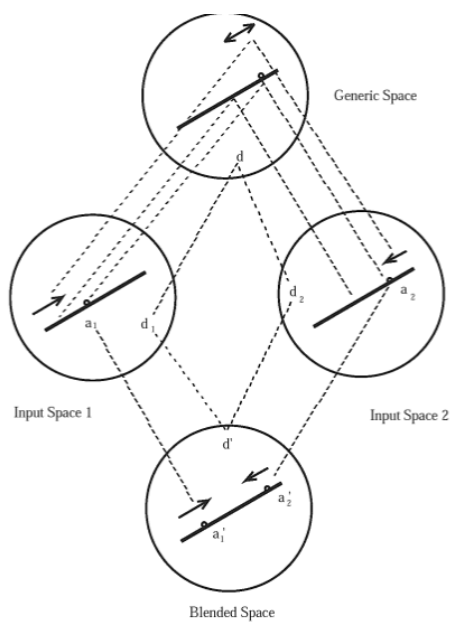
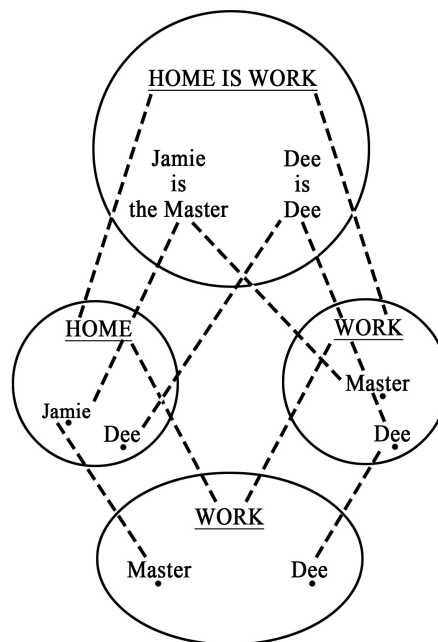


FIGURE 3.4 BLENDED SPACE



A Network Model Fauconnier and Turner (Buddhist monk). My Network Model *And I and Silence Scene.*



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“A Decade of Performance and Cognition: Moving Towards the Integration of Cultural and Biological Studies.”

(Interview with Dr. Bruce McConachie.) by Rovie Herrera Medalle.

(In press) Miranda. Issue 14 May 2017. Multidisciplinary peer-reviewed journal on the English-speaking world. [with the permission of the Editor Emeline Jouve].

The Interview.

Rovie Herrera Medalle: Dr. McConachie, you have been in the forefront of theatre and cognitive studies for the past ten years. Can you tell us how the field has changed since the publication of your anthology of essays with Elizabeth Hart in 2006?

Bruce McConachie: Sure; it has changed in some ways, but not in others. Those of us doing this work – and that includes theatre critics, acting teachers, performance historians, clinicians, advocates of theatre for social change, and others – continue to look to psychology, evolution, neuroscience, linguistics, anthropology, and other sciences for insights into how and why we perform and what performance can mean and do for spectators. Our reliance on experimentation and logic based in empirical evidence sets us apart from other performance scholars, most of who continue to rely on traditional or poststructuralist approaches that cannot be validated scientifically. This is not to say that we have experimental proof for all of our claims; experiments with actors and audiences are still in their infancy, although that is starting to change. Because testing under conditions of live performance is very difficult, we have mostly applied scientific insights in related areas of human behavior to the specifics of our field. There is already quite a lot of good science on imagination, role-playing, empathy, emotions, meaning-making, and other areas of acting and spectating that is relevant to our interests and questions.

It's fair to say, though, that these questions have changed in the last ten years, both in response to new scientific discoveries and syntheses and to changes in the general field of theatre and performance studies. When Liz and I were gathering essays for *Performance and Cognition* in 2005, we primarily turned to writers who were influenced by the combination of linguistics, literary criticism, and cognitive science that had shaped the work of George Lakoff, Mark Johnson, and Mark Turner. Lakoff and Johnson were known for their 1980 classic, *Metaphors We Live By*, plus other individual work on categorization, embodiment, and philosophy, and Turner had recently published his book on conceptual blending with Gilles Fauconnier. (Among other things, blending explains how our minds can comprehend the synthesis of actor and role that goes into playing a character on stage and the compression that allows spectators to combine many small events into one complete performance.)

RHM: What about the substantial cognitive work that had already occurred in other humanistic disciplines by 2006? Did the cognitive paradigm shifts in philosophy, musicology, and film studies, for example, influence the questions you and others were asking about theatre and performance in the early years?

Bruce McConachie: Yes, but the influence was mostly indirect. The essays by me, John Lutterbie, Lisa Zunshine, Rhonda Blair, and others in *Performance and Cognition* were primarily trying to figure out how cognition and emotion worked in theatre events and what this new approach might mean for our usual ways of understanding performances. I did not venture very far into those other disciplines until my next book, *Engaging Audiences: A Cognitive Approach to Spectating in the Theatre*, published in 2008.

RHM: What were the primary humanistic fields and personal experiences that shaped your writing of Engaging Audiences?

Bruce McConachie: In terms of life experiences, I decided I would use plays I had directed or performed in as my primary examples. I discussed historical and contemporary productions

of five of them throughout the book – *Oedipus the King*, *Twelfth Night*, *Uncle Vanya*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and *Top Girls*. I'd been doing a lot of reading in theatre history, philosophy, and film studies when I wrote that book and these influences are evident in the writing. In addition to couching many of my scientific claims in theatrical-historical contexts, I wrote a lengthy Epilogue, "Writing Cognitive Audience Histories," to summarize my general approach to this historiographical problem. In the Epilogue and throughout the book, I argued that a cognitive approach was better than semiotics, the usual way in 2008 for theatre scholars to understand audience response. I also offered a philosophical defense of embodied cognitive science as superior to the poststructuralisms of Lacan, Derrida, Butler, and others. Regarding film studies, I borrowed some insights from film historian David Bordwell and theorist Noel Carroll and, following their lead, investigated audience emotions and the psychology of comedy much more thoroughly than I had before.

RHM: Engaging Audiences is a central title part of your series with Palgrave Macmillan Press, right?

Bruce McConachie: Yes, it was one of the first books that Palgrave published in our series. Blakey Vermeule, an English professor at Stanford, and I started "Cognitive Studies in Literature and Performance" in 2007.

RHM: Have you been satisfied with the titles you and Blakey compiled in the series?

Bruce McConachie: In general, yes; there are some great monographs in our series. Over the past ten years, we've attracted many of the top scholars working in our field, including Joseph Carroll and Jonathan Gottschall, whose *Graphing Jane Austen* (2012) takes an empirical and evolutionary approach to the response of readers to classic novels. In the area of performance, Amy Cook published a book with us on conceptual blending, Kirsten Uszkalo investigated the centrality of rage in historical performances of witchcraft, Evelyn

Tribble explained how Shakespeare's actors negotiated the Globe Theatre stage, and John Lutterbie drew on a range of cognitive science to advance a "general theory" of acting.

We were talking a minute ago about the ways in which cognitive studies in theatre and performance has changed in recent years. These books had a formative effect on our emerging field. All four of them helped to broaden and deepen the reach of cognitive science in studies of theatre and performance. Cook's *Shakespearean Neuroplay* demonstrated the inevitability of blending for spectator meaning-making among a wide range of *Hamlet* productions and Uszkalo, in *Bewitched and Bedeviled*, showed that the contemporary science of emotions has surprising usefulness in historical investigations. In *Cognition in the Globe*, Tribble drew on "distributed cognition," our ability to use our immediate environment to remind us of cognitive solutions to immediate tasks – think of the cockpit of an airplane – that gave the first historically credible explanation for how the actors at the Globe knew where to enter and what to say when they got on stage. Finally, Lutterbie deployed dynamic systems theory, long used to predict the action of many biological systems, in his *Toward a General Theory of Acting* to discuss the constraints and satisfactions that all actors work within when they perform. These four books brought recent scientific insights to bear on questions that have puzzled scholars for decades. They also demonstrate some of the several ways our field has broadened since its initial focus on linguistics, criticism, and cognitive science.

RHM: Yes, indeed. Would you include your 2013 book, Theatre & Mind, among those that have had a formative influence on extending the field?

Bruce McConachie: It's kind of you to ask that question, but I have to say that this little book – it's only 82 pages long – was not an attempt at innovative scholarship. Palgrave's "Theatre &" series is addressed primarily to undergraduates and its general goal is to introduce them to "connections between theatre and some aspect of the wider world," as the Editors'

Introduction explains. I'm happy to admit that I took ideas from several of my colleagues in the field (including a book I have not mentioned, *Embodied Acting*, by Rick Kemp), boiled them down for undergrad consumption, and added some sexy examples. It's still a pretty reliable read for anyone who wants a brief summary of the most of the main ideas in the field of theatre and cognition. I wouldn't trust *Theatre & Mind* after about 2020, however; the field is changing too fast.

RHM: What about Evolution, Cognition, and Performance, which you published in 2015?

From my reading of the book you seem to have broken a lot of new ground.

Bruce McConachie: Yes, maybe too much. Unlike *Theatre & Mind*, I may have stretched to include some ideas that are out of the reach of the general reader. The task I set for myself was to find a general theory based primarily in evolution and cognition that could encompass all of performance studies. In the U.S., scholarship in performance studies includes all aspects of theatre, but also encompasses rituals, games, public speeches, music, film, and, more recently, interactive posts and videos in social media and related digital events. Performance studies seeks to explain the full implications of "performance;" the field has been – and might become again – a significant platform for social and political critique and action. The field has a conflicted history populated by a variety of theories that draw from among anthropology, psychology, sociology, and linguistics. Although I borrow from some of these theories, especially the social scientific ones, I found that I had to challenge many of them because they were based in assumptions that no longer hold after the cognitive revolution.

RHM: Let's talk about that. In your introductory chapter of Evolution, Cognition, and Performance, you rebut philosopher John Locke's enlightenment-era belief that a child's mind is a "blank slate," awaiting the "writing" that culture and society will inscribe on it.

Can you please explain why challenging Locke's notion is important to your project?

Bruce McConachie: Locke was the first philosopher to put forward an idea that is still a dominant part of western thinking. Most older schools of sociology and anthropology, along with mainstream theories of performance studies, readily accept what is usually called “the social construction of reality.” This idea divides biology from culture to assert that human beings have inherited no natural qualities or predilections; instead, society and culture alone shape how we “construct” the world. Evidence has been piling up for several decades, however, that *Homo sapiens*, like other mammals, do inherit many cognitive capabilities that predispose our bodies and minds to behave in some ways and not others. Society and language are still important, but evidence from around the world demonstrates that the gene pool of our species has structured the same basic stages of human development for all of us, regardless of differences in cultural learning. Our minds are not “blank slates” awaiting the imprint of culture.

RHM: As I recall, Evolution, Cognition, and Performance goes further than that. At one point you make the argument that “biology shaped culture, but culture also shaped some parts of biology.” This statement was particularly revealing to me, since I understand it as a groundbreaking view in terms of performance studies, can you please expand on it?

Bruce McConachie: Sure, but I’ll need to go back into evolutionary time to do it. According to contemporary evolutionary biologists, several crucial aspects of our social evolution occurred during *Homo erectus* times, from about 2 million to 200 thousand years ago. During this period our ancestors became the most social animals on the planet in order to survive. Living in small bands of 30 to 50 individuals, *Homo erectus* hominins gradually learned how to cooperate in matters of sexual relations, child care, hunting, food sharing, and protection. But not all bands survived. Only those that learned these and other social skills could flourish in the dangerous and sometimes rapidly shifting environments of that time. Evolutionary scientists now believe that some *Homo erectus* bands began to pass on genes to their

offspring that predisposed members of these bands to act with heightened levels of socialization. These predilections – which include the capacity for empathy, tribalism, pro-social emotions (such as shame and guilt), and altruism – continue in our own species today; we inherited them from our *Homo erectus* ancestors. In fact, our heightened ability to behave in these ways is one of the things that set us apart from other mammals. In this sense, the culture of some *Homo erectus* bands gradually shaped their genetic evolution; only those bands that cooperated could survive. In turn, these genetic predilections shaped the culture of *Homo erectus* offspring and continue to undergird our own cultures today.

RHM: You mentioned empathy as one of the social skills that helped our ancestors to survive. Some theatre theorists – notably Bertolt Brecht – have been critical of empathy. Do you agree with Brecht that empathy can get in the way of understanding?

Bruce McConachie: Brecht was rejecting a nineteenth-century, romantic conception of empathy. No cognitive scientist today would agree that artists and others can lose themselves in the contemplation of another person or object, which is what the German romantics believed. So Brecht was right to reject that old fashioned notion of empathy. Most scientists today accept a version of empathy as the attempt of one person to put her/himself in the place of another in order to understand that person's thoughts and feelings. This more modest version of empathy does not involve the loss of self. And it obviously has survival value; if several people in a *Homo erectus* band are hunting a dangerous animal, it helps if each person can understand the experience of the others so that they can all work more effectively together.

RHM: I can see that. So, do you think that this integration of cultural and biological studies should be an essential part of the teaching in theatre and performance studies programs?

Bruce McConachie: Yes, I believe so. But it will take some textbooks advocating this biocultural approach before that can happen. My next project is a co-edited introductory

anthology of essays that we hope will be accessible to undergraduate readers. Rick Kemp and I are editing *The Routledge Companion to Theatre, Performance, and Cognitive Science*; it will be published in paperback in 2018.

*RHM: That sounds fascinating, we will stay tuned. I understand that Cambridge University Press is also bringing out a paperback edition of your *Evolution, Cognition, and Performance* soon.*

Bruce McConachie: Yes, that will be available later this year.

RHM: Thank you very much for this interview, Dr. McConachie. I appreciate your insights.

Bruce McConachie: Thank you, Rovie.

