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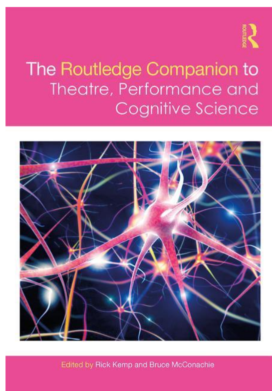

The Routledge Companion to Theatre, Performance, and Cognitive Science

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Emergence, Meaning and Presence

Publication details
https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315169927-24
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Published online on: 05 Sep 2018

How to cite :- Amy Cook. 05 Sep 2018, *Emergence, Meaning and Presence from:* The Routledge Companion to Theatre, Performance, and Cognitive Science Routledge
Accessed on: 03 Oct 2023
https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315169927-24

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EMERGENCE, MEANING AND PRESENCE

An interdisciplinary approach to a disciplinary question

Amy Cook

During the summer of 2017, The Public Theater's production of *Julius Caesar* created quite a stir: it seemed to depict the assassination of President Donald Trump and thus was perceived by some to be a dangerous piece of propaganda calling for the death of the president. Scholars, critics—anyone who had read or seen the play, really—quickly pointed out how ridiculous this interpretation was: the play does not go on to suggest that this action, taken early in the play, was such a good idea and things don't end well for the conspirators. Nonetheless, Shakespeare's play became ground zero in a political/cultural battle over meaning and representation.

Those who argued that The Public's *Caesar* did not advocate assassination of Trump would have agreed that the actor playing Caesar was costumed and directed to evoke the U.S. President and that the play involves that character being stabbed multiple times by the senators around him. Yet two different groups took two different meanings from the same performance. This might be an extreme example—Fox News and rabid Trump supporters can only be straw men in an argument on Shakespearean performance analysis—but the question remains: What does it mean to make meaning? How do we know when we have achieved it? These are legitimate questions being addressed by scholars across the academy: linguists want to know, for example, how each 'there' in 'there's no there there' can mean different things; computer scientists working on artificial intelligence want to know how to teach a computer to perceive 'meaning;' medical researchers struggle with patients with various serious problems all related to a felt loss of meaning; and neuroscientists, cognitive scientists and psychologists want to know how humans ascribe meaning. A theatrical interplay with the cognitive sciences helps to reimagine what it can mean to mean.

My work started with a desire to understand how complicated poetry affected an audience. I wanted to know, for instance, why spectators sit forward at a particular piece of poetry. Why everyone remembers some lines ('to hold the mirror up to nature') but not others ('twas caviar to the general')? Cognitive linguistics, with its insistence on embodiment and scale of evidence similar to literary theory (both look at comprehended text to understand something behind or beyond the words spoken or written), has been a powerful tool for these kinds of inquiries. Using conceptual integration and metaphor theory, I pulled apart sections of poetry (Hamlet's 'mirror held up to nature,' Richard's 'winter of our discontent' and *Henry V*'s 'crooked figure,' for example) and argued that the networks of meanings

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evoked and primed in the process of understanding the text are then part of the scaffolding of larger thematic threads throughout the play (Cook 2007, 2010, 2012; Fauconnier and Turner 2002). The mirror Hamlet holds up to nature at the centre of the play, the one that stands in for the 'purpose of playing,' is not an actual mirror. This is not the mirror we use to check our blind spot or correct our lipstick: this mirror is capable of reflecting impartially and also anatomising or expanding. The purpose of playing is not just strict duplication or precise mimetic representation (indeed, the play he has performed for the King is 'something *like*' the murder of his father), it is a slightly edited, amended or distorted reflection that allows the audience to see virtue's feature, for example, in 'Virtue.' Through examining *how* audiences have understood this creative image, rather than what they have understood, I found a web of evoked sources (convex mirror, political tracts, the use of glass in scientific instruments and the small flat glass mirrors newly available from Italy) tied together. Understanding 'the purpose of playing' evokes a number of tools for vision that do different things.

This is only helpful to see, of course, if seeing it allows us to ask new questions about the poetry or to perceive new angles in the performance. It does not prove that Shakespeare 'anticipated' current theories in cognitive science and it does not prove that these theories are accurate because we see evidence in Shakespeare. Cognitive linguists have received many calls to find a way to empirically verify their theories, and interdisciplinary scholars must be attuned to the disciplinary status of studies or theories that we are importing into our field. Across the sciences, findings evolve, theories are challenged and research proves difficult to replicate. This caveat must be reiterated, and care must be taken at the start of any project like this: new research is happening every day, challenging and stabilising interpretations and assumptions of the past. While I cannot use Shakespeare's poetry to prove a question in cognitive linguistics and cognitive linguistics cannot prove the value of Shakespeare, integrating the two enriches both and ignoring the knowledge and research across the disciplines imperils the work in our own. My means are interdisciplinary, but my goals are disciplinary.

This essay will explore the various ways cognitive science challenges how we make sense of theatre and performance. A cognitive approach must foreground the embodied and embedded nature of communication, attending to the importance of time, presence, emotion and learning, areas traditionally overlooked by more semiotic 'readings' of meaning onstage. Research in cognitive linguistics offers a dynamic and embodied perspective on meaning. The theory of conceptual integration networks, also called blending, has been influential outside of its home discipline, and yet the true value in applying it to theatre and literature comes from how it operates specifically and rigorously, not as applied metaphorically, as often happens. Language onstage, of course, comes out of the mouth of an actor playing a character. I will apply integration theory to complicate our understanding of the relationship between the actor's body and the character's story. Finally, I will discuss Alva Noë's ideas about 'presence' and art; my aim is to destabilise, from the beginning, the idea of meaning.

Conceptual integration networks

Cognitive linguists are now almost unanimous in understanding that thinking and speaking are creative and metaphoric. We do not use language as a code with which we translate what is out there; we organise what is out there around metaphors, image schemas and mental spaces that come from embodied and embedded experience in the world. The father points to the illustration in the book and asks his child, 'do you see the blue ball?' and the child connects the visual activity with the words spoken. The father later asks the child, 'do you see how the pan is hot? Can you see how dangerous that is?' and the process of visual perception

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is abstracted to more general intellection. TO SEE IS TO KNOW has been referred to as a 'dead metaphor,' but it is powerful despite and because it is rarely visible as metaphoric. I do not respond to my interlocutor by insisting that her 'point' is not visible and thus of course I do not 'see' it; we experience intellection and visual perception similarly.

There is growing evidence, however, that the connection between the abstract and the concrete (between understanding and seeing, for example) remains active in our bodies. In other words, the metaphors are not dead but operate zombie-like, shaping our perception of the discourse. Researchers found that subjects will map directions onto verbs, such that 'lifted' is coded as upward, 'pulled' and 'fled' as leftward, 'walked' as rightward and 'owned' as downward (Richardson et al. 2001). Other studies suggest that readers of many languages with left-to-right word order mentally represent consecutive events as laid out from left to right, where speakers of languages with no egocentric directions have been observed to prefer east-to-west (Boroditsky 2010; Fuhrman 2010; Santiago et al. 2007). The state of the body is both an input into language interpretation and an output. When we read 'open the drawer' we are much quicker to perform a movement moving our hands towards our bodies than away, for example, suggesting that the comprehension of the sentence accessed the motor cortex sufficiently to prime one physical action (movement towards) rather than another (movement away) (Bergen 2012). Others have extended this kind of result to show that the hand muscles are primed even by sentences that describe metaphorical exchanges ('You delegate the responsibilities to Anna') (Glenberg et al. 2008). Comprehending language is a full-bodied affair. We cannot rely on readings that disembody language and talk about meaning as a kind of semiotic code. We require a new look at the language that moves us.

Blending theory builds on Gilles Fauconnier's theory of mental spaces (*Mental Spaces* xvii). Fauconnier defines mental spaces as 'constructs distinct from linguistic structures but built up in any discourse according to guidelines provided by the linguistic expressions' (Fauconnier and Turner 2002, 16); these are packets of information constructed and framed on the fly in which information is organised. Mental space theory provides a model for meaning construction that is fluid and expandable, capable of explaining many examples in language that the more complicated logical theories cannot, such as (as Lakoff and Sweetser point out) 'If I were you, I'd hate me,' co-reference and propositional problems (Lakoff and Sweetser 1996). Some words prompt for meaning, these are 'space builders,' such as 'Max believes' or 'In that movie' (Fauconnier and Turner 2002, 17 and 18). These words set up a space that will inform and/or structure the words/information to come. 'Max believes Sarah went to the store,' for example, creates an event as understood in relation to what Max believes. To connect Max's belief system with whether or not someone went to the store creates a complex social scene in one short sentence.

Certain language explodes in my mouth like pop-rocks: I swirl the words around and the effect multiplies. I repeat, 'let slip the dogs of war' or 'Cowards die many times before their deaths; / The valiant never taste of death but once' (2.2.34), and the enjoyment gives way to mystery. How can someone die before death? How can 'death' seem to mean more than one thing in the same sentence? Traditional theories of language comprehension suggest that we first access the definition of the word and only when it does not fit (one cannot die many times) do we explore more metaphoric or figurative meanings. Language comprehension is always dynamic and embedded; there is no vacuum of ideal meaning from which we find variation. One critical insight of George Lakoff and Mark Turner is that abstract concepts like time, life, love and death are understood metaphorically by mapping – or connecting through perceived similarity – elements of a concrete experience (such as heat) with an abstract concept (such as love) (Lakoff and Turner 1989). We can understand a relationship

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heating up, consuming us in flames and cooling down. This relies on compression, a process by which the relationship between love and heat is compressed and love *becomes* heat. In this way, all that we know about how heat operates can be recycled to think and speak about love. It also means that we can imagine impossible things (basking in the warmth of her love) because the concept of love is dynamic and networked.

Death may seem like a literal thing, but without any experience of it, we rely on other experiences to make sense of it. We often borrow the path or journey metaphor we use to speak of life to speak of death: 'she passed on' or 'he is gone.' Personification allows us to understand abstract states or nouns by turning them into things capable of causing the thing. The state of no longer being alive (death) can become the agent that caused the state ('Death') such that one can then say 'Death, be not proud' and be understood. Something caused the death of our grandmother and so we narrativise the mystery by creating a Death that can 'come for her.' An agent is created where none originally existed. Death in general need not have intention or agency; death occurs because humans are mortal. The only evidence we have of Death is its effect. Fauconnier and Turner call this entrenched compression a causal tautology. As Turner explains elsewhere,

> from the Event, we read off a Cause that is tautologically and exclusively defined in terms of the event category and is referred to by the very terms for that category … 'Death' here is an 'empty cause:' Lust causes all events of lust, Hunger causes all events of hunger, Death causes all events of death. In the blend, the specific event of dying is caused fundamentally by Death-in-general; the specific manner of death is the means.
> *(Turner 2004, 14)*

The reason these insights are crucial for those of us working in the arts and humanities is that if we examine the network that allows Death to be proud, we can better understand the language that moves us. Because a blend like 'to pass away' evokes many mental spaces necessary to understand it (travel, here vs. there, etc.), something simple can become complex. As Turner says: 'A blend is not a small abstraction of the mental spaces it blends and it is not a partial cut-and-paste assembly, either, because it contains new stuff, new ideas. It is a tight, packed little compression. It contains much less information than the full mental web it serves. From it, we can reach up to manage and work on the rest of the vast mental web' (Turner 2014, 8).

Cognitive linguistics, with its insistence on an embodied experience of and articulation of life, has produced many influential works on Shakespeare and classic texts. Donald Freeman views *Macbeth* as being tightly constructed around the image-schemata of PATH and CONTAINER and notes that the metaphoric structure of the play then becomes the metaphoric structure for the critics who write about the play; the scaffolding then becomes contagious (Freeman 1995). Mary Thomas Crane's *Shakespeare's Brain* examines how the language of the early modern period reflects and illuminates the brain that created the work (Crane 2001). More recently, Raphael Lyne explains and connects theories of rhetoric and contemporary cognitive science in order to explore how the two may be harnessed together to depict Shakespeare's characters as thinking with and through their language. For Lyne, moments of rhetorical failure are often the most exciting; his discussion of Macbeth's 'pity, like a naked new-born babe' simile shows how Macbeth is unable to find the words to compel restraint as evidenced by the conflicted and arresting image of this striding, vulnerable infant (Lyne 2011). In addition to Shakespeare, cognitive linguistics has proven influential in thinking on, for example, the Cold War theatre of America, suspense films and viewpoint (McConachie 2003; Oakley and Tobin 2005; Dancygier and Sweetser 2012).

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According to Fauconnier and Turner, as we process language, mental spaces are networked, connected analogically by a shared, generic space, and emergent meaning comes from the integration of the networked spaces. Blends create emergent meaning by combining structural information from many input spaces. This integration is not complex, weird, advanced or literary; it is everyday and omnipresent. This is in contradiction to Noam Chomsky's theory of language wherein we inherit a system of rules and, through exposure to language, we learn how to generate sentences. Many cognitive linguists view language as being compositional and creative from the start. If language was a system of rules and definitions in the brain, then children should have tremendous difficulty understanding stories involving talking animals, and yet these seem to be the bulk of the characters in children's books. We compose and stage the world around us, generating new ideas (like a grumpy donkey or dying more than once) by linking up disparate spaces.

It is unfortunate that 'blend' is such a simple and evocative word. This can make it seem like 'blending' is some special thing we do when we are being poetic or quirky. It can seem like a blurring or combining of ideas. This is not accurate. Conceptual integration is a theory about how we make meaning below the level of consciousness. Its greatest flaw is also its greatest strength: it explains too much. It hasn't been empirically validated and its proponents have not come up with a way to falsify it. This does not mean that it is not accurate or a powerful explanatory paradigm, but it does mean that claiming that something is a blend does not say enough. What is illuminated once the spaces evoked and connected necessary to create a seemingly objective or literal thing (such as a mirror) are displayed? How do those connected spaces allow us to ask and answer new questions about our disciplinary object? There have been extraordinary studies that have been inspired by cognitive linguistics and would not have been possible without it. For example, Rafael Núñez and Eve Sweetser find an alternate conception of the mapping of the past and the future in the gestures of Aymara Amerindians (Núñez and Sweetser 2006). Teenie Matlock did an experiment that showed that people activate the motor cortex when they read 'the trees ran down the driveway' but not when they read 'the trees lined the driveway' (Matlock 2010). While the impact of this research is on demonstrating the profoundly embodied nature of our cognition (we need our non-neural bodies to make sense of trees running down the driveway), it would not have been possible without recognising the conceptual blend that is 'ran' in this sentence. It is not up to those of us in the arts and humanities to prove or disprove the work in the cognitive sciences, but we should understand that work created in that field is meant to communicate with that world. They, too, are answering disciplinary questions.

Actors and characters

In *The Way We Think*, Fauconnier and Turner refer to the blend that is created when an actor takes the stage:

> The character portrayed may of course be entirely fictional, but there is still a space, a fictional one, in which that person is alive. We do not go to a performance of *Hamlet* in order to measure the similarity between the actor and a historical prince of Denmark. The power comes from the integration in the blend.
>
> *(Fauconnier and Turner, 266)*

Embodied by the actor, 'Hamlet' can become Hamlet. The actor remains visible while also evoking this other entity: 'While we perceive a single scene, we are simultaneously aware

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of the actor moving and talking on a stage in front of an audience, and of the corresponding character moving and talking within the represented story world' (Fauconnier and Turner, 266). Fauconnier and Turner are correct to perceive that the audience is neither in a trance state nor 'suspending disbelief' but as I have said elsewhere, I worry that my earlier work implied a simplification of what this 'blend' is. By referring to the character blend with a slash ('character/actor' or 'Hamlet/Hawke'), as both Bruce McConachie and I have, we are attempting to keep the actor's body present, not obscure a more complicated network of integration. Casting, the process by which actors are selected for characters in a particular production, is everything, as many directors will tell you. The protesters at *Julius Caesar*, for example, were responding to the whole cast, not just the costume and hair of the murdered senator.

Shakespeare was well aware of which actor would play which part, and the conventions of the time meant that spectators used the information they had about Richard Burbage, Will Kempe, the boy player and so forth to anticipate the story through reference to the actor. The plays often display the actors bodies or histories underneath them. As I argued elsewhere, Hamlet playfully disrobes the boy player playing Ophelia when he comments on the 'nothing' between his legs (Cook 2006). As Arden editor Harold Jenkins points out, the original actor of Polonius also played Caesar the year before, sharing a stage with Burbage, who is thought to have played Brutus (Jenkins 1982). This makes the discussion that Hamlet and Polonius have about 'acting' a rich, intertextual event for the knowing audience member. Hamlet asks Polonius about his acting past and Polonius reports, 'I did enact Julius Caesar. I was killed i' th' Capitol. Brutus killed me.' And Hamlet responds, 'It was a brute part of him to kill so capital a calf there.' For spectators at the Globe, Polonius is simultaneously speaking to both the character of Hamlet and the actor, Burbage. Polonius is pointing to his past and future with this particular actor. For spectators in the Globe who had seen *Julius Caesar* the year before, this might be a bit of foreshadowing. It might invite a layer of complexity to the troubled relationship between Polonius and Hamlet if we are also watching Ceasar and Brutus. Caesar and Brutus ghost Polonius and Hamlet.

'Ghosted' is what theatre historian Marvin Carlson calls it when the previous roles of an actor bleed through the current performance – either enriching it or undermining it, as the case may be (Carlson 2001). Oskar Eustis, director of The Public's 2017 *Julius Caesar*, was aware of this when casting his production. Gregg Henry, the actor cast as Caesar, may not have reminded everyone in the audience of Hollis Doyle, the dirty-trick-playing presidential candidate in the television show *Scandal* from the previous year, but his tall physique and blond hair have gotten him many roles before as lawyers, politicians and villains. With a bit of mousse to his blond hair and an extra-long red tie, he was easy to see as a particular politician. Further, the rest of the cast is filled with actors seen most recently in contemporary political dramas like *House of Cards* (Eisa Davis as Decius Brutus, Elizabeth Marvel as Antony, Corey Stoll as Marcus Brutus), *Homeland* (Elizabeth Marvel) and *Madam Secretary* (John Douglas Thompson as Caius Cassius). Eustis used the casting to locate the time and place for *Julius Caesar* as right now in Washington D. C. In the curtain speech Eustis made about the show (and subsequently published online), he notes, 'we didn't write any new lines. It's all Shakespeare.' Apparently, his casting worked so well that he wanted to remind the audience of the authorship.

Familiarity is a positive element of a production in most cases. We build character through a dynamic interplay between a number of conceptual spaces – visible before the actor crosses the stage or delivers a line: the body (age, race, gender, physical attributes); textual

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information (actions taken or lines said about or by the character); what we know already or anticipate based on historical information, personal information about the character and the actor portraying it; the reputation of the character (and the actor) and what we know about other roles the actor's body has taken on. The body of the actor and his/her history is always onstage with the character. By casting actors who many spectators would recall from other fictional depictions of political intrigue, Eustis knew the audience would perceive this 'Rome' as the contemporary 'D. C.' that these actors are usually seen in. With the cast set, the play was going to be about Washington politics no matter what other choices were subsequently made by the costume designer, set designer, director or actors. With the cast set, a large part of the meaning was already made.

Presence

Theatre scholars and practitioners spend a lot of time thinking about what happens onstage and (relatively) little time talking about what is going on in the audience.[1] There are experiences as a spectator that make us feel like a part of something bigger and then there are those experiences where what is onstage cannot upstage what's happening in the house. Wagner built his Beyreuth Theatre to give each spectator a good view of the stage, without being distracted by other audience members or the musicians, who were now hid in a pit. The audience was supposed to be consumed by the *gesamtkunstwerk*. The work of the theatre was on stage and the spectators were to be transported. This set of conventions continues, largely, into the present day. We enter the theatre, sit in our seat and are told to turn off our phones and be quiet. We will feel for the characters, get caught up in the story, gasp at the spectacle, clap when it ends and leave talking about what it meant. 'I thought the tree represented hope.' 'I thought she was going to die at the end.' Our job, as audience, is to read the meaning and then probe the illness through the symptomatic behaviour of the characters.

There are several problems for me with this scenario. First, this describes relatively few of my experiences in the theatre. I get distracted by the man who is falling asleep one row down, or I'm wondering how long until intermission or I'm trying to recall where I saw the actor playing the waiter. This may be because of bad luck in audiences, my own lack of discipline or poor casting, but being pulled out of my current state is not common. The second problem is that I know that I am supposed to feel real feelings for these fictional characters, to worry about what will happen to them, but I rarely do. The secret will come out, the gun will go off, the door will slam. I can be delighted, I can laugh, I can register sadness and I can appreciate virtuosic acting, but I rarely feel swept up in the drama as this scenario of expectations depicts. Finally, if I leave propelled to talk about what it meant, if it seems to me that the play was supposed to mean something, I wonder why the producer didn't just save us all a lot of time by telling us what it meant in the programme and letting us go home. I don't want meaning and I don't want escape: I want something I can use.

I am building a straw-man theatre experience from which I can launch my next point about presence and art. Clearly, I am describing a particular kind of experience in the theatre and my own very particular biases. I am not being fair and I'm not trying to be. I believe that *A Doll's House* was art in 1879 and *A Streetcar Named* Desire was art in 1947. When I saw *Long Day's Journey Into Night* by Eugene O'Neill in 11th grade, I was moved – though the *meaning* was slow to reveal itself. I struggled for a week afterwards with what happened: why was the story chilling to me? What did I recognise out of the corner of my eye, resisting words or narrative? Eventually I did have that moment when the pieces came

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together: when my feelings for the Tyrone family linked up with an analysis of the family unit and my own developing self. My teenage self felt that the play provided me with a way of understanding the self as having an internal psychology messed up by one's parents, containing memories that haunt until purged. This genre of theatre stages a Freudian self and a Cartesian mind, which was tremendously valuable when this was the dominant scientific paradigm.

R. Darren Gobert argues that theatre after Rene Descartes reflected a concept of interiority and the importance of passions: actors were prized 'not only for their outward abilities to represent emotion but for their interior perceptual, emotional, and volitional apparatuses, which determine these outward abilities and shape their performative expression' (Gobert 2013, 86). Gobert refutes the reading of Descartes as separating the body and the mind that was popularised by Antonio Damasio's book, *Descartes' Error.* In fact, argues Gobert, Descartes saw the 'animal spirits' as uniting the body, mind and passions. While contemporary scientists might point to a lack of evidence for 'animal spirits,' Gobert reads Descartes as committed to a mind-body union: 'Descartes defines the emotions as bodily perceptions and thus precisely as a source of knowledge…. Failing to understand the workings of mind-body union, critics… misread Descartes's concept of mind but also miss the crucial role that the passions play in the process of reason' (Gobert 2013, 12). The cultural shift Descartes engendered in this area is most vibrantly evident at the theatre. Gobert finds in Corneille's 'deviation from classical form' a turn to 'wonder,' 'the precise emotion that Descartes located at the center of his emotional physics and moral philosophy.' He explores Racine's *Phedre* as a demonstration of the power of the passions to overcome the body, and argues 'perspectival staging seemed to promise the ontological security of the spectator' (Gobert 2013, 89, 131). Gobert argues that scientific conceptions of the self drive and are reflected in what is on stage.

Theatre has to work on an audience and a spectator has to work to be part of it. It doesn't require labour, but it does require something to be shaken, changed, opened. The pleasure, for me, is in the way the work resists the categories I bring to it and challenges me to create new categories. I want theatre that does something to me that I don't even recognise that I need. I want it to show me something I didn't know. An experience like this might fit the definition of art, as defined by Alva Noë in his book *Strange Tools*: 'Art aims at the disclosure of ourselves to ourselves and so it aims at giving us opportunities to catch ourselves in the act of achieving perceptual consciousness—including aesthetic consciousness—of the world around us. Art investigates the aesthetic' (Noë 2015, 71). He describes art that works as philosophy, as a thinking tool: 'it is the domain in which we grapple with what we already know (or think we know). It is the domain in which we try to get clear about the ways we think and respond and assign value' (Noë 2015, 203). For Noe, theatre, all art, should help us reorganise ourselves to better fit the world around us. Through engaging with this strange experience, this moment in the theatre, we are charged to find new ways of picking up, of exploring the ideas involved.

In his earlier book on *Varieties of Presence*, Noë reconceives perception as a 'skillful engagement' (Noë 2012, 2) and argues for the value of honing our 'sensorimotor understanding' (Noë 2012, 20) of the world around us through a continual adjustment of our concepts:

> Don't think of a concept as a label you can slap on a thing; think of it as a pair of calipers with which you can pick the thing up. Seeing something is picking it up using one sort of caliper. Thinking about its absence requires that we pick it up, or at least try to, in a different way. If there is a difference between seeing something and thinking about it,

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> it is because of differences in our calipers. Insofar as there are overlapping similarities and kinship between thought and experience, this is because we use some of the same tools in both cases.
>
> *(Noë 2012, 36)*

The theatre I want now will expand my ability to see, it will give me new ways to imagine history, the self, the universe, physics, cause and effect, and how I think and feel as a spectator sitting there. I no longer care about secrets, about Oedipal desires, I don't even care about family dysfunction: I care about humans as mutually dependent organisms with the miraculous ability to communicate. I don't want to be swept away: I want to be called up short. I want to be given new tools to deal with this rapidly changing world. I want to experience myself in the audience differently. The theatre that excites me now does not stage a Freudian or Cartesian self, it stages the expanding conceptions of language, the body and cognition, that is also exciting my colleagues in the cognitive sciences.

Conclusion

The growing consensus within the cognitive sciences is that thinking is not computing in the brain but action with the body in the world. This is not a small change to the general received wisdom about literature, theatre and art. Such an approach offers a method of understanding performance and connecting it with work being done in other disciplines. It is no longer adequate to say about good theatre that, 'we know it when we see it.' Making meaning is not magic; it can be studied, applied and demonstrated. If thinking is 'world-making,' rather than processing stimuli into meaning, then the hermeneutic tradition of literary and art scholarship must adapt; we do not read to attain meaning, we read to enact worlds within which to experience anew. If cognition is embedded in a given environment, always affective, and extended outside of skin and skull, then a spectator's experience, emotion and attention depend less on what is happening 'inside' the actors onstage – as the acting style of Constantin Stanislavsky and others, and the playwriting of Tennessee Williams, and others, seem to suggest – and more on an enacted experience of her own. If thinking means using objects in our environment in order to make changes to our own and extended ecosystem, then an interaction with a work of art can be aesthetic, poetic and autopoetic.

Note

1 There are notable exceptions, of course, such as McConachie (2008); Bennett (1997); and States (1987).

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