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Testing the Blending

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ABSTRACT. Some cognitive accounts of the experience of theatre audiences have been using the notion of “conceptual blending” in order to describe the way spectators combine distinct objective elements of a given actor – his voice, walk, gestures, or even his overall persona, including the memory of her previous performances – in order to build up their concept of the fictional character that is being played. This paper intends to measure the plausibility and the explanatory traction of the notion of “conceptual blending” as an account of theatrical experience. First, by assessing its novelty as a new definition of what is specific to theatre as an art form, and a suitable alternative to Aristotelian and Brechtian conceptions. It seems that by placing conceptual integration as the basic theatrical experience and by reviewing role-playing as the cognitive foundation of theatre, the concept of blending allows us to reassess the importance of emotional empathy, or detachment, in theatre. Second, we shall try to compare theatrical blending with other theories of art (namely, visual art) that portray artistic representation as a kind of “shuttle” or “fusion” between configuration and content. In particular, we propose that theatrical blending works as a kind of “seeing in”.

Like a dull actor now / I have forgot my part (...).
(Shakespeare, *Coriolanus*, Act 5, Scene 3)

I. Introduction

Some cognitive accounts of the experience of theatre audiences (e.g., Faconnier & Turner, 2002, McConachie, 2008) have been using the notion of “conceptual blending” in order to describe the way spectators combine distinct objective elements of a given actor – his voice, walk, gestures, or

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even his overall persona, including the memory of her previous performances – in order to build up their concept of the fictional character that is being played. This is both an exercise connected to the very core of human cognition, based on the ability to combine different perceptions and turn them into abstract concepts (Edelman & Tononi, 2000) and a deeply entertaining practice, already present in the game of role-playing adopted by children after two years old. Blending, and particularly theatrical blending, is highly selective and it is up to each spectator to choose which characteristics of the actor belong to the conceptualization of the fictional character and which are not. This also makes it possible for the spectator, for instance, to actively “ignore” the fact that the character dies at the end of the play or to forget the actor’s persona outside the current stage role. Blending is also a dynamic process and both actors and spectators will often oscillate in and out of their respective blends. For instance, spectators often abandon their actor / character blend so that they may better admire this actor’s vocal or gestural prowess.

Conceptual blending may also be presented as an alternative theory of theatre and a powerful competitor vis-à-vis the usual para-Aristotelian notions of “empathy” or “identification”, and Brechtian *Verfremdung*. Ultimately, it encourages the spectator to think about the duplicity that characterizes all theatricality.

This description of theatrical experience as akin to a process of conceptual integration and assimilation seems to recall other accounts that tend to envisage aesthetic appreciation in general as a kind of peculiar linkage of the configurational properties and the content. This is the case of Richard Wollheim’s “seeing in”, Robert Hopkins’ “collapsed seeing-in” or Gregory Currie’s distinction between “representation-by-origin” and representation-by-use”. According to Currie, photography and film share the same possibility for distinguishing between “representation-by-origin” and “representation-by-use”. A film like *Casablanca* may represent-by-origin Humphrey Bogart but also represents-by-use the fictional character of Rick Blaine. Sometimes what the film represents-by-origin is so intrusive that the whole film is marred by what psychologists call “pop-out”, i.e., representation-by-origin grabs the spectator’s attention in such a way that prevents her from attending the fictional representation-by-use thus producing a strong sense of “representational dissonance”. “Pop-out” is also

common in theatre, of course. An actor's clumsy misunderstanding of his role, a distractive audience, the super-star persona of the leading actress may force actors and / or spectators to un-blend the actor / character assimilation and remove them from the fictional flow. Accepting the parallel with visual depiction, they stop seeing the character *in* the actor.

This paper intends to measure the plausibility and the explanatory traction of the notion of "conceptual blending" as an account of theatrical experience. First, by assessing its novelty as a new definition of what is specific to theatre as an art form, and a suitable alternative to Aristotelian and Brechtian conceptions. It seems that by placing conceptual integration as the basic theatrical experience and by reviewing role-playing as the cognitive foundation of theatre, the concept of blending allows us to reassess the importance of emotional empathy, or detachment, in theatre. In a given sense, emotional empathy or sympathy become just an ingredient of blending, albeit a very significant one. Second, we shall try to place theatrical blending side by side with other theories of art (namely, visual art) that portray artistic representation as a kind of "shuttle" or "fusion" between configuration and content. In particular, we propose that theatrical blending works as a kind of "seeing in". More recent developments of Wollheim's concept – such as Bence Nanay's – will be adapted to the experience of role-playing in order to test whether this constitutes a suitable analogy.

2. Conceptual Blending

According to Fauconnier and Turner, "the essence of the operation [of conceptual blending] is to construct a partial match between two input mental spaces, to project selectively from those inputs into a novel 'blended' mental space, which then dynamically develops emergent structure."¹ "Mental space" is a key concept here and it is described as an *ad hoc* "conceptual packet" that we assemble as we think and talk by blending together an array of distinct elements taken from previous mental spaces "for purposes of local understanding and action." This blending is described as a three-stages process: composition, pattern completion and elaboration,

¹ Fauconnier and Turner, 2003: 58.

and from the very start the activity of theatre spectators and actors is proposed as a quasi-paradigmatic case of conceptual blending. For the purpose at hand, I shall concentrate on composition.

2.1. Composition

Conceptual blending in film requires three steps: (1) a selection of characteristics of the actual actor (that he is alive, that he moves and talks in certain ways, etc.); (2) some knowledge of the fictional character being played (his past history, his present motivations, his beliefs regarding other characters, etc.); (3) with the concept of “identity” as a sort of template spectators create a new and more complex identity merging together the actor and the character, such as Benedict Cumberbatch / Hamlet.

Something of a similar nature occurs with the actor’s own blending. He chooses to draw salient, for instance, his “motor patterns and power of speech” while at the same time suppresses “his free will and foreknowledge of the situation”: “in the blend he says just what the character says and is surprised night after night by the same events.”² In fact, the authors defend that conceptual blending lies at the basis of all role-enacted games of make-believe.

Suppose that we are watching an actor playing a role. The two personas – the actor’s physical manifestation and the character’s supposed configuration – constitute two distinct mental spaces and each one of these reflect different salient aspects of each persona: his age, his height, his regal posture and illocution. The two also share a more “generic” space like, for instance, the fact that both are conscious of acting a part or simply that the two are involved with theatre. Conceptual blending is initiated when the spectator partially matches the two inputs and “projects selectively from these two input spaces into a fourth mental space, the blended space.”

In this new blended space, some features of the actor are selected because they are more congruent matches to the spectator’s knowledge of the character (e.g., the actor’s youth) and some characteristics of the character are also projected onto the way the actor is perceived and in some extent act as “focusers” for the spectator’s attention.³ Significantly, many

² Fauconnier & Turner, 2002: 267.

³ “I once saw a performance of *The Elephant Man* (...) where one of the cast collapsed on

other characteristics pertaining to each one of their mental spaces are suppressed, like the fact that this particular actor is already famous for his impersonation of other dramatic roles or the fact that the character dies at the end of the play. The construal of a third persona becomes emergent in the blend, one that is actively responsible for bringing the spectator closer to the fictional flow but may also be admired in a more distanced way, as when spectators *blend out* of the actor / character mental space in order to better admire the actor's technical expertise.

2.2. Characteristics of the Blending

To blend in and out of conceptual compositions is also a deeply entertaining practice. Blending, and particularly theatrical blending, is highly selective: each actor and each spectator involved in conceptual blending is able to choose which characteristics of the actor belong to the conceptualization of the fictional character and which are not in a kind of aspect-seeing that makes salient some features of the actor and overshadows others. Another important characteristic of conceptual blending lies in the ability of concentrating on the “moment-to-moment playing of the character”⁴, for instance, by actively “ignoring” the fact that the character dies at the end of the play or to forget the actor's persona outside the current stage role. Considering the point of view of the spectator, usually, this kind of blending is used in order to better involve the spectator in the fictional flow providing a meaningful gathering of the actor's characteristics towards the manifestation of the fictional character. That way, even the most histrionic and ham actor can be turned into a suitable and unexpected implementation of a given character.

Throughout this blending in and out, spectators develop an acute sense of the twofoldness intrinsic to role-playing and this awareness can even be extended to props, spoken dialogue and the very nature of plays.

Naturally, social values and cultural ethos also affect the blend of char-

the floor. [A] doctor who happened to be in the audience (...) had at once gone backstage to help. After examining the patient he diagnosed him (...) with simple hyperventilation – then turned to Nicky [who played the role of a doctor in the play] and asked him with courteous deference if he agreed.” Michael Frayn, 2010: xi.

⁴ McConachie, 2013: 24.

acter and role. Shakespeare, for one, used this cultural saturation by weaving complex innuendos about the sexual implications and ambiguities of male actors playing female characters, as ordained by Elizabethan law. In *Twelfth Night*, the female character of Viola dresses up as a boy – Cesario – so that she may ask the Duke for a job as male page. And it is as Cesario that the character would appear to her / his audience for most of the performance, thus becoming much more like the young actor actually performing the part and defying the spectator’s ability to blend in and out of the juxtaposed triad male actor / Viola / Cesario. “I am not that I play”, says the triad when asked by Olivia if he is a “comedian”. The alluring nature of this complex and entertaining exercise is quite evident. The spectator is given the chance to move between different temporary blends. The most immediate blend would combine the male actor with the character Viola; a second blend – the one that would most aptly defy the ability of the spectator to stay within the fictional flow - would correlate the male actor and Cesario; and a third blend, - the “two step blend”, as McConachie calls it⁵ - would require imagining that the male actor is playing a female character who in turn is impersonating a male character. Adding to the complexity of the exercise, the spectator is required to integrate the fact that Viola is a fictionally existing character – with the wrong gender - while Cesario is a fictionally non-existing character – but with the right gender.

2.3. Predecessors

Conceptual blending seems to echo some of the jargon proposed by Edward Bullough on his famous and theatre-inspired theory of psychical distance. Three major options are available in the continuum of aesthetic transaction. Spectators may (a) decide to “blend-out” actor from character and concentrate on the actor’s exuberance, distancing themselves from the fictional flow (to the point of risking an “over-distancing”); (b) engage fully with the character and sub-distancing themselves to the point of forgetting the actor’s performance;⁶ (c) reach an ideal balance between the

⁵ Cf. McConachie, 2008: 194.

⁶ As an extreme example of “sub-distance” in conceptual blending, one could quote the intriguing case of some Britons in the 1980s who suffered from nervous depression because they failed to win the lottery even though they knew that the odds were extremely

actor's physical presence and awareness of the character's personality in a suitable blend – “psychical distance”.

Conceptual blending is also in perfect consonance with what phenomenologist Bert O. States named “the three pronominal modes” of the actor-spectator relationship.⁷ The self-expressive mode refers to the way actors choose to show off their virtuosity, relaxing a proper manifestation of the character; in the representational mode the actor disappears behind the character; and in the collaborative mode actors interact actively with the audience, suggesting a kind of communitarian belonging. Oscillating between admiration of virtuosity and engagement with fictional characterization, the spectator prepares different blends adding more actor and less character, or vice-versa.

Conceptual blending is also at the core of David Saltz's conception of theatre as “the actual embodiment of alternate structures of reality”.⁸ Saltz's main point is that instead of what semiology and phenomenology defend, theatre spectators are not usually engaged in extracting meaning from the play, which would require them to perceive any production as a sign of something else. Rather, spectators watch the play by seeing the actors and props in a different mode, or by using them differently. To illustrate his point, Saltz quotes Gombrich: “If the child calls a stick a horse (...) the stick is neither a sign signifying the concept horse nor is it a portrait of an individual horse. By its capacity of serving as a ‘substitute’ the stick becomes a horse in its own right.”⁹ According to Saltz, and in perfect consonance with Fauconnier and Turner's conceptual blending, Gombrich was describing artistic creation “as an act of bringing objects into the world rather than imitating or referring to existing objects.”¹⁰ What this means in a theatrical context is that spectators use fiction in two complementary modes. First, they go from the narrative to the performance by following the given set of ‘prescriptions to imagine’ (“infiction”). The way Saltz describes this

slim: “[B]etween the purchase of the ticket and the drawing of the winner, these victims had fantasized (...) about what they would do upon winning the lottery. The actual lottery made them lose everything they had acquired in the fantasy world. In that world, they did indeed suffer a severe loss.” (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002: 231).

⁷ Cf. McConachie, 2008: 46.

⁸ Saltz, 2006: 218.

⁹ Saltz, 2006: 209.

¹⁰ Saltz, 2006: 210.

process is quite similar to that of conceptual blending. The actor builds up “a fictional schema that structures the event” and the spectator perceives the narrative not as a third term hovering above the performance but as totally permeating the performance, which becomes “the primary focus of attention”. Saltz equates infiction with Wittgenstein’s proposal that the expression in the face drawing inheres in the drawing, and finds a correspondence in Peirce’s notion of “secondness”, i.e., when there are only two terms involved: the spectator and the performance. Secondly, spectators may move away from the performance into the narrative: outfiction is the name Saltz proposes for this “metaphorical redescription” of the performance, i.e., the spectatorial or critical interpretation of the play. Outfiction constitutes the semiotic step out of the blending and is similar to the *description* of the face in Wittgenstein’s example. It also corresponds to Peirce’s notion of interpretative “thirdness”, i.e., the emergence of three terms: a sign (the play), its object (the performance) and its interpretant (the sign created by the spectator and read off of the performance of the play). Only then, the narrative content is extracted from the performance and a triadic relationship between spectator, performance and fictional world is created.

2.4. Consequences

a) The Moral Consequence

What are the implications of conceptual blending for the emotional involvement and moral commitment of spectators regarding the fictional character? If blending is a two-way process and actors may also be seen as acquiring some of the characteristics of the roles they’re playing then empathy could be assessed by considering the consequences that the characters predicaments may have on the psychology of the actor carrying the role. For instance, there are several actors who have performed the role of Jesus Christ on film (e.g. Jim Caviezel or Enrique Irazoqui) who have confessed some psychological disturbance after playing that part. Naturally, this concern will affect the spectator the more she is aware with the actor’s actual persona. This concern for the actor-in-character may indeed become a stylistic tool in film and should be distinguished from the Socratic fear that imitating someone can increasingly become natural – “so

much so that one can begin to take on characteristics of the person one is imitating.”¹¹ Furthermore, if imagining to be someone else – such as the actor per trade and the spectator per empathy do – is perceived as a condition for pitying someone, then, through moving in and out of the actor / character blend, spectators may become truly mesmerized – and emotionally affected – by the way an actor expresses full comprehension of a character’s personality. Awareness of the actor’s ductility or adaptability to quite distinct roles may play an important part in this respect.

b) The Emotional Consequence

Blending also provides an interesting basis for re-examining Diderot’s principle according to which there is never a correspondence between the emotions expressed by the actor and the emotions actually felt by the actor, actually more concerned with manipulating the tools of his trade than being moved by the character’s passions. The juxtaposition of the actor’s expressiveness and the character’s emotional life is also a result from the blending.

c) The Fictional Consequence

Apart from its cognitive justification, blending is a refreshing concept also because it may be used as an alternative explanation vis-à-vis the usual para-Aristotelian notions of “empathy” or “identification”, and Brechtian *Verfremdung*. In a way, it acknowledges both attitudes as constitutive of that typical oscillation between experiencing the fictional flow, on the one hand, and attention to illusion and artifice, on the other.

It also provides a better description of theatrical experience than all the theories that present attention to the fictional flow as a kind of on-off disposition. According to these theories – epitomized by Coleridge famous formula about “the suspension of disbelief” – the spectator would swing between belief and scepticism in her connection to the actor / character. Instead of a “leap of faith”¹² that leaves behind the actor to focus on the character, conceptual blending puts forth a cumulative conception of theatrical experience according to which spectators are constantly combining

¹¹ Stern, 2008: 116.

¹² Cf. McConachie, 2008: 44.

actor and character. Instead of a binary or digital attention, spectators are involved in an exercise with different degrees of immersion in the fictional flow within a continuum that goes from exclusive attention to the actor to complete awareness of the character. Naturally, blending can be an acquired taste and different audiences tend to mix together different elements in varying degrees. Sometimes the elements drawn from the actor will be more numerous than the character's contribution, particularly if we are watching a famous star. But sometimes the fictional character will constitute the centre of attention as in the case where a particularly clumsy or rather unknown actor is on stage. Variations in the blend also occur during the production and experienced spectators develop different strategies that allow for the creation of a believable blend.

Usually, theories of theatrical representation, and semiotic theories in particular, have concentrated on the propositional meaning we extract from productions and followed exclusively the path from performance to narrative. However much of what is significant for us in a theatrical performance is of a non-propositional nature, and is clearly perceived when we are involved with conceptual blending. Kendall Walton identified a class of what he called "silly questions" in aesthetics much of which – significantly, we must add – occur in theatre: "How did Othello, a Moorish general and hardly an intellectual, manage to come up with such superb verses on the spur of the moment?" or "it is fictional in William Luce's play *The Belle of Amherst* that Emily Dickinson is an extraordinarily shy person who keeps to herself. Yet she is onstage throughout the play, speaking constantly. (...) How can it be fictional that Dickinson says all that she does (...) yet fictional that she is not gregarious? Is it fictional that Dickinson is and is not gregarious? That she is and is not shy?"¹³

Although these questions may seem plausible from a semiotic standpoint, they seldom interrupt the spectator's attention to the performance. This could prove that blending is quite often the main diegetic path followed by the spectator and is quite sufficient to sustain a meaningful and rewarding theatrical experience. Actively engaged in conceptual blending, the spectator is oblivious of any "silly question".

As already mentioned, blending is a dynamic process and both actors

¹³ Walton, 1990: 175-176.

and spectators will often oscillate in and out of their respective blends and this ability was, to some extent, identified by authors such as Coleridge and Stendhal, for whom spectators drift in and out of the fictional “spell” not in a binary way away but in varying degrees. This ability to move in and out of the fictional flow while still maintaining an aesthetic appraisal of the production constitutes one of the most distinctive traits of theatre *qua* art form. And even under the most intense blending experience, as Coleridge writes, “it is at all times within [the spectator’s] power to see the thing as it really is.”¹⁴ The pervasiveness of this blending and un-blending encourages spectators to reflect on the twofoldness that characterizes film. But what kind of twofoldness is this?

3. Twofoldness

Is conceptual blending a kind of twofoldness?

Arguably because of a semiotic and phenomenological bias, and until very recently, theories of theatre haven’t been keen on exploring the active twofoldness or doubleness involved in watching a play. On the other hand, however, twofoldness, input blending and representational seeing constitute established topics in philosophy of painting or visual representation, in general. In order to interrogate the conditions in which conceptual blending takes place let us look for assistance in the current discussion concerning the concept of “seeing-in”. What follows is an exercise in analogic reasoning. We have twofold visual experiences if we are simultaneously aware of both the representation of an object and the medium of representation. We see something in a painting when we are simultaneously aware of the canvas and the representation of an object object. It is, to a fair extent, a conceptual blending, with composition, pattern completion and elaboration: two input “mental spaces” share a generic space (e.g., both the original model and the canvas are oriented towards the viewer) and there is a selective projection from the two input spaces into a blended space. Although the two input spaces may share equal importance in seeing-in – as when the material properties of the canvas interact and assist the viewer to see the represented object, as in some paintings by Le-

¹⁴ Quoted by Stern, 2008: 64.

Leonardo da Vinci or Antoni Tàpies -, it is usually an unilateral experience in which the properties of the canvas *serve* the emergence of the represented object: we *see* the object *in* the canvas. What this entails is that, in painting, to blend out of the object-being-represented (which is not the same thing as the represented object, the latter being an element of the original input mental space and the former the object in the blended space) in order to concentrate on the material qualities of the canvas does not seem to amount, *per se*, to an aesthetic attention of the canvas. Whereas when we see Hamlet in Cumberbatch, to blend out of the character in order to admire the actor's prowess is still within the latitude of an aesthetic experience.

For a number of years there persisted a consensus encircling the idea that the experience of a picture necessarily amounts to a twofold experience of the kind I've just described. Dominic Lopes and Jerrold Levinson broke this consensus.¹⁵ Levinson's arguments are of particular significance in our context. In particular, he pointed out that not all seeing-in should be described as "aesthetic in character" and distinguished between (a) twofoldness as a necessary condition for the experience of *pictures* and (b) twofoldness as a necessary condition for the aesthetic appreciation of pictures. According to Levinson, b is true and a is false. Levinson denies the fact that whenever we see, say, a woman in a picture we are always in some measure "attending to, taking notice of, or consciously focusing on the picture's surface or patterning as such".

To some extent, Levinson's distinction between (a) recognizing a depicted object and (b) the aesthetic appreciation of that depiction can be projected onto theatrical conceptual blending. Take, for instance, the difference between (a) simple impersonation and more or less complex (b) acting or representation. Accordingly, aesthetic appreciation of theatrical representations also involves "attending to, taking notice of, or consciously focusing on" the way the actor's persona or physicality becomes instrumental in the implementation of a specific character. But that kind of attention is not necessarily involved in the mere recognition of which character is being played or which famous person is being impersonated. Indeed, just like aesthetic appreciation of a picture's configuration involves, to some ex-

¹⁵ Cf. Lopes, 1996; Levinson, 1998; Nanay, 2005.

tent, going beyond the mere visual recognition, so too the complexities of the integration between the actor and the character's mental spaces only become the focus of attention when the spectator departs from simple imitation. In an important sense, imitation is not representation.¹⁶

Following Levinson's criticism, Bence Nanay went back to Richard Wollheim's original formulation of "seeing-in" and identified two different senses of twofoldness wrapped together:

1. Twofoldness of the experience of a painting means that one is visually aware of the (two-dimensional) surface and the (three-dimensional) represented object simultaneously – which corresponds to Levinson's stage of recognition of the depicted object.
2. Twofoldness of the experience of a painting means that one attends to (takes notice of, consciously focuses on) of the represented object and the way it is represented simultaneously – which corresponds to Levinson's stage of aesthetic appreciation of the painting.¹⁷

Nanay considers that the two senses should be kept apart and argues – to my view convincingly – that twofoldness in the second sense is a necessary condition for the aesthetic appreciation of pictures (a point Levinson also maintains) whereas twofoldness in the first sense is a necessary condition for recognizing a depicted object (something Levinson denies).¹⁸ Also, notice that twofoldness in the first sense does not require "attending to, taking notice of, or consciously focusing on" the surface of painting whereas twofoldness in the second sense does require that attitude towards "the way something is represented".

Roughly adapting this debate to the theatrical environment, this segmented experience, from the twofold experience of surface and represented object to the twofold experience of represented object and the way it is represented, would produce a parallel distinction:

¹⁶ Just like there is room to defend that "trompe l'oeil paintings are not pictorial representations", as Wollheim does (cf. Nanay, 2005: 254). "[I]t is not necessarily the case that the more effective the illusion, the better the play. (...) Breaking the spell, or manipulating its intensity, may well be part of a successful performance." (Stern, 2008: 64).

¹⁷ Nanay, 2005: 256.

¹⁸ Cf. Nanay, 2005: 252.

1. Twofoldness in theatre means that one is aware¹⁹ of the actor's physicality and the represented character simultaneously,
2. Conceptual blending in theatre means that one attends to the represented character and the way it is represented simultaneously.

The first sense corresponds to a simple recognition of the character and is present in a simple act of imitation of a given character - fictional or real. Arguably, this could also account for what Tom Stern calls the Houdini-type illusions in theatre, such as the stage slap.²⁰

Wollheim's argument in favour of 1) in pictorial twofoldness is worth pursuing in theatrical terms:

[A] salient fact about our perception of representations (...) is that any move that the spectator makes from the (...) standard viewing-point does not (...) necessarily bring about perspectival distortion. Under changes of viewing point the image remains remarkably free from deformation (...). The explanation offered of this constancy is that the spectator is, and remains, visually aware not only of what is represented but also of the surface qualities of the representation.²¹

Thus, if the argument holds, constancy in pictorial recognition requires twofoldness in sense 1. The argument points out to the simple fact that recognizing something in a painting is different from recognizing something in the real world.²² When asked to touch the object shown in a photograph, the viewer will not try to reach through the photograph to touch it. She merely touches the surface of the photograph because awareness of the surface is a constitutive element of her recognizing the object in the photograph. Similarly, in theatre one could argue that the process of recognizing the character via the actor is different from recognizing a real person. Namely because spectators are fully aware that "actors pretend to perform various kinds of illocutionary acts rather than genuinely

¹⁹ Of course, the exact nature of this awareness is doubtful: is it visual, is it conceptual?

²⁰ "In the case of the stage 'slap', the actors behave in such a way the the audience thinks that something has taken place when, in fact, it hasn't." (Stern, 2014: 61)

²¹ Wollheim, 1998: 215-216.

²² Nanay, 2005: 254.

performing them.”²³ This implies, first, that spectators are aware that actors don’t have appropriate illocutionary intentions or are under some sort of Gricean “sincerity obligations” (an assertion on the part of the character cannot lead the spectator to think that the actor is making that assertion). Second, because actors are not identified as making genuine illocutionary acts spectators have no reason to believe that the actors’ utterances are caused by anything other than the script. It is ultimately this awareness of pretension that holds the representational constancy and makes it possible for the spectator to step back from the actor / character blend and still keep attention to the way the character adheres to the actor’s persona – just like moving away from the painting’s centre of projection does not cause in the viewer any additional sense of distortion.

Twofoldness in the second sense corresponds to a “higher-order mental activity” and in theatre that would correspond to a more reflexive attention to the actor’s ability and, curiously enough, depends on a certain degree of blending out of the actor/character mental space. Unlike simple imitation, the aesthetic value of this second twofoldness seems to depend on the way the actor deviates from stereotypes and tradition in the rendering of the character. That would explain why complex and unexpected role-playing is more aesthetically rewarding than formulaic impersonations: it mandates from the spectator a more demanding conceptual blending and provides a richer twofold experience in the second sense. The way the character is represented becomes constitutive of the spectator’s awareness of the character instead of the other way around. Among other things, I propose that through twofoldness in this second sense, the spectator is able to discern the particular attitude of the actor *vis-à-vis* the character he is impersonating, including his personal moral or political stance on the issues raised by the character, his philosophical understanding of the play, or even his overall existential standpoint within the constraints of

²³ Alward, 2009: 321. Alward holds his “illocutionary pretence view” against Gregory Currie’s “theatrical illocution account” – “actors hold the illocutionary intention of making the listener imagine or make believe the proposition expressed by her utterance” (2009: 323) – and David Saltz’s game model account – actors adopt some game intentions and following these intentions “genuinely perform the whole gamut of illocutionary actions” (2009: 325).

that particular role-playing.²⁴ This requires an effort of blend-out but still maintaining awareness of the character that is being actively reformulated as the actor unravels his interpretation: it is, after all, his take on *that* character that the spectator is attending to.

I would like to argue at this point that in theatrical twofoldness in the second sense, what is represented supervenes on the traits of the actor that lead to the recognition of the character and is perfectly compatible with conceptual blending – this is the mimesis-imitation level. But in twofoldness in the second sense – which is “aesthetic in nature” – it is the character that is being represented that supervenes on the way it is represented – the mimesis-imagination level.²⁵

4. Final Remarks

Our attention to theatrical fiction is never binary, continuously switching on and off. It works in layers and in relation with other assessments of what is real. It is a kind of dialectic blending: we accept something as real; with proper timing we tend to reject it as such; some other representation comes along that looks and feels more real than the previous one; for a moment, it is real; with proper timing, that too subsides into the artificial and something else comes along. It is not so much a question of providing the spectator with a tool for stepping out of the blend but a question of grasping yet another aspect of reality and turn it into a scaffolding for the fictional flow.

Pirandello is a recent production of the Portuguese company Mala Voadora. The award winner stage design is uncanny. We see at first a large backdrop with a bi-dimensional painting of two twin houses. We are given some time to exhaust the potential verisimilitude. Then the backdrop disappears and we are presented with the same two houses in a three dimen-

²⁴ I adopt here a view of aesthetic experience close to that of Noël Carroll: “aesthetic experience is a matter of attending with understanding to the way in which the point or purposes of an artwork is embodied or presented” (Carroll, 2012: 177). I think that theatrical conceptual blending, but in particular the exercise of “blending out”, constitutes an important cognitive tool towards attending with understanding to the way the work embodies its content. As a matter of fact it looks like a suitable epitome of aesthetic experience.

²⁵ Cf. Stern, 2014: 24.

sional lifelike setting. In comparison with the first representation, this is more verisimilar and for a moment it may even be mistaken for the real thing. When this suggestion gets exhausted, another model with the house's indoor is produced. Immediately occurs the same effect of an apparent upgrade in verisimilitude, mimesis, or conceptual integration. The game could be carried on with a 1:1 scale photograph of those same two houses. And if for argument sake, the stage could be finally removed and we could see those two houses in the landscape, we would eventually end up by judging them to be fictional. In a way, this is theatre's way of settling the score with Plato as if theatre becomes the tool that ends up revealing the veil of appearance of reality. The world is a stage but we only get to know this after watching the stage as a world.

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