

THEATRE/ECOLOGY/COGNITION

Cognitive Studies in Literature and Performance

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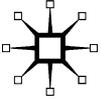
Theatre/Ecology/Cognition

Teemu Paavolainen

Theatre/Ecology/Cognition
Theorizing Performer-Object Interaction
in Grotowski, Kantor, and Meyerhold

Teemu Paavolainen

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Series Editors' Preface

Noam Chomsky started a revolution in human self-understanding and reshaped the intellectual landscape to this day by showing how all languages have deep features in common. Gone—or least retreating—is the idea that the mind is a blank slate. In its wake, fierce debates have broken out about what the mind is and how it works. At stake are some of the most urgent questions facing researchers today: questions about the relationship between brain, mind, and culture; about how human universals express themselves in individual minds and lives; about reason, consciousness, and the emotion; about where cultures get their values and how those values fit our underlying predispositions.

It is no secret that most humanists have held fast to the idea that the mind is a blank slate. Not only has this metaphor been an article of intellectual faith, it has also underwritten a passionate moral agenda. If human beings have no inherent qualities, our political and social systems are contingent rather than fixed. Intellectuals might be able to play an important role in exposing the byways of power and bringing about a fairer world. But evidence is rapidly piling up that humans are born with an elaborate cognitive architecture. The number of our innate qualities is staggering; human cognition is heavily constrained by genes and by our evolutionary past. It is now known that we are born with several core concepts and a capacity for developing a much larger number of cognitive capabilities under ecological pressure.

Beyond that bold headline, however, the story gets murkier. Each of the mind sciences is filled with dissonant debates of their own. In her magisterial investigation into the origin of concepts, Susan Carey writes that her goal “is to demonstrate that the disciplines of cognitive science now have the empirical and theoretical tools to turn age-old philosophical dilemmas into relatively straightforward problems.”¹ Notice her sense of being on the verge rather than on some well-marked path. The terrain ahead is still unmapped. But

notice, too, her sense that scientific methods will eventually transform fuzzy questions into testable ones.

How brave, then, are language and performance scholars who, driven by their passion to understand how the mind works, seek to explore this new terrain? Brave, but increasingly in good company. The Modern Language Association discussion group on cognitive approaches to literature has grown exponentially in the last decade.² And the working session in cognition and performance at the American Society for Theatre Research is flourishing. Many scholars are fascinated by what cognitive approaches might have to say about the arts. They recognize that this orientation to literature and performance promises more than just another “ism.” Unlike the theories of the last century, the mind sciences offer no central authority, no revered group of texts that disclose a pathway to the authorized truth. Indeed, cognitive approaches to the arts barely fit under one broad tent. Language processing, reader and spectator response, pragmatics, embodiment, conceptual blending, discourse analysis, empathy, performativity, and narrative theory, not to mention the energetic field of literary Darwinism, are all fields with lively cognitive debates.

Cognitive approaches are unified by two ideas. The first is that to understand the arts we need to understand psychology. Humanists have uncontroversially embraced this idea for decades, as their ongoing fascination with the now-largely discredited theory of psychoanalysis suggests. Now that psychology has undergone its empiricist revolution, literary and performance scholars should rejoice in the fact that our psychological claims are on firmer footing. Second is the idea that scholarship in this field should be generally empirical, falsifiable, and open to correction by new evidence and better theories—as are the sciences themselves. Of course this epistemological admission means that many of the truth claims of the books in our series will eventually be destabilized and perhaps proven false. But this is as it should be. As we broaden our understanding of cognition and the arts, better science should produce more rigorous ideas and insights about literature and performance. In this spirit, we celebrate the earlier books in our series that have cut a path for our emerging field and look forward to new explorations in the future.

BLAKEY VERMEULE
and
BRUCE MCCONACHIE

Acknowledgments

I have always appreciated Freddie Rokem's early "fantasy" expressed in his Preface to *Performing History* (University of Iowa Press 2000, ix), "that the ultimate goal of academic scholarship was to compose a study consisting of quotes so perfectly put together that no one would notice that this was an act of plagiarism." While such worries can readily be rebutted by the contextualist metaphor that the "meaning" is in the "weaving," a work concerned with notions of distributed cognition is inherently obliged to the various threads of thought and benevolence that pervade its apparent web. These extend infinitely beyond my ubiquitous quotation marks.

Some of the most fertile cognitive ecologies I have been privileged to feed on were formed in The International Centre for Advanced Theatre Studies (ICATS) summer schools, organized by Professor Pirkko Koski and co-tutored by Professors Bruce McConachie, Janelle Reinelt, Freddie Rokem, S. E. Wilmer, and W. B. Worthen. The three rounds I participated in—2003 to 2005, in Lammi and Helsinki—also remain the most fun experiences of my academic life. On both fronts, my gratitude extends to dozens of colleagues from dozens of countries around the world.

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Yet it was the suasive skill of my perceptive professors and supervisors that afforded the near miracle of my receiving so very many rounds of funding. In order of appearance, I pledge my gratitude to Pia Houni, Pentti Paavolainen, and Hanna Suutela. Bruce McConachie, Janelle Reinelt, Freddie Rokem, and Bill Worthen have also enhanced my thinking with solid advice, in and after ICATS. While Bruce is to thank (or blame) for my initial turn to cognitive studies, their insights have remained with me, as something of an internalized sounding board throughout the years.

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Apart from the Theatre Symposium, Wake Forest University 2009, and various conferences of the International Federation for Theatre Research (St. Petersburg 2004, Helsinki 2006, and Lisbon 2009), some drafts of the material have been presented in the British Grotowski Conference of 2009 (University of Kent, Canterbury), that of the UK Cognitive Linguistics Association in Cardiff 2007, in the 2009 Stage Animation Conference at my home university, and in visiting lectures in Helsinki kindly invited by Professors Laura Gröndahl and Esa Kirkkopelto. I thank all organizers.

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Yet such extensive temporal investments also call for a high degree of patience from one's loved ones. In duration, the support from my parents Viola and Mauri Paavolainen predates anyone else's and extends beyond gratitude. The gratitude extends to all of my family and also embraces the family Ikäläinen. Specifically, my heartfelt thanks go to Kaisa, for her abiding patience and understanding—including many stimulating discussions on more theoretical matters of metaphor and metonymy.

However, it is only fitting that I dedicate this study to Elsa. Born within a month from my defense, she has, before and since, enacted its ecologies of embedding, embodiment, and extension, in ways beyond analysis. The book is now hers to chew over.

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Notes on Style

Text

In citations, *italics* are from the original unless otherwise noted.

Quotation marks are used to mark direct quotations, bar the occasional emphasis on key terms and nonobvious cases of metaphorical expressions (e.g., “have in mind”).

In accordance with the established tradition in cognitive linguistics, names of “image schemas” are given in SMALL CAPITALS, those of metaphors and metonymies, with Capital Initials (e.g., Time is Space, Place for Event).

Notes

To combine concise discussion with an additional degree of informativity, most notes are given in clusters of author-date references encompassing entire paragraphs.

Generally in their order of appearance in the text, specific sources may also be identified by key words therein, cited in parentheses: for example, Johnson 2007, 17 (“recruited”).

Sources in Polish are given in [square brackets]. When an English translation exists, the original is not specified unless it entails some amendment to the translation.