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Boltanski's Dilemma: Mimetics, Distance and Spectating Suffering.

Introduction

The art of theatre is exceedingly ancient, and I do not believe that the principles underlying it have radically altered... The actor onstage pretends: and presents the pretence to the public... To what end, and in what manner, the social conditions of the age and the occasion will determine. (Arden 1977: 11)

In a paper published in the first number of this journal (Keefe, 2010), I discussed the mimetic staging of the *Crucifixion* episode or pageant from the York Corpus Christi Play asking questions of the spectator:

1. How do they look at such a theatre (scene) from their own time and culture and experiences?
2. How do we look at such a theatre (scene) from our own time and culture and experiences?

Subsequent research and writing, lead me to the work of Luc Boltanski (1999) and what I now refer to and discuss as 'Boltanski's dilemma': 'But what sort of pity can we really feel for an imaginary scene on the stage? The TV audience is not called upon to offer help but only to feel sorrow' (Boltanski 1999: 22). This 'imaginary scene' is Arden's simple, fundamental principle of mimetic performance that underpins the question 'why do we watch the imaginary scene'?

I would argue that any theorising of 'performance' that confuses the distinction between social/everyday and mimesis/(re)presentation carries the risk of terms losing meaning, the loss of metaphor. Here, the unproblematic or received use of 'immersion, participation, connection, interaction' (see Cranfield and Owen, 2017) - to which I add 'tragic' - is countered by the simple fact of mimesis as experienced: always potentially problematic, ambivalent, with ripples of disturbance and proximity and reception as we recognise the presentation of a fictional 'other' as if our-self.

The paper will re-visit the earlier work as archive material to develop key themes now encapsulated by Boltanski's dilemma (see Keefe and Arntzen, 2020, on 're-visiting' our archives). I will draw on current neurocognitive research that challenges and re-grounds our understanding of empathy and projection of self in the embodied mind. This manifests in the spectatorial experience, the spectator's ability to see and accept the 'double reality' of the theatre and other visual (mimetic) experience, and the issues of 'moral distance' represented by Boltanski, Bandura and others. I suggest Boltanski's dilemma confronts us as knowing spectators with the inherent ethical paradox of any and all representations of suffering in any given cultural and social context.

The paper will draw on case studies from theatres, film and art to illustrate and exemplify the position of the spectator: in the spirit of ethos, a series of musings, of questions and signposts as well as arguments.

On Suffering and Spectatorship

We experience many different (re)presentations of suffering: as journalism, watching a TV or online news report of an event (accident, war, conflict, act of aggression), looking at the pictures accompanying such reports in newspapers; looking at photographic 'reportage' in an exhibition; as a documentary on the subject of war or conflict, or recent medical procedures showing an operation (although given the use of anaesthetics, perhaps the suffering has come before?).

But the crucial and central distinction is between these as reported or documented events and similar material shown to us as mimetic representation – as the 'imaginary scene' or 'as if' presented and received as itself an act of social performance. In all cases, our empathy is called into play but again from distinct moral and psychical distances; as knowing spectators, we are aware of the mimetic mode but equally we are aware of the overlaps, echoes, reciprocities and similarities of non-mimetic and mimetic experiences as humans living amongst other humans.

As exemplified by *Peeping Tom* below, there is a distinction between reciprocal looking and objectifying gazing. But both occur within our 'human-ness' of 'being' among others.

...that the among-others, like the for-itself and the for-others is indistinguishable, in its root nature, from the bodily being of persons. The space I live in is the space created, however indirectly, by such bodily being-with. (Greene 1972: 41)

So, whether in non-mimetic (represented by photojournalism), hybrid (the non-mimetic performer) or mimetic (the fictional characterisation) forms, our watching and looking and responses are shaped and coloured by the same impacts. Our knowledge, our emotions, the media used and shared, the forms of reporting and (re)presentation. We do not watch in any state of neutrality or innocence, but with degrees and differences and sharing of knowledge and experiences. We choose to watch with varying proximity (physical and emotional) to the suffering that may or may not be distant. We are always active, knowing and engaged - to different degrees - spectators, never 'passive'.

The inherent paradox that Boltanski identifies is thus found in all forms of imagery; the overlaps & similarities will colour any writing about theatre – the subject itself means we can only make 'an attempt' (see Kelleher and Ridout 2006: 2) to ask the question(s) that may suggest the conflicting answer(s). Such paradox underpins my reservations concerning the ideas of Levinas, Rancière and others on what I consider to be narrow dramaturgies of spectatorship (the fragmenting of the body, the continuing insistence on the spectator as 'passive', the contradictions of the spectator's emancipation). As I argue elsewhere, I can acknowledge Rancière's critique of dramaturgical assumptions whilst arguing that 'emancipation' itself implies something to be inculcated, something lacking (see Keefe and Arntzen 2020). Rather, we must always recognise the messy, hybrid, polysemic nature of theatres and so of the spectatorial experiences of fictions as a real event in, of and about our world (re)presented in the world of the play.

This empirical spectatorship is predicated on a peculiar form of work and action.

The attending spectator always engages with the presented material and its forms of presentation - the *mise-en-scène* - in certain ways or others; is therefore in an active, inherently ethical, dramaturgical relationship with theatres. (Keefe, 2010: 37)

Martin Warner's discussion of different senses of 'publics' helps alert us to this multi-dimensional character, where his second type – the concrete audience – is distinguished by

its self-knowledge as such. Gathered together for a particular purpose, an audience 'knows itself', it's where and when with common visibility and action (Warner 2002; see also Macdonald 2011). But we must note that Warner's second public embraces both the crowd at a sporting event or similar social or non-mimetic performance, and that at a mimetic performance; within the common elements (to be always borne in mind), these are distinct gatherings for distinct purposes.

On Boltanski and Distance

Boltanski seeks to articulate the types of mediations that intervene between spectators and the subjects/objects of suffering; from this, the many ways we, as distant spectators, may and do respond to the presentations of suffering. He draws on two key concepts: Arendt's 'politics of pity' that distinguishes between those who suffer and those who do not, and Taylor's discussion of authenticity in relation to subjective experience. I will not discuss these as such, but I believe that Arendt's distinction may be qualified for the purposes of this paper. As social beings we are 'among others'; as we are 'other' to others as they are to us (both subject and object), so we have all suffered and not suffered; we have seen others suffer as they have seen us suffer to different degrees and in differing political and personal circumstances. 'This is theatre – the art of looking at ourselves... In this usage, all human beings are Actors (they act!) and Spectators (they observe!). They are Spect-Actors' (Boal 1992: xxx). Boltanski is most concerned with the suffering we see on our screens presented as news and reportage in the contexts of social justice and our possible humanitarian responses. What we may consider as the non-mimetic but socially and individually performative.

Within this task, Boltanski makes – almost in-passing, and drawing on Augustine's writing – observations that mark our spectatorial position in relation to mimetic (re)presentation. It is these that I am extracting as the particular dilemma and challenge: how we may watch simulated suffering for our entertainment as well as enlightenment.

...one of the main motivations of fiction is the staging of suffering and that the spectacle of suffering has been seen as a cause of the spectator's pleasure... held to be paradoxical or enigmatic. (Boltanski 1999: 21)

... but what sort of pity can we really feel for an imaginary scene on the stage? The audience is not called upon to offer help but only to feel sorrow... The fact remains that viewing suffering is especially problematic when the object of suffering is presumed to be real... (: 22, 23)

It is just this tension that the metaphor of theatre highlights... which brings together unconcerned spectators at the same time appealing to their emotions... But then the question arises of how far it is appropriate to go in the description of wretched details... (: 33)

Whilst Boltanski is concerned with the distance involved in reporting suffering and thus its location, the same principle of 'how far away' is central to our other spectatorial (shared and subjective) experience. Thus, Aristotle proposes that whilst the objects of imitation may be painful to see, we view in order to learn.

To briefly return to a non-mimetic perspective. In her book (2003) on the presentation of suffering as images/ forms of photojournalism, Sontag argues that it is the narrative and framing that confer meaning on images of the pain of others. But if we have not lived through these 'horrors', Sontag presents an apparent uncomfortable truth that we 'can't

understand, can't imagine' (2003: 126) this suffering of others due to the (apparent) distance between object and subject; such distance itself amplified by an oversaturation of images. This may be the case as Bandura illustrates below as 'moral disengagement'. It may also be a further uncomfortable truth that when confronted by such images we are placed in the position of 'spectator' or 'coward' (2003: 42). But is this a viable either-or; can we be both just as we are both subject and object? It is the mechanisms of the embodied mind and simulation discussed in the next section that allow us to empathise, to imagine, to put ourselves 'in the place of' from both direct and indirect stimulations. It is the 'living-not living through' apparent divide that mimetic (re)presentation bridges and thus enables learning.

To achieve this, such incidents should arouse 'pity and fear', even to the point of showing dead bodies whilst retaining an inherent staging distance. The medieval theatre moves to a greater degree of similitude based on violent word pictures and stage *techne* for a reducing of moral distance predicated on proximity to the stage, and proximity ('real-ness') to everyday experience. Brecht plays with distance: wanting his artists to 'pay a visit sometime to that theatre whose setting is the street' (Brecht 1981: 176) and us as spectators to be both detached and engaged observers, for both to learn: '(the MESSINGKAUF...) deals with the traffic between stage and auditorium... by means of an act of empathy... criticism is stimulated... and it is this that moves the spectator' (Brecht 1993: 81). Edward Bond reduces the distance with his declarations that he writes about violence, with the estranging staging he uses, with his challenges and direct addresses to us:

You sit and watch the stage
Your back is turned –
To what? (Bond 1978: 4)

Wife. You who live in barbarous times...
Monster. You killed us for freedom...
What is the freedom you gave me?
Two fists of ash (*He throws the ash to the ground*)
Where is the freedom in that? (Bond 199/: 39-40)

Whilst Boltanski argues that distance, in his context and thesis, can be overcome by imagination, theatre rests on the ambivalent playing with and by the spectator's knowing imagination that both maintains and overcomes distance. This remains the paradox of an enabling 'psychical distance' set out by Bullough: a moving in and out of our knowing suspension of disbelief; our empathy and disengagement.

On the Roots of Empathy and Disengagement; The Embodied Mind/Embodied Simulation

The painting will move the soul of the beholder when the people painted there each clearly shows the movement of his own soul... These movements of the soul are known from the movements of the body. (Alberti in Grayson 1972: 80)

It may be suggested that terms such as empathy, mimesis and *katharsis* have become unfashionable in theatre theory; but I argue that these remain as axioms and principles of what theatres are and may be. An actor or other *actant* continues to re-present a form of other, we are moved to some understanding (or not) of that other's position/actions/character as if our-self, as Brecht understood and grappled with. What underpins these principles? As

Alberti prefigures, such 'movements of the soul' are not only a short-lasting emotional response and affective state, but also an affective state of body & embodied mind from our mirror mechanism and embodied simulation. (See di Cesare and Rizzolatti 2020)

Neural research begun in the 1990's found that mirror neurons are pre-motor neurons that fire not only when object-directed actions are performed but also when we observe others performing the same or similar actions (see Iacoboni 2005). It seemed that the intentions behind another's actions can be recognised by the human motor system using a mirror mechanism. Ongoing research has extended these insights into an understanding of empathy, mimesis and imitation, and aesthetics.

Empathy is the result of a direct experience of another person's state (action, emotion, sensation), thanks to a mechanism of embodied simulation that produces within the observer a corporeal state that is – to some degree - shared with the person who expresses/experiences that state. (Gallese 2010: 3)

Such work thus becomes a neuro-cognitive counterweight and complement to our necessary enculturation and socialisation; to our mutual recognition and identification commonly grounded in reciprocity of behaviour, feelings and ideas. It is both arresting and enlightening to see such empirical research into our phylogenetic mechanisms or 'hard-wired' pre-dispositions and social cognitions giving substance to the empirical insights into theatres, dramaturgy and empathy we associate with Aristotle and others.

I find this work complements other principles that feed into an understanding of theatres that draw on the notion of the 'embodied mind': the 'habitus' of Bourdieu; the 'structures of feelings' of Williams; the *Hyle & Leib* (lived body) of Husserl, all discussed in the 2010 essay.

This is a vast area and covered by a large body of writing (see Damasio 2000; Shaughnessy 2013; Lux & Weigel 2017; Gallese 2018). I will look only at a few salient points on aesthetics, empathy and disengagement that will lead into and have a bearing on the case studies that then follow.

In terms of mimesis and dramaturgy, 'empathy' is generally used to stand for 'putting oneself in the place of some other (person or being)' perhaps identifying with, perhaps on the basis of 'there but for the grace of...', with degrees of understanding or (maybe) indifference. We may attribute aspects of our or another's personality to the subject/object, we may anthropomorphise with more or less sentimentality. In a paper from 2007, Freedberg and Gallese propose that the embodied mirror mechanisms and embodied simulation as neural processes lie not only behind empathy but also aesthetic experiences. In this, they offer research and theory that complements the insights of earlier writers; for example, the work of Robert Vischer suggesting that *Einfühlung* or 'feeling-in' stands for the physical responses to paintings. In other arts, the Expressionist sculptures of Barlach and their equivalent physical extremes of the ecstatic in acting come to mind.

Building on the concept of neuroaesthetics, they show that embodied simulation is evoked in the observer by the subject looked at. The embodied motor simulation and emotional resonance appears to be a crucial component of our aesthetic response to subjects and objects in artworks. This seems to be the case even when observing the gestures involved in making that art; the strokes, marks, drawing of lines activate our brain to reconstruct the actions of the agent being watched. Later studies - using EEG scans to measure cortical motor activation when observing and perceiving Roman letters, unfamiliar language characters and scribbles – indicate that all these stimuli are read as traces of hand gestures (see Heimann, et al 2013, Benuzzi, et al 2018). Such material trace is also argued by

Hustvedt (2005) as relational, intersubjective. In all this we may see empirical underpinning (again); to the words of Alberti, to forms of proximity.

I suggest such embodied responses to strokes and colour on a canvas or types of lines on a page find correspondence in our responses to the bodies we watch on stage or screen. Whether watching delineated material or degrees of 'clues' in mimetics, we are pre-disposed to accept, and/or construct and respond to the presented materials as if real. Mirror mechanisms are activated and combined with 'conceptual blending theory' and 'visual intentionalism' (see below).

We may take one particular example to underpin the argument here and pre-figuring the case studies – responses to pictures and expression of pain. Further to Heimann and Benuzzi above, Schott (2015), drawing on fMRI and other research suggests that there are two neural networks involved in our responses to images of pain. That is, learned, cognitive processes that mediate responses within a particular cultural context as well as the mirror mechanisms already outlined. Such images may be graphic or metaphorical, reported or imagined; in all cases I am not persuaded we have to fall into an either/or position. As Schott concludes, '...both' mirror neuron and alternative networks are likely to be enlisted in the empathetic response to images of pain' (2015: 819). I suggest any proper *katharsis* is not dependent on feelings alone; mirror mechanisms and embodied simulation allows that we may feel ideas and think feelings.

This idea of intertextual and common ground informs the approach of Cuccio and Gallese (2018) in their account and survey of two opposed theories of human cognition: Computational Theory of Mind (that concepts are abstract and amodal symbols in the language of thought) and Embodied Cognition (that concepts are embodied and grounded in actions and perception). Research shows that the pre-motor and parietal areas of the brain are neurally and functionally integrated, thus providing frames of reference for actions and general 'characterisations of agent-action-object relations that function conceptually' (Cuccio and Gallese: 4). Embodied mirror mechanisms allow a proposing of an embodied approach to inter-subjectivity and inter-corporeality – Embodied Simulation theory. Drawing on Peirce's notions of icon and abductive inference, and acknowledging key differences, both may also have a bodily foundation that bring together abstract and concrete concepts.

In our view, Embodied Simulation, defined as an icon, is the first and primary source of categorization... Thus, phylogenetically, both abstract and concrete concepts have a bodily ground... the apparently conflicting results (of empirical findings) can be accounted for in the light of the heterogeneity of the class of abstract concepts (Cuccio and Gallese: 9)

What seems common to the inter-subjectivity of human-to-human relations, our shared and recognisable responses to others (empathetically and aesthetically) are qualities of the enculturated and embodied, the socially and corporeally inter-twined mind and body. The question then becomes one of what role these neuro- cognitive mechanisms play in also underpinning our disengagement, of a negative empathy, the obverse of altruism?

As knowing spectator's, we are caught in the paradox of distance. The distance necessary for knowing suspension of disbelief is also a distance from what is being viewed: a displacing of imagination or denial within awareness. As social and cultural agents so we are caught in a further paradox; whose agency is qualified by the very social and cultural conditions that complement and play on the mechanisms of embodied simulation.

More specifically, the observation of another person in pain can evoke the aversive experience of personal distress, triggering a self-focused affective reaction associated

with the desire to alleviate one's own, but not the other's, pain... suggesting that the activity of this region (right supramarginal gyrus) is crucial for the self/other distinction. (Benuzzi, et al 2018: 8-9)

The opposite of the good Samaritan is the obverse of empathy and altruism; what Bandura (1999; also 2016) discusses as 'moral disengagement': where the fact of qualified agency gives us power to behave inhumanely. Bandura's 'social cognitive theory' proposes a reciprocal and interactionist perspective to morality: 'Moral actions are the product of the reciprocal interplay of cognitive, affective and social influence' (Bandura 2002: 102). Bandura presents a model of the mechanism through which moral self-sanctions are activated and disengaged selectively in a self-regulatory process (1999: 194). Such moral disengagement comes from a cognitive restructuring through moral justifications, the sanitising of language and euphemism, and making exonerating comparisons; the reciprocal other becomes the de-humanised 'other'. This necessary agential balance to embodied simulation is supported by other models of behaviour: the model of dispositional mediation of empathy and affective dispositions formed on moral judgements (Zillmann 1994); the effects of confirmation bias in what we favour (Nickerson 1998); polyvagal theory whereby we are phylogenetically predisposed to be attuned to social behaviour - positive and negative - and respond autonomically (Porges 2001).

Work by Speirs, et al (2016) would seem to support such hard truths about the human and her /his behaviour. fMRI data reveals the inter-relationship between embodied mind and social action in the activity of the anterior temporal lobe in the forming of prejudicial intergroup attitudes.

These are discussions of behaviours in the real world, and seemingly have little relation to our aesthetic, emotional-psychological and physical responses to the world of the play. Boltanski offers the clue here when he invokes the principle of theatre that the object of the viewed suffering is presumed to be real. I propose the same mechanisms of embodied simulation are applicable here as we watch suffering (or great pleasure or satisfying resolution) in mimetic forms; we know it is a fiction, yet we watch it 'as if real' drawing on 'conceptual blending theory' and 'visual intentionalism' (see Murray and Keefe, 2016). Our neuro-cognitive functions allow us to embrace or accept such images of greater or lesser verisimilitude, suggested or direct, denoted or connotated as if real. When watching mimetics, we mirror the responses we make to real events whether empathetically, or morally disengaged. So Boltanski's question still hovers over us as spectators – why do we watch suffering that is presumed to be real? The following case studies (complementary and contrasting) may offer some clues.

On Watching Broken Bodies: Recognition and Repulsion

When we look at the accounts in the Gospels of the scourging and crucifixion of Jesus, what strikes us is the 'plain' quality of the language, here taken from the King James Bible (British and Foreign Bible Society):

Matthew 27: 26 '...and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.'

27: 35 'And they crucified him...'

Mark 15: 15 '...and delivered Jesus, when he had scourged him, to be crucified.'

15: 24 'And when they had crucified him...'

Luke 23: 22 '... I will therefore chastise him, and let him go.'

23: 33 '... there they crucified him, and the malefactors...'

John 19: 1 'Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him.'

19: 18 ‘Where they crucified him, and two others with him...’

There is no embellishment, no gory detail; simply a matter-of-fact account of an event that would have been commonplace to the witnesses of it. In a sense, the event spoke for itself in terms of what was happening, the suffering involved and inflicted. Plain words may be sufficient at any time.

All human beings entertain the capacity to imagine worlds that they have or have not seen before, to imagine doing things that they have or have not done before... in the light of neuroscientific research... we now know that visual and motor imagery are embodied. (Gallese and Lakoff, 2005: 463)

We cannot know directly what was barely described as a distant account; we can only bridge the distance by the words offered and our imaginations, fed both by an accretion of subsequent images imagined from the words and witnessed experiences, thus becoming an accumulated knowledge.

When crucifixion is no longer a common - but still known - method of execution, then mimetic (and linked iconic) representations and embellishment fill the gap in direct knowledge. By the time of the medieval Passion Play, audiences were familiar with such depictions in painting and church imagery. The sequence of encounters from one theatre performance to the next that Rozik characterises as a processual ‘process of generating theatre meaning... in the context of each theatre experience’ (2008: 1) is itself within a wider context of images, knowledge and received ideas of all forms and varieties. I suggest this again helps us make the distinction between what is a real event of social performance (a crucifixion) and an event of social performance both real in itself whilst embracing an enactment or mimetic representation enabled by conceptual blending and visual intention.

In terms of medieval mimetics, the presentation of the body had already become a procession of meaning in elaboration of style and staging. The relative simplicity of the 10th century *Quem Quaritis*, the Easter trope as the *Visitatio Sepulchro* set out in the *Regularis concordia* a few decades later, the full staging represented by the 12th century *Le Jeu d’Adam* and the Corpus Christi Passion Play that follows. This is the same impulse and desire for mimetic embellishment that marks the distance between the chronicler’s accounts and the Passion Play. (See Kobialka 1999)

Thus, the spectators of the Tilemakers’ ‘The Judgement’ and the Pinners’ ‘The Crucifixion’ brought their own procession of meanings and experiences to the performance.

The Crucifixion. (15th. Century)

1 Soldier: Strike on then hard, for him thee bought
2 Soldier: Yes here is a stub will stiffly stand;
Through bones and sinews it shall be sought...
3 Soldier: It fails a foot or more;
The sinews are so gone in...
1 Soldier: Why carp ye so? Fast on a cord,
And tug him to, by top and tail...
2 Soldier: Lug on, ye both, a little yet
3 Soldier: I shall not cease, as I have sele
4 Soldier: And I shall fond him for to hit...
Ho now! I hold it well
1 Soldier: Have done, drive in that nail
So that no fault be found.

(Cawley 1974: 148-49)

As our audience plays witness to the nail-makers (re)presentation being set out in front of them, they will recognise many things: the bodies and hands and tools being put to such a purpose; the dark humour of the trade's competence for such a task; the skill in physical handling of the tools and the cords and the body familiar from such handling of tools and meat in their own lives, the casual brutality and grimness of the representation as it echoes the battlefields and executions and punishments and pains of life with which they are also familiar. (Keefe 2010: 37). The fields of 'distance' are not as clear-cut as Sontag perhaps implies.

Looking back at our distinctions, this makes the Passion Play a peculiar form of hybrid mimesis, of the polysemic nature of theatre.

Staging expands what the audience knows already and so adds to that knowledge from a particular experience. The same principle holds when, in 1951, the similar observation was made: 'There is an enormous and impassable gulf between us and the people who wrote, performed and watched these plays' (Elliot 1989: 76). But the gulf is both more and less in terms of ontology and epistemology (see Anderson 2018). In our own society and culture, we may be less directly familiar with aspects of life outlined above, but equally and more so in terms of the reporting of suffering and the depictions of suffering that Boltanski and Bandura discuss. Boltanski's question is just as valid for the medieval audience as it is for us; they looked at such a theatre scene from their own time and culture and experiences, with similar neuro-cognitive responses and for similar purposes. Were they repulsed as well as entertained? Was the learning inherent in such depictions qualified or enhanced by the enjoyment of seeing their neighbour playing Jesus, or one of the soldiers? In terms of mimetics and responses, the gulf may always be less; it may not be the event as such but the style and mode of portrayal that asks how do we look at and respond to such a theatre scene from our own time and culture and experiences?

I suggest that whilst such earlier depictions of suffering do not shy away from details (the words give a precision of detail that feeds our knowing imagination) it is the role of imagination that has changed and been diminished creating the 'pornography of graphic violence' that characterises more recent accounts of this event. We now see a tension between thoughtful intent and gratuitous superfluity in the showing.

Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) has a dramaturgy that mixes brutal and graphic details with an iconography that echoes medieval art. Some reviews have suggested over 100 minutes of such violence – of this, some 30 minutes covers the scourging to crucifixion. The focus is not only on the nailed hands and feet but the increasingly beaten and bloody face of Jesus and the faces of the onlookers: the soldiers, Mary, priests, other followers, the crowd. We are shown the first beating with canes, then the 'flagellum' with metal embedded on the thong(s). As the skin is cut, flayed and ripped - all in close-up – so with the faces of those watching, some of whom turn away. Do we as spectators also turn, stop watching? To ask the question 'how do we react to the facial pain expressions' is to invite the answer 'each of us will react differently' to the traces from one instance to the next - so why watch?

The progress to Golgotha follows, as the cross is carried, again with many close-ups of the battered body and face. Then follows the crucifixion itself, with close-ups of the hammer blows on nails, the stretching of limbs, the nailing of hands and feet, the lifting and dropping of the cross into the ground. What the sequence does is to make pictorially explicit (with effects and prosthetics) what the expressive words of the York Passion Play give us to 'work' with; evocations that work on us by 'playing' with our imaginations and with our knowledge.

But because of the insistence on such extreme verisimilitude that lessens imagination, there is no depth to the signifiers used; the few but rich are replaced by the insistence of many and explicit. The (faint) echoes of earlier iconography are just that, without the depth and expressiveness of Grünewald's *Isenheim Altarpiece* whose expressive, twisted contortions of body and hands pre-figure Barlach. The relentless reverential violence and loss of the 'imagined' becomes a barrier to relating my 'lived body' to that mimetically presented on-screen despite the deep responses inherent in embodied simulation. The film lacks the rough, grim humour of the Passion Play that makes the soldiers, however uncomfortably and thus confronting, seem more like us. As Kobińska (1999) and Hartnell (2018) argue, medieval attitudes to the body were complex and contradictory - as perhaps are ours today in both similar and different ways.

Is Boltanski's question answered by the story of apparent redemption that Gibson is aiming for, and so in basic terms, the end justifies the means: the enduring dramaturgical tension and dilemma between these? What are the intentions (ends) behind the seemingly gratuitous embellishing (means) of the chronicler's plain words? What of flogging scenes in films such as *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1935/1962/1984, (becoming increasingly explicit) or *Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World* (2003), where there seems no similar aim of redemption? In all cases we are as likely to have a 'self-focused, aversive affective reaction' as an empathetic one, thereby nullifying redemption.

From the deep responses inherent in embodied simulation, we never-the-less choose, as qualified social agents, to continue to watch or to turn away. Perhaps it's the factor of choice that offers glimpses, the beginnings of answers to the dilemma.

On Faces of Anguish and Serenity

The faces presented in suffering range as widely as images of the body. We have seen the faces of anguish in that of Jesus and those looking on in Gibson's film. We can only speculate on the facial expressions used by the actors in the Passion Play – grimacing in the pain or with the serenity shown across the art of the Passion and other martyrdoms?

In discussing the viewing of images of suffering as activating the same brain centres as our own sensations of pain, Freedberg and Gallese example the etchings of Goya in his *The Disasters of War* series. In the Chiesa Nuova in Assisi, there are a number of 17th century frescos of martyrdoms of Franciscan monks and saints (attributed to Vincenzo and Giacomo Giogetti, and Giotto). These show in striking colour beheadings, disembowelment and crucifixions carried out in Flanders, Morocco and Japan in the 13th and 16th centuries. Are these on the walls (the means) to praise the martyrs, to remind the congregations to remember their sacrifice and suffering in martyrdom (the end)? I suggest the viewing is coloured by the same familiarity with bodies and punishments as that for the York Passion Play.

When viewing the frescos there is the same impact as viewing the Goya's or Callot's *Miseries of War* or Dix's *War* (see Malbert 1998) if we regard these as pre-figuring/pre-echoing the images we now associate with photojournalism. We are both responsive to and repulsed by the grotesqueness, the pain, the degradation, the realism of what is shown. The same question and paradox we are asking of the spectator may be asked of the artist. An image of suffering and pain becomes a work of art; a fictionalised or dramatised representation of a real event. With respect to Boltanski's question are we being shown, are looking to what (justified) intentions of learning? As Gallese (2018) argues, the model of embodied simulation shows that all human experience may be understood as a form of relational experience that can be taken into the realm of art.

Schott discusses the altarpiece *Flagellation of Saint Marina*, pointing out that we see the sufferer experiencing pain but not the expected facial expression. I suggest we

experience a disjointed but simultaneous response; the brain centres activated by pain and the brain centres activated by serenity, both also informed by our enculturated state. We feel ideas and think feelings.

We can contrast two images from the 15th century. The pain of loss is the focus of Masaccio's *The Fall* (with expressions again pre-figuring Barlach) as Adam and Eve are expelled from Eden. We may place by this the illumination *Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden* (Panayotyova 2016: 25). We see the state of a mythic creation with nature in harmony, and serenity on the faces. The spectator brings their beliefs, their knowledge, their own experiences to any readings to the story of before and after the expulsion as well as any embodied aesthetic response. Suffering and serenity are symbiotic in certain contexts and certain viewings.

Perhaps we can play with the notion of 'parergon' (see Derrida, 1987) as we place images side-by-side, as we place ourselves beside as well as in front of the image, as we place and hold our conflicting responses beside each other. The 'parergon' helps us bridge the ontological-epistemological gulf - looking at 'then' from 'now' - as an attempt to enter their suffering through our embodied imagination and our own knowledge. We may make ontological unfamiliarity - the strange - less so by recognising similarities and echoes that affect us.

On Looking or Watching or the Ambiguous Both

Berger makes clear that seeing is central to our place and being in the world:

Seeing comes before words... The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled... It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world...
Soon after we can see, we are aware that we can also be seen. (Berger 1972; 7, 9)

Boltanski talks of 'viewing suffering' but I suggest we must distinguish between forms or modes of viewing and seeing: an objective/objectifying gazing (after Mulvey); mutual and reciprocal looking and seeing (after Studler) (see Keefe 2010); the degrees of pleasurable 'voyeurism' inherent in any looking; the degrees of scopophilia inherent in objectifying or morbid gaze. In other words, forms of looking and gazing and watching are a conundrum, the subject/object position becomes situational and the move between forms is of the moment and of the context.

These signifying terms are all too often muddled and confused in use. Michael Powell's film *Peeping Tom* (1960) is not, as usually and simplistically claimed (even by the screenwriter), about a 'voyeur-as-scophiliac' but is a challenging exploration of the intertwining of looking and gazing and watching. We view not simply suffering as such, but as a means. We will be confronted by our own viewing as we watch what Powell and 'Mark Lewis' choose what and how to show us.

Too often we will read that all theatre/film/television (even any image to some extent?) are inherently voyeuristic; such discussion is thus negatively predicated on this assumed ethical spectatorial position (see Rodosthenous 2015).

But I suggest that this position is not 'voyeuristic' in its negative formulation, but rather, a particular form of permitted viewing that has a quality of *frisson*, but not transgression. This is the *frisson* inherent in all viewing and not only a phenomenon of the 'fourth wall' or frame. It is this more challenging notion of the term that Powell is exploring predicated on the pleasures inherent in all looking. The challenge is made more so when we are confronted with Powell's insistent suggestion that it is the spectator who 'gazes' on the pornography and the images of death, not Mark (merely a further means). If we accept the concept of the knowing spectator on which to partially predicate an ethics of spectatorship,

then we also accept that the spectator chooses what to watch (or not) with varying degrees of attention, engagement and a simultaneous mix of responses drawing on embodied simulation, enculturation and imagination. 'If the drama presents 'dying agonies' we take pleasure because we know, on some level, of our consciousness, that the event is not real, and because we experience the freedom of our imagination' (Ben Chaim 1985: 76).

These extended moments of shared imagination rest on acts of visibility, in a space that is darkened (usually) but with enough light spilling from stage and fire safety signs that the spectators are visible to each other and thus aware of each other's responses; in neither the theatre nor cinema do we sit 'in the dark'.

The film explores, uses and returns us to one of our themes; that of 'distance'. I have suggested that viewers of the Crucifixion (or similar images of suffering cited) would have had a lessened distance given their lived proximity to death and punishment. If our contemporary European culture has less such direct experience (relatively speaking), then our sense of distance is itself re-framed and re-located. In this we must be aware of contemporary theories of 'distance', 'proximity', 'contiguity' (see Cranfield and Owen) and the subtleties placed on these by the position of 'parergon', as the spectator is always 'beside'.

In his own mischievous way, Powell uses and moves between the narrative strands as a challenge to the distance we would want to take from the actions and behaviours he confronts us with. Unlike a linear realistic-naturalistic structure, Powell uses the overt exposing to us of the narrative structure to achieve a non-Brechtian distancing. We are estranged as well as drawn in by the human tendency to inadvertent voyeurism as lookers-watchers-gazers.

From and for such distancing, Powell plays with viewpoints: that of the extradiegetic camera that shoots *Peeping Tom*; the studio camera we see Mark working with in shooting *The Walls are Closing In*; the projected screenings of Mark's own films; Mark's own ciné-camera. It is this last that is most often the source of the (often extended) point-of-view shots that make us complicit in the subject/object of his 'home movies'. We are also given a further tangential perspective in the screening of his father's research 'home movies' of which Mark himself is the subject/object. Thus, as spectators of *Peeping Tom* we are moved between and among the range of looking and gazing and watching (voyeurism) of both everyday life and of the presentations of mimetic representations of that life. Powell confronts us with different angles on & of viewing the body; the violence is non-graphic; the father's home-movies are more chilling; we share 'Helen's' horror at the induced fear shown in Mark's face as he becomes the subject/object of research.

Theatre (and film & television) is thus associated with a voyeurism inherent in all looking; here in a specific context of particular kinds of permitted and knowing looking – sometimes returned by the actors/characters, usually shared by the audience. Powell confronts us with our difficult acceptance that we have a sense of *frisson* (our dopamine and endorphin rush) when watching – with spectatorial pleasure - mimetic suffering. An intention quite distinct from showing for showings sake.

On Some Kinds of Conclusions as Questions: Intentions, Ends, Means

We could ask the question of whether film (and television) will always tend towards greater verisimilitude of mimetic suffering (and to an increasing degree) because of the possibilities and seductions of special effects and editing, and changes in tastes and criteria of film classification?

We could trace this in theatre; for example, the word pictures and bloody stage effects in the blinding of Shakespeare's King Lear with the cold, sterile machine blinding of Bond's Lear (1972). We may compare the fight between Mike and Les in Berkoff's *East* (1978),

using word pictures and the stylised techniques of physical theatres with the graphic simulation of sexual acts and sucking out of eyes in Kane's *Blasted* (1995) or the descriptions of blood-soaked staging in a recent production of *The Duchess of Malfi* (Billington 2018: 26) where front-row spectators are provided with protective sheets. Why is this literalism deemed necessary against the spectator's knowing imagination? How far do we need to go in the description of wretched details for the spectator's paradoxical or enigmatic pleasure in the spectacle of suffering? 'Excellent. Remember, we need to hear splintering bone' (Ross 2018: 10-11). Will a stylised staging or one where the 'techne' is openly presented or where the audience completes the picture for-it-self be more effective; to compare like with unlike, the anthropomorphic horse presented as physical theatre/puppetry in *War Horse* (2007) with the suffocating simulations of CGI techniques? (see Murray and Keefe 2016: 249-250.)

May we assume the audience for the York Crucifixion heard the hammers hitting the nails as described and thus 'saw' the nails going into the hands and feet without need for close-ups and the trickery of special effects and prosthetics? This suggests that the greater verisimilitude in mimetic simulation the lesser imagination demanded in mimetic simulation. For example, the new game *Red Dead Redemption*: 'a wild west fantasy so authentic that you can forget it is real... We're trying to build worlds that people believe in, that they can get lost in...and believe in' (MacDonald 2018). Such fantasy is contradictory, at odds with the fact of the knowing spectator, the rhythms of psychical distance, with how we view.

To what extent do changes in cultural norms and prevailing fashions of mimetic simulation (the 'social conditions of the age') both conflict with and shape/are shaped by our predispositions of embodied simulation? Is what we choose to watch or turn away from itself a question of how I relate my 'lived body' to those bodies captured in images of torture and suffering; the same 'lived body' that also allows me to be repulsed by those same images in the spectacle of suffering? It appears that, as qualified agents, we will choose to watch or turn away above/beyond the deep responses inherent in embodied simulation. It appears that we may just live with Boltanski's paradox as it returns us to thoughtful intent set against mimetic gratuity, the dramaturgical ends and means used to engage us in the moral dilemmas that is the purpose of theatres?

We may look at Sontag's 'distance' from a mimetic perspective with her staging of *Waiting for Godot* in besieged Sarajevo in 1993. Whether regarded as hubris, metaphor or simply an act of empathy become questions placed beside the event itself. The attempt to 'bridge distance' by an act of theatre, an act of performing *Godot* seems to articulate a recognition of both difference and sameness emphasised by extreme circumstances. Both engaging with embodied displacement and leaving questions unanswered (see Sayers 1990).

Likewise, it appears that we are always returned to the paradox of pleasure and learning. In 1951, Brecht re-visited the notion of spectatorial pleasure and the dilemma of learning through pleasure.

For it is a peculiarity of the theatrical medium that it communicates awareness and impulses in the form of pleasure: the depth of the awareness and the impulse will correspond to the depth of the pleasure. (Brecht 1978: 230)

To take two contrasting but similar examples:

There comes a moment in *Mother Courage* when the soldiers carry in the dead body of Schweizerkäs (Swiss Cheese). They suspect that he is the son of Courage but are not quite certain. She must be forced to identify him. I saw Helene Weigel act the scene...

As the body of her son was laid before her, she merely shook her head in mute denial. The soldiers compelled her to look again. Again, she gave no sign of recognition, only a dead stare. As the body was carried off, Weigel looked the other way and tore her mouth wide open. The shape of the gesture was that of the screaming horse in Picasso's *Guernica*. The sound that came out was raw and terrible... But, in fact, there was no sound. (Steiner 1958: 353-54)

In the film *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* (McDonagh 2017) we are presented with a similar 'Mother Courage' figure. Mildred is unlikeable, unsympathetic whose manner and behaviour is as flawed as Fierling's, who is not seeking our warmth in response to her, who never-the-less gains our respect and empathy for her thorny courage. In both cases we are left with a *katharsis* of uncertainty, with challenging figures whom we may not like but from whom we learn. Perhaps a successful performance is one

...that disturbs, offers no comfort, advances no solution... (leaves the spectator) perplexed, wanting to know more although convinced that no knowledge can ever cure him of his perplexity. (Schumacher, 2006: 8)

Our experience of fictional worlds, besides being a suspension of disbelief, can thus be interpreted as a sort of 'liberated embodied simulation'. (Gallese 2018: 76)

The 'pleasure' perhaps lays in our embodied mind learning from the examples of mimetic suffering and the inflicting of suffering presumed to be (as if) real.

Perhaps the messy and paradoxical ethos and politics of learning from mimetic suffering lies in our states of being. The states of *décalage* or perpetual transitions between our understandings of the world in which we live and watch, and the worlds we enter as peculiar, knowing spectators who sense that Boltanski's dilemma has no resolution, is our dilemma, the always present questions. We are both 'cowardly' and 'non-cowardly' as spectators. We are always being asked 'what would you have done'?

On References as Forms of Signposting

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