Chapter

Perspective Chapter: Qualified Empathy – The Spectator Looking/Not Looking Away

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Abstract

This paper will reflect on empathy, not only as *Einfühlung* or 'feeling in' but is a qualified embodied, affective, and neurocognitive feeling. That it may be given and withheld, sometimes at or in almost the same moment. I suggest that empathy is a complex and paradoxical response to the arousing action or event. As such, empathy needs to raise questions to distinguish it from sympathy or sentimentality and bathos. I will suggest that qualified empathy is characterised by vulnerability, can be given but with a sense of vicarious *frisson*. Such empathy allows and demands questions be raised and asked of us. As knowing spectators of (mimetic) empathetic moments, we look with a critical distance as well 'feeling in', 'there but for the grace…', or degrees of moral disengagement toward the subject-object. This other is an 'I' like me in reciprocal states of mutual homeostasis and shared affordances. I suggest we place ourselves 'beside' the character and event or action that not only qualifies but therefore enriches our empathy as a learning *katharsis* of understanding.

Keywords: distance, embodied simulation, fear, *Frisson*, mimesis, 'Parergon', pre-dispositions, spectator, subject-object, vulnerable

1. Introduction

We may start with Aristotle and his *Poetics*, where the imitation of an action is complete, with incidents that will arouse pity and fear to accomplish a *katharsis* or moment(s) of learning (see [1]). Notwithstanding Aristotle's basing of this on tragedy, I would claim as an axiom that such responses are a reaction to all forms and genres of mimetic and other performance.

So, when we 'look through another's eyes', we place ourselves in their position or, more uneasily, be thankful we are not in their place—'there but for the grace of…'. When expressed in such a manner (perhaps this, maybe perhaps that), I suggest we are confronting not a simple either-or response, but something more challenging. We see the world from their perspective, but I remain a discrete viewer retaining my own perspective on what they are seeing. As an 'I', we both feel and think, we experience both pity and fear through our enculturated embodied mind and predispositions.

I will be focusing on spectatorship and mimetic instances of actions that arouse pity and fear. The purpose of such mimetics is to show actions such that from our

response we may reflect on these. I see this as the purpose of world 3—the fictional world—showing us world 1—our world we live in, past, present, future—through 'world 2'—the conveying and intermediary techniques of actantial staging that enable the shared experience. This is the simple yet complex experience of the knowing spectator that underpins the state of our knowing suspension of disbelief necessary for watching and listening to...

Drawing on the principle and argument that we are our own personal archive, and that our research and work is (like spectatorship) processual, I will be re-cycling and drawing on my previous ideas and examples, developing these in the light of my own further research (see [2]).

2. The ways we look and feel

Boltanski asks the question concerning pity in our daily experience but with especial respect to the mimetic:

> *...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... [3]*

Parts of an answer to this paradox remains with Bullough's ideas of 'psychical distance' (see [4]), with Brecht who attempts to both engage us and keep us at a questioning distance towards some end, and primarily with ourselves as knowing spectators. We are spectators who know we are watching a fiction, who knowingly accept the artifices of stage and screen, whose knowing imagination accepts, maintains, and overcomes that distance. This is what I refer to as a 'knowing suspension of disbelief' that extends the psychical distance.

It is the as-if realness that allows us to enter the moment, to feel-think/think-feel the pity and fear that comes from recognising, being reminded of the/a real event. What we might understand as a mimetic distance has been overcome by an empathic response.

But distance also mediates the order of our response. A reflex response, a degree of empathy in the moment becomes a reminder in the next: the echoes of our-before experiences. As with our spectating, so empathy is processual as it mixes feelings and sympathy and understanding and questioning and, sometimes, a turning a way.

That real event may be something we know directly or indirectly—I would argue that the response is still the same in that we recognise it as happening to a being who is both other and not-other to us at the same time. As I shall discuss below, 'at the same time' is a fundamental qualification to what we might call 'being among others'.

> *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 [5].*

Thus, 'empathy' is generally used to stand for the 'feeling-in' we associate with Robert Vischer's sense of *Einfühlung.* The 'putting oneself in the place of some other (person or being)' perhaps identifying with, perhaps on the 'there but for the grace

of…' I indicated above with it's now emerging but still shadowy qualification, of (maybe) understanding or (maybe) indifference. We may attribute aspects of our or another's personality to that subject-object other to whom we are equally subject-object, we may anthropomorphise those feelings to a sentient non-human being in ways similar to the recognition-response given to an animated or cartoon figure.

Supporting this position, Freedberg and Gallese propose that the embodied mirror mechanisms and embodied simulation as neural processes lie not only behind empathy but also aesthetic experiences (see [6]). It is in drawing on this (extensive) area of research that I ground my long-standing proposition paraphrased above; that *katharsis* is not dependent on feelings alone; mirror mechanisms and embodied simulation—the embodied mind—allows that we may feel ideas and think feelings.

Such neurocognitive approaches can now take us further into human cognition and empathy. Cuccio and Gallese argue that the pre-motor and parietal areas of the brain are neurally and functionally integrated, and that function conceptually for agent-action-object relations that function conceptually. Such embodied mirror mechanisms allow them to propose an embodied approach to inter-subjectivity and inter-corporeality—Embodied Simulation theory.

> *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 [7].*

What seems common to the inter-subjectivity of subject-object to other subject-object relations, our shared and recognisable responses to others (empathetically and aesthetically)? I suggest these are qualities of the enculturated and embodied, the socially and corporeally inter-twined mind and body.

However, as knowing spectator's, we are caught in a paradox of distance. The distance necessary for a knowing suspension of disbelief may also be a distance from what is being viewed. I would argue that the same mechanisms shape and colour our responses to events in the real world and those we knowingly look at 'as if' real. Just as we may have an aversive reaction, a 'looking or turning away' to an event in the street or in a news report, so we may look away at a scene in play or film that we find too painful to watch or listen to. The intersubjectivity of subject-object to other subject-object become a self-other distinction, a distancing involving the activity of the right supramarginal gyrus region (see [8]).

Our role as spectators is itself to be placed within our position as social and cultural agents. But we are caught in a further paradox; that agency is qualified by the very social and cultural conditions in which we inescapably live. The conditions that complement and play on the same mechanisms of embodied simulation.

The question then becomes one of what role these neuro-cognitive mechanisms play in also underpinning our disengagement, of a negative empathy, of qualified empathy?

3. Preferences and pre-dispositions and prejudices

Qualified agency—the fact of our living among others—shapes our behaviour not only towards empathy and altruism, but also to the opposite of these. We are

not autonomous moral agents but socially and culturally qualified agents; as others impinge on us, so we impinge on them.

Bandura's original concept of 'moral disengagement' looked at eight proposed interrelated cognitive mechanisms for understanding seemingly morally disengaged behaviour. Here, we put to one side our normative and normal moral behaviour to perform a normally immoral act. This is developed into proposals that our moral agency may manifest both as acts of humane behaviour and prospective acts of inhumane behaviour; what I am proposing we understand as 'qualified agency'. Where virtue in the abstract is qualified by our actions in fact when faced with circumstances of threat, fear, and similar manifestations of 'the other' when the other as subject is outweighed by the other as object.

> *Moral actions are the product of the reciprocal interplay of cognitive, affective, and social influence [9].*

Using fMRI scanning techniques, Speirs locates this inter-relationship of cognitive and social influences in the anterior temporal lobe regions. Activity here seems to correlate with emerging prejudicial beliefs towards others that becomes socially expressed (see [10]).

This may be pointed to, in performative terms, in the Milgram and Zimbardo examples touched on below. Moral disengagement moves towards a withholding of empathy comes from a cognitive restructuring through moral justifications, the sanitizing of language and euphemism and making exonerating comparisons; the reciprocal other becomes the dehumanised 'other'. These are discussions of behaviours in real world, and seemingly have little relation to our aesthetic, emotional-psychological and physical responses to the world of the play. I suggest we are returned to Boltanski where 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 working here whether we watch pleasure or conflict or resolution or suffering 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 [11]).

As I have outlined, the same activities of the embodied mind are stimulated by both real and as-if real events with the important qualification that we, as knowing spectators, distinguish between the two within that activity. Hence, our spectatorial, prejudiced response of qualified or withheld empathy to that mimetic, enacted event. Perhaps we can illustrate this through a particular form of mimesis—the virtual violence of video games. The frequency of playing, the framing and presentation of the virtual violence within the world of the game (the ends and means being invoked?—my question), the circumstances of playing seem to have implications for post-playing levels of aggression, cheating, and emotional state (see [12]).

The subject body or *Leib* and object body or *Körper* are concepts not only for my 'I-self', but also allow us to recognise 'like me' bodies both positively and negatively as one subject-object to another as our lived experience. Such Embodied Simulation theory as explored across the writings of Gallese and others rests on the activity of the neurally and functionally integrated pre-motor and parietal areas of the brain: the embodied mind acting within any given and prevailing and paradoxical social circumstances.

To take one aspect of such circumstances as our example, I want to look at the work of Karen Stenner. Her writing focuses on authoritarianism and the pre-disposition that feeds this within any given social & cultural setting. The predisposition is characterised by a need for order and shared values expressed as an aversion to

complexity and diversity. This is not the same as conservatism, discussed as an aversion to change, but a predisposition in a significant minority in any social group or demographic toward order and conformity.

It is not authoritarianism that I want to discuss but the concept of pre-dispositions that, in part, qualify our empathy. My reading of her work is that this is a phylogenetic, evolutionary trait for ensuring safety and security against threats, both known and potential. The safety grounded in a

> *... fundamental and overwhelming desire to establish and defend some collective order of oneness and sameness... [13]*

This may be presented as ideas of kin, of clan in relation to others whom we may recognise as subject such as us but are also object who are not us. We are returned to Aristotle's notion of 'fear' but not mimetically in cause. The basic survival mechanism of 'fear' is at play here, as I shall discuss when looking at the work of Porges later.

In evolutionary terms we can see that for much of human history, most societies have lived in clan groups.

These may and do trade, interact, co-exist at whatever scale but the underlying wariness will remain at the base, underlying level.

> *I distinguish between the fundamental predisposition, its manifold sources, and its attitudinal and behavioural 'products', while specifying the conditions of 'normative threat' (Stenner 1997) under which the predisposition will yield these manifest expressions... [13]*

In other words, the pre-disposition is not determinist given that at a social & personal level we accept difference, diversity, interactions, the acceptance of 'like-me' subject/objects intersubjectivity. We may and can and do have empathy—but this will always be within evolutionary, neurocognitive limits and boundaries. The enduring activities of the brain regions outlined above.

Perhaps as an aside, we can cite the Milgram experiment at Yale in 1961 and the Zimbardo experiment at Stanford Prison in 1971 looking at the manipulation of empathy. The methodology and results of both the experiments may be disputed but I suggest they at least expose uncomfortable questions about the depth and unstable quality of an empathy we take for granted.

Again, in evolutionary terms such taking for granted is a social necessity for our day-to-day living until disrupted by an event or threat.

We are again thrown into the paradox of each as a self-aware individual living with/among others (see Heidegger's concept of *Dasein*) and thus (to re-cycle one of my most used quotes):

> *To state this differently, 'behaviour is always in relation to the behaviour of others – we 'act in relation' [14].*

Of course, but this also allows for those acts arising out of threats that Stenner presents as an uncomfortable truth. To wrench the notion of 'parergon' from art to ethics, we not only live with/among others, but also 'beside' however minimal or miniscule the distance.

If we borrow the phenomenological sense of *phronesis* as not simply 'being-in-the-world' existentially, but also in Aristotle's sense of 'practical knowledge' and action

based on self-knowledge. It is from this position that Gadamer argues we must have a means to understand the world we live in. For Gadamer, these means are the pre-understandings and pre-dispositions that themselves require *Vorurteil* (prejudice). For Gadamer, the positive prejudices—pre-or fore-judgement. These are the situated judgements—that which is tacit, often unacknowledged pre-understanding that places us in the world with which we are engaged, shaped by and shape in turn.

There is no *tabula rasa*, but the preliminary abilities to have a necessary engagement that we are born with and born into.

It is again processual; the active nature of understanding the world are the same means by which we may affect the world, to revise such pre-judgements into different judgements, to build from one to another. As a spectator, I watch a drama of any and all kinds that may add to my judgements, that is one small part—again Aristotle—of the greatest pleasure that is learning and that so allows me to know empathy. A response itself coming from that dynamic of pre-judgements and subsequent, ongoing judgements. Almost counter-intuitively, Gadamer argues for the necessary limits or horizons that allow this processual dynamic, i.e. the boundaries within we have to work. If the visual horizon necessarily delimits the visual field, so epistemic horizons frame what has preceded (history), what is around us (our culture and society), what may be before us (our expectations and projections).

Thus,

> *... horizon is... something into which we move and that moves us. Horizons change for a person who is moving [15].*

Such positive prejudice, such pre-understandings are part of our inherited bodily pre-dispositions necessary for our survival and social being as subject-object for each other. Our embodied mind and emotions, our abilities and practices, the social circumstances and enculturation that act on us and are acted on by us as qualified agents, positively or perversely.

In terms of spectatorship, we interpret; what we are looking at is necessarily predicated on our prejudices, preferences, what we have seen before. It may be unstable—what is my mood? We may be moved unexpectedly from a pre-judgement to a different judgement. What this confirms is the inherent hybrid, messy nature of theatre and by extension drama on television, on the radio, at the cinema, now via streaming.

4. Fears and *Frisson*

Aristotle, in his short piece 'On Dreams', proposes that not only do we have emotional responses to what we perceive but that we may be deceived when excited. Thus, the coward is excited by fear when seeing one who resembles a foe approaching from memory of previous encounters. The emotion of fear may become misleading even if well founded (see [16]). We are taken back to one of Aristotle's *kathartic* emotions, here in a possibly threatening situation rather than from a mimetic experience but grounded in the same embodied foundations.

Following this line of 'fear', I suggest that Porges' work on the polyvagal theory and phylogenetic predispositions & autonomic responses allows for some further embodied grounding (see [17]). The theory argues that the autonomic nervous system responds to both environmental and social signals, as a development of phylogenetic

evolutionary changes. The earliest vertebrate and mammalian survival mechanisms were fight-flight-immobilisation behaviours, but evolution of a second vagal pathway allowed for a better ordering, such that the primitive systems act only when more evolved and social functions fail. To maintain homeostasis, the nervous system responds constantly to the signals around us, in a balance between alert and calm. The evolution of the second pathway allowed for a better regulating of the primitive forms of defence toward co-regulation of states of safety or danger. The basic fight-flight is moderated and mediated by a necessary attuning to face and body signals from the shared neurocognitive mechanisms that allow a necessary co-behavioural and social co-operation.

We cannot live nor survive in a permanent state of alert or stress; an ongoing disruption of the habitual assumption that all subject-object persons will treat each other with reciprocal respect and co-operation. Thus, the evolved vagal regulatory system sits alongside our other evolved-adaptive neurocognitive mechanisms of individual, intersubjective and socially affective responses and actions and behaviours outlined so far. From autonomic and phylogenetic perspectives, we may see how persons may and can be subject-object for each other whilst remaining in states of relative homeostasis in social dispositions.

Before moving to the point of this section, I wish to follow a small but fascinating side path. In a current article on what I understand to be issues for Artificial General Intelligence (AGI), Christov-Moore and colleagues are arguing for the concept of 'vulnerability' to preventing sociopathic robots via artificial empathy (see [18]). Predicated on the relationship between cognitive and affective empathy, we may generally predict and have vicarious feeling of the behaviour of others towards us and thus us to them. This is necessary to avoid harm, to maintain homeostasis, to value these in others and we wish to have these valued for ourselves.

For the authors, such mutual recognition is grounded in the recognition of mutual vulnerability, and the sociopathy that results when the mutuality or recognition fails in action. This is an impairment of affective empathy, of the shared simulated states of others. Based on this fundamental axiom, 'vulnerability' and a homeostatic imperative may be 'built into' such future AGI systems as safeguards against sociopathic robots.

From the point of view of my paper, it is interesting to note that the authors acknowledge the limitations of empathy, especially the affective. In echoes of Stenner and others, issues of bias and preference are raised, with our neocortex size limiting our ability to interact dynamically with only a few others at any one time. Thus, we may add vulnerability to fear and threat as drivers of behaviours that are regulated and moderated by our evolved phylogenetic and social systems.

This long account is driving me toward the suggestion that, as spectators, we experience a safe expression of this vagal threat-fear-vulnerable 'aroused' state in our *kathartic* reactions to all forms of mimetic presentation and other theatre/performance.

To borrow from de Certeau, we may think of theatres as talk, language and action expressing pictures of everyday life. Whether these have been experienced, dreamed of, or felt as ecstasies or desire, I suggest we are circling around fear and threat and vulnerability as a *frisson* that is an almost visceral response to any story told in any form or any configuration. That *frisson* is a form of vicarious empathy or sympathy or turning away from the representation in front of us; a distanced reaction to the represented other of subject-object.

Frisson may be regarded as a 'necessary occasional severing' from a sense of safety but here within bounded circumstances. Here, the forms of fear and vulnerability

become not a potential threat but the root of thrilling, vicarious pleasure: the safety of the *frisson* as a shared, embodied experience. The shared experience that is entered through (the sort-of-safety-of) our densely packed, embodied theatres and journeys of word-scapes and body-scapes. I suggest we enjoy the almost-fear that spectatorship allows; may be for a cheap thrill or for the *katharsis* that may lead to learning.

5. Affordances and the social embodied mind

The environment in which we live and is (re)presented in our forms of drama consists of three fundamentals: the lithosphere, the atmosphere, the hydrosphere, and their interfaces. This environment is comprised of a complex web and network of inter-related niches and habitats that afford what is needed and provided for life; these are the affordances offered. Such niches and habitats may be shaped and modified by cultural and other imperatives (see [2, 11] on *techne* in the theatre). As environments are shared, so we are afforded (and need) social interactions. As discussed above, we perceive others as they perceive us, and we act according to the circumstances as understood and predicted at that moment. These are the social affordances of behaviours one to another, of maintaining social homeostasis.

It is these affordances, and the environments in which they set that are enacted in our dramas and that we knowingly recognise as the forms of pretence that stand for... what we read and interpret. That we bring our empathy or otherwise to bear.

The idea of social affordances has recently been linked to further understanding of the embodied mirror mechanism (see [19, 20]). Rather than individual 'mirror' neurons that mirror others behaviour, it seems to be a network of brain regions linking areas involved with perceptual processes with motor and visceromotor functions. What the authors characterise as the anatomofunctional architecture presents as an evolutionary feature of the mirror mechanism allowing us to anticipate (predict?) rather than simply react to others observed actions. What has been discussed as phylogenetic pre-dispositions thus appear to relate to social interaction and social perception in the links between the visual brain and the parietofrontal regions via the social affordance framework. We might consider that our social brain or embodied mind is always with us.

We are always aware of our own and others' affective states (actual and potential, active or latent); after autonomically triggered emotional responses (visceromotor and neurobehavioral reactions), we may then become aware of the context in which emotional responses are rooted. In a mimetic display of emotions, we place the display alongside any memory or experience we may be reminded of—a qualified spectatorial response.

I put myself 'in their place' to a lesser or greater extent in what I suggest as a qualified alterity of difference and sameness. I do not momentarily 'be' as in a child's playing out in imagination. I am not the other but can identify with or understand or feel for or turn away from as a knowing spectator.

6. Some case studies

For the purposes of this section, I will take 'empathy' as a formal condition whereby we project into and so understand the condition of another or others. I will take 'sympathy' as the capacity to share the feelings of another or others. Perhaps a

little simplistic but I would suggest that the two terms are often confused together, that sympathy can often fall into bathos.

6.1 Two animations

The death of Bambi's mother is often cited as a moment that brings the spectator to tears. What happens: there is a shot, Bambi calls out 'mother', his father appears stating 'your mother can't be with you', then 'Come…my son', turns and walks into the forest. Bambi looks back, then follows the stag into the coming blizzard. They do not touch.

Very differently but using the same technique of coloured cels running as an animation, a baby elephant is taken to see his mother chained by the leg in a barred wagon. Both strain and stretch, the moment is held then, through the bars, the tips of their trunks touch then entwine. It becomes a moment.

A sequence of coloured drawings plays to our pre-disposition to imagine and project, to accept the 'make believe' and to respond as-if real. But I suggest that we have a degree of empathy for Dumbo not there for Bambi (whatever the feelings) in the embodiment of the moment—mother and baby touch. Is it too fanciful to suggest that the closing scene (before the final song) plays with the *pieta* as the mother now cuddles Dumbo in a mother-baby stereotype whilst moving us towards the archetype?

The mother-child archetype is evoked by the physicality of touch, and thus plays to our visceral memories and emotions with understanding.

> *Our experience of fictional worlds, besides being a suspension of disbelief, can thus be interpreted as a sort of 'liberated embodied simulation' [21].*

Given the positions already set out, I would agree with Gallese but qualify the experience as a 'knowing suspension of disbelief'.

6.2 Installations and anti-empathy

For a weekend in October 2023, performers from the Marina Abramović Institute presented 'Takeover', a set of simultaneous performances around and between which the spectators promenaded. Although the body is at the centre of all the pieces, the body was used to make a series of statements that, dramaturgically, were almost anti-empathetic in that we were kept at a distance rather than being psychically distanced spectators. As spectators, we move in and out of this state of distance, always knowing we are watching a performance, yet momentarily entering the world of the play. Here, I was kept at a disengaging distance, with no invitation to enter but invited simply to watch.

Two pieces ('Glorious Past' and 'Nobody') did embody stillness and thus time to reflect on the images. But something more emerged from this stillness that touches on another of our themes here; that of vulnerability. The two still, present figures made themselves vulnerable that we could recognise, not as a threat, but as standing for our own vulnerability as they trusted us with their vulnerability. In this, we also become spectators of and for each other; we watch and are watched, look and are looked at perhaps sharing the unspoken unease at the spectacle of vulnerability.

Perhaps these are an echo, albeit less extreme, of Abramović's own piece 'Rhythm O' (1974) where members of the audience were invited to use various instruments/implements from the table on her own body. Accounts of the performance tell of the

use becoming more extreme, as vulnerability became an invitation to act in ways we otherwise reject. Again, we are drawn back to some of the uncomfortable questions at least posed by the Milgram and Zimbardo experiments. Why would a spectator take the opportunity to inflict pain for their own and other onlookers' pleasure: another aspect of *frisson*?

6.3 Anna Fierling and Mildred Hayes

At the end of Brecht's 'Mother Courage and her Children', Anna hitches herself to her cart with a simple stage direction 'tugging at her cart'. Any production has a choice as we hold our breath: does she move the cart and thus we are released from the moment as a moving forward? Does she tug and the cart does not move and so we are held in the moment as physical immobility?

If the former, I suggest we are given a *kathartic* release of sympathy (and risking sentimentality). If the latter, we are given a *kathartic* release of empathy, of a difficult understanding of her condition brought upon herself. The horror of denying her own son, the 'silent scream' seen only by the audience as she cannot openly weep, the putting business first to be placed alongside a tough tenderness when squatting by her dead daughter, Kattrin allow an understanding of what survival means and takes. Our understanding permits or demands a qualified empathy of pity and fear.

In a more recent character, we see another woman who seems to deny warmth yet is closest to Anna in the understanding that challenges us. McDonagh's *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* (2017) presents us with a similar 'Mother Courage' figure. Mildred is unlikeable, unsympathetic whose manner and behaviour is as flawed as Fierling's, who never-the-less gains our respect for her craggy, spikey courage. Yet like Anna, her attitudes and obstinacy both drive her and almost deny her endearance to us. She is not likeable but forces an admiration for her refusal to give up her search for justice.

Mildred moves on, driving toward a moral uncertainty of what her actions might be.

In both cases, Anna's straining immobility, Mildred's taking to the highway, we are left with a *katharsis* of pity and fear through uncertainty. Both challenging figures whom we may not like but from whom we learn through a qualified empathy of understanding. 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 [22].*

7. Questions and conclusion (of a kind)

As I hope to have outlined, empathy is predicated on understanding another or others from my enculturated pre-dispositions and phylogenetic, embodied social mind.

I would argue that I cannot 'see through another's eyes' but I can see through my eyes that, by the mechanisms of embodied simulation, are the same as the other in forms of mutual looking. This is qualified alterity as I cannot be the other, but I can place myself momentarily in then next to their situated position.

This complexity is outlined, for example, by Edith Stein with her five layers of affectivity; the felt evaluations that shape our experienced apprehension of the other subject-object like us (see Stein [23]). Does such a phenomenological position allow us to understand empathy as a sensual, perceptual, emotional, affective, and cognitive shared lived experience of motivations and actions?

Is empathy a form of social habit and pre-dispositions? Moments of empathy partially located in the structuring habits of perception, appreciation, and action that Bourdieu characterised as 'habitus'? Do our social and personal enculturated routines shape a pre-disposition toward degrees of sympathy and empathy between low- and high-level responses?

It may appear that our phylogenetic pre-dispositions & autonomic responses mitigate against complex empathy. But the evolution of the second vagal pathway allows for a better regulating of the primitive forms of defence toward co-regulation of states of safety or danger. As I have argued, the basic fight-flight response is moderated and mediated by a necessary attuning to face and body signals. The shared perceptual, affective, neurocognitive mechanisms allow a necessary co-behavioural and social co-operation. Does this make empathy a strange tension between preparation to co-operate and preparation to be wary; thus, the qualified empathy that is our existential experience?

Thus, empathy happens despite the 'primitive', evolved pre-dispositions, as the inherited social and cultural dispositions acting on and with embodied simulation. Empathy is not a simple feeling but part of a qualified understanding of another's position. As spectators of mimesis and other theatre performance, we extend that understanding to situations of make-believe that stand for the world we experience directly and indirectly.

As a spectator, I place myself beside the character or performer or other; I 'am' them but not them as the psychical distance allows me to understand, to empathise or not to whatever degree.

This is the *kathartic* 'pleasure' coming from pity and fear grounded in our embodied mind. The learning empathy from examples presented especially by acts of mimetics consequently presumed to be (as if) real. Perhaps a further question presents itself as a challenge for another time and discussion. Once I/we have felt empathy, have projected out from ourselves towards another, should some action follow, some practical 'so next'?

For the moment, I suggest that empathy (here but not only) in the theatre, which is itself in the world, is a set of juxtapositions. Of *Einfühlung* or 'feeling in' with understanding or complex experience of 'other' with the 'parergon' or placing beside or against with a challenge to some further action in the world. We are taken back to Aristotle and Brecht.

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