

Article

Re-Affecting the Stage: Affective Resonance as the Function of the Audience

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Abstract: This article uses an affect theory framework to show how the audience has the power to intensify the circulation of affect in the theatrical encounter, and to impact on the unique felt quality of the performance. Assessment is made of the vital function of affect to performance through the images, sensations and expressions that performers use to describe audience engagement. Intermittently, from 2010 to 2012, the author embarked on practice-led research to find out how performers describe the experience of being on stage with regard to their engagement with an audience. Conversations were recorded with more than 50 performers (mainly actors and dancers) from the USA and Brazil, as well as Portugal and other European countries.

Keywords: affect theory; circulation; performance; audience; performer; re-affecting

1. Introduction

During or after a show, it is common to hear performers commenting on the audience: sometimes the audience was “with them”, while at other times it felt aloof; sometimes the performer feels that they grabbed the audience—had it in “the palm of their hands”—while at other times they feel that they lost it. One could say that this jargon is merely an oversimplified and closed professional communication that reduces the complexity and nuances of experience. Yet it is intriguing how widely such expressions are distributed across countries that share the inheritance of the Western theatrical paradigm. This fact points not only to the cultural conditioning of felt experience but also to a specific kind of knowledge that performers develop on stage to engage with the audience. In what way do actors, dancers and performers know that the audience was “with them”? How do they know they had it in “the palm of their hands” or, on the contrary, that they lost it?

Under an apparent banality, jargon expressions reflect like tiny crystals on a deeper dimension of live performance, illuminating a pathway into the felt experience of being on stage and performing for an audience. All examples refer to experiences in a proscenium theatre, unless otherwise stated. I am interested in understanding audience engagement through the lens of affect, to disclose the specific, embodied knowledge that performers develop on stage and to rethink the function of the audience in live performance. An affect theory framework shows how the audience has the power to intensify the circulation of affect in the theatrical encounter, impacting the unique felt quality of the performance. This article assesses the vital function of affect to performance through the images, sensations and expressions that performers use to describe audience engagement.

Intermittently, from 2010 to 2012, I embarked on practice-led research to find out how performers describe the experience of being on stage with regard to their engagement with an audience. I have recorded conversations with more than 50 performers (mainly actors and dancers) from the USA and Brazil, as well as Portugal and other European countries. All interview quotes in this article are taken

from this research [1]. At first, I thought that the best moment to collect such description would be at the end of a performance, while impressions and sensations were fresh. In the first part of this phase, I asked performers to write their feedback and, in a second part, to speak directly. Contrary to my expectations, the timing of these interviews proved to be unsuitable—the adrenaline of the post-show moment was too distracting. My alternative approach was to meet performers at some later time for a conversation during which they tried to recall from memory different performing situations. These conversations typically lasted from 20 minutes to one hour. In order to elicit a natural stream of expression from the performers, I closely followed linguistic and bodily cues. I had also prepared a list of questions, such as: How do you sense a live audience? Do you feel it in your body? Can you describe it? What does a “bad” or a “good” audience feel like? How does it feel when the audience arrives on opening night? What do you receive? How does it affect your performance? How do you know what you know? Interestingly, nearly all performers hesitated, held back and resisted translating experience into words. “I don’t know; it is hard to put it in words. It is something you feel”, they would say. A loose protocol proved to be the right choice, as it gave room for performers to follow the bodily traces impressed in their memory. Lastly, I have privileged the words of performers rather than those of spectators, for two reasons: performers have access to the impact of several different audiences and they also apprehend audience engagement as a collective process. While the average spectator experiences a production only once, performers have access to the vast array of possible felt differences that each performance brings forth. In addition, the spectator cannot have an overall awareness of his or her impact on the collective process in which he or she is participating. Though influenced by a collective ongoing process, each audience member’s awareness of experience is individual.

During my conversations with performers, a “sound-felt” embodied knowledge—a kind of knowledge that consists of listening to rhythms felt as intensities in the body—emerged to define the quality of felt experience that, to their minds, could not be entirely captured by words. Instead of considering such knowledge untranslatable, I take up Teresa Brennan’s argument in *The Transmission of Affect* [2]: the transmission of affect is felt through the senses in the body, so it is a social process that has physiological consequences. Although affect might not be perceived while it is being transmitted or received, it can be discerned. Perhaps, also, though the common usage of words is not enough to grasp the nuances of felt qualities of experience for each person, there are other means of disclosing these experiences, outside of words [3]. I pursued an investigation of the particular choice of words, figures of speech and tactical expressions used by performers in order to chart out a common semantic ground. Four clear strategies emerged:

- an inter-sensory vocabulary
- rhythmic metaphors
- onomatopoeia, and
- bodily gestures

In the following pages, I will discuss these findings, suggesting that performers’ embodied sound-felt knowledge foreshadows the function of the audience in performance as an affective resonance, re-affecting the stage again and again.

2. The Performativity of Affect

In the Western theatrical paradigm, the audience is a premise of the theatrical event. Without the audience, there would be no performance. According to the same paradigm, the staged performance event aims to affect the audience, traditionally through emotional effects. Throughout the 20th century, this conception has been challenged in both artistic practices and theoretical fields. On the one hand, Futurist, Dadaist and surrealist avant-garde experiments questioned the status quo of the audience, while Brechtian political theatre encouraged a critically engaged spectator, and performance art disrupted the place of the spectator (inviting him or her to experience and intervene in live events). Further participatory practices claim a political empowerment of the audience and postdramatic theatre

gave rise to an autonomous and self-conscious spectator. On the other hand, since the 1960s, semiotic approaches have disclosed the spectator as an interpreter of signs [4], while anthropological approaches see the spectator as a participant in the transformative ritual of theatre [5], and feminist approaches have critically debated the ideological and cultural constructions of the audience as a unified, collective entity [6]. Approaches that stress co-presence as a necessary feature of live events [7] and others, which investigate the neuroscience of spectatorship [8,9], as well as sensorial and affective centered perspectives [10–14], have contributed to rethinking the multi-layered and complex dimensions of audience engagement.

However, the focus of attention has mainly been directed to one-way theatrical effects, or to the different ways through which the audience can be engaged, activated and transformed. I propose here that the audience re-affects the stage, and will investigate this assertion by examining empirical descriptions of audience engagement provided by interviews with performers, dancers and actors. Elaborating on this data allows for the development of a specific vocabulary that can be used to name affective phenomena arising from artistic practice, and it highlights the performativity of affect as part of the labor of an audience during performance. Thinking through the lens of affect makes it possible to disclose the political, ethical and aesthetic dimensions of performance encounters. The politics of the affect of performance is revealed through the ways in which performance conditions and/or potentiates affect circulation, defines the ethical premises of the encounter, and the ethics of being with another in a shared space and time. It defines the degree to which performance is permeable to the impact of the audience. This approach further highlights the political force of such impact, defined as an affective resonance, challenging notions of activity and passivity associated both with participatory projects and the traditional locus of the spectator.

“Emotion” is a term that pervades the Western theatre model. It is mainly associated with the effects produced by performance on the audience. I prefer the term “affect”, which indicates both the broader scope of felt phenomena and the present theoretical currency of the word as it is used in articulating models of transmission and circulation of affect in social and cultural spaces. I will be using “affect” to refer to the sensitive charges or felt intensities carried by words, sensations, thoughts and emotions that circulate in social spaces. Affect is a concrete, felt phenomenon of social atmospheres at work in the shifting “sensorial and affective continuum” shared by performers and audience [11]. Considered as moving particles that can be transmitted and intensified, affect permeates the contact zone that connects or keeps a distance between both performers and audience, depending on the particular performance’s politics of affect.

The theoretical elaboration of this research is indebted to the work of Sarah Ahmed and Teresa Brennan on models of affect circulation—on the performative features of affect [15] and on the notions of transmission as a social process that has consequences on bodies [2], respectively. Both of these are seminal authors in the conceptual field of affect theory. This research has also been influenced by Deborah Kapchan’s investigation of sound knowledge and sound writing [16]. In addition, to further elaborate on affective rhythms and intensities, I will use Julian Henriques’ concept of vibration as rhythmic patterns [17] and Daniel Stern’s concept of vitality affects [18].

3. “The Audience Was There”

More often than not, one can hear performers claiming that “the audience was there tonight” during the show or that “the audience was with us”. What do they refer to? Where exactly is “there”? In the Western paradigm of the proscenium theatre, “being there” means to be both in a distant (as opposed to “here”) and undetermined (as opposed to being physically determined) place, traditionally understood as a “fictional place” ([19], p. 29). In this sense, “being there” requires creating a fictional world that both actors and spectators have access to. Theatre represents fictional spaces, times and characters; performative practices present bodies and actions in the here and now. In both the fictional and the concrete places inhabited by the performers, the poietic creation of an expanded and multiple space—where actors and spectators can enter and leave—is at stake. One can call it

the place of the poietic event, where the connection/disconnection between audience and actors is established. There, in the poietic event—whether a fictional representation or a world performed before an audience—is where the felt experience of the event unfolds.

The fact that theatrical encounters require the presence of an audience does not necessarily mean that an encounter as such will happen. Perhaps paradoxically, the encounter in a shared space and time is the condition of possibility for both connection and disconnection, meeting and confronting. One needs to be there physically in order to be able to “be there” affectively. The kind of encounter that happens at the poietic level is conditioned and potentiated by the affect politics of each performance. The circulation of affect and the permeability of the performance to the impact of the audience in the moment of the event can be more or less pre-determined. As André Lepecki reminds us, encountering a work of art happens on a “meta-plane”, where the mundane meets the miraculous; where daring to make the impossible means to wholeheartedly embrace unplanned and undetermined possibilities of difference, conflict and accordance (with *cor* or heart) ([20], p. 118). Every performance exceeds what was previously planned, but welcoming the unplanned as an artistic choice perhaps assures an ethical and political commitment to the conditions formed for the encounter.

The idea of a distanced and indeterminate place where encounter can occur resonates with philosopher Jacques Rancière’s notion of performance as an autonomous entity—a “third element”—that comes between the artist’s idea of his or her work and the sensation of the spectator ([21], pp. 14–15). In his critique of the passive spectator, Rancière distinguishes the distance between the artist and the spectator—where the production of effects is prevalent—from the distance inherent to the performance itself—foreign to both. The work in itself is ungraspable; it remains distanced and foreign in its entirety. That is why actors can be surprised when confronted with facets of a production that appear only when performing in front of an audience—for instance, scenes or characters that have a comic side, dramatic moments that emerge where they were not planned, etc. Due to the existence of a place “there”, a “third element”, it becomes possible for Rancière to imagine an emancipated spectator and to elaborate on the anonymous common power of the “equality of intelligence” ([21], p. 17).

For Rancière, the emancipation of the spectator consists of a capacity “exercised by an unpredictable interplay of association and dissociations” that allow for different worlds of interpretations and translations ([21], p. 17). These competences of interpreting and translating empower all spectators ([21], p. 17). One could argue, however, that emancipation, rather than being purely cognitive, also involves an affective dimension. The “shared power of the equality of intelligence” is intertwined with another intelligence and another power: the performativity of affect ([21], p. 17). If the work invites the audience to a space of encounter pervaded with tensions, intensities and affects, then the work demands a reassessment of its affective emancipatory power. Together and collectively, each spectator participates in the social and unpredictable process of setting affects in circulation and intensifying them in the performance. The emancipation of the spectator can be found in the performative power of doing something to the performance in the place “there”, which has consequences on the felt quality of the potential encounter with the work. A performer can only know if the audience is “there” or is “with” them if they (the performer) consider the felt experience of “being there”. The performers know it because they feel it. Paradoxically, the more a performer engages with what happens “there”, the closer he or she might be to the audience; in other words, the sharper the sensation of “being with” the audience might be.

4. Being with the Audience

Actors, dancers and performers claim to know when the audience is “with them”. The expression refers to how they feel the audience through sensations of proximity and distance, heightened bodily states, tensions and fluctuations. The use of showbiz jargon but also specific phrases, vocabulary and images that come up during conversations highlight a sensorial and affective semantic field anchored in felt experience. Referring to a specific evening at the Single (Antwerp, Belgium) where she presented

her piece *CPAU*—*get ready*, choreographer and dancer D. D. Dorviller shared how a deep heaviness could change into a sense of attentiveness:

I didn't know the audiences there and it was in a very difficult space [the auditorium]. During the duet, it felt almost like they were resentful. And I kept thinking to myself: it's because they can't see me, it's because they don't really understand what I am saying and it's OK, they are gonna get it. I just had to calm down and not respond to this negative thing. They don't know. I felt this kind of heaviness but then halfway through, in the third part [choreographic quartet in unitarts], they started to move and laugh a little bit until one big laugh! Then they sort of relaxed and they enjoyed this very strange dance. By the end, when they were clapping, you could really feel that they were very happy. There were different ways of reading it: I could see the audience's faces, they were clapping, I could make eye contact, I could see smiles, I could hear voices. It felt like they were with us and attentive [1].

Actors and performers know what they know because they feel connected to (or disconnected from) the audience, as they feel the attention of the audience (or the lack of it). As we will see, these aspects of felt experience are vital to the unfolding of a performance.

4.1. Intersensorial Vocabulary

On one day, performers might find the audience energetic, welcoming or appreciative; the next day, they may find it stiff, critical or disconnected, even if they are performing the same production. Some performers emphasize the importance of listening to the audience, of adapting quickly so they can take the spectators along with the performance; others stress that feeling the "temperature of the room" is crucial, preferring what they term a "warm" audience to a "cold" one. Some are sensory-appreciative of the tangible qualities of the audience ("velvety", "a smoothness"); others feel a physical empowerment, fuelled by the adrenaline of heightened physiological states. Sometimes the audience brings a totally new insight about the rehearsed piece. For example, North American actor Jim Fletcher (who works with the New York City Players, among others) was manifestly surprised in the opening night of the production *Gatz*, by Elevator Repair Service:

When we did *Gatz*, we worked on that for several months—that way we could get through the entire novel...The night we did it in front of an audience, it was such a revelation. We had no idea, first of all, that it was funny. Who knew *The Great Gatsby* was funny?...We didn't know. When you go to the show, it's very simple and undeniable...it's hilarious, it's a riot, aside from being a tragedy...but we did not know until we did it in front of an audience...Aside from the power of it, why didn't we know that? Why did it take a room full of people to understand that? [1]

These are some of the words and phrases used by performers to tell the difference between a "good" and a "bad" performance. If a performance is going well for the performers, then they claim to feel it through sensations of proximity and/or connection; if it is going badly, they feel it as a sense of distance and/or disconnection—like a sense of expansion or contraction (physically empowered or drained). As Australian dancer and performer Anton Skrzypiciel puts it, "When you feel like a show is going badly, it's almost like somebody deflated a balloon, like all the air left. Whereas when people are engaged, you do feel like the air pressure is slightly more intense on you—it surrounds you, that intensity" [1]. These encompassing sensations might often be anchored in imagination and in the primary motor sensory experience of the body, which are crucial to processes of meaning making as much as for understanding abstract concepts. Hence, it comes as no surprise that an intersensorial vocabulary is brought forth to describe and make sense of the felt experience of being on stage, which is different for each performance. One could say that the performers' knowledge of audience engagement comes from ways of feeling, which is part of their training.

Performers are expected to consider how they feel and consequently to recognize how connected they are to the audience. Some define such connection as an “electrical” one, while others define it as a “kinesthetic” one. Terry O’Connor, founding member of UK company Forced Entertainment, argues that Quizoola’s open structure offers more possibilities for an open circulation between audience and actors: “If there was a way of diagrammatically representing the audience and their effect on us, and the effect on the audience on how that effects the moment-to-moment delivery of the piece, Quizoola’s the most open to that. It’s the most open circuit of electricity going between the performers and the audience, and around and around...” [1] Likewise, for Ari Fliakos, North American theatre actor and long-time collaborator with the Wooster Group: “Something has to be moving through everything in order to make that feeling of connection; there has to be, for lack of a better word, an ‘energy’ that has to be passing through” [1]. Thus, the audience takes part in the process, intensifying the unique, felt quality of the performance. Permeability to the atmosphere in the room or in the street—a “radical connection” [1], in the words of Brazilian performer and theoretician Eleonora Fabião—is key to recognizing the territory and navigating through it. For Fabião, the body on stage is open to a state of flux as an expanded body blurring the borders of the skin, deeply connecting to rhythms of the environment, adjusting and readjusting to a movement of sensations in a shared time and space. As her most recent series has taken place in public streets, the relational space of engagement requires an expansion of the “scenic body”, as she calls it:

I was trying to realize how to create a scenic body, which is expanded; it is a body of an open sensoriality, a body radically connected and radically receptive. The decisive shift [from wanting to work in a theatre room to wanting to work in the streets] happened when I clearly realized—based on my psychophysical experience—that it was not about being creative; instead, it was about being receptive. Then, I stopped making propositions. I started to look at what the world proposed to me... [1].

Yet, to be permeable can be dangerous. Like a gust of wind, the feel of the room can throw a performer off balance. Affective atmospheres are like the weather, says Tony Torn, North American theatre actor and director, well known for collaborating with Richard Foreman and Reza Abdoh: “You are on a tightrope and it [the performance] depends on how strong the wind is” [1]. Hence the performer has hardly any choice but to feel completely immersed by intensities of atmosphere that can be so powerful that the performer sometimes fears losing control. This is why the audience is sometimes portrayed as a force that can take performers higher than any other experience but—as with an addiction—threatens with the possibility of sucking the performers’ energy away, even if they do feel connected. Despite the dramatic touch, these images should be taken seriously if we want to assess the vital role of affect in audience engagement.

What the performers claim about connection also entails another danger: projection. As Jim Fletcher puts it: “It’s more like listening to it [the audience], because if you get too committed to the idea of connection you start to presume about what’s going on with them. [Instead] it has to be an open connection, listening the whole time. And that means, all the time.” [1] Despite the dangers of subjective presumption and misinterpretation, establishing a connection—open to miracles as much as to catastrophes—is considered vital to performers for the unfolding of the event. The balance between reading the audience and projecting what the audience is thinking, understanding or feeling is delicate. Although the performer has to listen to the audience, he or she also has to be grounded in his or her own body. The audience can impact in a negative way if the performer’s focus is on “feeding” the audience according to what he or she thinks/projects instead of on moving back and forth through the sensitive flow. Connection is perceptible by the senses and requires a focused listening of the audience—a “whole-body” listening of affective rhythms and intensities that circulate in the room. The model developed by Julian Henriques in his analysis of a dancehall scene in Kingston (Jamaica) can help to make this point clear. To Henriques, affect is expressed through rhythm and transmitted like a sound wave, with similar distinctive features (frequency, intensity, timbre). Rhythmic frequencies, he claims, are felt haptically as intensities in a “whole-body vibrotactile experience” ([17], p. 78)—a

listening that encompasses all the senses. Likewise in the theatre, performers embrace a whole-body experience that allows for a listening to patterns of rhythm and intensities—hence for a negotiation of tension and attention in moving and being moved by others. What do they listen to?

The gap between the audience and the stage is filled with tension in so far as the audience attention that actors recognize sustains the connection between both sides. Performers listen to attention as connection in its multiple layers, tensions and miscommunication, as patterns of rhythms and intensities that intensify their experience and, to a certain extent, influence their performance. They listen to attention, but this is attention in a “bigger sense, attention as listening”, claims Kaneza Schaal, theatre actress and long-time collaborator of the New York-based company Elevator Repair Service [1]. Attention carries affect through the senses, impacting on the bodies of performers, manifesting in a “felt quality of stillness”, in states of quietness, in audible and non-audible reactions (but ones that can still be listened to) [1]. Frank Vercruyssen, theatre actor and co-founder of the Belgian company T.G. Stan, feels attention as a stillness so concrete and material that it could be touched:

The level of attention one gives to what is happening on stage provides a certain quality of stillness that makes it possible for a performer to know whether one is with him or her or not. Therefore, to be with the performers means to embrace a state of tension...it’s very “tangible”—it’s all I can find as a word [1].

Also referred to as the “quality of silence” [1], this tangible state is one of connection/attention. Many performers argue that there is a kind of silent audience that is felt as stiff and distanced (indicating audience disconnection) and another type of silent audience, felt as stillness or suspension (indicating audience connection). Such connection emerges as a productive state induced by receiving attention: it is tangible and draws the audience closer to the performers, as if attention could, as Anton Skrzypiciel explains, “feed off itself and reveal more” [1]. Thus “being with” the actor or performer means encouraging and sustaining a state of tension, as in attention’s etymological sense of “giving heed to something”—an inclination of the senses towards something.

This quality of attention shares some features with Teresa Brennan’s concept of “living attention” ([2], p. 40). In her seminal theory of the transmission of affect, Brennan posits that living attention is a material, biological and energetic force that creates affective attachments with the world. By animating affect, attention makes affect powerful. According to Brennan’s theory, living attention is the premise of affect transmission and the condition for its perception and discernment. The senses, Brennan further maintains, are the vehicles for the circulation of living attention. Thus, intersensorial vocabulary used by performers makes clear how they know what they know—that is, how they feel living attention through heightened sensorial states.

Like the senses of performers, living attention from the audience to the stage is heightened. Given that audience engagement is part of a systemic relation of live performance ecologies—as Baz Kershaw has fully demonstrated [22]—tension produced by giving attention (giving energy and power to affects that circulate in the room, influencing the performance) is an intensive force that activates the planned and rehearsed structure of the production (the score). Such forces produce an invisible performativity in the unfolding of the performance. What I am suggesting here (and will come back to later in the article) is that the audience has a function in the performance: it activates, intensifies and amplifies the circulation of affect in the room through an affective resonance, a mode of tension and attention that impacts the felt quality of the performance in as much as it impacts the bodies of performers.

4.2. *Rhythmic Metaphors*

While frequently used by performers, metaphors of rhythm elaborate further on felt qualities of the performance from their point of view. Significantly, these metaphors stand for a rhythmic movement that is sensed in a back-and-forth movement pattern. Many performers describe their connection with the audience as “an ocean” of blowing and sucking forces, a felt breath, a wave that

moves back and forth or “a pulsing heart” [1]. Every image entails a paced movement: back and forth, inhaling and exhaling, as if following the heartbeats. Brazilian choreographer and performer Marcela Levi feels the impact of the audience “a bit like the ocean...Sometimes it is very agitated and you sense that. It seems not to get to you but you are receiving those waves. Sometimes it is still, at other times it is super-rough or with strong currents” (my translation) [1]. A sense of instability emerges from these words and pictures, revealing the stage as an indistinct sliding floor where the performer has to learn how to move with the audience while following a script. In the specific case of Vera Mantero’s performance *Until the Moment when God Is Destroyed by the Extreme Exercise of Beauty*, in which Marcela Levi performs, the script addresses directly the give-and-take movement of the audience, the two groups that keeps meeting “for centuries”. She gives an example of the impact of the exchange on her performance:

It had to do with the fact that all six performers were lined up at the front stage, facing the audience. We were facing them the whole time. If I was unlucky enough to have a horrible person sitting in front of me, someone hating it and desperate to leave the room...Sometimes we could read in the spectators’ faces what they were thinking: “I am not getting it. What are you getting at?” Then one person starts laughing, bullying us, in a way...and then I feel...I remember sometimes I would laugh with the person...we would laugh together and then it is not bullying anymore because the spectator was already inside. Bullying shifted to affection. It is a conversation: you call people to a place, the person takes you to another and then you react to it in some way... [1].

Interestingly, the impact of the audience in this performance resulted in a radical change after the first presentations at the premiere (Brest) and at the Festival d’Automne (Paris) in 2007. Instead of moving around, facing the four different fronts of the stage, the line of six performers became fixed facing the auditorium during the entire performance. Having realized that it was extremely difficult to engage the audience in a movement of affect, choreographer Vera Mantero decided to make this change, which benefited the perception of felt rhythms and intensities.

“Give and take” is a game of power. Performer and choreographer Miguel Gutierrez understands such an exchange of forces as a shifting landscape:

I had the experience of doing that same solo [“Retrospective Exhibitionist”] once in Russia and it was an incredible performance because people were yelling at me, they were laughing at me. It was like a punk show, kind of: they were heckling! And it was hard but it was awesome. It became this aggressive thing but I was excited, kind of, by it, because it was attention. Like: they’re here, they may be mad but they’re fucking here ...It was like the pasture, it was exciting because the mountains are forming [between you and the people who are watching you] but they’re forming and they’re dropping, and they’re forming and they’re dropping and we’re all running around, so in a way, now, it’s a game...but we’re in the game together so it’s actually OK that there’s conflict and it’s actually exciting that there’s conflict because I’m not forcing and it’s not a passive experience...That piece allows that to happen. Not all the pieces are like that; some pieces are much more fragile, and it would be very dangerous if that happened. It would maybe destroy the fabric, because sometimes the fabric is very, yeah, it’s like a very beautiful dress made of fine material [1].

Thus the movement of going back and forth, either as the beat of the waves or a landscape of mountains forming and dropping, re-affects the performers in subtle though intense ways.

Likewise, breath reveals rhythm, suggesting a moving together with the same beat. Breath shows that performers not only listen to afford the audience its own breath, but also that they attune themselves to the back-and-forth rhythm. The physiological process of breathing implies an exchange of gases with the atmosphere. Audience engagement generates an exchange of affect in the same way, so the atmosphere nurtures and energizes the performance. For Portuguese theatre actor António Fonseca, it comes as a global feeling:

You have something that works, one could say, in the emotional sense, in which the fundamental element is breathing. And I really mean breathing: inhale, exhale...Of course it is not literal, but it is having 100 or 150 people in the room and feeling that they share a common breath. That is the emotional side. [He oscillates his upper body back and forth.] It is something the body does too: breathing, a kind of suspension that is and it isn't physical. It is a more global feeling (my translation) [1].

Such "global feeling" resonates with what Daniel Stern proposed as the felt quality of experience engaged through "vitality affects". These are a distinctive mode of global and abstract apprehension of rhythms and intensities. Stern defines vitality affects as "dynamic, kinetic qualities of feeling that distinguish animate from inanimate and that correspond to the momentary changes in feeling states involved in the organic processes of being alive" ([18], p. 57). Vitality affects are experienced as dynamic shifts or patterns of change in us and in others ([18], p. 156), and the meaning is conveyed by the expression of the affect. Although Stern's findings are based on modes of communication specific to mothers and children (audio-tactile), he suggests that these affects encompass all our life experience. Vitality affects capture *how* we do and say things, not *what* we do and say: minuscule and constant physiological shifts, subtle movement and sensations that only the body can know in its patterns of rhythm and intensities. Likewise, audience engagement unfolds as rhythmic patterns and shifting intensities, weaving the felt quality of the performance, informing the performers' whole-body listening experience and awareness. Most appropriately, performers use rhythmic metaphors to express such felt quality.

4.3. Onomatopoeia and Bodily Gestures

Stern further elaborates that only a kinetic vocabulary—such as "rushes", "explosive/implosive", "bursting", "restraint"—can express vitality affects ([18], p. 54). Perhaps not by chance, performers use a similar kind of vocabulary—kinetic and cross-sensory—to describe the way they feel the attention of the audience and the dynamics of the atmosphere created by the audience. This is particularly clear in their use of onomatopoeia.

Portuguese theatre and cinema actor Ivo Canelas provides us with a fine example:

I was in a production in which my stage blocking, at a given moment, was to look back and face actress Teresa Roby: PPRSSSSHHIU (*sound of explosion*)! Whatever happened during the performance, I yearned for that moment. It was a kind of fuel deposit tank in the middle of the show. I looked at her and...FUUUUAAAAHHHH. And then one day I looked at her and not only those eyes were there but also they were a thousand times more intense. The tank exploded (my translation) [1].

Another remarkable image is one from Karen Kandel, North American theatre actor with Mabou Mines: "Reaching out and talking up there and out there, it makes me feel like I am huge [emphasizing with bodily gestures]. It's emotional..." [1].

Like vitality affects, both onomatopoeia and bodily gestures echo felt rhythms of the experience. They carry a sense/significance of what is felt. When actors, dancers or performers try to describe states of tension and connection, they find in onomatopoeia the resonance of the quality of experience that they want to express. How does the performer feel? Like this: PAAAAAHHHHH, PRRRRSSSSHHHHIU, WINGWINGWING, FYUUUUHAAA. As linguistic phenomena and figure of speech, onomatopoeia mimetically reproduces sounds of the world verbally, hewing as closely as possible to how it is perceived by the senses. Thus the dynamic features of onomatopoeia are also its expressive and significant features.

Contrary to what one might expect, performers generally use onomatopoeia to reproduce a felt experience rather than a sound event: the clapping of the audience, the level of intensity and rhythms in the room, the gaze of an actor feeding another as an explosion or the power or weakness of connection with the audience. They express the dynamics of felt experience, unlocking impressions

kept in the body. It is interesting to note that performers tend to consider this experience as part of an emotional engagement, but they hardly name emotions or feelings, like joy or sadness. For Kandel, what is emotional is the experience of feeling “huge” and as much as for Fonseca an “emotional side” points to the repetition of rhythmic patterns [1]. What the performers seem to be referring to are aspects of felt experience, rather than the emotional word in the categorical objectified sense or the meaning of such experience. They refer to how they feel, or develop the felt quality of each performance while performing, which has a meaning on its own, independent of the emotions in the performed score or acted text. In other words, they articulate their embodied felt-knowledge.

Lastly, words are accompanied with bodily gestures. While hardly aware of how they were using their bodies to express a felt experience, and without a clear intention of underlining verbal speech, performers allowed gestures speak for them during our conversations. While they were talking or when words seemed to fail them, their bodies replicated movements—as if recalling the memory of the experience had awakened a cellular vibration. Activated by memory, rhythmic back-and-forth gestures with their hands, arms or upper body arose to cue the verbal. When I would draw their attention to those gestures, performers were often surprised, but they ended up wondering if those gestures might in fact be the best descriptions that they could come up with. Bodies mimicked rhythmic patterns of audience engagement, as if magnifying it, as if the movement of amplification and intensification of affect remains inscribed in the body and can be unlocked by memory. This movement throbs in the bodies of performers as an echo of intensity—as “sea tides” (my translation), according to Miguel Seabra, theatre actor and director with Portuguese company Teatro Meridional [1].

5. Re-Affecting the Stage

Not only do these empirical findings show an embodied sound-felt knowledge that performers develop and practice each time they stand before (behind, around, alongside) an audience, but they also indicate how the audience re-affects the stage and how that shifts the felt quality of the performance. I am arguing that the audience has a vital function in performance: one of affective resonance that consists of an intensification and amplification of the circulation of affect. Performers feel and listen to such intensification as patterns of rhythm and felt intensities, with a whole-body listening—that is, through the felt experience of the encounter with the audience. Having elaborated elsewhere the concept of affective resonance and how it impacts the aesthetic materiality of the performance [23], I would like to highlight here its political and ethical relevance.

Regardless of the degree of actual influence on the performer’s delivery, the audience impacts the unfolding performance repeatedly and unpredictably. It happens again and again, both through what is brought forth by the stage and in addition to planned events. The audience re-affects the performance because it moves together with what happens while it is being generated. Yet the conditions granted to the encounter predetermine and/or potentiate how the audience engages in the process of re-affecting the stage. When the politics of the affect of a performance is centered in the production of effects on the spectator—for instance, a Broadway show—little room is given to the emergence of unplanned affects in the collective atmosphere of the room, as affect circulation is intensified in a predetermined way. In a performance that potentiates unplanned affects, permeability to what emerges in the moment and is set in circulation will dictate the intensification process that engages the audience. Thus, in making the artistic choices that create the conditions for the encounter, the politics of affect either privilege or disavow the political implications of re-affecting the stage. Understanding the “intelligence” of empowered audiences through the performativity of affect is to acknowledge the political implications of how theatrical encounters are affectively conditioned and created at the same time, as well as the ethical choices in which they are rooted.

In the conversations that I instigated with performers, the sound-knowledge they disclosed underlined the importance of listening to others as a whole-body practice of feeling. The more we learn how to listen and discern the impact of attention, of feeling connected, and of sensing energizing or draining forces from others and from social atmospheres, the harder it is to remain unaware of

how responsible we are for the possibility of changing ourselves and the environment. Improving one's tools for heeding, and both recognizing and—more importantly—responding affectively to the embodied images, sensations, impressions and intensities received from others, can be considered an ethical imperative—not only for the performing arts, but for life. Performers are trained to feel and make others feel; spectators have been told that to feel is to be exposed to the action of others. However, with the knowledge of the performativity of affect, one can think of theatre as a practice of feeling, a place in which to practice ways of feeling/listening to others, of affecting and re-affecting that comes from an awareness of what the body knows (and tells us, if we care to listen).

In conclusion, the data collected in this research show the value of artistic experience to the performing arts theoretical debate: such experience offers the possibility of developing new vocabulary and assessing affective dimensions of performance. Making clear that embodied knowledge is undervalued in Western culture, and drawing attention to the performativity of affect as part of every relational situation, performers can contribute valuable knowledge to a wider understanding of the role of affect in ways of relating to others, of engaging with collective processes, of becoming aware of invisible but concrete dimensions that create and condition our worlds. As a micro-environment of affect circulation and social atmospheres, performance can shed new light in the construction of more conscious and ethical social spaces.

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