

A Theatre Acting Perspective on the Dramaturgical Metaphor and the Postmodern Self

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ABSTRACT. Based on the premise that a psychology of theatre acting can teach psychologists about social acting, I evaluate Goffman's influential dramaturgical metaphor and discuss what theatre acting reveals about conceptions of the self. Within Goffman's model, differences between the quotidian and theatre worlds are accidental and daily life is like theatre actors' life on stage. First, I assess how well this version of the dramaturgical metaphor accounts for both theatre acting and social interaction. The complexly layered, psychological aspects of theatre acting reveal the limitations of Goffman's model. The second critical issue pertains to the implications of a psychology of theatre acting for conceptions of the self. The flexible, relational nature of theatre actors' multiple 'selves' challenges psychologists' literalist applications of dramaturgy to social actors as well as essentialist conceptions of a core self, while complementing postmodern notions of relational selves.

KEY WORDS: dramaturgical metaphor, postmodern self, theatre acting

In the opening chapter of Kvale's collection *Psychology and Postmodernism* (1992), Kenneth Gergen (1992) advocated critical scholarship of unexamined psychological concepts embedded in Western cultures and an exploration of these constructs' social implications. Danziger (1997a) contended that, when psychologists take the history of their conceptual categories for granted, they are prone to ignore fundamental questions about past, current and future practices of the discipline. Because psychological categories are public, they serve a political, ideological function in that they saturate institutionalized forms and practices in the discipline that, in effect, demand adoption by psychologists and their students. In addition, psychologically constructed terms function as cultural discursive formations by which the laity interpret their experiences.

One taken-for-granted notion in psychology, particularly evident in social and personality psychology textbooks, is the dramaturgical metaphor for

ordinary social life (Goffman, 1959). Psychologists have typically used such durable terms as 'self-presentation' and 'impression management' to express the Shakespearean notion of the world as a stage on which individual social actors merely play their life-roles. They regard the dramaturgical model as impactful in the discipline and in mundane life (Sarbin, 2003). For example, the authors of a current social psychology textbook have stated, 'Indeed, the metaphor of a theatrical performance has become part of our everyday thinking, particularly in the sense of playing a role' (Alcock, Carment, & Sadava, 1998, p. 80). However, I argue here that the dramaturgical model in its popular form, intended for virtual mass consumption, is problematic for social scientists and their audiences, chiefly because advocates of the Goffman model seem to misunderstand the psychology of theatre acting, as I demonstrate shortly, hence they over-extend the metaphor or take it literally.

The paper is organized around two related questions: how well does the dramaturgical metaphor fit both theatre acting and social acting? What are the implications of theatre acting for contemporary conceptions of the self? To answer these questions meaningfully a fine-grained analysis of psychological aspects of theatre acting is required. After describing the historical development of the dramaturgical metaphor, I examine theatre acting from an insider's perspective as theatre actor and director, aided by philosophers, literary critics, performance and drama theorists, theatre artists and social scientists. In addressing the second question I describe how theatre actors' creation of their roles and the flexible sense of self demanded by their profession illuminate the relational and discursive self. By the nature of their craft, theatre actors integrate internal and external psychological functions within layered contexts of social relations and flexibly employ multiple selves in their rehearsals and performances.¹

In his book *The Drama of Everyday Life*, Scheibe (2000) argued that Goffman 'reduce[d] life to drama, leaving out psychology' (p. 3), meaning that by concentrating on social interaction, Goffman focuses on the phenomenon of identity but excludes the self. Scheibe proposed that to broaden and deepen their understanding of the drama of quotidian life, psychologists should use a substantially revised theatrical metaphor in which psychology and theatrical principles complement each other. It was in this spirit that I developed answers to my two critical questions.

The Relationship between Theatre Acting and Social Acting

The Dramaturgical Model

Historically, William James and his student, Mary Calkins, fashioned theories of personality development in which 'the self' stood in relation to

others and one's environment. James (1890/1950) proposed multiple selves that are shaped by varying social situations and noted the recognition that other people give to the individual. James's concept of the social self is the image that a person projects to others. Calkins (1915) promoted the study of conscious selves in relation to other selves as the heart of psychology's subject matter. Using the metaphor of a 'looking glass', Cooley (1922) explained that the self has a mirroring function served by the reactions of others to one's actions and to one's capacity for imagining others' judgments about one's actions; but the persons and groups with whom an individual relates reflect back to her or him but one social meaning of who the individual is. Mead (1934) echoed the interpersonal nature of multiple selves and explicitly used the notion of taking on roles particular to social situations. For Mead, the internal self, the 'Me', was like an internalized theatrical audience that monitors the social projections of the 'I'.

The dramaturgical model specifically seems to have originated with the sociologist, R.E. Park (1927), who asserted: 'Being actors, we are consciously or unconsciously seeking recognition' (p. 738). Emphasizing the conflict between public and private existence, Park described the tendency toward conformity with social conventions as functioning as a social mask: 'in a sense, and in so far as this mask represents the conception we have formed of ourselves, the role we are striving to live up to, this mask is our "truer self", the self we would like to be' (p. 739). Burke (1945) subsequently described five essential dimensions for understanding social behaviour (act, scene, agent, agency and purpose). Following Burke, Mangham and Overington (1983) promoted the notion that: 'It is through language that we become self-conscious, capable of playing a number of characters to varying audiences and yet still retaining a grasp of an acting self' (p. 221). The distinction between one's acting self and one's roles conceptually links what Mangham and Overington termed dramatism with symbolic interactionism and the concepts of James (1890/1950), Calkins (1915), Cooley (1922) and Mead (1934) concerning self, others and society.

In his highly popular version of the dramaturgical model, Goffman (1959) distinguished among self as performer (Mead's 'I'), as character and as audience to the performer (Mead's 'Me'). In effect, Goffman supplemented the classical model with 'a critical recognition of the conventionalizing influence of the social looking-glass' (McCall, 1977, p. 277). When he observed theatre actors' activities during rehearsal and performance, Goffman (1959) inferred that to be socialized is to be well 'practiced in the ways of the stage' (p. 251). That is, just like theatre actors on stage, ordinary people are social actors always playing to an audience, real or imagined. Social actors adopt various characters, depending on the situation, and different strategies to shape how their various audiences perceive them. The particular form that 'on-stage' behaviour takes is shaped by the individual's self-image, which changes from situation to situation because of

the social actor's different roles. Thus, according to Goffman's version, all social behaviour is on-stage behaviour, governed by social actors' adherence to scripted roles in conformity with stylized rituals of self-presentation and impression management, and people are primarily the roles they play, that is, social identity prevails. Goffman distinguished public, 'frontstage' behaviour, by which social actors create social identities and manage impressions for audiences, from private, 'backstage' behaviour, by which social actors are not actively presenting a particular 'self' but nevertheless are preparing for a performance (Sarbin, 2003).

In contemporary social psychology it is virtually axiomatic that social actors are always playing to an audience, real or imagined (e.g. Leary, 1996; Schlenker & Weigold, 1992). With some exceptions (e.g. Gleitman, 1990; Pervin, 2002), psychologists seem to take Goffman's model for granted and do not contextualize it in the actual theatre world. For instance, authors of social psychology textbooks present the metaphor uncritically when explaining the concepts of social perception, self-presentation (e.g. the tactics of ingratiation and self-promotion) and impression management (e.g. Alcock et al., 1998; Aronson, Wilson, Akert, & Fehr, 2001; Brehm, Kassin, & Fein, 1999; Franzoi, 2000; S. Taylor, Peplau, & Sears, 2000).

Closely related to Goffman's dramaturgical model is role theory. Sarbin and Allen (1968) explicitly employed the theatrical metaphor and cite the legendary acting theorist Constantin Stanislavski. They intended role theory to link individual processes with group and organizational processes, and argued that just as off-stage actors' enactments are influenced by other social actors in complementary roles and audiences, so actual or internalized audiences shape role-enactments. Off-stage actors learn and prepare their roles through the socialization models of complementary actors, audiences and 'acting coaches' or mentors. Kenneth Gergen (1971) also employed the concept of role, perhaps because it connected 'the social reality of the patterned world of institutions and the changes they undergo on the one hand, and the human reality of individual consciousness and individual behavior on the other' (p. 21). Gergen explained role-playing in relation to identity and self-concept, claiming, 'Just as the actor learns to recite his [*sic*] lines on cue, so in daily life we learn the behavior and words that are appropriate for each occasion' (pp. 54–55).

Subsequently, both role theory and Goffman's dramaturgical model have been significantly modified. Sarbin (1986) introduced the concepts of time and narrative in his theory of role-players who create stories about their lives. When reflecting on the dramaturgical metaphor, Gergen (1990) characterized Goffman as attributing pretence to social behaviour and has recast the metaphor as presupposing that individual social actors are agents whose actions are not determined mainly by environmental contingencies.

Similarly, in Harré's (1977) conception of the theatricality of ordinary life, social actors are not only like theatre actors but also like directors,

spectators and critics. 'We stage [our action], we appear in it, and we ourselves experience it as spectator and critic' (p. 324). Harré argued that these functions also are present in 'the play that surrounds the play', meaning the imaginative capacities of social actors as they anticipate social scenes. He described actors' agency in relation to templates that they adjust to specific social conventions. Later (Harré, 1993), when characterizing personality in terms of role-playing, he conceded that theatre actors are aware of the distinction between their personal identity and their character's identity, and he noted that in creating a character, theatrical actors infuse their social identity with their personal identity, as exemplified by two actors' interpretations of the same character. But Harré maintained that in ordinary life social actors become the roles they enact, that is, social identity prevails, and people usually are unaware of the distinction between their personal identity and their social identity.

The Psychology of Theatre Acting

When Burns (1972) examined the relationship between social life and the theatre, she observed that: 'The actor inhabits four distinct domains of social reality' (p. 150). That is, theatre actors are *persons* who pursue the vocation of *theatre actor*, who present on stage a *character* as conceived by the playwright and as interpreted by the director and by themselves, and who represent *objects of projection* for audience members. Thus, in a theatre performance, actors, directors and audiences are engaged 'in a process of interpretation which is conditioned by a shared contemporary view of the individual's relationship to society' (p. 150).

Playwright influences.

The characters that theatre actors present to audiences typically, but not invariably, are the artful constructions of playwrights. The theatre actor is united with the character and its 'plot of human nature on which the actor builds his [*sic*] stage self' (States, 1992, p. 201), as conceived by the playwright. In ordinary discourse, lay persons and professionals characterize a person as composed of an inner and an outer self, as if there were a *real* self buried inside the person. But playwrights conceive of the inner and outer selves of their characters as on a continuum (Ure, 1974). Playwrights create their characters' motives for action in relation to imagined or remembered external behaviour to enhance their drama's plausibility to audiences. As the individual characters play their social roles, playwrights illuminate character transformations across the psychological continuum, so that audiences witness the character's psychological tensions and conflicts in particular social situations. Shakespeare epitomized the art of balancing the extremes of the audience's intense engagement with and detachment from the playwright's characters (Mack, 1962) in the dramatic situations he

created for such psychologically rich individuals as Beatrice, Hamlet, Lear, Othello, Richard II and Viola. On the one hand, Shakespeare aroused the audience's passionate identification with the characters, but, on the other hand, he controlled the illusions he created to induce self-knowledge in the audience.

By 'character', which has its own history as a cognitive category in scientific psychology (Danziger, 1997a), playwrights intend a certain degree of consistency across changing life-circumstances. States (1992) argued that theatre actors

... cannot act the character without a proper and consistent character base. The moment an actor cannot find a self to play, however deluded his [*sic*] character may be about what selves are, the character is gone and the actor is alone on stage, as it were, by himself. (p. xviii)

On a superficial level the playwright's text is a narrative of the character in time and space. Beneath the surface is the structure of the character's personality, as inferred from the plot and relationships among the characters. At an even deeper level the playwright has constructed the metaphorical, social equivalent of genetic codes for the character that set 'a kind of tonal chord, a denotative center of energy (in word, gesture, manner, etc.) that announces a range of connotations-to-come' (States, 1992, p. 205). Through readings, personal research and rehearsals, actors create the deep structure of their character that then guides their specific actions in the different moments that are embedded in relationships in the play. What changes in eventual performances is the surface not the deep structure of the actor's character.

Actors and directors.

Following Burkean drama theory (Burke, 1945), a theatre actor answers five questions in preparing a character:

1. What? The act performed.
2. Where or when? The scene in which the act took place.
3. Who? The agent engaging in the act.
4. How? How the agent engaged in the act.
5. Why? The purpose of the agent's act.

But presenting a character is not simply the product of a *performer's* activity. Rather, the development of actors' characters largely is dependent upon playwrights, directors and other actors, and is augmented by designers, musicians, wardrobe and make-up artists, and ultimately affected by audiences and theatre critics.

The psychological challenge for theatre actors and their stage directors is to bring the playwright's characters 'to life' on the stage. Customarily, theorists and practitioners of theatre acting distinguish between two main acting styles, the imaginative (internal) and the technical (external) (e.g.

Wilson, 1994). In the former case actors attempt to create an authentic characterization from the audience's perspective, while in the latter case actors focus on developing their character through rhetorical techniques (Burns, 1972). Actually, in the theatre, in contrast to film and video acting, these styles are complementary rather than antagonistic approaches, as professional actors' anecdotal accounts indicate (e.g. Jackson & Smallwood, 1988). Effective theatre actors fluidly shift between the imaginative and technical styles, depending on the immediate theatre situation. In fact, Stanislavski integrated the imaginative and technical styles for the purpose of enhancing effective communication to the audience. 'Method' acting, which is typically confused with Stanislavski's approach but diverged significantly from it, emphasizes psychological analysis of the character's thoughts, feelings and intentions to evoke naturalistic performance suited to cinematic realism rather than the theatre (Wilson, 1994). The technical approach to acting, which is as intrinsic to the rehearsal process as the imaginative approach, emphasizes the crucial nature of homework for actors, so that they can plan in a disciplined way the timing of lines and movement for maximum theatrical effect. Moreover, the director serves the extremely important functions of initially mapping ('blocking') the actors' moves for the performance space to facilitate actors' learning their lines and their characters' personalities. Later the director advises actors about the communicability of their performances.

Extensive observation of rehearsals and performances revealed that gifted actors use the most personal aspects of their selves in relation to the scripted and directed character (Aaron, 1986). Intuitively, skilled actors find their objectives through empathic identification with their character. In uniting the character with themselves, which is largely an unconscious process, actors blend their participating with their observing selves. From a psychoanalytic perspective, Aaron (1986) argued that actors form a 'working alliance' with the director, submerging their observing ego or self-monitoring capacity for the purpose of creative exploration. During those periods when more deeply preparing the character, actors' perceptual, memory and self-evaluating processes can be suspended, while the director temporarily performs these psychological functions. Because of actors' dependency on the director in rehearsal and the intensely personal demands of their art, they unconsciously struggle with basic fears of abandonment or engulfment. In this context of the actor's transformation from 'personal self' to the character, the actor can fear the loss of her or his observing ego in the service of creative regression, which arouses intense anxiety. The actor's challenge is to manage this performance anxiety, while integrating reality with fantasy and blending the enacted text with her or his imaginative resources.

Although unconscious processes are central to it, the craft of on-stage acting is hardly an exclusively intra-psychic journey. Rather, as noted above, actors shape their characters in relation to the directors' vision for the play

and to the other actors. As acting theorists have noted, 'The most significant discoveries about character and motivation are made in the course of bringing the play to life on the stage. Introverted psychoanalyzing is of little use in itself' (Wilson, 1994, p. 64). Similarly, 'a modern actor needs no detailed knowledge of Freudian psychology to interpret pathological personalities, but depends rather upon observation' (Bates, 1987, p. 170) and, of course, other psychological phenomena. The small literature of experimental studies on theatre-rehearsal processes confirms the relative effects of permissive vs restrictive communication between director and cast, the influence of directors' expectations on casts' performances, and varying levels of actors' cognitive complexity affecting depth of character portrayal (e.g. Constantinidis, 1988).

In view of these phenomena, one may regard theatre acting as basically interpersonal, as each actor establishes her or his role in a web of enacted relationships, nurtured implicitly or explicitly by the director in an intensive rehearsal process. As with life off-stage, theatre acting is fundamentally relational in that other actors provide the foundation on which individual actors construct their character. Actors discover through the directed rehearsal process how they can transcend their techniques and fuse their own horizon with that of their character and collectively with the other actors' parallel journeys. When creating the inner lives of their characters as part of their foundational work, actors concentrate on their acting partners, not merely the characters they are playing, to actualize their individual creativity, vitalize their empathic identification and animate their individual motives, hence, the old theatrical saw, 'Acting is reacting.' During the rehearsal process actors develop a sense of intimacy with their acting colleagues because of the shared experience of taking emotional and sometimes physical risks (Bates, 1987). As States (1992) noted, 'We speak of actors as feeding each other lines, but it would be as accurate to say that they feed each other character, or the stimulus for demonstrating it' (p. 7).

Theatre actors animate their characters along a continuum of three phenomenal modes: self-expressive, collaborative and representational (States, 1983). In the *self-expressive* mode, because of the demanding nature of the character as conceived by classical playwrights (e.g. Euripedes' Medea or Shakespeare's Hamlet), actors, consciously or not, strive to express the limits of their talents to impress the audiences with the artistry of their characterizations. In modern theatre adept actors create brilliant moments of strikingly realistic human behaviour for their characters that also impress audiences. The intent of the *collaborative* mode of performance is to reduce the distance between actor and audience by activating the audience. This approach is easily recognized in the clowns and villains of Elizabethan drama who address the audience. In the 20th century Bertolt Brecht advocated the theatre of alienation to raise audiences' political awareness. Theoretically, actors in Brechtian theatre practise emotional detachment to

keep audiences' attention riveted on the 'objective' message of his dramatized social critiques. The *representational* mode emphasizes audiences' reflections on the subject matter of the play. If one can characterize the self-expressive and collaborative modes of the actor's presence as the theatre of extraversion, then the representational mode is introverted in the sense that actors' energies are focused on becoming their characters, and, generally speaking, actors operating in the representational mode do not acknowledge the audience's presence. In actual theatrical practice, if one mode predominates, the other two are latent. Adept actors can shift the emphases in their performances from a focus on themselves (a self-expressive mode), to the audience (a collaborative mode in which the actor removes the fourth wall and directly engages the audience), or to the character (a representational mode). Moreover, the self-expressive and representational frequently converge, as they did at the turn of the 20th century in the legendary performances of Sarah Bernhardt and Eleanora Duse, who relied on self-expressive and representational modes respectively (States, 1983). Alan Bates masterfully exemplified the convergence of these two modes in his Tony-award performance in the 2001–2 Broadway production of Turgenev's *Fortune's Fool*.

Audience influences.

As the rehearsal period concludes, actors experience a deep need for connectedness with an audience. Live performance sharpens the concentration of theatre actors and enables them to complete the creative circle of building a character to present to audiences for their identification and appreciation. To actualize directors' desideratum for actors—'Be real, be in the moment, be *really* in the moment'—actors must maintain a balance of creativity and self-monitoring, cognizant at some level of the audience. When actors employ the same gestural and vocal techniques in the same rote, mechanical way for all the different tasks of their roles, the result is a performance that bores the audience. By contrast, skilled actors are fresh or emergent as they proceed from moment to moment in performance. Actors often can be quite aware of the audiences' reactions, including silence, and might gauge their performances accordingly to enhance the emotional impact on audiences. Theatre actors' recollections of their performances indicated that their interpretations of audience reactions led to them modifying their performances (Bates, 1987).

In performance, actors stand in for characters and audiences identify with the characters directly or indirectly. The responsive audience is like a mirroring presence for the actor in the sense that during performances the audience supplements the actor's observing ego, replacing the director's function as observer (Aaron, 1986). Actors and audiences mirror each other, as audiences participate in the theatrical activity vicariously. In this sense, then, 'Theatre is to be construed neither as a preeminently visual, nor

auditory, nor literary phenomenon, but as a perceptually induced mimetic phenomenon of participation—an imagined experience of total activity' (Arnold, 1991, p. 26). Consequently, the relationship that occurs between actors and audiences is one of mutual influence and relative trust; each party feeds the other:

Any performer knows that the conventional active/passive relationship between actor and audience is, in fact, a constantly shifting relationship between equals, signalled and sustained by a continuous interchange of messages between the two parties, which re-adjusts the relationship as the performance is developed in time and space. (Arnold, 1991, p. 76)

Live performance, however, generally can be moderately stressful. Actors often worry about remembering their lines and blocking, their biological and psychological health at the moment, their colleagues' memories and on-stage functioning, and the responsiveness of the particular audience. Konijn (1991), for example, studied two female and two male university student actors during dress rehearsals and public performances, using measures of perceived personal control, quality of performance and heart rate. Although the student actors denied that the presence of an audience made them anxious, in fact their heart rates peaked during public performances, which seemed to enhance performance quality.

The complexity of the relationship between actors and audiences is epitomized by what happens during the curtain call. The actors remain in costume but to a greater or lesser degree not in character. At this point the actors bring the audience and themselves back to real life, because it is their skills as actors not their characters' skills that the audience applauds. 'Virtuosity, in theater as in athletics, is not simply skill but skill displayed against odds which, when mastered, become beautiful passages' (States, 1985, p. 119). Thus, effective theatre performance constitutes a Nietzschean balance of Dionysian ecstatic involvement and Apollonian rational detachment for both parties in the theatre-performance relationship: actors and audiences.

Psychological Issues in Theatrical Acting

Implicit in the theory and practice of theatre acting are certain psychological questions, including: what is the relationship among the functions of thinking, imagining, feeling, willing and behaving in theatre actors? Do actors fully experience their character's feelings? Do they lose their identity in their roles, even become possessed or subject to pathological states?

Psychological functions.

Stanislavski (1948) stressed the importance of two psychological capacities for theatre actors: imaginative projection, whereby actors insert themselves into the character's situation, and emotion memory, whereby actors connect

with their emotional experience in situations corresponding to the character's to bring personal authenticity to the role. The Stanislavski (1924/1958) tradition of psychological naturalism oriented toward the theatrical paradox of actors achieving 'natural life' on stage has three elements. First, theatre actors must be physically and sensorily primed to observe, listen and respond on stage just as they would off stage. Second, actors place themselves psychologically in the situation created by the playwright, adopting the psychological character of the scripted role. As they grow in understanding the play and their character, actors integrate internal motives for their characters with their external physical actions. Third, the organic union of motives with actions generates genuine feelings of the character suited to the immediacy of the scripted situation. Directors' instruction to actors, 'Be really in the moment,' expresses these psychological connections.

Stanislavski (1948) argued that the essence of truthful theatre acting is for the actor to harness the interrelated resources of thinking planfully, accessing emotions and expressing her or his will consciously and unconsciously in terms of specific theatrical objectives that are then enacted. Furthermore, physical objectives in terms of their specific bodily components are inseparable from thinking, feeling and willing. As Stanislavski put it, 'Every physical act, except simply mechanical ones, has an inner source of feeling' (p. 136). Moreover, he emphasized action evoking feelings. Thus, it is the actor's focus on what her or his character is *doing* rather than what the character is feeling that generates authentic rather than contrived emotions, hence the director's cliché, 'Your body is your instrument as an actor.'

Rather than conceiving of the actor as interpreter or mediator between the playwright's text and director's vision for the play, on the one hand, and the audience, on the other hand, a phenomenological approach to the craft of acting points to the embodiment of interrelated psychological functions germane to the scripted situation:

Acting is not an exercise in analytical understanding, nor is it a flight of the imagination: it takes place in an actor's body, through an actor's voice, on a specific stage, and with other actors. Minimally, the fusion must occur between the actor's instrument and the character's sensibility. (Kelsey, 1984, p. 68)

Kelsey described a rehearsal situation in which the director recommended that the actor adopt a particular gesture, set of movements and type of breathing before giving her character's speech. By practising these motoric responses, the actor entered the character's emotional space and began to fuse her actions with those of her role, which enabled her to communicate in character with the other actors, who themselves made adjustments to their own characters' development in response to the first actor's incorporation of her changed approach.

The importance of body movement in the psychology of theatre acting cannot be overestimated. For example, Bloch, Orthous and Santibanez (1987, cited in Wilson, 2002) established with psychophysiological measures that individuals can learn the craft of projecting emotions effectively to an audience simply by moderating three nonverbal dimensions: body posture, facial expression and breathing patterns. To illustrate, sexual desire is communicated by a relaxed posture, facial expressions of invitation and small amplitude and low frequency of breathing with the mouth open. Bloch et al. demonstrated that behaviour can shape emotions, bypassing internal identification with the character through personal emotion memory, using Stanislavski's term. Consequently, directors need to adapt their instructional methods to accommodate the individual differences in learning styles among actors, because for some actors emphasis on movement is more effective than intense 'psychological' work.

A delicate balance.

The theatre actor's emotional experience can be understood as a dialectic between the content of the feelings aroused and the *form* of expression that the actor gives to those feelings as shaped by the conventions of the stage director's and actor's own interpretations of the enacted script. Kochnev (1990), for instance, observed empirically that actors engage in a series of inspirations to consistently arouse the appropriate emotions as demanded by the theatre situation. But do actors fully experience the feelings of their character? Kochnev and other Russian researchers demonstrated that, physiologically, theatre actors' emotions are like those of social actors in real-life situations, but with a major exception: theatre actors develop the capacity to voluntarily arouse and quench their emotions as necessitated by specific acting situations and by the conventions of 'stage time', which is far more compressed than real time. Moreover, actors' experiences of their on-stage emotions are not the same as their off-stage emotions, because when on stage, actors live their characters' situation and feel what their characters feel (Kelsey, 1984).

Theatre actors can split their consciousness of their performance into awareness of the demands of the enacted role and awareness of oneself as the subject of this creative process. Actors walk a delicate, but not dangerous, tightrope between performance and real life. Specifically, the characteristics of the on-stage emotional experience include actors voluntarily starting and stopping their emotional experience and calibrating it to suit momentary changes in the conditions of rehearsal and then live performance. It is the controlled nature of actors' emotional expression that creates the highly intense yet apparently shallow stage feelings that social actors and some psychological observers find so curious about the emotional life and personality functioning of theatre actors. But the latter dialectically unify natural emotional content with enacted feelings tailored to specific

theatrical conventions (Kochnev, 1990). If actors did not achieve this balance, their emotional activity on stage would be disorganized and violate aesthetic norms of stage performance. However, in metaphorical and poetic plays where the emotions and actions are heightened (e.g. W.B. Yeats's *Purgatory*), the conventions of this genre and the rhythms of the images that actors project to the audience take precedence over the actor's display of 'real' emotions. Similarly, Russian research with comic actors, whose performances are concerned with exaggerated situations, showed that they were unable to effect the psychophysiological changes so evident in naturalistic theatre actors (Kochnev, 1990).

A common term in academic parlance on theatre acting is 'fusion', by which actors strive for absorption in the character through personal identification with the character's personality. As Murray (1996) put it, the actor 'thinks the thoughts and feels the emotions the script creates for the character and responds to what happens on stage as if the action were real' (p. 48). Fusion is believed to permit actors' intuitive processes to operate. Murray compared actors' fusion with the character to a hypnotic state that is induced by internalization of the script, blocking and actors' own 'speech, movement, gestures, thoughts, and emotions' (p. 51). In a sense, actors' instrument, which is the unity of their body, mind, heart and spirit, has a life of its own. For instance, 'a close examination of the gesture reveals that in developing a character there are forces at work over which the actor has no control' (Kelsey, 1984, p. 68).

When theatre actors are fused with their character, some commentators believe the spirit of the actor's instrument is in a state of virtual daimonic possession. One psychologist of the theatre, Bates (1991), contended that in authentic acting the actor's capacity to feel and express genuine emotions supplants the acted emotion of the character. In effect, the actor is a channel for the character portrayed, through which its emotions flow from deep within the actor's emotional reservoir 'right through the layers from deep unconscious to surface persona' (Bates, 1991, p. 15). Actors breathe life into their on-stage character by connecting with their own emotional, intuitive and spiritual history. Bates (1987) concluded, on the basis of actors' reports of spiritual connectedness and paranormal experiences, that access to dreams and other unconscious processes empowers theatre actors to give authentic, believable performances in their characters. In fact, without this access to their inner lives, theatre actors' performances would be flat and unconvincing for audiences and themselves. Actors are 'possessed' by the character in the sense that they allow themselves to be influenced by aspects of the self that are hidden in social acting. Bates believed that this ordinary 'possession' can become extraordinary, infusing a performance with particular energy, and that actors' experiences of being 'possessed' by their roles in performance can teach psychologists about emotions and aspects of the self.

But the analogies of actors' fusion, hypnotic state and possession are only partly useful. Another psychologist of the theatre, Wilson (2002) characterized the 'possession syndrome', by which theatre actors on occasion over-identify with the character they are playing, as relatively unusual and of questionable practical value for their effective communication with audiences. Wilson argued that at the same time as actors fuse with their characters, they balance the experience of strong emotion with self-awareness to ensure that they are attuned to the other actors and to their collective need to communicate with the audience. Although 'method acting' proponents interpreted Stanislavski as advocating fusion, actually he intended it for rehearsal not for performances proper, because he believed that the observing self is critical for the actor's public enactment. In effect, theatre actors modulate fusion with the character with artistic control (Arnold, 1991). Thus, acting is more accurately understood as a balance between fusion, by which the actor disappears into the role, and 'fission', by which she or maintains separateness from the character; actors need to experience fission so that the *audience* can experience fusion (George, 1986). This balancing act is comparable to the dramatic effect that the playwright has intended for the audience members, who shift between psychological engagement and detachment (Mack, 1962; Ure, 1974).

In sum, the feat of theatre acting is a delicate balancing act of the real and the imaginary. Acting is like an aerialist without a net—it is dangerous metaphorically, and the audience knows it too. '[T]he actor-character teeters constantly on the verge of catastrophe—that is, of becoming one of us' (States, 1985, p. 146), as in the actors' expression, 'falling out of character'. When that happens, the audience perceives the actor primarily, not the character, whereas the theatrical goal is for the actor to disappear behind the mask of the character. Playing the role is a constant danger in the sense that actors strive to produce believable performances within the realm of illusion and to submerge their egos within the character.

Actors pathologized.

Historically, social scientists and clinicians tended to depict theatre actors as fascinating but essentially character-disordered and stereotypically 'theatrical'. For example, the psychoanalytically oriented literature characterized theatre actors as narcissistic (e.g. Fenichel, 1946), restlessly searching for 'self' and struggling with identity confusion (e.g. Henry & Sims, 1970). In this vein, Hayman (1973), a theatre critic, claimed that actors are simultaneously driven to reveal themselves and conceal themselves because they lack a firm sense of personal identity. He also likened actors' motives to achieve the libidinal satisfaction of performing to clinically diagnosed exhibitionists whose compulsions to expose their body parts or skills mask their deep desire for acceptance by others and their drive to overcome their internal sense of profound alienation. In a sense, he contended, actors narcissistically

observe themselves through the eyes of their audiences. Furthermore, Hayman characterized actors' creative process of inhabiting a character as splitting of the 'real self' from the 'false self', which is the persona of the character they adopt that, he believed, can 'take over' or possess them. Because of their profession, theatre actors can revel in the audience's attention and approval of their characterizations without disclosing their personal off-stage identity.

The social-personality scientist Kenneth Gergen (1971) also referred to the phenomenon of theatre actors' over-identification with the role played and alleged spill-over effects from characters enacted to the actor's off-stage personality. He claimed that 'over 70 percent of a large group of actors, ranging from unskilled amateurs to trained professionals, indicated they had experienced this carry-over from their stage roles to their off-stage lives' (p. 55). But he provided no further information about this unpublished study.

Although these speculations about the dubious psychological status of theatre actors might have 'face validity', there is little bona fide evidence to show that theatre actors are more prone to pathological functioning than social actors. For instance, Fisher and Fisher (1981) studied the psychodynamics of comedians and clowns with interviews and projective tests. But they found that theatre actors, in contrast to their focal population, developed a strong sense of flexible personal boundaries that enabled them to take psychological risks in exploring the depths of their characters. Overall, the reduction of theatre actors' creativity to pathological processes seems to be a modern manifestation of the hoary Western prejudice of denigrating the theatre and actors as disreputable (Barish, 1981). Perhaps social scientists are attracted to the concept of theatrical role because of the erotic salience that theatrical actors have held in the public and educated imagination. William James (1890/1950), for example, cited an 1888 study by William Archer, 'The Anatomy of Acting', to strengthen his argument about the visceral experience of emotions.

Moreover, it is important to distinguish between pathologizing theatre actors and understanding the unconscious and conscious artistic processes operative in the craft of acting. Marinovic and Carbonell (2000), for instance, studied 34 female and 42 male Chilean professional actors' conceptions of acting, their motives for acting and their perceived role in theatre production. Many participants described the artistic process entailed in acting as 'a living communal art form' (p. 247), produced by collective effort. The most frequently reported motives for acting were personal expression and communication with audiences. Regarding identity and self-awareness, the actors disclosed that they aimed to achieve a flexible balance between their personal characteristics and those of the character enacted, situating themselves in an intermediary space between their off-stage identities and their character's identity.

Similarly, Hammond and Edelmann (1991a) intensively studied how the characters that theatre actors play influence their self-perception. The authors observed that the character does not take over the actor entirely. Rather, the actor allows access to pre-existing aspects of her or his self to inform character development and subsequent public performance. Although actors, in effect, play themselves, they vary in terms of the relative flexibility of their personal identity: the less flexible the personal identity, the narrower the range of theatrical roles selected. Wearing the figurative or, in certain theatre situations, the literal mask of the character enables actors to freely and self-confidently explore aspects of their off-stage personalities that are relatively hidden and perhaps inaccessible in 'real life'. In a different study, Hammond and Edelmann (1991b) compared the personality profiles of professional with amateur actors and non-actors in terms of standardized personality measures. The investigators found no significant evidence indicating pathological characteristics of theatre actors. Similarly, in a comparison of the personality traits of actors, dancers and musicians with a sample of the general population, Marchant-Haycox and Wilson (1992) did not find major differences between performers and their non-performing sample. Although the actors were significantly more expressive than the non-performers, they were also more reflective.

Distinguishing Theatre Acting from Social Acting

As I have suggested, theatre acting both resembles and differs from social acting. The world of the theatre, which is a metaphor of life, is distinct from aspects of off-stage life that resemble the theatrical world, for example 'role', for which the term 'second-order metaphor' is appropriate (Wilshire, 1982a). When social scientists transpose a second-order theatre metaphor to off-stage life, they imply that the off-stage actions described by the metaphor are at least fictional, if not deceitful, stylized appearances enacted. But these performances constitute *social actors' copies of theatre actors' copies of social actors' actions*. Furthermore, the term 'role' can mean a unit of personality, a container of psychological states, a personality concept, a metaphor for making sense of performance in everyday life, a method in drama therapy and a character performed in a drama or theatre production (Landy, 1993).

Despite its longevity in social and personality psychology, Goffman's dramaturgical metaphor was based on an inadequate understanding of theatre and the theatrical experience (Gleitman, 1990; Wilshire, 1982a).² Even though theatre and social acting mirror each other, such that life is like theatre and theatre draws its authenticity as an art form from life, on-stage life is not a good model for off-stage life, for several reasons. Unlike social actors, for whom the stakes are higher, theatre actors generally have control over their actions in character; they usually do not suffer actual conse-

quences for their behaviour as characters; and they easily can account for discrepancies between their on-stage actions in character and conceptions of themselves as persons (Pervin, 2002).

The basic reality of the theatre world is that playwrights, directors and actors assume that human behaviour is grounded substantially in internal referents. If these parties operated literally on a dramaturgical basis, that is, took as their implicit assumption that all social behaviour consisted of 'on-stage' behaviour, characters in plays would be quite unidimensional and the 'sub-text' (i.e. the underlying intentions of characters) would be irrelevant. Since the dawn of naturalistic acting in the late 19th century, so evident in productions of Anton Chekhov's plays (e.g. *The Cherry Orchard*), the modern history of the theatre has been grounded in a psychological approach to understanding the character's thinking, feeling, willing, conscious and unconscious wishing, and behaving. Theatre actors do not simply perform roles, they interpret them, mediating among the playwright's, director's and their own conceptions and the audience's perceptions of the character. As I have argued, actors rely upon their psychological functioning as off-stage persons to infuse their on-stage characters with theatrical authenticity. Furthermore, the playwright reduces complex real-life action to fit those situations that are theatrically playable within the conventions of the art form (Burns, 1972). Literally, the on-stage time of the characters' lives, that is, theatre actors' on-stage behaviour and 'playtime', are not equivalent to the off-stage time of off-stage actors' lives and 'worldtime' (Wilshire, 1982b). Because theatre actors' playtime is distinct from the audience's worldtime, it observes on-stage life in microcosm from a privileged position that it cannot occupy out of the theatre.

Theatre actors are not only characters, they are also artists and obviously persons (Wilshire, 1982a), and, generally speaking, they do not invent the scripted roles that they enact under a stage director's supervision (Burns, 1972). Consider George's (1986) triad model of three concepts—person, profession (actor) and character—against Goffman's two concepts—actor and character. According to George's model, if the theatre actor playing the title role in Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* does not actualize any one of his three concepts on stage, a bad performance from the audience's as well as the actor's perspective will result. Thus, 'the performer fuses with the character as a *person* but remains simultaneously separate as an *actor*' (p. 358). In short, theatre actors are in dialogue with themselves as persons, artists and characters: they are aware of what their character knows, what they know about their character's awareness, and how the audience seems to be responding to them as they are in role. States (1985) characterized this multiple and delicate relationship in theatre acting as a dialectic among 'I' (the actor), 'you' (the audience) and 'he, she, or it' (the character). *Actors* speak to *audiences* indirectly, or sometimes directly, about the *characters* they are playing. Thus, the actor's 'I' is not the character's 'I'. *There is*

always the ghost of a self (States, 1985, p. 151, my emphasis) in actors' performances, directing what they do and enabling them to enliven their craft. Skilled actors are very capable of fusing their personal identity with their character's identity, drawing upon rich inner resources, including a firm sense of a core 'self' (Bates, 1987). In performance, there is usually awareness of both the performing self and the observing self, and the effective actor is one who does not totally identify with her or his persona. In fact, actors feel comfortable having many 'selves' within them, which paradoxically strengthens their *personal* sense of self.

Moreover, the Goffman model avoids the relationship between self and role, which is, as Burns (1972) contended, 'much closer than that of the actor to his [*sic*] part in the theatre' (p. 127). Goffman argued that social actors take on roles in life-scenes that are predetermined. But people generally believe that they can determine their own actions and have an effect on others. In addition, social actors can find themselves in situations in which they abandon their basic social role and treat, and are treated by, others according to quite different social expectations than those relevant to the abandoned basic role. Behaviourally, social actors—and theatre actors when they are off-stage—shift from one learned role to another according to the situational demands of daily life, but they generally remain socially identifiable as the same person. It is self-identity that unifies our disparate social experiences.

Although 'the self is an occasionally conscious body that displays itself in a theatre-like way to others, and the first- and third-person views on it are deeply intertwined' (Wilshire, 1982a, p. 232), focusing exclusively on the social self 'ignores the self-conscious structure of the self' (p. 279). Goffman's model deals with observable communication and the world of appearances, not with the thoughts, feelings and inner experience of either social actors (Brissett & Edgely, 1990; Mangham & Overington, 1983; Scheibe, 2000) or theatre actors. Goffman's dramaturgical version reduces the self to 'a performed character' (Pervin, 2002, p. 171). One can argue that social actors, including theatre actors when they are off stage, have multiple personae. Just as theatre actors create characters, so social actors create personae. 'But it does not follow that the actors are nothing but their characters or their personae' (Wilshire, 1982a, p. 204).

From the perspective of individual differences, Buss and Briggs (1984) asserted that social actors' behaviour is represented not only by on-stage behaviour but also by the needs, impulses and dispositions of individuals' personalities. Actually, to take the theatre-acting metaphor at face value, in most plays each character carries 'a core of consistency' across situations. Buss and Briggs concluded that social actors do not have multiple selves, but they also rejected an extreme trait view that ignores situational influences. Rather, they argued that social behaviour can be best explained in terms of three dimensions of expressiveness—pretence, formality and

shyness—that vary across individuals and situations. Buss and Briggs noted that social actors vary in the extent to which they allow themselves to be dominated by their roles or are highly individualistic in their identification with their roles. In the authors' view, personality needs, impulses and dispositions shape the social aspects of role identity.

Implications for Psychological Conceptions of the Self

The second critical issue concerning the dramaturgical metaphor for everyday life pertains to the implications of theatre acting for conceptions of the self.

Theatre Acting and the Self

As a psychological category, the self 'cannot be described or expressed directly' (Scheibe, 2000, p. 11), but it 'accounts for the reflexivity of human thought' and 'inner agency' (p. 12). The dramaturgical approach requires both a horizontal dimension of social identity that is shaped by social interaction, which was Goffman's focus, and a vertical dimension of self-reflection that integrates social experience, which Goffman ignored.

The craft of theatre acting demands that actors distinguish between their personal identity and their character's identity (Brissett & Edgely, 1990). When building and performing a character, theatre actors occupy intermediary space between their off-stage identities and their character's identity, and infuse their character's 'self' with their own self, which explains two actors' different interpretations of the same character (Harré, 1993). But theatre actors have relative control over their onstage actions in character (Pervin, 2002). Embedded in a web of relationships with other actors and the director, actors flexibly balance observing, connecting and performing selves in rehearsal as they adapt to their character's requirements for public performance. Thus, they maintain multiple levels of awareness of their character, of themselves playing the character and the other actors playing characters, and of the audience.

Theatre actors know how crucial it is to have easy access to and understanding of their own multiple selves when they attempt to re-create human experience artistically and build and then enact a character. For example, in her novel, *Love, Again*, Doris Lessing (1996) depicted the intense, erotically charged atmosphere of a rehearsal in which a male actor uses his theatre character to attempt subtly to seduce the female actor (not the character she was rehearsing) playing in the scene with him. Like this fictional character, theatre actors operate with another set of motives than those of the characters they portray. To use Lessing's metaphor, actors have strings at their disposal to manipulate their enacted roles. In other words,

multiple social selves are at the service of both the theatre actor's and the social actor's observing ego.

A professional actor, formerly with the Stratford Festival, Ontario, described actors' flexible, inner balancing act, illustrating the point that actors' multiple performance selves are at the service of their connecting and observing selves:

Acting, as I describe it, is the profession of tapping into all the different people that we are. And my sixteen-year-old person is there for me, as my four-year-old person is there for me, as is my eighty-year-old person there ready to come out. I feel that what I do is I tap into, most importantly, the emotions and instincts that are that person, and that is where I get, start my base for my characterization, recapturing parts of myself. I think we all have within us hundreds and hundreds of people and that we are different with our parents than we are with our husbands, than we are with our best girlfriend, than we are with a girlfriend that we sort of know, than we are with our children. It's just the same in regular people's lives. Anyone in this restaurant will have about at least ten different people that they carry around with them all the time and they pull out whenever they need to without any stress or deliberate action. It's not acting, it is just a part of you. (In Walsh-Bowers et al., 1994, p. 11)

Ironically, modernist theorists of theatre acting have portrayed it as if it were the solo activity of individual creative artists. For example, Stanislavski (1948) adopted the assumptions of an autonomous self and the possibility of a Dostoyevskian authentic subject within the theatrical actor. He believed that acting is governed by the same Newtonian laws that govern the physical world, which he apprehended in Pavlov's experiments on conditioned reflexes (Schmitt, 1986, 1990). In Stanislavski's system, actors rationally control emotions by constructing a logical set of psychologically true behaviours, founded on cause-effect connections.³ As a product of the European Enlightenment, Stanislavski's theory is congruent with the modernist project of 20th-century psychology, focused on the 'internal' psychological functions of the agentic individual actor. But some evidence shows that theatre acting is largely relational (e.g. Walsh-Bowers et al., 1994), which complements contemporary accounts of a relationally defined self. When theatre actors are building a character, they are engaged in a speech situation of a common space created by the actors at least implicitly joining their perspectives, which is analogous to the process of social actors developing selves in relation to other social actors.

Developmentally, theatre acting is intersubjective, from the actor's audition to the curtain call of the final performance. Creating and sustaining a believable character are the result of actors being engaged in externalized and internalized dialogue with their stage director and other actors. Fur-

thermore, actors fluidly balance self–other relations, that is, the interdependency of their creative work enables them to internalize what they have learned from their immediate experience of practising their craft. Essentially, in both rehearsal and performance, authentic acting consists of deeply listening to and observing what the other actors are doing and then responding accordingly. In effect, actors co-construct the ‘reality’ of their characters. An actor’s observing ego, therefore, is shaped by the social creation of her or his character in a network of relations with other actors and the director. This theatrical reality corresponds to Sampson’s (1993) concept of shared ownership of all aspects of psychological phenomena, such as memory, which converts what psychologists and society consider to be the interior property of an individual to a fundamentally social process. Two or more interacting parties create and then share the memory of events.

A person’s interior is conversationally constituted and conversationally sustained. The presence of others is invariably involved. Although the process may be invisible and mute as we gaze at the individual, it is nevertheless fully social and based on a publicly shared culture. (Sampson, 1993, p. 138)

So it is with theatrical actors, whose recollection of text and blocking is literally dependent upon what the cast is doing in directed rehearsal and performance situations.

Postmodern theatre theorists and practitioners are influenced by the contemporary scientific principle of indeterminacy in nature and human nature (Zarrilli, 1989). Rather than developing a disembodied and asocial model of acting, independent of context and historical location, post-Stanislavski theatre has moved to a relational position in which person, actor and character are a unity. Against discrete Western categories of self, behaviour, experience, role and character, Zarrilli advanced integrative notions of the embodied self in which there is no clear distinction between the performing and observing selves, and actors’ personal boundaries are permeable not fixed. Furthermore, in theatrical practice, levels of actor engagement vary across empathic vs non-empathic styles of acting suited to particular types of theatre, of which Stanislavski’s realistic approach is but one (Constantinidis, 1988). Thus, in Brechtian theatre, actors are not to empathize with but to ritualize their characters, minimizing self-involvement; whereas in some postmodern approaches, like those of Grotowski and Brook, actors fuse with their characters.⁴ Stanislavski’s system stands in a middle position of empathy and self-involvement, saving fusion for preparing and building a character during rehearsals, while maintaining separation of the self from the character for performances (George, 1986).

Psychological Conceptions of the Self

There is considerable congruence between understanding the psychology of theatre acting relationally and the shift toward social constructionist and postmodern perspectives on the self. Just as adept theatre actors balance multiple selves while integrating the functions of performance with internalized direction and possible audience and critics' responses, so do social actors in the drama of everyday life, while serving as directors, spectators and critics of their actions (Harré, 1977). Like the theatre actor's psychological development of a character, the three historical roots of selfhood in Western society—the social actor's experience of reflexive consciousness, the development of selves within interpersonal relations, and the person's executive function or choice-making and self-monitoring capacities (Baumeister, 1997)—are fundamentally intersubjective. Consequently, the person as 'an autonomous and intentional agent' of self-determining reason is dead (Lovlie, 1992, p. 120) and conventional psychological notions of the self are in an irreversible crisis (Rose, 1996).

Revisionist dramaturgical social scientists view the 'self' as an inherently social process, a consequence of one's relationships, and as changing over one's life-span (e.g. Brissett & Edgely, 1990). This version represents a comparable position to the social construction of personality in that the 'self' is a meaning, not an entity, and challenges the common personality assumption of an essentialist conception of a core self (Sarbin, 2003). However, in quotidian Western discourse about human beings, we presume that we are free and self-contained selves. We conceive of our identity in terms of agency (sometimes complemented by communion), a belief and feeling which we attribute to our human nature. Since its inception, scientific psychology has followed suit, reinforcing the view that humans possess an internal universe that is ultimately under our control if we but attain self-fulfilment (Rose, 1996). However, this does not represent a continuity of discourse about the self from the Ancient Greeks onward; indeed, only in recent centuries have Westerners operated according to this world-view (e.g. C. Taylor, 1989). The modern notion of the individualistic, masterful self that is not directly observable but that gives expression to a person's social roles did not emerge culturally until the 16th century (Baumeister, 1987, 1997). Moreover, European languages other than English do not have equivalents to the term 'self', although with the Americanization of international psychology the anglophone concept of the self now prevails in the discipline (Danziger, 1997b). The modern sense of self as a point of origin of individual experience stems from John Locke's speculations about personal identity and consciousness of self at a time of shifting social identities during the expanding commercialization of late 17th-century English society (Danziger, 1997a). Subsequently, Adam Smith regarded the self as examiner and judge of one's own conduct, just as other people

view one's actions, a view that James, Cooley and Mead extended (Danziger, 1997b).

In psychology historically, theorists have distinguished an observing 'inner self' from a performing, socially presented self or selves in everyday situations (Harré, 1991). Psychoanalytic and humanistic-existential theorists, indebted to the modernist notion of personal autonomy, posited a true or authentic self, representing personal identity (Hare-Mustin & Maracek, 1990). Healthy human beings were believed to proceed from attachment to separation to individuation to autonomy; thus, fundamentally asocial individuality was counter-posed to relatedness (Guisinger & Blatt, 1994). If 'the normal course of human development moves from dependence to independence' (Sampson, 1993, p. 37), then it is 'abnormal' to lose ourselves to others. Instead, health consists of maintaining the illusion of self-determination and the psychological ideal is for each person to 'own' her or his identity, self and mind.

Arguing that constructions of the self are shaped by economic and political conditions in given cultures, Sampson (1988) identified 'firm boundaries, personal control, and an exclusionary concept of the person' as the key characteristics of the regnant Western construct of 'self-contained individualism' (p. 15). But Cushman (1990) proposed that 'the *present* configuration . . . is the empty self' (p. 600), to be filled by consumption of disposable commodities, whether material objects, relationships or celebrity actors.

Feminist psychologists initially positioned an idealized true self against oppressive sexist structures. The advocates of self-in-relation theory, for example, asserted that there *is* a core self, but they also emphasized that 'for women, the primary experience of self is relational' (Surrey, 1991, p. 52) and that all aspects of the self, such as creativity, develop in and through relationships. Moreover, basic dimensions of the 'self' are intersubjective in nature—emotional connectedness, capacity for mutual empathy and responsibility for growth of one's relationships—and relationships shape personal identity and self-experiences. Similarly, Lykes (1985) described the self as 'an ensemble of social relations' (p. 364) and defined 'social individuality' as encompassing 'a coacting network of relationships embedded in an intricate system of social exchanges and obligations' (p. 362). Other feminists, such as Hare-Mustin and Maracek (1990), contended that there is no fixed and bounded core self. Rather, the self *is* relation, and perceived social relations constitute subjectivity and the inner experience of a self. Relatedness is the essence of the self; no relationships, no context, no self (Bohan, 2002). That is, one's social location in terms of gender, culture and class, family relationships, historical time and place and dominant discourses produces multiple selves for diverse social relations and gives meaning to so-called 'private' experience. The personal is the intersubjective. In fact, studies of the dialogical self show that intersubjectivity and

consciousness itself are conceived in parent–infant relations (Fogel, de Koeयर, Bellagamba, & Bell, 2002).

Also counter to self-contained individualism, Sampson (1988) advocated a view of the self as ‘ensembled individualism’. In this notion the boundary between self and other is fluid; personal power and control are located ‘in a field of forces that includes but goes well beyond the person’ (p. 16); and the self is inclusive, completing itself through relations with others. Ensembled individualism is the norm in non-Western cultures, such as Aboriginal societies in North America. Altruism and cooperative behaviour provide human beings with evolutionary advantages (Guisinger & Blatt, 1994), whereas the psychological category of human agency is peculiar to Westerners or those who have adopted Western concepts (Sampson, 1993). When we understand human beings dialogically, then we observe that we are better characterized as transitory multiple selves, contingent on social situations, and that consistency of personality emanating from a solid inner core is illusory (Sampson, 1993). Rather than a marketplace-exchange theory metaphor of conditional sociality as the foundational principle of life, Sampson advocated the metaphor of caretaking and promoted the concept of *unconditional* sociality, meaning the centrality of service to others, no strings attached.

Social constructionist and postmodern notions of the self encompass internal psychological functions as well. For example, Harré (1991) extended the thesis that we constitute our selves through discursive practices directly to the *inner* self. Both the social self and the alleged core self ‘exist only as presentations to “oneself” and to others’ (p. 54). Any communicative act, verbal or nonverbal, involves the social actor, the intended recipient and onlookers interpreting it. These dimensions of discourse entail the spatial and temporal realities of a person’s location that in turn produce the individual’s sense of self. As Lovlie (1992) claimed, ‘The self as the ensemble of stage performances plays up to the idea of a relative self *that knows it is a relative self*’ (p. 125), a position that still can accommodate notions of individuality, subjectivity and critical capacity. Accordingly, everything we commonly associate with the self and with ‘the effects of psychological interiority’ (Rose, 1996, p. 172) is better understood as an effect of connections among ‘assemblages’, that is, how we are assembled social-historically. When we reflect upon our experience and our social relations, we employ socially constructed self-narratives, which are ‘symbolic systems used for such social purposes as justification, criticism and social solidification’ (K.J. Gergen & M. Gergen, 1988, p. 21). Consequently, psychologists should replace analysis of presumed psychological interiority with analysis of the discourse by which social actors attribute interior states to individuals.

One resolution for competing psychological conceptions of the self, fittingly enough, is dramatized in Henrik Ibsen’s fantasy-based satire *Peer*

Gynt, which was first performed in 1876 (Young, 1992). The playwright presciently depicted the chaotic, inconsistent self in a postmodern world. The rakish title character, Peer, ‘discovers at the core of his assumed and accumulated sense of self—“empty air”’ (p. 141). But then, in the midst of his fragmented, disconnected vacuity, Peer is reconciled through the realization of faith, hope and love in a committed relationship with Solveig, the woman he loved fifty years previously. The resultant re-formed self, Young (1992) argued, is ‘relationally defined’ (p. 144). Rather than nihilism or total scepticism in Ibsen’s climactic resolution, Peer’s radically individualistic rebellion against bounded ownership dissolves into commitment and pluralized, negotiated, intersubjective meanings (M. Gergen, 1992; Lather, 1992). Human agency becomes selves in relationship, a principle that is embodied in a relational psychology of theatre acting.

Conclusion

A persistent theme in this critical review has been actors’ delicate balancing of observing, connecting and performing selves. The theatre acting literature indicates that actors endeavour to strike a flexible balance among their many selves and situate themselves in an intermediary space between their character’s identity and their own. Moreover, actors’ relatively fluid personal boundaries enable them to take physical and emotional risks when exploring their character’s personality and the most theatrically effective means of presenting their characterization in performance. Theatre acting demands that actors stretch themselves psychically to enliven their character work. Whether they employ a technical or psychological style, theatre actors explore the same territory as social actors, namely the integration of internal and external psychological functions, embedded in social relations. Given the complex demands of their art form, perhaps theatre actors can teach psychologists how to understand human functioning more authentically.

Notes

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1. I use the terms ‘social actors’ and ‘theatre actors’ to distinguish what the latter do on the theatre stage from what the former do on the metaphorical stage of life, whether or not they behave in ‘role’.
2. Actually, the limitations of the ‘on-stage’ metaphor for off-stage life were evident to Goffman (1959) himself, who acknowledged that ‘this attempt to press a mere analogy so far was in part a rhetoric and a maneuver’ (p. 254).
3. Stanislavski (1948) also defined theatre acting more broadly as a dynamic integration of planning, feeling and conscious and unconscious intending, and a

unity of internal and external action. This position resembles Vygotsky's (1967), who in the 1930s paved the way for current North American psychologists' recognition of the social control function of language and internal speech (i.e. 'self-statements'). In fact, his description of the process of child and adolescent play in relation to cognitive development is congruent with Stanislavski's (1948) explanation of theatrical acting: 'imagination, interpretation, and will are internal processes in external action' (Vygotsky, 1967, p. 15).

4. In bringing postmodern, decentred roles to life on stage, such as Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* or the tramps in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, theatre actors necessarily draw from their inner resources to connect emotionally with these characters' anxiety, confusion and impulsivity and to receive what their acting colleagues are conveying to them in rehearsal and during performance. To create a convincing authentic characterization of postmodern characters, actors need to find the motives and emotion memory internally and the connections with the other actors relationally.

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