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Notes toward The Philosophy of Theatre

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Abstract: This article draws from the contemporary French thinker François Laruelle to perform a 'non-philosophical' analysis of recent literature from the analytic or Anglo-American philosophy of theatre. Much of this literature, I argue, suffers from the problem of application, namely: non- or extra-theatrical assumptions are both brought to bear upon and remain unchallenged by the philosopher's encounter with theatre – particularly in the form of assumptions as to the nature of philosophy or the role or position of philosophy with respect to other forms of thought, such as theatre and performance. Having sought to articulate some of the problems arising from the conception of the philosophy of theatre as a definitional project, the article then considers – via Laruelle – what kind of 'stance' a philosophy of theatre might need to occupy in order not to impose its thought on theatre but to be open to theatre's thoughts.

Introduction

In the call for papers for this special issue, the editors noted the recent intensification of scholarly engagement with the relationship between theatre and philosophy, and indeed more broadly between performance and philosophy. In this article, I want to address selected aspects of one strand of this development: namely, the arguably new focus on theatrical performance (and in some cases the notion of 'the performing arts') that has emerged over the last twenty years or so from what might be variously described as: "Anglo-American aesthetics" (Zamir 2014: 6), "analytic aesthetics" (Hamilton 2007: 23), "philosophical aesthetics", or somewhat less succinctly as work by and engaging with "philosophers from the classical, modern and contemporary philosophy (not associated with philosophy in the Continental tradition)" (Bennett 2016: 2).

Of course, it may well be deemed problematic to speak in terms of "the analytic philosophy of theatre", for as Clive Cazeaux notes, "the Continental-analytic distinction is a contentious one [...] judged by many to be the product of competing institutional forces rather than confirmation of the existence of distinct

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philosophical styles" (Cazeaux 2017). However, I would suggest that there are also issues with speaking in terms of '*The* philosophy of theatre' in general, when what is often being referred to, in fact, is a very specific strand of a much larger and more diverse set of thinking practices.[1] For instance, in 2009, Nöel Carroll pronounced that "philosophers are interested in theater again [...]. After decades of neglect [...] the philosophy of theatre is back in business" (2009: 441). What he meant was that those working in the dominant model of Anglo-American academic Philosophy were interested in theatre again – although it is independently true that theatre has largely been "the ugly duckling" among the arts within Continental philosophy too (Badiou 2013: 207). And indeed, whilst Paul Thom's *For an Audience: A Philosophy of the Performing Arts* (1993) was once the only book-length study of performance from an 'analytic' perspective, the last ten years have seen the publication of a series of monographs, including the following selection that will serve as the key reference points for this article: James Hamilton's *The Art of Theater* (2007); Paul Woodruff's *The Necessity of Theater: The Art of Watching and Being Watched* (2008); David Davies' *Philosophy of the Performing Arts* (2011); Carroll's own *Living in an Artworld* (2012); Tzachi Zamir's *Acts: Theater, Philosophy and the Performing Self* (2014); Tom Stern's *Philosophy and Theatre: An Introduction* (2014) and the anthology *Staging Philosophy* (2006), edited by David Z. Saltz and David Krasner, which includes a number of essays that might be seen as taking a broadly 'analytic' philosophical approach to theatre.

Historically, analytic philosophy has had much less to say about theatre and performance in comparison to the extended attention that has been paid to the other arts. While analytic philosophers of literature have long since included discussions of canonical dramatic texts in their work, they have not given the same level of consideration to theatrical performance.[2] Before 2000, the various

1 For many, the analytic/continental distinction is at best a "spurious case of cross-classification" in which a philosophical approach is compared to a geographical position (Chase and Reynolds 2011: 2); or, at worst, a false and oppressive one that perpetuates unnecessary hostility and rivalry between philosophy's warring factions and prevents philosophers from appreciating their common project. But whilst calls for reconciliation are profoundly appealing, it is hard to ignore the influence that this internal divide continues to exert on the practice of contemporary philosophy, at least in the UK. As Chase and Reynolds note: "Academic philosophers, journals, conferences, publication series and even entire publishing houses very often live entirely within one or the other tradition" (2011: 4).

2 However, I would suggest two caveats to this narrative of the overcoming of historic neglect. Firstly, we should not over-emphasise this relative lack of attention at the expense of ignoring those analytically-oriented essays on theatre and performance that precede the current proliferation of book-length works. Carroll himself, for instance, has been publishing articles on theatre

'introductions to', 'companions' or 'readers' devoted to analytic aesthetics often failed to include entries on theatre and performance (see Cooper and Hopkins 1992/1995; Dickie 1997; Townsend 1997; Graham 2000). And just as there has been a historic lack of engagement with theatrical performance by analytic philosophers – what Saltz (2001: 149) lamented over fifteen years ago is arguably still largely true today: namely, that Anglo-American analytic philosophy is "one of the few major theoretical paradigms almost entirely absent from the discourse of contemporary theatre and performance theory and criticism". Whilst, as Saltz has also acknowledged, there are "a few crossover figures, such as J. L. Austin and, to a lesser extent, Wittgenstein" (2001: 150) that are more often referenced in theatre and performance research, the discipline (at least in the UK and US) has been and arguably continues to be largely disengaged from analytic philosophy, whether in terms of the philosophies of theatre or more broadly in terms of exploring the potential value for theatre and performance studies of key concepts and approaches from the analytic tradition.

At the time, Saltz (2001: 151–152) suggested that this might be a matter of both institutional politics and disinterest or even distaste in relation to the perceived style and assumptions of analytic philosophy (based on varying degrees of founded and unfounded prejudice), rather than ignorance or a simple lack of awareness. For instance, he suggested that "[m]any performance theorists imagine that philosophers of art preoccupy themselves with defining abstract notions such as beauty and the sublime, and only take into account a classical canon of Western, white, male artists" (2001: 152). Whilst admitting some historical basis for these qualms, Saltz argues that these were, even then, largely stereotypes of the field "based on partial and mostly outdated impressions" which deserved to be revisited in the light of the internal diversity and self-critique of contemporary analytic thought (2001: 151). And whilst I think it is fair to say that prejudices of the kind Saltz describes do indeed continue to 'script' encounters – or perpetuate the non-encounter between analytic philosophy and theatre and performance studies – there are some ways in which these prejudices might be seen to be confirmed in and by the philosophy of theatre itself, including in its more recent manifestations. For instance, one might observe that in Tom Stern's recent book (2014), the philosophy of theatre is predominantly limited to the discussion of canonical Western, white, male playwrights: Shakespeare, Chekhov, and Brecht (with Caryl Churchill as the only contemporary and female artist referenced).

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and dance – alongside his better known work on film – since the mid-1970s. In turn, as Saltz and Krasner note, James Hamilton is "one of the few philosophers in the analytic tradition who has devoted extended attention over many years to the phenomenon of theater" (Krasner and Saltz 2006: 12) – regularly publishing articles on theatre since at least the early 80s.

However, my focus in this article will be on the question of philosophical *method* – and especially, once more, with the problem of *application*. In their important collection *Staging Philosophy*, Krasner and Saltz (2006: 7) create a distinction between 'Doing versus Using Philosophy', where the former denotes the philosophy of theatre proper as distinct from the mere application of philosophy in the latter. Here, they argue that much extant performance theory suffers from its tendency to merely apply theories borrowed from other fields to performance. Whilst they will admit that the application of theories from someone like Judith Butler "to an analysis of a performance by the performance group Split Britches" (2006: 7) may generate valuable insights, they contend that the validity of the study itself "ultimately rises and falls on arguments proffered by the theorists upon which the theory draws, rather than on the theorists' own argument" (2006: 8). In contrast, they claim that such conditional limitations do not apply to the kinds of arguments presented by those doing rather than merely using philosophy; exemplified by the work in the collection itself, arguments in the philosophy of theatre proper "stand – or fall – on their own" even whilst they "draw deeply on the work of previous theorists" (2006: 8).

In this article, by contrast, I will draw from the concept of non-philosophy of François Laruelle to suggest that much of the work in the analytic philosophy of theatre suffers from application. That is, in the philosophy of theatre too, I will propose, non- or extra-theatrical assumptions are both brought to bear upon and remain unchallenged by the philosopher's encounter with theatre – particularly in the form of assumptions as to the nature of philosophy or the role or position of philosophy with respect to other forms of thought, such as theatre and performance. Even the arguments of those conventionally considered to be 'doing philosophy' will often "rely upon whatever other philosophical assumptions are adopted by the person producing it" (Bowie 2007: 10). It is not just in places where a theatre and performance theorist might explicitly 'use' an idea from philosophy that an argument might 'succeed' or 'fail' to the extent that we accept the premises of the philosophy cited. In turn, the criteria for determining what counts as 'success' and 'failure' – whether of philosophical or theatrical thought – must also be called into question.

Specifically, the article will explore the way in which the problem of application arises when the philosophy of theatre conceives its task as defining the properties which can and cannot be assigned to theatre as a phenomenon. Whether it is conceived as mere description, normative evaluation, ontology, or the determination of essence, definition seems to introduce the risk that the encounter with theatre is predetermined such that it merely confirms one's existing concepts, presuppositions and values. The problem of definition leads us to the question of how philosophy relates to the novel or unanticipated in theatre

practice, and what stance it must take as regards its own thought in order not to prohibit not just the exclusion of the unforeseen or unknown aspects of theatre, but also not to merely assimilate them without changing itself. The article seeks to ask: are there limitations to identifying the philosophy of theatre with definition, and seeking to define theatre and philosophy exclusively? Might the very thought of theatre, the very power of theatre as thought, be somehow inhibited or even repressed by such gestures? What kind of 'stance' would a philosophy of theatre need to occupy in order not to impose its thought on theatre but to be open to theatre's thoughts? Drawing from important previous work by Andrew Bowie on music (2007) and John Ó Maoilearca on film (2009, 2015), I want to explore the extent to which the philosophy of theatre relies on assumptions which in fact serve to prevent it from encountering the real challenge but also creative possibility that theatre presents its own performative identity. Another way to put this, perhaps, is to call upon us to consider what kind of theatre *philosophy might make*: what qualities of attention or modes of relation might it bring as one participating dramaturg, director or creator amongst others to the multiple, ongoing and collaborative creative processes that constitute theatre?

1 Laruelle and the Critique of the Philosophy of X

Laruelle's work aims to democratize or equalize the relationship that philosophy has to other forms of thought, including the arts. His project – which he calls non-standard philosophy or non-philosophy – is an attempt to perform a qualitative extension of the category of thought without any one kind of thinking positioning itself as its exemplary form that, therefore, is in a position to police the inclusion and exclusion or relative status of other thoughts within the category. The discipline of Philosophy has often sought to play this authoritarian role, Laruelle claims. For Laruelle, standard philosophy involves the gesture wherein thought withdraws from the world in order to occupy a position of authority or power in relation to it. Or as he puts it: "To philosophise on X is to withdraw from X; to take an essential distance from the term for which we will posit other terms" (Laruelle 2012: 284). In contrast, in *Principles of Non-Philosophy*, for instance, Laruelle asks us to consider how we might equalize philosophy and art, "outside of every hierarchy" (Laruelle 2013a: 289). Laruelle argues that "we must first change the very concept of thought, in its relations to philosophy and to other forms of knowledge" (Laruelle 2012: 232). According to this democracy of thinking, the call is not "to think without philosophy but to think without the authority of philosophy" (Laruelle 2006: n. pag.). Through a non-philosophical procedure, philosophy and theatre would be realigned as equal yet different forms of thought –

embedded in the whole of the Real, with neither being granted any special powers to exhaust the nature of the other, nor indeed the nature of the whole in which they take part.

For some, philosophy's sense of its own universal applicability is both a source of pride and indicative of its disciplinary exceptionalism. Analytic philosopher James Tartaglia for instance, suggests that:

> Philosophy is exceptional in its breadth of interest, such that it can reflect productively on other academic disciplines, artistic endeavours, religious and political life, and practically any area of human concern; while remaining recognisably philosophical. [...] It emerged [...] not from fusion but fission; as sciences and other fields of learning gained their independence, leaving a core set of concerns that could be traced back to the Greeks and other ancient cultures (Tartaglia 2016a; 2016c). These concerns — with knowledge, reality and right action — were so wide that they remained applicable to these fields, such that there can be a 'Philosophy of X' for a very extensive range of Xs. No other academic discipline is like this. (Tartaglia 2016: 109)

However, in Laruelle's non-philosophy, this same characteristic – what Laruelle calls the 'Principle of Sufficient Philosophy' – is the source of critique. The aim of what Laruelle calls philosophy "is to capture everything under its own authority —its definitions of reality, knowledge, and, most particularly, thinking itself—an aristocratism of thinking" (Ó Maoilearca 2015a: 1). In contrast: "Whereas standard philosophical approaches take their conception of what proper philosophy is and then apply it to all and sundry objects—which Laruelle calls the 'Principle of Sufficient Philosophy'—non-philosophy is a 'style of thought' that mutates with its object" (Ó Maoilearca 2015a: 13). It is important to emphasise that what Laruelle calls 'philosophy' is a tendency that has often been performed (differently) by the discipline of Philosophy, but can also be found in other disciplinary fields. In this sense, when Laruelle critiques 'philosophy' he is not exclusively criticizing the discipline of Philosophy in its various historical and institutional formations – albeit that non-philosophy has particularly focused its experiments on materials associated with European traditions within Philosophy. Rather, what Laruelle calls 'philosophy' is a transcendental gesture within thought in which it assumes its "primacy [...] over all knowledge" (Laruelle 2013b: 37).

And just as Laruelle's non-philosophy more broadly aims to deprive philosophy of its sufficiency and authority regarding the 'democracy of thought' that, for him, constitutes the indeterminable and inexplicable nature of the real, he specifically seeks to deprive aesthetics of "its sufficiency vis-à-vis art" (2012: 2). That is, Laruelle's critique of philosophy as an authoritarian gesture within thought – as a thought with "pretentions of the absolute" (Laruelle 2012: 18) – extends to philosophical aesthetics. "There is a Principle of Sufficient Aesthetics derived from the Principle of Sufficient Philosophy" (Laruelle 2012: 3). It pos-

sesses, he suggests, "internal derivatives" (Laruelle 2012: 3), for example its assumption of a transcendent position from which to determine the necessary and sufficient conditions for art, including theatre. In *The Concept of Non-Photography* (2011), for instance, Laruelle is deeply critical of what he describes as the 'unitary' modes of interaction between art and theory in philosophical aesthetics (2011: 72).

Based on this preliminary introduction, Laruelle's concept of a non-standard aesthetics might not sound substantially different from the kinds of appeals to the autonomy of art from philosophy and the critique of the logic of recognition that we find in thinkers like Deleuze and Badiou. Laruelle is, of course, by no means the first to call for something like a philosophy *from* art rather than a philosophy *of* art. Indeed, Laruelle himself refers to Deleuze's Spinozist call to "create concepts parallel to artistic works" as a "giant step toward a non-standard aesthetics" (Laruelle 2012: 6). And yet, there are some subtle differences between these enterprises. For instance, Laruelle suggests that both Deleuze and Badiou ultimately end up over-determining the nature of art's thought from the point of view of their own philosophy, even whilst they characterise it as external to it. That is, insofar as Deleuze is willing to define the force of art in terms of *affect* (relative to philosophy's concepts and science's functions), he still performatively claims a privileged epistemological status for (his own) philosophy. Art cannot produce 'encounters' – cannot transform Deleuze's thought – to the extent that it is over-determined as encounter qua the forcing of thought by difference. Likewise, Badiou's characterization of theatre as a 'generic truth procedure' (that conditions philosophy rather than functioning as its object) ostensibly removes philosophy's ontological function (which Badiou assigns to set theory as a privileged ontology of the pure multiple), but covertly conserves its authority through this very meta-ontological gesture (Laruelle 2013a).

Of course, the problem of application and the 'philosophy of X' approach to aesthetics has already been both widely criticized and defended elsewhere, in relation to both music and film, if not – as far as I'm aware – with specific reference to the philosophy of theatre. Bowie, for instance, is a strong critic of the idea that the task of philosophy is to conceptually "determine the nature of the object 'music'", and instead encourages philosophers to focus "on the philosophy which is conveyed by music itself" (2007: xi) or "the philosophy that emerges from music" (2007: 11). Indeed, might one even go as far as to suggest that there is broad *agreement* that what we are aiming for is an approach to theatre practice that avoids "merely confirming the philosophical and methodological presuppositions that one adheres to before engaging with" it (2007: 12)? Is there a growing consensus that the philosophy we seek is one that performatively enacts the values of openness, equality and pluralism that we 'preach' but perhaps struggle

to practice in relation to all forms of thought including whatever counts as 'theatre' and 'performance' in a given context (Ó Maoilearca 2015b: 162)? Whilst some of the philosophers we will consider in this article may cast doubt on such an optimistic hypothesis – as in Paul Woodruff's (2008) self-consciously judgmental solution to relativism, for instance – it might be that for others the contentious issue lies not with 'application' or 'the philosophy of X' itself (which perhaps many would agree may be ultimately circular albeit often interesting and pedagogically useful), so much as with, when, and where, or in what specific instances, such application is perceived to be going on, as it were.[3] Application, perhaps, is very much in the eye of the beholder…

2 Philosophy *as* Definition, Ontology and Essence

The definition of theatre, insofar as it intersects with the ongoing controversy surrounding the definition of art, is a matter of debate in contemporary professional philosophy in the UK and US – including the question of the criteria for preferring one definition of theatre over another, and indeed the question of the value or purpose of such definitions (to what extent they support the production of 'better' theatre, enrich the experiences of audiences, allow us to argue for the value of theatre to its critics and so on). And yet, definition, and specifically ontological definition, is still often understood as a defining feature of philosophy itself, including with respect to the question of what might define 'the *philosophy* of theatre'. In *Staging Philosophy*, for instance, Krasner and Saltz suggest that the questions, "What is theater?" and "What is philosophy?" are intrinsically philosophical questions (2006: 2). And for many, it seems, there is a need to identify what might be exclusive to a 'philosophical' approach to theatre (symptomatic, perhaps, of the broader need to locate an essential identity for philosophy per se) in order to differentiate it from other approaches to the study of theatre or indeed to the kinds of thinking that go on in and as the practice of theatre itself.

The vast majority if not all of the recent work in the analytic philosophy of theatre engages with the question of definition in some respect – with chapter headings either in the form of questions, such as "What is Theatre?" (as Stern's book begins), "What is a Performance?" (as in Davies 2011: 4) and "What makes *Hamlet Hamlet*?" (as in Woodruff 2008; see also Saltz 1995); or in the form of statements such as "What Theater Is" (as Woodruff 2008: 38), "What Actors Do" (as in Zamir 2014: 11) or "What Performers Do and What Audiences Can Know"

3 See, for instance, Tomas McAuley's (2015) reciprocal critique of Bowie.

(in Hamilton 2007: 149). Of course, it would be too easy to extrapolate from such titles alone a shared ambition to produce a transcendent, totalizing theory that exhausts the nature of theatre. Beneath such semantic similarity (and leaving aside for now the immediate distaste that the statement form may provoke in theatre practitioners), the approach to responding to these questions (the concept of the task of definition, why we might or might not need definitions of theatre and the 'status' assigned to the answers) varies a great deal. Indeed, analytic philosophies of theatre also offer multiple ways to understand the concept of definition itself – definitions of a definition of theatre, if you like, seeking to clarify what it is we are asking when we ask, "What is theatre?" These include: the idea of a definition as the statement of theatre's essence (Woodruff); as the indication of its 'necessary and sufficient conditions' (Davies, Saltz, Woodruff, Rozik 2002); and the distinction between 'weak' vs. 'robust' (Hamilton), or 'descriptive' vs. 'normative' (Stern) definitions of theatre, to name but a few. For his part, it might sometimes appear that Laruelle refuses definition altogether insofar as he construes definitions as imposing unnecessary limits on the inclusive expansion of both philosophy and thought: "as soon as I give a definition it is a failure. We have to refuse the temptation or appearance of definition" (Laruelle, qtd. in Ó Maoilearca 2015a: 7). And yet, as we'll see later on, this is primarily a critique of a certain kind of rigid and unilateral definition, rather than the notion of a definitional project *per se*.

Starting with definition in relation to ontology, we might observe that contemporary analytic philosophies of theatre tend to circle around a set of shared questions, which include ontological questions: what kind of thing is theatre? What type of thing is a play or, for instance, what makes *Hamlet Hamlet*? (and it is very often *Hamlet* which is called upon to play the role of the 'example' in these debates). Saltz, Carroll, Davies and Woodruff, in particular, devote considerable attention to this question, which departs from the tendency to constrain the philosophy of theatre to a restricted definition of theatre as drama (but perhaps also reflects an attempt to apply a work-performance model derived from classical music), and directly relates to the extended discussions of the text/performance relationship which dominate the analytic philosophy of theatre per se (at the expense of other considerations such as the relationship between theatre and politics, ethics, history, animality, space, time, and so forth, as well as backgrounding considerations of process such as acting, directing and design). In particular, much of the literature under consideration here engages the conceptual distinction between 'types' and their 'tokens' as a means to discuss the relationship between "a general sort of thing and its particular concrete instances" (Wetzel 2006: n. pag.). Analytic philosophers of theatre, in turn, have taken up this ontological distinction and applied it to variations on the question

'what makes *Hamlet Hamlet*' as well as using it as a model to understand the relationship between text and performance.

To summarise, admittedly in rather simplistic terms to begin with: the matter of theatre ontology returns us to age-old debates as to the relative status of play texts and play performances in determining the nature of the identity of the 'thing' we call *Hamlet* (where, at times, *Hamlet* seems to be taken to be interchangeable with the name of any play). Given that plays are both read and performed (and indeed, read aloud in contexts other than 'full' performance and performed in a wide variety of senses), does it still make sense to think of some 'thing' – *Hamlet* – that exists or is in some way being repeated in all of these situations; and if so, what is the nature of this thing we are referring to? As Saltz puts it: "If I have seen a play twice, and read it three times, is there some single 'thing' that I have encountered five times?" (1995: 267). Or even, because of the huge variance between the nature of performances that describe themselves as *Hamlet*, analytic philosophers wonder how we can possibly identify them all as productions of the 'same' work. Is there an essence to *Hamlet*, that all productions of it must share in order to qualify as such, and if so what is the nature of that essence? Or as Davies puts it, "When is a theatrical performance a performance of a particular play?" (2011: 104). Philosophers have found 'play identity' particularly puzzling – given the very different nature of the ways that theatrical works seem to exist on page and stage. For instance, Saltz suggests that those of the view that it is only in the event of performance, and not merely in the act of reading that we can genuinely access the identity of the thing we call *Hamlet*, are left with the conundrum that such a view seems to suggest: namely that "when no one is performing *Hamlet*, the play ceases to exist" (1995: 267).

For instance, in his exploration of the question, "What makes *Hamlet Hamlet*?", Woodruff encourages us to begin our project to establish the essence of the play with central rather than boundary cases, by which he means productions that are clearly *Hamlet*, rather than those about which we are less sure. He acknowledges that there will always be 'hard cases' – concrete examples that are difficult to classify according to whatever schema we have devised. But he warns against the 'relativism' of abandoning altogether the project to assign identities to events:

> Any classification scheme will leave some cases to dither about, and there are bound to be some *Hamlet*-like events that are not quite *Hamlet* and not quite like anything else either. We should not be put off by these hard cases, and we must be especially careful not to allow the hard cases to make us think the whole business is arbitrary. It is not. As long as there are clear cases of *Hamlet* in performance, we can ask what features of those performances make them clear cases, and then we may reasonably debate how well those features show up in the questionable cases. […] We must not let just anything be called *Hamlet*. (Woodruff 2008: 52)

But what allows the recognition of a 'clear case' of *Hamlet* in performance? Why do apparently 'clear cases' justify an identitarian project and yet supposedly boundary cases do not suggest a challenge or resistance to the philosopher's self-positioning as the gatekeeper against relativism? Of course, using *Hamlet* as an example is particularly apropos. That is, while Woodruff refers to 'some *thing*' called *Hamlet* created by Shakespeare (Woodruff 2008: 52), Shakespeare scholars have – for decades – exposed the difficulty of identifying *Hamlet* with any one authoritative script given the variations between the two quarto and Folio versions of the play. And that is just to touch on the "ontological anxiety" generated by considerations of *Hamlet*-as-text, let alone those raised by performance (Kidnie 2005: 101). Of course, Woodruff is aware of this, and does not attach the project of identification to fidelity to a text (Woodruff 2008: 52). Likewise, he acknowledges that "Hamlet is rarely performed without some abridgement" (2008: 55); but surely this makes it difficult to argue what precise degree or quality of abridgement preserves the identity of the work, and which one tips the event into becoming something else. And yet, Woodruff still holds to the idea that there are such things as "noncontested performances" of *Hamlet*, which can secure the criteria for identifying *Hamlet* as such: namely: "1) that its main character is Hamlet and 2) that it is about resolving certain conflicts generated by Hamlet's felt need to seek revenge for the killing of his father" (2008: 54). But, in turn, Woodruff can only point to the determining qualities of these noncontested instances on the basis of his own existing definition of theatre as "the art by which human beings make or find human action worth watching" (2008: 18); he argues that the two qualities above are what make Hamlet 'worth watching' in his ethically-inflected sense of that phrase.[4]

Historically, the philosophical art of definition and the "What is x?" form of question has been associated (by some, and not uncontroversially)[5] with ontol-

4 Where – one might wonder – would this essentialising of *Hamlet* leave creative responses to the play such as Carmelo Bene's seven different homages? In particular we might think of Bene's staging of Jules Laforgue's "fierce abridgement" of Shakespeare (Wilson 2007: 66), *One Less Hamlet* (1973). If Hamlet can do without "the Ophelia subplot", as Woodruff maintains (Woodruff 2008: 54), who is to say that it cannot do without Hamlet himself? How do we measure what constitutes a 'main' character? Woodruff then goes on to apply the case of *Hamlet* to all so-called 'mimetic theater': that which "consists mainly of make-believe", where actors are not the same as their characters, and events on stage "do not have real consequences for the audience or for the actors" (2008: 33). In all such theatre, he argues, the identity of the work lies in its main character/s and "the principle conflict (or conflicts) that are resolved in the plot" (Woodruff 2008: 55).

5 There are debates within analytic aesthetics around what counts as an 'ontological investigation' proper as distinct from other forms of enquiry. However, it is beyond the scope of this article to go into these in any depth here.

ogy, and specifically with the pursuit of essence according to a Platonic model. Here, the X in question is presumed to have a universal, ideal, self-identical and eternal essence that lies beyond its changing, material and contingent appearance. In the case of theatre ontology, the self-nominated role of philosophy is to clarify what kind of 'thing' theatre is. In this sense, one could see the very gesture of ontology as a matter of philosophy bringing its own concerns to bear on theatre – regardless of the nature of theatre. That is, philosophers' interest in what makes theatrical performances different from musical ones or from dance, makes sense in the context of the tradition of ontological enquiry that philosophy has applied to all kinds of other objects, but arguably makes little sense from the interdisciplinary point of view of creative practice.

And indeed, much of the recent work in the analytic philosophy of theatre still seems to take the view that theatre – or a given 'specimen' within the 'species' like Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (to cite what is often the philosophers' exemplary example) – must have an essence and a set of exclusive properties that it is up to philosophy to clarify (departing from the premise that there is something definite that actors or performers exclusively do, for instance) (Woodruff 2008: 66–67). That is, whilst some – like Hamilton and Stern – do acknowledge the historical complexity, plurality and multiplicity of theatre, and therefore, its resistance to definition, there is arguably less consideration of what this means for how philosophy defines itself (for example – the extent to which this implies that philosophy might be indefinite too; or, that the kind of definitional thinking philosophy has historically considered exclusive to itself might equally be a part of what it seeks to define as theatre).

But this pursuit of ontological definition has often led philosophy to assume a position of transcendent authority in relation to theatre. Aldo Tassi, for instance suggests that "Philosophy, from the beginning, has been driven by logic as the art of definition. It is an activity that seeks to transport us to the place where boundaries are established so that we may 'see' how things come to be" (Tassi 1995: 472). As we'll see, on what grounds philosophy might presume to locate itself in such a privileged position with respect to the emergence of identities is precisely Laruelle's question. And indeed, within the analytic philosophy of theatre too, there is an awareness of the potential objections to the idea of philosophy as a definitional project, particularly insofar as philosophers have traditionally held that "the aim of definition was to state an essence" (Woodruff 2008: 50). As Woodruff suggests:

> Philosophers expect to define their subject at the outset of discussion [...] but in the realm of art, definition carries the stench of exclusion, of drawing lines between the good stuff, which is appreciated by cultivated folks like me, and the bad stuff, which is amusing to barbarians

> like you. Why not forego the nasty pleasure of exclusion and simply enjoy to the full whatever comes before us, without asking what it is, without asking whether it is really theater? (Woodruff 2008: 35)

Understood in terms of "necessary and sufficient conditions", it is suggested that the definitional task of the philosophy of theatre, is to "clarify issues relevant to our understanding" of what theatre is or is not (Davies 2016: 24). As Stephen Davies summarises, this approach assumes that "if we specify the *necessary* condition (or the set of conditions) that is *sufficient* for something's being an X, we have indicated a combination of conditions such that all and only X's meet them, which is the hallmark of a definition of X-hood" (Davies 2016: 25).[6] Definition here is about categorization, an act of generating arguments as to how phenomena and modes of thought might be identified as belonging to a particular category or type (in a manner that either assumes the reality of such fundamental categories or 'classes' as an ontological feature of existence, or presumes the value of conceiving the world categorically). And indeed, the circularity of the logic underpinning this idea of definition seems evident in the language itself. A necessary condition for something being theatre is a condition that all theatres must satisfy; a sufficient condition for something being theatre is a condition that, when satisfied, guarantees that what satisfies it is theatre.

3 Defining 'the work': Text, Performance & Fidelity

The relationship between text and performance is a particularly central concern for theatre ontology. However, the historic and ongoing focus on the text/performance relationship in the philosophy of theatre might also be construed as symptomatic of application – on the one hand, as the application to theatre of established conceptual models concerning what counts as 'the work' (of art) that derive from the philosophy of music; and on the other, in terms of locating the philosopher in a transcendent, determining position with respect to the knowledge of his object. In terms of the former, it is troubling perhaps, that one could (as I have here) simply substitute the word 'theatre' for 'music' in Bowie's summary of the discussion of music in analytical philosophy: Discussion of theatre (as in music) in analytical philosophy often takes the form of attempts to

6 See Stephen Davies: "A necessary condition for something's being an X is a condition that all X's must satisfy" (2016: 24). Correlatively, "A sufficient condition for something's being an X is a condition that, when satisfied, guarantees that what satisfies it is an X" (Davies 2016: 25).

determine what constitutes a theatrical 'work': is it the dramatic text, all performances which are 'faithful' to the text, any performance that gets near to fidelity or authenticity, or can there be performances without texts etc.? (And indeed this same line of questioning is equally dominant in contemporary analytic philosophies of dance where questions of "dance ontology, dance work identity and authentic performance" lead to debates as to "the conditions that must be satisfied in order for two distinct dance performances to be instances of the same work" [Bunker, Pakes and Rowell 2013: 10]). That is, all of the recent analytic philosophies of theatre under consideration here devote some time to addressing the identity of theatre in terms of the text/performance relationship – indeed some, such as Hamilton and Davies, are almost exclusively concerned with this question, at least in the particular books we focus on here. As we'll see, analytic philosophers of theatre hold a range of views on this point – from those, like Woodruff, who argue that there is some 'thing' – the theatrical work – which is repeated by but irreducible to its productions and performances of those productions (Woodruff 2008: 57), to those like Hamilton who reject the very idea that performances are 'of' anything extraneous to them.

First applied to art by Nelson Goodman in *Languages of Art* (1968), the type/token distinction is still widely used in analytic philosophical aesthetics "to distinguish works of art themselves (types) from their physical incarnations (tokens)" (Wetzel 2006: n. pag.), particularly in relation to the so-called 'multiple arts' – such as photography, film, printmaking and certain cast-based approaches to sculpture – as well as to the performing arts, to differentiate and examine the relationship between, *Hamlet* (per se) and specific performances of it. For many analytic philosophers of art, performable works are best understood as 'types' and work-performances as their 'tokens' – with Richard Wollheim being the first to do so with specific reference to theatrical performances in his influential 1968 text, *Art and Its Objects* (Saltz 1995: 268). Indeed Hamilton goes as far as to suggest that "[m]ost philosophers engaged in analytic aesthetics accept something like the type/token model as roughly on the right track" (Hamilton 2007: 23) – and certainly, after Wollheim, the type/token distinction remains a key conceptual tool for both Saltz and Carroll in particular.

More problematic are the ways in which this application of the type/token distinction has arguably encouraged a focus on performance in terms of 'fidelity' or authenticity, with the philosophy of theatre placing itself or its models in the role of gatekeeper with respect to the criteria (or 'fidelity standards') for a true performance of X. That is, another defining feature of the classical paradigm is its concern for the question of what counts as 'truth to the work' when it comes to performances of particular musical scores, plays and so on. Or, to translate the same question into the vocabulary of the type/token distinction: analytic philo-

sophical aesthetics has often sought to determine what allows a given performance to be a 'correct', 'authentic' or otherwise 'properly formed token' of a given work; what makes one interpretation more truthful to the work than another? Conventionally, the authenticity of a performance has been equated with the extent to which it is seen as conforming to the author's intentions (see Davies 2011); and in turn, there have been some analytic philosophers – such as Goodman (1976) with respect to the classical music context – who take the absolutist view that a performance is only true to the work it performs – only a 'correct' token of its type – if it follows the explicit prescriptions contained within the script or score, *to the letter*. In turn, applying Goodman's requirements to performances of *Hamlet* – even if we accept the possibility of a pure truth to a play-text – would render 'incorrect' all productions that abridge or edit Shakespeare's text in any way (which, as Davies notes, is almost all of them). And this is before we raise the issue of *which version* of the Hamlet text we are talking about.

Of course, Goodman's position is a particularly extreme one. And both Hamilton and Saltz have criticized the failure of supposed alternatives to this 'classical paradigm' of the text/performance relation – such as the 'two-text model' primarily associated with semiotic approaches to theatre – to escape the prescriptive notion of 'fidelity standards'. Likewise, I am not denying that analytic philosophers vary in their definitions and understandings of types (as sets, kinds, categories, laws, or universals being just some of the more influential designations) and indeed there are also those who question whether the concept of a type has any explanatory value at all.[7] But whether or not they think in Platonic terms – of philosophy as capable of seeing beyond the material appearance of tokens (performances) to the ideal types (works) they instantiate – what remains unchanged, from a Laruellian perspective, is the auto-positioning of the philosopher as transcendent authority. In this respect, and in what follows, I am less concerned about the hierarchy between *text and performance* which the analytic philosophy of theatre has relentlessly sought to address (for instance, from the point of view of 'fidelity standards' and their critique), and more concerned with

7 However, there are some more dominant views and general definitions that I will outline briefly here. For instance, Linda Wetzel notes, the relationship between types and tokens "has often been taken to be the relation of *instantiation*, or *exemplification*; a token is an instance of a type; it exemplifies the type" (Wetzel 2014: n. pag.). Broadly speaking, types are construed as general and abstract entities, whereas tokens are particular and concrete instances of that type; for instance, 'humanity' can be understood as a type and specific individuals as examples or instances of humanity. As such, the relationship between types and tokens has been variously understood as more or less transcendent or immanent, representational or expressionist by competing theories. According to a Platonic model, for instance, a type is an abstract entity existing outside of space and time; tokens are our only (poor) representatives of the existence and nature of types.

the hierarchy between *philosophy and theatre*: between the mode of thought and knowledge that the philosophy of theatre assumes for itself and that which it assigns to theatre (with *the very act of assignation* being a moot point). That is, whilst the analytic philosophy of theatre has developed its own extensive critique of the idea that a performance is necessarily a 'performance of X' (*of* an independent work, such as a play-text, and all the issues of hierarchy and determination that such a model has tended to imply in terms of the relationship between text and performance),[8] it has arguably been remarkably uncritical of its own stance as a 'philosophy of X'. Or again, even though analytic aesthetics provides the resources to critique the kinds of hierarchies of 'composition' over 'execution' implied by the application of 'two-tier' models to performance (Carroll 2006: 107), there arguably remains limited attention to the forms of power and evaluation involved in the philosophical definition of the identity of theatre itself.

4 The Philosophy *of* Definition

As we've noted though, there are a wide variety of understandings of the philosophical work involved in the act of definition – not all concerned with essence and ontology. In this sense, definitions themselves have also been 'objects' of philosophical reflection in analytic aesthetics too – with an almost sculptural attention being paid to their material properties (as more or less 'rigid' or 'elastic') and a particular concern for their edges. Though for many such material arguments might be considered as 'metaphors', we might also consider them more literally in terms of how the materiality of different philosophies of theatre *move*, *behave* and *act* in relation to other material forms of thought. Conventionally, definitions are understood to enable distinctions; they supposedly serve to describe, distinguish between and categorise different kinds of phenomena – for instance, different kinds of creative processes or theatrical forms. In order to serve this function, they must be sufficiently 'robust', to use a term adopted by Hamilton (Hamilton 2007: 65); too loose or open a definition and it fails to serve this distinguishing function – allowing anything and everything to fall within its scope. And yet, too robust, fixed or restrictive a definition may exclude worthy, existing, and future counter-examples; or indeed "exert a stifling influence on

8 For example, both Saltz and Hamilton are not only critical of textual priority in the literary model, but also in the subsequent 'two-text model' – as employed in much semiotic theory wherein the performance itself is conceived as a 'text' that transforms, translates or 'transcodes' a written text – for failing to escape fidelity standards and maintaining a Platonic hierarchy of text as original type and performance as poor copy (Saltz 1995: 266; Hamilton 2007: 27).

artistic creativity" (Adajian 2016: n. pag.) however indirectly. For instance, Woodruff describes his own definition of theatre as having 'soft edges' which allow for certain phenomena to operate on the boundary between theatre and other things (2008: 40), and indeed many philosophers in the broader area of analytic philosophical aesthetics have suggested that definitions be valued on the basis of their acknowledgment of such 'borderline cases' as a feature of creative practice.

And yet, there is an argumentative circularity here insofar as the perceived 'clarity' or uncontroversial nature of any 'example' of theatre, or the apparent worthiness of any 'counter-example', is never simply self-evident or given but depends on its recognition as such according to an extant definition of theatre. In turn, then, the judgment of the usefulness of a given definition – of how well it *works* or 'stands up' – can only be made on the basis of the application of an existing idea of what theatre is, which remains unquestioned. In Davies, for instance, a definition – as a set of conditions to which an example must necessarily conform in order to be defined as such – is valued on the basis of its ability to withstand counter-examples; it falls if one can find an 'incontestable example' of that which it defines that fails to meet one of the conditions set (Davies 2011: 12). Likewise, Woodruff's articulation of his project seems indicative of the ways in which philosophy of theatre often involves a 'seeking' determined by an advance decision as to what you will find, rather than an act of genuine discovery or invention: "My thesis that theater is necessary implies that it is culturally universal – that it can be found in every culture. If the 'it' I am seeking is a cultural universal, then *it should be hard to pin down* in terms that are specific to one culture or another" (Woodruff 2008: 13; my emphasis). In order to argue that theatre is something that all human cultures need, Woodruff could not adopt a restricted definition of theatre based on what he calls, "art theater in the European tradition" (Woodruff 2008: 25). But which of these features of Woodruff's philosophy comes first: the openness to an expanded definition of theatre (which is required by the argument), or the desire to make the argument for theatre's universality (which necessitates the expanded definition)?

Of course, it might then be protested that the analytic philosophy of theatre escapes these issues through the much celebrated 'debate' it claims to foster within its own communities. That is, philosophical aesthetics – as much as other branches of Anglo-American philosophy – often seems to pride itself on and place great store in the value of arguments between philosophers to develop our understanding of phenomena like theatrical performance. And certainly, the definition of theatre provided by one of our philosophers here can indeed be challenged by the 'examples' or 'counter-examples' drawn from another. For instance, Woodruff argues that "We need only ourselves in theater. Theater is human action being watched" (2008: 38). In contrast, both Stern and Hamilton engage with what

might be considered historical precedents for and, in Stern's case, future possibilities of something like a 'theatre without humans' or at least, without human performers. In this sense, whilst definitions of theatre are often presented as a necessary starting point from which an argument can then 'move on', it is also that the terms in which definitions are articulated themselves require definition, and so on, in a seemingly endless process. Woodruff, for instance, must explain what he means by 'action', 'watching' and 'human' in ways that can all be contested based on differing concepts of such terms or by introducing distinctions within terms according to different 'types' of watching (2008: 18).

For his part, John Ó Maoilearca proposes a notion of constantly mutating definitions: those that operate as 'quasi-concepts' and mark a material resistance to positive definition and conceptual determination and an openness to the unexpected or unpredictable. What we need, he suggests, is a "definition of philosophy and thought *malleable* enough to accommodate radically new forms of thinking from non-philosophical sources" which would include theatre and performance (Mullarkey 2009: 4). And colleagues in analytic philosophy might suggest that there are already parallels (even long-standing precedents) for such thinking within philosophical aesthetics – for instance, in Weitz's 'open concept argument' (Adajian 2016: n. pag.).[9] But there are differences, I suspect, both in terms of how the movement of conceptual *expansion* or *opening* is understood in each of these cases, and in what 'triggers' such an expansion. In Ó Maoilearca's and indeed in our own conception, conceptual or definitional expansion can be understood via Henri Bergson as well as Laruelle – not as a merely *quantitative* expansion wherein a concept comes to include more cases within itself without ostensibly changing, but as the result of a *qualitative* extension or 'break' that transforms or mutates the identity of the concept altogether. Such an extension is less a matter of a conscious 'decision' on the part of the thinker, and more the effect of a more embodied attitude or practical 'stance'. The risk of the former way of thinking is that novelty – a new kind of theatre, for instance, that puts pressure on our concept of theatre – is simply incorporated or assimilated into a definition according to a gesture of homogenization or appropriation. The new theatre has been 'allowed in' but only on the grounds of suppressing that which made it apparently excluded or novel in the first place. Or again, putting too much store on 'decision' – the decision that *this* new phenomenon or *this* new change in

9 According to Thomas Adajian's exposition of Weitz's Open Concept Argument: "any concept is open if a case can be imagined which would call for some sort of decision on our part to extend the use of the concept to cover it, or to close the concept and invent a new one to deal with the new case; all open concepts are indefinable; and there are cases calling for a decision about whether to extend or close the concept of art. Hence art is indefinable" (Adajian 2016: n. pag.).

theatre practice demands an expansion of our concept of theatre (whereas others or previous ones did not) – risks leaving unquestioned precisely the criteria that would enable such a decision in the first place. *What is it that allows* a practice to be perceived by the philosopher of theatre as requiring definitional expansion, as demanding inclusion? The imperceptible processes that generate our decisions – about what to include in our concepts of theatre and philosophy – seem to me to require a different way of thinking about practicing inclusivity, if that is indeed our shared aim.

Of course, one might reasonably ask why philosophical approaches to definition matter from the point of view of theatre practice. What are definitions ultimately *for*? What, if any, material effects might they have on theatre? As Anna Pakes and I have recently discussed, what philosophers define as 'theatre' (as distinct from 'dance' or 'non-art' forms of action) seems unlikely to have any direct influence on what kinds of theatre practice receive public funding or are programmed by major institutions. So is it mere arrogance or over-blown self-importance, then, that allowed Richard Schechner, when he was developing his broad-spectrum account of performance, to state: "I want to work to expand the definition of theatre so that theatre practice may be expanded and vice versa" (Schechner 1973: vii–viii)? And yet, it is obvious that what has been said and written about theatre – including in the form of the philosophy of theatre – has historically had significant material effects on its practice as well as the other way around. David Kornhaber's (2016) excellent recent book on the reciprocity of (more and less direct) influence between Nietzsche and the development of modern drama demonstrates as much. What matters, as Bowie (2007) has discussed with respect to music and philosophy, is that we think in terms of a 'complex two-way relationship' rather than in terms of a unilateral one in which it is philosophy's role to determine and define (whether masked as 'description' or privileged ontological 'insight') the nature of theatre practice with no such determination operating in the other direction: *of* philosophy *by* theatre.

If this philosophy has sometimes positioned itself as uniquely positioned to produce an authoritative knowledge of theatre's ontology, it has also cast itself in the role of theatre's savior and situated the act of definition as a core aspect of that heroic task. In Woodruff's case, this is staged as a dramatic confrontation between theatre and cinema, in which film is portrayed as having "shaken audiences out of theaters and into the multiplexes" (2008: 35). Philosophers, Woodruff suggests, "need to defend theater against the idea that it is irrelevant, that it is an elitist and dying art [...] in a culture attuned only to film and television" (2008: 231). And they can do this through the determination of its essential characteristics, through the 'What is...' form of questioning: "What is theater, apart from a script or something that can be done on film? And why has it

been important to us? If we knew the answers, we would know whether to plead for its survival" (Woodruff 2008: 36). On the basis of such a stance, Woodruff clearly cannot engage with new media theatre and the use of cinematic techniques in theatre by companies like the UK-based group 1927 that may yet be shown to have done a great deal to bring new and larger audiences into theatres (and even via the multiplex given the popularity of phenomena such as NTLive). And Woodruff perhaps is also the most vociferous about the *need* for the philosophical definition of theatre in this regard in order to protect against relativism: a postmodern nightmare where 'anything goes' and in which anything and everything might be called theatre, philosophy or thought. According to Woodruff, for instance, we need "clear criteria" that enable us to decide whether the performance we are watching "is, or is not, *Hamlet*" (2008: 53) – even though he admits the possibility of boundary cases which are not *Hamlet*, but not not *Hamlet* either (2008: 52).

5 Definition, Description and Evaluation

However, it could clearly be objected that not all, and even increasingly few, philosophical definitions of theatre are conceived in terms of an 'old-fashioned' notion of 'essence'. Indeed, Saltz insists that contemporary analytic philosophers no longer seek "to define a timeless essence of art or aesthetic experience" (2015: 101). Philosophers of theatre know that theatre is diverse and ever-changing, and therefore steer clear of attempting to generate definitions of theatre that might apply universally and for all time. Stern, for instance, draws attention to the challenges that theatre presents to 'description': and refers to the unlikelihood of producing "a satisfactory descriptive definition that captures just exactly what it is that makes something 'theatre'" given the 'multi-faceted', historical complexity of the phenomenon (and yet we might observe that there is still an 'it' here: some thing that makes theatre theatre even if it is presented as inaccessible to direct philosophical description) (2014: 6). Likewise, Hamilton, goes as far as to suggest that no definition of the practice of theatre is possible: "The technical problem is that for any reasonable definition of 'theater', just as of 'performance', equally reasonable counterexamples are possible, indeed even likely" (2013: 543). For instance, Hamilton suggests, any definition that distinguishes theatre through its presentation of live performers "clearly excludes puppetry, which is a fairly standard form of theater in Europe and Asia" (2013: 543). Even if we expand the definition to include "performers *or* things made to act like them" (2013: 543), he notes, we necessarily exclude important instances of Futurist theatre. But in this respect, my own resistance to definition is somewhat different: thinking less in

terms of the supposed givenness of 'reasonable counterexamples', and more in terms of the seeming circularity of logic where the value of a definition is proven on the basis of counterexamples, which themselves require a definition in order to be recognized as such. But what are the criteria for identifying the counterexample: Futurist theatre without actors as theatre (not some other order of event); puppetry not only as theatre but as 'proper' theatre (no less theatre than any other form)?

Likewise, Saltz (2015: 99) argues that although the 'poststructuralist revolution' had a greater and more immediate influence on Anglo-American scholars in literature and the arts, by the early 1990s a similar aversion to totalizing theories and metanarratives had taken root in analytic philosophical aesthetics too. For instance, he cites Peter Kivy's presidential address to the American Society for Aesthetics in 1993 as evidence of the field's willingness to abandon a 'top-down approach' to the arts:

> Progress in the philosophy of art in the immediate future is to be made not by theorizing in the grand manner, but by careful and imaginative philosophical scrutiny of the individual arts and their individual problems. We can no longer hover above our subject matter like Gods from machines, bestowing theory upon a practice in sublime and sometimes even boastful ignorance of what takes place in the dirt and mess of the workshop. (Kivy 1993: 128)

And yet, this very proclamation might be seen as preserving a transcendental authority for philosophy insofar as it decides, from the outset, that what there are are "individual arts" with "individual problems" (rather than, for instance, hybrid or multi-modal practices, interdisciplinary arts, or works that might situate themselves in art contexts but borrow forms from the social rather than assuming a clear delineation between the standard creative disciplines and everyday life). Whilst Kivy endorses a grounded knowledge of practice, the logic through which he articulates this knowledge seems to suggest that it will be generated in a tautological or circular manner, wherein the philosophy of art 'finds' the individuality of the arts it seeks. Likewise, despite the appeal to philosophers of art to come back down to earth in order to create theory on the basis of a closer relationship to practice, this call is still expressed in terms that seem to assume that "philosophical scrutiny" or theorizing is not already going on, immanently, in the supposed "dirt and mess of the workshop". Surely, though, the genuine 'descent' or fall of the philosopher (with no pejorative association attached to downward movement) is not about getting his hands dirty, but questioning his very presumption of the messiness of practice (and the 'cut' between this mess and the clarity assumed to be provided by philosophy).

Related to this, it might also be objected that philosophers increasingly recognize the inevitably normative rather than purely descriptive nature of defini-

tions. Although such a view returns us to the question of the values embedded in his own choice of 'examples', Stern is nevertheless right to observe that: "Debates about definitions of theatre are, often enough, really debates about what matters and what ought to matter" (2014: 7). That is, Stern suggests: "those who would offer a definition of theatre often aren't really trying to include everything that could be counted as theatre; often they have a particular aesthetic or philosophical goal in mind – a certain view of what theatre ought to be, rather than a descriptive account of what it is" (2014: 7). Just as a history of theatre is clearly never a "neutral description of a cultural practice" (Stern 2014: 7), nor can a philosophy of theatre be considered apolitical or without reference to the power relations and conventions it resists and reinforces (which is not the same as claiming any direct political power for academic philosophy or direct or immediate power over theatre practice for the analytic philosophy of theatre). Drawing attention to the extent to which 'how things come to be', or come to be counted as the thing they purport to be, is a matter of convention and the unequal distribution of power is a valuable thing in itself here, perhaps – such that one might welcome Saltz's reference to the plural and changing conventions that may allow a particular performance to count as a performance of *Hamlet* for one audience but not for another (Saltz 2015: 102).

And indeed some philosophers are willing to be explicit about and unapologetic of this normative agenda. Woodruff, for example, does not conceal the fact that his definition of theatre is there to support his aim "to provide a systematic background theory for judgments of value" – in the end, to claim that "a good performance of *Antigone* is better as theater than a typical football game" (2008: 37), despite his willingness to define both as theatre (2008: 41). And indeed, the inseparability of definition and evaluation is particularly pronounced in Woodruff's work – partly because he consciously addresses this theme, but also because of the troubling implications of the values embedded in his definition of theatre and of good theatre. Drawing from a scientific model of classification, Woodruff suggests that "[a] good specimen is one from which you can learn about the nature of the species. A definition states the nature of a kind of thing. [...] It follows that a good specimen is a good illustration for the definition" (2008: 66). In this way, Woodruff emphasises, the project of definition is clearly also one of evaluation; "defining things is not innocent", it involves a judgment of what differentiates a "good" from a "bad" or at least "better" or "worse" specimen (for instance, of the human species), distinguishing examples we should learn from and those we should reject as misleading anomalies (2008: 66–67). The disquieting nature of this gesture surfaces when it becomes clear that Woodruff's judgment of better and worse theatrical characters also amounts to an evaluation of better and worse people (or possibly even, more or less valid specimens of

humanity) – where reason and 'sanity' is valued over madness; coherence and consistency (though not predictability) over incoherence and randomness; the 'free' over those whose lives are judged to be determined by internal or external forces (2008: 88–89). Good humans are those who make choices that "come from a mind in working order" (2008: 91), and like good characters, they are those who love and are loved (2008: 104). So the implication would seem to be that the mad, oppressed and unloved make both less good characters and worse examples of humanity (albeit that, for Woodruff, this is a matter of 'seeing as'. That is, what matters is if we are able to see or imagine the character or person as having these qualities whether they have them, 'in truth' or not [2008: 105]).

6 Philosophy's Knowledge of Theatre vs. Theatre *as* Knowledge

If Laruelle's non-philosophy has a founding premise, it is the renunciation of foundation itself in favour of "the multiplicities of knowledge" (2013a: 101). Whereas, philosophy has often assumed a special status for itself with respect to identifying and ordering other knowledges – a privileged power to distinguish between and hierarchize knowledges that demonstrates in itself the assumption of a hierarchical position – non-philosophy argues that "knowledges — including philosophy — must all become equal in the generic, while conserving their difference in disciplinary technique and materiality" (2013a: 104). In this respect, non-philosophy is not a homogenizing gesture. There is a specificity to the material operations of theatre and performance, for instance; but to render these equal to philosophy is precisely to refuse the latter the power to decide upon the nature and basis of disciplinary differences in advance.

In contrast, much contemporary philosophy of theatre continues to assign itself a special kind of insight into theatre – in its most fundamental nature – which is often framed as distinct from or unavailable to either theatre practice itself or indeed other forms of theatre scholarship. This is articulated using a variety of visual-spatial metaphors – where philosophy is understood to "illuminate" (Zamir 2014: 31) or "shed light" on theatre, to clarify and determine the "deep concepts" or "conceptual architecture" that are said to precede theatre practice and make it possible (Carroll and Banes 2001: 159). At times, this is problematic insofar as it seems to deny any equivalent powers to theatre practice itself – often reinforcing dichotomies between inquiry and action, thinking and doing, as well as in Zamir's case, experience or existence and knowledge. For instance, despite being willing to characterize such things as mathematics or

history as "practices of inquiry", Carroll insists on aligning theatre with sport, claiming that both are "primarily a matter of making and doing, rather than one of pure inquiry" (2006: 105). Such arguments stand in stark contrast to the foundational premise of the 'practice as research' initiative: that making and doing can constitute forms of inquiry in their own right. Similarly Davies – despite supporting the engagement of philosophers with empirical examples of practice – still ultimately concludes that: "Our general methodological principle counsels us to look to artistic practice for guidance, while holding this practice accountable to rational reflection" seemingly assuming that artistic practice does not encompass rational reflection in themselves (2011: 138).

An epistemological hierarchy between theatre practice and philosophy seems particularly pronounced in Zamir (2014). For instance, Zamir suggests that the philosophy of theatre "is not merely a description" of theatrical practice, rather "it undertakes to unearth the more abstract underpinnings of a practice, ones that", he adds "even its best practitioners risk misrepresenting. […] What a philosophy of art promises (and sometimes, delivers) an artist is […] growth as artist: a greater insight into what one does" (2014: 7). In part, this seeming inequality of philosophical and artistic insight may be because Zamir follows the well-established view, held by many analytic philosophers of language, that thought is a fundamentally linguistic phenomenon (2014: 58). On this basis, he also creates a distinction between thoughts and emotional "states (what one undergoes, experiences, feels)", arguing that whilst our body language, such as the actor's body language, can convey states such as "nervousness" or "anger" in "a nuanced way", it is only spoken language that "externalizes particular thoughts" (Zamir 2014: 58). He goes on:

> Thoughts differ from other mental operations by being linguistic entities not merely conveyed through language, but themselves made up of words. States, on the other hand, often include words, but not necessarily and not all the time. Happiness, for example, may include the verbalized awareness of the reasons underlying one's feeling. But it can also encompass substantial gaps, in which no thought is being consciously formulated, or in which only half-thoughts surface. (Zamir 2014: 58)

He also posits a firm distinction between philosophy and acting on the basis of a series of other related conceptual oppositions: between thinking and doing, knowing and experiencing. Allow me to quote him at length in this instance:

> Acting is first and foremost an experience rather than a mode of knowing. Yet the hold exerted by such experience on an actor, its power, its meaning, arise from touching what really exists. Acting is an artificial mechanism that cuts through appearances, revealing hidden dimensions of the living process. Its overlap with philosophy consists of this reach

> into an evasive reality. Its distance from philosophy relates to orientation: philosophy justifies, whereas acting realizes; philosophy thinks, acting does; philosophy articulates, acting situates. Philosophy, in short, is a rigorous expression of the wish to know – acting, a committed manifestation of the desire to be. (Zamir 2014: 218)

In the first instance, by contrast, we might insist that acting can and does function as a way of knowing – as countless practitioner-researchers in this area would attest. But I also want to suggest that there is a gesture of authority and of closure enacted or performed in this essentializing definition of philosophy and acting – even if Zamir bestows upon acting a metaphysical power. That is, Zamir does indeed admit of an 'overlap' as well as a 'distance' in the relationship between acting and philosophy; he does indeed credit the practice of actors to "*illuminate* what we know", philosophically, as much as philosophical knowledge "intensifies what one becomes" – hence his support for a greater meeting of the vocations of acting and philosophizing (2014: 218). And yet, he assumes for his own thought the privileged perspective (what we might think of as a transcendent view from nowhere) from which to survey the nature of thought *per se* – to act as the gatekeeper at the threshold of thought and half-thought. Furthermore, seen in the context of Bowie's arguments about music, Zamir's linguistic determination of thought risks neglecting precisely that which is 'philosophically significant' (Bowie 2007: 416) about theatre, and specifically the work of the actor. That is, the psychophysical techniques of the trained actor might well prove profoundly valuable to our project to enact a "democracy of thought", given that the qualitative extension of philosophy's concepts might have less to do with argument or conscious decision and more to do with something like an affective or felt "knowledge of 'unknowing'" (Mullarkey 2009: 211).

The birth of practice as research is important here. This development in turn, of course, might be put into the context of long-standing arguments within philosophy regarding the relationship between art and knowledge – to debates as to whether the value of the arts, including theatre, lies in the emotions and pleasures they might be seen to produce or in the knowledge they might be seen to provide for both makers and audiences. But the potentially radical proposition of practice as research – or of theatre as the production of knowledge (which would surely demand the idea of emotion and pleasure as forms of knowledge) – does not yet seem to have made an impression within the philosophy of theatre. Zamir, for instance, implies that actors and academics belong to distinct categories of people and reinforces a distinction between philosophy as a kind of thinking and source of knowledge, versus acting as a mode of existence of being. Regardless of which side of the binary might be valued over the other here, the assumption that it is the role and capacity of the philosopher (alone) to determine such categories is problematic in itself. And indeed, Kirkkopelto acknowledges

the ways in which practice as research itself has "had recourse to philosophy in order to justify its existence and legitimize itself in the eyes of others" (Kirkkopelto 2015: 4). Whilst not intrinsically troubling in itself, Kirkkopelto notes how artists turning to philosophy and philosophers risk remaining unilateral:

> Such thinkers tend to be used as ultimate authorities, whose role in the discourse is to frame the area of questioning and to define its basic orientation. There is no question of criticizing or challenging Deleuze, Merleau-Ponty, Foucault, Dewey or Wittgenstein through one's own humble practice! From the point of view of the artist, however, this kind of preliminary delimitation is deeply compromising. From the philosophical point of view, in turn, the relation itself remains unphilosophical. (Kirkkopelto 2015: 4)

In contrast, he suggests that "[w]hat is more important is to recognize the genuine nature, in other words the *philosophical bearing*, of the questions practitioners present to their artistic and academic communities as well as to a wider society" (Kirkkopelto 2015: 4). Of course, long before the emergence of PaR or artistic research, theatre practice already included an interrogation of the conditions of its own appearance and the boundaries of its own identity, in different contexts. Theatre has always been a self-contesting identity. Practitioners have asked and provided responses to the question of what produces theatre as such, and what (if anything) makes something 'theatre' in a huge variety of ways. That is, an immanent self-questioning – undertaken in and as theatre itself – of the spatio-temporal, perceptual, relational and formal boundaries of where theatre might be seen to *occur* is what has driven and continues to drive many theatre practices.

From a Laruellian perspective, in fact, we might note the ways in which theatre itself has sought to act as 'philosophy' – that is, as transcendent authority. In this respect, it is not only Philosophy (the discipline), but theatre too that has assumed for itself the capacity for a privileged kind of 'seeing', metaphysical or otherwise, in relation to the Real. For example, in 2000, the philosopher Aldo Tassi delivered a paper in which he noted the irony that: "At the very moment when philosophy is focusing its efforts at bringing metaphysics to an 'end', metaphysics finds itself flourishing in the theatre, which speaks of itself as 'metaphysics-in-action' and publishes treatises carrying such titles as *The Act of Being: Toward a Theory of Acting*" (Tassi 2000: n. pag.). In a genealogy that runs from Artaud's *The Theatre and Its Double* to the American director and playwright Charles Marowitz's 1978 text [via Peter Brook], Tassi observes that:

> Theatre has redefined itself in the last hundred years. It has resolutely rejected all the conventions that have sought to control its performance in advance, in effect bypassing the book metaphor. The theatre has once again taken on metaphysical weight [...] declaring its

> goal to be one of "reconciling us philosophically with Becoming." (Artaud, 44, 109). (Tassi 2000: n. pag.)

In the case of Artaud – even if we accept that the aim of his metaphysical Theatre of Cruelty was a form of 'differential presence' (Cull 2009), rather than a simple presence vulnerable to deconstruction – it still assumes for itself alone an exceptional power to touch the real and make evident its true nature. In this sense, as Laruelle (2011) suggests with respect to photography, a non-standard philosophy of theatre would not simply be a matter of reversing the status of theatre and philosophy with respect to ontology or of reaffirming them as rivals in terms of their relative powers to capture reality in its most fundamental form. What matters on both sides is the abandonment – again, in each new context – of claims to have attained 'the truest real' either through theatre or philosophy, and the rejection of the kinds of domination that such claims perform.

Correlatively, Laruelle's non-philosophy is not simply a reiteration of the Kantian critique of metaphysics, nor indeed of the "intraphilosophical critique" of philosophy as a mirror of reality – whether via Fichte, Husserl, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, or Lévinas (Laruelle 2013c: 11). That is, just as the theatre clearly contains a long-standing internal critique of the idea of its capacity to hold an undistorted or 'unrefracted' mirror up to nature, Laruelle is not disputing that the history of philosophy contains countless explorations of the limits of its own representations of reality. However, Ó Maoilearca and Smith suggest that the significance of Laruelle's project lies in the extent to which it extends such critique beyond metaphysics, to "*all* self-styled philosophical thought, metaphysical and nonmetaphysical" (Mullarkey and Smith 2012: 4). In the same way, it is not that the problem that non-philosophy seeks to address has already been 'solved' by so-called philosophies of difference insofar as these too tend to position their own particular definition of true philosophical thought (however affective or immanent) as a privileged explanation of the real. Even Badiou's seemingly egalitarian stance towards theatre as a form of thinking that conditions philosophy, for instance, masks the way in which he retains for his own philosophy the supreme function of 'the thought of thought' and its highest example.

Conclusion

So, is our conclusion that we must abandon the project of definition altogether? From the point of view of philosophies of difference and process – definitions and identifications necessarily operate according to structures of exclusion. This is not to reject the project of definition outright, or the notion of theatrical and

indeed philosophical identity per se; so much as to note the ways in which identities are perpetually established by exclusion – and to consider the ways in which we relate to that which might currently be excluded from our concepts of philosophy, theatre and thought. Or again, it means that every definition is provisional and must remain provisional: as a sort of fiction – but by no means 'unreal' as such. Or perhaps, definition *is* theatre understood in an expanded and expanding fashion, understood indefinitely, by or through the very performance of thinking it as an equal to philosophy and other forms of thought. It is to insist on the acknowledgment of the unequal operations of material forces of power and resistance, convention and invention, that surround the production of what counts as 'thought' and the often hierarchical relationships between different forms of thought like theatre and philosophy. Correlatively, this is not to deny that there continue to be situations in which both theatre and philosophy need to assert a particular identity in order to protect against marginalization, for instance in the context of ongoing debates about the wider social value or 'relevance' of them both as disciplines in secondary and higher education. It is not a call to abandon definition necessarily, but for a pluralist stance towards the co-existence of theatre and philosophy's multiple identities and an attention to the processes through which our definitions of both might be qualitatively extended.

From a Laruellian perspective, theatre and philosophy as forms of thought, as well as thought in general, are 'perpetually indefinite' in a manner that resists any essentialising definition (Mullarkey 2009: 208, 210). This is not inconsistent or paradoxical, in that to call theatre a perpetually indefinite process, or fundamentally multiple, is not to provide a definition of it. Nor is it a rejection of the production of definitions of theatre, but a call to open the 'stance' we occupy in relation to the multiplicity of definitions produced by the philosophy of theatre, theatre studies and by theatre practice. Such a stance does not deny the concrete specificity of different forms of thought; nor does this alternative paradigm involve renouncing the 'techniques' belonging to specific practices of philosophy and theatre, in favour of a kind of post-disciplinary or post-professional dilettantism. Indeed, elsewhere, Laruelle suggests that "it is necessary to know what is philosophy and what is science" – but this is necessarily and perpetually a provisional knowledge in a given context (2013a: 71). It is not a knowledge arrived at in advance via a "dogmatic *unilateral cut* between two terms", but one that performs an "ambiguity of relations", or what he describes as a "unilateral complementarity" (Laruelle 2013a: 71).

In this respect, Laruelle is not dismissing the possibility of producing theory or philosophy in relation to art, just not as interpretation or application (consciously or not). He states: **"**We propose another solution that, without excluding aesthetics, no longer grants it this domination of philosophical categories over

works of art, but limits it in order to focus on its transformation" (Laruelle 2013b: 1). Laruelle describes his own "non-aesthetics" or "non-standard aesthetics" as aiming toward "the reciprocal determination of art and philosophy" (2013b: 1). Alternatively he suggests that non-aesthetics might be conceived as the extension of art to philosophy: "the moment when thought in its turn becomes a form of art. It is a new usage of their mimetic rivalry, their conflictual tradition, which is finally suspended for a common oeuvre, a new 'genre'" (2013b: 2). Indeed intriguingly for us, Laruelle describes the work of non-standard aesthetics in arguably theatrical and performative terms; that is, he suggests that in order to deliver art from the authority of aesthetics "one must construct non-aesthetic scenarios or duals, scenes, characters, or postures that are both conceptual and artistic. [...] We will not start from a question, we will not ask *what is art*, *what is the essence of a photo*?" (Laruelle 2011: 3). Neither 'creation' nor 'thought', practice nor theory, can be placed on one side of the art/philosophy divide or the other. It's not about artists and philosophers simply turning into each other. As Laruelle puts it:

> The reciprocal autonomy of art and theory signifies that we are not the doubles of artists, that we also have a claim to 'creation', and that inversely, artists are not the inverted doubles of aestheticians and that they, too, without being theorists, have a claim to the power of theoretical discovery. We recognize that they have a place all the more solitary, and we receive from them the most precious gift, that we will cease to make commentaries on them and to submit them to philosophy so as finally not to 'explain' them but, on the basis of their discovery taken up as a guiding thread (or, if you like, as cause) to follow the chain of theoretical effects that it sets off in our current knowledge of art, in what is conventional and stereotypical in it, fixed in an historical or obsolete state of invention and of its spontaneous philosophy. To mark its theoretical effects in excess of all knowledge. (2011: 71)

And crucially, we might end by noting that Laruelle's non-philosophy does not suggest itself as simply the next new and better philosophy (of art, of philosophy, or of anything else), or as the latest fashionable (European) method that theatre and performance theorists need to learn how to *apply*. Non-philosophy is not a 'better method' of representing the Real and indeed must keep mutating its own concepts too in order to avoid contradiction. Non-philosophy is and must remain "the manner of thinking that does not know a priori what it is to think or to think the One" (Laruelle 2012: 67). What this means in practice, is the genuine opening and re-opening of thought to its own mutation.

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