Revisiting Eva Marie
Saint’s White Glove
On Props, Neurons, Subtext, and Empathy
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In what is known as the “white glove scene” of Elia Kazan and Budd Schulberg’s 1954 film *On the Waterfront*, Eva Marie Saint’s good-girl character, Edie Doyle, does not wish to spend time talking in a New Jersey waterfront park with the longshoreman thug Terry Malloy, played by Marlon Brando. As she turns away from him to walk home alone, she takes her gloves from her coat pocket and accidentally drops one. Terry picks it up and, rather than hand it back to Edie, he sits down on a swing, casually cleans the glove of dirt, and then puts it on his left hand. The behavior was not scripted for the film yet it accompanies Schulberg’s dialogue, which is mostly uncomfortable small talk initiated by Terry in a labored attempt to seek out a connection with Edie.¹

For cinephiles the white glove scene has acquired mythic status. It holds a special allure for many reasons, one being that fans of the film appreciate it according to its intended reception. Kazan, providing an authorial, psychoanalytic interpretation of the scene, says, “As they were walking along, she accidentally dropped her glove; and Brando picked up the glove; and by holding it, she couldn’t get away—the glove was his way of holding her. Furthermore, whereas he couldn’t, because of this tension about her brother being killed, demonstrate any sexual or loving feeling towards her, he could towards the glove. And he put his hand inside the glove . . . so that the glove was both his way of holding on to her against her will, and at the same time he was able to express, through the glove, something he couldn’t express to her directly. So the object, in that sense, did it all.”² In other words, the glove served Brando by allowing him to express through behavior the subtextual yearnings of the character. Because of his guilt for the role he played in Edie’s brother’s
death at the start of the film, and because of his own sense of worthlessness, Terry does not feel permitted to express verbally his attraction for Edie. Brando found a way to express the character’s desire behaviorally with the assistance of an object, and appreciative audiences thrilled at the virtuosity of the performance. Looking at the scene from another perspective, Paul Willemen and Noel King call it “epiphatic,” which they define as providing revelations beyond the intention of the performance text and towards “an aspect or dimension of a person . . . which is not choreographed for you to see.”3 In phenomenological terms, something in excess of the character and the story became present in Brando’s performance, even in the filmic medium.

In light of Bruce McConachie’s admonition that theatre scholars apply cognitive research to their objects of inquiry whenever feasible, this article reevaluates the kinds of audience responses conjured by moments of performance like the white glove scene.5 McConachie specifically cautions against relying upon twentieth-century critical theories like those reflected by Kazan and Willemen and King, but rather than reject those theories, he asks that they meet the demands of falsifiability—that is, that they be tried by the scientific method.5 Yet, as David Saltz points out in his editorial comment to the Theatre Journal issue devoted to cognition, while McConachie tends to regard semiotic and phenomenological theories as “inadequate” to account for audience perception, other theatre scholars find that cognitive science may be used productively with other theoretical approaches, specifically phenomenology.6 This paper argues that common ground exists between psychoanalytical, phenomenological, and neurological considerations of behavior, object use, and audience reception, especially in terms of their understanding of empathy, which is a touchstone issue of central concern to McConachie’s work in cognition. The article seeks a better understanding of how various discourses inform our comprehension of the co-affection and empathic responses audiences experience during moments of heightened stage and film behavior.

Rather than simply extol further the virtues of cognitive science for theatre studies, however, this article also inserts cognitive studies, along with psychoanalysis and phenomenology, into another contemporary discourse currently transpiring on theory, spectatorship, and the unique essence of performance. Expressing disenchantment with the negative assessments of performance stated or implied in recent criticism, Aleksandra Wolska and Alice Rayner call for an attention to performance that appreciates its unique facility for breathing new life into old forms, for engaging the force of becoming, and for “launching into the territory of the radically unknown,” not as bracketed off from our own messy
and inchoate lives but as intimately interwoven with them. Rayner calls
the “ghost” of theatre the sense that we as individuals bring our own
pasts, experiences, and stories to bear on the present of performance,
and thereby the presence of performance becomes haunted. What cog-
nitive science and phenomenology yet have to account for, and what psy-
choanalysis continues to attempt, is the degree to which our own specific
and individual desires and memories partake in the creative endeavors we
encounter—like that of Brando, Saint, and a glove. Therefore, as Wol-
ska suggests, citing Tadeusz Kantor, “To find performance as a mode of
becoming, we have no choice but to look for it in the ‘very manifes-
tation of life.’”

The article proceeds in two parts. The first defines the kind of prop
use Brando demonstrates with the white glove in light of recent schol-
arship on stage props and within the American Method acting tradi-
tion generally in order to better understand the discourses that inform
the authorial interpretation of the scene Kazan provides. Because the
Method was greatly influenced by Freudian psychoanalysis and under-
stood as a means for actors/characters to become present and transpar-
ent to audiences, the second part takes a closer look at how psychoanaly-
sis and phenomenology account for the kinds of audience co-affection
stage realism fosters and how cognitive studies corroborate those ac-
counts. The article closes with summary thoughts about how future
investigations might lead us into an appreciation of performance—and
of props in performance—as a manifestation of each of our individual
lives.

I. Props, Subtext, and the Method

What do audiences see in the white glove of the white glove scene? The
first characteristic to note is its utter banality. Inexpensive, made of heavy
cotton yarn, knitted, possibly store bought but not new, the glove com-
plements the prim yet economically disadvantaged nature of its owner,
Edie Doyle. The glove has no arresting quality of its own—no mono-
gram, pattern, or detail, nothing to set it apart as unique. Were Brando
not to have toyed with it we may have missed its presence in the perfor-
focuses upon the degree to which props rise above what he calls their
iconic (that is, intended) use in order to draw attention to themselves
and thereby command an integral position within the play’s narrative
and sometimes outside the narrative as well. The white glove resists tran-
scending its iconicity and banality, and therefore it distinguishes itself
from the eight categories of prop use that Sofer outlines.
The glove is not a transformational object because in the hands of the actors it does not become, or signify, another object altogether. Audiences observe and understand Edie’s white glove always as Edie’s white glove even when it is on Terry’s hand. Likewise the glove is not de-familiarized. The actors never use it so that it does not function as a glove and thereby do not tempt the audience to lose the narrative thread of the story in order to reassess the context in which the prop appears or to question the prop’s nature. Because of Terry’s unconscious handling of the glove it does seem to become fetishized; it becomes, in Sofer’s words, “the focus of a character’s projected desire, fear, or anxiety.”

But in Sofer’s description, a fetishized prop takes on the special significance invested by a character, maintains that significance for the audience for the duration of the play, and thereby rises to symbolic stature in association with the play’s theme, like Hedda Gabler’s pistols and the check in A Raisin in the Sun. In the case of On the Waterfront, the white glove takes on no more significance than what Terry invests in it only during the one scene. The use of the glove helps to advance the narrative without becoming a part of the narrative; the glove draws attention not to itself but to Terry, and likewise it avoids according with another of Sofer’s categories, that of signifying independently of the actor who handles it.

Therefore we may propose an additional category for Sofer’s list: that props may maintain their iconic value while at the same time serve to reveal character subtext. This category divides into two subcategories. In the first, characters may use props consciously to express their subtext. As an example, in Tony Kushner’s Homebody/Kabul (2001), Quango Twistleton, high on heroin, takes Priscilla Ceiling’s panties from her suitcase and puts them on his head, then puts his head in the suitcase. The behavior is done when nobody else is present (Priscilla’s father is asleep on the bed having just smoked heroin) and reveals the extent of Quango’s desperation, loneliness, and perversion. Similarly, in an early scene of Paula Vogel’s How I Learned to Drive (1997), Uncle Peck offers his handkerchief to L’il Bit, who has been crying, so she can empty the content of her nose into it. After doing so she hands it back to Peck and, in Paula Vogel’s words, “Without her seeing, he reverently puts it back.” The odd behavior—most people don’t revere snotty handkerchiefs—reveals Peck’s subtextual feelings for his seventeen-year-old niece.

In the above examples the characters are aware of their behavior and are intentional in its execution. Brando’s use of the white glove provides an example of the second subcategory, that of a character using a prop unconsciously to express the character’s subtext. As critics have surmised, Brando’s behavior aims to communicate that Terry is unconscious of his
handling of Edie’s glove, and his unconscious activity speaks volumes about his unspoken feelings for Edie. An early example of unconscious behavior with an object in modern drama occurs at the beginning of Heinrich von Kleist’s *Prince Friedrich of Homburg* (1811). The Prince, on the eve of a decisive battle with the Swedish army, longs for success and recognition. Taking a rest at the castle of the Elector of Brandenburg before joining his troops for the march to battle, the Prince sleepwalks and, unconsciously, makes for himself a laurel wreath. The behavior illuminates for the court the extent of the Prince’s ambition, which turns out to be reckless and sets up the problem of the play.

While not transformed, defamiliarized, or fetishized, props used to reveal subtext acquire a special status that they do not have at any other time in the production or when they are used in a daily, utilitarian manner. The white glove scene would not have attained its singular status had Brando/Terry simply handed the glove back to Saint/Edie after she dropped it; layers of Quango’s and Peck’s emotional problems would remain hidden without the manipulation of panties and handkerchief; and without the laurel wreath, nobody would be able to gauge the Prince’s inner thoughts. For brief moments subtextual behavior with a prop enriches the audience’s comprehension of the verbal flow by revealing for the audience bursts of recognition of hidden facets of the character. Properties like gloves and handkerchiefs skirt the existential possibility that they partake in character agency because, as Rayner notes, “they are not metaphoric substitutes for the person but metonymic connections, attached by mutual touch.” Interest and enjoyment in the subtextual use of props stem not only from the audience’s engaged construction of character and plot that the behavioral moments provide, but at times they also stem from what Willemen and King have identified as the reception of meanings that appear to be in excess of the intended meanings of the authors or actors and that seem to resonate intimately with individual spectators.

The white glove scene offers one notable case. Part of the excess has to do with the unique personal presence that Brando provides—his noted mystique and sexual allure across the gender divide. Furthermore, his acting reputation rests on his exhibition of a craft that makes seemingly improvised moments with mundane objects like a glove routine. But another explanation for such excess might reside in the popular notion that Brando really was living, and not reproducing or manufacturing, his most startling moments of performance, that his acting realized the Method ideal of “being in the moment,” and that he himself was unconscious of the behaviors he exhibited. As Krin Gabbard observes, “The variety of gestures that Brando explores with the glove, seemingly with-
out artifice, convinced many that he was letting his unconscious do the work for him and that he was drawing on training based in psychological insights.\textsuperscript{18}

James Naremore has labeled Brando's handling of the white glove as "a locus classicus of Method technique."\textsuperscript{19} Yet he also argues that the Method should not be given too much credit for pioneering the psychological dimension of character behavior, given that neither the recognition of subtext nor the expressive use of objects were twentieth-century stage inventions, as evidenced in the example of *Prince Friedrich of Homburg* above. But more than that, the belief that Method training promotes a use of objects to reveal subtext is not supported by a review of the tenets of Method technique. None of the acting texts in the American tradition nor any that they spawned nor even the trilogy of acting instruction books by the Method's primary source of inspiration, Constantin Stanislavski, address a use of props beyond their intended utilitarian design.\textsuperscript{20} The mention of props in these books simply serves to advance a truism of psychological realism: that actors inhabit the physical lives of their characters and in so doing exploit the behavioral possibilities inherent in all manner of stage props by, for example, reading a newspaper, tying shoelaces, and fiddling with desktop items.

Nonetheless, most practitioners working in realism would recognize the subtextual use of a prop as characteristic of realist acting despite its lack of mention in acting texts. They do so not only because authors like Kushner and Vogel insert tantalizing uses of properties in their stage directions, but because the subtextual use of a prop does not fall afielde of the theoretical tenets of the Method. Steve Vineberg in *Method Actors: Three Generations of an American Acting Style* (1991) argues in detail what has been recognized as a critical commonplace for some time—that the Method, stimulated by Stanislavski's application of psychological insights, codified the psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) as the foundational principle of its acting process.\textsuperscript{21} The Method in turn prepared actors to reveal through expression and behavior the unconscious and repressed problems of the characters who populated the plays of authors likewise influenced by Freud, such as Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, William Inge, and others.\textsuperscript{22}

As the books devoted to expounding the Method reveal, the writers emphasize relaxation, sensory perception, improvisation, character appearance and mannerisms, and the availability of complex emotion. Most of these techniques aim to cultivate a type of acting that appears to be transpiring as if for the first time and in a manner that is truthful and available in a way that the presentational acting of the late nineteenth-century stage and early twentieth-century film was not. As the realist
American films of the midcentury demonstrate and preserve for us today, great stock was placed on how well an actor could reveal through subtlety of expression the problems of the character’s past: Blanche’s haunting by the death of her homosexual husband in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), Biff’s betrayal by his father in *Death of a Salesman* (1949), and the guilt and shame of the entire Tyrone family for its multiple skeletons in the closet in *Long Day’s Journey into Night* (1942).²² That the past loomed large in the psyche of a character reinforced a central Freudian hypothesis, that the problems and neuroses of the individual result from repressed unconscious drives that war against the subject’s ego.²⁴ Moreover, the sources of such problems—or the nature of the unconscious drives—become evident to the psychoanalyst (and informed spectator) through slips of tongue, unconscious behaviors, and other revealing symptoms such as dreams.

While the Method primers neglect discussing unconscious behaviors in detail and subtextual behaviors with objects altogether, Freud provides definitions and examples. In *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901), Freud distinguishes two types of behavior that reveal unconscious desires and motives. Of note, while Freud does not draw attention to this, most of the examples he provides entail a telling use of a mundane object. The first, “bungled actions,” are behaviors routinely executed successfully (like locking the door when leaving the house) but for some reason executed poorly or unsuccessfully on noteworthy occasions (like forgetting to lock the door when leaving the house for several days). The second type of behaviors Freud called “symptomatic and chance actions.” These are distinguished from bungled actions because they are not variants of habitual behaviors but are unique occurrences that nonetheless do not draw attention to themselves because they seem innocent (like cutting your ring finger accidentally on your wedding anniversary). As with every uncharacteristic action in the life of human beings, Freud places psychoanalytic value on both bungled actions and symptomatic and chance actions; in all cases they reveal something of the unconscious life of the individual.²⁵

Actors aware of the subtextual possibilities available to them in the unconscious handling of mundane objects can create behavioral moments that reinforce or exceed the specific demands of the playwright. The blind character Don in Leonard Gershe’s *Butterflies Are Free* (1969) demonstrates throughout the play that he can navigate his apartment as well as any sighted person. At the climax of the play, he attempts to communicate to Jill that he does not feel hurt by her standing him up for a candlelit dinner and leaving him for another man, and he nonchalantly eats a corned beef sandwich. Gershe provides some clichéd stage
directions that illuminate Don’s pain, such as stammering through lines of dialogue and bumping into things—the kinds of behaviors many journeymen playwrights and actors might invent. But imagine that as the actor/Don eats his sandwich, he reaches for a glass of water but picks up instead a lit candle and lifts it to his mouth, only to set it back down quickly with embarrassment when he feels the heat of the flame against his face. In his distracted state, the actor/Don loses the composure and physical dexterity he normally exhibits, commits a bungled action and almost burns himself, and unconsciously reveals to Jill and the audience the level of his inner torment.

George in Arthur Miller’s *All My Sons* (1947) arrives at the Kellers’ backyard after having visited his father in prison for the first time in several years. In a scene that lasts no more than fifteen minutes, the actor playing in a realistic mode must chart an incredibly difficult arc of the character’s experience even though the text provides no behavioral cues. He must arrive in an outrage bent on disrupting the proposed marriage between his sister Ann and Chris Keller, then within the span of a few minutes acquiesce to the warmth of the Keller family, and then become enraged again once Kate Keller reveals her husband Joe’s culpability in sending George’s father to jail. As George greets Chris and Ann with emotional distance as the stage directions indicate, imagine that the actor adds to George’s attitude the shock of a flood of delightful childhood memories that war against his recently awakened indignation. As he avoids Chris and Ann, the actor/George distractedly approaches the arbor, picks a leaf from a vine, crushes it and smells it. The aroma triggers memories and feelings from an idyllic but lost past. Even before the actor/George begins his argument with Chris and Ann, and before Chris’s mother, Kate, can work her charm on him, the physical environment softens his resolve to confront Joe. Later in the scene as his old girlfriend Lydia, who is now married to someone else, leaves, the actor/George offers her a glass of Kate’s grape drink or an apple sitting in a basket nearby in a desperate attempt to keep her in the backyard, which she declines. All of the actions are chance and symptomatic actions that could be interpreted as innocent and empty of intent but are full of meaning on the subtextual level and reveal George’s emotional fragility.

Spectators watching such behavioral moments proposed above or those exhibited by Brando with the glove indeed may be interpreting the performances according to dominant discourses that their culture provides. Because the language of psychoanalysis has permeated the North American landscape of the late twentieth century as well as the emergent twenty-first, spectators likely receive and interpret the behaviors
with objects as unconscious and as communicating meanings that support and also exceed the demands of the performance texts.29 But what accounts for the sensation that the revelation of character or actor in such behavioral moments—a revelation that author, director, or even actor may not anticipate—strikes one as personal, private, or even epiphany? As explored below, cognitive science informs us of the degree to which the individuals in the audience are likely to be feeling remarkably similar physical sensations and emotions, and may be sharing intensely empathic responses to the characters. But as Rayner points out, sometimes the ineffable quality of performance does not transpire unless audiences bring “a certain mode of attention,” that is, that they join in the creation of performance. She continues, “The consciousness of performance is impossible without the performers, the materiality of the stage, the audience, the moment. Such consciousness is not in any of them, yet arises from them and in a certain sense because of their intersection.”30 The mundane prop at times lies at the heart of the intersection, and we attach to it not only the stories of the text or of the character but those of ourselves.

II. Props, Neurons, and Empathy

The word Einfühlung, literally “in-feeling” or “feeling into” but translated as “empathy,” was coined in 1873 by the German philosopher Robert Vischer (1847–1933) as a means to explain human emotion in relation to aesthetic appreciation. Vischer used it to describe the feelings human beings receive when they project themselves into the inanimate forms they encounter in the world, like cliffs and buildings. By projecting myself into the size and expanse of a mountain, for example, I receive in turn the emotional sensation of grandeur and aspiration.31 Another German philosopher, Theodor Lipps (1831–1914), applied the term to psychology in order to explain our awareness that other people also have selves, and he ranks empathy as one prime source of knowledge, the other two being sense perception and inner perception.32 Lipps’s consideration of the term influenced both Freud and the phenomenologist Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) who saw empathy as one means by which people can extend their consciousness into that of another person and thereby come into the fullest knowledge possible of the other.

From the phenomenological perspective, to empathize with another means to extend my understanding away from myself in order to experience the life of another, and I do this by means of an intuitive act; I allow the being of the other to be totally present to me. Because of our shared co-humanity I can associate the psychic life of another and enter
into it. Notably, the extension into another’s life happens through the sensory perception of the other. As J. N. Mohanty writes, “In the other’s bodily expressions I visibly perceive the other’s inner life.” In so doing, I then come to understand better the view of the world from another’s subjective perspective and I understand better a set of actions that at first seem foreign or confusing to me. I experience, through empathy, “the mental life, the consciousness, of another I—not in the same way I experience mine, but in another, very different, manner.” In empathy I am taken from my own life and placed within another life and I experience it as it is, without judging it or “bestowing meaning upon it” as I do objects.

To feel empathy for another does not mean to sympathize with another; empathy is not grounded primarily in shared feelings or shared sentiments. I may find after I empathize with another that my view of the world, different from the other’s, makes better sense for me. I even may disagree with actions taken by another, but at least after the experience of empathy I have a greater understanding of the other and might be better equipped to hold the other in an inclusive ethical regard. Likewise, empathy should not be confused with pity, for when I feel pity for another I have already made a value judgment that the other suffers some kind of lack and therefore is in need of some kind of emotional support from me. To empathize does not mean I must form some kind of relationship with the other. Rather, to empathize means that I can fully feel with the other, maintain my own sense of self, and grant to the other equal subjectivity. Husserl labels as “appresentation” the sense that I can experience the presence of another subject as well as my own at the same time. Furthermore, in our empathy for others comes the greater realization that the world we inhabit is constituted intersubjectively, that is, that the world is created and constituted not only by me and my own understanding but by all other subjects as well.

Freud’s conception of empathy remains closer to Lipps’s formulation and, while Freud does not enter an engaged critique of empathy, he sees it as a means for us to understand others by putting ourselves in their place. He also thinks empathy essential for the analyst to adopt in order to understand patients during treatment. Cognitive science has indeed invalidated many of Freud’s hypotheses such as the structural and topographical models of consciousness, the Oedipus and Electra complexes, and the two drives of eros and thanatos. But as contemporary psychologists argue, Freud remains relevant to the degree that most of our cognitive processes are unconscious and that, though yet to be explained satisfactorily by neuroscience, the clinical setting works to relieve individuals of psychic stress. By the end of the twentieth century, empathy had maintained its status as a primary tool of the psychoanalyst’s craft,
and the ethical implication of empathy in phenomenology has found its way into contemporary neuroscience, specifically in its accounting for the evolution of human beings as social animals.29

With the aid of functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), neurologists for the past decade and a half have been able to conduct empirical research on all manner of neurological phenomena. As McConachie argues in more depth, studies in the neurological processes of empathy provide a framework for understanding the emotional experience of spectators at performance.40 In one example, Philip Jackson, Andrew Meltzoff, and Jean Decety showed test subjects pictures that inferred the infliction of pain on others and asked them to rate the level of pain the people in the pictures might feel (see figure 3). They noted increased activity in areas of the brain known to play significant roles in the processing of one’s own pain (the anterior cingulate, the anterior insula, the cerebellum, and to a lesser extent the thalamus), and that the activity in one specific brain area strongly correlated with the participants’ ratings of the others’ pain (the anterior cingulate). They conclude from this test and others like it that “the feeling of pain is not restricted to its physical sensation, but occurs within the individual as a result of observing another’s emotional state.” They ventured that empathy transpires with a degree of emotional identification given that a person exhibits “an affective response to another person, which often, but not always, entails sharing that person’s emotional state.” They also recognize a conscious identification because their subjects demonstrated “a cognitive capacity to take the perspective of the other person while keeping self and other differentiated.”41 The “appresentation” that Husserl posits seems to be corroborated by the observation that the test subjects could feel with and understand others while maintaining a secure sense of themselves, their physical safety, and their lack of pain.

The presence of properties in figure 3 are so banal as to practically escape notice. The four compositions represent mundane situations and all could classify as one of Freud’s bungled actions. In all four situations, the subject of the photograph is not passive but active, that is, negotiating a car door or slicing a cucumber. Given that action is implied in the still photographs, the situations invite narrative interpretation—a story of some type seems to transpire in each. Because the first-person perspective of the photographs comes close to positioning the viewer as the agent of the event, the implied action implicates the viewer within the narrative, and it may not be difficult for observers to envision the slicing of their own index finger with a knife and then dribbling the white cutting board and translucent cucumber with crimson blood. In this regard the banal properties—a doorknob, a knife, a cucumber—firmly situate the subjects of the photos as engaged in a physical, social world.

The objects add an embodied layer of meaning that simple vocal, facial, and bodily expressions cannot summon. And in order to understand the narratives, we bring our own experiences to bear in the telling.

McConachie discusses the discovery by neuroscience of “mirror neurons” as an unconscious cognitive means by which human beings attend to, understand, and anticipate the behaviors and use of objects by others. Described by Vittorio Gallese, mirror neurons are neurons in the brain that discharge not only when we execute actions but also when we observe others executing the same or similar actions. Mirror neurons are not isolated in the brain but connect to the physical extremities via the motor system, that is, the neurological pathways that descend from the brain to the rest of the body. Gallese proposes, with the support of other studies, that the existence of mirror neurons “could be at the basis of a direct form of action understanding.”

In an fMRI study conducted by Gallese and colleagues, participants observed videos that represented contexts for action (a tidy tea service and a messy tea service), actions without context (a hand grasping a cup two different ways), and actions within a context, or what the researchers label as “intention” (a hand grasping a cup to drink or to clean up a mess) (see figure 4). The videos for actions without context and intention, but not for context alone, activated the right frontal cortex areas of the brain, which are known to be part of the mirror neuron system, and the videos for intention elicited even stronger neural responses than those for action without context. The results led the researchers to con-

clude that the mirror neuron system assists human beings in understanding and anticipating the actions of others. Comprehension of the actions and motives of others does not occur only as conscious mental activities. Our bodies inform us of the intentions of others. As Gallese writes, “Such body-related experiential knowledge enables a direct grasping of the sense of the actions performed by others, and of the emotions and sensations they experience.”

Whereas the mirror neuron system allows us to attune to others and shows that through empathy we understand others better, cognitive science and phenomenology have yet to address the extent to which, in our modeling of others, we attune others—specifically the characters/actors in performance—to ourselves. Likewise what remains unexplored is the extent to which in our modeling of others in performance we become more attuned to ourselves as well. As Wolska claims, “performance cares not for the end, but grows through it into other forms of continuance. It transforms the world into a theatre where a show is but one phase in a process that goes on continuously in real life.” As the mirror neuron system and processes for empathy clarify, we take ourselves and our histories into performance, and through our experiences we participate in the creation of the theatre event. But in addition, the theatre event accompanies us into our future lives and serves to inform our becoming. The objects that litter our world play a significant role in our under-
standing of character and performance because, as Rayner observes, "The historical, memorial, and nostalgic functions of objects are possible because objects already relate to humans through a paradox of intimacy and exclusion." The paradox exists because characters, actors, and spectators all bring their own intersubjective histories to bear in the intersections of performance. Our commonality in part stems from our shared existence in a physical world and our shared manipulation of the objects that make up that world.

Current studies in consciousness and neurology challenge our assumptions about the affective and “excessive” aspects of performance and provide the foundation for an empirical and materialist theory of audience reception that McConachie and others have begun to pioneer. Various critics have looked at unique behavioral moments of performance like Brando’s handling of a white glove and attempted to account for the apparent communication of meanings in excess of the performance text or even the performers’ intentions. Twentieth-century phenomenology and psychoanalysis offered several theories toward the recognition of an individual’s interior state. Vischer’s and Lipp’s recognition of the human attribute of empathy served both disciplines by providing an explanation for how one subject could experience the physical sensations, thoughts, and feelings of another. Contemporary cognitive studies into empathy and the discovery of a mirror neuron system seem to confirm that the human body has the innate ability to share the subjective experience of another by literally making the other present to one’s self through shared feelings and physical sensations. Still, the meanings or revelations identified as transpiring in performance in excess of authorial intention may still resist our theoretical attempts to explain them, especially to the degree that performance speaks to us individually. But one observation surfaces—that the mutual realities of our lives and the theatre coalesce in a tactile world of objects.

Notes

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4. Bruce McConachie, Engaging Audiences: A Cognitive Approach to Spec-

5. McConachie, Engaging Audiences, 8–9; McConachie, “Falsifiable Theories,” 571.


8. Rayner, Ghosts, xix.


11. See Sofer’s discussion of the eight categories of prop use (Stage Life of Props, 23–28).


16. Rayner, Ghosts, 81.


19. James Naremore, Acting in the Cinema (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 194. Naremore attributes the sentiment to Andrew Higson, but in Higson’s discussion he cites the behavior as a means to focus actor concentration, which is a far cry from the kind of psychological subtext Naremore discusses. See Higson, “Acting Taped,” 12.

20. Among the authors who do not mention a subtextual use of props are Stella Adler, Robert Barton, Robert Benedetti, Michael Chekhov, Robert Cohen, Uta Hagen, Lorraine Hull, Robert Lewis, Constantin Stanislavski, and Lee Strasberg. This list is not exhaustive. It follows that scholarship on Method acting onstage and film likewise neglects the subtextual use of props. For a recent example

21. Stanislavski was influenced by Ivan Pavlov (1849–1936) and Théodore Ribot (1839–1916).


23. I agree with Naremore that an “expressive-realist” style of acting was more of a general trend in early twentieth-century acting and not the exclusive purview of the Method (Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema*, 198). Note that Vivian Leigh, Blanche of the film version of *Streetcar*, was not a Method-trained actor, yet her performance could be mistaken for being Method influenced.


34. Ibid., 286, 287.
42. McConachie, Engaging Audiences, 70–87.
47. Rayner, Ghosts, 79.