

Third Symposium on Embodied Cognition, Acting and Performance,
AISB2016, University of Sheffield, 4-5th April 2016

Abstract

Applications of Cognitive Science in Scenographic Reception: Enactive and Ecological Perspectives of 'Work Space I'

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'Work Space I: a Scenographic Workshop on Consciousness' (WS I) is a Practice as Research investigation, which brings the audience/participants into conversation with the how of the workings of a collective creative process through *material*. This workshop explores the ways in which the audience/participants converse through the act of making using a number of simple materials (such as wool, paper, watercolours) and by situating them within a dynamic scenographic system-game. In 'WS I' the audience/participants are the skilled agents within a rich landscape of affordances (Rietveld & Kiverstein, 2014) who respond to the materials, the voice, the environment and their co-participants.

In the scholarly field of theatre and performance McConachie uses an enactive perspective of perception to make the observation that when spectators enter a performance space they 'begin to use their extended cognition to figure out the affordances of their environment' (McConachie in Shaughnessy 2013: 187). In the same field Bleeker and Germano would similarly argue that enactive approaches are valuable in understanding the workings of theatre 'starting from the interaction between the affordances of the medium and the perceptual possibilities of spectators' (Bleeker, Germano 2014:383).

In the field of cognitive studies enactivists Varela, Thompson and Rosch stress the idea of perception being a sensorimotor enactment focusing on the structural coupling of the animal, and would take a critical stance to the Gibsonians' 'attempt to build up the theory of perception almost entirely from the environment' (Varela et al 1991: 204). However, recent radical enactive and embodied views and approaches of Gibson's ecological understanding have contributed to the creation of new frameworks for approaching the notion of affordances. These views consider affordances both relational and a resource (Rietvelt and Kiverstein 2014: 327) and will be used in this paper to reflect on the rich, reciprocal exchange between the participants, co-participants and materials in WS I.

Using examples from the above practice-led investigation and drawing from radical enactive cognitive frameworks which shift existing views on the notion of the Gibsonian affordance (Rietvelt and Kiverstein 2014, Bruineberg and Rietvelt 2014), I will examine the ways in which we might use radical cognitive science to investigate the audiences' experience of dynamic/scenographic systems.