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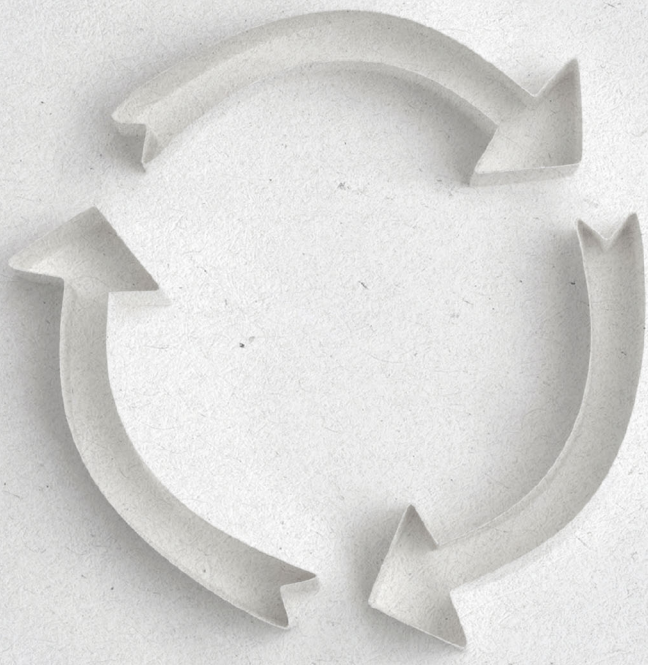

THEORY FOR THEATRE STUDIES

EMOTION

PETA TAIT

Theory for Theatre Studies: Emotion

Theory for Theatre Studies meets the need for accessible, mid-length volumes that unpack keywords that lie at the core of the discipline. Aimed primarily at undergraduate students and secondarily at postgraduates and researchers, volumes feature both background material historicizing the term and original, forward-looking research into intersecting theoretical trends in the field. Case studies ground volumes in praxis, and additional resources online ensure readers are equipped with the necessary skills and understanding as they move deeper into the discipline.

Theory for Theatre Studies: Emotion

Peta Tait

Series editors: Susan Bennett and Kim Solga

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SERIES PREFACE

Theory for Theatre Studies (TfTS) is a series of introductory theoretical monographs intended for both undergraduate and postgraduate students as well as researchers branching out into fresh fields. It aims to introduce constellations of ideas, methods, theories and rubrics central to the working concerns of scholars in theatre and performance studies at the opening of the twenty-first century. With a primary focus on twentieth-century developments, TfTS volumes offer accessible and provocative engagements with critical theory that inspire new ways of thinking theory in important disciplinary and interdisciplinary modes.

The series features full-length volumes explicitly aimed at unpacking sets of ideas that have coalesced around carefully chosen key terms in theatre and performance, such as space, sound, bodies, memory, movement, economies and emotion. TfTS volumes do not aggregate existing essays, but rather provide a careful, fresh synthesis of what extensive reading by our authors reveals to be key nodes of interconnection between related theoretical models. The goal of these texts is to introduce readers to a wide variety of critical approaches and to unpack the complex theory useful for both performance analysis and creation.

Each volume in the series focuses on one specific set of theoretical concerns, constellated around a term that has become central to understanding the social and political labour of theatre and performance work at the turn of the millennium. The organization of each book follows a common template: Section One includes a historical overview of interconnected theoretical models, Section Two features extended case studies using twentieth- and twenty-first-century performances and

Section Three looks ahead, as our authors explore important new developments in their constellation. Each volume is broad enough in scope to look laterally across its topic for compelling connections to related concerns, yet specific enough to be comprehensive in its assessment of its particular term. The ideas explored and explained through lively and detailed case studies provide diverse critical approaches for reading all kinds of plays and performances as well as starting points for practical exploration.

Each book includes a further reading section and features a companion website with chapter summaries, questions for discussion, and a host of video and other web links.

Susan Bennett (*University of Calgary, Canada*)
and Kim Solga (*Western University, Canada*)

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Author's note: filmed performances are described in the past tense to accord with the standard approach for live performance, while plays are discussed in present tense.

Introduction: Approach and concepts

Emotions have an impact everywhere in life. This does not mean that they are easily explained. An emotional declaration such as 'I love you' is vague, even unreliable because the English word 'love' has multiple meanings and the declaration needs a context. This is where theatrical performance comes to the fore. Dramatic scripts present narratives that frame the emotions in a context, and theatrical performance conveys some of the accompanying physical and physiological dimensions.

Theatrical performance in Western culture has always presented and interpreted the emotions of individuals, families and social interactions in recognizable ways even within the context of extreme events. But in a philosophy of emotion, Carolyn Price is careful to point out that emotions are diverse and only approximately similar (Price 2015: 6). Since emotions are experienced in a range of ways, there needs to be social opportunities to align them. In communicating about the emotions, drama and theatrical performance encourage thinking about them and interpretations of their development and veracity. Price elaborates that 'an emotional response, then, is not just a matter of *feeling* a certain way: it can involve thinking, wanting, remembering, and imagining; it can involve changes in your body and in your behaviour' (2015: 2, italics in original). The possibilities for thinking about and remembering emotion, as well as imagining it, have long been part of theatre and its theory and practice. The emotions of theatrical performance contribute to social experience.

Emotion investigates dramatic narratives and performance processes that invite shared understanding as it asks: what does performance communicate about emotion and why is this important? The book presents four concepts that are widely used – the emotions, emotional feelings, affect and mood – to explain what happens in theatrical performance. *Emotion* points out that the emotions and emotional feelings should be distinguished as happens in other disciplinary fields of study, and that affect and emotional feeling can be separated out in theatrical patterns of engagement, patterns that additionally create an overarching emotional mood. In this book, the emotions are cognitive ideas and impressions, emotional feelings are physiological experiences, and affect emphasizes embodied felt sensitivity to and within the surroundings while the concept of mood allows individual, social and aesthetic experiences to be linked.

A shorthand way of separating these concepts within lived experience involves allocating duration. Affect is short-lived and transient happening in seconds, emotional feeling lasts minutes and has the potential to last hours whereas an individual mood can last days, even months, and the emotions are spoken about in language over years.

Applied to theatrical performance (Hurley 2010: 22–3), the four concepts encapsulate the different functions involved with creating and watching it. The diverse perspectives operating within live performance can include those of a writer, a director, the performers, the musicians, designers and technological artists, as well as those of audience members. Performance-makers approach emotion in relation to a specialized capacity: a writer will compile words for the emotions in a text which a performer speaks and seeks to embody as emotional feeling, and a director will consider both cognitive ideas and embodied expression as well as create the overall mood effect working with a music composer and a lighting designer. An audience member will respond cognitively to ideas of the emotions and mood as well as bodily with affect and emotional feeling.

The arousal of audience feeling is a theatrical intention. Erin Hurley's (2010) succinct, insightful summary argues that feeling is central to theatre as she explains, spectators 'attend the theatre to feel *more*, even if it doesn't make us feel *better*; we go to have our emotional life acknowledged and patterned', and potentially 'expanded' (Hurley 2010: 77, italics in original). Hurley explains that theatre helps us interpret our emotional feelings and she describes how spectators respond vicariously to performers and explores a theatrical potential for the transmission of feeling to the spectator. Conversely, Martin Welton contends that it is the whole experience of attending live performance which creates spectator feeling because it arises from being in a designated space (ecology) with all its elements (2012: 8). These different explanations of how feeling happens in theatrical performance point to multiple types of felt experience.

From comedy to serious drama, emotions are an inseparable part of the communication in theatrical performance whether directly through words for the emotions or through more indirect effects such as emotional feeling, affect and mood; these are introduced in this Introduction. *Emotion* has three main sections that explore how contrasting dramatic genres and live performance present emotion as: ideas of the emotions through the narrative, spoken text and acting in Section One; less tangible affect and emotional feeling and empathy in spectator responses to performance and technologies in Section Two; aesthetic moods of large and intimate productions that interweave subjective and shared experience in Section Three.

Section One, Legacies and Case Studies, explains the communication of emotions: in ancient Greek tragedy, Euripides's *Medea*, and Aristotle's analysis; in Shakespeare's romantic comedy *Twelfth Night*; and in twentieth-century realist drama such as Chekhov's *The Seagull* and Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. This section probes Stanislavski's and Brecht's approaches to acting and the approaches of other influential theatre practitioners and theorists who

advocate thinking about the emotions and to benefit society. Section Two, Affect and Case Studies, contrasts the emotional feeling in Henrik Ibsen's psychologically realist play, *A Doll's House*, with sensations of affect evoked by a non realist production such as Mabou Mines's *Dollhouse*. Contemporary performances by Stelarc and Cirque du Soleil illustrate affect theory about impersonal energetic exchange and within technological worlds. More meaningfully, the affect of real life converges with the affect of political performance in the work of Anna Deavere Smith. Drama and performance focused on gender, racial and sexual (LGBTQI) identity, disability, and Indigenous First Nations identity, however, invite empathy and other personal responses to stories of suffering such as those presented in Jane Harrison's *Stolen*. All encompassing performances, such as Robert Lepage's *Needles and Opium* and *887*, evoke affect, emotional feeling and empathy. Section Three, Mood and Case Studies, explores and contrasts how the production of aesthetic mood connects to individual mood in 'feel-good' musicals such as *The Lion King* and *Dear Evan Hansen* about friendship and in intense immersive performance such as *The Artist Is Present* by Marina Abramovic. It explores political economies of mood in *Alladeen* and the ambient productions of Socìetas Raffaello Sanzio, Rimini Protokoll and The Wooster Group. As Section Three considers eco-moods of fear in productions about the future, it outlines how a happier mood can emerge from the anticipation of performance – its future promise.

Emotion draws on studies of theatre and refers to studies of the emotions in science, philosophy, psychology and sociology, some of which ask the underlying question: what is an emotion? The answers are open-ended because responses vary according to the discipline, and disciplinary study of theatre contains its own variation. A scientific study considers biological brain activity, while a sociological explanation might emphasize the emotions in social exchange and a psychological explanation might emphasize individual emotional feeling (e.g. Harré and Parrott 1996). Like theatre, philosophy is often concerned

with the relationship between ethical values and the emotions (Goldie 2012b). Only performance, however, repeatedly shows the ways in which the emotions are performed in society. The process of performing emotions in lifelike ways became particularly refined within early-twentieth-century realist theatre (Tait 2002). Theatrical and screen performance suggests that we copy the emotions around us in our social worlds. Performance often presents emotions with logical causes that align with, even influence, widely accepted psychological frameworks but such emotional expression may also reinforce social stereotypes. Social beliefs about emotion are interpreted through performance and its aesthetic styles, and therefore identity diversity in innovative performance needs to be supported by emotion (Tait forthcoming).

In *Emotion*, the emotions, emotional feelings, affect and mood are conceived of within a spectrum and as conditions that overlap and flow into each other. The four concepts are introduced in the summaries below, which encompass related terms including empathy and their historical antecedents. They are explored in detail through the case studies and other examples of drama, theatre and performance in the book's three sections.

The emotions

Drama communicates the emotions through words and language and draws on a long history within which particular emotions have remained recognizable. The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle describes an audience thinking about the emotions presented in the narrative and its dramatic action, and responding with pity and fear which remain recognizable today (see Section One). A dramatic narrative

presents the emotions of, for example, love, grief, anger and fear as inspiring characters or causing upheavals and having detrimental consequences in their lives. Drama depicts the emotions shaping social interaction as a character's disgust or embarrassment or jealousy is conveyed through verbal disclosure and exchanges between characters.

While an audience member might recognize a word for an emotion – the social idea of an emotion – this is not the same as having a corresponding emotional feeling. Love or anger refers to what is broadly understood about that emotion and there are hundreds of words in English used in communication and thinking. In addition, language in communication is accompanied by structures that qualify and allow for tone and vocal expression to enhance the meaning of the words, and theatre effectively reproduces and highlights the intonations of social languages.

In theatre and in philosophy over millennia, the emotions were interpreted through thought and cognition, and it was assumed mental functions preceded emotional feeling. While the words are shorthand in everyday communication for an all-pervasive feeling that can become overwhelming, the study of the emotions requires more careful distinctions. Neuroscientist Antonio Damasio explains that the 'emotions and feelings are not the same thing as objects of study', although they are brought together in 'real life' (2004: 49). He explains that studies of emotion confirm 'distinctive, albeit interrelated, physiological and mental events that benefit from separate designations' and 'allow for a clearer communication' (Damasio 2004: 50).

The emotions have been well studied in theatre. Joseph Roach (1985) explains that historically actors were considered to have specialist knowledge about the emotions, which were formerly called passions. The word 'emotion' comes from a Latin word, *emovere*, about vitality and means 'to move out, to stir up' (Roach 1985: 27). But it probably came into the English language through the French *esmovoir*, and means '"to remove, displace"', to 'disturb' even dislocate (Jensen and Wallace 2015: 1249). A range of meanings suggesting

movement reflects how theatrical performance emotionally moves an audience and how feeling is changeable, shifting in focus and scope and expanding and contracting. As Katharine Jensen and Miriam Wallace point out, however, dictionary definitions of the emotions (words) can be misleading when these start with the premise of 'individual self-possession' of an object, so that an explanation applied to what is happening in literature (and in theatre) does not encompass a fluctuating experience inseparable from the artistic and social context (2015: 1252).

Particular emotions such as love, anger, fear and shame might remain recognizable over millennia but their collective noun label changes over that time. The word 'emotion' appeared in the English language in the seventeenth century, and it was increasingly used in the eighteenth century coming into common usage as the collective term for individual emotions during the nineteenth century and to gradually replace earlier words such as 'sensibility', 'sentiment' and 'passion' (Fisher 2002: 6–7; Roach 1985: 95). Sentiment was connected to sensibility which reflected a historically specific belief evident in literature, philosophy and science from the mid-eighteenth-century about, 'an innate ability to experience readily and intensely a broad spectrum of emotions, perceptions, and sensations, but especially a kind of tender, pleasurable sorrow' (Kastan 2006). By the nineteenth century, 'sentimental' referred to superficial or insincere expression of emotion. Sensation came into use from the 1860s to describe literature and theatre that depicted sensationalist events such as crimes, murder and the secrets of 'transgressive women', and although the characters and their actions were morally questionable within the prevailing values, they were a source of social fascination (Kastan 2006). The word 'emotional' referring to an 'emotional feeling' developed in the nineteenth century, replacing sensibility, and it was increasingly used during the twentieth century.

It is clear that the labelling terms for emotion expand and change as the qualities and meanings are adjusted over time.

Affect offers a complicated example of this change since the philosophical use of affect originally described rage, shame or terror, but over centuries this became diluted to a milder emotional feeling such as affection (Fisher 2002: 4) and, most recently, became detached from emotional feeling. Teresa Brennan writes that 'the term "affect" is one translation of the Latin *affectus*, which also translated as "passion"' (2004: 3). Philip Fisher explains that passion historically was first used in English to mean the extreme emotions of the sufferings of Christ on the cross (2002: 4). He explains that passion meant strong emotion and specifically anger in ancient Greece but that it has come to be used in everyday contemporary language for an enthusiasm or for sexual desire (Fisher 2002: 5). In relation to performance, Roach explains that passion, derived from the Latin *patior* meaning to suffer, was linked to historical understanding of the body and scrutinized for the ways in which it might be imaginatively, facially and gesturally replicated by a speaker (actor) to induce sympathetic feeling in audiences (1985: 28). The process of analysing and defining the emotions and terms continues to be relevant to the practice of theatre. Theatrical delivery was and is bound up with thought and a linguistic approach to the emotions, and it has responded and does respond to changing belief about the emotions.

Emotional feelings

The accepted convention is that theatrical performance evokes the feelings of audience members. Since these are experienced through the body, its physiological processes are implicated. Audience feeling might be guided by, for example, the narrative, the accompanying signs such as a label of comic or tragic, the

performance, the music and the technical effects. As performers present nonverbal facial and bodily indicators of emotional feelings with spoken language, they illustrate how emotional feeling is understood, observed and perceived. While anger or love can be communicated by a performer in nonverbal ways, other emotions such as envy or paranoia can seem ambiguous to spectators without words, and some emotions are not socially accorded facial expression. In the absence of words, audience interpretation of which particular emotional feeling is being enacted might diverge even with agreement that the performance is emotional or intense.

The interpretation of other people's feeling in everyday life is often ambiguous – as it can be in theatre. For example, involuntary blushing might suggest someone is embarrassed when he or she (they) could be angry. Embodied feeling, however, develops in familiar patterns within families and everyone has the capacity for emotional feeling, which is also shared with nonhuman species. The triggering of adult human emotional feelings is associated with the amygdala, a small area in the base of the brain. The scientific study of electrochemical patterns of emotional feelings locates them, as Damasio shows, in several areas of the brain often simultaneously, and particularly in the older parts, in the brain stem, hypothalamus that releases chemicals and peptides, and especially the amygdala in the temporal lobe and ventromedial prefrontal cortex (2003: 59). Sections of the frontal lobe including the ventromedial prefrontal area integrate emotions, memory and sensory experience in meaningful ways. Some parts of the brain, however, do seem to correspond with particular emotional feelings; feelings of fear may or may not arise in the amygdala while emotions such as embarrassment are connected across areas. The physiology of emotional feelings is complex because it encompasses desires, happening in multiple regions of the brain and throughout the body in rapid succession, and responding in part to sensory input and thought. Rick Kemp (2012) explains that recent brain science provides valuable knowledge for performers. Psychologist

Lisa Feldman Barrett (2018) supports emotional intelligence training as she argues that physiology may be shaped more by life experience than hard-wired and that the flexible brain learns to predict an emotional feeling as meaningful within a context.

Interestingly, human feeling is described in psychological studies with terms used in theatre such as roles or 'emotion scripts' or 'social scripts' (Tompkins 1995; Parkinson, Fischer and Manstead 2005: 41, 44). Psychologist Silvan Tomkins (1995) describes emotional feeling with a combination of words such as fear-terror or distress-anguish that signify compounding experiences which are difficult to reduce to a word. Theatrical performance confirms that one emotion replaces another when, for example, an unexpected occurrence initially causes surprise that turns into fear. It reveals fluctuations in emotional responses towards other people, the situation, events, nonhuman others and inanimate objects.

In the late nineteenth century, William James with Carl Lange (1967) questioned the prevailing belief in the study of emotion that feeling followed thought by arguing physiological changes precede conscious thinking. The separation of an idea of an emotion from an emotional feeling ensued, and arguments developed in the twentieth century about whether an emotional feeling is self-generated or happens in response to external occurrences. The influential challenge to James's (1984) sequence of bodily feeling before mental processing comes from appraisal theory that finds feeling develops in relation to external stimuli and cognition, even where someone is not consciously aware of the orientation (Lazarus 1994; Frijda 1994). (Theatrical performance provides external stimuli for spectator feeling.) Towards the end of the twentieth century, neuroscience shows that the brain activity of feeling happens seconds prior to conscious thought – these studies utilize external images and provocations. Science suggests that the neurobiology of the brain-body reacts rapidly to the surroundings.