Kinesthetic Spectatorship in the Theatre

Phenomenology, Cognition, Movement

Stanton B. Garner, Jr.

Cognitive Studies in Literature and Performance

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Acknowledgments

Kinesthetic Spectatorship in the Theatre is a study of movement and movement perception in theatrical performance. Aligning itself with scholarship on kinesthetic empathy in dance studies, it explores the ways in which we inhabit the movements of others inside and outside the theatre, and the ways these movements inhabit us. Because this book is an extension of my 1994 book on theatre phenomenology, *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama*, it owes a debt to those who have developed this field in the years since that book's publication. Eirini Nedelkopoulou contacted me in 2011 to ask if I was interested in contributing a chapter to an edited volume on performance phenomenology, and while the project I embarked on expanded beyond the scope of what became *Performance and Phenomenology: Traditions and Transformations* (2015), that volume and its contributors have done much to bring phenomenological performance studies into the twenty-first century. George Home-Cook and Jon Foley Sherman have written important recent books in this field, and both were a resource to me as I wrote my own. Although we have met only through email, let me also acknowledge Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, whose pioneering book on the phenomenology of dance preceded the emergence of theatre phenomenology and whose extensive writings on movement over the last half-century have demonstrated the centrality of this dimension of human and animal life.

Theoretically and methodologically, *Kinesthetic Spectatorship in the Theatre* joins the burgeoning interdisciplinary dialogue between phenomenology and cognitive science in philosophy and the empirical sciences. In so doing, it harks back to my first book, *The Absent Voice: Narrative*

Comprehension in the Theater, which described (not always convincingly, I feel) the cognitive dynamics of memory and anticipation. My turn when I completed this book to the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty was motivated by my dissatisfaction with the cognitive models I had been compelled to use, which treated cognition as an information-processing system, and by my growing suspicion that the book I had just finished was phenomenological at heart. In an irony I had no way of knowing at the time, my turn to a phenomenology of embodiment in the late 1980s and early 1990s paralleled a similar turn in cognitive studies by those proposing an enactive, embodied way of understanding cognition. Many of the figures in this movement were inspired by phenomenology, and they welcomed the exchange between empirical and experientially based methodologies. Excited by this dialogue, I am grateful to those scholars working in cognitive theatre studies who welcomed, challenged, and supported a phenomenologist fellow-traveler: Rhonda Blair, Amy Cook, Rick Kemp, Jon Lutterbie, Bruce McConachie, and Lyn Tribble. I have benefited from their interdisciplinary knowledge of fields not their own, their patience with a sometimes novice, and their willingness to entertain a different but compatible perspective on areas of common interest.

Because this book foregrounds corporeal variation in its analysis of movement and movement perception, I value the conversations and interactions I have had with those who live with and have thought deeply about disability: Carrie Sandahl, Leonard Davis, Janet Erkkinen, Randy Isom, Rob Spirko, and Hannah Widdifield. I have benefitted considerably from discussion on disability aesthetics with colleague and art historian Timothy W. Hiles, whose interests intersect with mine across media. Others who have encountered disability and deepened my intimacy with it include my parents Katherine H. Young and Stanton B. Garner, my stepmother Lydia M. Garner, and my parents-in-law Richard E. Maerker and Sylvia L. Maerker. Disability transforms the world and one's movements through it, and I have been graced by resourceful, often cantankerous witnesses to this formidable realm during the past fifteen years.

I thank Eric Bass, Marla Carlson, Rachel Ann Finney, Christina Schoux Casey, Kerri Ann Considine, Amy J. Elias, Gabriel J. Escobar, Brad Krumholz, Kirk Murphy, and Matthew Pilkington for conversations about this book, the issues it addresses, and the productions I write about in it. Saul Jaffé and Mary Swan provided extensive information on Proteus Theatre's production of *Merrick, the Elephant Man* and made a significant contribution to my thinking about able-bodied actors portraying disabled characters. Dan Zahavi

responded to email questions on Edmund Husserl and the phenomenology of disability with useful reading suggestions, and Christian Keysers shared his thoughts on the neuroscience of attention and motor resonance, along with scientific readings related to this subject. The following individuals provided insightful written comments on material that appears herein: Nic Barilar, Michael Shane Boyle, Matt Cornish, Warren Kluber, Brandon Woolf, Peter Zazzali, and the two anonymous readers who reviewed my manuscript for Palgrave Macmillan. Earlier drafts of material in this book were presented at the following working groups sponsored by the American Society for Theatre Research (ASTR): Methods and Approaches: Cognitive Science in Theatre, Dance, and Performance (Cognitive Science in Theatre, Dance and Performance Research Group, Nashville, 2012); Postdramatic Theatre and Form (Portland, OR, 2015); and Violent Bodies, Violent Acts (Atlanta, 2017). I am grateful to the organizers of these groups for facilitating scholarly exchange on topics important to my research and to the participants for their stimulating discussion and feedback. A brief passage in my introduction was previously published in a *Theatre Survey* book review, and material from chapters "Movement, Attention, and Intentionality" and "Language, Speech, and Movement" appeared in earlier form in *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*. I thank the editors of these journals for permission to reprint.

I want to acknowledge Phillip Zarrilli and Jed Diamond for their special contributions to this book. Phillip, whose theatre scholarship and practice also embrace the dialogue between phenomenology and enactive theory and who is currently completing a book on phenomenology and acting, has encouraged my project from its inception. Over the last several years he and I have exchanged pieces of our works-in-progress, and I have valued his responses and support. Jed, who heads the University of Tennessee MFA Acting program and is an outstanding actor himself, has shared his insights into theatre, acting, and the dynamics of embodiment over breakfasts and at many other times since well before this book was conceived. As someone who shares my fascination with *King Lear*, Jed organized an informal acting workshop on the play's blinding scene in which I was able to deepen my understanding of this sequence's phenomenological and sensorimotor dynamics by acting the roles of Cornwall and Gloucester and observing their traumatic encounter from all sides. I thank Luke Atchley, Miguel Faña, Ben Pratt, Preston Raymer, Hannah Simpson, and Lauren Winder for joining us in this workshop.

I wrote the majority of this book during a sabbatical after stepping down from a five-year term as department head. I thank former Arts and Sciences Dean Bruce Bursten for helping to arrange this sabbatical and my colleagues in the English Department for making this a department I could relish leading. Judith Welch heads an invaluable administrative staff, and it is hard to imagine what life would be like without her and them. Allen R. Dunn, who replaced me as head, has been unwavering in his support and eager to talk about my project, especially when the subject turns to ethics. I value my drama colleagues Misty G. Anderson, Heather Hirschfeld, and Robert E. Stillman, my current and recent graduate students in drama, theatre, and performance, and the amazing faculty and students in the Theatre Department, who keep me grounded in performance. The resident Clarence Brown Theatre Company, led by Artistic Director Calvin MacLean, is a continuing and invaluable source of excellent theatre. Current Dean Teresa M. Lee and her team in the College of Arts and Sciences were a pleasure to work with during and after my time as department head and continue to support my work. I am considerably indebted to the Interlibrary Services staff of the John C. Hodges Library for securing research material that our collection does not have and the Library Express staff for bringing me the library books I needed (and taking them back when I was done with them). Outside the university, I am grateful to the staff of the Billy Rose Theatre Division Theatre on Film and Tape Archive and the Jerome Robbins Dance Division Audio and Moving Image Archive at the New York Public Library for their help during two research trips. The performances I studied in these collections were crucial to the writing of this book.

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a figure in the background orients this dynamism to the human form, which—motionless here—is animated in performance.

My final debts are the greatest of all. Alison Maerker Garner and Helen Elizabeth Garner have been a part of this project from the start, and the book that emerged is underwritten by their love and support. As a professional musician, music teacher, writer on music pedagogy, and trained dancer, Alison is an intellectual companion as well as life partner. It has been a joy sharing insights and perspectives on performance, movement, skill acquisition, and art in the years since we first met. Helen, who came into the world fifteen years before this book will, opened a world of movement to me as she learned to crawl and walk, developed language and skills, and deepened her cognitive mastery of her environment. She and her mother are constant reminders that movement, movement perception, and intersubjectivity are situated, communal, and affectively resonant. I gratefully dedicate this book to them.

Contents

Introduction

Watching Movement

This is a book about movement and movement perception: about the centrality of movement to human life and the embeddedness of theatre in this sensorimotor reality. Because theatre—like all performance—is a domain of spectatorship and embodiment, this book addresses the questions of how we perceive the movements of others in this environment and outside of it, how we enact movement as part of our sensorimotor engagement with the world, and how the perception and execution of movement are entwined. Phenomenological in a collaborative and eclectic sense, it considers these issues through the lens of experience and through the accounts of movement, embodiment, and movement perception in phenomenology, cognitive science, neuroscience, acting theory, dance theory, philosophy of mind, and linguistics. In specific, this book pursues an insight that has developed within and between these disciplines in recent years: that one of the ways we apprehend the movements of others is by vicariously enacting these movements at pre-conscious and conscious levels. Inevitably, then, this book is about empathy and other responses to the actions of others: what these responses are and what they are not, what they do and what they do not do.

Contemporary interest in these connections was encouraged by the discovery of what have come to be known as "mirror neurons" by neuroscientists in the early 1990s. These neurons, which fire in the same way when

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goal-directed movement is observed and when it is executed, were discovered in the pre-motor cortex of macaque monkey brains, and equivalent neural networks were later identified in humans. In the rush of excitement that followed their popularization in the early 2000s, mirror neurons were hailed as universal keys to action understanding, imitation, language acquisition, and empathy. In the years since their discovery, researchers have provided fuller insights into how these cells work, and some of this research has challenged or qualified the initial claims made on their behalf. But despite the controversies that continue over its relationship to other cognitive mechanisms and its role in action understanding, the discovery of a neural mechanism that links motor execution with motor perception continues to focus attention on the cognitive processes linking one's movements to those of others.

The idea that human beings take on, are inhabited by, or resonate with the movements of others is not a new one, nor is it restricted to neuroscientific accounts of cognitive resonance. In his *Principles of Psychology* (1890), William James wrote: "*We may then lay it down for certain that every representation of a movement awakens in some degree the actual movement which is its object; and awakens it in a maximum degree whenever it is not kept from so doing by an antagonistic representation present simultaneously to the mind.*"[1] Developmental psychologists study imitative behavior in neonates, marine biologists look at movement synchronization in fish schools, and anthropologists study mimetic enactment in states of spirit possession. In the performing arts, the term *kinesthetic empathy* has served as a focal point for practitioners and scholars interested in the empirical and experiential connections between observing and enacting movement. *Kinesthesia* (from the Greek words meaning "to move" and "sensation") denotes the experience one has of one's movements as a result of the sensations generated by one's muscles, joints, tendons, and the vestibular and other systems involved in balance and orientation. Referring to this lived movement sense, it differs from the term *kinetic*, which refers to movement, or motion, as an objectively describable phenomenon. The concept of kinesthetic empathy, which originated in scientific studies of involuntary motor mimicry in the nineteenth century and philosophical treatises on the kinesthetic aspect of aesthetic experience, was taken up in the twentieth century by dance studies, where it has continued to be analyzed and refined in studies such as Susan Leigh Foster's *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance* (2011) and the research of Dee Reynolds, Matthew Reason, and others associated with the 2008–2011 "Watching

Dance: Kinesthetic Empathy" project in the United Kingdom.[2] As Reynolds and Reason's 2012 edited collection *Kinesthetic Empathy in Creative and Cultural Practice* demonstrates, the idea of kinesthetic empathy is now being applied to fields outside of dance studies. Reynolds and Reason write: "We feel comfortable … in stating that kinesthetic empathy is a key interdisciplinary concept in our understanding of social interaction and communication in creative and cultural practices ranging from entertainment and sport to physical therapies."[3] Much of this recent interest in kinetic embodiment has been informed by the mirror-neuron research mentioned above.

More than twenty-five years have passed since the initial discovery of mirror neurons, and it is more than eighty years since *New York Times* dance critic John Martin, building on work of late nineteenth and early twentieth century aesthetician Theodor Lipps, introduced the terms *inner mimicry* and *kinesthetic sympathy* to describe the audience's response to modern dance. The intensified interest in these two areas since the early 2000s has established an unprecedented convergence between science, philosophy, and the arts. It has also deepened and complicated our understanding of the operations identified by these terms. Alongside the critical responses of scientists and philosophers to what one might call "mirror-neuron overreach," Foster and others have challenged Martin's claims that kinesthetic empathy provides universal access to the embodied experience of others. The result is an understanding of mimetic embodiment more in tune with historical, cultural, and individual difference.

With their shared interest in embodiment, observation, action, and intercorporeality, the convergence of neural mirroring research and a rejuvenated interest in kinesthetic empathy has proved validating and theoretically productive to performing arts scholars and practitioners. In the opening lines of *Mirrors in the Brain—How Our Minds Share Actions and Emotions*, Giacomo Rizzolatti (one of the scientists who discovered mirror neurons in macaque monkeys) and Corrado Sinigaglia cite the director Peter Brook:

> In an interview some time ago, the great theatrical director, Peter Brook, commented that with the discovery of mirror neurons, neuroscience had finally started to understand what has long been common knowledge in the theatre: the actor's efforts would be in vain if he were not able to surmount all cultural and linguistic barriers and share his bodily sounds and movements with the spectators, who thus actively contribute to the event and become one with the players on stage.[4]

Although not all who embraced the discovery of mirror neurons would subscribe to the universalism of Brook's comment, his response to this discovery was shared by many involved in the arts of movement and imitation, particularly those who have embraced the cognitive turn in theatre studies. Bruce McConachie's *Engaging Audiences: A Cognitive Approach to Spectating in the Theatre* (2008) discusses mirror mechanisms along with emotional contagion, facial recognition, and other imitative/empathic components of social cognition in the theatre. Rhonda Blair's *The Actor, Image, and Action: Acting and Cognitive Neuroscience* (2008) includes mirror-neuron research in its analysis of cognitive neuroscience's contribution to actor training. And in *Embodied Acting: What Neuroscience Teaches Us about Performance* (2012), Rick Kemp applies mirror-neuron research to the actor's process of identifying with characters. All three of these studies are appropriately cautious when it comes to applying neurological claims that are subject to disagreement among scientists.

Because the concept of kinesthetic empathy pre-dated the discovery of neural mirroring mechanisms, dance theorists have tended to consider neurological findings, when doing so, within this framework. They have also integrated this research within a broader range of methodological approaches—physiological, philosophical, historical, and cultural—for thinking about movement observation and enactment. Of particular interest to my work here, many of their accounts have a strong phenomenological emphasis, one based on experiential, historically situated accounts of dancers, choreographers, and spectators.[5] Ann Cooper Albright writes: "Over the course of the last thirty years, phenomenology has replaced aesthetics as the philosophical discourse of choice for dance studies, prodding scholars to think about a broad continuum of moving bodies within the cultures they inhabit."[6] Maxine Sheets-Johnstone's landmark study *The Phenomenology of Dance* (1966) claimed philosophy for dance and dance for philosophy, and her subsequent work and that of others has deepened the phenomenological understanding of expressive movement. The Winter 2011 issue of *Dance Research Journal* was devoted to the topic "Dance and Phenomenology: Critical Reappraisals." Several of the essays in this issue explore the limits of phenomenology as a theoretical point of view, but it is remarkable (as editor Mark Franko notes) that "phenomenology rarely if ever absents itself from the terms of dance analysis, despite the attempt to subtract it." Franko also observes that "The upsurge of interest in the topic of kinesthetic empathy is reframing perspectives on phenomenological inquiry."[7]

Kinesthetic Spectatorship in the Theatre

Inspired, in part, by Foster's work and the "Watching Dance: Kinesthetic Empathy" project, the last ten years have seen an emergence of kinesthetic research in performance studies, particularly in the United Kingdom. Since 2010, for example, the Research Centre for Cognition, Kinesthetics and Performance at the University of Kent has brought together scholars and practitioners who are interested in a range of issues connected to kinesthetic performance. For the most part, however, theatre has held an uneasy position in this important area of research. The relative scarcity of kinesthetically oriented theatrical studies, I suggest, reflects our underdeveloped understanding of theatre, particularly dramatic theatre, as a kinetic and kinesthetic form. While it is easy to recognize the movement dimension in highly physicalized theatre forms such as Kabuki, *commedia dell'arte*, and the acrobatic performances of Cirque du Soleil—in the Biomechanical theatre of Vsevolod Meyerhold and the immersive productions of Punchdrunk or Sound&Fury—the movement dynamics of less physically overt theatre styles and traditions are less immediately apparent. Indeed, one of the most pervasive modern traditions—theatrical realism—may seem predicated on suppressing a kinesthetic sensibility. Realist stage settings often inhibit movement as much as they enable it, and the actor/characters who inhabit these environments are restricted by historically and socially specific movement conventions. When Nora Helmer breaks into a frenetic tarantella in Act 3 of Ibsen's *A Doll House*, she violates not only the propriety governing female movement but the kinetic circumscriptions of the realist mode as well, which has restrained her up to this point like the corset she wears. In a sequence such as this, Bert States's observation that realism represents an "imprisonment of the eye" could be generalized to include the moving body as well.[8]

When Nora's tarantella erupts in the midst of the measured movement practices that surrounds it, dance emerges, momentarily, in the context of theatre. In fact, though, Ibsen's play has been "moving" from its opening moments, and it continues to move to its end. Navigating their circumscribed but concentrated action fields, Ibsen's actor/characters move within, at the edges of, and beyond the kinetic conventions of their social world. They express themselves, consciously and unconsciously, in mannerisms and gestures. Their bodies move deliberately and in response to their physical environment and those who share it. They are sometimes

still, though this stillness can be tense with movements intended, suppressed, released through speech.

And speak they do. Another impediment to theatrical applications of kinesthetic empathy is the centrality of spoken language to most forms of theatre. The prevailing model of kinesthetic empathy—and neurological models of motor perception, which the concept sometimes incorporates—is directed toward physical movements, and it provides less insight into how speech and language might function in a broader account of sensorimotor experience. Here, too, dramatic theatre is particularly disadvantaged. In practice, the more theatre art forms accentuate the physical aspects of performance (mime is a good example), the more they reward the existing study of kinesthetic empathy. Conversely, the more these forms incorporate spoken language alongside physical movement, the more obviously they require an expanded and refined kinesthetic vocabulary.

Addressing this need, *Kinesthetic Spectatorship in the Theatre* offers a theoretical account of the sensorimotor and kinesthetic processes joining theatre spectators and performers in a dynamic of shared enactment. It takes up the existing work on kinesthetic empathy in dance studies, discussions of movement and movement perception in theatre studies, and the extensive insights on these subjects provided by phenomenology, cognitive science, neuroscience, and linguistics. In doing so, it insists that our response to others' movements forms part of our broader sensorimotor attunement with our environment. Experience is fundamentally dynamic, and movement is the medium through which humans perceive and encounter their world. Underlying this fact is the phenomenon of animateness. The word *animate*, when used as an adjective, means "endowed with life, living, alive; (esp. in later use) alive and having the power of movement, like an animal."[9] The etymological linking of these meanings underscores the phenomenological inseparability of aliveness and movement. When we speak of someone or something (a statue, abstract painting, piece of music) as "animated," the liveliness to which we refer manifests itself as movement, actual or potential—hence the technique of cinematic and other forms of animation, which brings still images to life by making them move. The fact that *animate* in this sense functions as a transitive verb ("to give life to, make alive or active") supports the idea that humans have an active role to play in the animateness surrounding them.[10]

If kinesthesia is the lived experience of one's movements, then such experience, I argue, forms part of our fundamental attunement to the movements of our world. This phenomenological claim is supported by research in the cognitive sciences and the practice-related insights of dance and acting theorists. Shifting the focus on kinesthetic spectatorship to the experiential dynamic in which it arises allows us to reframe issues such as the role of mirroring activities in motor apprehension, intersubjectivity, and empathy. As long as this conversation is conducted only in neuroscientific terms, the correlations between functional magnetic resonance imaging and phenomenal experience remain indeterminable. Descriptions of empathy and motor resonance that rely exclusively or largely on mirror-neuron research must rise and fall with scientific claims and challenges. Understanding that one's engagement with one's own movements and the movement of others has its own experiential structures, on the other hand, allows us to orient our investigation toward the givenness of kinesthetic encounters. A phenomenological turn may not resolve what philosophers call the "hard problem" of consciousness—how do cognitive operations generate lived experience?—but it does provide a necessary other perspective for thinking about this question.[11] I will have more to say about this shortly.

One of this study's contributions to the discussion of movement and movement observation in the theatre is that it explores the role of language as kinesthetic phenomenon. It does so based on two recognitions. For one thing, embodied utterance is gestural: it mobilizes the body's musculature in intentionally directed, meaning-bearing acts. Our attention to the content of what is said in particular language encounters may eclipse the dynamics of its production, but this does not change the fact that utterance is a sensorimotor activity. With its traditional reliance on vocal training and its projective modes of address, theatrical speech foregrounds its corporeal delivery in ways that underscore its kinetic and kinesthetic foundations. For another thing, language is saturated with virtual movement. Language embodies actions and agents in its words and linguistic structures, and as an experience-conveying medium it generates its own sensorimotor realities. With their rival form of perceptual address, the movement/gestures embodied in language form part of the broader movement field that theatrical audiences inhabit and engage with. In theatre, the movements manifested by language counterpoint, reinforce, and interact with the physical movements; at times—the Messenger's narrative of Oedipus' self-blinding in Sophocles' *Oedipus*

Rex, for instance—recounted movement eclipses onstage movement. Given that our kinesthetic responses to recounted movements bear similarities to the way we respond to physically observed movements, any notion of kinesthetic empathy in the theatre must take into account the stage's multiple modes of presencing and enactment. By including language, I also introduce narrative and imagination to the investigation of movement perception.

Empathy, Otherness, and Disability

If *Kinesthetic Spectatorship in the Theatre* examines the kinesthesia half of "kinesthetic empathy" by situating the concept in our broader sensorimotor attunement to the world and expanding it to include the movement fields of utterance and language, it also joins the longstanding theoretical discussions concerning empathy in performance. "Empathy" is a widely applied concept these days, but it is also a contested one. Much of this results from the term itself, which means different things to different people and has proved difficult to define with consistency or precision. In addition to resonance mechanisms, "empathy" is regularly used to signify sympathy, compassion, identification, engulfment, perspective-taking, and mindreading. Underlying most conceptions of empathy is the idea that individuals recognize and vicariously share the experience and point of view of others. In his 1759 *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Adam Smith described this using the term *sympathy*: "As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation."[12] For Smith, this apprehension relies heavily on imagination, which allows us to place ourselves in another's situation and conceive what it would be like to undergo the other's experiences. His descriptions of actual sympathetic encounters, however, have a corporeal force that sidesteps mentalization:

> When we see a stroke aimed and just ready to fall upon the leg or arm of another person, we naturally shrink and draw back our own leg or our own arm; and when it does fall, we feel it in some measure, and are hurt by it as well as the sufferer. The mob [*sic*], when they are gazing at a dancer on the slack rope, naturally writhe and twist and balance their own bodies, as they see him do, and as they feel that they themselves must do if in his situation.[13]

Over a century later, Theodor Lipps used the giddying spectacle of an acrobat balancing on a high wire to argue for an organic connection between the visual and the kinesthetic. The term from philosophical aesthetics that Lipps used to describe this connection—*Einfühlung*, or "feeling into"—was translated into English as "empathy" by Edward Titchener in 1909.

Scientists and philosophers disagree about the operations involved in empathy, and they disagree about the priority that these operations assume in empathic encounters. Given the further muddying introduced by the term's psychological, therapeutic, ethical, and popular uses, there were moments in the writing of this book when I entertained the thought of sidestepping the term *empathy* entirely as an experiential and analytic category for the study of theatrical spectatorship and restricting myself to less loaded descriptive/analytic terms. But "empathy" cannot be dispensed with so easily. The concept is deeply embedded in theatre, dance, and performance theory; aesthetics; philosophy; cognitive science; and psychology, and it has occasioned a rich tradition of phenomenological inquiry, where it is frequently described under the broader rubric of intersubjectivity. Moreover, the literature on kinesthetic empathy has played a crucial role in my research, and I want the book that results from it to contribute to this important interdisciplinary area. So, while *Kinesthetic Spectatorship* focuses on the broader subject of sensorimotor experience, perception, and motor resonance in the theatre—with the word "empathy" not in its title—I address the phenomenon of empathy in the book's final chapter. Readers who expect a global or integrative theory of empathy at that point will be disappointed. What this book offers, instead, is a perspective on theatrical empathy from a sensorimotor point of view attentive to the phenomenological and cognitive complexities of actual theatrical encounters.

In offering this perspective, I do not mean to imply that all empathy is sensorimotor in origin or kinesthetic in the way it manifests itself. From the point of view of neuroscience, motor resonance has been shown to be one neural route to empathy among others. Cognitive scientists and philosophers of mind distinguish between "motor empathy," "emotional empathy," and "cognitive empathy," and the experiments designed to study these phenomena often reinforce the distinctiveness of these categories. Outside the laboratory, however, our relations with others are multi-channeled and holistic; they mobilize all our capacities and engagements. These engagements are animated: they take place within an inter-

subjective field constituted in terms of actual and latent movement. When we see anger in someone, we see it in the way she tightens her facial muscles, holds her body, directs her voice, walks or does not walk. This is especially true in theatre, where kinetic acts are foregrounded within the dynamic of display. The fact that we typically engage such acts while seated does not negate the kinesthetic nature of this encounter; as I will argue, sitting and not-moving exists on the movement continuum. While motor engagement in its many facets may not be the only way to think about empathy, in other words, it allows us to access a dynamic dimension of the self–other interaction, which includes (but does not subsume) other dimensions of empathy, including emotion. This last point is worth underscoring, since the notion of sharing another's feelings has tended to dominate discussions of empathy. Considering the sensorimotor grounding of theatrical and other forms of spectatorship returns movement to the empathic equation, and it highlights the role of movement in seemingly different cognitive operations. What we think of as "empathy" is a dynamic, interactive process rather than a state of mind or feeling that one accomplishes then resides in atemporally.

A different obstacle to the study of empathy is the specter of universalism. This specter can be found in the unexamined assumption that empathy provides unproblematic access to the minds and experiences of others. After centuries in which this assumption prevailed, we know that it is not true, that our ability to apprehend and empathize with others is conditioned by variables of culture, history, gender, race, and embodiment. The differences opened up by these variables raise difficult questions about accessibility, knowability, and identification, and they challenge any notion that empathy and kinesthetic engagement are automatic, total, or unmediated. When we claim to empathize with someone else, we run the risk of universalizing what we feel and mistaking our projections for actual, intersubjective apprehension. Others are hard to know, and the history of I–you (and we–you) encounters is littered with examples of appropriative empathy.

The present study endorses and builds on the work of Foster and others who have challenged universalizing notions of empathy in dance studies and the work of neurologists who have demonstrated the variability and situatedness of neurological mirroring mechanisms. An important task of anyone writing about empathy and the mechanisms underlying it, this work indicates, is to delimit its achievements and qualify excessive claims made on its behalf. Crucial to doing so, I believe, is rigorous

engagement with the issue of difference. Phenomenologically and cognitively, we come to know others by navigating a perceptual field of commonalities and differences. Denying a solipsism that would leave us imprisoned in our own worlds and a boundarylessness that would have us merge with those we encounter, we negotiate what we know, what we do not know but can, and what we cannot know and never will. The limitations and possibilities attendant on this situation complicate the phenomena of movement perception and kinesthetic resonance. What does it mean to say that we resonate with the movements of others? Do we actually inhabit their movements in an experiential sense, or do we vicariously activate our own motor repertoires and experiences? How do we engage with sensorimotor performances that are radically different from ours? If my sensorimotor capabilities and practices differ markedly from another's, what happens when my sensorimotor orientation to the world encounters hers?

As a vehicle for understanding the role of difference in sensorimotor encounters, *Kinesthetic Spectatorship in the Theatre* foregrounds the phenomenon of disability in its analysis. The variability of embodied subjectivity that disability highlights puts many of the assumptions concerning movement perception, kinesthetic resonance, and empathy to the test. As we will see in the chapter "Kinesthetic Resonance", Martin's writings on kinesthetic empathy in the 1930s assume a normative body; when disability appears in his discussion it is marked as a deficit or threat. A related form of ableism can be found in medico-scientific, psychological, and even phenomenology studies of movement that describe perceptual and motor dysfunction using the language of pathology. Most accounts of movement experience and movement perception, of course—including many of the ones referred to in this book—ignore disability entirely by taking able-bodiedness as an epistemological, cognitive, and experiential norm without considering alternative forms of embodiment and motility. Marginalizing or eliding disability in these ways impoverishes our understanding of those who fall into this category, but it also impoverishes our understanding of those who do not. Impairment and physical limitation are not restricted to the "disabled," nor is the ability to execute movement the sole property of those we consider "able-bodied." Incorporating disability by examining its role in movement and movement perception opens important insights into the ways we move through the world. It also gives us a sensorimotor perspective on the difficult question of how, and how much, we can know those who are different from us. While I reject the

universalist position that all experience is essentially the same, I am equally skeptical of the relativist claim evident or implicit in certain currents of identity studies that experience is hermetically sealed within individual or group identities. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty proposed in *The Visible and the Invisible*, we are attuned to one another, implicated in one another, as part of an innate intercorporeality (*intercorporéité*); our experiences, however different, are grounded kinesthetically as they are in other ways (cognitively and linguistically, for example).[14] Social life—and its elaborated manifestations, such as theatre—hinge on the fact that another's experience is to some degree comprehensible to me. By directing attention to our sensorimotor resonance with others, kinesthetic responsiveness provides an important tool for plumbing this apprehensibility and discerning its limits. If we acknowledge that sensorimotor resonance and the higher-order empathic projections it enables are never identical to the experiences they respond to, we can investigate the far more interesting questions of how we constitute a world that includes other people through our perceptual and kinesthetic engagements with it and how we come to know what disability theorist Lennard Davis calls the "commonality of bodies within the notion of difference."[15]

Socially constructed categories of difference, such as disability, complicate the self–other encounter and the terms we use to discuss it. As Disability advocates and theorists have demonstrated, "disability" is an ideological, political, medical, and institutional category as well as—or more than—a physical condition. To quote Davis again: "The object of disability studies is not the person using the wheelchair or the Deaf person but the set of social, historical, economic, and cultural processes that regulate and control the way we think about and think through the body."[16] Disability is also, for those who embrace the term, a vehicle for solidarity, activism, and self-expression. Anthropologist and Disability activist Robert F. Murphy writes, "Disability is not simply a physical affair for us; it is our ontology, a condition of our being in the world."[17] The stigmatizing and empowering effects of this identification have consequences for those it encompasses in terms of how people with disabilities experience themselves and their relationship with others. As a way of acknowledging this influence, I will use the capitalized "Disability" to refer to the social category and the identitarian movement that has emerged over recent decades to contest its objectifications, while using the lower-case "disability" (and other terms, such as "inability," "impairment," and "divergence") to designate sensorimotor and cognitive difference. I do this with

the understanding that these levels are not independent of each other: that being viewed as Disabled by an ableist world is a form of sensorimotor disablement in its own right. For people who are identified with their impairments, disability is subjectively inseparable from Disability.

As a way of integrating disability into a theory of movement perception, I highlight the issue of sensorimotor difference in many of the performances I discuss. Five productions involving disability are central to the chapters that follow: Sandglass Theater's puppet play about dementia, *D-Generation: An Exultation of Larks* (2013); Deaf West Theatre's revival of the musical *Spring Awakening* (2014); an evening of performances by Oakland's AXIS Dance Company, a physically integrated company of performers (attended in 2015); Sam Gold's Broadway production of Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* (2007), with wheelchair-bound actress Madison Ferris as Laura Wingfield; and Proteus Theatre Company's innovative one-man show *Merrick, the Elephant Man* (2007), which featured an able-bodied actor. With each of these productions—and other theatrical moments I discuss throughout this study—I explore kinetic and kinesthetic-based attempts to navigate the disabled–nondisabled divide. One of my contributions to the discussion of knowability, kinesthetic resonance, and empathy here and elsewhere in my book as these pertain to sensorimotor difference is phenomenological. Working from the perspective of kinesthetic experience, I examine the claim, put forward by some, that phenomenology erases difference, by considering this tradition's attitudes toward disability. Taking Merleau-Ponty's famous statement that "[c]onsciousness is originally not an 'I think that,' but rather an 'I can'" back to its original formulation by Edmund Husserl, I show that Husserl conceived the phenomenon of *I can* in relationship to an equally fundamental *I cannot*.[18] I propose that this counter-phenomenon be developed beyond Husserl's limited application of it that *I can* and *I cannot* be understood in dialectical relation to each other. Building on Sara Ahmed's critique of Merleau-Ponty's *I can* in *Queer Phenomenologies*, I argue that *I cannot* be broadened to include those inabilities and inhibitions that are imposed from without—the gender-imposed inhibitions that Iris Marion Young identified in her influential 1980 essay "Throwing Like a Girl," for instance, or the constraints that ableist society imposes on those who are differently embodied. But the limits that *I cannot* represents are also, I maintain, intrinsic to embodiment itself in a more fundamental way than Husserl's ableist perspective allowed him to acknowledge. Recognizing that my own movements and my perception of others' are

constituted, in part, by what I cannot do, know, or share provides a foundation for including difference within an understanding of sensorimotor enactment, resonance, and empathy.

As I hope to demonstrate in the following chapters, a sensorimotor analysis sensitive to difference challenges the absolutism of disability/able-bodiedness binaries without denying the ideological and sociopolitical realities these categories point to. I understand how fraught this project is given longstanding discussions of Disability and other identity-derived categories of experience. I do not propose to speak for those who are Disabled; when I present this experience, it is through the written accounts of those who live it. The perspective I take in the performance encounters I describe is that of a largely able-bodied-up-to-this-point male who has had intimate contacts with disabled individuals over his lifetime, lived through episodes of impairment, and become more deeply acquainted with *I cannot* as he gets older. There are some things I know about being disabled (small "d"), some I am almost certain to learn, and many more I will never know. But the reality of living in a world populated by others with variable embodiments and sensorimotor/cognitive capacities is something everyone shares whether they acknowledge it or not. Embracing this reality, I have written a book less about disability than about the productive challenge disability presents to traditional models of phenomenal experience, cognition, and aesthetic reception. As Carrie Sandahl writes, "Disabilities are states of being that are in themselves generative and, once de-stigmatized, allow us to envision an enormous range of human variety—in terms of bodily, spatial, and social configurations."[19] Given the fact we are all "other" to everyone else in varying degrees, the issue of how we encounter difference—what we have access to and what we do not—is as important as the issue of difference itself. As I hope to show, theatre and other forms of performance offer a space where such encounters are foregrounded, questioned, and enabled.

Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences

As the earlier sections of this introduction have indicated, this book is a continuation of my longstanding interest in the phenomenology of theatre; those who are familiar with my earlier book *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama* will see many of the same preoccupations revisited with the perspective of twenty four additional years spent thinking and writing about theatre. As in that earlier

study, I approach the performing body as an experiential reference point of the performance space it inhabits and bodies forth, and as a phenomenological component of the audience's perceptual field. The notion of kinesthetic spectatorship that I develop here allows me to explore this twinness with a differently attuned phenomenological attention. Because "kinesthetic empathy" and other models of motor resonance seek to understand the mutual relation of movement perception and enactment—the act of perceiving movement is accompanied by a virtual enactment of it—a focus on sensorimotor perception opens up additional layers in the actor–spectatorship relationship. Coming to terms with the phenomenology of movement and movement perception has allowed me to understand this relationship in more richly dynamic terms.

As even a cursory look at the field demonstrates, the last ten years have seen a resurgent interest in phenomenological approaches to performance.[20] In addition to the dance scholarship alluded to earlier, scholars and practitioners in theatre and performance studies have taken up phenomenological questions and methodologies. This interest has proceeded from, and in tandem with, the performative, corporeal, and experiential "turns" in theory and practice of the arts, and it has been inspired by experimental forms of technologically mediated, immersive, and participatory performance. I cannot do justice to the range of new work in this area, but I will single out a few exceptional books: Susan Kozel's exploration of human bodies and digital technologies, *Closer: Performances, Technologies, Phenomenology* (2007); George Home-Cook's study of theatrical listening, *Theatre and Aural Attention: Stretching Ourselves* (2015); Jon Foley Sherman's *A Strange Proximity: Stage Presence, Failure, and the Ethics of Attention* (2016); and Maaike Bleeker, Sherman, and Eirini Nedelkopoulou's collection *Performance and Phenomenology: Traditions and Transformations* (2015), which brings together some of the most exciting performance-directed phenomenological work being done today.[21] Those doing this work draw upon classical tradition of phenomenology—Edmund Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Martin Heidegger, and Erwin Straus—but they also interrogate this tradition and its conceptions of subjectivity, perception, and embodiment in light of contemporary theory, new performance practices, and our increasingly technologized, intermedial life-world. Scholars and performers have also explored the practical question of how one *does* phenomenology, generating valuable insights into the processual nature of phenomenological inquiry, the modes of attention and inscription best suited to capturing the nuances of experience,

and the differences between phenomenological descriptions and first-person impressions. One of the most important insights to emerge from this "new-wave" research is that performance itself is an important way of doing phenomenology.

I am indebted to all of this work for carrying the phenomenological study of performance into a new millennium and for refining the terms that earlier scholars developed. I am indebted, as well, to scholars in such fields as anthropology, geography, and architecture for similarly important insights and applications. The expanding interdisciplinarity of phenomenological analysis is one of its most significant developments. In the chapters that follow I join a particularly influential interdisciplinary conversation: the growing dialogue between phenomenology and what is broadly defined as the cognitive sciences.[22] This dialogue is both inevitable and methodologically fraught. It is inevitable because phenomenology and the cognitive sciences (in which I include cognitive psychology, philosophy of mind, neuroscience, and cognitive linguistics) deal with similar and overlapping phenomena. It is methodologically fraught because the two traditions have historically defined themselves in opposition to each other. Husserl grounded his phenomenological philosophy on a critique of naturalism, the objectifying belief underlying positivist science that the world exists as something distinct from the perceiving subject.[23] Applying his critique to all disciplines that treat phenomena, including consciousness, as entities that can be measured, analyzed, and manipulated, Husserl presented phenomenology and what he considered naïve empiricism as antithetical. For their part, scientists in the decades that followed usually dismissed phenomenology as empirically unsound, dependent on introspective rather than scientifically verifiable procedures and claims.

This apparent incompatibility has been reexamined in recent decades by proponents on both sides of the phenomenology–cognitive science divide. As Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi note, this rapprochement has been supported by three developments in the cognitive sciences, all of which undermined the computational and cognitivist models that dominated studies of cognition to that point.[24] One development was a revived interest in phenomenal consciousness and the methodological question of how one studies this scientifically.[25] A second development was the emergence of embodied and enactive approaches to cognition, which rejected the mind–body dualism that continued to underwrite the cognitive disciplines. The third has to do with advances in neuroscience since the early 1990s. With the advent of technologies such as functional magnetic

resonance imaging (fMRI) and positron emission tomography (PET), scientists have been able to generate highly detailed images of neural activity within and across specific brain regions. Not only does this experimental information suggest neurological correlates to the experiential processes that phenomenology and the philosophy of mind examine, but the scientists who design, conduct, and interpret brain-imaging experiments often depend on the reported experiences of experimental subjects. Given these parallel and intersecting developments, an approach such as phenomenology, which derives descriptive models of experience from rigorous procedures, has an important contribution to make to cognitive research.

A number of philosophers with backgrounds in phenomenology have embraced this rapprochement from the other direction. Abandoning "pure" phenomenology—which hinges, as Alva Noë describes it, on the assumption "that phenomenology is *free standing* in the sense that phenomenological facts are logically and conceptually independent of empirical or metaphysical facts"—these philosophers propose different ways of accommodating phenomenology to the naturalized world that science and other objectifying disciplines examine.[26] Daniel C. Dennett's notion of "heterophenomenology," which advocates a third-person approach to consciousness instead of the autophenomenology that traditional phenomenology is rooted in, is an early shift in this direction, as are the efforts of Francisco J. Varela and others in the late 1990s to "naturalize" Husserlian phenomenology under the rubric "neurophenomenology."[27] More recently, philosophers have used phenomenological accounts of cognitive processes to confirm or challenge the models of science and analytic philosophy; examined phenomenological assumptions in light of these models; and opened new areas for dialogue. The robustness of the conversation is evident in the growing number of books and articles that explore these convergences.[28]

My own engagement with the cognitive sciences is methodological and pragmatic. Having previously argued for the complementarity of phenomenology to other disciplines and approaches, I proceed with the conviction that phenomenology and the cognitive sciences are natural collaborators in the investigation of experience. In the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty drew upon psychological and neurological case studies, such as Kurt Goldstein and Adler Gelb's 1920 study of Schneider, a German man who sustained brain injuries during World War I. And Vittorio Gallese, one of the scientists who identified monkey mirror neurons at the University of Parma, contributed his understanding of Merleau-Ponty to