Acting in the Logical Space: an investigation into the codification of acting practice through Logical Space application and Hermeneutics

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Introduction
An actor stands on the threshold of an empty room\(^1\). The room is devoid of feature – there are no pictures, there is no furniture and no other people present. It is a vacant, physical space, characterless and awaiting input. The actor may not be directly, or solely, responsible for what happens next, but he/she is, nonetheless, going to have to define the space for his/her own personal understanding. This is because the empty room will undergo a transformation and become the performance space. It will acquire a life on many levels – a life in reality (as a rehearsal space), a life as something to view (from the perspective of an audience) and, of course, a life as a fictional world in which the actors pretend to be characters and interact with each other, and ‘things’ in the space itself.

But how might the actor transport him/herself through such a shift? Actors are transcending an empty room into a world with rules, with characterization, characters and tone; they are forming something out of nothing. Meanwhile, they themselves are employing acting technique to fit perfectly into this new world. Can such a process be codified? Does such a process require a system of understanding, interpretation and application that informs and organises the process, and remains present throughout? Will it allow the actor to maintain a clear, effective method of performing his/her job, so to speak, without the interference of vagueness or overkill of ideas\(^2\)?

To assist in the clarification and codification of this ‘world building’, two primary philosophical concepts will be employed and their uses in theatre explored to uproot potential uses of them. The first concept is Logical Space and its relationship to the physical space, as well as its conceivable ability to render order where there could otherwise exist creative disarray. The second concept (which in many ways supports and tests Logical Space) is Allegorical Hermeneutics.

Hermeneutics
Writing on ‘Performance and the Exposure of Hermeneutics in Theatre’, Benjamin Bennett claims that, ‘hermeneutics’ is: ‘a discipline which is aimed at keeping open a particular problem complex’ (1992, 432). ‘Problem complex’, could potentially mean any given set of problems inherent to, or as a consequence of, a structure which, in this case, is a theatrical performance. A further defining
quality of hermeneutics can be explained as: only understanding the whole (of a text) by first understanding the individual part or parts, while the parts can only be understood by understanding the whole. Hence, hermeneutics lends itself to a sort of conceptual loop, forever chasing its tail to reach a unification of itself.

**Logical Space**

Logical space is defined as a term:

used by analogy to physical space, which presents us with a set of locations, positions, or places that can be occupied by objects in relation to other objects. Logical space is thus the ensemble of logical possibilities, a universe composed of all possible-and-existing states of affairs and all possible-and-non-existing states of affairs (Bunnin & Yu 2004, online).

An example of logical space in drama would be to examine a play according to the efforts of its characters. Iago in *Othello* doesn’t simply take a dagger and kill Othello when his back is turned, despite Iago’s overall intention to ensure Othello’s destruction. There is no great physical distance between Iago and Othello that would hinder such a direct course of violence, and there are no physical obstacles that could shield Othello from Iago’s eager blade. The distance that exists between Iago and his goal is one of a logical distance, a space shaped by public image, by reputation, by the need to avoid punishment, and for Iago to achieve something more colourful than merely Othello’s quick death. Iago is obliged to fulfil requirements to close the distance between his plans and their physical climax, requirements of effort that see him carefully manipulating people, playing them off against each other, deceiving with wordplay and planting seeds of doubt in Othello’s head. It is this question of logical space that provides the thrust of the play, and without it Othello could be dead before the end of the first act. Thus, the character in question performs a linking series of actions, scene-by-scene, in order to achieve their purpose, thereby creating and adhering to a logical space. The Stanislavskian devices, of dividing a play up and identifying a character’s units, objectives and super-objectives, are the tools of logical space operation.

To support such an argument for logical space as a structuralist examination of theatre, this analysis turns to Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* ([1921] 1961), in which Wittgenstein’s attempt to create accurate symbolism and factual relations acquires and applies logical space with great effect throughout the work. The current investigation into the ‘clarification’ of acting practice
finds a union with the *Tractatus* in its claim that ‘[p]hilosophy aims at logical clarification of thoughts’ and that ‘[w]ithout philosophy thoughts are, as it were, cloudy and indistinct: its task is to make them clear and to give them sharp boundaries’ (Wittgenstein [1921] 1961, 4.112, 49).

This idea of ‘boundaries’ is very relevant to the ideas behind logical space in theatre, given that a play is a fictional space separated from the real world by boundaries, such as the fourth wall, that are invisible, but mutually understood between the actors and the audience. From Wittgenstein’s philosophy logical space is transplanted in aid of the clarification of thoughts – thoughts of the actor undertaking a role. The need to rid the actor of his/her ‘cloudy and indistinct’ initial thoughts, finds itself met by the standards of logical space outlined by Wittgenstein.

Wittgenstein defines logical space as:

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\text{The world is all that is the case ... The world is a totality of facts ... The world is determined by the facts ... The totality of facts determines what is the case ... The facts in logical space are the world (1, 1.1, 1.11, 1.12, and 1.13, 7).}
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Already there exists a structure to which the properties of a piece of drama can be set. There is an elegant simplicity that dovetails the *Othello* example above with the statement:

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\text{The logical scaffolding surrounding a picture determines logical space. The force of a proposition reaches through the whole of logical space (3.42, 35).}
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If the ‘picture’ is the play in question, then the object of an actor’s intention is surely to construct the logical scaffolding around it.

When Wittgenstein mentions ‘a totality of facts’, cannot these ‘facts’ be representative of physical objects? The logical space is just as much defined by the solid elements of the play as is the unseen. Props, furniture, walls and doors, for instance, contribute to the makeup of a space, and actors can employ these things to further build their world, build their characters. These objects become instruments of the space, with logical space providing a structure for how these objects are used, as well as the objects themselves defining what is logically possible:
the height of the chair, the texture of the costume, the brightness of the light, the quality of emotion, matter all the time: the aesthetics are practical (Brook 1990, 110-111).

Wittgenstein’s logical space also provides an insight into the dynamics of the relationship between the fictional world of a play with its real world parent. In his exploration of the notion that language cannot be described without the aid of another language to describe it, can it be derived that a dramatic text is a language used to describe reality? The importance of the actor’s clarity of mind and intent as a performer becomes ever more tantamount under the lens of the idea that he/she is a medium between one world and another, delivering a language that describes the very world occupied by the audience. This is a hierarchy of spaces: the real world and the fictional one, with the latter located within the former. The actors finds themselves operating at the bottom of a gravity well of logical spaces, the boundaries of which blur in the relationship between the dramatic piece and the audience watching.

In the introduction to Wittgenstein’s Tractatus, philosopher Bertrand Russell refers to ‘bounded portions of the world’ (Wittengstein [1921] 1961, xvii) and postulates that ‘[our world] cannot have a boundary, since it has nothing outside it’ (xvii), and implicitly frees the logical space (of a theatrical production) from such a designation. A play does have a reality beyond it, therefore the actor can refer to, and find stimulus from, such a hierarchy. A play is bounded in the real world, a fact that carries a great deal of significance to the meaning of a dramatic text, and the way in which an actor operates within it. Peter Brook defines this further:

although the dramatist brings his own life nurtured by the life around him into his work – the empty stage is no ivory tower – the choices he makes and the values he observes are only powerful in proportion to what they create in the language of the theatre (Brook 1990, 42-43).

Returning to the subject of action, the logical space’s structure lends itself to the accuracy and clarity of a choice and its subsequent gesture or movement. It could be argued that Stanislavski and Meyerhold serve as compatible aids. Vsevolod Meyerhold’s biomechanics, with its attention to detail, its strength of precision, and its lucidity, provide the actor with an excellent resource for the clarification of physical form. With its ‘absence of superfluous, unproductive movements ... [and] correct positioning of the body’s centre of gravity’ (Braun 1969, 198), it is perhaps the greatest
attribute inside a logical space where the gestures of the actor’s body are concerned. However, where the subject of ‘world building’ (the process of transforming a blank space into a theatrical space) is concerned, it is perhaps Stanislavski that segues seamlessly into the demands of logical space clarification.

Stanislavski arguably brought into focus the systems that were able to deconstruct a fictional landscape within a text, and rebuild it alongside the individual actor’s understanding with confidence and precision. But does Stanislavski’s sometimes rigid system demonstrate a weakness in logical space’s case as a demystifying force? Certainly, a logical space enjoys ‘naturalistic’ productions, simply on the premise that the closer a production is to reality, the greater the logical space can use reality as a template from which to structure itself. Does this also mean that the rigidity of ‘naturalism’ (an attempt to create an image of reality onstage) as a theatrical form, ‘rubs off’ on logical space application? It may be argued that, if Logical Space is taken to its extreme as a physical analogy, the concept falls short of creating a work of theatre, or at least one that does not enslave itself to mimicking reality. However, in its more relaxed form, Stanislavski’s methods find a harmony with logical space application. Using Anton Chekhov’s The Seagull as a case in point, Bella Merlin writes:

Many clues of how to enter the life of The Seagull can in fact be seen quite clearly in the text, although it requires critical skills as well as artistic skills to access these clues (Merlin 1999, 219).

This statement also implicitly supports that logical space is an important and workable ‘critical skill’ that unfolds, exposes, identifies and structures the ‘life’ of a text.

These founding days of the Stanislavski method do uncover an interesting factor of which the Logical Space is susceptible to hindrance and perhaps even failure, and it comes in the form of what becomes an even deeper section of the so-called hierarchy. If ‘reality’ can be said to be at the pinnacle of the hierarchy, and the fictional world of the text is the inset, should not the writer him/herself be the next one down? Or, it could be argued that writers, being part of the real world, are occupants of the highest part of the hierarchy and could not possibly be in another place at the same instance; or perhaps the writer can be in two sections of the hierarchy at once, if the hierarchy is something more akin to a loop, that starts with the writer, who creates the fictional world, which exists within the real world but has boundaries, in which the writer themselves lives and was
inspired to write ... who then loops back to where he/she began: writing the fictional world. Whether or not in the form of a loop, the writer does exist as something that underpins the hierarchy, for as Bella Merlin observes:

[Stanislavski’s] later attempts to make tangible the subtleties of the writing were thus evidently confounded by Chekhov’s own inconsistency with regard to detail ... With such evasiveness on the part of the writer, Stanislavsky can be forgiven for making unsophisticated choices in these early, pioneering days of naturalism (Merlin 1999, 220).

Therefore, is Chekhov solely responsible for the ‘unsophisticated choices’ that Stanislavski makes? Does it follow that the playwright is required to make detailed notes and specifications in regards to set? It can be argued that these details are not the concern of the playwright, and that such specifications are not needed to create a fully comprehensible dramatic piece, whether naturalistic or theatrical. Likewise, a writer’s indecisions, or absence of detail, would not hinder the formulation of a logical space that corresponds with and informs a physical space. Logical space can be inferred from text alone, and perhaps Chekhov’s indecision regarding these other details are an example of the logical space not being adequately invoked by Stanislavski at that time.

Hermeneutics in acting practice

Wittgenstein’s claim that: ‘A picture is a model of reality ... A picture represents a possible situation in logical space’ (1961, 2.12 and 2.202, 15 &17) lends itself to a perspective that Logical Space is perhaps not a language of certainties, at least where the story of a play is concerned. If the term ‘picture’, which he defines as a ‘model of reality’ is the model of the reality of a play, then ultimately the play is one of alternative ‘situations’ (‘situation’ is here defined as an interpretive outcome) in ‘logical space’ (which, in this instance, will come to represent the make-up of the reality outside of a play; the world of the audience watching). The fact Wittgenstein uses the word ‘possible’, rather than ‘fixed’ or ‘the only’, indicates that the meaning of the play (or any analogous reality) can have more than one interpretive outcome in the world outside its boundaries – the real world. A logical space is ‘guaranteed by the mere existence of its constituents – by the existence of the proposition with a sense’ (1961, 3.4, 35). Since a ‘proposition with a sense’ is an offer of a fact that is not false, Wittgenstein implicitly defines a logical space’s operative capabilities within the world of the play to be founded on the facts of that world, keeping the logic of the play at harmony according to its own. Logical space offers models of reality, but it does not appear to answer questions of meaning and
interpretation, which are surely important to an actor who wants to comprehend the sense of the world their character is occupying. Logical space is now calling for the need of hermeneutics.

Hermeneutics is better able to provide an insight into the actor’s efforts outside of the narrative. There exists a world of meaning that is constantly being interpreted, understood, accepted and argued. Why is Iago doing these things? Why does he hate Othello so acutely? Logical space is telling us how and when; it is showing us what needs to be interpreted, but it seems to lack the reach of telling the audience what to think (or what to think exactly.) Hermeneutics frees up what logical space cannot always achieve, and encourages the audience to take on the thread of the work and carry on weaving.

The ‘acceptance’ that an actor finds through hermeneutics may sound insipid and irresolute, but is very probably the only sure outcome of hermeneutical examination toward any field of problematic study. When there are no indisputable facts, where there exists no jointly agreed definition or meaning by one or more interpreters, then acceptance becomes a default. Whether, in the case of two opposing critiques, it is a matter of agreeing to disagree or, in the case of an audience member who does not outright understand a message conveyed to them, but nonetheless comes to an understanding that they prefer or reason into being, then the broad definition is acceptance. Benjamin Bennett elaborates that ‘the most hermeneutically desirable performance situation is one in which absolute enthusiastic unanimity is combined with a communicated content’ (1992, 442), and goes on to compare such a desired performance to a political fascist demonstration, such as the Nuremberg Rally. However, what does this say for acceptance? When steered in such a direction as to touch on fascism (viewed here as a negative force), acceptance becomes somewhat undesirable. Of course, this is not to suggest a performance is anywhere near approaching something so sinister, but merely to expose the idea that too much willingness to embrace acceptance – and the hermeneutic approach – on the part of the actor, is to endanger the actor’s pursuit of clarity in their work.

Where this discussion utilizes acceptance as an end-product of hermeneutics, Bennett in many ways embodies the same end-product with the word ‘generalization’ in the context that the relation between performance and theory – between the dramatic performance and the text – ‘inevitably disintegrates under the stress of generalization’ (Bennett 1992, 431). In the service of logical, space-driven, clear-thinking, this serves as a strong warning to the marring auspices of hermeneutics’ clarifications. The problems with hermeneutics, it seems, stem from the very nature of what it is
trying to answer, and for an actor trying to translate into the physical space what is implied in a text, it is an inept force that takes hold of a problem and runs away with it in everlasting circles:

> if interpretation claims to operate in the service of understanding or meaning, we are tempted to ask whether the result of this service is not mainly to create an ever greater need for itself, whether interpretation, far from approaching its ostensible goals, in truth only defers them indefinitely (Bennett 1992, 432).

Even the logic of Wittgenstein is guilty of mystifying more than it answers, which Bertrand Russell concludes with ‘the feeling of the world as a bounded whole in the mystical’ (Wittgenstein 1961, xxi), justified by examining Wittgenstein’s statement that the totality of the value \( x \) is mystical where \( x \) in the form \( fx \) is given as all propositions (from 6.45 of Tractatus) and therefore rendering all totalities uncertain. This could mean that even the premise of logical space, by proxy, becomes something that enweaves itself into indistinct territory. However, it is useful to separate the concept of logical space from its presence in Wittgenstein’s Tractatus in this case.

### Samuel Beckett, Logical Space and Hermeneutics

In 1994, at the Garrick Theatre in London, director Deborah Warner and actress Fiona Shaw performed their production of Samuel Beckett’s *Footfalls* and, despite Warner’s previous revised staging of Ibsen’s *Hedda Gabler*, there came something of a backlash from the Beckett Estate. This was due to Beckett’s rigidity towards stage directions and uncompromising adherence to spoken text during his lifetime. Warner had transferred certain lines of dialogue from one character to another, and the consequences threatened to close the production down altogether. What does this say for the relationship between logical space and hermeneutics? Here there is a complex but fixed procession of stage directions and text written into being by Beckett, with the specification that it has to be followed to the letter, that produces, as in *Waiting for Godot*, a piece of drama that requires a great deal of interpretative engagement.

The removal of accident from a logical framework allows for a purer perspective on the clarity of work Beckett is trying to achieve. Wittgenstein’s ideal of a language of logic, that deals in certainties, seems to compliment Beckett’s need to remove revision and the possibility of change from what he has written, and to preserve the totality of his worlds, and their state of affairs, as they are. Although logical space is indeed transferable and flexible enough that, as a method of mapping the text, it can
be applied and adjusted according to specification, it is perhaps here, in the foundations of Beckett’s plays, that it is set in its most literal form.

If Wittgenstein’s statement ‘The world is all that is the case’ (1961, 1, 7) can be applied to *Waiting for Godot*, there immediately comes into existence ‘A country road. A tree. Evening’ (Beckett 1956, 1), as it is written in the script, as it remains throughout the entire play. It is a perfect totality, confined and ordered, consisting of a mound and a tree, with a road passing through it. The tree becomes an on-again, off-again, topic of conversation between the characters Vladimir and Estragon, as they deliberate on whether they should hang themselves from its branch. The mound becomes something they climb or peer around routinely, while the road, which neither starts nor finishes in their field of vision, provides a channel of exit that they faithfully refuse to follow. The logical space permeates through every aspect of the narrative. The tree, for instance, is an aspect of the physical space that could logically allow for the two men to hang themselves, but the logical space denies them the presence of the rope and, later, is too weak a belt from which to perform the grim task.

In drama, the use of improvisation, game-playing, experimentation and the results of serendipitous events can lead to major breakthroughs and decisions on how parts are played and how storylines are developed and performed. Omitting the results of accidents in many ways omits improvement, and negates what could be said to be an evolutionary process that suffuses a piece of drama with the Peter Brook ideas of the Holy, Rough and Immediate Theatres, theatres that concur with the contemporary and allow for truth in place of strict, and ultimately deadly, adherence to what was. This is, of course, not to say that logical space cannot adapt to the results of accidents. Logical Space remains at the mercy of playwright, directors, designers and actors. It is a tool that builds physical things and can just as well take them apart for rebuilding, or redesigning.

Logical space guides the actor through the actions and motivations of *Waiting for Godot* with the added clarity of direction from Beckett concerning details. It tells the actor to take off shoes, put them out to rest; it tells the actors, once fallen to the floor (Lucky, Pozzo, Vladimir and Estragon), that they are somehow unable to rise again easily, despite no physical force stopping them. What logical space fails to tell the actor, and the audience, is what it all means, and what is going on, and why. *Why are they waiting for Godot? Who is Godot?*

Hermeneutics materializes into practice automatically, naturally.
Benjamin Bennett asks of such a move into hermeneutical discipline, ‘Is this theological move [interpretation] a solution to the problem [of trying to understand the play], or merely an avoidance of it?’ (1992, 432). This beckons the response, in the case of Waiting for Godot, of whether there are actually any answers to avoid in the first place. In the transference from certainty in hermeneutics, ideas about meaning become structured on possibilities alone. Bennett describes such a notion as ‘a totality comprising all of the self-elaborating structures of text generated by hermeneutic thought ... I call that totality “hermeneutic space”’ (1992, 434), and goes on to justify:

Meaning and understanding, in hermeneutic space, may be subject to infinite deferral, but they cannot be denied outright. For without their operation there could be no structure; the chains or fabrics of interpretation, or of the proliferation of texts, would have no leverage by which to articulate their identity as basic structural elements; the system would include no differential to entropy (1992, 435).

Perhaps Waiting for Godot sits comfortably in the hermeneutic space, relegating logical space to the confines of merely providing the hermeneutic space with something to analyse. However, without such a logical framework organised as it is within a physical space, the theatrical relevance falls further and further into a form of dramatic obscurity. Bennett comments that:

The theatre’s materiality is ... of a thoroughly heterogeneous collection of objects suggesting extrapolation in the direction of ‘world’ (1992, 438).

These ‘objects’ that form the materiality of a play, he notes, are pre-semiotized and therefore pre-signified before they go on stage, wherein they become the carriers of significance to an audience (one tree on a barren mound next to a barren road means more than a tree outside the theatre on the pavement as the audience walk in):

objects in a theatrical performance thus have, for us, a greater operate materiality than objects in the real world, and offer greater resistance to the engulfing tendency of hermeneutic space (1992, 438).
Implicitly, by nature materiality resists hermeneutic entanglement, preserving the logical within the physical space and thereby ensuring that hermeneutics does not override what is intended physically by an actor in a performance.

**Blue Kettle**

Logical space finds an ultimate destroyer, however, in Caryl Churchill’s play *Blue Kettle*. *Blue Kettle* provides, in a gradual but devastating blow, a complete negation of the logical space as both a concept that codifies an actor’s physical process and understanding of the play, and the ability to inform the entire production. In many ways, the destruction comes at the expense of the logical space as something that is inclusive. The premise follows wherein a set of characters, who begin with a series of conversations concerning an adopted man meeting his birth-mother, slowly transform into something completely different: the words ‘blue’ and ‘kettle’ and syllabic snippets of them arrive from nowhere and act like a virus, consuming the entire text until there is nothing but the words ‘blue’ and ‘kettle’ spoken by the characters as though they were in normal conversation.

These two words have no relevance to the play’s original logical space, and are introduced from outside of it, where it proceeds to eat away at the dialogue until it is thoroughly consumed. The logical space cannot hope to make any sense of the dialogue from that point on, and with no information to go on, the play falls entirely into the hands of hermeneutics.

This cancelling out of the logical space leaves a void that provides the actor with a territory little encountered – one with no rules to govern the narrative.

**Conclusion**

An empty space transforms into something logical through the application of the ‘requirement of effort’ from the characters that operate within it. The actor embodies the motives, the drives, and the actions of a character, and it is their use of the logical space that brings a narrative into existence. Actions are the host of the logical space and its power lies in the actor’s awareness that this is the case.

Logical space is informed by the reality beyond its boundaries, and the actor has a responsibility to its nature. It rests in a hierarchy of spaces, with boundaries that can be adjusted for different effects, blurring the logical space of the play and the logical space of the real world as it does so.
In the matter of logical space’s possible advocacy of rigidity in drama, whether it be the Realism/Naturalism of Stanislavskian methodology, or the creative decisions of Samuel Beckett, it is perhaps more appropriate to conclude that logical space is an appreciator of it. As a form, it responds to set proximities between text and action, word and speech, and works well the more a play offers it in terms of certainties. It does not, however, force an actor to remain within a certain line of thought or decision, and can be altered to bring awareness and clarity to any possible variation on action.

Logical space may not be able to bring answers to all the meanings and questions of a text, but neither should hermeneutics be trusted to support the actor through the process of trying to understand a play. Leaving a question open ended, without any reasonable attempt to understand it, is something arguably injurious to an actor. On the opposite scale, if an actor invests too much energy in applying hermeneutics to solve a particular problem complex, he/she may lose sight of his/her function as a communicator of the character’s will. Actions are the bedrock of both the logical and hermeneutical spaces, and an actor is the conveyer of those actions.

Notes

1. Allow us to hypothesise such an empty space, not as an absolute void, but as a place awaiting input.

2. ‘ideas’ – the competing theories actors may have about the meaning of a piece, or indecision regarding how best to conduct themselves through these interpretations of meaning.

3. Lefebvre usefully elaborates that: ‘[t]he semiological use ... places more emphasis on meaning: marks are supposed to signify, to be part of a system’ (1974, 141).

References

Beckett on Film. 2001. DVD Collection, produced by Michael Colgan and Alan Moloney.


