HETEROTELIC MODELS AS PERFORMATIVES: FROM SPEECH ACTS TO PROPOSITIONALITY[1]

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Performatives in the sense of speech act theory have long been held for the elementary building blocks of theatre and performance. This article proposes a theory of performative models as autonomous forms that are (1) propositional *(to be worked with), (2)* reified *(things in their own right), and (3) inherently* heterotelic *(shifting in their purpose between models-of and models-for, and are always put to uses outside the epistemological system that created them). The article contextualises speech act theory with cultural and political events of the 1960s: the act of naming as an exemplary speech act is set against the disintegration of imperial powers and the postcolonial emancipatory initiatives striking back against the oppressive (and often nominalistically prescriptive) pasts. Rather than the acts of naming, the decisive factors are* recognition *(that a certain event is happening) and* consensus *(that the event is valid and constitutes a new social reality). Analysing case studies from drama and history, this article also addresses speech act theory's failure to come to terms with theatre and performance proper, epitomised by Searle's claim that, "in a perfectly straightforward sense," there are no true speech acts (i.e., performatives) in actors' performances – any promises made by actors on stage cannot be reasonably held to account outside the stage, in real life. This profound misunderstanding on Searle's part (but also otherwise common) of the actors' performed personas and the remit of their promises within the performed social realities of the play. The nature and validity of performatives made in performance is the prompt for this essay. I argue that the situation in performance is epistemologically not a parasitical form but rather a case of performatives more complex and holistic than in real life.*

[1] In conceiving this essay I have benefitted from an illustrious company of friends and colleagues. I would like to thank them for their suggestions that contributed to the arguments and to the critical reading, as well as brought up several of the case studies. Among the many, I would particularly like to thank Nicoleta Cinpoeş, Kira Curtis, Tracy C. Davis, David Drozd, Campbell Edinborough, Cat Fergusson Baugh, Russell Gilbert, Odai Johnson, M.A. Katritzky, Natasha Korda, Peter W. Marx, Noémie Ndiaye, Josh Overton, Martin Procházka, Adam Railton, and Freddie Rokem.

> A man buys himself a parrot. He wants his bird to call him "Uncle" and proceeds to train it, using brutal methods that are not successful. He finally resorts to a new punishment: He locks the parrot in the henhouse with the chickens for the night. In the morning, the man goes into the henhouse and finds the parrot attacking the last surviving hen. The parrot is screeching repeatedly: "Say 'uncle' to me, say 'uncle' to me…"[2]

Preamble

Speech act theory has had it. Its heyday. As a system it was formulated in the mid-1950s by J.L. Austin in a series of lectures. When Austin started to deliver his William James Lectures at Harvard University, he was elaborating on ideas that had occupied him since 1939; he also published on them after the war, and in the three years preceding his Harvard series, he delivered lectures at Oxford entitled "Words and Deeds."[3] It is perhaps no coincidence that his influential theory on the power of words to "do things" – such as name a ship, declare a war, make a promise, and other rule-governed forms of behaviour – was first thought of in the year of the declaration of World War II and breaches of promise, and developed and delivered in immediate vicinity of McCarthyism and communist show trials. In that era, rule-governed declarations – words of accusation, libel, or fabricated lies with vested interests – could and did indeed "do things" by their mere utterance.

When Austin's lectures were eventually published in 1962 as *How to Do Things with Words*, two years after his premature death, they entered a world that was on the cusp of a seismic change. Between 1955 and 1962, the critical seven years that included the Suez Crisis of 1956 or the 1960 Year of African Independence, the British Empire and the Old (rule-governed) World had almost disintegrated. Doing things with words depended more and more on what Austin had called the felicitous conditions – seemingly self-explanatory sets of circumstances that determined the success of speech acts (or performatives, as they are also called); in the new predicament the world was in, the category of felicitous conditions became a Pandora's box of theoretical problems. On re-reading Austin's *How to Do Things with Words*, one could argue that the entire theory is a precarious

2 Viktor E. Frankl, *Recollections: An Autobiography*, trans. Joseph and Judith Fabry (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing, 2000) 41.

3 J.O. Urmson, "Preface to the First Edition," J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures Delivered at Harvard University in 1955*, ed. J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisà (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975) vi.

concept that starts disintegrating as soon as Austin gets into discussing the particulars and technicalities. At that point, speech acts are far from simple affairs: the propositional value of the speech act statements becomes tentative, dubious, or even speculative – much closer in line with the Leibnizian propositionality of *what if*.

The following two decades saw a flurry of critical activity that tried to consolidate Austin's inspirational theory, especially in the disciplines of linguistics (pragmatics) and the philosophy of language. The most influential proponent of speech act theory, John R. Searle, elaborated on this essentially logocentric approach to communication and social engagement and argued – authoritatively, but rather unconvincingly – that

> a theory of language is part of a theory of action, simply because speaking is a rule-governed form of behavior. Now, being rule-governed, it has formal features which admit of independent study.[4]

As long as speech act theory remains in the realm of language, its tenets and principles are important with their implications for a theory of action, but that does not automatically mean that speech act theory principles are equally valid and determining for action within a social reality (context, body language, speech intonation). Searle's assertion to that effect protests too much when he claims that

> it is in principle possible for every speech act one performs or could perform to be uniquely determined by a given sentence (or set of sentences), given the assumptions that the speaker is speaking literally and that the context is appropriate.[5]

The possibility Searle outlines here is speculative and impracticable; his impossible assumption is based on an ontological fallacy of literality or objective reality. Discussing speech acts (or performatives) as "propositional acts […] uttering words in sentences in certain contexts, under certain conditions"[6] brought up more questions than answers when it came to real-life application: contexts and conditions are always uncertain – as became ever more apparent in the years in which the theories were published. What the actual pragmatic remit of speech act

[4] John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969) 17.

[5] Searle, *Speech Acts* 18.

[6] Searle, *Speech Acts* 24-25.

theory was beyond a narrow, analytic theory of language, became a prompt for increasingly technical and hair-splitting studies. Speech act theory, even in those early stages, had to come with numerous correctives and addenda – as Searle's seminal book *Speech Acts* (1969) suggests; its Part II, "Some Applications of the Theory," provides a list of fallacies of misapplication and problems of reference. The process of disintegration continued.

Jacques Derrida launched a critique of Austin's and Searle's theory at a conference on "Communication" organised in Montreal in 1971 by the Congrès international des Sociétés de philosophie de langue française. His paper "Signature Event Context" (delivered in French and published in his *Marges de la philosophie*, 1972) was translated by Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman a few years later and published in the 1977 inaugural issue of *Glyph*.[7] John Searle's response, "Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida," followed in the second issue of the journal and the chasm between the two schools of thought – the Anglo-American analytic philosophy and French deconstruction theory – opened wide, with both sides fanning the flames of their differences.[8] Searle launched his reply with an oblique rebuff, asserting that Derrida "has misunderstood and misstated Austin's position at several crucial points" and "Derrida has a distressing penchant for saying things that are obviously false,"[9] and continuing with a rigorous repetition of the tenets of analytic, and strictly "rule-governed" philosophy of language. Derrida's reply grew into a lengthy essay "Limited Inc a b c…" in which the rhetoric flair of deconstruction and its relativistic wordplay proliferated. Derrida countered Searle's reply, playing not only with the "limited" validity of speech act theory, but he also took up the confrontation *ad personam*: his title and his rhetorical device throughout the essay is a fictional character of Sarl (*société à responsabilité limitée*, a limited company), punning on his opponent's name and pointing out the limited reliability of the theory when put to the test. The chasm between the two schools never closed. While deconstructionist theory was immensely influential, time has not been kind to it either: its self-contented relativism contributed significantly to the disintegration and seems to have become a symptom of the epistemological change that has been taking place since the dissolution of the rigid "rule-governed" world. Deconstructionist theory has been partly discredited by its

7 I am working with a 1988 edition that includes "Signature Event Context" as well as other related texts: Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc.*, trans. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988).

8 John R. Searle, "Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida," *Glyph*, 2 (1977): 198-208.

9 Searle, "Reiterating the Differences" 198, 203.

nihilistic relativisation of historic truth – such as in the infamous affair of its leading proponent Paul de Man, who had been posthumously shown as "an unrepentant con man – an opportunist, bigamist, and toxic narcissist who'd been convicted in [wartime] Belgium of fraud, forgery, and falsifying records" and who was shown to have "written at least one hundred articles for a pro-Nazi Belgian publication, *Le Soir*, during World War II."[10] Despite indubitable proof of de Man's anti-Semitic publications, his defenders – among them Derrida, himself Jewish – used deconstructionist techniques to undermine the evidence. A potent critical tool, honed in 1960s France to deconstruct oppressive power structures, became a tool in Holocaust denying and the creeping methods of post-truth. A statement uttered in 1998, that truth "depends on what the meaning of the word 'is' is" was not made by any of the deconstructionist theorists, but by Bill Clinton during his Grand Jury Referral.[11] Speech acts became increasingly uncertain and relative, and manufacturing the "felicitous conditions" to serve political ends has turned into much more than the small print on the instructions leaflet of how to do things with words. To be sure, these are not particularly effective critical guides to analysing how performatives work in practice.

This article is about performance and performative models, for which both the theories are necessary precursors. I do not aim to rehabilitate speech act theory or deconstruction; both are probably beyond redemption – perhaps apart from the absurdly reduced awareness that making a statement is one of the ingredients constituting social reality, and that any statement has elements of uncertainty and is incapable of controlling its meaning, respectively. The point of departure for this article is an observation made by Searle in his 1977 reply to Derrida. Here, Searle refers to actors' performance as instances of hollow or void promises, and to theatre utterances as "parasitical" on the "nonpretended" ones:

> Austin's idea is simply this: if we want to know what it is to make a promise or make a statement we had better not *start* our investigation with promises made by actors on stage in the course of a play or statements made in a novel by novelists about characters in the novel, because in a fairly obvious way such utterances are not standard cases of promises and statements. We do not, for example, hold the actor responsible today for the promise he made on stage last night in the way that we normally hold people responsible for their promises, and we do not demand of the author how he knows that his characters have such and such traits in a way that

[10] Michiko Kakutani, *The Death of Truth* (London: William Collins, 2018) 57-58.

[11] On 21 September 1998; quoted in Kakutani 68.

> we normally expect the maker of a statement to be able to justify his claims. Austin describes this feature by saying that such utterances are "hollow" or "void" and "nonserious." Furthermore, in a perfectly straightforward sense such utterances are "parasitical" on the standard cases: there could not, for example, be promises made by actors in a play if there were not the possibility of promises made in real life. The existence of the pretended form of the speech act is logically dependent on the possibility of the nonpretended speech act in the same way that any pretended form of behavior is dependent on nonpretended forms of behavior, and in that sense the pretended forms are *parasitical* on the nonpretended forms.[12]

It follows from Searle's emphatic explanation that, "in a perfectly straightforward sense," there are no true speech acts (i.e., performatives) in actors' performances – any promises made by actors on stage cannot be reasonably held to account outside the stage, in real life. That is, of course, a profound misunderstanding on Searle's part of the actors' performed personas and the remit of their promises within the performed social realities of the play. That misunderstanding – not only Searle's but generally common – is rooted in a popular, non-critical understanding of performance. The nature and validity of performatives made in performance is the prompt for this essay. I argue that the situation in performance is epistemologically not a parasitical form but rather a case of performatives more complex and holistic than in real life.

In what follows, this article discusses several examples of performatives from plays and from history. Rather than narrowing down the theory of action to speech acts and their felicitous conditions as criteria of their validity and success – pursued, for instance, by Stanley Fish, who applies it, in a somewhat pedestrian way, to Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*[13] – I adopt the concept of performative models and social consensus. My approach is not relativist in a deconstructionist sense, nor absolutist in the sense of traditional speech act theory that presupposes an objective social reality. While certain events may have various interpretations or be seen even as self-contradictory in the relativist Rashomon effect, there are principles and even laws that govern physical as well as social reality, from irreversible events of one's life and the passage of time, through social consensus and legal authority, to matters of interpersonal trust and personal integrity.

[12] Searle, "Reiterating the Differences" 204-205.

[13] Stanley E. Fish, "How to Do Things with Austin and Searle: Speech Act Theory and Literary Criticism," *MLN*, 91.5 (October 1976): 983-1025.

In referring to models, I am elaborating on my concept of models as autonomous forms (material or immaterial) that are *propositional* (to be worked with) and *reified* (things in their own right).[14] Models are inherently *heterotelic*, shifting in their purpose between models-of and models-for. A model is made for a purpose, as a functional, holistic proposition, and it is always put to other uses, outside the epistemological system in which it was created. That is the model's defining feature – its heterotelic indeterminacy.

What's in a Name

> O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?
> Deny thy father and refuse thy name: […]
> 'Tis but thy name that is my enemy: […]
> What's in a name? That which we call a rose
> By any other word would smell as sweet.[15]

Austin's probably most famous example of a speech act is the act of naming:

> "I name this ship the *Queen Elizabeth*" – as uttered when smashing the bottle against the stem.[16]

Instead of going with Austin and Searle into the felicitous conditions and other vagaries of what makes this event a legitimate and valid act of naming, I offer a different theoretical approach.[17] Rather than seeing this as a mere act that either happens, or does not, let me consider it as a performative model:

> A person says: "I name this ship the *Queen Elizabeth*."

[14] For a detailed discussion of my theory of models, see Pavel Drábek, "Modelling the World through Play," *The Routledge Companion to Theatre and Performance Historiography*, ed. Tracy C. Davis and Peter W. Marx (London and New York: Routledge, 2021) 400-401.

[15] William Shakespeare, *The Most Excellent and Lamentable Tragedie of Romeo and Iuliet* (London: printed by Thomas Creede for Cuthbert Burby, 1599), lines 827-38. The spelling has been modernised and punctuation included.

[16] Austin 5.

[17] For an alternative approach, see David Holdcroft, "Indirect Speech Acts and Propositional Content," *Foundations of Speech Act Theory: Philosophical and Linguistic Perspectives*, ed. Savas L. Tsohatzidis (London and New York: Routledge, 1994) 350-64. Holdcroft discusses the same example to address what he refers to as the "[d]ifficulties with Austin's and Searle's theories" (350).

Witnesses of this event *recognise* it as the act of naming a ship – and probably anticipate it. The notion of *recognition* is crucial here: it is a model – a pattern, a form – that is part and parcel of the cultural knowledge we have acquired. (There may be cultures where it is unthinkable to give names to a ship. In such circumstances, no such *recognition* would occur.) Having recognised the model of naming, witnesses consider the circumstances – what Austin calls the felicitous conditions. In a more dynamic, real-life set-up of this scene, the success of the naming depends less on the abstract, analytical notion of felicitous conditions but on our social awareness:

> Even if we are out of earshot or even out of sight;
> even if we cannot understand the language of the christening;
> even if the person uttering the sentence makes a mistake;
> even if the ritual (i.e., the performative model we have recognised) is somehow botched and broken;
> *the ship has been named Queen Elizabeth by social consensus*
> because such is the social custom of the culture that frames it.

This act of naming a ship also happens if this scene is part of a theatre performance – only with the difference that the naming is valid within that frame. The model itself does not change, neither its validity *within the relevant frame*. It is the social consensus that gives it its absolute validity – in real life as well as in the theatre. (The fictional ship in the play has been christened Queen Elizabeth as absolutely as the ship in Austin's fictional real-life example.)

While it might seem that this is a speculative example and the framing by the social custom of the culture is a technicality, the opposite is true. If the ship had just been captured from the enemy, appropriated and rechristened Queen Elizabeth, will the enemy on recapturing it know the ship by its new name, let alone feel the need to rechristen it? Let us consider a historic act of naming, rather than the fictional example that Austin gives. In his account "The first voyage made to the coastes of America," Arthur Barlowe relates to Walter Raleigh of an event that took place on the coast of the New World on 4 July 1584:

> Wee viewed the lande about us [… called] Wingandacoa, (and nowe by her Majestie, Virginia).[18]

[18] Quoted in Louis Montrose, "The Work of Gender in the Discourse of Discovery," *Representations* 33 (Winter 1991): 7.

Barlowe's expedition was fortunate enough to return, so they could report on the act of naming Virginia, and the English social consensus retained the name and sealed it by its colonisation. While Austin, conceiving his speech act theory at the height of the British Empire, and Searle writing in the city of Boston, would well have taken this act of naming as complete, the social consensus framed by the political system and the culture is defining and absolute. It may well be that the State of Virginia soon follows Canada's example of acknowledging original, native names too, and Virginia is, once again, not only named Wingandacoa but also consensually known as such. In 1964, two years after the publication of *How to Do Things with Words*, an interesting act of naming occurred. The boxing champion Cassius Clay changed his name to Muhammad Ali. "Cassius Clay is my slave name," he declared, and although he seems to never have changed his name legally,[19] he insisted on being called his new adopted name for the rest of his life. The model of naming is the same, but the social consensus was gradual and even painful and physically performative – as in his 1967 bout with Ernie Terrell, in which Ali batters Terrell insisting: "What's my name? What's my name?"[20]

The postcolonial act of renaming was an important cultural moment since the early 1960s. In 1969, the year of publication of Searle's *Speech Acts*, the Martiniquan theorist and playwright Aimé Césaire finished his play *Une Tempête*, a postcolonial riposte to Shakespeare's play. Here, a seminal moment is enacted, in a dialogue between Caliban and Prospero:

> CALIBAN: […] I forgot: I've got something important to tell you.
> PROSPERO: Important? Well, out with it.
> CALIBAN: It's this: I've decided I don't want to be called Caliban any longer.
> PROSPERO: What kind of rot is that? I don't understand.
> CALIBAN: Put it this way: I'm *telling* you that from now on I won't answer to the name Caliban.
> PROSPERO: Where did you get that idea?
> CALIBAN: Well, because Caliban *isn't* my name. It's as simple as that.
> PROSPERO: Oh, I suppose it's mine!

[19] Josh Peter, "Why Muhammad Ali Never Legally Changed Name from Cassius Clay," *USA Today Sports*, 11 July 2016, https://eu.usatoday.com/story/sports/boxing/2016/07/11/muhammad-ali-name-change-cassius-clay/86956544/ (accessed 10 November 2020).

[20] Russell Gilbert's article in this issue provides highly relevant case studies of adopted names and masks that traverse between the arenas of professional wrestling and politics.

CALIBAN: It's the name given me by your hatred, and everytime it's spoken it's an insult.
PROSPERO: My, aren't we getting sensitive! All right, suggest something else… I've got to call you something. What will it be? Cannibal would suit you, but I'm sure you wouldn't like that, would you? Let's see… what about Hannibal? That fits. And why not… they all seem to like historical names.
CALIBAN: Call me X. That would be best. Like a man without a name. Or, to be more precise, a man whose name has been stolen. You talk about history… well, that's history, and everyone knows it! Every time you summon me it reminds me of a basic fact, that fact that you've stolen everything from me, even my identity! Uhuru! (*He exits.*)[21]

Césaire's Caliban re-enacts the (by now) recognisable model of postcolonial renaming: cultural phenomenon modelled by way of tribute on the postcolonial and religious defiance of Muhammad Ali and his mentor Malcolm X, assassinated in 1965. Approaching these performatives as models rather than as declarative speech acts allows a more precise acknowledgement of the social consensus at play and the cultural and socio-political frame at play: these performatives are not only about names; these models are repurposed to reflect what is unique about performance – the shared sense of social reality: the here-and-now. The cultural reference to abandoning one's given slave name is what gives the performative model of Césaire's play its relevance and brings the fictional incident to (real) life. Approaching critically the moment as a performative model rather than a performative sentence or speech act enables the uncoupling of the utterance from its pragmatics: the crucial critical lapse of traditional speech act theory. Having recognised the action as a particular model – an act of naming, or even more specifically an act of renaming oneself – the act allows the activation of cultural memory: Cassius Clay's and Caliban's renaming are not only performative acts of naming in their own right but also acts declaring allegiance to a political movement; they also acquire some of their power from the cultural momentum they invoke by this allegiance. The cultural implications and momentum of that particular performative model (whether of Cassius Clay/Muhammad Ali or of Caliban/X) are a social process that is *commensurate, if not identical, with the social consensus that establishes the act's validity and stability*, irrespective of whether it is a

[21] Aimé Césaire, *A Tempest* (1.2.218-43), trans. Richard Miller; *The Harcourt Brace Anthology of Drama*, 3rd edn, ed. W.B. Worthen (Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt College Publishers, 2000) 1237-53.

real-life act (Cassius Clay/Muhammad Ali), or a fictional one (Caliban/X). Using one or the other name to refer to them becomes then a social act of allegiance, solidarity or opposition: as we know well not only from the altercation between Ali and Terrell, but also from the many instances of people referring to places by their old names after their politically motivated renamings – as, for instance, in the case of the city of Gottwaldov in communist Czechoslovakia (renamed after the first communist president of the country), which was called by its original name, Zlín; or the post-WWI period, when the Slovak capital of Bratislava was still referred to by its earlier German or Hungarian names (Pressburg and Pozsony, respectively). Using a particular name was a declaration of allegiance by invoking a particular social consensus and its socio-political framework.

Let us consider a more historic and complex instance of personal renaming, discussed by Kwame Anthony Appiah.[22] In 1707, a young boy was taken from Axim (in today's Ghana) to Amsterdam and onwards to Wolfenbüttel. Baptised Anton Wilhelm Rudolph Mohre, a servant of Duke Anton Ulrich von Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel's household, the man went on to achieve significant erudition, a knowledge of half a dozen modern and classical languages, a doctorate in philosophy at Wittenberg, and renown as an authority in philosophy. At some point in his career, he adopted the name Anton Wilhelm Amo Afer, adding to his Christian also his original Nzema name of Amo and the Latin attribute Afer to signal his African origin. After a career in Germany, Amo returned, in 1747, to Axim and settled in Fort St. Sebastian in Ghana, "acquir[ing] the reputation of a soothsayer."[23] Apart from the baptismal record, the naming and renaming acts are irretrievable. However, the performative models can be safely assumed:

- the Nzema boy, whose original name is unknown, was baptised Anton Wilhelm Rudolph Mohre (*Mohr* being the German word for *moor*);
- Anton Wilhelm starts using the name Anton Wilhelm Amo Afer, declaring his origin (*afer*) and probably reasserting his birthname (Amo), although it is unknown when this actually happened and if there was any "speech act" involved;
- Anton Wilhelm Amo Afer drops his given Christian names on returning to the African Gold Coast, assuming (or reverting?) to his Nzema name of

[22] Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Lies that Bind: Rethinking Identity. Creed, Country, Colour, Class, Culture* (London: Profile Books, 2018) 108-18.

[23] Appiah 134.

Amo; again, it is unknown and irrelevant if there was a speech act involved, but the model of renaming clearly took place.

What is lost alongside the historical circumstances and concrete events is also the social momentum and consensus of the naming acts. The names attached to the real-life person of Amo may be many, and while this fluidity and its doubtful speech acts may be frustrating to the nominalist, the reality of the historic persona remains unchanged and undoubtable.

Immaterial Models and Propositionality

> *Jak se to neb ono vskutku stalo* je otázka, jíž nerozřeší beze zbytku ani ten, kdo se toho súčastnil; musil by býti vševědem a všudybylem.[24]
>
> [*How did this or that really happen* is a question that cannot be fully answered even by a direct participant; they would need to be omniscient and omnipresent.]

There are a great variety of performative acts and many of them are done with words but, more often than not, they are not as strictly delimited and clear-cut as speech act theory would wish. The last example of Anton Wilhelm Amo Afer testifies to the fuzzy nature of even such simple performative acts as naming. Other performatives – among many others, such acts as admissions and declarations of unpleasant truths, threats, accusations, apologies, or the loss of political power – are much less apparent, and it is the effort of recognising the model at play that assumes great importance.

Clinton's evasive statement cited above – that truth "depends on what the meaning of the word 'is' is" – is less of a speech act on the ontological state of the verb *to be* but rather a covert and indirect admission of an unpleasant truth. The admission is far from transparent here, and even less legally so, although the performative model, hidden behind the evasive and relativising answer, is obvious. The irony of this model is not dissimilar from the parrot joke that I used as superscript for this essay: how the model is used often radically differs from its intended purpose. The same model is at play in another admission – from Rolf

[24] Otakar Zich, *Estetika dramatického umění: Teoretická dramaturgie* (Aesthetics of Dramatic Art: Theoretical Dramaturgy) (Prague: Melantrich, 1931) 203. The translation, by Pavel Drábek and Tomáš P. Kačer, is forthcoming at Karolinum (Charles University Press) in David Drozd's edition.

Hochhuth's controversial drama *The Representative* (*Der Stellvertreter*), published in 1963 (the year of Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*), which caused a great uproar by laying open the Vatican's complicity in the Holocaust.[25] In the following dialogue, the SS officer Salzer in Rome interrogates a converted Jewish manufacturer Luccani:

SALZER: […] What I want to hear is a clear statement:
do you declare yourself against your race
and for Adolf Hitler who wishes to free
the world of that race?
MANUFACTURER: My behaviour during this war
is proof enough of that.
SALZER: Behaviour from which one earns
as much as you do from this war
is no proof of any kind. Stop quibbling:
do you approve of the extermination of the Jews?
Yes or no?
MANUFACTURER: The Führer knows what he's doing.
SALZER: Yes or no, man? Stop wasting my time.
MANUFACTURER: Yes.
SALZER: That sounded a bit thin.[26]

While the admission is resisted as much as can be, there is no doubt that it is made: the model is clearly identifiable, although the SS officer Salzer finds the speech act of Luccani's admission half-hearted: "a bit thin." The actual performative of admitting to the truth is fuzzy, lacking in gestural clarity, but the social consensus on the part of the audience as well as the fictional personas of the play is obvious.

Given that this model is part of a theatre play, written by Hochhuth to communicate more than an admission of a fictional persona, it works (like Caliban's renaming) on other levels too: models resonate both *within* and *without* the theatre frame – not only within the fictional frame of the play but also, figuratively, in reference to the real world. A model, by my definition heterotelic, is put to various uses; here, the performative model communicates not only the complicity of converted Jews with the Nazi anti-Semitic machinery, but also the cul-de-sac dilemmas and systemic blackmail orchestrated by the regime.

25 Rolf Hochhuth, *The Representative* (*Der Stellvertreter. Ein christliches Trauerspiel*), trans. Robert David MacDonald (London: Methuen, 1963).

26 Hochhuth 159.

It also resonates on a metaphorical level: activating personal and cultural histories by virtue of its proposition. That heterotelic dimension of performative models plays a significant role in the theatre, prompting complex hermeneutic activity in the spectator's mind, often evoking powerful emotional and intellectual connections. That is what is referred to as the Hecuba question, derived from Hamlet's meditation on the power of theatre to evoke emotions:

> HAMLET: […] Is it not monstrous that this Player here,
> But in a Fiction, in a dream of Passion,
> Could force his soul so to his whole conceit,
> That from her working all his visage warm'd;
> Tears in his eyes, distraction in's Aspect,
> A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
> With Forms to his Conceit? And all for nothing!
> For Hecuba?
> What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,
> That he should weep for her?[27]

Philosopher Ted Cohen has dedicated an insightful essay to this moment in *Hamlet*, to reflect on the metaphorical power of theatre – and, by extension, fiction – to activate emotions and memories, personal and public – or, as he calls it, to *cultivate intimacy*.[28] Theatre metaphors – i.e., performative models – do more than that as we have seen in the above examples from Césaire's and Hochhuth's plays. The momentum theatre metaphors solicit in the spectators creates a community of shared knowledge: we all respond to Hecuba in one way or another – visualising her suffering, empathising with and pitying her fate, projecting our experiences onto that mental image. At the same time, we are aware that other spectators are being moved too – and although everyone in a different, individual way, the community of shared knowledge (what Victor Turner refers to as *communitas*) embodies a social consensus.

The performative model – the fictional Hecuba (the metaphor in its fuzzy, indeterminate, and even aporetic abstraction) – is what enables the activation of this shared, social consensus, while retaining individual variation and uniqueness.

27 William Shakespeare, *The Tragedie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke*, in *Mr. William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies* (London: Edward Blount and Isaac Jaggard, 1623), lines 1591-99. The spelling and punctuation have been modernised.

28 Ted Cohen, "Real Feelings, Unreal People," *Thinking of Others: On the Talent for Metaphor* (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008) 29-51.

This hermeneutic potential is the inherent quality of the performative model, as well as of its subspecies, the stage metaphor.[29] Everyone has probably been involved, at some point in their lives, in a heated debate over the meaning of a performative model experienced in the theatre – whether it was over an evocative piece of stage decoration or another aspect of scenography, over the interpretation of a cryptic line or a gesture, or an idiosyncratic behavioural pattern in portraying a character (was the actor imitating someone or not?). It is in the interpretive openness that the performative model's heterotelic quality is explored to the full.

Some performative models are intentionally fuzzy, emphasising their propositional value – as in the following real-life experience of around 2000, recorded by journalist Jon Ronson, of his engagement with the London-based extremist Omar Bakri, who liked to refer "to himself as Osama Bin Laden's man in London."[30] Bakri's equivocal self-proclamations were clearly calculated and opportunistic:

> I telephoned Omar on the evening of his arrest [in mid-October 2001]. […]
>
> "This is so terrible," he said. "The police say they may deport me. Why are people linking me with Bin Laden? I do not know the man. I have never met him. Why do people say I am Bin Laden's man in Great Britain?"
>
> "Because you have been calling yourself Bin Laden's man in Great Britain for years," I said.
>
> "Oh Jon," said Omar. "I need you more than ever now. You know I am harmless, don't you? You always said I was laughable, didn't you? Oh Jon. Why don't people believe you when you tell them that I am just a harmless clown?"
>
> "I have never thought you were a harmless clown," I said.[31]

What is remarkable in this incident is the attempt at disavowing a proposition as a *mere* proposition. In other words, the model of self-proclamation is now to be reinterpreted differently, and the social consensus is to be reverted; the model is to be used to *different* ends.

[29] For a recent study on the stage metaphor informed by cognitive theatre studies see, Šárka Havlíčková Kysová, "Stage Metaphors in Verdi's *Otello*: Miloš Wasserbauer's State Theatre Production (Brno 1967) in the Context of *Otello*'s Staging Tradition," *Theatralia*, 19.2 (October 2016): 29-58.

[30] Jon Ronson, *Them: Adventures with Extremists* (London: Picador, 2001) xv.

[31] Ronson xvi.

Such was Bakri's method on other occasions too – this time the propositional performative model being one of threat:

> "Helen Jacobus said that you said that I would burn in hell."
>
> "Ha ha ha!" said Omar. "I was *joking*! I say that to my *children*! If you don't do your homework you will go to the hellfire! Ha ha! I can't believe that you believed me!"
>
> "So I won't go to hell?"
>
> "You will go to paradise," said Omar. "And if you go around telling people that I said you will burn in hell then I will give you sixty lashes."
>
> "Will you?" I said.
>
> "Jon!" said Omar. "I'm joking again! Ha ha!"
>
> "Ha ha," I said.
>
> "Sixty lashes for you!" said Omar.[32]

Bakri is deploying the performative model of threat and frames it, duplicitously, in two ways *at the same time*: as a genuine threat and as an innocent, avuncular joke. There is little doubt what the model at play is; it is its *propositionality* and the social consensus that are fluid.

There are also examples of performative models of resolution that are obvious in both its determination and its proposition, but not in the social consensus. Let us leave aside the notorious dramatic example from Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* of Vladimir and Estragon resolving to go without ever moving. An interesting historical example is Philip III of Spain's 1602 sumptuary law banning jewel-encrusted clothing in response to the popularity of pearls from the Caribbean:

> But it was too late: pearls had already crossed the threshold from the global exotic to the domestic familiar. Trying to legislate against them was like trying to make breathing illegal. Within ten years, the King was obliged to exempt pearls from his general ban.[33]

The model of a public ban is more than obvious and legally binding – a perfect Austin-Searlian speech act – but the proposition of the law was ignored and the lacking social consensus rendered it void.

[32] Ronson 284.

[33] Kathryn Hughes, "Richer Than All His Tribes: The Excessively Mutable World of a Baroque Jewel," *Times Literary Supplement*, 8 June 2018, 10.

Let me conclude with another complex real-life example of a performative model: the loss of political power, or the fall of a political regime. This case study is remarkable for its indubitable outcome (success), even to the point of being cited as a prime example of the fall of a political regime in real time. And yet, while the model is apparent, its identification – that is, the moment of recognition needed for the necessary social consensus – is a result of a complex web of cultural knowledge.

Historian Yuval Noah Harari retells the situation:

> On 21 December 1989 Nicolae Ceauşescu, the communist dictator of Romania, organised a mass demonstration of support in the centre of Bucharest. […] Flanked by his wife Elena, leading party officials and a bevy of bodyguards, Ceauşescu began delivering one of his trademark dreary speeches. For eight minutes he praised the glories of Romanian socialism, looking very pleased with himself as the crowd clapped mechanically. And then something went wrong. […] Ceauşescu start[ed] another long sentence, saying, "I want to thank the initiators and organisers of this great event in Bucharest, considering it as a – ", and then he falls silent, his eyes open wide, and he freezes in disbelief. He never finished the sentence. You can see [on the surviving footage] in that split second how an entire world collapses. Somebody in the audience booed […] and within a few seconds the masses began whistling, shouting abuse and calling out "Ti-mi-şoa-ra! Ti-mi-şoa-ra!"[34]

I am not using Harari's account here as a critical history but rather as an articulation of the indubitable consensus that what occurred at that moment, in the middle of Ceauşescu's sentence, was the performative act of loss of political power – or, if you wish, the model of fall of regime. While the outcome was absolute and beyond any doubt, and while that breaking point is also obvious, the identification of the model – the recognition that the regime has collapsed – is clear only in hindsight. While potentially (propositionally) possible at that point, the model attained its immaterial form only later, as a result of substantial socio-political activity and in gradual steps.

[34] Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (London: Vintage, 2015) 155-57. For a critical history of the fall of communism in Romania, see, among others, Dennis Deletant, *Ceauşescu and the* Securitate*: Coercion and Dissent in Romania, 1965-1989* (London: Hurst and Company, 1995) 359ff.

Looking at the surviving video footage of the fated mass demonstration in Bucharest on 21 December 1989, the disruption is apparent: Ceauşescu's momentary loss of bodily tonus, of his vocal security and gestural confidence is clearly visible; this ostensive performative behaviour happens, but it is a minor lapse, not in itself a fall of regime. The eventual outcome is far from obvious from this moment: the social and political consensus was only just gathering momentum – and clearly this mid-sentence lapse was not the first or the ultimate sign of loss. In other words, the central performative model at play – the one for which that moment is known, recorded in history, and even cited as a crying example (as in Harari) – was not an identifiable performative *act* at that point. It was merely a propositional model, framed in its momentum by many intervening circumstances – from the fall of several other regimes in Central and Eastern Europe in the preceding weeks, through the demonstrations in Timişoara (invoked by the chanting masses in Bucharest), to the disintegrated Securitate no longer capable of enacting its political power (which was also, in turn, caused by the loss of the social consensus in its validity). There would be other moments that iterated that momentary mid-sentence loss of Ceauşescu's composure, amassing bit by bit the momentum leading to the undoubted general consensus. Some of the iterations of that model preceded the fated moment on 21 December 1989, such as the sending of armed forces to suppress the protests in Timişoara or the many signs of disintegration of the communist camp, while some of them followed it: from Ceauşescu's attempts a moment later at reasserting his authority (which were more or less successful for the rest of that day's mass demonstration), to the repressions in the upcoming hours and days.

The interpretation of that momentary lapse as "history in action" or as "that split second [when] an entire world collapses" is an ex-post repurposing of a performative model. From a historical and political point of view, there is no doubt that this *was* the tipping point, but that tipping point was not in the model itself but rather in the social consensus that has reached a critical mass. That new awareness repurposed the performative model and framed it as the moment when the regime collapsed. It had not been intended as such; it had been unforeseen and unexpected; it was rather innocuous and seemingly inconsequential – and yet. What is crucial is the shared, public recognition of what that minute model eventually meant: the fall of communism in Romania.

Performative models as heterotelic entities have the potency to convey numerous purposes – thanks to their figurative (metaphoric, symbolic, ironic) qualities. How they are deployed, what uses they are put to, and what interpretations they solicit in its participants depends on the cultural frames, the interests they 'vest' and social momentum they garner.