



FABRIC PHILOSOPHY: THE “TEXTURE” OF THEATRICALITY AND PERFORMATIVITY

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Beyond their apparent connotations with the performing arts, the notions of theatricality and performativity have come to function as all-embracing metaphors of social existence and all but pervade our aesthetic, academic, and everyday discourses. Arising in the wake of modernity and postmodernism respectively, neither concept need have close ties to theatrical performance. Indeed, their attendant philosophies have extended their reach not only across different art forms (cf. Fried 1998), but further into the material, technological, or social sphere at large (e.g. McKenzie 2001). However—and this is the first axiom of the present article—both concepts also seem to fluctuate between conflicting values of *novelty* and *normativity*: theatricality, between the essence of an art form and a more evasive cultural ‘value that must be either rejected or embraced’ (Puchner 2002, 31); performativity, between effective *doing* and mere *dissimulation*.

Very briefly, the former field of tension evokes what has come to be known as the ‘antitheatrical prejudice’ (Barish 1981), dating back to the values of catharsis and contamination as mobilised in Plato and Aristotle’s early dispute over theatrical mimesis. More recently, the ‘theatrical and deconstructive meanings of [the] “performative” would ‘span the polarities’ of what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick dubs ‘the *extroversion* of the actor (aimed entirely outward toward the audience) and the *introversion* of the signifier’ (2003, 7)—hence also the paradox that Jon McKenzie (2001, 15) notes between the ‘subversive’ and ‘normative valences’ of performativity, in turn-of-the-century Performance Studies and in the philosophy of Judith Butler.

The second axiom—one that I only state here but will elaborate throughout—is that certain *dramaturgical* tendencies can be ascribed to both concepts that not only validate their distinction, but also hold across the kinds of tensions described (effecting a certain consistency, that is,

between the normative and the subversive, for performativity, or the rejected and the embraced, for theatricality). To divest them of a certain taken-for-grantedness, and to avoid the circularity of only defining them in terms of changing theatre or performance practices, this article aims to tease out aspects of theatricality and performativity relatively detached from notions of “acting” or “role-play,” say, and ultimately to enlist them in a *textural* philosophy of weaving and zooming—specifically inspired by Tim Ingold’s ecological anthropology and by Stephen C. Pepper’s philosophical pragmatism from the 1940s. Where Ingold’s ecology of *lines* admits to ‘no insides or outsides,’ ‘trailing loose ends in every direction’ (2007, 103, 50), Pepper’s ‘contextualistic world’ of *events* admits ‘no top nor bottom’ to the ever-ramifying strands of their texture and quality ([1942] 1984, 251). Rather than individual action or social sanction, both reflect a world of emergence and becoming. In such terms, I argue that the idioms of theatricality and performativity alike have yet to outlive their usefulness and are indeed capable of doing critical work today, if only we shift from models of binary containment (the *ins* and *outs* of “what counts”) to something of a more “textural” approach along the lines I shall work to propose.

Surely, there is more to fabric philosophy. Deleuze and Guattari’s (1988) well-worn language of *rhizome* and *haecceity*, with *lines of flight* or *becoming*, is a particular influence on Ingold; *felt* and *fabric* exemplifying their ideas of smooth and striated space: crochet and knitting, patchwork and embroidery. Today, textile scholarship is also boosted by its long-term relegation to a domain, not of masculine vision, but of tactile femininity (see Hemmings 2012). As Ingold puts it, ‘the technical and the textilic’ stem from the same root but were ‘elevated’ and ‘debased,’ in modernity, as masculine technology and ‘mere craft’ (2011a, 211–2).

Indeed, there is an important debate within second- and third-wave feminism over figures of weaving and embroidery. For some, they suggest female-specific metaphors of thought, creativity, and collaboration, potentially subversive of patriarchal systems of technology and domination; for others, they only go to reinforce essentialist stereotypes of domestic womanhood and female submission. (Paasonen 2005, 173–8; Parker 2010.) The historical performativity of such stereotypes is neatly captured in a recent essay by literary scholar Katie Collins (2016): ‘Women’s naturally nimble fingers were to be occupied,’ the ‘frills and fripperies’ they produced providing ‘ample evidence, should anyone require it, that [they] were frivolous creatures entirely unsuited to public life.’ Recognising the built-in masculinity of the ‘theories-as-buildings metaphor’ of academic writing—that it is public, orderly, and rational—she suggests that *needlecraft* metaphors might define it as a decentred activity that is ‘not individualistic or competitive,’ nor apart from life (like the solitary scholar of old, sitting in his study ‘while the minutiae of clothing and food is organised for him, around him, despite him’). Most importantly, it is about ‘piecing together ... things of varying source and quality ... that wouldn’t necessarily fit together’ in the building metaphor; certainly true of this article, this also suggests one way of doing performance philosophy.

In what follows, Strand 1 of the article delves deeper into the tensions inherent in how theatricality and performativity have often been discussed, and introduces the “textural” metaphors of Ingold and of Pepper’s “contextualism.” Strand 2 introduces Ingold’s *meshwork* as a key figure of plural performative becoming: the interweaving of lines (lives, materials, actions, gestures), as opposed

to the *network* as a key figure of theatrical detachment or abstraction—the connecting of points or objects into which the meshwork is simplified when we optically “zoom out” from its haptic engagement. In Strand 3, the dramaturgical fluctuation between theatrical networks and performative meshworks—Pepper’s *textures* and *qualities*—is exemplified by briefly zooming out to the Anthropos(s)cene, as a globally urgent variant of the medieval *theatrum mundi*. (That even the more concrete of my examples remain relatively abstract reflects the article’s rationale as a primarily theoretical provocation. If it is any excuse, I have just finished a draft manuscript for a book in which I unravel theatrical and performative textures across a wide fabric of case studies, from theatre practice, through Baroque and modernist architecture, to technology and artistic activism.)

Strand 1. Novelty and Normativity: Some Competing Metaphors

So what are the tensions inherent in the language of theatricality and performativity? On the one hand, a certain duality tends to be posited *between* the two terms. Arguably, the former has been more popular among continental, and the latter among Anglo-American theorists (Reinelt 2002, 207). In the wake of performance art and the rise of Performance Studies, the two would even be reduced to a binary opposition. More important to the continued vitality of their conceptual distinction, however, is the derivation of the words themselves. Superficially, it would seem that the shared suffix of *theatricality* and *performativity* only identifies them as general qualities of events or actions, and thus as somehow equivalent—abstracting them away from the specifics of actual theatres and particular performances, but also implicitly essentialising skill and sensibility as do words like *musicality* or *humanity*. More crucially, however, the core distinction that their etymologies suggest between *seeing* and *doing* (from the Greek *theâsthai*, “to behold,” and the Old French *parfornir*, “to do, carry out, finish, accomplish”) is casually extended to those of form and function, theory and practice, fixity and change: rigid semiosis as opposed to effective action, inner meaning versus outer effect, the *what* of representation and the *how* of reiteration. As Stephen Bottoms notes, even such “braided” binaries as Richard Schechner’s—of “entertainment” and “efficacy” (2003, 112–69)—often come with gendered overtones of ‘potent virility versus showy sterility’ (Bottoms 2003, 181; he takes specific issue with Schechner’s heteronormative validation of performative efficacy over theatrical “effeminacy”).

On the other hand, both terms are ridden with tension and paradox in themselves. Caricaturing their more negative and more positive valorisations in four points, I return to the conflicting values of *novelty* and *normativity* briefly posited above:

[1] Begin with the “antitheatrical prejudice” and the theatre’s stated etymology of sight and spectatorship; add a Platonic suspicion over “mere appearances,” and theatricality becomes a pejorative term for something derived from, and perhaps also detrimental to art and society alike. As Thomas Postlewait and Tracy C. Davis neatly put it, it seems defined by its “excess and its emptiness, its surplus as well as its lack” (2003, 4).

[2] By the twentieth century, however, these very qualities would also define theatricality in the affirmative. Newly conscious of its specificity in the modernist moment—in line with concurrent formalisms of *literariness* or *pictoriality*—the *art of theatre* now sought to enlist its epistemological baggage of perception and appearance in an ontology of expressive essence, freely capitalising on many qualities historically charged against it (Postlewait and Davis 2003, 12; Carlson 2002, 249). Thus the aesthetics of excess and emptiness could now range from the ‘rich’ or Baroque or Wagnerian to the ‘poor’ bare essentials of a Brecht or a Grotowski (see Paavolainen 2016a, on directorial theatricality).

[3] Then again, both expression and essence are precisely opposed to *performativity* as Judith Butler intends it, as a ‘reiteration of norms’ the very historicity of which it tacitly ‘conceals or dissimulates’ as the natural workings of pregiven entities (1993, 234, 12). Instead of our ‘doings’ (styles, clothes, gestures) merely exteriorising what we essentially ‘are,’ for Butler they ‘effectively constitute the identity they are said to express or reveal’ (1988, 528).

[4] Finally and somewhat problematically, the kind of cultural agency often cherished in Schechner-style Performance Studies is ultimately more akin to J. L. Austin’s ([1962] 1986) pragmatic vision of performativity as the *doing of things, effectively*, not only with words but in the world—here, coupled with a subversive politics (conditionally allowed by Butler as well) that is equally opposed to social discipline as it is to the near-obsolete art form of theatre.

In short, the conceptual positioning of the two terms is radically contextual and utterly flexible (cf. Jackson 2004, 6, 126), as both in turn may equally work to sustain or disrupt the powers that be. In one context, theatricality is seen as essentialised by modernist ideals of self-containment and medium-specificity, in another, as obstructing aesthetic ‘absorption’ by its very ‘objecthood,’ and therefore as *corruptive* of some alleged essence (be it of art, authenticity, nature, life, or literature: cf. Fried 1998; Carlson 2002, 243, 246–7). In other idioms, the ‘prisonhouse’ of theatricality—as product, introversion, representation—gives in to a conceptual ‘breakout’ of *performance*—as process, extroversion, presence—yet soon the confines of *re*-presentation are taken over by those of *re*-iteration. If ever there was a confining, pregiven identity that the subject wishes to escape, she can only perform that escape *per formam*—“through” a pregiven “form,” as the Latin etymology (cited in Sauter 2000, 38) suggests.

Perhaps, then, the more fortunate etymology is that of “thoroughly furnishing” (*par fornir*), in the sense of *bringing forth* what the rest of this article will specifically strive to identify as different kinds of theatrical and performative “textures.” Performatively, “texture” names an emergent pattern that is, however, only achieved in the iterative process of its weaving (novelty versus normativity again). Theatrically, it can be perceived as the very substance or as the mere surface of something—confirming the validity of what is performed, or revealing it as mere dissimulation. More generally, the language of texture helps us turn from rigid semantic conditions (“theatre”: hence drama, stage, acting, viewing) to the more temporal or *dramaturgical* dynamics of their discursive and material “interweaving” (see Barba 1985; the important connection of texture and dramaturgy is further elaborated in Paavolainen 2015).

In one sense, then, I am only arguing for a change of metaphors—but there is a twist. While both theatricality and performativity have been used to address more abstract phenomena of social existence, both also remain abstract enough in themselves, so as to ultimately depend on more basic metaphors still, according to the context and purpose of their varying definitions (take the implied distinction of *seeing* and *doing*; see also States 1996). Therefore I will study them not as metaphorical source domains for further understanding, as has usually been the case (as in “All the world’s a stage”), but as themselves *target domains*, in effect created by historically specific metaphors of spatiality or conduct, perception or action—by a changing set of extra-theatrical qualities, themselves attributed with shifting values in different contexts. In so saying, I do not intend metaphor as mere figures of speech—“theatrical” in the sense of only embellishing or reflecting some pre-existing reality—but instead as deeply performative, in the sense of creating the very textures of thought we take to be real—establishing what they name while rendering natural their means. Thus the very possibility of change lies in attending to what our metaphors serve to hide or highlight, instead of merely reiterating those we are accustomed to live and act by. (Cf. Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Paavolainen 2012, 6–7, 39; see also Paavolainen 2016b, on the argued theatricality and performativity of current philosophies of embodied cognition.)

And here we return to Pepper and Ingold. In terms of competing metaphors, the last decade or so of Ingold’s philosophical anthropology has explored what he calls the ‘life of lines’ (effectively derived from Deleuze and Guattari 1988) and their ‘fragmentation—under the sway of modernity—into a succession of points or dots’ (Ingold 2007, 75). In his most recent work, Ingold presents the *block* and the *knot* as ‘mutually exclusive master-tropes for describing the constitution of the world, predicated on philosophies, respectively, of being and becoming’ (again, of *building up* or carrying on). The challenge is ‘to consider how a reversion to the knot, after a period during which blocks, chains and containers have remained the paramount figures of thought, could impact on our understanding of ourselves, of the things we make and do, and of the world we live in.’ (Ingold 2015, 15; on “containment” in Grotowski, Kantor, and Meyerhold, see Paavolainen 2012.) Not to argue for any direct correspondence, these four metaphors—block, chain, container, knot—are strikingly akin to the four ‘root metaphors’ of Western epistemology and aesthetics that the American philosopher Stephen C. Pepper (1891–1972) explored in his 1942 book *World Hypotheses*.

A historian of ideas and a philosopher of art and ethics—himself a disciple of John Dewey—Pepper dismissed the attitudes of ‘utter skepticism’ and ‘utter dogmatism’ much as he did philosophical eclecticism, arguing that at the time only four such hypotheses stood out as ‘relatively adequate’ in ‘scope and precision’—each with a distinct root metaphor and theory of truth, drawn from ‘common-sense’ experience. If *formistic* metaphors try to explain what something is like (cf. Ingold’s categorical “containment”), those of *organicism*, how this something develops (Ingold’s “chains” understood as processes), and *mechanistic* ones, how it works (Ingold’s “building blocks” approach), then *contextualistic* metaphors are concerned with how something—anything—happens, occurs, or comes about. (Pepper [1942] 1984.)¹ While rarely acknowledged among the likes of Dewey or James, Pepper’s “contextualistic” elaboration of American pragmatism provides an arguably important precedent to current philosophies of “becoming,” and as such, the most general

dramaturgical framework for this article. As I will only return to it at the end, after a central section on Ingold, I conclude this introductory bit by briefly introducing its central terms and categories.

As articulated in *World Hypotheses* (1942) and *Aesthetic Quality* (1937), “contextualism” names for Pepper a process ontology of constant novelty and change, less to do with pragmatic ends than with the larger contexts in which such qualities continuously emerge (perhaps, his choice of terms was to downplay the overly instrumentalist interpretations easily levelled at pragmatist tenets). The specific root metaphor of this approach is the ‘historic event’—not as a thing of the past but ‘the event in its actuality,’ ‘alive in its present ... when it is going on *now*, the dynamic dramatic active event’ that eventually can only be described by verbs (rather than formal similarities, organic wholes, or mechanical elements: Pepper [1942] 1984, 232). Further key distinctions are between ‘the *quality* of a given event [as] its intuited wholeness or total character’ and *texture* as ‘the details and relations which make [it] up’ ([1942] 1984, 238). Irreducible to hierarchies of content and form or essence and appearance, the two are ultimately intertwined but may also be approached as if they were separate, by way of intuition and analysis respectively. Finally, if ‘whatever directly contributes to the quality of a texture may be regarded as a *strand*, whereas whatever indirectly contributes to it will be regarded as *context*’ ([1942] 1984, 246, my italics), then which is deemed which is ultimately a matter of perspective: up close, there is a texture to every strand, while whole textures may appear as mere strands from afar. In Pepper’s terms, such is the work of *fusion*, evident ‘wherever a quality is had’, yet often obscuring its both temporal and textural *spread* ([1942] 1984, 239–46). Where fusion gives us ‘unity’ (be it of action or character—Ingold’s example of the knot), there the spread will confirm its constitutive heterogeneity (Ingold’s ‘proliferation of loose ends’: Ingold 2013, 132).

What I wish to argue is that such a language of overlapping textures may equally accommodate the various tensions of theatricality and performativity as outlined above. In such terms, in brief, what is performatively naturalised will depend on widely *spread contexts* of reiteration, but often takes a thoroughly *fused quality* in the present; only occasionally may a novel *strand* of action undermine its assumed normality. Conversely, instants of theatricality work to unravel such performative strands to their local *textures* and perhaps to their wider *contexts*, in a quasi-theoretical operation that may render their *relations* more perceptible but only ever at the cost of historical specificity. I will return to some of these propositions in the final section of the article; for now, note how this ‘sheering character’ of tracing out the strands at hand also defines Pepper’s contextualistic epistemology. On the one hand, ‘you never reach the end of it,’ on the other, any event can be analysed in ‘many equally revealing ways ... depending simply on what strands you follow from the event into its context’:

The reason for this is that what is analyzed is categorically an event, and the analysis of an event consists in the exhibition of its texture, and the exhibition of its texture is the discrimination of its strands, and the full discrimination of its strands is the exhibition of other textures ... Contextualism is accordingly sometimes said to have a horizontal cosmology in contrast to other views, which have a vertical cosmology. There is no top nor bottom to the contextualistic world. (Pepper [1942] 1984, 249–52)

Strand 2. Network and Meshwork: Tim Ingold's Ecology of Lines and Becoming

As shorthand terms for specifically theatrical and performative textures, I now wish to recruit Tim Ingold's notions of the 'network' and the 'meshwork'. If the performative argument is for *coextensivity* over 'any originary notion of interiority,' as the sociologist Vikki Bell suggests (2007, 11), then Ingold's critique of what he dubs the modern 'logic of inversion' (2011a, 67) is precisely coextensive with the performative critique of any naturalised sense of essential identity. Rather than converting the 'pathways along which life is lived into boundaries within which it is enclosed' (2011a, 145), *meshwork* names the *becoming* of things in their ongoing entanglement. Thus embracing the 'paradoxically constitutive plurality' in which Bell sees the 'promise of performativity,' the concept would also seem to account for the creativity and self-organisation of *matter* in which she sees a challenge to narrowly psychic or cultural notions of performativity (Bell 2007, 29, 20, 98, 114). In what could amount to a novel articulation of the *materialisation* that also undergirds Butler's 'bodies that matter' (1993), Ingold envisions environments and organisms alike as 'meshworks of interwoven lines,' with 'no insides or outsides, only openings and ways through'. In turn, *ecology* is seen as 'the study of the life of lines ... wriggling free of any classification ... trailing loose ends in every direction.' (Ingold 2007, 103, 50; this is somewhat different from the Gibsonian sense of ecology e.g. in Paavolainen 2012.)

Clearly such a world evokes not only Karen Barad's 'posthumanist performativity' (one of being "entangled," with no "self-contained existence": Barad 2007, ix, 66) but also the insistence, in Actor-Network Theory, 'on the performative character of relations and the objects constituted in those relations' (Law 1999, 7)—only in the meshwork 'things *are* their relations' (Ingold 2011a, 70). As a specifically ecological term for philosopher and literary scholar Timothy Morton, the *mesh* implies 'the interconnectedness of all living and non-living things' (2010, 28). 'Vast yet intimate' (40), infinite in both size and detail (30), it 'extends inside beings as well as among them' (39). Likewise in Ingold's terms, every organism is itself 'a tissue of knots, whose constituent strands, as they become tied up with other strands, in other knots, comprise the meshwork'; thus the meshwork will extend from the 'organic tissue ... of nerve, muscle, [and] blood vessels' to the wider weaves of weather and landscape which engulf them (2011a, 70, 86–7; on weather, see specifically 2015, 51–111²). In Pepper's terms, even if their *qualities* depend on specific strands and contexts case by case, the *textural* dynamics of networks and meshworks can also be crudely drawn—as they are in Figure 1—and unlike Schechner's fan and web of performance, for example (Schechner 2003, xvi–xix), derive their value not from the nodes or knots they encompass, but from how precisely these are woven together in 'the connecting of points' and in 'the entanglement of lines' (Ingold 2007, 81–2).

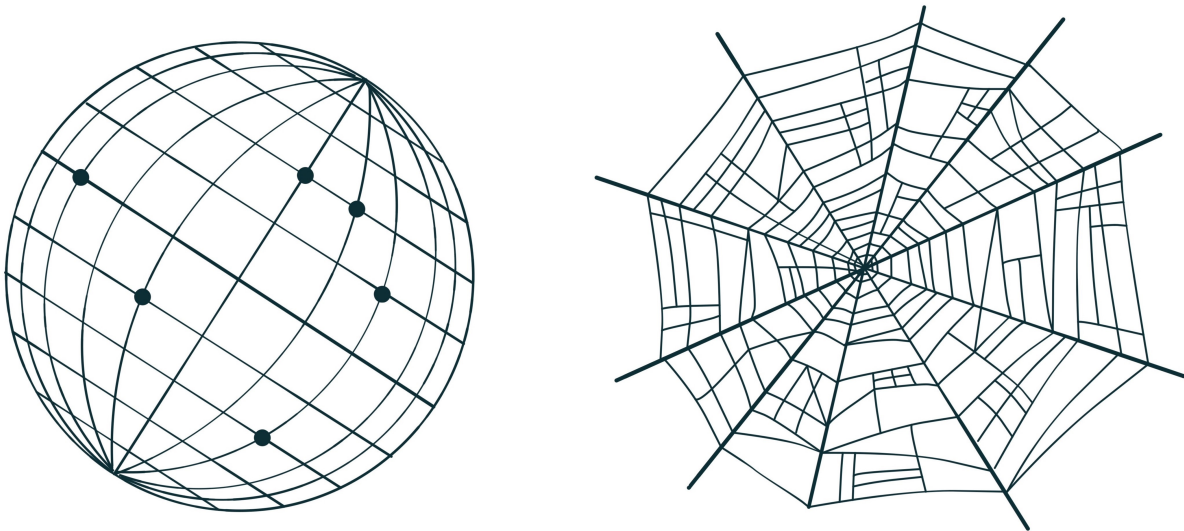


Figure 1. Theatricality and performativity as abstraction and absorption: Ingold's "network" of connected points and "meshwork" of interwoven lines, exemplified by the globe (with geographic coordinates) and the spider's web. Drawing by author.

Indeed, it is as temporal 'lines of life, growth and movement'—or lines of *flight* and *becoming* in the Deleuzo-Guattarian parlance which Ingold also cites—that beings are instantiated in the world' that he conceives of as meshworked through and through (Ingold 2011a, 63, 71). Critically for the thinking of performativity, not only may such imagery divest the concept of the overly human-centered associations sometimes entertained, but also of any strict division between what I have termed creative novelty and normative reiteration. "'Issuing forth" along the lines of their relationships,' the things of this world enfold its larger history within their constitution and thus remain *of* the meshwork, 'woven into its very fabric' even as they 'contribute to its ever-evolving weave' (2011a, 71, 168, 120). 'Knotted together at the centre but trailing innumerable "loose ends" at the periphery,' their meshwork is explicitly likened to the Deleuzeian *rhizome* or *haecceity* (2011a, 85–6). The one concrete example that Ingold himself repeatedly returns to is the spider's web of Figure 1. As opposed to the supposed *connectivity* of networks, 'the lines of the spider's web ... do not connect points or join things up,' but rather they 'lay down the *conditions of possibility* ... *along* which it acts and perceives' (2011a, 85). (In his "social theory for anthropods," Ingold contrasts the ANT of Actor-Network Theory with SPIDER, for "Skilled Practice Involves Developmentally Embodied Responsiveness": 2011a, 94.)

In contrast to these more positive associations, Ingold's notion has yet to incorporate what we might call 'the prey's perspective', to keep with the spider example. In Vikki Bell's terms, this equals the Foucauldian lines of *power and knowledge* in which performed subjects are 'caught' and which they are pressed to 'continue or at least to negotiate'; as the 'effects' of which they are sustained and which they themselves sustain; which they 'literally incorporate' yet must also deny in order to

assert themselves as subjects (Bell 2007, 4, 11–12, 17, 21). As distinct from Ingold's enabling sense of immersion—with bodies 'enlightened, ensounded and enraptured' 'in the currents of a world-in-formation' (2011a, 135, 129)—one is here, in Butler's words, '*in power* even as one opposes it' (1993, 241, my italics). Furthermore, as Morton notes, *mesh* itself has etymological 'antecedents in *mask* and *mass*, suggesting both density and deception,' and may also denote (citing the OED) "'a complex situation or series of events in which a person is entangled; a concatenation of constraining or restricting forces or circumstances; a snare'" (2010, 28).

For Ingold, however, what rather ensnares our thought is the popular imagery of *networks* in which, instead of being actively enacted and entangled, 'all lines [merely] connect: objects into assemblies, destinations into itineraries, letters into words' (2011b, 14). With its 'extension to the realms of modern transport and communications' (2007, 80), 'the network metaphor logically entails that the elements connected are distinguished from the lines of their connection' (2011a, 70), things from their relations. As 'connections *between* one thing and another' (2011a, 91)—rather than experienced '*along* their severally enmeshed ways of life' (2007, 103)—the lines of the network lack both duration and material presence. What they 'connect up, in reverse' (2011a, 215) are essentially reduced to *objects* (etymologically "*against* us," not "*with* us" as *things* would be in Ingold's reading of Heidegger: 2011b, 5), while the network itself remains 'a purely spatial construct' (2013, 132). Again, the one solid example that Ingold repeatedly returns to is the globe of Figure 1. Inverting the meshworked world itself into a contained object, the planetary and the classroom variants alike are for him the epitome of deadly abstraction—'a full-scale model' that he often, and not altogether accidentally, likens to 'a stage set' (2011a, 117):

[We] must cease regarding the world as an inert substratum, over which living things propel themselves about like counters on a board or actors on a stage [If mere objects were laid about like] scenery on a stage ... how could anything live or breathe? ... As in a stage set, ... the appearance is an illusion. Absolutely nothing is going on. Only once the stage is set, and everything made ready, can the action begin. But the open world that creatures inhabit is not prepared for them in advance. It is continually coming into being around them. (Ingold 2011a, 71, 96, 117; for an extended example of theatrical inversion, see 2015, 74–5)

Then again, there is a way of shedding such decidedly antitheatrical valences, insofar as Ingold's networks of connected objects—but *not* his meshworks of interwoven lines—can also be taken to afford focussed acts of theatrical manipulation: acts of *de*-contextualisation that specifically enable the drawing of novel connections between the objects thus abstracted (the dots on the globe), on scales of texture distinctly below the default networks of society and information, transport and communication. In other words, the prime advantage of both the globe and the theatrical stage lies in their *synoptic* aspect rather than the mediated one: hence also the link from the medieval *theatrum mundi* to the modern, spectatorial understanding of the world by way of a world *view* (this Heideggerian link is neatly elaborated in McGillivray 2008). Ingold himself admits as much elsewhere, casting the 'topologies' of meshwork and network not as 'mutually exclusive' but as perspectively contingent:

[When] attention is focused, it sets us in a distanced or 'optical' relation with objects in the world; it is 'zoomed out' [When] attention is dispersed, it sets us in a close or 'haptic' relation with things in the world; it is 'zoomed in'. ... Zooming in, up close, we see the meshwork of things; zooming out, from a distance, we see the network of objects. (Ingold 2011b, 15, 5)

Again the contextualistic metaphor of zooming or sheering is equally applicable to the dynamics of performativity and theatricality as tacit and more apparent qualities of material becoming and cultural perception. Up close, absorbed or implicated in entrenched meshworks of embodiment and discourse, one is prone to perceive none; while it does afford an efficacious transparency to one's engagements, such "zooming in" has both body and performance recede from consciousness, as the meshwork itself is habitually dissimulated by the apparent qualities of action and behaviour it serves to furnish forth. These are the *strands* and *local textures* we grow to live and perform by, while remaining oblivious to the larger contexts of social sanction they may serve to dissimulate. (Try reading that again with the spider's web of Figure 1 in mind.) To recap, it is only in theatrical acts of "zooming out"—or stepping aside—that the entangled lines of such performative meshworks gain the optical quality of *objecthood* prerequisite for acts of attentive manipulation, and also perhaps for a Brechtian sense of estrangement. (As a fairly extreme example of defamiliarisation, compare the dots on the globe, in Figure 1, to the more meshworked experience of actual cities.)

Indeed, I am inclined to suggest theatrical textures always, even if otherwise widely discrepant, have extensive stories of performative constitution effectively *compressed* into objects, words, gestures, masks—whatever provides the nodal conductors sufficient for the network to "tick," yet crucially devoid of material commitment. Where the performative is ostensibly in and of its specific context, the theatrical exhibits but a loose coupling of word and action, equally prone to convergence and contradiction, and also a functional equivalence between acting together and acting alone. From the joint performance of personified crowds to the fine-motor control of solo puppetry, the sense of theatrical networks is made in simple feats of connectivity. Be the "theatre" in question a single body or a "total work of art," it reduces the mesh of emotion and intention to a specifically *gestural* dynamic, such that its conventionally poor and rich variants really only conduct networks of vastly different scale (on gesture and theatricality, see Puchner 2002, 34–48; see also Paavolainen 2016a). In either case, what makes such networks specifically *theatrical* is that in their ultimately human behaviour they are always also potentially identifiable as such; perhaps, their association with "mere appearance" is to do with their failure or refusal to dissimulate the performativity of how they are woven together; perhaps, they are so prone to ridicule because their very crudeness so often causes mere embarrassment (cf. Ridout 2006).

Now Ingold's rendering of such theatrical reduction is both intuitive and ingenious: to effect its "inversion" into network terms, you just 'take a line described by a movement, cut it up into segments, roll each segment tightly into a dot, and finally join the dots' (2007, 111). Given such acts of fragmentation and compression, the resultant network sports 'lines not of flight, but of interaction' (2011a, 63), whilst 'the pattern they eventually form—much as in a child's join-the-dots

puzzle—is already given as a virtual object from the outset’ (2007, 74; on the linear dramaturgy of this, see also Paavolainen 2015). Intriguingly, this image has a direct counterpart in the ‘careful sprinkling of artifacts’ that Bert O. States once identified on the early realistic stage, amounting to ‘a sort of infra-plot through which the action passes and defines itself, as in those coloring-book pictures children make by drawing lines through a series of numbers’: ‘All of these “stations” are visible from the beginning, ... but their contribution becomes evident only as they are folded into the action’ (States 1985, 66–7).

Where States ends up in awe at ‘the self-sufficiency of [his] room to have contained, in advance,’ all that was needed for a ‘unique reckoning in time’ (1985, 68), however, Ingold remains critical of thus “‘joining the dots” ... even before setting out,’ since their very network pre-exists their physical engagement (2011a, 152; cf. Figure 1 again). Furthermore, as he poetically elaborates, ‘whatever movements you might make’ between drawing the dots of the network, these remain ‘entirely incidental to the line’ that it helps imagine: during the intervals between the ‘little pirouettes’ whereby the dots are formed on a paper, ‘the pencil is inactive, out of use,’ and could even be set aside ‘for any length of time’ (2011a, 150). Arguably it is such concealed backstage activity precisely that contributes to the sense of *theatricality*, for good or ill, of networks whose planning and performance alike rest on just such cuts and compressions. While they cannot undo their meshworked entanglements (the infrastructural support on which the most imaginative feats of theatricality depend), they do have the potential of also leading us on, perceptually, astray or to the point, between a series of objects and their aspects—nodes and links, textures and strands—ultimately, through a whole network of relations that are to be reckoned with. It is the dramaturgy of such interrelations that the final strand of my article seeks to unravel.

Strand 3. The Web and the Globe: Dramaturgies of Absorption and Abstraction

Whereas the feet ... propel the body *within* the natural world, the hands are free to deliver the intelligent designs ... of the mind *upon* it: for the former, nature is the medium through which the body moves; to the latter it presents itself as a surface to be transformed. (Ingold 2011a, 35, his italics)

To begin to tie up loose ends, what I have been arguing is that the well-worn idioms “theatricality” and “performativity”—and by way of etymology, how we *see* and *do* things more generally—might be defined somewhat anew if we suspended the theatre-specific language of actors and roles for that of more heterogeneous “textures.” Adapting Tim Ingold’s concepts, I have suggested that theatrical *networks* typically offer themselves as synoptic objects for perception and manipulation, while performative *meshworks* rather unfold as lines of action to engage or weave into. (In this sense, the globe and web of Figure 1, in their relative closure and openness, also lean toward Pepper’s formistic/mechanistic and organistic metaphors, respectively.) While Ingold’s own standing is clear—referring to the above epigraph, he always prefers the meshworked *medium* of performativity over the networked *surface* of theatricality—I have also argued for the value of not preferring one over the other; there is no need to revisit the boundary wars of Theatre and Performance Studies in the 1990s.

In this final section, I propose a simultaneous topology of overlapping textures, one perhaps occluding the other, and a dual-aspect dramaturgy of zooming in and out between them—one of perspective rather than transgression. In such a dramaturgy of (performative) absorption and (theatrical) abstraction, the latter is akin to the merest act of contemplation in the midst of ongoing action—zooming out to check the pattern, before weaving in again—but can be defined as specifically “theatrical” insofar as the perspective it purports to provide is on precisely *performative processes* of change and emergence, only reducing their meshwork to more synoptic networks.

To exemplify, if ever so slightly, let us now zoom out from the relatively minor example of the spider’s web to what could be called the performative meshwork of all those other things on the scene long before and after—the more-than-human performativity of what is too slow or fast or near or far for representation. In a sense, the theory of *evolution* signals a performative turn writ large, as nature itself comes to be viewed not as God-given but as ‘the greatest show on earth’ (Dawkins 2009). For Ingold, evolution names the ever-extending meshwork of human and non-human creatures, ‘establishing what others in turn must undergo’; history, in this scheme, appears as little more than its ‘local version,’ with human beings ‘humanifying’ or actively *producing* their lives in the Marxian sense (2015, 157, 127). In terms of the above epigraph however, this meshwork of evolving creatures is also where their feet—or their wings, or their fins—will weave their lines, *within* the world rather than upon it, with a crucial epistemological consequence: ‘Far from taking up a standpoint or perspective ... walking [or any other way of weaving] continually pulls us away from *any* standpoint’; ‘there is no point of arrival’ in the meshwork (2015, 135).

Here, arguably, is where zooming out to a more theatrical perspective will prove more valuable than Ingold might allow. Even if the worlding world will never “be” a simple ‘surface to be transformed’ (2011a, 35), presenting it *as if* it were provides for tactical manipulation by momentarily freeing our hands—a point of interruption rather than arrival (cf. Weber 2004). As distinct from the slow reiteration of meshworked performativity, theatricality is less about “doing” than about the *action* of *stopping* doing and stepping back, or as Ingold consistently frames it, of “looking back” (e.g. 2015, 120).

Specifically, what cannot quite exist in Ingold’s world are things like global warming, way too slow to be perceived or believed in from within the meshwork—and yet, on zooming out, we are now firmly in the Anthropocene: this is the stage or epoch where climate and geology alike bear the performative effects of human kind humanifying. Of the many acts of activism during the 2015 Paris climate talks, COP 21, one of the most theatrical in my terms took place in Place de la République, beginning from November 29: as a reaction to a police ban on political gatherings in public spaces (again in reaction to the Paris terrorist attacks of November 13), the prominent square was solemnly occupied by some ten thousand empty pairs of shoes, instead.³ Apart from the hundreds of thousands of absented demonstrators, this metonymic set of props could not but evoke the Holocaust: the atmosphere inverted into a stagnant gas chamber; the earth itself as a solitary rock, on whose surface lines of migrant flight weave the texture of one possible future (moving en masse due to unlivable weather conditions); the early modern *theatrum mundi* gone global for the twenty-first century.

In such terms, the difference between the performative meshwork and the theatrical network—of the feet weaving their lines *within* the world and the shoes that remain *upon* its surface—is that between two visions of *ecology*. One is Ingold's: to avoid the 'logic of inversion,' he defines ecology as 'the study of the life of lines' (2007, 103). The other is that of someone like Timothy Morton, who in very similar terms notes that the ecological *mesh* can never be perceived directly: thus ecosystems will have to be modelled 'on different scales in order to see things properly,' and as he continues, 'seeing yourself from another point of view is the beginning of ethics and politics' (2010, 57, 14). While Morton's example is that of a flickering flower on a fast-forward video, one may also simply think, with the feminist geographer Doreen Massey, of the hills rising, or the rocks moving, or the very climate undergoing change (Massey 2005, 141)—on a global scale, seeing all the world as a stage indeed depends on something of a theatrical inversion of its lines of becoming. (Cf. Figure 1 again.)

With these images in place, I now try to weave together what has been suggested in the various strands of this article, revisiting the categories of Pepper's contextualism, on the one hand, and also the field of tensions evoked earlier (the "performativity" of novel and normative action; the "theatricality" of enhanced or misled perception).

[1] If the paradox of performativity consists in its naming the *eventness* of apparent objects and essences while simultaneously dissimulating it, then that of theatricality consists in rendering this eventness perceptible precisely by reducing it to manageable objects—in making explicit, for good or ill, the texture of relations that supports it.

In Pepper's terms, the key concepts here are "quality" and "texture." If *performed* qualities of change and continuity both work to dissimulate their textural becoming, then theatricality serves to disclose this very dependence—for example, of global warming on cumulative human action (relativising its normativity), or indeed of effective action on contextual support (relativising its novelty). As with the spider's web of Figure 1, this explicitly heterogeneous conception of performative action can readily be figured as *weaving*. Just as Butler suggests that performativity only takes the quality of singular acts by concealing its conventional grounding in reiteration (such that 'the reduction of performativity to performance would be a mistake': 1993, 234), so also the surface of woven cloth effectively dissimulates its intricate interweaving. Graphically, the occlusion of doing by the thing done (cf. Diamond 1996, 1) equals that of weaving by what is woven. Conversely, when this aspect of weaving is foregrounded, so are the 'eventness' that Willmar Sauter argues to 'facilitate theatricality' (2000, 63); the heterogeneity that Samuel Weber argues to inform its condemnation (by a humanistic tradition of self-enclosure: 2004, 6–7); the sense of situation and duration that Michael Fried argues is to "degenerate art" in theatrical "literalism" (admitting, though, that "we are all literalists" most of the time: 1998, 164, 168).

[2] To enlist a proliferation of e-words circulating in the literature, the performative textures I discuss are often entertained as being effective, efficient, efficacious, and enduring (cf. McKenzie 2001), whilst the theatrical would only seem to provide more ephemeral strands of expression, whether deemed empty, excessive, or etiolated (cf. Postlewait and Davis 2003, 4; on etiolation see

Austin [1962] 1986, 22). This observation can be approached through two different sets of Pepper's contextualistic concepts.

One is the perspectival relativity of *strand*, *texture*, and *context*. Assuming that there is a texture to every strand and that whole textures may appear as mere strands from afar, performative effects of efficacy and essence translate as qualities of coherent strandness, *taken on* to dissimulate their more textural emergence in the interweaving of divergent materials (not all of them discursive or necessarily human). Likewise, if what we may gloss as a "rich" or Baroque variety of theatricality may devour whole contexts and textures as mere strands within its own (think of Wagnerian *leitmotifs*), so the poor or Grotowskian or Brechtian rather seeks to disclose how the very strandness or continuity of habitually performed entities—think of bodies or societies as naturalised categories—is inherently textured even to appear as such. Accordingly, the "excess" or "emptiness" of theatrical textures translates as their deviant *density* or *sparsity* with regard to what has been performatively naturalised in the context. The Paris shoes appear not only in excess of the marching ban, but also prefigure a world emptied of humanity, should the human performance of global warming go uninhibited. Rather than figuring in some special or heightened relationship to some generic everyday "reality," it can be argued that theatrical textures are ever relative to *performative norms*, and may also be regarded with suspicion (as in the antitheatrical prejudice) insofar as they work to render these explicit (cf. Brechtian estrangement).

[3] Finally, the theatrical and performative emphases on instants and iterations can be approached through Pepper's notions of textural fusion and contextual spread. If performative textures are typically enacted over time and depend on further histories of habit and experience ("spread" by reiteration), then more theatrical ones are perhaps opportunistically assembled on the fly, drawing on whatever strands of context are available, cutting some and compressing others ("fusion" by articulation).

On the one hand, this equals the conversion or inversion of performative meshworks, to adopt Ingold's term for things like the spider's web, into more theatrical networks. As distinct from how the word is often used in technology or communications, it is this very *synopticity* that defines the latter as "theatrical," whether we think of the typical theatre stage, or of the merest tabletop globes of geography classrooms. On the other hand, to apply a distinction first introduced in the caption to Figure 1, the two perspectives could be rendered as *absorption*—of the spider in weaving its webs, or of humanity humanifying the world out of existence—and *abstraction*: zooming out to see who's caught or about to be, or to perceive the very world as a humanly comprehensible rock, carrying the effects of human performance or not. (Hence the Janus-face of theatrical manipulation: one's proof is another's hoax.) If we regard the performative range of change and iteration as one of *time* or *becoming*, then the theatrical provides a *space* in which its strands may momentarily be objectified for inspection and also manipulation—imposing a synoptic view on what in fact are interwoven histories, collapsing into space what otherwise only unfolds over time. To enlist the two terms in a general philosophy of *action* and *perception*—true to their etymologies of doing and seeing—if the performative names a dramaturgy of becoming (of identity, species, climate), then the theatrical provides an optic for its analysis.

Notes

¹ Pepper admits to having given his world hypotheses “slightly unfamiliar names so as to avoid issues over the names themselves,” which again are intended to characterise styles of thought rather than individual authors. Thus *formism* “is often called ‘realism’ or ‘Platonic idealism’”; it grounds itself in the intuition of similarity, and endorses the correspondence theory of truth. *Mechanism* has the lever or pump as its earliest root metaphor, and causal adjustment as its theory of truth; it “is often called ‘naturalism’ or ‘materialism’ and, by some, ‘realism’.” *Organicism* “is commonly called ‘absolute (or, objective) idealism’,” and rests its claims to cognitive validity on the coherence of organic processes. Finally, *contextualism* virtually equals “pragmatism,” and takes to unravel our experience of unique events to their strands and textures by an operational theory of successful working. Further distinctions are made between *analytical* and *synthetic* theories, on the one hand (formism and mechanism as opposed to organicism and contextualism), and between *dispersive* and *integrative* theories, on the other hand (formism and contextualism versus mechanism and organicism). (Pepper [1942] 1984, 141–3)

² In his 2015 *Life of Lines*, Ingold adds to his earlier “linealogy” (*Lines*, 2007) a complementary “meteorological” concern: ‘where the linealogist asks what is common to walking, weaving, observing, singing, storytelling, drawing and writing, the meteorologist looks for the common denominator of breath, time, mood, sound, memory, colour and the sky’—hence the reciprocity of the *meshwork* and the *atmosphere* (2015, 53).

³ See the photos e.g. at <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/climate-protest-paris-1.3342384>.

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Biography

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