

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Acting and pretending

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Abstract

What is the nature of the kind of behaviour English speakers call “acting”? A popular strategy is to say that acting is a kind of pretence, and onstage actors pretend to do and say what the character does and says. This paper aims to reject this “pretence theory of acting”. To do so, first, I introduce several counterexamples showing that actors do not engage in pretending but still enact their characters; second, I argue that the reasons in favour of the pretence theory of acting are not persuasive; finally, I argue that the pretence theory of acting can lead to a misunderstanding about acting.

KEYWORDS

acting, drama, pretence, theatre

1 | INTRODUCTION

What does an actor really do when portraying a character on stage? What type of action is an actor performing when saying and doing what her character says and does? Suppose that an actor plays the role of Romeo. It seems that the actor does not really commit Romeo's actions. He does not actually drink poison, and when Romeo says, “Well, Juliet, I will lie with thee tonight” (*Romeo and Juliet*, Act 5, Scene 1), the actor does not assert that he himself will commit suicide. English speakers generally call such actions, performed when enacting a character, “acting”.¹ Therefore, our question is, what is the nature of acting?

Currently, there are four main approaches to answering this question: the pretence theory of acting proposed by John Searle and his adherents, James Hamilton's display theory, Gregory Currie's *sui generis* theatrical illocution account, and David Saltz's game model (Currie, 1990; Hamilton, 2009, 2013; Saltz, 1991; Searle, 1975). At present, the pretence theory has the most support. According to this position, acting is a kind of pretence: actors pretend to do and say what their characters would do and say. Another position is Hamilton's display theory, according to which acting is a kind of demonstration, and actors display and hide their own features to enable the audience to figure out the content of the narrative. Currie's *sui generis* account places more focus on the actor's speech acts: it says that the actors on stage perform a

¹I here deal with the problem relevant to the case English speakers call “acting”. However, I do not think that acting appears only in the English-speaking world. Almost all countries and cultures have this kind of activity. French speakers call it “interprétation du rôle”; Germany speakers call it “Schauspiel”; Spanish speakers, “actuación”; Chinese speakers, “表演”.



sui generis type of illocutionary actions that differ from familiar illocutions, such as assertions or requests.² Another alternative is David Saltz's game model, according to which onstage acting is like a game: actors' onstage actions are derived from the goals associated with the roles they occupy, as in a game of chess.³

In this paper, I argue that pretence is not an appropriate concept to describe and interpret acting.⁴ That is to say, what an actor does and says when portraying a character should not be seen as pretence. In Section 2, I present the pretence theory of acting as exactly as possible; in Section 3, I clarify the necessary features of pretence; in Section 4, I introduce some examples that are seen as acting but not as pretence, showing that the pretence theory cannot successfully interpret some cases of acting; Section 5 explains that arguments in favour of the pretence theory are not persuasive; Section 6 argues that the pretence theory can lead to a wrong view of what acting is. Due to space limitations, I do not develop arguments to rebut the other three theories of acting (display, game, and *sui generis* accounts); this paper focuses only on the pretence theory.⁵

2 | THE PRETENCE THEORY OF ACTING

What we call the "pretence theory of acting" refers to a family of theories that regard acting as a kind of pretence (Alward, 2009; Austin, 1979; Currie, 1990; Lewis, 1978; Searle, 1975; Walton, 1990).⁶ The earliest version of pretence theory is supposed to stem from Searle's account of illocutionary actions in fictional discourse (Searle, 1975). According to Searle, an author of fiction does not really perform familiar illocutionary acts but rather pretends to perform them. For example, when writing an indicative sentence, the author does not really assert it, but pretends to assert it. Searle's theory of fictional discourse can also be seen as an account of theatrical discourse: the onstage actor pretends to perform familiar illocutionary acts. For instance, when Romeo says to Juliet, "I love you", the actor portraying Romeo does not really assert that he loves Juliet but rather pretends to assert it.

The pretence theory of acting has recently gained much support. A standard account states that acting is built on children's pretend-play (Goldstein & Bloom, 2011; Walton, 1990). Imagine two children playing a game. One child says, "Let's imagine that tree is a monster." Another asks: "What does it look like?" One responds: "It has a big mouth and many arms. So terrible! It would eat us!" Another child follows his friend's suggestion, screams for help and quickly runs away. In this case, the children seem to engage in pretend-play: they pretend to assert that there is a terrible monster and pretend to escape from the monster. In the pretence theory, acting is viewed as a development of the children's game: the onstage actions of actors resemble what children do in pretend-play.

Moreover, the proponents of the pretence account introduce certain additional stipulations to transform a form of children's game to the case of acting. For instance, it is said that onstage acting is done "for others" – actors enact characters for audiences to watch them. Thus, the theory stipulates that actors not only pretend to do and say what the characters do and say, but

²Currie (1990) develops an account of fictional utterance rather than onstage acting. However, as fictional storytelling can be seen as a kind of theatrical performance in which the storyteller plays the role of the narrator of the story, his view can also be seen as an account of acting. For relevant discussion, see Alward (2009, p. 321).

³It should be noted that the four theories are not always in conflict each other. For instance, when defending his game model, Saltz partially endorses the display account. For example, he argues that illocutionary acts on stage function like quoting another's assertions (Saltz, 1991, p. 34). This resembles Hamilton's point that what actors do on stage is a kind of demonstration of quotation.

⁴Hamilton also rebuts the pretence theory of acting. His objections rely more on a comparison between his display theory and the pretence theory; he thereby argues that the display theory is the best explanation (see Hamilton, 2013, pp. 51–54). In this paper, I rebut the pretence theory independently of other theories, and I do not intend to explain which theory is the best.

⁵I do not rebut Currie's *sui generis* account, Saltz's game model and Hamilton's display theory; this does not mean that I think that these three theories are plausible.

⁶Many proponents of pretence theory, such as Alward (2009), consider only the actor's illocutions rather than all onstage actions.

also do so in front of audiences in order for them to watch and react in particular ways (see Hamilton, 2013, p. 50; please note that Hamilton opposes the pretence theory). It is also said that onstage acting involves certain theatrical conventions that count an action of one type as another type. For example, when Romeo drinks poison and begins to die, the actor may walk with weak, unsteady steps and then fall on the stage. The actor's behaviour does not reveal that he himself is going to die, but rather counts as dying according to the conventions of the play (Alward, 2009, p. 328). Thus, the pretence theory stipulates that in the case of acting, actors engage in pretending according to the conventions of the play.

Given that acting is seen as pretence, the literature on pretence in the philosophy of mind and cognitive science has broadened the study of the problem of acting over the past three decades. The relevant work purports to explain the connections between pretence, acting and imagination (Currie & Ravenscroft, 2002; Doggett & Egan, 2007; Funkhouser & Spaulding, 2009; Kampa, 2018; Langland-Hassan, 2012, 2014; Liao & Doggett, 2014; Nichols & Stich, 2000). For instance, Nichols and Stich argue that both acting and child's pretend-play are motivated by beliefs and desires; however, Doggett and Egan argue that both are motivated by *i*-beliefs and *i*-desires, the imaginative analogues of beliefs and desires. Langland-Hassan (2014) classifies the three different cases – acting, deception, and child's make-believe game – as pretence and provides a definition of pretence not involving imagination to explain all three cases. Kampa (2018) argues that the case of acting in imaginative transportation is not a kind of pretence, but he still believes that acting is motivated by beliefs and desires – two mental states that motivate pretend actions.

Although I do not support the pretence theory, this theory is certainly very attractive. It can well characterise what an actor enacting a character does. Suppose that an actor portrays Romeo. When the actor says, "Well, Juliet, I will lie with thee tonight", the actor does not really believe that Juliet has died and does not really want to kill himself; he also does not intend to tell others that he himself will commit suicide. The actor does not sincerely perform the familiar illocutionary acts in this case. For this reason, it seems intuitive and comprehensible to characterise the actor as engaging in pretence: the actor pretends to assert that Juliet died and to declare that he wants to die. As he only engages in pretend-play, the actor does not need to believe that Juliet died and to desire to kill himself. The pretence theory is equally adaptable to explain general onstage actions other than illocutionary acts. For example, when Romeo drinks poison, the actor does not really drink it but rather pretends to drink it. The pretence theory seems to capture the fact that actors are able to distinguish themselves from their characters.

In fact, the pretence theory of acting can be divided into two versions. As demonstrated, for the pretence theory, acting is built on child's pretend-play. It is often said that the child pretends to do something when playing a game. This implies that actors also pretend to do something when portraying their characters. Here, pretence means "pretending-to-do", and acting is viewed as "pretending-to-do". When Searle claims that one pretends to assert, it seems that one engages in pretending-to-do. Peter Alward, another proponent of the pretence theory, also supports this version. For example, he said: "The sense of pretence at issue here is that of pretending to do as opposed to pretending to be" (Alward, 2009, p. 327).

Another version of the pretence theory explains that the sense of pretence is "pretending-to-be". That is to say, when actors engage in pretence, their behaviours can be seen as "pretending to be someone". David Osipovich seems to support this version of the pretence theory. For example, he claims: "What does it mean for an actor to 'enact a character' or 'play a character'? In the most basic sense, it means that the actor pretends to be someone other than an actor pretending for an audience" (Osipovich, 2006, p. 468).

The two different versions of the pretence theory are not in conflict with each other. Pretending-to-do can be seen as a means of pretending-to-be. To pretend to be Romeo, the actor needs to say and do what Romeo says and does; that requires that he pretends to assert,

command, ask and perform other actions. In summary, the pretence theory holds that we should characterise actors as engaging in pretend-play, in which they pretend to be the character or pretend to do what the character would do.

However, the proponents of the pretence theory still have much to do to equate acting with pretending. They need to explain what features acting has that enable us to consider it as pretence: When an actor portrays a character, what features do her actions have? Why do these features prompt us to characterise the actor as engaging in pretence? This requires a conceptual understanding of pretence. Only when we determine the essential features of pretence and find that acting also manifests these features can we use pretence to interpret acting. However, unfortunately, proponents of the pretence theory of acting have still not developed the relevant account: they have not tried to explain the essential features of pretence.

Searle suggests that the behaviour an agent performs is a constituent part of the action that the agent pretends to do: “It is a general feature of the concept of pretending that one can pretend to perform a higher order or complex action by actually performing lower order or less complex actions which are constitutive parts of the higher order or complex action” (Searle, 1975, p. 327). However, this account fails to define pretence. Suppose that a child pretends to be a cat. She may say, “Meow, meow! I’m a pussycat”. This utterance is not a constitutive part of a cat’s behaviours: cats neither talk nor say “meow”. Alward modifies Searle’s point and claims that what the agent does is neither a constitutive part of a higher order action nor its resemblance but rather fulfils some conventions counting one type of action as another type. Alward claims: “The core general idea is that pretence requires the existence of conventions according to which actually performing an action of one type counts as pretending to engage in an act of another type” (Alward, 2009, p. 328). Acting is a pretence because the action the actor performs can be seen as another type of action according to the relevant conventions. Nonetheless, counting one type of action as another is not always a kind of pretence. Suppose that I raise my hand during the bidding at a public auction: I thereby make a bid for what I want to buy. Here, my behaviour of raising my hand counts as “making a bid” according to the relevant conventions, yet I do not pretend to make a bid.⁷ These points do not directly demonstrate that acting is not pretence, but only imply that the pretence theory is incomplete. In the next section, I try to list some necessary conditions of pretence.

3 | PRETENDING: A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

In this section, before rebutting the pretence theory of acting, I try to clarify the concept of pretence.

What it is to pretend? The behaviourist view might be the simplest account (Jarrold et al., 1994; Lillard & Flavell, 1992; Nichols & Stich, 2000; Perner, 1991; see also Stich & Tarzia, 2015, a slightly different version of behaviourism). According to this view, what is central to pretence is behavioural: pretence is a kind of behaving-as-if; pretend-play is driven by a process of behaving-as-if. When one pretends *p*, one behaves as if *p* is true, or behaves in a way

⁷Saltz seems to consider that mere conventions of play are enough to explain acting, and we do not need the concept of pretence: “To say an actor ‘pretends’ to murder does not help us understand what the actor really is doing. I would prefer to say that the actor is (really) committing an action that counts as murder within the conventions of the play” (Saltz, 1991, p. 41). However, he does not explain in detail what the conventions of the play involve. It seems the conventions have a key feature: although the actions performed by actors represent the real actions, actors do not have the same intention as the real actions. For example, “raising my hand” represents making a bid at a public auction. In the context of play, the actor raising their hand also represents “making a bid”. However, unlike the agent in real life, the actor does not really want to make a bid; they only follow the requirement of the script. I do not think that this difference is enough to define acting. Consider the relationship between a boss and a secretary. A secretary conveys the boss’s ideas; it is like a representational relationship. Sometimes the secretary does not really agree with the boss’s ideas. Here, the secretary also does not have the same intention as the boss. Such an example is similar to a play, but we do not say that the secretary is portraying the boss or acting out. Perhaps the conventions of play involve other elements, but currently I am uncertain what they are.

resembling the behaviour of someone who believes *p*. For instance, when a boy pretends to be Superman, he behaves as if he were Superman or does something that resembles the behaviour of Superman (Superman can fly, but the boy cannot, so his behaviours resemble the behaviour of Superman only in some ways without being identical).

However, it seems that sometimes people can behave-as-if but not engage in pretence. Consider the following case: Two athletes are fighting with each other in a fencing competition. Their behaviour resembles that of two pirates. However, they are not pretending to be pirates.⁸ In order to avoid this problem, several theorists endorse an intentionalist account of pretence (Langland-Hassan, 2014, 2022; Rakoczy et al., 2004; Searle, 1979)⁹: when people pretend, they do not merely behave as if *p* is true: they “act” as if *p* is true; the latter requires that the agent has an intention to act. The two fencing athletes are thought to behave unintentionally. When people pretend to be pirates, they intentionally act like pirates. To pretend that *p* is not merely to behave in some ways that would be appropriate if *p* were true, but also have an intention to act as if *p* were true.

This type of intention seems a necessary condition of being a case of pretence because it can effectively distinguish pretence and mere resemblance. Consider an experiment from the psychologist Angeline Lillard in the 1990s (Lillard, 1993, 1998). Lillard asks us to imagine a story: “Moe is a troll. He does not know what a bird is, and has never seen a bird. Moe is running around with his feet on the ground and arms outstretched.” Then, Lillard asks whether Moe is pretending to be a bird. The psychologist found that four-year-old children affirmed that Moe is pretending to be a bird; however, most eight-year-olds and adults denied Moe’s behaviour as pretence, despite what Moe does resembling a bird. Lillard considers what determines the development of young children’s understanding of pretence, but we are interested in the question of what makes us deny his behaviour as pretence. Suppose I limp around the house because my knee is sore after a soccer game; it seems obvious I am not pretending to be a peg-legged pirate, although my behaviour looks like that (Langland-Hassan’s example, see his 2022, p. 1004). The two examples illustrate that one type of behaviour often resembles another (Moe looks like a bird; I look like a pirate); however, the former is not always regarded as a pretence of the latter. Introducing “an intention to act” successfully differentiates mere resemblance and pretence. Moe has *no* intention to act as if he were a bird; therefore, he is *not* pretending to be a bird. I do *not* intend to act like a pirate; therefore, I am *not* pretending to be a pirate. As Langland-Hassan states, “To pretend, it is not enough to merely act like some other thing; one needs to intentionally act like that thing” (Ibid.).

Another theory is the primitive theory of pretence, according to which pretence is a primitive notion; what distinguishes pretence from other actions is a special kind of mental ability – an ability to perform pretence and recognise pretence – which is the possession of the concept “pretend”. Alan Leslie (1987, 1994) endorses this kind of view. He claims that pretence, like belief, is primitive “in the sense that they cannot be analyzed into more basic components such that the original notion is eliminated” (Leslie, 1994, p. 218). In other words, if a person did not understand the concept of pretence, he would not engage in pretence.

⁸For a critique of behaviourism, see Friedman and Leslie (2007), who argue it is both too broad in many cases and too narrow in others. To avoid this problem, several theorists have endorsed an intentionalist account of pretence.

⁹In the basis of the intentionalist account, Langland-Hassan (2014) develops a conceptual definition of pretence. He argues that pretend behaviour is driven by an intention to make *x* *y*-like, because pretence is performed not only for oneself but also for something other than oneself. For example, when a child pretends that a pencil is a rocket, he might make “Wooooshh” noises. However, the child does not act as if the pencil were a rocket; if it were a rocket, the child would hold it up in the air rather than making “Wooooshh” noises. Thus, Langland-Hassan proposes that the child has an intention to make the pencil rocket-like (Langland-Hassan, 2014, p. 409). In fact, the intention to act-as-if also can interpret this case. We can say that the pretend behaviour is driven by an intention to act in some ways that resemble *p*. When the child makes “Wooooshh” noises, what he does resembles the running of a rocket in some ways such as a sound-effect.

The primitive theory of pretence has also faced criticism.¹⁰ Despite that, the theory does not completely refute the intentionalist account. It is easy to change the content of the pretender's intention in accordance with the primitive position of pretence. The primitive theory of pretence can be revised as a theory stating that the pretender has an intention to pretend; this intention itself involves the concept of pretence. For example, when a child pretends to be a pirate, she understands the concept of pretence; and she is conscious that she is pretending, and has an intention to pretend to be a pirate rather than an intention to act like a pirate. What distinguishes the child's pretence from other types of behaviour-as-if is a kind of intention involving the concept of pretence.

Therefore, pretence requires a certain kind of intention; when an agent pretends to do p , they must have certain intentions relevant to p . This kind of intention can be described as an intention to act as if p were true or an intention to act in some ways that are appropriate to p ¹¹; Moreover, if the concept of pretence is primitive and cannot be analysed as more basic components, then this kind of intention can be described as "an intention to pretend". To pretend, it is not enough to behave like someone or something else; the pretender must have certain intentions to do so. I remain open to the content of this kind of intention: it is either an intention to act-as-if or an intention to pretend. I adopt a disjunctive claim. Maybe a full conceptual definition of pretence would require more complex conditions. However, in this paper, my aim is only to distinguish acting from pretence. If the cases I introduce in Section 4 do not satisfy the intention condition, then we can judge they are not pretence; here, a sufficient definition of pretence is not important.¹²

4 | COUNTEREXAMPLES TO THE PRETENCE THEORY OF ACTING

As demonstrated in Section 2, the pretence theory can be divided into two versions. One says that actors pretend to do something when enacting characters; the other states that actors pretend to be someone. Given that pretending-to-do can be seen as a means of realising "pretending-to-be-someone", I firstly focus on the former. In Section 4.1, I propose four kinds of counterexamples to the view of "pretending-to-do" and in Section 4.2, I rebut the theory of "pretending-to-be".

4.1 | "Pretending-to-do" and its counterexamples

4.1.1 | Basic actions

Sometimes what actors do on stage involves only some very simple and basic actions. For example, when the character raises her arm, the actor also raises her arm; when the character sits down, the actor also sits down; when the character walks, the actor also moves on foot.

¹⁰For example, Stich and Tarzia argue that Leslie's explanation is underdeveloped; it does not account for how the concept of pretence enables us to engage in pretending, nor how we can recognise others are engaging in pretence (Stich & Tarzia, 2015).

¹¹In addition, many theorists, such as Langland-Hassan (2014), Picciuto and Carruthers (2016) and Gomez (2008), agree that beliefs are indispensable for pretence: when one pretends p , one does not really believe p is true. For example, when a child pretends to be a pirate, he does not believe he is pirate; otherwise, he does not engage in pretence, but suffers from a delusion. Thus, when one pretends p , one either does not believe that p is true or believes that p is not true. However, Sauchelli (2021) suggests several counterexamples to the belief condition. I remain open to the question of whether belief is indispensable in this article, because the debates of the belief condition do not matter in this consideration. My aim is not to list all the necessary conditions of pretence.

¹²Some recent 4E (embodied, embedded, enactive or extended) cognition approaches to pretence and imagination seem to avoid appealing to intentions to explain pretend actions (see Gallagher, 2017; Hutto, 2015; Rucińska, 2016). For objections, see Langland-Hassan (2022), who argues that 4E approaches cannot really distinguish pretend actions.

These kinds of basic actions are very common on stage. Only in the case of actions that are very inappropriate or cannot be performed on stage, such as murder or suicide, does the actor need to perform actions that are radically different from the character's (Saltz, 1991, p. 33). In many cases, the action the actor performs and the character's action can be specified in the same description. When the character raises an arm and sits down, it can be said that the actor also really raises her arm and sits down. These basic actions may constitute pretending-to-be-some-one, but they are not pretending-to-do. When the character raises her arm and sits down, the actor does not pretend to raise her own arm and sit down, but really raises her own arm and sits down. The basic actions do not satisfy the necessary condition of pretence. Take the example of the actor raising her arm. It seems that when raising her arm, the actor has no intention to act as if she raised her arm. She also has no intention to pretend to do so: she wants to really raise her arm and believes that she is raising her arm. Therefore, she does not engage in pretending-to-do, but a real action.

Moreover, the actor can also perform slightly more complex actions that are the same as the character's actions. For example, in Ridley Scott's film *Alien: Covenant*, David teaches Walter how to play the flute. With David's help, Walter successfully plays a simple tune. Here, Michael Fassbender, the actor playing Walter, is actually playing the flute rather than pretending to do so. Although the actor realises that he is not Walter, he does not pretend to play the flute; instead, he really plays a simple tune. When playing the tune, the actor has neither the intention to pretend to play the flute nor the intention to act as if he is playing the flute; he believes that he is playing the tune.^{13,14}

4.1.2 | Resembling a character

Sometimes an actor can fully enter into the situation of the character and cause themselves to have the same motivational state as the character or to resemble the character in some aspect. The actor may then act on the basis of the same or similar mental states. Consider the following examples:

Example 1. Actors are portraying two characters who love each other. Moreover, the two actors are in fact a couple and really love each other. When an actor says to the other actor, "I love you", his illocution is derived from his real sentiments and emotions. He has a feeling of affection, and he expresses his love. In other words, when saying "I love you", the actor does not only enact the character, but also really wants to declare his love and really believes he loves the other actor.

Example 2. In a play, the character is thirsty, and he drinks water. The actor playing the character makes himself feel thirsty by not drinking all day. When the actor drinks water on stage, he not only enacts the character, but his thirst is also eased. Here the actor does not pretend to drink water but really drinks water.

¹³However, one might respond that arm-raising and flute-playing remain pretence insofar as they are parts of a pretence (or the people doing them participate in "a pretence episode" in Langland-Hassan's terms, see Langland-Hassan, 2014, p. 407). Thus, these basic actions might be understood as pretending-to-be: the actor really raises her arms but pretends to be the character, or the actor is pretending to be Walter or David playing the flute. I consider this problem and argue that pretending-to-be also faces serious counterexamples (see Section 4.2).

¹⁴It might be that people have many different intentions, and not only one of them can motivate actions. Nonetheless, my argument is not that I pick one intention and then consider whether agents have it in some given circumstances. My argument is rather that if agents have such intentions, they would fail to perform those actions in the given circumstances; therefore, agents do not have the given intentions if they actually perform those actions. For instance, in the case of "Basic actions", if an agent has an intention to pretend to raise their arm, they would fail to really raise their arm. Yet, the agent actually raises their arm in such cases. Therefore, they do not have an intention to pretend.

Example 3. A popular acting training strategy is for actors to become the type of character and then act accordingly. In this case, the actor performs real and sincere actions, not pretence. For instance, an actor almost never drinks alcohol but needs to portray a drunken man on stage. To enter the drunken man's inner world, the actor begins to drink heavily and, through indulging himself, becomes chronically addicted to alcohol. Thus, the actor really suffers from alcohol problems. When, on stage, his character demands a drink because of his alcohol addiction, the actor can sincerely want a drink due to his own desires, not only because of the requirements of the script.

In these cases, the actors perform real actions, not pretend actions. These examples reveal a general type of case in which actors can get into the character's situation or become the type of the character and then act accordingly.

Proponents of the pretence theory may suggest that it is possible for an agent to both believe p and pretend p . That implies that one may still engage in pretend actions although one is in the same circumstance as the character. Leslie's "tea party" experiment confirms this point. A child pretends that an empty cup is full of coffee; then, when the cup is overturned, the child can continue to pretend that the cup is empty even though he believes that the cup is actually empty (Leslie, 1994). That is to say, one can believe and pretend the same content. This case implies that an actor can both pretend that he is thirsty and believe that he is thirsty or both pretend that he is drinking and believe that he is doing so.

I admit that one can pretend and believe the same content. However, the above three examples cannot be seen as Leslie's "tea-party" cases; they have two obvious differences. In Leslie's experiment, the child has an intention to pretend, or an intention to act as if he were at a tea party. However, in Example 2, the actor does not intend to pretend. He really feels thirsty and really wants to drink water; he does not act as if he were thirsty and then drink water. More importantly, the agents' reasons for their actions in the two kinds of cases are different. The child pretends that the cup is empty because his current pretence is derived from his prior pretence. He pretends that the cup is full and then overturns it; thereby, he is able to continue to pretend that the cup is empty. However, in the case of onstage acting, the actors' actions are derived from their real feelings not their pretences or imaginings. Actor *A* wants to drink water because he really feels thirsty; Actor *B* declares his love because he really loves the other actor; Actor *C* demands alcoholic drinks because he suffers from an alcohol addiction. This difference prevents us from identifying this type of case with Leslie's experiment.

4.1.3 | Preparing a performance

The cases of acting can happen during the process of preparing a performance, not only during a performance. Consider the following cases:

An actor is preparing the role of Romeo. To perfect his onstage performance, he often repeats Romeo's lines aloud: "Is it even so? then I defy you, stars! Thou know'st my lodging: get me ink and paper. And hire post-horses; I will hence to-night" (Act V, Scene I). By repeating this many times, he finds the best tone of voice and becomes familiar with Romeo's inner soul.

Another actor is also preparing the role of Romeo. When alone at home, he tries to imitate Romeo's facial expressions and postures by watching himself in the mirror. Then he tries to act all the scenes in which Romeo appears. By repeating this many

times, he successfully remembers how to better portray Romeo and how to communicate with other actors.

The two cases happen when actors are preparing their roles. Here, the actors do not intend to present a theatrical performance to an audience. When someone approaches, they may suddenly stop their acting because they do not want to show its imperfect aspects. In other words, the actors intend to iron out wrinkles, memorise how to act on stage and become more familiar with the character. During such processes, the actors' aim is to make preparations in order to better play the role; what they do is a preparation for theatrical performance, not the performance itself.

However, what the actors are doing in such cases should be considered acting. They are enacting the characters: they imitate the facial and behavioural expressions of the characters and speak aloud what the characters speak. Suppose there is no performance at the theatre today, but I steal into the theatre and see the actors preparing their roles for the performance next week. Like the abovementioned cases, I watch the actors repeat the characters' lines aloud. In this case, it is of course claimed the actors are acting the scenes. Or suppose we see two people fighting each other on the subway, and then we try to break it up. However, the two suddenly say they are not really fighting but are preparing the performances. In this case, we would claim they are actors engaging in acting but not performing plain actions. Hence, it seems the concept of acting designates both performance and preparation: acting can happen during the process of preparing a performance.^{15,16}

Critics may suggest the events happening during preparation for a performance should not be considered acting, and I am confusing "acting" with "acting preparation or rehearsal." As with a distinction between dance and dance preparation, critics may draw a distinction between acting and acting preparation and state the latter should not be regarded as "acting": only what happens in performance is acting. Thus, repeating the lines of the character or imitating the character's facial and behavioural expressions while looking in the mirror should not be considered acting but "acting preparation".

In my opinion, this viewpoint implies a categorical mistake: acting and dance do not belong to the same category. This view might sound counterintuitive, but a more detailed analysis can make sense of my point. Moving the body and stepping are the key components of dance. Hence, we can claim that moving the body and stepping constitute dance. Similarly, acting constitutes the core of a theatrical performance. Acting the scenes and characters is the key component of theatrical performance. Thus, compare the pairs "stepping/moving body – dance" and "acting – theatre". It seems acting should be considered the same category as moving bodies and stepping. The latter is a component of dance, whereas the former is a component of theatre. Dance and theatre belong to the same category: they are art forms. Nevertheless, moving and stepping are not art forms; they are deliberate actions that constitute those art forms. In the same way, acting, as a deliberate action, is not a kind of art form but rather constitutes theatre qua art form. It is highly bizarre to say "stepping and moving rehearsals." Therefore, I do not

¹⁵Another word, "rehearsal", can also be used to describe the process of preparing a role. However, "rehearsal" is a rather ambiguous concept. Loosely speaking, rehearsal is an activity in the performing arts that occurs as preparation for a performance: it is a synonym for "preparing the performance". But sometimes, rehearsal refers to ensemble activities undertaken by a group of people. For example, when all actors together act out scenes as if they were on stage, this is called "rehearsal". When an actor alone cuts the character's action into several pieces and imitates each part, this is not a "rehearsal" but "practising" or "training". In this paper, my purpose is not to theoretically distinguish these two activities: I call both group rehearsal and practising "preparation for performance".

¹⁶However, I also admit that not all that happens during a process of preparing a performance can be seen as acting. For example, in a play, the character loses his lover. The actor can try to relive her own similar experience. These cases are not a kind of acting because they are relevant to the actor herself; the actor is not portraying the character. Nevertheless, if the actor tries to perform the character's actions on the basis of her own emotional experience, then the actor is enacting the character.

think there are events called “acting rehearsals or acting preparations” (but such events can be called “theatre rehearsals and preparations”); they are only cases of acting that happen when actors prepare a theatrical performance.^{17,18}

Yet, the actor does *not* engage in pretend actions during the process of preparing a performance. When an agent pretends, she has an intention to pretend or an intention to act-as-if. However, in the process of preparing his performance, the actor’s intention is more likely to be interpreted as finding imperfections and ironing out wrinkles, becoming familiar with the performance, remembering lines and scenes, arousing emotions, overcoming shyness, or something else that aims to improve his portrayal of the character.

This becomes very obvious when we consider the “trial and error” method, which implies that the actor is explicitly aware that what he is doing is not appropriate for the character’s behaviour. For example, a person is preparing to sing a song with a bass voice, but she has difficulty in finding the most appropriate voice. Her teacher may let her sing in a high voice (a wrong way), which allows her to personally realise the problem. By comparing the two voices, the actor can improve her singing of this song. Equally, when preparing a theatre performance, to help an actor personally recognise a problem, the teacher may suggest the actor intentionally makes a mistake. When the character always speaks in a bass voice, the teacher may require the actor to speak in a high voice: via the “trial and error” method, the actor understands why he has to speak in a bass voice and why a high voice is not appropriate for the character. It seems that the behaviours motivated by “trial and error” are not driven by an intention to act-as-if or an intention to pretend to do what the character does because the character does not behave in those wrong ways. This kind of behaviour is rather driven by an intention to improve in playing the roles. For this reason, the case of acting that occurs in the process of preparing a performance is not pretence.

Langland-Hassan (2014) provides a conceptual definition of pretence that involves a key condition to distinguish pretence from other cases. This condition can help us to distinguish acting from pretending. Langland-Hassan argues that pretending does not simply involve an intention to act-as-if or an intention to pretend (“make x y -like”, in his terms), but rather an intention to currently act as-if or to currently pretend (in his terms, “make x currently act or function in y -like ways”). The latter is a key condition to distinguish pretence from other cases. Compare “making a plane model” and “playing with a plane model”. The player is not pretending while making the plane model. However, when he has completed the model and makes it behave like a plane, he is pretending. Langland-Hassan claims that an intention to act currently as-if can help us to distinguish the two cases. “Making a plane model” is not pretending, because the player does not intend to, at that moment, make the model behave as if it were a plane; his only intention is to build the model. However, “playing with a plane model” is pretending because the player intends to, at that moment, make the model behave like a plane (Langland-Hassan, 2014, p. 415).

¹⁷Does the term “acting” pick out a “natural kind”? I am not sure, but it does not prevent us from analysing it. The concept of acting can be analysed in two ways: conceptual analysis (CA) and rational reconstruction (RR). The former aims to identify what the term “acting” designates in ordinary language. The latter aims to dispel the misuses of the term “acting” and to provide a stipulative definition, a recommendation for usage. Thus, RR may include many items not classified as “acting” in ordinary language or exclude others ordinarily classified as such. When I argue that acting is not only a case of performance but also can happen during a process of preparing, I offer both a CA and an RR explanation. When I explain why there is no event called acting rehearsal, I offer an RR, but when I explain why preparation is a kind of acting, I appeal to a CA. When attempting to define a term, we often use a mixed account, such as Gregory Currie’s for the term “fiction” (Currie, 1990).

¹⁸An anonymous reviewer suggests that actors, in preparing for their roles, are not performing; therefore, they should not be regarded as acting. It seems here that the reviewer confuses performance/performing with acting. I posit that performing is not identical to acting; one can do the latter without the former. Performance is viewed as a type of act guided by an expectation regarding how the performers’ actions will be appreciated by their intended audiences (Davies, 2011). However, when testing various facial expressions, gestures or tones of voice, actors sometimes do not expect that what they are doing will be watched and appreciated (maybe they do not want to display their imperfect preparation). Thus, such behaviours should not be regarded as performance. However, acting is not always guided by such expectations; it is rather a kind of representation (see Guo, 2022). When testing expressions, gestures or tones of voice, actors are still representing their characters. Therefore, they are regarded as acting.

The process of preparing a performance is like “making the plane model”. Both are long-term processes. When making the model, the player does not act with an intention to currently pretend that it is a plane; equally, when preparing a performance, the actor does not act with an intention to currently pretend to do what the character does. She might have an intention to make herself behave like the character in the future performance, but she does not intend to, at the current moment, behave like the character. Hence, the process of preparing a performance is not a kind of pretence.

4.1.4 | Other cases in which actors do not pretend

Sometimes an actor simply follows the director’s or the other actors’ suggestions without consciously thinking about what she is doing. For instance, if the actor does not know how to enact the character, the director may tell him to do something concrete to imitate the character’s behaviour. The director might say: “Now the character should raise his arms and cheer. Raise your arms and make a happy face!” The actor follows the director’s suggestions and performs these behaviours. It seems that here the actor does not intend to act as if he were the character. He only follows the other’s suggestions. His intention should be interpreted as following the other’s suggestions rather than pretending to do something.¹⁹

In addition, often a good acting teacher may tell a beginner to break the character’s actions into manageable pieces. For example, an actor needs to act the scene where Romeo kills himself. He does not know how to do so. The teacher might tell him to cut Romeo’s behaviour into several pieces and do each piece sequentially: “First, shout with your hands on your belly. Then, fall backward. Try to pull your eyes, nose, and mouth close together”. In this way, the actor does not need to act like a person committing suicide, but only to perform these pieces of behaviour. Here, the actor does not pretend when performing every piece: he does not consider how to act as if he were going to die but only how to perform those pieces of behaviours.²⁰

4.2 | Pretending to be someone

In the previous section, I argued that pretending-to-do cannot account for acting, because what some actors do when enacting their characters is not pretending-to-do. It should be noted that there is another version of pretence theory according to which what actors do when enacting characters is a kind of pretending-to-be. The cases of *Basic actions* and of *Resembling the characters* I introduced in Section 4.1 might be interpreted as kinds of pretending-to-be. For example, when the character raises her arm, the actor also raises her arm; here the actor does not pretend to raise her arm, but pretends to be a character raising her arm. Equally, when the actor drinks water because of his thirst on stage, he does not pretend to drink but pretends to be a fictional character drinking water.

This section aims to rebut this account of pretending-to-be. To begin, consider the relationship between pretending-to-be and pretending-to-do. It seems that sometimes actors can generate fictional truths, such as that a character does such and such, by actually doing something

¹⁹I do not state that such a case is not pretence only because it includes instructions. Having an intention to act-as-if, accompanied by an intention to follow the instructions, still should be seen as pretence. For example, a child pretends to be a lion and says “meow”; an adult says that this is not a lion and then gives the child some instructions. Here, the child is still engaged in pretending. The case I consider involves unintelligent actors who have no intention whatsoever to act out; they do not even strictly consider what they are acting out or how they should act and instead mechanically follow instructions.

²⁰This technique of decomposing the character’s actions is more common. Here, what actors actually perform are the “basic actions” considered in Section 4.1. When actors break the character’s actions into manageable pieces, they break down complex actions into several basic actions. They only need to perform those basic actions, and all basic actions constitute the whole action of the character. This kind of technique is often used in rehearsals and preparations.

while pretending to be the character. For example, the actor can make it fictionally true that Romeo kisses Juliet by actually kissing another actor playing Juliet. However, there are certain fictional truths that cannot be generated by performing the same action. For instance, the actor cannot make it fictionally true that Romeo commits suicide by actually killing himself; he must do something else to generate the fictional truth that Romeo commits suicide. This requires that the actor engage in not only pretending-to-be, but also pretending-to-do – to act as if he killed himself. Otherwise, the actor cannot generate the relevant fictional truths. In many cases, the actor needs to not only pretend to be the character, but also must pretend to do what the character does. Hence, pretending-to-be cannot totally replace pretending-to-do: mere pretending-to-be cannot account for all cases of acting.

Pretending-to-be also faces the following type of counterexample, as suggested by James Hamilton:

Suppose that an actor has a choice of speaking in German or in English. Although in the play the character speaks German, the actor speaks English rather than German; because most audiences of this play do not understand German and English is the language they uniquely understand (Hamilton, 2013, p. 52).

Hamilton argues that pretence theory cannot account for plays being performed in translation. The same example can also be used to rebut the account of pretending-to-be. To pretend to be the character, the actor should consider what language the character speaks. If the character speaks German, then the actor should also speak German while pretending to be the character. Being successful at pretending to be the character requires that the actor adopts the language of the character. However, the practice of acting shows that the actor does not always speak the language the character speaks. He may change the language the character speaks according to the audience's language. Pretending-to-be gives a false account of a play being performed in translation.

Pretending to be someone, or something, seems to require that the pretender tries to make herself resemble the thing or person in some salient respects. However, the abovementioned example implies a very common case: When enacting the character, the actor does not always act in a way that resembles the character. As well as a play being performed in translation, it is very easy to find similar cases. For instance, two actors are auditioning to play Peter the Great. One actor is very tall; another actor is less tall. Since Peter the Great was, in fact, very tall, the taller actor is more appropriate to the role. However, the actor is selected and their performance is evaluated not only by considering who more resembles the character, but also by asking who can better attract an audience. If the taller actor cannot do so more successfully, the director will select the shorter actor. Whether the actor's appearance resembles the character is not the most important element considered when evaluating actors. However, pretending to be the character would require that the actor more resembles the character's features in some salient respects. Thus, the pretence theory is not consistent with the actual practice of acting. Pretending-to-be cannot give an appropriate account of onstage acting.

In addition, reconsider the process of preparing a performance. When an actor is preparing a performance, he repeats the lines and scenes. I have argued that in such processes, the actor does not intend to pretend to do what the character does. Moreover, in this kind of process, it seems that the actor also does not intend to pretend to be the character. When preparing the role, his aim is to improve at playing the role, not to act like the character. The "trial and error" method can better demonstrate this point. When using a "trial and error" method, the actor does not act in a way that is appropriate to the character; he intends to act in a way that is different from the character's behaviour to pinpoint a problem. Here, the actor does not pretend to be the character because the character does not act in those wrong ways. Hence, pretending-to-be also cannot account for the cases of acting in preparation for a performance.

It could be suggested that the pretending-to-be account has an advantage over other theories: It can better account for how actors represent characters. When actors do and say something on stage, it is often said that it is the characters doing and saying it. For example, when Marlon Brando says, “A friend should always underestimate your virtues and an enemy overestimate your faults”, in the movie *The Godfather*, the audience is inclined to think it is Don Vito Corleone saying the sentence. There is a representational relationship between the actor and the character. Pretending to be someone also implies a representational relationship: When a person pretends to be a knight, that person is representing a knight. Thus, someone might suggest that the pretending-to-be account can make sense of the representational relationship between actors and characters.

I admit that acting is a kind of representation; but not all types of representation are pretence. Pretence is not a synonym for representation. Consider a secretary–boss relationship. The secretary needs to faithfully convey the boss’s decisions. Maybe the secretary does not personally think that the boss is right, but while playing the role of secretary, she has an obligation to faithfully convey what the boss has said. It can be said that the secretary is representing the boss, yet the secretary does not intend to pretend to be the boss or to act as if she were the boss. Her aim is to convey the contents of the boss’s utterances, not to make herself act in a boss-like way. Given that actors do not have an explicit intention to pretend while enacting their characters, the case of acting is more like a secretary–boss relationship than a case of pretending-to-be. Hence, pretending-to-be is not the only possible interpretation of acting representation.

5 | ARE THERE PERSUASIVE REASONS SUPPORTING THE PRETENCE THEORY?

In this section, I discuss two reasons that are thought to support the pretence theory and argue that they are not persuasive.

5.1 | The illocutionary-intention condition and sincerity-obligation condition

A common reason for supporting the pretence theory is that the actions of actors while enacting characters are not genuine illocutionary acts; therefore, what actors do should be seen as a kind of pretence. What criteria allow us to say that onstage illocutions are not genuine illocutionary acts? It seems that a genuine illocution satisfies two criteria – an illocutionary-intention condition and a sincerity-obligation condition – and onstage illocutions fail to satisfy these conditions (Alward, 2009).

According to the illocutionary-intention condition, to perform a genuine illocutionary act, the speaker’s utterance should be produced by an illocutionary intention appropriate to the act. This illocutionary intention is often specified as an intention to produce some effect upon the listener by means of the listener’s recognition of this intention (Grice, 1957; Searle, 1969, 1983). For example, when a person genuinely says, “It is raining”, the person intends that her listeners come to believe that it is raining by means of their recognition of her intention that they believe it, and the person’s utterance is produced by this intention. In addition, when a person demands a glass of water, the person intends that her listener brings water to her by recognising her intention that the listener give it to her, and her demand is produced by this intention.

According to the sincerity-obligation condition, a speaker who makes an illocutionary act of a certain kind is under an obligation to be in a certain mental state corresponding to the effect she intends to produce in listeners. For example, when a person says, “It is raining”, she should believe that it is raining; when a person demands water, she should have a desire to drink it.

Obviously, onstage illocutions do not satisfy these two conditions. When an actor says on stage, “It is raining”, his utterance is not produced by his intention to tell others that it is raining, and the actor does not really believe that it is raining. When an actor demands poison on stage, his utterance is not produced by his desire for others to give him poison but by what the script requires, and he does not really want to drink poison. Since onstage illocutions fail to satisfy the two conditions, some theorists suggest that they should be seen as pretence. Actors do not really make illocutionary acts but pretend to do so: they pretend to assert, to command, to question and so on (Alward, 2009; Searle, 1975).

The case *Resembling the characters* introduced in Section 4.1 may satisfy the sincerity-obligation condition. When an actor says to another actor, “I love you”, he can believe that he loves her, since they are in fact a couple. However, this case fails to satisfy the illocutionary-intention condition. The actor may really love another actor and want to declare his love, but he neither intends that the audience believe that he loves her nor that the audience believe that by recognising his intention to declare his love. The actor knows that audiences do not confuse fiction and reality; they do not believe fictional events truly happen but only make-believe or imagine them. For this reason, the actor does not intend his audiences to believe his utterance when performing an assertion-like illocution on stage. The case “preparing a performance” also fails to satisfy the two conditions. During a process of preparing roles, the actor may repeat the sentence, “The King is dead”. However, his utterance is not produced by his intention to utter the truth, and the actor also does not believe it. Almost all kinds of onstage illocutions do not satisfy one or both of the two conditions of genuine illocutionary acts. When an actor has golden hair and says, “My hair is golden” on stage, we do not claim that the actor has made an assertion. She is not under obligation to commit to the truth of this proposition, and she also does not want us to believe her hair is golden. For these reasons, onstage illocutions are viewed as pretence.

Nevertheless, I do not think that this implies that acting is pretence. First, the two conditions are not applicable to some cases of acting. In fact, the two conditions apply only to illocutionary acts, a kind of communication between speakers and listeners. When one communicates something to others via language, if one’s utterance is genuine, then it should satisfy both the illocutionary-intention and sincerity-obligation conditions. However, it must not be forgotten that acting also can happen during preparation for performance, which is *not* a communication between an actor and audience. Suppose that an actor is preparing her performance and is repeating some lines and scenes. When someone approaches the actor, she may suddenly stop her acting. Currently, she does not want to communicate; she only wants to become familiar with the scenes and correct imperfections. Here, the illocutionary-intention and sincerity-obligation conditions are not applicable, because the actor is not engaging in communication. The two conditions apply only in the performance of acting, not in all cases of acting. The former is a form of communication between actors and audiences, but the latter involves many non-communicative contexts. Hence, we could say that the performance of acting is a pretence because it does not satisfy the illocutionary-intention and sincerity-obligation conditions of genuine illocutionary acts. Yet, acting is not always a pretence. When preparing roles, what the actor does is not pretence, since the two conditions are applicable only to communicative contexts and the preparation process is not a form of communication.

The above argument seems to admit that some cases of acting are a kind of pretence. The second, independent, argument I develop implies a stronger position: it is implausible to consider acting as pretence only because acting fails to satisfy the two conditions. In other words, the fact that an illocution does not satisfy the illocutionary-intention and sincerity-obligation conditions cannot determine whether it is pretence. I admit that onstage illocution is non-sincere, but that does not mean that it must be pretence. In fact, many utterances do not satisfy the two conditions, but are not pretence. Suppose that a girl is singing Lady Gaga’s song *Till It Happens To You* that is about sexual assault at university. When Lady Gaga sings, “Tell me,

what the hell do you know? What do you know? [...] Till it happens to you, you don't know how it feels", it is like a girl who has suffered from sexual assault and accuses others of indifference and incomprehension. However, suppose that a girl singing this song has never suffered sexual assault. When singing the sentence, "What the hell do you know?", although she shows empathy with victims, she is not obliged to believe that others are indifferent and to accuse them accordingly. Her singing is not produced by her intention to accuse others of indifference. She simply wants to sing a song. Reconsider the boss and the secretary. When the boss tells something to the secretary and asks her to convey his ideas to other staff members, the secretary is not obliged to believe what she says is true. She might disagree with the boss's ideas but still convey them to others. What she says is also not produced by her own illocutionary intention. She is motivated rather by the role she occupies: since she is a secretary, she must convey the boss's ideas. This case also does not satisfy the two conditions of genuine illocutionary acts. Imagine a non-English-speaker reading aloud some English sentences, such as "shut the window", "I want to drink water" or "it is raining today". Like what the actor says on stage, the speaker also does not have illocutionary intentions and corresponding mental states when uttering these sentences.

Pretending requires that the agent has an intention to pretend or to act-as-if. However, in the above cases, the speaker does *not* have such intentions. The non-English-speaker intends to exercise his English, not to pretend to make assertions or demands. The secretary intends to faithfully convey the boss's ideas, not to act as if she were the boss. The girl singing the song does not want to act as if she suffered from sexual assault or as if she were Lady Gaga, she only wants to sing a song she likes, to amuse herself. Since there are so many cases that do not satisfy the two conditions and are not viewed as pretence, we can say that even if acting does not satisfy the two conditions, it is also not a pretence. The pretence theory needs to suggest more features that cases of acting have that are similar to pretending; merely not satisfying the two conditions cannot cause us to consider acting as pretence.

Finally, proponents may suggest that onstage illocutions are driven by scripts, so they are pretence (Alward, 2009, p. 322). However, other cases, such as singing a song, also have script-like elements. For example, when singing Lady Gaga's song, what the singer wants to sing is not produced by her own desires but by the lyrics: they are like a script.

5.2 | Fictive intention and acting

The proponents of the pretence theory may suggest another reason in favour of their position. Reconsider the relationship between a boss and a secretary. Their relationship is somewhat like acting because the secretary's motivation for action is produced by the role she plays: the secretary acts on behalf of the boss because she wants to play the role of secretary. Similarly, when enacting characters, actors' motivations are produced by the roles they play; they act like their characters because they are actors and need to enact the characters. However, the two cases have an obvious difference. The secretary believes the boss is a real person; but the actor does not believe that the character is a real person. On the contrary, the actor believes that the character is fictional, and the actions of the character are performed in a fictional world.

Someone might thereby claim that actors do not have genuine illocutionary intentions but rather fictive intentions. For example, when saying, "The King is dead", the actor does not intend to assert, "The King is dead", but asserts that he is dead in the fiction. Similarly, when demanding poison, the actor does not really want to take poison, but wishes to do so in the fictional world. Onstage actions are performed with fictive intentions. The actor does not really

intend to do what the character does, but rather intends to do those things in the fiction.²¹ Since the actor has an intention to “make fictional”, it follows that the actor engages in pretending when enacting a character.²²

There are three separate reasons in favour of my point of view that fictive intentions cannot lead to pretence. First, as a matter of fact, fiction is not a synonym for pretence. What is fictional is not always pretended. For example, it is fictional that Sherlock Holmes has two eyes, one nose and one mouth, but normally readers of novels containing this character do not pretend that proposition. Equally, what is a pretence also is not always fictional. Suppose that a thief pretends to wash windows to assess what valuables are inside a house. Here, the thief may pretend that he is cleaning windows, but he does not intend to assert that he is washing windows in a fiction.

Second, not all cases of acting involve this kind of fictive intention. Sometimes actors do not have such an intention when performing onstage actions. For example, when the character drinks water, the actor can make himself thirsty and thereby really wants to drink water. It seems that here the actor does not intend to drink water in the fiction. He drinks water because of thirst, not because he wants to make his behaviour fictional. For many actors following the style of method acting, when they become the type of their character, they often have a genuine intention to do what the character does but no intention to make fictional.

Moreover, in many cases, this kind of fictive intention can undermine the actor’s performance. When an actor intends to make something fictional or intends to do something in the fiction, the concept of fiction is embedded in the content of her intention and therefore the actor constantly notices the fictionality of the play. This prevents her from being immersed in her performance and destroys the blending of actor and character. Suppose that an actor is acting out the scenes. His fictive intentions always make him notice the fictionality of his performance: “This is not true, everything is fictional.” This is a failure in portraying the character and builds a distance between the character and the actor. Thus, fictive intentions should not be encouraged for many actors.

Third, this kind of fictive intention may be inconsistent with the actor’s own attitude towards the play; it can produce some mental states that the actor should not have. So this kind of intention should not be encouraged in performance. Suppose that an actor always plays the role of Romeo. According to this account, to act the scene in which Romeo dies, the actor should have an intention to kill himself in the fiction. However, at the same time, the actor also can have other attitudes towards the play. For instance, he feels that Romeo should not die in the play because from a third-person point of view he knows that Juliet is still alive at this point (she only took a potion to induce a coma) and therefore Romeo’s dying for love is needless. In addition, as he has portrayed the tragic character many times, he may really hope that the play will have a happy ending for the pitiful couple. Thus, the actor can want the play to be such that he, as Romeo, should not die. This creates two problems. First, on one hand, according to this account, the actor is supposed to have a desire that Romeo dies in the fiction; on the other hand, he also wants the play to be such that Romeo not die because of his own preference. The two states are conflicting. When a person has conflicting intentions, he becomes ambivalent.

²¹This kind of fictive intention cannot be understood from the views of Currie (1990), Stock (2017) or Lamarque and Olsen (1996). They introduce the concept of fictive intention to distinguish fiction from nonfiction: the author of fiction intends their audience to make-believe the content of the fictional utterance; such a kind of intention is regarded as fictive intention. However, the “fictive intention” I introduce has no relation to the distinction between fiction and nonfiction. It is more like a “desire to make true in the fiction”, which Schellenberg (2013) introduces when considering the case of imaginative immersion. Schellenberg claims that actors are able to immerse themselves in the roles they are playing, and in this case, they are motivated by a desire to make fictional, not a simple desire concerning real things.

²²Even in improvisational performances, actors are conscious that the character’s actions are fictional. Thus, they do not intend to perform real actions, but rather to do that in the fiction. That implies that even if the actions actors perform are not determined by scripts, they are not determined by their genuine illocutionary intentions. What determine the actions of the actors is a kind of fictive intention – a kind of intention to make fictional.

This kind of ambivalent attitude will undermine the actor's performance. Second, to avoid this kind of ambivalent attitude, actors need to make efforts to overcome their own attitudes when playing roles. An actor should try to suspend his own dispositions and preferences and not to attend to his own feelings. Here, acting becomes a process of overcoming one's own disposition, which requires a great deal of effort. However, these ambivalent attitudes and efforts are not indispensable for actors. An actor does not need to always experience an ambivalence and then to overcome it by adjusting her own states when enacting a character. This kind of intention should not be adopted by actors, as it creates additional problems and is not indispensable for acting.

6 | PRETENCE LEADS TO A MISUNDERSTANDING OF ACTING

This section's aim is to argue that the pretence theory leads to a misunderstanding of acting. First, the pretence theory leads to a confusion about deception, pretend-play and acting. Second, it makes us notice something irrelevant for acting. Third, acting is a process, but this theory identifies acting with an episode. I successively clarify these three points in the following.

Pretending is often thought to involve three kinds of cases: deception, pretend-play and acting (e.g., Langland-Hassan, 2014). Consider a thief who pretends to wash windows to assess what valuables are inside a house: this case is a deceptive pretence. Reconsider a child who pretends to be a knight and swings a toy sword: this is a child's pretend-play. Finally, consider an actor who portrays a character: according to the pretence theory, the actor engages in pretending while playing the role. In the framework of the pretence theory, the three cases are seen as the same kind of behaviour. However, acting obviously includes much more than child's pretend-play and deceptive pretence do. In performance, actors intend to attract audiences; in group rehearsals, they want to ensure that all details of the subsequent performance are adequately prepared; when alone preparing roles, actors try to memorise lines and scenes. Moreover, in performance, the actors' actions are done for audiences to observe and react to their performances. In preparing for a performance, the actors' acting is done according to theatrical norms, such as the requirements of the script or techniques of acting. Child's pretend-play and deception do not have such features. Merely saying that actors engage in pretence seems to ignore the distinction between acting and child's play or deception and to fail to endorse the distinctive characteristics of acting. The pretence theory only explains that actors engage in pretending when portraying their characters; it does not explain why acting has some distinctive characteristics that pretend-play and deception do not have.

The pretence theory also makes us notice something irrelevant for acting. The concept of pretence generally implies that something is not true. Introducing the concept of pretence aims to distinguish truth from falsity or reality from non-reality. In the case of deception, what a thief does is considered as pretence because we want to use the concept of pretence to distinguish a lie from a truth, and to understand the fact that the thief is not really cleaning windows. In the case of child's play, what the child does is considered as pretence, since we want to explain what mental and behavioural states the child has: the child does not really believe that he is a knight; instead, he pretends or make-believes that he is a knight. Pretence, therefore, works as a means of distinguishing fiction from reality. However, truth and falsity are irrelevant to acting. In other words, whether the actor really performs the character's actions does not matter when appreciating the acting. What audiences are more interested in is the content of the play, the narratives the actors display to them. Some professional actors may recall their genuine emotions and thereby truthfully act, other actors may not trigger their emotions but only imitate some expressions and behaviours. But this is not what the audience wants to know; most audience members are not interested in what technique the actor adopts or whether the actors really perform the actions. We are not interested in whether the actor himself really loves

Juliet or whether the actor is really thirsty when drinking water on stage; instead, we want to know how Romeo loves Juliet and what meaning the behaviour of drinking water implies in the play. In theatre and acting, true and false or reality and non-reality do not matter for audiences; the audience focuses on the content of the narrative, not the mental states the actors have when enacting the characters. Yet, pretence theory makes us more attentive to the non-reality of the acting: this leads to a misunderstanding of acting. For instance, when an actor playing Romeo “drinks poison” and “dies” on stage, to say he is “pretending to kill himself” only explains what mental and behavioural states the actor actually and really has when acting the scene. That is not what the audience wants to focus on. They are interested in the represented characters, not the means of representing or the actor representing.

Finally, acting seems to be a process including both performance and preparation, but pretence is often used to describe only a performance (see Section 4.1). That means that if acting is seen as a pretence, it might bring a misunderstanding of acting: acting is identical to a performance. That might lead us to notice only the performance aspect of acting, but to ignore its preparation aspect.

7 | CONCLUSION

In this paper, I rebut the pretence theory according to which acting is a kind of pretence. My objections are in three parts. First, I proposed some counterexamples to the pretence theory; second, I argued that reasons in favour of the pretence theory are not persuasive; finally, I argued that the pretence theory leads to some misunderstandings of acting. To conclude, acting should not be seen as pretence. Then, what is acting? In this paper, I do not answer this question, but I personally prefer to say that acting is a process involving many different events and states. Maybe a simple activity, such as display or a game, cannot explain the case of acting.

Moreover, someone might suggest that I do not consider the form of pretending that p is q . For example, Osipovich said in theatrical contexts “the pretense might be that the action is taking place somewhere else, or that the audience is not present, or that the audience is something other than the audience for a performance” (Osipovich, 2006 p. 468). Here, the pretence takes the form of a proposition. I have two responses. First, when pretence takes the form of a proposition, it is like imagining or supposing. I admit that acting includes imagination or supposing (maybe not always).²³ However, it seems obvious that saying that acting involves imagining or supposing does not add something new. Many actions include imagining or supposing, such as planning, counterfactual reasoning and mindreading. Merely imagining or supposing cannot distinguish these ordinary actions from acting. It cannot explain what is essential for acting. Suppose that we want to understand what Napoleon was thinking in the battle of Waterloo. We might imagine or suppose that we were Napoleon and think about how we would react from Napoleon’s perspective. Equally, when we portray Napoleon on the stage, I might also imagine or suppose that we became Napoleon and think about how we would do from Napoleon’s perspective. Both need a kind of propositional imagination or supposition. Merely imagining or supposing cannot distinguish acting from other cases. Pretend actions – pretending to do – are still indispensable in order to clarify acting. Second, when one is pretending that p is q , one also needs to pretend to do something to realise the former. For example, when an actor playing Romeo pretends that the onstage actions are taking place in the real world, he also needs to pretend to be a real man living in the Middle Ages or pretend to do something that is appropriate to a real man living in the Middle Ages. The latter is a kind of pretending-to-do or pretending-to-be. Hence, such

²³I say “not always” because, in some cases of acting, especially in “fully immersed acting”, in which the actor inhabits the role and temporarily ignores the distinction between fiction and reality, the actor’s attitude might be like a belief, rather than imagination (e.g., see Schellenberg, 2013 on imaginative immersion).

pretending cannot replace pretending-to-do or pretending-to-be. Mere pretending that p is q cannot account for all cases of acting.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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