**ESCOBAR VARELA — Non-Hegemonic**

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**Non-Hegemonic Interoperability: Towards a Global Conversation in Digital Performance Research**

Escobar Varela, M.

Current models of interoperability discussed in the digital humanities are premised on standardization (Grassi et al., 2013; Doerr, 2003). Working toward this level of interoperability is a praiseworthy objective that requires enormous amounts of effort. However, the problem of standardization is that it does not reflect the multiplicity of perspectives that characterize humanistic practice throughout the world. In other words, standardization often supports a hegemonic view of the humanities. Addressing this limitation is a pressing challenge for the digital humanities, which have been criticized for their lack of linguistic diversity (Galina, 2014) and for not representing oppositional, non-hegemonic views of culture (Koh and Risam, 2013; McPherson, 2012).

This paper suggests that the existing technology stack of semantic web applications (such as OWL ontologies and SPARQL endpoints) can be used to develop a non-­hegemonic approach to interoperability in digital humanities projects. The paper focuses on theatre and performance studies but presents conclusions that are applicable to other areas of humanistic inquiry.

**Shared Conceptualizations?**

An ontology is often defined as a ‘formal, explicit specification of a shared conceptualization’ (Gruber, 1993). The ideal of a shared conceptualization is well suited to areas of science where collective efforts are aimed at constructing universal knowledge models. This explains the rapid adoption of ontologies such as the Gene Ontology Consortium (GOC), since ‘much of biology works by applying prior knowledge (“what is known”) to an unknown entity’ (Stevens et al., 2000).

This teleological epistemology might be ill-fitted to describe the work of scholars in the humanities. The humanities are historical and interpretive, and newer conceptual models do not disprove previous ones. Previous knowledge is not aggregated and falsified. Rather, knowledge production is the result of interpretation and disagreement. Coordinated efforts to find shared vocabularies in the humanities are laudable efforts. However, they do not take into account the atmosphere of ‘sophisticated disagreement’ (Strine et al., 1991) that is intrinsic to many aspects of humanistic practice. In the humanities, concepts are often ‘essentially contested’, as argued by W. B. Gallie (1964).

The essentially contested nature of concepts in the humanities is not just a methodological fine point. A multi-vocal debate in the humanities is a necessary recognition of non-normative subject positions. The progressive recognition of alternative views has been one of the main developments in the study of the humanities. As argued by Edward Said (2004), this is probably one of the main contributions from the humanities to the current world.

**Failed Inclusivity in Theatre and Performance Studies**

This paper aims to suggest ways in which semantic web technologies can be used in the development of a global, inclusive dialogue in the field of theatre and performance studies. In order to trace the contours of a truly inclusive digital scholarship in these areas, it is important to consider the criticism launched against previous attempts to create an international dialogue in theatre and performance.

In the 1960s and 1970s intercultural theatre was presented as a creative methodology that had the potential to include and represent multiple perspectives on theatre. However, critics such as Rustom Bharucha (1993) have identified a contradiction in intercultural discourse. Although it aims to represent a set of varied perspectives, it is still premised on an essentially Western view of the world. Likewise, Paul Rae (2011) shows that most academic discourse on intercultural theatre is conducted in English and that few Western interculturalists are multilingual.

Another example comes from performance studies and the idea of a ‘broad-spectrum approach’ (Schechner, 1988). The broad-spectrum approach aims to consider a multiplicity of practices (such as theatre, rituals, political protests, and performance art) as part of a continuum rather than as distinct categories. However, this approach betrays an Anglophone perspective. When translated into other languages, the term “performance” does not cover the same semantic space and cannot be applied to the same range of practices considered in the spectrum (Taylor, 2003).

The previous examples demonstrate how interculturalism and the broad-spectrum approach can be criticized for their lack of cultural and linguistic diversity. However, this argument can also be can be extended to other non-hegemonic perspectives not always represented in official histories and conceptualizations of theatre and performance. How to work towards this goal and avoid the pitfalls of these previous attempts?

**An ‘Essentially Contested’ Ontology?**

This paper suggests that semantic web technologies can offer a possible way of ensuring a multi-vocal dialogue in theatre and performance studies. Instead of setting up standards and controlled vocabularies, the semantic web stack can be used to make data available from a multiplicity of sources (for example, with SPARQL endpoints).

The Web Ontology Language (OWL) can be used to specify different (even contrasting) models of intercultural theatre and different versions of a broad-spectrum classification. Perhaps different scholars and institutions can make their data and schema available by setting up independent SPARQL endpoints. Rather than trying to collapse or merge these ontologies, federated data models can be used to show a multiplicity of perspectives (cultural or otherwise).

Creating ontologies and linked data is becoming increasingly easy with the use of free software such as Stanford University’s Protegé and the Open Link Virtuoso Universal Server. Nevertheless, this solution has its problems. Scholars would require technical knowhow and server space. However, the entry bar for this public, global debate is perhaps much lower than the one set by the publishers regulating the previous exchanges on interculturalism and on broad-spectrum approaches to the study of performance.

Following Lins Ribeiro’s notion of *non-hegemonic globalization* (2009), I would like to propose the concept of a non-hegemonic interoperability that would still use the semantic web stack. As Lins Ribeiro notes, non-hegemonic globalization movements also make use of established networks—for example, environmental NGOs that benefit from the same global communications network as the official institutions that support a capitalist globalization. Likewise, free or open-source tools developed for the semantic web applications can be used to foster an global, inclusive dialogue on theatre and performance research.

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