



Situated self-awareness in expert performance: a situated normativity account of *riken no ken*

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Abstract

We explore the nature of expert minds in skilled performance by examining classic Japanese dramatist Zeami's account of skilled expertise in Noh drama. Zeami characterizes expert minds by the co-existence of *mushin* and *riken no ken*. *Mushin* ("no-mind") is an empty state of mind devoid of mental contents. *Riken no ken* ("seeing with a separate seeing") is a distinctive form of self-awareness, where the actor embodies a common perspective with the audience upon one's own performance. Conventional accounts of *riken no ken* present it as a form of imagination: expert actors deliver their performance by imagining what it looks like from an external point of view. These imagination-based accounts, however, do not square well with the claim that *riken no ken* co-exists with *mushin*. We propose an alternative perception-based account that better accounts for this co-existence, drawing on the concept of "situated normativity" from embodied-ecological theories of cognition. The situated normativity account characterizes *riken no ken* as a form of "direct affective perception" in which actors are aware of their performance's quality of attunement with the performative situation. Expert Noh actors realise a common perspective with the audience not by imagining an external point of view, but by perceiving the situation that encompasses their own performance from an aesthetic perspective cultivated and shared within the Noh community.

Keywords Expertise · Japanese philosophy · Mushin · Zeami · Self-awareness · Situated normativity · Affordances

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1 Introduction

Current studies on skilled performance suggest that skilled experts often embody a unique state of mind in delivering their best performance. Researchers refer to this unique state of mind variously, for example, as “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), “peak experience” (Maslow, 1987), and “absorbed”, “mindless” or “skillful coping” (Dreyfus, 2002, 2007, 2013). Experts thus presumably experience the world very differently from most of us non-experts in any field of skilled performance. Existing accounts of skilled expertise, however, tend to be relatively uninformative about what it is exactly like to see the world as a skilled expert.¹ Expert minds are often characterized negatively in terms of their lack of deliberative control over their performance, which for a bystander might seem an indispensable component to perform excellently in any domain. But this still makes us wonder what it is like in more positive terms to deliver an excellent performance without supervising our body with our mind.

This paper explores the nature of expert minds in skilled performance by examining a classic account of skilled Noh performance in the works of fifteenth-century Japanese dramatist Motokiyo Zeami. Zeami characterizes expert minds in terms of the co-existence of *mushin* and *riken no ken*. *Mushin* (“no-mind”) is an empty state of mind devoid of mental contents. *Riken no ken* (“seeing with a separate seeing”) is a distinctive form of self-awareness, where the actor embodies a common perspective with the audience upon one’s own performance. We aim to clarify the nature of this co-existence by reconstructing the notion of *riken no ken* drawing on embodied-ecological approaches to mind and cognition.

Current philosophical debates on skilled action are by and large carried out within the context of modern Western philosophy. Recently, however, a new approach is emerging which aims to explore these ideas cross-culturally, by comparing modern Western approaches to mind and action with classical non-Western approaches (e.g., Barrett, 2011; Lai, 2022; Mingon & Sutton, 2021; Priest & Young, 2014; Siderits et al., 2011; Slingerland, 2014; Varela et al., 2017; Zarrilli, 2004). Studies that look specifically into the Japanese tradition in relation to modern discussions on skilled action have also appeared in the literature (e.g., Finnigan & Tanaka, 2010; Hutto & Ilundáin-Agurruza, 2020; Krein & Ilundáin, 2014; McKinney et al., 2020; Miyahara, 2022; Ravn, 2022). The current paper seeks to advance these cross-cultural lines of research by considering Zeami’s classical account of skill and expertise, which exerted an enormous influence on ensuing Japanese treatments of the topic, from the modern perspective of embodied-ecological cognition.²

In the following, we start by presenting a brief introduction to Noh drama. In Sect. 2, we present Zeami’s account of *mushin* and *riken no ken* in more detail. We will specify two questions that will guide our exploration into the nature of *riken no ken*. In Sect. 3, we review conventional interpretations of *riken no ken* that regard it as a form of imagination. We suggest that these accounts do not square well with Zeami’s claim that *riken no ken* co-exists with *mushin* in the expert minds of Noh actors. In the rest of the

¹ There are of course notable exceptions, such as Legrand and Ravn (2009), Høffding (2019), Hytönen-Ng (2016), Montero (2016).

² There are a few existing studies that specifically explore the relevance of Zeami’s thoughts to Western philosophical and psychological studies, such as Kono (2019), Miyahara (2022), and Nagatomo (1981).

paper, we develop an alternative interpretation of *riken no ken* that does not come up against similar problems. In Sect. 4, we introduce the concept of “situated normativity” developed in contemporary embodied-ecological theories to analyze the ways in which affective perception of socio-culturally constituted affordances makes possible unreflective normative behaviour. In Sect. 5, we advance our original interpretation of *riken no ken* by applying this perspective to the case of expert Noh performance. We then conclude the paper in Sect. 6.

1.1 A brief introduction to Noh drama

We explore the nature of expert minds by examining Zeami’s account of skilled expertise in Noh performance. Accordingly, let us start by providing the uninitiated reader with a basic introduction to the art form. Those who are already familiar with the subject matter may safely skip ahead to the next section.

Noh drama is a form of classical Japanese theatre, consisting of dancing, singing, role-playing, and instrumental music. Not unlike Western dramatical forms such as classical opera or the modern musical, it seeks to entertain the audience by bringing about a harmonious integration between dramatic and musical ingredients through performance. Established between the fourteenth and fifteenth century by Zeami Motokiyo (世阿弥元清, 1363–1443) and his father Kan’ami Kiyotsugu (観阿弥清次, 1333–1384), it is included on the UNESCO List of Intangible Heritage of Humanity as one of the oldest forms of theatre in the world, with a history far surpassing six centuries. From its roots onwards it has been performed as a conservative art form, preserving the same basic format unchanged for hundreds of years.

Noh performances are delivered by a small number of performers. Many performances involve just two actors, the main actor (*shite*) and the subordinate actor (*waki*). The main actor’s performance constitutes a large part of the drama, while the subordinate actor prompts and reacts to it, so that the drama unfolds naturally. Other performances involve one or two additional supporting actors at the most. Besides the actors, there are two other categories of stage performers, the chorus (*jiutai*) and the band (*hayashi*). Together they supply the music, whose function is not merely to accompany, but more importantly to guide, the main actor’s performance. The band consists of three drummers (playing a small hand-drum, a large hand-drum, and a large drum) and a flutist, so the music is not so much melodious as percussive. The chorus consists of singers (between eight and ten in number) who complement and enrich the actor’s performance by chanting out the story as it is enacted on stage. The aesthetic quality of the performance depends largely on whether the primary actor’s performance unfolds in harmony with the narrated drama and the accompanying music.³

Noh performers strive to achieve a form of aesthetic ideal known as “grace (*yūgen*)” through highly stylized and abstract performances (*Kakyō*, pp. 92–93). Noh actors deliver their performance by strictly adhering to a pre-determined choreography, the *kata*. Their goal is not to produce a realistic representation of a narrative in the guise of acting out a role, but rather to express one implicitly by carrying out the choreography

³ Since all Noh performers were male in Zeami’s time (and in fact until 1948), we will refer to Noh actors only with he/him or they/them pronouns in this paper.

in a graceful manner. Hence, Noh actors are not so much “[realistic] representers” as “storytellers who use their visual appearances and their movements to suggest the essence of their tale rather than to enact it” (Noh theatre, 2017). In the Japanese language, Noh actors are said to “dance” rather than “perform”, “play”, or “act” Noh. Because of its highly abstract format, a certain amount of cultural knowledge and experience in the art form is required to fully appreciate a Noh drama, and Noh tends to be quite obscure even for Japanese people. As we see later in Sect. 5, this feature of Noh drama plays a key role in our argument.

It is worth noting that the experience of seeing a Noh performance possesses a distinctive aesthetic quality. It is not so much the impress produced by witnessing a narratively organized sequence of events that unfolds with all due immediacy on stage, but rather the experience of being drawn into a supernatural world engendered by the performance itself. In part, this feature may be traced to the character of the music, which involves a considerable amount of enigmatic and repetitive chanting that allows for a delicate allusion to events taking place in a narrative—a delicacy without which the highest ideal of *yūgen* cannot be attained. It is also due in part to the fact that many Noh dramas revolve around narratives that feature supernatural beings such as ghosts, gods, and devils. Moreover, the structure of Noh theatre stages, designed to project outwards into the auditorium, enables the performance to be seen from multiple angles. This traditional Noh staging contrasts with modern Western proscenium stages, which constrain the audiences to view the performance from a more or less unitary angle from anywhere in the auditorium. Accordingly, Zeami notes, in the best of Noh, the audiences become so completely absorbed in the immersive experience that they forget about evaluating the aesthetic quality of the performance, only to realize its excellence afterwards when the play ends (*Kakyō*, p. 91).

Zeami was a prolific writer, producing at least fifty plays through his life, and authoring a number of treatises on the art of Noh. However, until the beginning of the twentieth century these circulated only among a handful of Noh performers. Among the twenty-one treatises currently attributed to Zeami, the most well-known are *Fūshikaden* (風姿花伝, *Transmission of the Flower Through Forms*, 1400) and *Kakyō* (花鏡, *The Mirror to the Flower*, 1422). *Fūshikaden* is a masterpiece belonging to his earlier period, when he was most enthusiastically supported by members of the aristocracy, and it documents the teachings on the art form inherited from his father Kan’ami. *Kakyō* is a classic from his middle period, when Zeami sought further to refine the art form by introducing themes from Zen Buddhism, which was highly celebrated in the aristocratic society at the time.⁴

In the following, we will mainly consider Zeami’s account of skilled expertise in Noh performance—especially that of the main actor (*shite*)—presented in *Kakyō*.⁵ This means that we set aside several potentially relevant issues from consideration in this paper, such as Zeami’s treatment of skilled expertise in his other texts, later

⁴ For an extensive account of Zeami’s biography, see Hare (1996, chapter 1).

⁵ References to both *Fūshikaden* and *Kakyō* are cited according to the English translation by Thomas Rimer and Masakazu Yamazaki (Zeami, 1984). Yet all English translations of Zeami’s writings in the present chapter are our own. We have consulted existing translations by Rimer and Yamazaki (Zeami, 1984), William Scott Wilson (Zeami 2006), and Tom Hare (Zeami 2008). For the Japanese texts, we have consulted edited collections by Konishi (1970) and Omote and Kato (1974).

Japanese discussions on expert minds developed in the wake of Zeami's reflections, and the applicability of Zeami's classic account to contemporary Noh practice. Instead, we will focus on reconstructing Zeami's account of expert mind developed in *Kakyō* by drawing on conceptual resources from contemporary embodied-ecological approaches to mind and cognition.

2 Zeami on *mushin* and *riken no ken*

Zeami characterises the expert mind of a skilled Noh actor in terms of the co-existence between *mushin* (無心, “no-mind”) and *riken no ken* (離見の見, “seeing with a separate seeing”). *Mushin* is an empty state of mind devoid of all mental content. *Riken no ken* is a distinctive form of self-awareness, in which actors “see [themselves] with the same mind as the audience” (*Kakyō*, p. 81). In this section, we introduce these two key concepts in more detail (§2.1, §2.2), and raise two crucial questions concerning the nature of *riken no ken* (§2.3).

2.1 *Mushin*

Noh actors perform several actions on stage all at the same time. They sing and dance according to the given choreography and script, whilst calibrating their performance to that of the supporting stage performers, that is, the chorus and the instrumentalists. As Zeami notes, “real mastery” in Noh acting consists first and foremost in the ability to align the musical and dramatic components of the performance, so that they unfold in time with each other (*Fūshikaden*, p. 27). Successful Noh performance thus requires coordination of a variety of different skills.

One might be led to think therefore that expert Noh performance involves a significant expenditure of mental effort. In general, doing many disparate things at the same time requires a commensurate amount of mental effort. For example, it requires more effort to engage in a conversation while also keeping an eye on your child than doing either on its own. Applying the same logic, one might suppose that Noh actors expend an exorbitant amount of mental calculation to coordinate multiple skills in a single performance. However, Zeami contends that the best Noh performance precisely requires that actors refrain from exerting this kind of mental effort to control their performance. On his account, expert actors deliver their best performances when they empty their minds of any thought and embody a state of “no-mind” (*Kakyō*, p. 97).

To illustrate, Noh actors role-play a character by impersonating stereotypical gestural styles. Learning how each style corresponds to each character-type is a crucial step of training. Yet according to Zeami, expert performance is not guided by considerations about these learned principles. Expert actors can impersonate a role without thinking explicitly how best to achieve this outcome: “In role play, there is without question a rank of ‘no imitation’. When you have exhaustively studied the art of role play to truly become the object of impersonation, there no longer is the mind that intends to impersonate” (*Fūshikaden*, p. 55). Expert actors identify themselves so deeply with the enacted character that they only need to engage in spontaneous acts without making

special efforts to impersonate the character in a convincing way—which is probably not a surprising feat for those familiar with certain styles of acting.

This is not to say that skilled expertise consists in the ability to produce an accurate performance automatically, in a manner akin to mindless operations of a robotic intelligence. On the contrary, Zeami emphasises that expert Noh performance is a distinctly mindful act: “the actor *must never abandon his mind but keep his inner attentive mind*. It is this sense of the inner state of mind that diffuses outwards and makes the act interesting” (*Kakyō*, p. 96, emphasis added). Yet actors should refrain from delivering their performance by entertaining explicit thoughts, for example, by recalling the choreography, thinking about the basic instructions for role-playing, or formulating action plans for the upcoming sequence. These explicit deliberations will not so much contribute to the performance as distract the actors’ “inner attentive mind”. Accordingly, Zeami claims that actors “must rise to the rank of *mushin*, in which their own mind is hidden from themselves” (*Kakyō*, p. 97) to achieve an excellent performance.

2.2 Riken no ken

Zeami introduces the concept of *riken no ken* to cast light on the idea of the “inner attentive mind”. Zeami claims that Noh dancing draws on different kinds of knowledge (*Kakyō*, pp. 79–80). At the most basic level is the “knowledge of gestures”. Actors must know the sequence of steps and movements that comprises the pre-determined choreography of each performance. Since this category of knowledge concerns specific bodily movements that constitute the choreography, it can be explicitly articulated and transmitted from teachers to students.

Second, there is the “knowledge of dance”. To produce a successful performance, actors must additionally know how to compose their body gracefully. The range of specific gestures required to make the performance graceful varies widely from performance to performance. It follows that this category of knowledge cannot be articulated in terms of specific physical movements. Cast in contemporary terminology, we may say that “knowledge of dance” is not a form of propositional knowledge (knowledge-that) with articulate content, but rather a form of practical knowledge (know-how) that guides the actor’s bodily performance (Ryle 2009).⁶

Third, expert performance further requires the supplementary possession of “knowledge of mutuality”, which consists in the skill to coordinate elements belonging to the first two categories of knowledge. Knowledge of gestures enables one to produce an accurate performance, but it does not guarantee aesthetic appeal. For this to be achieved, one must also possess knowledge of dance. Nonetheless, having these two kinds of knowledge separately is still insufficient, for one might possess each of these individually and yet be unable to coordinate among them to produce an adequate performance. Thus, an actor with non-coordinating knowledge might complete a performance accurately in a non-graceful manner, or he might do so gracefully while making missteps. In each of these hypothetical situations, he would fail to act both

⁶ Some challenge the distinction by suggesting that knowledge-how reduces to knowledge-that about ways to do things (Stanley, 2011; Stanley & Williamson, 2001). We set aside this complication here.

gracefully and accurately at the same time. Thus arises the necessity for the third, coordinating form of knowledge.⁷

Zeami introduces *riken no ken* to clarify what it means to have the second category of knowledge, “the knowledge of dance”. *Riken no ken*, he writes, is “the attentive mind in performative expressions of the aforementioned knowledge of dance” (*Kakyō*, p. 81). In introducing this concept, Zeami first contrasts it with an ordinary mode of awareness called *gaken* (“egoistic seeing”). In *gaken*, one is aware only of what is presented to one’s individual perspective. If an actor compares her current performance with what he takes to be an ideal performance, for example, he is aware of his performance in the form of *gaken*. Zeami goes on to compare *gaken* with the audience’s distinct awareness of the performance, which is called *riken* (“separate seeing”). Since the actor and the audience are differently positioned in relation to the stage, the same performance appears differently to the actor’s *gaken* and the audience’s *riken*. In particular, the audience can see parts of the actor’s body that are physically hidden from the actor’s individual perspective. As Zeami notes, an actor aware of himself exclusively in terms of *gaken* “knows what is in front and to the right and the left, but does not yet know what he looks like from behind” (*Kakyō*, p. 81). If the performance lacks aesthetic quality “from behind”, we cannot say it is an aesthetically appealing performance, even if the actor himself judges well of it. Therefore, the actor should refrain from giving his performance based solely on his own *gaken* or egoistic form of self-awareness.

Rather than *gaken*, Zeami claims that expert actors base their performance on *riken no ken* (“seeing with a separate seeing”). While *riken* refers to the audience’s awareness of the performance, *riken no ken* in this context refers to the actor’s self-awareness of his own performance. Yet *riken no ken* differs from *gaken* insofar as it contains the audience’s perspective on the performance as an intrinsic component: “To see with *riken no ken* is, in effect, seeing with the same mind as the audience” (*Kakyō*, p. 81). More specifically, Zeami holds that *riken no ken* allows an actor to be aware of aspects of the performance that are not directly accessible from his individual perspective. Accordingly, it enables him to adjust his performance to the audience’s aesthetic experience:

For this reason, one must take on the same seeing as the audience in *riken no ken*, see how one looks even in those parts of the body that lie beyond the gaze, and present a graceful form through one’s entire body. (*Kakyō*, p. 81)

In this regard, Zeami observes that adopting *riken no ken* is like “putting your mind behind yourself” and adopting a perspective that goes beyond what is immediately present to your individual mind. Thus, *riken no ken* forms a key component of the knowledge of dance: expert actors can perform gracefully precisely because they know how to adopt a *riken no ken* towards their own performance.

⁷ Knowledge of mutuality bears several refinements. The first of these is the so-called “knowledge of gesture-centered style.” It consists of knowing how to perform a dance in a way that emphasizes the technical component of the choreography. The second variant is the “knowledge of dance-centered style”, which consists in the ability to deliver a performance without highlighting its technicality, but rather foregrounding its emotional expressiveness (*Kakyō*, p. 80).

2.3 Questions for *riken no ken*

According to Zeami, expert performance involves both *mushin* and *riken no ken*. It follows from this that *riken no ken* is a mode of self-awareness that embodies the audience's perspective without involving mental contents and hence without affecting the actor's *mushin*.

In the rest of this paper, we will clarify the nature of this co-existence between *mushin* and *riken no ken* in relation to two guiding questions: First, *riken no ken* allegedly allows one to “see with the same mind as the audience”. Yet precisely what kind of sameness is this? What exactly does it mean for the actor to be aware of the performance *in the same way* as the audience? Call this the *sameness question*. Second, how do expert actors adopt a *riken no ken*? What precisely are the actors required to do to enter this mode of awareness during their performance? Call this the *how question*. Before presenting our own answer to these questions that draws on embodied-ecological approaches to cognition and behaviour, in the next section, we will consider conventional interpretations of *riken no ken*, which in our opinion fail to offer a plausible account on both scores.

3 Conventional accounts of *riken no ken*

Here are two possible ways to construe the nature of *riken no ken*. The first account envisions it as a form of empathic imagination. Call this the *empathy account* (§3.1). The second account construes it as a detached form of self-awareness. Call this the *detachment account* (§3.2). We compare both accounts vis-à-vis the previous questions and argue that neither of them offers a plausible interpretation of *riken no ken*. In particular, we argue that both fail to render it compatible with Zeami's view of the place reserved for *mushin* in expert performance (§3.3).

3.1 The empathy account and its shortcomings

The empathy account holds that *riken no ken* consists in the actor's mental act of empathically identifying himself with the audience's perspective on the performance.⁸ Thus, expert actors do not simply do what feels right to them, but constantly monitor the aesthetic quality of their performance, by imagining how the audience sees it from its own vantage-point.

We take this to be the standard (or most popular) account of *riken no ken*. For example, Yusa (1987) explicitly advances a version of this idea in describing *riken no ken* as “the mental eye by which the actor knows what the audience sees of him and identifies his viewpoint with that of the audience” (1987, p. 335). Likewise, prominent Noh researcher Akira Omote claims that Zeami's proposal in *Kakyō* is that when an

⁸ Empathy is a contested term used in different senses by different authors (Batson, 2018; Maibom, 2020). We assume the simulationist notion of empathy, for it is the most common position in the cognitive sciences. According to this view, empathy refers to the act of reproducing a mental state that resembles another's in the imagination (e.g., Coplan, 2011; Decety & Jackson, 2006; de Vignemont & Singer, 2006). However, we have no intention to claim that this is the best acceptable notion of empathy.

actor adopts *riken no ken*, he becomes aware of his own appearance by shifting his spatial perspective on the performance from one centred on the location of his own body to another that is centred on the audience's location. *Riken no ken*, as he puts it, "describes the performer's state of mind of seeing one's own appearance objectively with the same state of mind as the audience" (Omote and Kato, 1974, p. 471). In a similar vein, Konishi (1970) indicates in his annotation to *Kakyō* that *riken no ken* is a form of awareness by which "the actor views his performance from the audience's standpoint, and so the performance being viewed must be an objectification of oneself" (p. 199). Finally, French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss adapted *riken no ken* for the title of his book *The View from Afar* (Lévi-Strauss, 1992). He compares an anthropologist's reflective stance on one's own culture premised on the adoption of the perspective of another culture to a Noh actor's reflective stance on one's own performance premised on the adoption of the audience's perspective (Nishihira, 2009). We can see that the comparison already assumes that *riken no ken* involves empathy with the audience.⁹

The empathy account can answer the *sameness question* by pointing to two respects in which an expert actor who is aware of his performance through *riken no ken* embodies "the same mind as the audience". First, he is aware of the performance from the same spatial perspective as the audience. This constitutes an awareness of the performance from a viewpoint that is located outside and at a certain distance from the actor's body. Second, he embodies a state of mind that represents the performance in the same way as the audience. For instance, if the audience perceives the performance as banal and boring, the actor will also perceive it as banal and boring, if only in his imagination. This alignment of viewpoints may provide him with an opportunity to improve the performance, for instance, by suggesting him to add a variety of novel and surprising gestures into the act—provided that these new gestures don't interfere outright with the overall coherence of the performance. Moreover, the account can answer the *how question* by saying that the actor adopts *riken no ken* by imagining the myriad ways in which the audience is aware of his performance. In brief, the actor is said to embody the same mind as that of the audience members by mirroring their state of mind in his imagination.

In general, stage performers often use this form of empathic imagination to adjust their performance to the audience (Montero, 2016). Nevertheless, it is questionable whether this captures the unique mode of self-awareness that Zeami calls *riken no ken*.¹⁰ One problem is that it is unclear how anyone can adopt the required multiplicity

⁹ Comparative philosopher Yasuo Yuasa suggests a different interpretation as he describes *riken no ken* as a state in which "there is no consciousness distinguishing self and others, or performer and audience. The world is fused into one" (Yuasa, 1987, p. 108). Yet he also advances an interpretation in line with the empathy account, according to which "the actor observes his own performance as from a seat in the audience" (p. 108). However, he does not make it clear how these two interpretations are compatible since if the actor is observing oneself (presumably in imagination) from the audience seat, it seems that the world is not really "fused into one" in the actor's consciousness.

¹⁰ Montero also denies that performers can only refine their performance aesthetically based on this form of imagination, as she writes: "To be sure, in some cases, one might proprioceptively judge that a movement is beautiful because one knows that the movement, if seen, would look beautiful. But in other cases, one might visually judge that a movement is beautiful because one knows that if proprioceived, this movement would feel beautiful." (2016, p. 206).

of perspectives at one and the same time.¹¹ According to Zeami, *riken no ken* allows an actor to become aware of his entire body presenting the performance. But each individual experience of the performance is limited in scope. A member of the audience seated right in front of the actor, for example, might be able to see the front-facing side of the actor's performance better than anyone else in the theatre; but in virtue of the angle of vision, she will not be able to see how the performance looks from the side or from further back in the house, etc. Thus, an actor resorting to the singular perspective of this sole individual would fail to gain an awareness of his entire body as seen from multiple angles in the audience.

For this last form of awareness to be possible, in principle, the actor needs to imagine how his performance looks like to each and every audience in the theatre (in the aggregate). The feasibility of such a collation of myriad perspectives is however highly implausible. How exactly can an actor imagine the perspective that each person in the theatre has about himself, and furthermore use these perspectives to control and shape his performance? What may we say about a scenario in which members of the audience experience the performance in contradictory ways (as is often the case)? The problem becomes more pressing still, if we consider the fact that aesthetic evaluations come in degrees. For the Noh actor to adopt "the same mind as the audience", he is then required to incorporate into a single coherent representation a potentially large number of differently graded, and possibly contradictory perspectives on the aesthetic quality of his performance.

At this point, one might claim on behalf of the empathy account that *riken no ken* should be seen as an ideal, rather than a descriptive state of mind that can be attained in reality. Zeami talks about it for purely pragmatic purposes as the idea pushes the actors to strive for a more and more external perspective on their own performance, which serves to improve their performance. In that case, it will not necessarily be a problem that the empathy account depicts *riken no ken* as an unattainable form of awareness. However, this is not how proponents of the empathy account typically consider *riken no ken*. For example, Yusa (1987) notes that Zeami seems to use this notion differently in different texts, yet she claims that "the concept is basically concerned with one single reality of the mind" (p. 332, emphasis added). Much interpretive work will be needed to sustain the claim that *riken no ken* actually meant to describe a purely ideal state.

All in all, the empathy account seems unable to explain how *riken no ken* allows the actor to become aware of his entire body presenting the performance. In our view, its fundamental problem lies in the fact that it associates this skilful form of self-awareness too strongly with the adoption of an external point of view (even if in imagination). This is not entirely groundless as Zeami describes it literally as a form of seeing or viewing ("ken"). However, it is also noteworthy that when he elaborates on the notion, he describes it more in terms of the mind ("shin"), for example, as a form of awareness where "the eyes are faced forward and the *mind* is placed behind" or one where one "sees with the same *mind* as the audience" (*Kakyō*, p. 81). This

¹¹ Gallagher and Gallagher (2020) suggest that actors embody a "double intentionality" being conscious of the character one portrays and one's portrayal of the character at the same time. On their account, they can do this thanks to the foreground/background structure of consciousness. The same approach may be applicable to *riken no ken*, but as far as we know, there are hitherto no attempts to explain this expert form of awareness in terms of the distinction between the foreground and the background of consciousness.

suggests the possibility that *riken no ken* is meant to be a more encompassing form of awareness than something restricted to the adoption of a particular spatial point of view. Before introducing our own account that builds on this possibility, however, let us consider another common account of the notion that is considerably different from the empathy account.

3.2 The detachment account and its shortcomings

The detachment account of *riken no ken* can avoid this objection. On this account, *riken no ken* allows an expert actor to be impartially aware of the situation comprising both the performance and the audience as though viewing it from a detached viewpoint. In so doing, they can objectively determine how the performance is affecting the audience, and thus adjust it appropriately when it is not bringing about the desired artistic effects, as opposed to carrying out a performance solely on the grounds that it feels subjectively right to them. Thus, it answers the *how question* in terms of the imagination, but a different kind of imagination nevertheless compared to the empathy account: one imagines how the situation would look like from a detached viewpoint that coincides neither with the actor's nor the audiences' spatial location. The actor occupies an imaginative perspective akin to a bird's eye view on their performance that accommodates every aspect of their body in sight. Thus, unlike the empathy account the detachment account can amply explain why an expert actor is aware of their entire body in *riken no ken*.¹²

The detachment account, however, also has its own problem. It fails to offer a plausible answer to the *sameness question*. According to Zeami, *riken no ken* allows one to become aware of the situation “with the same mind as the audience”. Therefore, the detachment account of *riken no ken* entails that, while watching the performance, the audience should adopt a purely detached viewpoint, encompassing both the performance and the audience members themselves. But this clearly misrepresents the experience of viewing a Noh performance, which tends to be heavily emotionally loaded, especially when one attends an excellent performance presented by an expert actor (*Fūshikaden*, p. 110; see also *Kakyō*, p. 111). Strictly speaking, it may not be fully *impossible* to adopt a detached stance with respect to an excellent Noh performance, but it would nevertheless require a quite exceptional state of mind on the part of the audience. The detachment account is consistent with Zeami's conception of *riken no ken* as “seeing with the same mind as the audience” only to the extent that the dramatist held the prevalence of this exceptional state of mind among the audiences as a working assumption. However, there is no independent reason to think that this was the case. It is therefore unlikely that the substance of Zeami's concept of *riken no ken* can be explicated in terms of a putative detached viewpoint that enables expert actors to see themselves objectively during the performance.

¹² Existing accounts tend not to distinguish the detachment account clearly from the empathy account. For example, Yusa (1987) advances an empathy account, but also describes *riken no ken* as a form of awareness “which objectively embraces the subjective viewpoint as well as hitherto objective viewpoints, that is, those of the audience” (1987, p. 335).

3.3 The co-existence of *riken no ken* and *mushin*

For these reasons, neither the empathy account, nor the detachment account seems to offer a plausible picture of *riken no ken*. In addition, there is a deeper problem that applies in equal measure to both accounts. Zeami considers *riken no ken* to be the key component of the “inner attentive mind”, which an actor relies upon when acting in a state of *mushin*, an empty state of mind devoid of mental content. It is often assumed, however, that acts of imagination must always involve mental contents (e.g., Clark & Toribio, 1994; Clowes & Mendonça, 2016).¹³ In that case, to imagine how another is seeing you (or how your present circumstances would look like from a detached standpoint) is to entertain the corresponding contents in your mind. Once you entertain these contents in the imagination, you are thereby no longer in a state of *mushin*.¹⁴ Correspondingly, the previous accounts of *riken no ken* that depict it as a form of imagination make it hard to understand how this unique mode of self-awareness co-exists with *mushin* in expert minds.

This is not to deny that actors can use their imagination to improve their performance in various respects. As we saw above, Montero (2016) points out that stage performers occasionally use empathic imagination to present a better performance. In theatre studies, for instance, imagining how a character would respond to certain counterfactual circumstances, known as the Stanislavskian ‘magic if’ method, is considered one of the most powerful tools for actors to better understand their character in preparing for their performance (Moore, 1984). We only dispute the claim that *riken no ken* consists of mentally occupying an external point of view in imagination.

One might object that we have not offered a conclusive argument against standard, imagination-based accounts of *riken no ken*. A possible response to our challenge of explaining how *riken no ken* and *mushin* can co-exist would be to state that acts of imagination may in principle be unconscious (e.g. Nanay, 2018; Phillips, 2014; Tooming & Miyazono, 2020). In that case, *riken no ken* would be a form of empathic imagination that operates below the level of consciousness. It might be proposed that expert Noh actors in *riken no ken* are aware of their performance by mentally entertaining the audience’s mental perspective; and yet that this mental content guides their performance without rising to conscious awareness. On these lines, *mushin* would be cast as a performance-guiding mental state devoid of any *conscious* mental content.

¹³ The following discussion takes this view of imagination as an assumption. Therefore, more accurately, our claim would be that *riken no ken* does not involve those forms of imagination in which the actor entertains an imagined content (viz., the performance seen from the audience’s perspective) in their mind. Recently, however, interesting challenges have been raised against this conventional view by proponents of the enactive approach (e.g., Hutto and Myin, 2017; Medina, 2013; Rucińska, 2021). These enactive views suggest that imagining may be something we do in our embodied engagement with the environment without entertaining mental contents in the mind. Applying these views to Noh actors’ minds in performance, we might think of them as imagining fictional situations through their bodily performance guided by their affective perception of the intersubjective situation, comprising other stage performers, audiences, and sociocultural norms. This suggests a truly interesting way to further develop our account of Zeami’s concepts presented below. We thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing us in this direction.

¹⁴ In the current literature, proponents of “radical enactivism” similarly argue that mental contents are not involved in expert skilled performance (e.g. Cappuccio et al., 2021; Hutto & Ilundáin-Agurruza, 2020; Ilundáin-Agurruza et al., 2019). Zeami’s account of expert Noh performance, as we see it, is congenial to this framework, which is not obvious if we interpret *riken no ken* in terms of imagination.

We here leave it open whether one can develop a more plausible conception of *riken no ken* in terms of the imagination, either as sketched above, or in some other way. However, we suspect based on the foregoing discussion that these accounts of *riken no ken* go wrong from the start, by construing it as a form of imagination in the first place. The missing conceptual possibility is that Zeami did not intend to characterize *riken no ken* as a form of imagination at all. Fleshing out this alternative possibility is the focus of the rest of this paper.

4 Situated normativity

We propose to clarify the nature of the co-existence between *riken no ken* and *mushin* by developing an alternative conception of the former. On our account, *riken no ken* is a way of being perceptually aware of one's own bodily performance in relation to the situational context, including (though not limited to) the musical elements of the performance (i.e., chanting and instrumental music). Expert actors shape their performance, not by imaging how it may be experienced from other vantage-points, but by being skilfully heedful of whether and how well it is attuned to the performance situation and especially to the music. In the next section, we will elaborate this conception of *riken no ken* by drawing on Erik Rietveld's account of "situated normativity" (Rietveld, 2008). To this end, we introduce and expound this operative concept in the ensuing discussion.

4.1 Human normativity without rule-following

Normativity is a ubiquitous phenomenon implicit in the biological world. Even a form of life as rudimentary as a bacterium exposed to a sucrose gradient may be represented as engaged in a normative behaviour organized around the biological norm of survival and self-production (Thompson, 2007). Nonetheless, human normative practice differs from this form of basic normative behavior in many respects (Satne, 2015). For one thing, our behaviour is not only shaped by biological norms, but also (or more so) by sociocultural norms including manners, promises, law, moral codes, linguistic rules, and their cognates. Furthermore, human beings are often characteristically aware of their observance of these norms as they engage in the relevant normative behavior.

But what does it mean to act according to a sociocultural norm? A classical approach to this question appeals to the concept of rule-following. On this account, human normative behaviour is like playing a game that is governed by a set of rules. Thus, we participate in sociocultural practices by applying our knowledge of the relevant rules to our performance.

However, the notion of rule-following does not fully explain the nature of human normativity. In many situations drawn from daily life, we act adequately without explicitly considering the relevant guiding norms. Consider how we maintain a social distance when we mount an elevator along with other people (Dreyfus, 2013; van den Herik & Rietveld, 2021). In such cases, we effortlessly keep an adequate distance from the others as a matter of course, without thinking about the operation of

rules for social distancing. If someone else enters the elevator, we may feel uncomfortable and readjust our position, increasing the distance from the newcomer whilst maintaining the distance from our other fellow passengers within an acceptable range. There are numerous other examples of human activity that demonstrate that we reliably participate in communal customs, adapting our behaviour to a specific normative background, without deliberating about relevant rules of conduct.¹⁵ Rietveld (2008) introduces the notion of “situated normativity” to characterize this sort of unreflective norm-following behaviour (see also van den Herik & Rietveld, 2021; Buskell, 2015).

4.2 Ecological perception in situated normativity

Situated normativity refers to “the normative aspect of embodied cognition in unreflective skilful action” (Rietveld, 2008, p. 973). According to Rietveld, our ability to comply with social norms unreflectively is distinct from our capacity to abide by rules by entertaining them, either explicitly or implicitly, in our mind. Rather, it consists of a sensorimotor capacity to perceive whether and to what extent a given situation is adequate or inadequate in light of certain norms, and act upon this perception without deliberating over our actions. Situated normativity thus involves the ability to perceptually distinguish better from worse relative to the context of a particular practice.

To explain the role of perception in situated normativity, Rietveld appeals to the ecological theory of perception, first introduced by James Gibson (1979/2015; see also Chemero, 2009; Turvey, 2018). The ecological theory of perception introduces two fundamental hypotheses. One is that perception is direct. This is to say that agents do not need to perform internal, representation-based inferences upon sensory stimuli to be aware of the world. Instead, perceptual information already specifies the environment, and the detection of such information suffices for the perception of the environment (see Segundo-Ortin et al., 2019; Segundo-Ortin, 2020). The second thesis is that perception is primarily of affordances, that is, the set of opportunities for interaction a particular environmental setting offers to an agent relative to its bodily features and skills. For example, when I detect information about a glass that is on the table, I do not first identify its properties (e.g., size, shape, location) and then consider whether I can grasp it by reaching out my arm; rather, I directly perceive the possibility of grasping it. By contrast, when a small child encounters the same glass in similar circumstances, she will not perceive the possibility of grasping it because of her limited arm-reaching range.

On Rietveld’s account, skilled agents perform unreflective normative behaviours by responding to perceived affordances. Thus, “the skilful individual’s responsiveness to *relevant* affordances forms the core of the normative aspect of unreflective action” (2008, p. 977, emphasis original). However, which affordances are relevant in a particular situation is *not* only determined by the perceiver’s bodily features and skills, but also by the socio-normative aspects of the activity in which the perceiver is engaged (Reed, 1993, p. 52; Segundo-Ortin & Satne, 2020). For instance, while beer is in principle drinkable by anyone, social norms prevent children from drinking

¹⁵ The claim is not that we never or cannot deliberate, but that we do not need to do so in order to act adequately.

it. Social norms concerning who is allowed to consume alcohol produce constraints on the affordances that some society members can utilize. Likewise, cultural norms constrain how people sit at the table in Spain, resulting in the seats on the outer reaches often being reserved for the elderly.

Learning to distinguish relevant from irrelevant affordances is called in ecological psychology “education of attention” (Gibson & Pick, 2000). Importantly, Rietveld proposes that part of this education is guided by critical feedback. This critical feedback can take different forms (van den Herik & Rietveld, 2021). First, there is “an implicit attunement to regular ways of doing things” (p. 5). Thus, we can learn to detect relevant affordances simply by seeing what other people do in certain situations. Learning to maintain appropriate interpersonal distances in a social situation is a good example, as it often occurs without prior instruction. Second, there is “active attunement” in which teaching takes place in the absence of explicit rules. Here, the teacher educates novices by showing what should be done, by responding spontaneously to their behaviours, and by providing feedback with gestures or words (“good”, “bad”, “better”, “worse”). Thus, the instructor need not be able to formulate explicit rules, but only to provide feedback based on her own practical experience. Crucially, this is the typical form of teaching and learning that takes place in traditional Japanese arts, including Noh theatre (Ikuta, 2000). Finally, there is “explicit attunement” which unfolds via the provision of a set of explicit rules. In this case, one cultivates one’s perceptual capacity to detect the relevant affordances by observing explicit rules of conduct.

4.3 Affectivity in ecological perception

Rietveld (2008) adds to the ecological view of perception the idea that perception of affordances can have an affective component. According to him, we do not take part in unreflective normative behaviour by perceptually identifying an object as affording an opportunity to engage in some normative behaviour, and then deciding to act on it. Rather, we are moved affectively by imminent affordances to pursue a certain course of action as we perceive the situation (see also Rietveld & Kiverstein, 2014; Withagen et al., 2012, 2017). For example, when another person stands too close to you in an elevator, you do not merely see the possibility of stepping back to adjust the interpersonal distance, and then on seeing it, decide to take up that opportunity in action. Rather, her close presence to you makes you feel uncomfortable, and thereby inclines you to step back. We experience affordances in an affective guise of perception, in which “fast instinctive reaction of appreciation precedes, in a sense, the distinction between emotion and cognition” (Rietveld, 2008, p. 976).

This capacity for affective direct perception comes in degrees. A novice and a skilled expert in a normative practice may both perceive situations affectively in light of their interest to complete their actions appropriately, but their ways of doing so may differ. Rietveld clarifies this idea by introducing the concepts of “directed discontent” and “directed discomfort”. Directed discomfort occurs when we perceive an object or a situation and feel that something is not right. That is to say, directed discomfort consists of “a raw, undifferentiated rejection of the object” (p. 980). By contrast, an agent who is more extensively trained in a practice will in similar circumstances experience

a directed discontent, which means that they will perceive the inappropriateness or incorrectness of the situation or the object in a more specific way:

Directed *discontent* is related to [an agent's] ability to make all kinds of subtle discriminations instinctively and immediately in unreflective action. This enables him to see what should be done to improve the current situation or solve the problem; to perceive and act on possibilities for action (affordances). (Rietveld, 2008, p. 980)

Rietveld illustrates this idea by appealing to a scenario in which an architect is designing a house. If a door is installed with a slight deviation from her blueprints, a novice architect might very well notice that something is wrong (i.e., directed discomfort); yet she may well need to think twice to identify the exact problem, that is, the specific source of the discomfort. A more experienced architect, by contrast, will presumably see the problem at a glance, and be in a position to think about a possible solution without further ado. For example, she might immediately notice that the door is installed a bit too low in relation to the frame, and she might thereupon call upon the carpenters to redo the work. Thus, skilled experts are set apart from novices at the level of perceptual discrimination (see Gibson, 1969). Expert agents can accomplish their goals unreflectively primarily in virtue of their cultivated perceptual skills, their ability to respond to problems by differentiating affordances in highly specific ways and by letting their actions be guided by these perceived affordances to reduce the affective tension.

Hence, according to Rietveld, it is affective direct perception of affordances that accounts for our ability to act unreflectively according to sociocultural norms. The norms that guide our perception and action are seldom verbalized and made explicit. Instead, they are materialized in our embodied habits and affective concerns shared by those who are already brought up in the practice. Once we develop the perceptual and affective responsiveness to the relevant affordances, we become able to act out of sheer acquired habit to navigate the environment; thus, both perception and resolution of problems in the material world eschew thinking about the background norms and rules implicitly governing our practices.¹⁶

In the next section, we advance a novel conception of *riken no ken* by applying this notion of situated normativity to the special case of Noh performance.

5 The situated normativity account of *riken no ken*

Rietveld's notion of "situated normativity" offers an adequate framework for making sense of Zeami's concept of *riken no ken*. To demonstrate the viability of this proposal, we first introduce the basic idea of our situated normativity account (§4.1) before going on to address the two key questions that any interpretative proposal of *riken no ken* needs to answer, namely, the sameness question (§4.2) and the how question (§4.3).

¹⁶ According to Rietveld, rule-following is a secondary form of normative behavior: "We should distinguish between explicit social norms and underlying patterns of activities. Explicit social norms are best understood as useful abstractions from a third-person perspective that articulate the regularities that are already manifest in the coordinated behaviour of a community of individuals." (2008, p. 988).

5.1 The basic idea

We propose to understand *riken no ken* as a form of self-awareness of one's bodily performance that is concerned with the quality of its attunement to a given situation. Noh actors keep track of their performance by picking up and attuning to multimodal information in the environment, such as their relation to the pillars on the corner of the stage (which they can barely see through their mask), the feel of the grains of the wooden floor, and the unfolding music produced by their fellow stage performers. These pieces of information inform the actors of the quality of the ongoing performance and guide their deliverance of it accordingly.

Montero (2016) suggests that dancers base their performance on a proprioceptive awareness of their bodily movements. Furthermore, she holds that they must skillfully coordinate proprioceptive and auditory inputs to attune their performance to the accompanying music (Montero, 2016, p. 194). Legrand and Ravn (2009) also documents that ballet dancers do not merely experience music as prompts to make pre-determined moves, but as something directly connected to their internal sense of movement in their body: "Hearing encompasses proprioception and the ballet dancers hear through their moving bodies more than through their ears" (p. 401). *Riken no ken*, in our view, designates a similar expert mode of awareness that encompasses multimodal aspects of the situation, including but not limited to proprioception and audition.¹⁷ The situated normativity framework provides us with suitable concepts to articulate this idea by enabling us to conceptualize it as a form of affective direct perception of socioculturally constituted affordances.¹⁸

On this account, an actor who is aware of his performance in the guise of *riken no ken* experiences it contently insofar as it is well-attuned to the situation. In such cases, his attention is fully devoted to the present situation, and he feels no need to mentally intervene with the performance. When the performance is not as well-attuned to the situation, however, he will feel a directed discontent just as the experienced architect in Rietveld's example. For example, he may feel a certain kind of discordance between his bodily acts (dancing and acting) and the accompanying music, and this affective feeling may urge him to adjust the performance appropriately so that the felt discordance will dissipate. Furthermore, although Zeami does not put it in this way, the situated normativity framework suggests that actors who have not yet mastered this form of self-awareness may not yet know the pleasure of being perfectly attuned to the ongoing

¹⁷ This is not to say that our account of *riken no ken* overlaps completely with Montero's account of aesthetic proprioceptive awareness. Montero indicates that dancers refine their performance based on their proprioceptive awareness by conceptualizing it in terms of aesthetic judgments (2016, p. 194). On our account, however, *riken no ken* allows actors to align their performance with the music without forming such conceptual judgments.

¹⁸ Our claim here is that this makes a reasonable reconstruction of Zeami's classical account of skilled expertise in terms of *riken no ken*. However, it is noteworthy that contemporary Noh practitioners also report on the experience of being guided by the situation during their best performances. For example, philosopher and amateur (yet serious) Noh performer Tatsuru Uchida discusses with professional top-rank modern Noh actor Kiyokazu Kanze his experience of finding himself turning his body with great pleasure as he felt being "pulled by the accompanying music" (Kanze and Uchida, 2013, p. 204). As he puts it, "the body was pulled as if being twisted around; I did not move at my will; the body wanted to move that way as it was pulled by the music" (p. 204). Kanze immediately agrees that this is the kind of experience he also has during performances.

theatrical situation. By contrast, they may only feel a directed discomfort when their performance is out of tune with some aspect of the situation. A less accomplished actor may well sense the discordance between his performance and the music no less than the expert, but in a more general way, and hence may not be motivated to undertake an immediate redress of the performance with quite the same degree of urgency.

One immediate virtue of this account is its coherence with the fact that Zeami refers to this expert mode of awareness as a form of perception.¹⁹ Conventional accounts depict *riken no ken* as essentially involving some form of imagination (Sect. 3), but ‘ken’ literally means seeing, that is, visual perceptual awareness. In fact, as far as we know, Zeami never describes *riken no ken* as a form of imagination. Seeing surely can mean multiple things, including vision in particular, perception more generally, and even understanding in general, but this choice of word gives some weight to our perceptual account of this expert mode of self-awareness in terms of situated normativity. In the following, we will further develop our case for this account by showing how it can answer the two key questions in developing an account of *riken no ken*: the sameness question and the how question.

5.2 The sameness question

Zeami characterizes *riken no ken* as a unique form of awareness that allows the actor to “see with the same mind as the audience”. Any interpretive account of *riken no ken* must be able to explain the nature of this sameness of mind between the actor and the audience. We called this the *sameness question* (§2.3).

It is first important to notice that although conventional accounts depict *riken no ken* as a form of awareness in which the actor occupies an external point of view of the audience, Zeami himself does not advance this metaphor in presenting this concept. Rather, he only talks about “seeing with the same mind as the audience”. Contemporary readers might easily associate this with imaginative perspective-taking, but other interpretations are also possible. We propose to read it as saying that *riken no ken* involves the realization of a common perspective between the actor and the audience. Of course, we are here not talking about a common spatial point of view: the actor obviously cannot really overlap spatially with the audience. Instead, the situated normativity account we are advancing holds that the actor in *riken no ken*—here considered as an affective direct perception of socio-culturally constituted affordances—and the audience are aware of the performance “with the same mind” by realizing a common affective and normative perspective.

To begin with the common affective perspective, an audience of a Noh performance is typically aware of the bodily performance of the actor directly and affectively in relation to the performative context. If the actor’s performance is attuned perfectly to the music, for example, audiences will be immediately impressed by its aesthetic quality; typically, they will not attempt an aesthetic evaluation indirectly after identifying the

¹⁹ One might question if affective responses, such as directed discontent, count as perception. This is certainly a possible point of contention, but we follow Rietveld (2008) in adopting the increasing popular view that affectivity is an inherent aspect of perception (e.g., Barrett & Bar, 2009; Colombetti, 2014; Gallagher, 2017; Pessoa, 2013).

properties of the performance in non-aesthetic, non-evaluative, non-affective terms. Alternatively, if the actor fails to synchronize his dance and role-playing with the music, the audience will immediately feel the discordance and assess the performance as lacking in aesthetic quality.

The audience's awareness here is not so much concerned with the bodily performance in isolation, as with the multimodal configuration of the situation determined by the relation between the bodily performance and its context. Thus, one can be repelled by a performance, even if all the bodily acts were performed accurately, were it to unfold discordantly in relation to the music. By contrast, an audience might be fascinated by a performance, even if the actor's dance and role-playing involved several missteps, when it is delivered in perfect harmony with the musical components. This is why, when an actor possesses a self-awareness of his bodily performance that is directly and affectively attuned to the context, they are in effect aware of the performance in the same way as the audience.

Moving to the common normative perspective, an audience is typically aware of a performance evaluatively in the light of communal aesthetic norms that determine the success conditions for a Noh performance. Appreciating a Noh performance is a highly advanced sociocultural practice, involving proper and improper ways of carrying it out. Seeing a Noh performance is an affectively moving experience for many first-time viewers, but few may know fully and properly how to appreciate it from the beginning. In general, people grow into a sophisticated audience by learning from other members of the community already in possession of the basic skills to properly appreciate Noh performances in line with the relevant aesthetic norms.

Importantly, aesthetic norms govern not only the audience's practice of appreciating Noh performances, but also the actor's delivery of these performances. Noh actors seek to fascinate the audiences aesthetically, but this will not happen unless they deliver the performance in line with pre-existing aesthetic norms. Accordingly, an expert actor's direct affective perception of their performance must also be strongly informed by these norms. If they feel a directed discontent for the immediate situation, and hence the urge to correct it in certain ways, this must be because their current performance is failing to meet the relevant communal aesthetic standards. In that case, we can say that an expert actor is aware of their performance in terms of direct affective perception and the audience is approaching it from the same normative perspective. In short, according to the situated normativity account, *riken no ken* allows the actor to approach the ongoing performance from a shared normative background, and to that extent, experience it "with the same mind as the audience".

Does this mean that an expert Noh actor delivering a performance based on *riken no ken* is essentially doing the same as an average member of an urban community adjusting social distance from other people on an elevator? To some extent, yes. In both cases, the actor is guided by a direct affective perception of the situation cultivated through their history of engagement with a certain sociocultural practice. Both are unreflective performances shaped by a shared normative background. However, there are also important differences that create a huge disparity in their respective artistic values: While it is the outcome brought about by the banal act of stepping a few steps back that mostly matters in the case of adjusting social distances, the performance itself matters hugely and is highly skilful in the case of Noh performance. Thus, one can

develop a habit of keeping a certain distance with others in an elevator unreflectively through “implicit attunement” by just living in a certain sociocultural setting, but the ability to deliver an excellent Noh performance cannot be cultivated without being reflectively engaged with the practice over years or even decades. Accordingly, the fact that expert Noh performance is a form of unreflective normative behaviour guided by direct affective perception, being comparable to any other unreflective social behaviour in that respect, has no damaging implications for its artistic value.

Finally, one might object that direct affective perception does not really explain the sameness of awareness realized in *riken no ken*. During a Noh performance, a portion of the audience might become focused exclusively on the actor’s bodily performance, such that its relation to the context falls out of their evaluative awareness. Other members of the audience, newly introduced to this art form, may know nothing about the communal norms for evaluating the aesthetic quality of a performance. According to the situated normativity account, *riken no ken* does not allow the actor to become aware of the performance in the same way as these types of audiences.

However, this objection does not square well with Zeami’s general stance towards audiences. Zeami is explicitly restrictive in this respect. The audience’s taste for Noh performance varies widely, so it is hardly possible for an actor to match their acts to everyone’s aesthetic preference in a single performance. But Zeami does not consider this to be a serious problem because he denies that every perspective matters equally. In particular, he contends that one should hold up those performances that have proven popular in the culturally sophisticated city as the aesthetic standard for critically appreciating a Noh performance (*Kakyō*, p. 99). This suggests that, for Zeami, an actor needs to embody in *riken no ken* the mind of an exclusively sophisticated, select audience to deliver an aesthetically successful performance; they can safely set aside the awareness of the less sophisticated members of the audience. Hence, if we follow Zeami, we must suppose the actor to become aware of the performance only with the same mind as audience members who are deeply cultivated in the cultural practice of seeing Noh performances.

More strongly yet, Zeami claims that unsophisticated countryside audiences cannot properly appreciate the aesthetic quality of the best Noh performances (*Kakyō*, p. 101). One may take it therefore that their fundamentally uninformed perspectives can do much to vitiate the performance, if allowed to enter the actor’s *riken no ken*. The situated normativity account is in accord with the spirit of these remarks, by committing itself to a notion of shared awareness informed by the perceptions of audiences deeply cultivated in this theatrical practice. Rather than making the account less credible, we argue that this feature is highly consonant with Zeami’s thinking on the subject.

5.3 The how question

We come now to the second question any interpretive account of *riken no ken* must answer, namely, the how question. How do expert Noh actors enter this mode of self-awareness? Since Zeami holds that they should refrain from holding mental contents, we cannot answer this question by appealing to the exercise of psychological acts involving mental contents, such as thoughts, intentions, and the imagination (§2.3).

For the situated normativity account, being equipped with the relevant perceptual skills, an expert actor is naturally aware of his performance directly, affectively, and evaluatively in relation to the communal aesthetic norms, just as a Noh-appreciating member of the audience is naturally aware of a performance directly, affectively, and evaluatively in light of the same aesthetic norms. Neither the actor nor the audience needs to do something special to enter this mode of perception. Rather, they are both trained to perceive performances spontaneously in this way through an extended process of perceptual learning.

The situated normativity account, accordingly, will answer the how question by approaching it on different timescales. It will do so in two ways, with reference to a longer timescale of the actor's history of training and with reference to a shorter timescale focussed on actions preparatory to a specific performance. Taking the first, we note that expert actors can see their own performance in terms of *riken no ken* thanks largely to their years of training in Noh performance. Training in Noh tends to be conducted through imparting light instructions. Mentors typically give broad rather than detailed feedback on a disciple's attempt at dancing a performance. Yet over time, trained disciples gradually develop a spontaneous habit of distributing their attention to the appropriate aspects or the relevant affordances of the situation. Their cultivated affective sensibility eventually helps them react spontaneously and affectively to ongoing performances in ways that well-align with aesthetic judgments based on aesthetic norms shared within the Noh community. In short, Noh actors undergo an implicit and/or active attunement of their sensorimotor capacities to the traditional norms of the practice. Our account thus acknowledges that actors come to adopt a *riken no ken* on a timescale of individual developmental history.

Turning to the second, shorter timescale, actors need to prepare themselves for upcoming performances beforehand. For instance, if an actor is fatigued from a long travel to the performance venue, they can be too distracted by their poor bodily condition to tell if the felt discomfort is an instance of directed discontent concerning the poor aesthetic quality of the performance, or simply a bodily discomfort due to fatigue. This shows that one way in which actors can facilitate their entrance into *riken no ken* during the performance is to take appropriate measures to keep their physical condition in good shape, starting with banal routines, such as going to bed early the night before.

Finally, on this account, *riken no ken* can easily co-exist with *mushin* in an expert mind. In *riken no ken*, expert Noh actors experience their ongoing performance in terms of direct affective perception of the entire situation that includes both the performance and its embedding context. In the best cases, this situated self-awareness arises and shapes their performance spontaneously out of their cultivated habits. Thus, the actors need not exercise any mental action that will prevent them from keeping their minds empty. In short, they will embody a state of mind characterized by the co-existence of *riken no ken* and *mushin*.

6 Conclusion

In this paper, we reconstructed Zeami's concept of *riken no ken* by drawing on the notion of *situated normativity* developed in recent embodied and ecological theories of cognition. According to Zeami, *riken no ken* is a mode of awareness in which expert Noh actors are aware of their own performance from a perspective shared with their audience. Many Zeami scholars envision *riken no ken* as a form of imagination, where the actor reproduces the audience's perspective on the performance in his imagination. However, these imagination-based accounts do not square well with Zeami's claim that *riken no ken* co-exists with *mushin* in expert minds.

"Situated normativity" describes the fact that well-cultivated agents can perform normative actions unreflectively based on direct affective perceptions of affordances. By applying this to Noh performance, we reconstructed *riken no ken* as a form of direct affective perception. On the situated normativity account of *riken no ken*, expert Noh actors experience the performance "with the same mind as the audience" not by imagining the audience's external point of view, but by approaching the situation that encompasses the ongoing performance through an aesthetic perspective cultivated and shared within the Noh community. Expert actors adopt *riken no ken* not by using their imaginative skills on the spot, but by cultivating perceptual skills that allow them to attune themselves well to the situation over the course of lifelong training in the art. *Riken no ken* construed as direct affective perception can co-exist with *mushin* as it by no means requires the actor to entertain specific thoughts, intentions, or imaginations in their mind.

How general is this account of expert mind? Is *riken no ken* considered as a form of direct social perception a mode of self-awareness unique to Noh performance? Or, is it also manifested in other forms of expert artistic performances? How about expert athletic performances? In this regard, it is noteworthy that phenomenological accounts of contemporary musical performance describe similar forms of awareness. For example, Hytönen-Ng (2016) reports that the experience of musical flow in modern jazz performance typically involves both a sense of being a "medium" playing the music "without any conscious effort" and a sense of detachment comparable to "out-of-body experiences" (p. 83); one musician even reports of having felt as if he was "in the audience watching' himself playing" (p. 85) during a flow. Based on a studious interview of the Danish String Quartet, Høffding (2019) argues that there is a form of musical absorption, which he calls "ex-static absorption", in which the performer gains a sense of overseeing the entire situation into its every detail, while also retaining a sense of being deeply immersed in the present.²⁰ These accounts are strikingly similar to Zeami's account of expertise in terms of both *mushin* and *riken no ken*, suggesting its general applicability across different times, cultures, and art forms.

Finally, we developed a novel conception of *riken no ken* by adverting to the theory of situated normativity, but there is a sense in which these concepts are mutually

²⁰ Høffding (2019) suggests that expert players undergoing ex-static absorption can hold the overseeing and the immersive forms of awareness in a single performance by swiftly switching between them (p. 86). This may stand in tension with the situated normativity account developed in this paper that depicts *riken no ken* as something that is realized simultaneously with *mushin* in the expert actor's consciousness. Yet a careful comparative analysis will be needed to determine the issue.

illuminating. Existing accounts of situated normativity tend to highlight the ways in which an individual agent's unreflective normative behaviour is sustained by perceptual or sensorimotor skills cultivated through practice. By viewing the matter in relation to *riken no ken*, however, it becomes evident that these unreflective skills are also foundational to the enactment of a shared normative perspective.

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