

Engaging the power of the theatrical event

by

William Weigler
B.A., Oberlin College, 1982

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

In the Department of Theatre

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University of Victoria

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Abstract

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In this dissertation, I advance the question of what it means for applied theatre artists to give voice to the community members with whom they work. The study engages with some of the ethical and aesthetic tensions that emerge when one group of people (artists) is entrusted with giving dramatic form to the lived experience of another group (community members). The central premise of the dissertation is that when community participants increase their independent capacity to devise dynamic and compelling theatre, they achieve greater agency. Using a grounded theory analysis, I theorize qualities and characteristics that contribute to the staging of aesthetically arresting theatre, organized into a conceptual lexicon. This praxis-based study is intended to enable applied theatre practitioners to more directly give voice to their community partners. The dissertation presents a vocabulary that offers community participants and professional artists a mutually understood language with which to engage the power of the theatrical event.

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Dedication

The eminent theatre scholar Marvin Carlson once reflected upon how much he treasures those rare, memorable moments in theatre that produce among audience members something akin to an epiphany. This dissertation is dedicated to all those who, like Professor Carlson, go to the theatre in the hope that they will be fortunate enough to encounter a luminous and unforgettable experience.

On a more personal note, I also dedicate this work to the memory of Lisa Barnett. As the chief editor of the drama division at Heinemann publishing company, Lisa was responsible for opening the door to scores of new authors, enabling them to bring their diverse and innovative voices to the field of theatre theory and practice. As my editor at Heinemann she was an absolute joy to work with—gracious, exceedingly smart, and always marvelously funny. Lisa died in the spring of 2006, following an extended struggle with breast cancer that led to brain cancer. She is deeply missed by all who knew her, though her spirit remains with us. Lisa used to sign off her e-mails “Onward!” I now sign off that way as well so that I may keep her memory alive in my heart.

Onward!

Some notes on usage

Throughout this dissertation, I describe imagined scenarios in which community members devise plays in collaboration with professional theatre directors, playwrights, and designers. For the sake of economy in language, I have referred to an entire creative team working in concert simply as “the actors” or “the ensemble.”

When describing situations that are gender neutral, I avoid defaulting to the use of masculine pronouns or awkward alternatives to language-based gender bias such as “him or her” or “s/he.” Instead, I have either constructed these sentences to employ third person plural, or I have alternated between use of masculine and feminine pronouns from one instance to the next.

If you have come to help me you are wasting your time—if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.

Lila Watson
(as cited in Levins Morales, 2009)

Introduction

Learning a word once changed my life. Later, my life changed again when I encountered a simple sentence that challenged the very basis of something I thought I knew well. This dissertation is about the power of words, and the concepts embodied within them, to open up a world of possibilities. At fifteen, like many teenagers, I was drawn to the cause of working for social justice. At the same time, I was developing what was to become a life-long passion for making theatre. I wanted to be involved in theatre that promoted positive change in people's lives. The political theatre I saw failed to impress me with its easy satire performed for sympathetic audiences, and so I grew to believe that one had to choose either to be a theatre professional or to work toward progressive social change. I could not see a satisfactory way to merge the two until I came upon that single word that changed everything for me. It was a French word that describes artists who apply their skills and talents to support the cultural expression and social health of a community. The word was *animateur*.

Having a name for that fusion of artist and community activist created a conceptual space for me to enact it in my life. I called myself an animateur, and for many years I worked as a theatre director, producer, and playwright with intercultural youth groups, hearing-impaired teens, people with limited economic resources, and indigenous communities. I righteously saw myself as contributing to these community members' "empowerment." Then, one day, I encountered the quote reproduced in the epigraph above: "If you have come

to help me you are wasting your time—if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.” The raw clarity of those words left me thunderstruck. Was my “helping” misdirected? What would it mean to have *my liberation* bound up with the community with whom I work? What would an authentically reciprocal relationship between artists and an ensemble of community members look like?

In recent years, I have searched for answers to these questions. In my theatre practice and in my writing (2001), I have explored strategies that address what I perceive as an imbalance of power between theatre artists and community members in the creation of original work. I have sought to create opportunities for non-professional ensembles to elevate their own capacities to convey complex and nuanced ideas on stage and to assume greater control over deciding how their cultural material and stories can be translated into aesthetically engaging drama.

With this project, I have pursued the notion that a single word or idea can indeed open up a world of possibilities. Through an inductive study of exceptionally powerful moments in theatre performances, a theory emerged which enabled me to develop a lexicon that puts names to conditions and qualities associated with these aesthetically arresting moments of theatre staging. This lexicon is intended to give artists and community members a shared vocabulary that will allow them to engage as equitable partners in the creative co-authorship and staging of dynamic and compelling plays.

Chapter One

Theoretical Foundations

Overview

In this dissertation I advance the question of what it means for applied theatre artists to give voice to the community members with whom they work. The study engages with some of the ethical and aesthetic tensions that emerge when one group of people (artists) is entrusted with giving dramatic form to the lived experience of another group (community members). These tensions are rooted in the premise that the community participants' access to their own cultural histories and circumstances associates them primarily with the *content* of the play, while access to aesthetic vision or *form* is considered primarily the domain of the artists. Individual community members devising an applied theatre play may be excellent storytellers, but to bring their stories to the stage in a compelling way, community members typically rely on the professional artists' aesthetic vision and theatrical expertise. The partnership is understood as a marriage of two parties contributing their separate fields of knowledge to a mutual enterprise. The artist's act of giving voice is therefore constituted as creating opportunities for the community participants' "voices" to be heard through the creation and performance of a play. In this dissertation I suggest how this relationship based on divided fields of expertise may be re-constituted into more equitably shared creative co-authorship.

I address this challenge by turning to Paulo Freire's (2000) pedagogical model, first introduced in translation in 1970, in which giving voice to students is achieved by teaching them to read and to write. Freire contends that it is achieving literacy—mastery of comprehension and construction of language—that allows students to meet teachers as fully

functioning equals, enabling their joint investigation and production of new knowledge. I propose that in the context of devising applied theatre plays, community members' fluency with a conceptual language of "theatrical" literacy will enable them to engage more fully with professional artists in the act of creative co-authorship.

In the *Rhetoric* (trans. 2007), Aristotle presented a lexicon of rhetorical concepts that any person could draw upon to substantially increase the effectiveness of his public speech. The premise of this dissertation is that a theatrical parallel to Aristotle's *Rhetoric* could be applied in a similar fashion to increase community members' *agency*: their independent capacity to devise aesthetically compelling artistic works. In this way, applied theatre artists would more directly give voice to their community partners by sharing knowledge of how to engage the power of the theatrical event. A mutually understood vocabulary would offer community participants and their professional artist partners a common vocabulary with which to co-create applied theatre plays.

This praxis-based dissertation directly links theory to practical application. The central focus of the research is theorizing and constructing a conceptual vocabulary that can be used to teach theatrical literacy as I have framed it. The theory presented here, written from the perspective of an applied theatre director, playwright and producer, is intended to be of use to other applied theatre practitioners wishing to enter into a relationship of reciprocity with community participants in the creation and performance of plays.

Background on applied theatre

Professional applied theatre practitioners leverage the power of theatre to engage community members in participatory research, civic discourse, and the creative expression of

their cultural identities. The concept of “community” figures strongly in applied theatre work. The word generally refers to a group of people bound by a common link. It can include individuals who have a mutual association with a profession or a political orientation, an identity (ethnic, racial, gender, sexual orientation), a religious faith or kinship, common circumstances (economic, age, health status, etc.), or a common association with the place that all the individuals in the group call home (Cohen-Cruz, 2005; Mattessich, 1997).

Applied theatre is a relatively recently coined “umbrella term” (Ackroyd, 2000) that describes a field known by a variety of names, including: community-based or community-engaged theatre; community cultural development; community animation (from the French *animation socio-culturelle*); popular or people’s theatre; and grassroots theatre, to name a few. The lack of a universally accepted term is the result of the field’s diverse roots. The contemporary practice of applied theatre can be traced to school-based Theatre-In-Education and Drama-In-Education (TIE/DIE) movements; to public health and safety awareness projects (including performance-based educational programs in ‘developing’ countries); to civic pageants and commemorations; and to therapeutic activities designed to engage the elderly, the incarcerated, or the physically or developmentally disabled. The work is also closely associated with political theatre, which has made and continues to make powerful use of the performing arts in opposition to social injustice, environmental degradation, and war. Applied theatre projects enable stories of communities often ignored or misrepresented in the mainstream media to be heard and acknowledged. (For additional background on the theory and practice of applied theatre, see Boon & Plastow, 2004; Cohen-Cruz, 2005; Haedicke & Nellhaus, 2000; Kuflinec, 2003; Kuppers, 2007; Leonard & Kilkelly, 2006; Prendergast & Saxton 2009; Prentki & Selman, 2000.)

The value of creative work produced by the plurality of a society's members is a recurring theme in the field of applied theatre. Haedicke and Nellhaus (2000) link cultural production through the arts to critical pedagogy, arguing that when individuals engage in making art about their lives, they gain opportunities to develop greater understanding of their own roots, rights, and the historic contributions of their cultures (p. 14). Following Freire, Haedicke and Nellhaus further maintain that strengthening one's cultural self-understanding directly or indirectly leads to greater agency: an increased capacity to assert one's rights and express one's perspectives (pp. 18-19). Cultural theorist Arlene Goldbard (2006) extends this aspect of critical pedagogy. She suggests that the very process of creative cultural production—making art—inherently offers opportunities for engaged political action and awakens one's capacity for social critique (p. 20). Creative cultural expression is additionally recognized for its value as a catalyst to promote civic discourse in a democratic society (Korza, 2005). Kershaw (1999) elevates the significance of creative cultural expression, proclaiming that, in a postmodern age, fostering dialogic exchange among those with different cultural perspectives becomes a radical act (p. 20).

Relationships between artists and community members in applied theatre

Issues of accountability and ethics are necessarily at the centre of applied theatre work. Goldbard (2006) identifies a defining feature of applied theatre artists as their capacity to maintain a “dual role,” accountable both to the needs of the art form and to the needs of the community with whom they work (p. 20). She insists that community-based (applied theatre) artists who maintain excessive control over the work risk violating a core emancipatory principle of the field, reducing the contribution of community members'

participation to the equivalent of contract labourers following an architect's specifications (p. 82). Cohen-Cruz (2005) also stresses the importance of community-based arts practice that is dialogic and reciprocal, involving meaningful exchange of perspectives and experiences among all members who share authority as equal stakeholders in the creation of the work (p. 95). This ethos of reciprocity is reminiscent of the phrase "cooperativeness in execution" coined by Egon Guba (1999), a pioneer in qualitative research fieldwork. Guba explains:

By cooperativeness in execution, I [mean] to indicate a style of inquiry in which there is no functional distinction between the researcher and the researched (subjects, in conventional parlance). They are all defined as participants, and they all have equal footing in determining what questions will be asked, what information will be analyzed, and how conclusions and courses of action will be determined. These participants, sometimes called stakeholders or local members, may include some with special training in inquiry, but if so, these specialists have no privilege in determining how the study will go; all participants share the perquisites of privilege. (pp. xi-xii)

While Guba's characterization of cooperativeness in execution describes relationships in participatory action research (PAR) projects in the social sciences, his dedication to sharing "the perquisites of privilege" undeniably echoes Cohen-Cruz' commitment to reciprocity. Hal Foster (1996) specifically draws a link between social science research and community-based arts, warning that artists may inadvertently mirror retrograde models established by traditional ethnographic researchers, such as treating community participants as the "subjects" of the work and assuming undue authority over them. Haedicke and Nellhaus boldly assert that well-intentioned artists, creating projects drawn and developed from the stories of marginalized groups, may replicate colonizing behaviour if they carelessly appropriate participants' stories as raw material to be fashioned into productions that essentially reflect their own artistic or political agendas. "Just recovering repressed stories," they write, "certainly may feel good to those finally given the opportunity to speak, [but]

does little to change the established power dynamic, especially if the theater/cultural worker is there to plunder, no matter how subtly” (2000, p. 15).

It is difficult to imagine that applied theatre playwrights would deliberately misrepresent the stories of the community members with whom they are collaborating. Despite their best intentions, however, artists may inadvertently misrepresent stories due to limitations inherent in their status as “outsiders.” Uma Narayan (1988), writing about outsider/insider relationships, admits that while outsiders may possess a clearer vision of the broader theoretical picture than insiders, she claims that they cannot truly understand an insider’s perception on their own. If they rely on their own observations, it will likely be clouded by layers of their own experience. She offers the following illustration to clarify her perspective:

An outsider, when told about or present at an incident that is racist, sexist, etc. most often does feel anger at the perpetrator and sympathy with the victim. The victim, however, may feel a complex and jumbled array of emotions: anger at the perpetrator, a deep sense of humiliation, a sense of being ‘soiled’ by the incident, momentary hatred for the whole group of which the perpetrator is a part, rage at the sort of history that has produced and sustains such attitudes, anger and shame at one’s powerlessness to retaliate, a strong sense of solidarity with those who face the same problems, and maybe even pity for the stupidity of the perpetrator. The outsider, not having been at the receiving end of the oppression, may fail to wholly grasp its effects on its victims and his understanding may, therefore, fail to do justice to the costs of that experience. (39)

An outsider listening to a description of such an event may well believe he understands the teller’s core intent when he is actually registering only certain elements of the story, or unintentionally filtering what he hears through his personal perceptions and history. If that outsider were a playwright, his feelings of anger and sympathy would undoubtedly influence the shape and colour of his script. In an applied theatre context, he could miss out on

significant richness and complexity by basing his script on his perception of her story. Lost in the equation would be the storyteller's opportunity to expand her personal agency, by not only telling her story but also by sharing decisions about what elements in it ought to be emphasized and, indeed, how to stage it in such a way that her experience is communicated according to her understanding of it. Only then will she be truly representing herself in the partnership. The negotiation of clarity in understanding and achievement of balance between the voice and visions of the community members, and the voice and visions of the professional artists forms a central tension in collaborative community-based arts.

Relationships between teachers and students in Freirean pedagogy

Operating within a pedagogical context, Freire anchors the work of teachers in a relationship of reciprocity with students. For Freire, teachers and students “meet to *name* the world in order to transform it” (p. 167). Freire emphasizes the word *name* in his text, but it is the word *meet* that reveals what is especially radical in his pedagogy. As an educator, Freire exhibits great faith and trust in the creativity and intelligence of students. He unabashedly expresses the need for teachers to approach this co-intentional relationship with humility, respect, and even love. In a Freirean pedagogical model, teachers are not working in service to students' aspirations, nor are teachers imposing a plan or program upon students. Rather, they share equal status with students as co-investigators in a mutual endeavour.

This co-relational status with students is not intended to dilute a teacher's high level of professional expertise, nor deny acknowledgment of a teacher's position as a leader. Freire's unequivocal commitment is for teachers to forge authentic partnerships with students. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he points to the dangers and what he deems the

“false radicality” of teachers who present students with the illusion of participation rather than making a full commitment to share the transformational process of learning with them (p. 126). This philosophical foundation is perhaps summed up most succinctly in his declaration, “We cannot enter the struggle as objects in order later to become subjects.” That is, if the aim of the work is for students to claim their own voices—their own authority as subjects in the world, not someone else’s objects—their status as subjects must be embodied into the learning process itself. The teachers must not treat students as objects who achieve their subject-status only at the conclusion of the work. In Freire’s pedagogical model, the act of “giving voice” to students requires recasting the traditional view of teacher-as-helper into a reciprocally beneficial project. In this way, students are considered as subjects from the outset, working in authentic collaboration with teachers.

Paulo Freire and the teaching of literacy

In Freire’s view, co-relational status between teachers and students is achieved by apprentic[ing] students into a new body of language” (Macedo, 2009, p. 19). Henry Giroux (1987) explains how achieving literacy is resolutely emancipatory:

Literacy for Freire is inherently a political project in which men and women assert their right and responsibility not only to read, understand, and transform their own experiences, but also to reconstitute their relationship with the wider society. In this sense, literacy is fundamental to aggressively constructing one’s voice as part of a wider project of possibility and empowerment. (p. 7)

As students increase their conceptual understanding of the ways in which language defines their lives, they transform their existing knowledge into what Freire calls *conscientização*: a deeper and more conscious attitude of awareness and understanding. Achieving literacy gives students the capacity to formulate, articulate, and thereby claim

self-definition on their own terms. They learn to “name the word,” which in turn enables them to “name the world” (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 98). To understand what it means to “name the word,” consider how oppression may be experienced opaquely as a condition of one’s life until a person develops the capacity to give a name to oppression. Assigning a name to what was only a feeling allows a person to formulate and define the concept of oppression as a social mechanism leveraged by one people over another. Once transformed into a knowable concept, the condition of oppression is recognized as something alterable. “Naming the world” involves putting names to all of one’s experiences in the world, rendering them as knowable concepts that may be defined according to one’s own understanding. This is the process of developing one’s agency.

What it means to have *voice*

Drawing from Freire’s work, Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren (1986) define having “voice” as people having “the discursive means to make themselves heard—listened to and understood” (p. 235). This adds a significant dimension to the project of teaching literacy. “The discursive means to make oneself heard” implies that literacy must offer individuals not only the capacity to examine and coherently articulate their self-identity, but also the capacity to express themselves in such a way that listeners will grasp what is being said. Applied theatre plays that give voice to marginalized groups’ self-defined interpretations of their cultural perspectives often find those voices competing with, and overwhelmed by, the powerful force of externally imposed characterizations of their cultural identities. Theatrically presented interpretations of cultural perspectives that counter dominant cultural perspectives are likely to be dismissed, disregarded, disbelieved, or simply not understood

(see Carstarphen, 2003). Given the circumstances of an audience's resistance to new perspectives, Julie Salverson (1996) emphasizes the importance of considering how applied theatre artists and community participants must negotiate what is required to establish "conditions of reception that will urge and allow the eventual audience to be affected and changed by what they hear" (p. 182). Indeed, Michael Etherton (2004) describes how one of his chief goals in applied theatre work with marginalized street children in South Asia is to help the youth to delight, challenge, command the attention of, and communicate with their audiences.

***Vorsicht* or "fore-sight"**

My interest in developing a vocabulary of theatrical staging that would enable applied theatre project participants to present their voices—their cultural perspectives—in such a way that audiences would "hear" them, led me to design an inductive study. I grounded my research in an analysis of brief moments in performance that a diverse pool of theatre scholars, practitioners, professional critics, and other theatregoers reported as having prompted a deeply felt insight, or the radical re-assessment of a long-held assumption. By compiling and analyzing a data set of experiences in the theatre that had, by the spectators' own admissions, dramatically affected and changed them, I hoped to gain insight into theatre staging that effectively promotes deepened understanding or shifts in appraisal among spectators.

In the course of systematically analyzing these many remarkable stories, and reflecting on the data as I constructed theory about them, I made a surprising discovery. The findings led me to realize that the effectiveness of the moments in performance described in

the data were not based in some kind of uniquely theatrical mode of persuasion, i.e., arguments delivered forcefully through the aesthetics of dramatic presentation. Contrary to my expectations, the staging choices made by performers, directors, playwrights and designers created revelatory impacts on the spectators by inhibiting the ease with which spectators habitually projected their predetermined interpretations onto what they were witnessing. This idea emerged as the most fitting explanation of the phenomenon I was examining. The staging choices described in the data effectively countered what is a widely discussed and theorized socio-psychological process in the human experience. Through a variety of means, these staging choices can be seen as interfering with what philosopher Martin Heidegger (1962) calls *vorsicht*, the human tendency to allow every direct engagement with another person or experience to be distorted through a lens of prejudgment. The English translation of *vorsicht* is the hyphenated term *fore-sight*, which should not be confused with “foresight,” meaning “prescience” or “prudence.” Heidegger’s term *fore-sight* carries the sense of a projected image thrust in front of one’s otherwise clear view. Heidegger’s 1962 translators add that *vorsicht* is alternately rendered in English as “what we see in advance,” and they explain that a related term, *vorgriff*, “what we grasp in advance” or “fore-conception,” is associated with the German verb *vorgreifen*, meaning “to anticipate” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 191). *Fore-sight* “takes the first cut” of any individual’s experience, imposing pre-determined attitudes and conceptualizations upon it that shape and direct the individual’s interpretations, responses and attitudes (p. 191).

Educator Jack Mezirow (1991) maintains that this human habit of ceding direct assessment of an encounter to one’s preconceptions develops very early in life. Erving Goffman’s (1974) claim that human beings are always asking the question: “What is it that’s

going on here?” (p. 8) is part of what Mezirow sees as the human need to assess the terrain of daily experience in order to give it coherence. These assessments we assign into categories, assembling what Mezirow calls “meaning structures,” and we progressively learn to rely on these structures to help us develop expectations about new experiences we encounter. He argues that assessing every new thing and person we face can feel overwhelming, and so we create shortcuts to perception in order to reduce the dizzying onslaught of new information. As we mature, it quickly becomes far easier to rely on the meaning structures we have created than to be openly receptive toward what actually stands before us. Mezirow (1991) writes, “We allow our meaning structures to diminish our awareness of how things really are in order to avoid anxiety, creating a zone of blocked attention and self-deception” (p. 5). Echoing Heidegger’s concept of fore-sight, Mezirow claims that as we engage with everything we encounter, we look for clues that will quickly guide us in identifying the category to which we presume it belongs. Once categorized, we adopt attitudes toward it we have already associated with that category.

The insidiousness of fore-sight is that we are rarely conscious of it happening. We consider our projected assessments and attitudes to be accurate, well justified, and obvious. This creates a significant barrier for applied theatre performers to overcome. The performers may devise a play that “names the world” according to their own cultural perspectives, but the spectators’ fore-sight will stand obdurately in the way of a direct encounter with the performers’ intended meaning.

Through a variety of means, the memorable moments in performance described in the data temporarily disrupted the ease with which spectators could project their preconceptions onto what they were witnessing. As a result, spectators were rendered more receptive to

experiencing a direct encounter with the performers' "voices." The capacity of certain staging choices to dislodge the grip of the spectators' fore-sight emerged as a significant prerequisite for a perceptual clearing of the way for performers to be heard, listened to, and understood by their audiences.

In addition to assigning pre-conceived meaning to an encounter, fore-sight can also be understood as leading spectators to limit their personal emotional investment in the object of that encounter. If an individual already knows how she feels about something, her level of investment in that thing has been pre-determined. I call this aspect of fore-sight "contain and dismiss." The ready assignation of a category "contains" the experience as something familiar, allowing the individual to "dismiss" any investment in it that deviates from her predetermined attitude. In the data, many staging choices succeeded in subverting the spectators' tendency to dismiss by introducing elements that substantially increased the spectators' level of personal emotional investment in the encounter. When the spectators found themselves more deeply invested in the events on stage, the intensity of their cognitive or emotional interest eclipsed the power of fore-sight to contain and dismiss the experience as something already understood. These staging choices also served to render the spectators more receptive to experiencing a direct encounter with the performers' "voices."

Rationale for the study

The research findings complement existing theoretical inquiries into the introduction and reception of meaning in art, literature, and performance. Theatre semiotics addresses how meaning is encoded into a work by the artist and subsequently "read" or "decoded" by the spectator (see Aston & Savona, 1991; De Marinis, 1993; Elam, 1980; Pavis, 1982;

Ubersfeld, 1999). In contrast, proponents of aesthetic reception theory (see Ben Chaim, 1984), aesthetic response (see Rosenblatt, 1978/1994), and audience reception theory (see Bennett, 1990), all assert that the meaning of an artwork is generated in the very act of its intersection with the spectators, whose prior individual experiences and judgments, their “horizons of expectation” (Jauss, 1982), shape and influence the meaning they make from the work. In all these theoretical orientations, the primary concern is how meaning is made—produced and then interpreted—in an artistic milieu. What sets this study apart is that I have not examined the conveyance and interpretation of meaning per se. The research reveals how the orchestration of staging can serve to deepen spectators’ *access* to meaning making and interpretation by enabling a less mediated encounter between performers and spectators. It is a study of mechanisms that establish preconditions to increase spectators’ receptivity toward engaging with new ideas and new perspectives by inhibiting the governing influence of the spectators’ fore-sight.

Aesthetic approaches to countering the grip of fore-sight

In poetry and fiction, as well as in theatre, others have grappled with the challenge of subverting the reader’s and spectator’s presuppositions and preconceptions. As early as 1805, in his “Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*,” Wordsworth (1805/1987) spoke of the poet’s need to defamiliarize the habitual and the everyday in order that it can be “presented to the mind in an unusual way” (pp. 20-21). Variations on this notion became an essential aesthetic technique for the Russian formalists, exemplified by Viktor Shklovsky; for the German theatre theorist and practitioner, Bertolt Brecht; for the novelist, James Joyce; and for the essayist, Arthur Koestler. All sought to understand what mechanisms might effectively

counter habitual modes of perception and allow the reader or the spectator to see the world afresh by overcoming the pervasive tendency to contain and dismiss.

Shklovsky's *ostranenie*

For the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky, the potential of literary devices to enliven readers' sense of cognitive and emotional awareness was paramount. In *The Theory of Prose* (1925/1990), he describes how swiftly perception is dulled by habit. He writes: "After being perceived several times, objects acquire the status of 'recognition.' An object appears before us. We know it's there but we do not see it, and, for that reason, we can say nothing about it" (p. 6). Shklovsky considers that as we become accustomed to something, we no longer see it as remarkable. It becomes, as I have described above, "contained" as something known to us, and then easily "dismissed" as not worthy of any personal investment in its uniqueness. Shklovsky believes that art has the potential to reverse this state of inattentiveness. In what may be his most often quoted statement, he declares that the purpose of art is "to make a stone feel *stony*" (p. 6). He describes a variety of techniques designed to stir readers or spectators into actually "seeing" not just "recognizing" what they have heretofore dismissed. Chief among these techniques is the use of *preim ostranenie*, which in English means literally "device for making strange" (Brecht, 1964 p. 99). The term, often shortened to *ostranenie*, has been variously translated as "estrangement," "defamiliarization," and "enstrangement" (Sher, 1990, pp. xvii-xix). Shklovsky fills his signature work *The Theory of Prose* with dozens of literary examples of *ostranenie*. Unconventional stylistic devices seen in the narrative descriptions and plot constructions of these writings are designed to dislocate readers' superficial assessments of what is

happening, forcing them to engage with the material in fresh ways. Significantly, Shklovsky scholar Gerald Bruns (1990) notes that the act of making the stone stony involves more than just relying on art to intensify what is dull. It involves “[chipping] away the *inscription* someone carved on [the stone]” (p. xiii, italics added). In other words, the stone is not a neutral object that has faded in meaning; it has been assigned some meaning other than stone. To enliven a vital connection with its stoniness, that superimposed meaning must first be effaced. In the context of this study, heightening the dramatic interest is not enough. One must find a way to chip away at the pernicious inscription carved into it by fore-sight.

Brecht’s *verfremdungseffekt*

Among Bertolt Brecht’s many contributions to twentieth-century dramaturgy was his extension of the formalist notion of *ostranenie* into the realm of theatre. Like *ostranenie*, Brecht’s *verfremdungseffekt* has been given various translations, including “alienation effect,” “defamiliarization effect,” “estrangement,” “strange-making effect,” “A-effect,” and “V-effect” (See Willett, 1959 p. 177). The term describes staging devices that interfere with viewers’ expectations by presenting common behaviours, actions, and characterizations in unfamiliar ways. Alternatively, things that an audience may consider strange and unknowable are rendered on stage in ways that seem unexpectedly familiar. Like Shklovsky, Brecht believes that familiarity with a thing dulls our ability to see it for what it is, until soon it no longer strikes us as unusual in any way (see Jameson, 1998 p. 84). However, while Shklovsky sees *ostranenie* as a means of awakening vital connections with the world, Brecht, informed by Marxism, is committed to calling spectators’ attention to their casual acceptance of oppressive social relations. The use of *verfremdungseffekt* is one part of Brecht’s political

project to reveal the unacknowledged workings of ideology. Oppressive social relationships typically taken for granted as normal and natural are presented with unconventional twists that encourage viewers to critically assess what they see.

Joyce's *aesthetic arrest* and *quidditas*

James Joyce's novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), was preceded by a draft of the book (unpublished during the author's lifetime) called *Stephen Hero* (1944). In both versions, in slightly different ways, the protagonist Stephen elucidates his concept of the principles at work behind the experience of having an epiphany. In an essay on *Portrait*, Joseph Campbell (2003) praises Joyce for an exceptional articulation of what he considers to be a remarkable theory of aesthetics. Linking it to Dante's achievement in *Vita Nuova*, Campbell characterizes both Joyce's and Dante's sense of epiphany as the experience of "being held in *esthetic arrest*" (p. 23).¹ Sonja Kufinec (2003), who learned of the term from director Ann Bogart, characterizes aesthetic arrest in theatre as "moments in a performance when one is stopped in one's tracks" (p. 17). These commentaries by Campbell, Kufinec and Bogart call attention to the fact that the word "arrest" has more than one meaning. "Arrest" signifies a sense of being held in suspension, and also signifies something in motion being brought to sudden a stop.

Kufinec continues by citing Suzanne Lacy's (1995) belief that spectators experience a sense of "arrest" in theatre as a result of these moments in performance "reassembling meaning in a way that, at that moment, appears *new*" (p. 44 as cited in Kufinec, 2003, p. 17). Lacy's assessment of arrest echoes Joyce's claim (through the voice of his protagonist

¹ Campbell coined the term using Joyce's early twentieth-century spelling of the word "esthetic." In this

Stephen) that what produces an epiphany is a person's sudden encounter with an object's *quidditas*. In Stephen's translation, the Latin *quidditas* becomes "whatness." *Quidditas* incorporates both senses of arrest: being held in suspension and being stopped in one's tracks. In Joyce's estimation, an observer experiences an epiphany when he suddenly apprehends the absolute whatness of a thing as distinct from everything else surrounding it, and then perceives how perfectly all of its elements combine to make it unique. This represents a distinct departure from the use of *ostranenie* or *verfremdungseffekt* to render the familiar strange or the strange familiar. In this case, the mechanism that cuts through the numbed perception and casual dismissal of fore-sight is the shock of perceiving a thing that so astonishingly exhibits its quintessential whatness, all preconceptions about it are eclipsed. Its perfect whatness arrests by utterly captivating one's attention while at the same time it arrests the projection of all other preconceptions. The thing thus appears as newly experienced (see Joyce, 1916, p. 250).

Koestler's *bisociation*

In *The Act of Creation* (1964), Arthur Koestler coins the term *bisociation* to denote what is colloquially called an "Aha moment" (p. 35). *Bisociation* functions in a very specific way to make an observer realize that her own assumptions have inhibited her ability to see the obvious. A narrative or visual image is presented to an observer with details that tacitly imply it is associated with one category of meaning. Then, at some point, a further detail is revealed which suddenly makes it clear to the observer that she has entirely misread what in retrospect seems obvious: all the details observed up to that point are also associated with an

alternative category. The power of bisociation is the way in which it forces the observer to reflect, often with shock or delight, on the limitations of her own preconceptions.

Summary

Aesthetic arrest, as I have framed it in this study, describes the experience of a spectator whose predetermined attitudes toward the performance as an event, and toward the content of the play, are held in abeyance by something that is integral to the aesthetic presentation of the work. “Arrest” in these instances carries one of two meanings. The forward momentum of a spectator’s assumptions may be arrested in the sense of being brought abruptly to a halt, or arrest may signify the spectator’s experience of feeling so fully captivated by the absolute clarity of what he sees that his preconceptions about it are eclipsed.

In this section, I have described various means and mechanisms that counter the human tendency to cede interpretation of experience to one’s preconceptions and assumptions. Shklovsky was interested in the literary device of *ostranenie* as a way to re-awaken a more vivid connection with the world around us. For Brecht, the use of *verfremdungseffekt* and other staging devices were intended to disrupt the ease with which ideology goes unnoticed in the public’s consciousness. Joyce’s articulation of the encounter with the quintessential whatness of a thing—its *quidditas*—was presented as a means to shatter the observer’s preconceptions of it. Koestler mapped the mechanism of bisociation to show how observers may be abruptly thrust into self-reflective reassessment by collapsing their confidence in the certainty of their assumptions. In my initial query to potential participants, I used the term “aesthetic arrest” as an open-ended invitational prompt without

having (or offering them) a clear idea of what aesthetic arrest entailed. Through the course of engaging with the data in this study, I observed theatrical staging choices that drew upon one or more of the key mechanisms at work in *ostranenie*, *verfremdungseffekt*, *quidditas*, and *bisociation*, yet the constant factor that emerged in the experience of aesthetic arrest may be distinguished from all four of these. Within the context of a theatrical performance, the experience of aesthetic arrest improves the potential for human encounters. In short, by circumventing the spectators' fore-sight, the experience of aesthetic arrest promotes a more direct relationship between those in the audience and the lives and stories of those on the stage.

Purpose and significance of the study, and the research questions

This dissertation was conducted within the context of applied theatre, a field that involves the performing arts in the promotion of civic engagement, education, and emancipatory community development. I focus in particular on applied theatre projects in which professional theatre artists partner with members of a community to create plays about the community members' lives and cultural perspectives. The central premise of the dissertation is that when community participants increase their independent capacity to devise dynamic and compelling theatre, they achieve greater *agency*. That is, they increase their capacity for more equitable creative co-authorship with professional artists in joint artistic endeavors. Furthermore, my core assumption in the research is that exceptionally memorable moments of performance present uniquely theatrical modes of expression, which can be theorized and understood operationally. The purpose of the study, therefore, is to theorize the qualities and characteristics that contribute to the staging of exceptionally

engaging theatre so that a conceptual vocabulary may be developed and shared with community participants involved in applied theatre projects.

To generate a teachable conceptual vocabulary of theatrical expression, I began by compiling a large data set of moments in theatre performances that witnesses reported as having prompted either a sudden and unexpected emergence of a deeply felt insight, or a radical re-assessment of a long-held assumption. I then conducted an inductive analysis of the data, asking two questions:

- What patterns emerge among the staging choices described in these diverse accounts of aesthetic arrest in theatre performances?
- What do the emergent patterns reveal about the capacity of these staging choices to produce an experience of aesthetic arrest for spectators?

Structure of the dissertation:

Five categories of staging choices that arrest fore-sight

In the main body of the dissertation I present qualities and characteristics of five core categories that emerged from the data. They represent a conceptual vocabulary of means and mechanisms that dislodge the grip of fore-sight on theatre spectators. Together they constitute a lexicon intended to increase the capacity of applied theatre project participants, in collaboration with professional artists, to promote spectators' receptivity toward the performers' "voices" presented in a play. The five categories are presented respectively in five chapters. Because these categories are not rooted in any one specific discipline, I have not included a single literature review chapter. Instead, each chapter features a dedicated section called "Discussion" in which I engage with theoretical considerations external to the

data. The discussion sections are followed by sections called “Implications for teaching.” Since the overarching intent of this research project is to generate theory that will lead to a teachable vocabulary, these sections provide indications for how the theories and illustrations examined in each chapter may be recast in a pedagogical mode.

- Chapter 2, “Methods and Methodology,” gives an overview of my approach to the research questions, including a rationale for using grounded theory methodology, methods used in gathering and analyzing the data, and criteria used for evaluating the study.
- Chapter 3, “Subverting (or Reconfiguring) the Contracts,” describes staging choices that disrupt unspoken “contracts” between audience members and the theatre event that severely circumscribe the spectators’ relationship with the experience. Implicitly or explicitly subverting and reconfiguring these contracts fosters the potential for engagement between audience and actors that is less constrained by the spectators’ expectations and assumptions about the encounter.
- Chapter 4, “Compelling,” describes staging choices that draw the spectators more deeply into a relationship of caring about the characters and the material addressed in the plays. These staging choices incorporate qualities that are inherently compelling. Inclusion of these elements engages the spectators on an affective level, increasing and intensifying their emotional investment in the play.
- Chapter 5, “Gest,” describes staging choices that engage spectators on an affective level through the presentation of a character’s complex experience or relationship made manifest in a single gesture. As with Joyce’s quidditas, witnessing the

quintessential essence of a thing eclipses preconception, leading spectators to grasp a new or renewed comprehension of that thing.

- Chapter 6, “Heuristics,” describes theatre staging that is orchestrated to lead spectators to achieve insights directly, rather than as a result of witnessing insights the characters achieve.
- Chapter 7, “Touching the Live Wire,” describes staging choices that increase the spectators’ investment in the world of the play by bringing a “real life” sensibility to the fictional realm of a play.
- Chapter 8, “Conclusions and Implications,” summarizes the study’s six key discoveries, which offer new perspectives on: traditional conceptions of audience reception theory; the use of affect in relation to Brecht’s vision of the epic theatre spectator; the effectiveness of “ordinary” gestures, as distinguished from social gestures, to dispel spectators’ cultural preconceptions; the introduction of personal vulnerability on the part of actors to alter spectators’ relationship with the event; the use of Aristotle’s *anagnorisis* (recognition) to dispel cultural spectators’ preconceptions; and spectators’ perceptions of the difference between illusion and reality in performance. Additionally, chapter 8 clarifies the links between the five core categories in the study and describes the contributions this research makes to grounded theory methodology, applied theatre practice, and the field of radical pedagogy.

Chapter Two

Methods and Methodology

Introduction

In this chapter I offer a rationale for the use of qualitative analysis for the research project and demonstrate why a grounded theory methodology is the most appropriate fit. This is followed by a brief overview of grounded theory methodology, a summary of the methods employed to compile the data set, and an explanation of the strategies and procedures used for data analysis. I conclude by addressing criteria for evaluation.

Choice of methodology

There are a variety of ways a researcher could approach the challenge of creating a conceptual vocabulary of theatrical staging. One could formulate hypotheses based on the abundant theoretical literature on audience reception theory that addresses relationships between aesthetic choices made in the construction of artistic works and the reception of meaning experienced by spectators. I chose instead to approach this inquiry using an inductive analysis, examining multiple narrative descriptions of what I refer to as aesthetic arrest in the theatre. My own profound experiences with the phenomenon suggested that respondents' actual encounters with these memorable moments in performance would provide a valuable and innovative source of data for qualitative analysis.

Qualitative methodologies lend themselves to analysis of narrative descriptions in order to explore, conceptualize, and articulate “an intelligible, coherent and valid account” of something in the human experience (Dey, 1993, p. 52). Given a data set of multiple descriptions of aesthetic arrest, a researcher could produce one or more phenomenological

analyses of the more richly described accounts, assessing the meaning that the experience had for each informant. A researcher interested in accounts of aesthetic arrest occurring in different eras or locales could identify a few well-documented instances in the data and then write case studies to determine common or contrasting features across time and geography. A thematic analysis (or interpretive content analysis) could be especially useful to identify relationships, links and contrasts among a broad range of descriptions in the data.

Several factors informed my choice of methodology. First, I required an approach that would enable me to reconcile the tension embedded in the premise of this study between postmodernist and positivist sensibilities. I accept a postmodernist position that a theatre performance is experienced uniquely by each spectator. Conversely, I remain committed to a positivist belief that one can identify conditions prevalent in certain staging choices that will explain and, to a certain degree, predict a spectator's response to a performance.

For me, a positivist position is manifest in joke telling. A joke teller who consciously sets up conditions in the telling of a story demonstrates empirically how a person may orchestrate a particular reaction from an audience. An experienced joke-teller knows where to put a pause and how long to hold it; he knows that the sounds of certain consonants in words are more likely than others to provoke a giggle; and he knows how careful word choice in the set-up and punch line can be critical to making the joke get a big laugh. Expert comedians and other performers can often count on the success of well-delivered material that is deliberately designed to achieve the desired result. Alternatively, postmodernists will argue that not everyone in an audience will laugh at the same joke, nor laugh in the same way. Each will find her own meaning and each will experience humour in a very particular way. I locate myself on the edge between postmodernist and positivist sensibilities by

conceptualizing the informants' descriptive texts not as sources for direct analysis, but as conduits to access accurate accounts of what was happening on the stage during each of the moments described. The responses exhibit an enormous disparity in the ways in which each individual engages with—and makes meaning from—a personal revelation. However, in every description, something very specific happened on stage that prompted the spectator's revelation. Out of all the theatre experiences that these frequent theatergoers have had, these are the experiences they identified as exceptionally memorable for them, even life-changing. What happened on stage during those moments is what I sought to examine. In other words, I was less concerned with assessing *how* study participants were personally affected than with examining *what it was* that had affected them. Were qualities or conditions embedded in the staging of these singularly arresting moments of performance discernible? Could they be analyzed and understood?

Second, as a professional director and playwright, I bring a wealth of experience and insight to the project. At virtually every theatre performance I attend, I seek to improve my skills by taking notes about what astonishes or disappoints me. I continually ask myself why a particular moment on stage does or does not succeed in my estimation. I wanted a methodology that would give me the freedom to exercise my expertise—to speculate on what I observed in the data—but only if I could trust that my conjectures would be subject to a rigorous and systematic process of validation and confirmation that would ensure my speculations were clearly linked to the data I collected.

Third, I required a methodology that would do more than identify relationships and patterns in the data. Because the rationale for the study is rooted in the intention to share knowledge with community members about the mechanisms of aesthetic arrest, the

methodology ultimately had to lead to the creation of a robust theoretical framework conducive to practical application. With these criteria in mind, I decided that grounded theory was the best fit for this project.

Grounded theory: an inductive approach

The intended outcome of a grounded theory approach is the discovery and development of a theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory as a methodology involves a systematic series of steps designed to lead the researcher through an inductive process of exploring a social phenomenon from the perspectives of different individuals involved in that phenomenon. The methodological steps include: gathering rich data; developing sensitizing concepts; conducting various levels of coding (open coding, in vivo coding, focused coding, axial coding, and theoretical coding); memo-writing; theoretical sampling; achieving saturation; sorting; drafting; and writing. The researcher seeks to formulate a generalizable explanatory theory of the phenomenon being investigated by examining the experiences of a variety of different individuals affected by it. Always asking the question, “What is happening here?”, the researcher identifies patterns and conceptual relationships among the data. She then tests provisional hypotheses against the data. The resultant *theory* is therefore considered to be *grounded* in the data (Hutchinson, 1993; Glaser, 1978; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). In every grounded theory study there is an assumed obligation for the researcher(s) to make a contribution that will be practical and useful (Charmaz, 2006).

In the 1960s, Anselm Strauss, a qualitative field researcher at the University of Chicago, and Barney Glaser, a positivist quantitative researcher from Columbia University

developed this methodology as a way to integrate qualitative and quantitative methodological approaches. They were interested in responding to criticism prevalent at that time that qualitative research lacked scientific rigour (Charmaz, 2000). Their groundbreaking work, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967), revolutionized sociological methodology by combining the two dominant trends of data collection. They demonstrated how quantitative research instruments could be applied to ethnographically-based data such as oral or written accounts of interpersonal relationships, social interactions, and personal interpretations of events, pushing and pulling positivist, quantitative analyses “around the postmodernist turn” (Clarke, 2005). Glaser and Strauss showed how this methodological approach enabled researchers to produce more than ethnographic descriptions from qualitative data; researchers could also generate formal and substantive theory from that data. (Charmaz, 2000).

Some grounded theorists take an objectivist approach to data analysis, arguing that verbatim reporting found within the data itself contains all the researcher requires to formulate theory. “Categories emerge upon comparison and properties emerge upon more comparison. And that is all there is to it” (Glaser, 1992, p. 43). An alternative to the objectivist approach is constructivist grounded theory. Constructivists acknowledge that researchers must exercise great care to avoid imposing preconceived ideas, but consider that their own observations and insights about the phenomenon being studied play a crucial role in developing a rich, robust theory. Charmaz (2000) claims: “what respondents assume or do not apprehend may be much more important than what they talk about. An acontextual reliance on respondents’ overt concerns can lead to narrow research problems, limited data, and trivial analyses” (p. 514). The constructivist stance assumes that to develop a sophisticated assessment of what is happening—and to formulate innovative theories—the

researcher must actively engage with the data. The researcher must continually pose questions to the data and bring to the analysis a personal awareness of the context in which the stories were told (Charmaz, 1995, p. 32).

Grounded theory researchers are encouraged to become familiar with the context of the study, by developing what is called “theoretical sensitivity,” but are discouraged from conducting a full review of the literature prior to engaging in the analysis. Postponing the literature review is intended to prevent researchers from becoming committed to preconceived notions that may influence their assessment of the data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978). During the course of reading and analyzing the data, preconceived judgments and opinions based upon “conventional wisdom” are likely to surface, but grounded theory researchers consciously choose to defer allegiance to these ideas, adopting what Henwood and Pidgeon (2003) wryly refer to as “theoretical agnosticism.”

There is a risk, especially during the early stages of drawing out concepts from the data, that a researcher may be seduced into theoretical conclusions that are premature. In grounded theory, an important safeguard against researchers investing their own preconceptions into the emerging theory is termed “memo-writing” (Glaser 1978). As flashes of insight and questions arise from examination of the data, the researcher writes reflective memos to record the ideas while they are still fresh in her mind (Charmaz, 2006). The researcher then quickly sets these notes aside in order to continue to keep an open mind while the process is underway. Later, the researcher returns to these memos for review, and may follow the leads they provide to determine whether they actually bear fruit.

What does it mean to generate theory?

The steps of a grounded theory analysis are systematic but not linear. Grounded theory's "constant comparative method" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) means that during each stage of coding and analyzing the data, researchers continually compare various respondents' accounts against one another (and in a constructivist approach, continually compare the respondent's accounts with the researchers' own observations of what is happening in the data). By constantly comparing and testing provisional concepts and categories against the data, researchers assess the strength of an emerging theory as it develops. Emerging concepts that fail to explain or account for the phenomenon sufficiently are either abandoned or modified (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The terms associated with gauging the strength of a grounded theory are: "grab," "fit," "work," and "modifiability."

A theory is considered to have "grab" if it makes sense to those familiar with the phenomenon (Glaser, 1978). The explanatory theory is deemed successful if the study's participants (or others in similar circumstances) find it captivating in its self-evident relevance and usefulness for them. Glaser and Strauss' original term for grab was "understandable" (1967, p. 237).

A theory has "fit" when it results from a thoughtful and thorough analysis of the data. Whether researchers employ an objectivist analysis of the texts alone, or a constructivist analysis integrating their own assessments, "fit" means that the researchers have withheld their preconceptions from the development of the theory (Glaser & Strauss, p. 238). A variant of fit is called "emergent fit." During the analysis, researchers may discover a social process or category in the data that has already been theorized elsewhere. A relevant pre-existing theory can be considered a legitimate element of the emergent theory, but it must

“earn” its way into the analysis by clearly reflecting what is found in the data (Glaser, 1978). The researcher is encouraged to incorporate only those aspects of a pre-existing theory that fit the phenomenon being studied; aspects that do not fit are dismissed.

A theory “works” if it usefully clarifies the phenomenon being studied, i.e. when it can successfully “explain what happened, predict what will happen and interpret what is happening” (Glaser 1978, p. 4). As described above, the assumption built into every grounded theory is that the theory should not only contribute to scholarly advancement, but also provide a practical benefit. A theory that fits and works is therefore considered to have “relevance” (Glaser, 1992, p. 15). The aim of grounded theory is to “make a big difference in contributing to the solutions of real problems” (Glaser & Strauss, p. 247).

The criterion of “modifiability” is related to grounded theory’s methodological commitment to achieving relevance. Glaser (1978) warns of the dangers of considering a theory to be inviolate once it is developed. In order to remain relevant as new data becomes available, a good theory must be resilient enough to accommodate continual evolution and refinement (p. 5).

Compiling the data set for this study

I knew from my own theatre-going—corroborated by colleagues—that encountering a truly astonishing moment of aesthetic arrest in a performance is rare, even among those who attend plays regularly. To establish a rich data set, I sought to recruit study participants who had witnessed a great deal of theatre in their lives. This would mean that each submission to the study would be an outstanding moment selected from the experience of someone who had seen many theatre productions. For this purposive sampling, professional

theatre critics were an obvious source of potential recruits. I obtained names and mailing addresses of all Canadian theatre critics who are members of the Canadian Theatre Critics Association, as well as a selection of newspaper theatre critics writing in major American and British dailies. I supplemented this direct mail list with the names of theatre scholars and historians, professional directors and producers in Canada, the U.S., the U.K., Australia, and Western Europe whose reputations I knew from my own lifelong interest in theatre. As soon as the University of Victoria's Ethics Review Board gave me permission to proceed with participant recruitment, I sent 131 direct mail queries via Canada Post and e-mail. Additionally, I posted a brief description of the project, accompanied by a request for submissions, on several Internet listservs used by professional and academic theatre subscribers: the Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE); the Canadian Association for Theatre Research (CATR); the American Alliance for Theatre and Education (AATE); the American Society for Theatre Research (ASTR); and the American Theatre Critics Association (ATCA).

For the direct mail queries, I drafted a one-page letter introducing myself, explaining the research project, and asking recipients if they had “ever witnessed a single brief moment onstage that managed to produce among the audience members a sudden and unexpected emergence of deeply felt insight, or the radical re-assessment of a long-held assumption.” To characterize this phenomenon of feeling momentarily astonished—and then deeply affected—as a consequence of witnessing something on stage during a theatre performance, I adopted Joseph Campbell's (2003) term “aesthetic arrest.”

Cognizant that I was asking for time from busy journalists, theatre professionals, and academics, I sought to make it as easy as possible for them to contribute to the study. To

achieve this, the query letter directed them to a research website I designed and created for this purpose: www.aesthetic-arrest.com. The website featured a compelling landing page, followed by a brief welcome and introduction page restating the invitation from the query letter. The welcome/introduction page offered clickable links for those who wanted additional information: the rationale for the study, the methodology being used, and a brief biography of the researcher. A fourth option linked site visitors directly to a page on which they could submit a story. Before this link would accept a submission, it presented a step-through page requiring all participants to electronically “sign” the study’s ethical consent form. Participants were given the option to print a copy of the consent form for their records.

Nowhere on the website or in the query letter did I give a description of what I or anyone else considered an example of aesthetic arrest. Offering a specific illustration might inadvertently constrain the potential range of participants’ responses and thus limit the diversity of data. Instead, I attempted to characterize my estimation of the response elicited by these moments of staging. On the website’s landing page (Figure 1), prior to the welcome/introduction page, visitors saw several phrases appear gradually in sequence. The intent of this initial page was to intrigue the website visitors by offering a kind of invitational prompt. I hoped to stir their imaginations by constructing fragments and sentences that would subtly direct them to complete the thought, drawing from their own experience. I kept the request open ended even as I deliberately framed the invitation to be about a story of sudden insight or re-assessment. The query letter and reproductions of the website pages may be found in Appendix A.

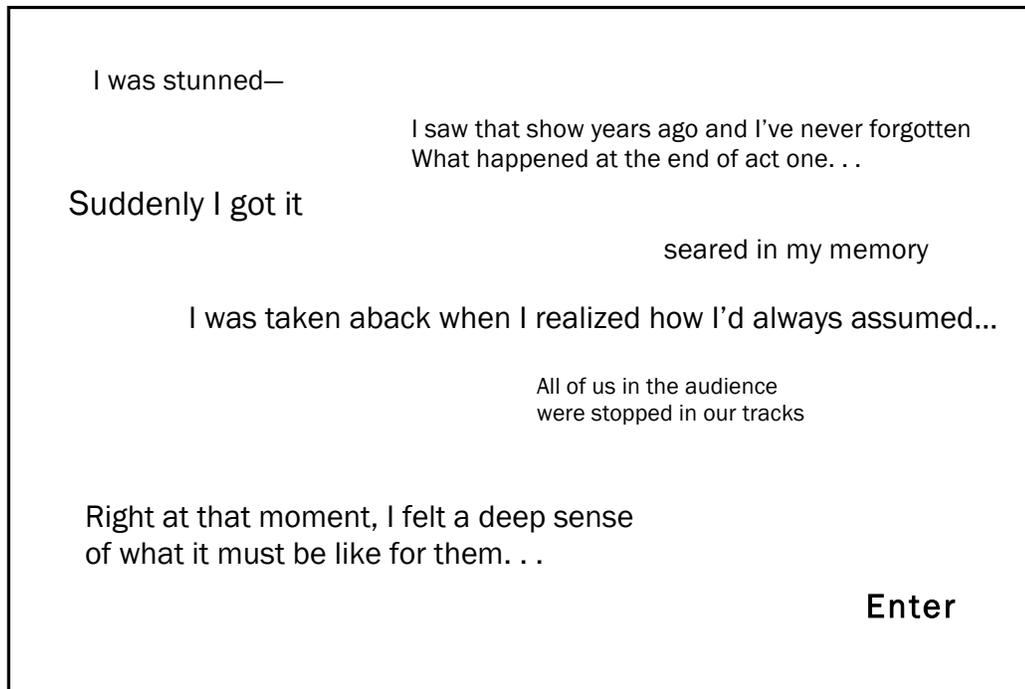


Figure 1. Landing page for the website www.aesthetic-arrest.com.

The direct mail query letters, the listserv invitation, and the website text all invited participants to forward my request (or simply to forward the website URL) to colleagues and associates whom they felt might also like to participate in the study (snowballing). I produced a set of business cards with a very brief description of the project and the website URL. When I met people who expressed an interest in the project, either while attending academic conferences or in the course of casual conversation, I was able to pass along a card that would direct them to the website. Having this self-explanatory, easily accessible website made it a simple matter for anyone visiting the site to learn or to be reminded what was being asked of them. They could give their consent to participate and submit a story without fussing with postage, envelopes, or having to schedule time for a telephone interview with the researcher. Occasionally, individuals related only a cursory description of a particular moment in a play they had seen and encouraged me to investigate that production. These I

categorized as “leads” rather than “respondents” due to the paucity of information in the description. At an early stage in the project, I also conducted a keyword search to identify critics who had used terms such as “astonished,” “amazed,” “gasp,” and “coup de théâtre” in their reviews. This search yielded nine examples of moments of aesthetic arrest, to which I added twelve examples from my own experience as a theatergoer. Figure 2 is a chart of the ninety-six initial respondents in the study.

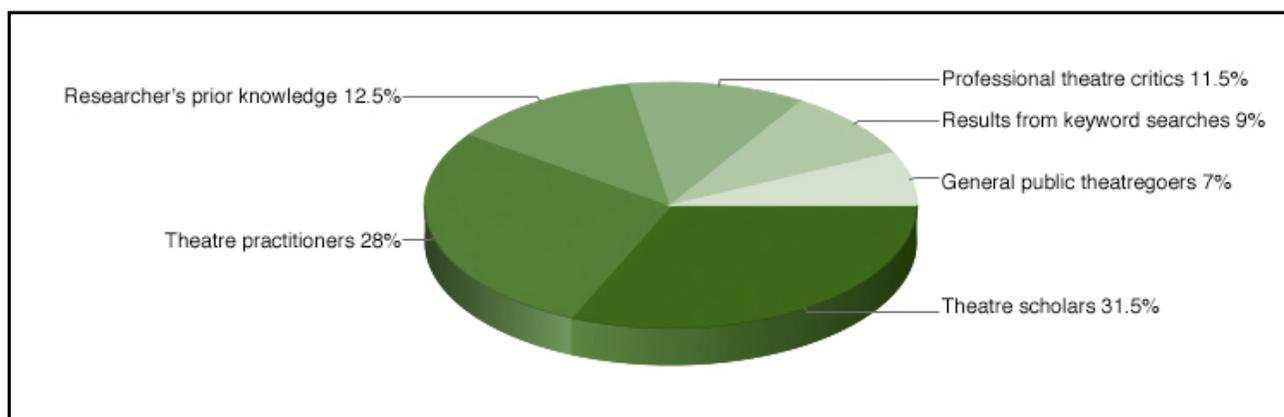


Figure 2. Initial data sources.

In addition to asking respondents to submit a narrative account, I asked them to list the title of the play described in their story, the theatre and city where it took place, and the approximate date of the performance they had seen. I used this information to generate a secondary data set of accounts written by other witnesses to the same productions described by these initial respondents. Upon receipt of each initial submission, I consulted twelve online and print databases to identify supplementary accounts in other critic’s reviews; articles in academic journals, periodicals and newspapers; blogs; books; and published correspondence. In some instances, I wrote to the authors of these extant materials to explain the research project and ask them to elaborate upon their earlier accounts. I occasionally wrote to an initial respondent to ask for clarification or further detail about his or her

submission. The secondary data set of extant texts includes 186 accounts. Appendix C provides a complete list of the plays and brief descriptions of the moments of aesthetic arrest examined in the study. Figure 3 is a chart of the sources of supplementary accounts of the productions found in the secondary data set.

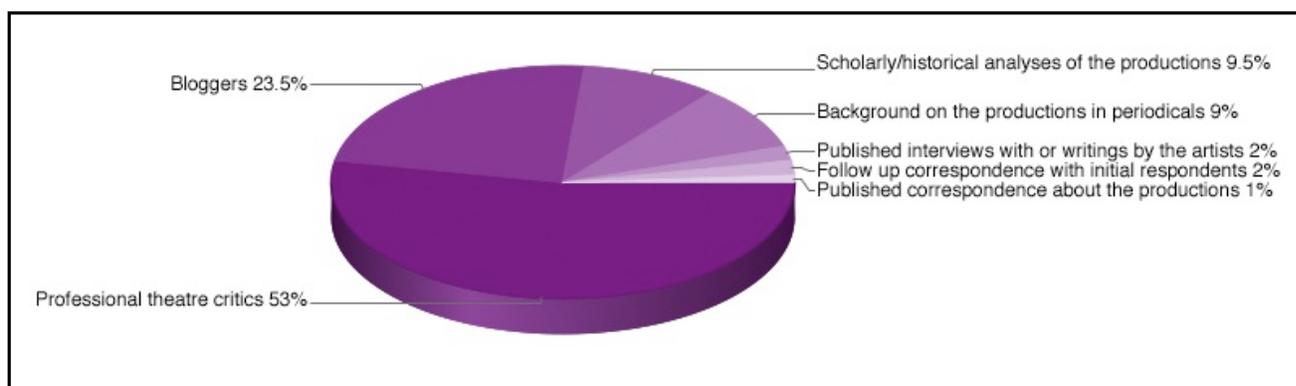


Figure 3. Secondary data sources.

The statistical information presented in Figures 2 and 3 is intended for description only. While multiple descriptions of a moment of aesthetic arrest in a performance added depth to my understanding of each event, neither the number of discrete descriptions nor the type of respondent is considered significant. Following Hutchinson (1993), the aim of this study is to establish analytic generalizability, not statistical generalizability. In other words, my intention is to develop a useful understanding of the phenomenon resulting from the purposive sampling represented in these data, and to produce a generalizable explanatory theory from them.

The data

The data range chronologically from a Victorian-era letter regarding *The Merchant of Venice* to accounts of plays still in production at this writing. Most are accounts of plays

produced since the 1960s. As might be expected from such a diverse data set, the type of description varied greatly from one account to another. In the initial responses to my direct mail, e-mail and listserv requests, I received focused descriptions of particular experiences of aesthetic arrest. These were frequently, but not always, accompanied by the respondents' personal assessments of why the moment had an impact on them and those around them. Respondents often described hearing collective gasps or feeling a sense of communal response to the moment on stage. Descriptions of the plays in previously published reviews of these productions (written by critics and bloggers) were typically much more comprehensive in their descriptions of the entire plays than those submitted to the research website. Overwhelmingly, however, these extant reviews referred to the same moments of staging that had been singled out by the initial respondents. In some cases, critics contrasted a particularly effective staging with what they considered a similar but less effective attempt seen in a different play. For example, in one account, the stylized fight scenes in *Black Watch* were compared favourably with the stylized fights in *West Side Story*. For that reviewer, the latter effort seemed self-conscious and overtly stagy, while the former seemed authentic and compelling. This information prompted me to view online videos of the fight scenes from both shows in order to observe and reflect first-hand on the differences. When I did not have access to direct observation, I examined additional reviews of the other play(s) in order to develop more depth in my appreciation of the differences between them.

I also found accounts of these productions in books on theatre theory and theatre history, and in academic papers. Scholarly writings concerning the significance of the moments of staging in these productions presented much broader descriptions, analyses, and opinions than were found in the initial respondents' accounts. I used these secondary sources

as part of my data analysis (see discussion of secondary sources in Glaser, 1978; Mills et al., 2007; Richards & Morse, 2007; Schreiber, 2001). Because my examination of the data focused primarily on obtaining accurate accounts of the staging, when these secondary sources presented the author's theoretical perspectives, I wrote memos about them and then set them aside for later review. These secondary sources occasionally added useful depth to my understanding of staging choices reported in the data. For example, playwright Lisa Kron's detailed explanations of her intentions behind the dramaturgical construction and direction of her plays shed light on the ways in which the moments of aesthetic arrest function in those instances.

In the study I have included two instances of aesthetic arrest reported by spectators at the cinema, as well as two accounts that occurred during curtain calls at two different plays, and a response by an informant who was deeply moved by an unexpected interruption at a dance performance (two accounts of dance performances were submitted, but only one was used as an illustration in the final text). Because my focus in this study is on spectators' responses to exceptional experiences in theatre, I felt justified to include a broader conception of performance than just the events confined between curtain up and curtain down in a traditional play. Theatre, cinema, and dance are all different media, and curtain calls are in a category all their own, but I maintain that if spectators are moved to experience aesthetic arrest in response to anything in the theatre encounter, the inclusion of these stories' in the data is legitimate.

Recording and managing the strategies used for data analysis

In grounded theory, the researcher's work to convert raw data into themes for analysis begins by naming what is happening in the data throughout the course of each informant's

descriptive text. In the initial stage of “open coding,” the researcher assigns a brief descriptor—or code—to each word, line, or cluster of lines, literally writing these codes in the margins of the pages. Each code succinctly characterizes what is going on at that moment in the telling of the story. The purpose of coding is to enable the researcher to stand apart from the unique narrative details in each informant’s text and focus instead on the processes occurring in the events being described. As researchers identify, conceive, and designate salient codes throughout a text, the process paves the way for identifying common denominators, variations and anomalies from one text to another.

During open coding, researchers either code what is happening according to their own assessments, or they may use the informants’ direct wording. This latter is known as an *in vivo* code. An *in vivo* code palpably conveys the informants’ experience. It also may be a term or phrase that has particular cultural relevance for them. For example, one respondent used the evocative phrase “a little kick-pause” to describe the briefly delayed jolt he felt after seeing something onstage and then suddenly realizing its implications. The second sense of an *in vivo* code is evidenced in the report by one critic who characterized his admiration for a performer by writing that she had a “Laurette Taylor naturalness.” For decades during the first half of the twentieth century, Laurette Taylor was the idol of actors and audiences alike due to her astonishing ability to appear utterly authentic on stage. The respondent’s three-word reference speaks volumes to those familiar with Broadway theatre of that era. *In vivo* codes can also offer clues to researchers when the same word appears frequently in many different accounts. In this study, the *in vivo* terms “sentimentality” and “sentimental” were often used by informants who were dismissive of the use of sentimentality in the staging of a play.

In order to manage the data in this study effectively, I digitized all the texts and transferred them into the software program “N-Vivo.” The program displayed the texts and allowed me to input and record codes along the right-hand margin of each story. Figure 4 presents an example of my open coding for a brief account of a play called *FrogWoman* that took place in Portland, Oregon shortly after the attack on New York City’s World Trade Center in September, 2001.

<p>I remember two shows that opened immediately after the 9/11 attacks — both had been in rehearsal before 9/11 — and both had remarkable effects not just on the audience but also on the performers. Everyone was numb, and no one was sure whether it wasn't really a bad idea to be doing theater at all. [...] at Stark Raving Theatre I saw the premiere of a silly little comedy called “FrogWoman,” which starred various characters in green flippers and had little purpose other than to make the audience laugh. At first, no one was sure they SHOULD laugh. But pretty soon they couldn't help it. The dam burst, the laughter began, and it was an incredible release. The actors and the audience gave each other permission to laugh at a time when none of us was sure that laughter was either possible or proper. It was a deep and necessary reconnection with emotional normality.</p> <p>A dumb show, maybe. But memorable and cathartic.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Actors & audience being affected together by the show — All feeling numbed by recent events; — Unclear about what is appropriate behaviour — Silly; purpose is to prompt laughter — Audience holding back, unsure — Funniness burst the dam — Incredible release of laughter — Giving each other permission to laugh during time of uncertainty — Returning from numbness; reconnecting to normality
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Figure 4. An example of open coding from a response to the play *FrogWoman*.

While a computer-assisted analysis offers benefits, it also has liabilities. Computer software facilitates sorting a large number of codes, but can elide the subtle interpretative work of a human researcher (Charmaz, 2000). My first run of open coding generated approximately 1,100 codes. I found it more effective to sort and organize the codes by hand than by computer. As I reformatted the codes from the N-Vivo software onto printable 3 X 5 and 4 X 6 index cards, I merged similar or identical codes onto single cards, distilling the

initial 1,100 codes onto 800 cards. This stage in the process is called “focused coding.” It involves consolidating overlapping and similar codes from different accounts in the data.

Figure 5 is an example of one of the focused coding index cards (in bold font). Some of the informants’ original texts have been included here for the benefit of clarity.

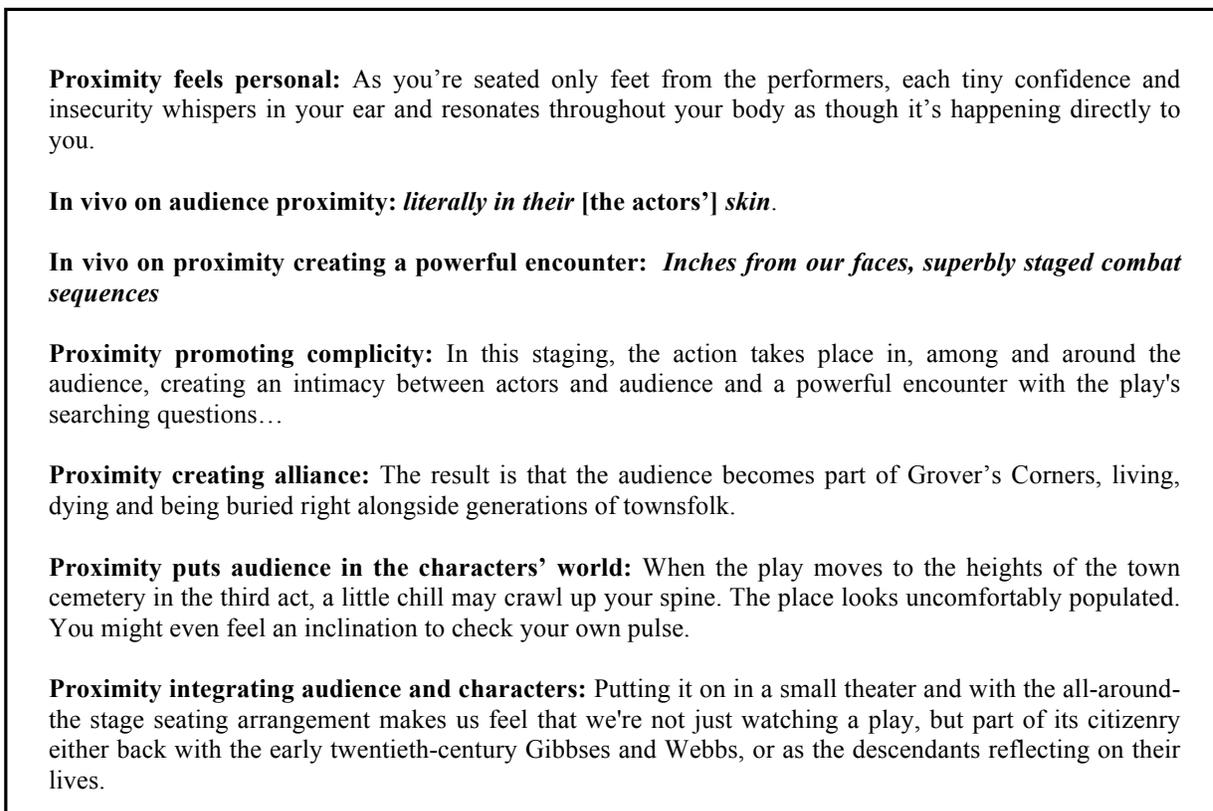


Figure 5. An example of focused coding on references to “proximity.”

The next step in the process is called *axial coding*, when the researcher consolidates the focused codes. Axial coding allows the researcher to retain the important subtle variations of the initial codes, while reducing them to a more manageable number. During this stage, I examined the eight hundred index cards one by one, placing them into eighty different stacks according to salient themes as they emerged. Among the eighty themes were categories such as: *risk-danger-vulnerable; venue; proximity; forced on audience; fracturing-interruption-*

rupture; diminishment; sensation; sound-music; and bravery (see Appendix B for a complete list of the axial codes).

This step is followed by “theoretical coding,” in which the researcher further hypothesizes about relationships between the organized clusters of focused and axial codes. During this part of the sorting process, hierarchies begin to emerge as it becomes apparent that certain thematic categories can be incorporated into a smaller number of categories. In this stage, I consolidated the eighty stacks of cards into eight and then ultimately five core categories. For example, the categories *forced on audience; limiting the visual; diminishment; sensation* and *sound* were all subsumed into a core category called *heuristics*. As I worked to integrate the codes, building conceptual categories, I continually challenged myself to justify their placement and organization. This is the work that builds a grounded theory: identifying commonalities, finding patterns, and drawing conclusions that shed light on understanding a phenomenon.

Throughout the entire process of coding the data and sorting the codes, I wrote memos to myself—some brief, some more extensive—in which I captured my thoughts about the data as it occurred to me. Figure 6 is an example of a memo I wrote based on one line from the text in Figure 4.

The stream-of-consciousness, fragmentary writing shown in Figure 6 is typical of a grounded theory memo. In it, I ruminate on potential links to other accounts of aesthetic arrest in the data and in my own professional work; I note resonance with existing theory (and then move on without becoming overly fixated with it); and I pose questions to myself. Constantly comparing the substance of the memos and the emerging conceptual codes with the data guided me in the next stage of analysis: “theoretical sampling.”

“...actors and the audience gave each other permission to laugh at a time when none of us was sure that laughter was either possible or proper.” (excerpt from Respondent 17)

Is this related to Peter Brook’s “clowns and the Queen of Heaven” or to “the children of Sejny”? In these three examples, the actors and audience gave each other permission to do what was beyond the frame of what was considered acceptable in that place at that time: relish food in the face of want; express cultural identity in the face of cultural insecurity; laugh in the context of recent pain and sorrow. Jim Thompson writes on this, but there is more here than theatre cheering the bewildered. What was it about the zaniness or silliness of the *FrogWoman* that had the power to bust through their apprehensions? Consider also the conventional wisdom that New Orleans’ Mardi Gras gives out-of-towners permission to indulge in sexual abandon *because it’s Mardi Gras and different rules apply during Mardi Gras*. The world of the play creates a bubble in which, perhaps just for the moment, the established rules can be set aside. It gives everyone permission. Permission is related to an unspoken contract that sets the rules. How does a play not just announce what the rules are (as the Blue Fairy did at the beginning of *The Pied Piper*) but convey what the rules are *in this place* through a performance mode? We achieved that in *Common Wealth* by staging it in a festival tent in the round. It was the orientation of seeing each other sitting in a circle together in a new place, a place that held no pre-existing connotations for the community members, that signaled—that’s the word: signaled—that this encounter was operating in an unconventional mode and therefore different rules applied. What else establishes or dispels the unspoken contract when we attend a play?

Figure 6. An example of a memo reflecting on an informant’s account of the play *FrogWoman*.

Theoretical sampling is considered to be a strength of grounded theory as it reinforces the robust link between theory generation and the data (Charmaz, 2006). As provisional conceptual categories begin to coalesce, the researcher seeks additional data that can be used to gauge the fit of emergent theories in new circumstances (Glaser, 1978). During theoretical sampling, I relied on questions I had posed in my memos—coupled with further imaginative ruminations—to identify examples of aesthetic arrest in my experience that I had not already included in the data. Strauss (1987) characterizes theoretical sampling as a stage of the process that involves “much calculation and imagination on the part of the analysts” (p. 39).

I gave my provisional concepts a “road test” on these new examples of aesthetic arrest in order to verify, clarify, or demonstrate gaps in their explanatory adequacy.

When the researcher finds that the emergent theory can account for all the experiences described in the phenomenon, this point is called “saturation.” If the emergent theory cannot account for any given aspect of what is observed happening in the data, the researcher is charged with returning to the process: reviewing and recasting the theory until these gaps are filled. When saturation is achieved, the task then shifts to drafting the text. Writing is considered another active step in the process of developing a grounded theory. It is during this stage that the researcher finally turns to the literature to “support or extend” the emergent theory with empirical data proposed by other scholars (Hutchinson, 1993). Having abstracted the informant’s narratives and observations through coding, and then generated the theory, the writing stage requires the researcher to find a way to explain the newly developed concepts to readers. Following Charmaz (1995), I chose to illustrate the concepts using extensive verbatim texts from the data or paraphrasing the data when respondents withheld permission for me to use their exact words. My work in the writing stage involved continuing to achieve clarity in my thinking and to organize the stories conceptually so that their inclusion in the text would effectively illustrate the emergent theory.

Evaluating the study

Charmaz (2006) offers four criteria for evaluating a grounded theory study that complement Glaser and Strauss’ demand for grab, fit, work, and modifiability. These are: credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness.

“Credibility” is related to Glaser and Strauss’ characterization of fit, which incorporates the requirement that the researcher is deeply involved in the phenomenon itself,

not imposing external attitudes upon it. Credibility also echoes Lincoln and Guba's (1985) measure of the effectiveness of an analysis according to the amount of time a researcher has spent becoming familiar with the phenomenon, and engaged in close observation of it. Like Charmaz, Lincoln and Guba also stress the importance of triangulating among multiple perspectives regarding the phenomenon. As a professional director, I came to this project equipped with a high degree of familiarity—what a grounded theorist would call theoretical sensitivity—toward theatre staging. I then spent months in close observation of the data. Despite being derived from a purposive sampling, the data came from a relatively wide variety of sources, ensuring triangulation.

“Originality” speaks to the vitality of the findings: whether they “challenge, extend, or refine current ideas, concepts, and practices” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 182). In this study I bring a new perspective to the field of audience reception theory as well as challenging traditional notions of collaboration in applied theatre practice, and I offer a refinement to the Freirean notion of radical pedagogy.

“Resonance,” as Charmaz describes it, is most closely linked to Glaser and Strauss' understanding of grab and work. To be considered effective, the emergent theory must demonstrate a robust connection with those who experience the phenomenon. When study participants (or others who are intimately familiar with the phenomenon) encounter the researcher's theory, do they readily understand it and recognize it as accurate? Does it help them to make sense of what has perhaps been only intuitive understanding? During the writing phase, I periodically conducted member checking, sending salient passages of drafts from chapters to a number of the initial respondents, asking for their candid appraisals of my theoretical explanations of their anecdotes. I received uniformly positive responses from

these queries. Additionally, I have frequently shared my findings with fellow professional theatre practitioners and other theatre enthusiasts and have consistently received confirmation of the theory's grab and work. In the chapters that follow, I extend the spirit of member checking to readers through the use of many paraphrased and verbatim descriptions from the data. Gall et al. (1996) argue that validity can be established in this way through what they term reader or user generalizability. Offering the readers direct access to the data allows them to assess for themselves the grab, fit and work of the theory. In a similar vein, Osborne (1990, p. 82) refers to empathic generalizability, in which readers of the study who have personally encountered the phenomenon being examined may assess the reliability of the theory by deciding whether, in the reading, it resonates with their own experience.

“Usefulness” is linked to the inherent utilitarian agenda that drives all grounded theory research projects. To be considered successful, the research must be beneficial to the people whose lives and work are impacted by the subject of the study. The substantive theories that have emerged from this research are indeed applicable. The study was originally conceived and initiated as a way to find a response to a challenge in my own professional practice. That challenge has been met, and the substantive theory in this work is presented with accessibility and practicality in mind.

“Modifiability” is a term that Glaser (1978) adds to his assessment of the criteria for a successful grounded theory study. Modifiability refers to the need for a theory to remain resilient enough to accommodate new data. In this study, I discovered a relationship between the experience of theatergoing and a formal theory described by philosopher Martin Heidegger and others. The substantive theories that I present in the main body of the research emerged from my analysis of the data as they relate to this formal theory. The study is

modifiable insofar as further complementary substantive theories can (and I hope, will) be developed upon continued examination of the relationship I draw between theatre and the formal theory described in the dissertation.

Summary

A grounded theory approach was particularly suitable for this study. The dissertation's stated imperative to produce a teachable conceptual vocabulary is congruent with the methodology's explicit obligation to produce useful, applicable theory. The constructivist model of grounded theory analysis enabled me, as researcher, to bring my high degree of relevant professional experience and insight to the project while keeping speculation in check through a rigorous and systematic analytic process. In this chapter I have described the means by which I obtained rich data from a purposive sample of informants, and explained the steps taken to code and analyze that data, frequently including illustrations from the study. I have concluded by presenting the standards used in grounded theory for establishing the reliability and validity of the findings.

Chapter Three

Subverting (or Reconfiguring) the Contracts

The theatrical experience is essentially a buildup from within the audience in answer to the conditioning they have received about the play before they enter the theatre and the stimuli they receive from the stage.

Ann Jellicoe (1967, p. 10)

[Spectators] bring to the theatre a decorum that has been learned elsewhere but which is nevertheless scrupulously applied here.

Richard Schechner (1968, p. 44)

Introduction

“Welcome to the theatre; please abide by the rules of the unstated contract.” It is unlikely one would ever read these words posted at the entrance to a theatre. Yet implied contracts between actors and spectators, between audience and event, dominate every theatre encounter. With a nod to Goffman’s (1974) terminology, Richard Schechner (1968) characterizes these typically unacknowledged contractual “transactions” as a complex “network of expectations and obligations” (p. 42). Adult spectators typically enter the theatre thoroughly primed with an understanding about their expected roles in the encounter, ready to fulfill their relational obligations as members of the audience.

It is rare in the data to find a respondent who explicitly comments on the existence of an unspoken contract in the theatre experience. However, what emerged was a coherent category of moments of aesthetic arrest that occurred as a result of staging that challenged the audience’s capacity to acquiesce to a host of unacknowledged assumptions surrounding the theatre encounter. The implied contracts that Jellicoe and Schechner allude to may be

understood as frameworks that serve to reinforce spectators' habitual and often unconscious assumptions and expectations as they assess and assign meaning to the performance. When certain staging choices circumvented these habitual transactional relationships, the spectators were thrust into more vital, direct encounters with the experience. In this chapter I outline two distinct types of implied contracts that were subverted (or reconfigured) by conditions embedded in a staging choice.

In some cases, the staging subverted what I call the *actor-as-authority contract*. This implied contract involves the spectators' experience of a theatre performance as a transaction in which the audience perceives that the actors deliver the performance to them as one might deliver a prepared commodity to a consumer. Five variations were observed in which the staging made it clear to spectators that the actors' function as deliverer of a commodity was compromised. These include actors taking emotional risks regarding public perception of their personal identities; groups of actors taking emotional risks regarding public perception of their shared cultural identities; actors lowering or decentering the primacy of their status in the actor-spectator relationship; actors abdicating their roles of authority in the presentation of a performance; and actors portraying characters with such a high degree of believability that the experience belied the impression of a delivered performance.

Alternatively, some staging subverted what I call the *spectator-as-recipient contract*. This implied contract involves the spectators' perception that their role in the transaction is that of consumer, receiving the performance as a prepared commodity. The staging in these cases re-positions actors and spectators as partners in a mutual encounter. Five related strategies were employed in establishing conditions that subverted the spectator-as-recipient contract. These include physically reconfiguring the space in the performance venue; the use

of “neutral” performance space that does not carry prior associations for the spectators; re-constituting the theatre experience as a “game” in which the spectators are the implied co-players; and an explicit or implicit reconfiguring of the spectators’ role as recipients that is set in motion at the outset of a performance.

I Subverting the Actor-as-Authority Contract

3.1 Risking personal emotional vulnerability—individual identity

In the data, actors were observed risking personal emotional vulnerability in a variety of ways. Their positions of authority in relation to the spectators were undermined when the staging choices they made openly subjected their beliefs, their personal credibility, their physical appearance, or their cultural identities to criticism and contestation not merely as the characters they played, but as themselves.

It is important from the outset to distinguish between emotional vulnerability exhibited by an actor-as-character during a scene, and personal emotional vulnerability exhibited by an actor-as-person. I use the term “emotional vulnerability” to mean the condition of being unguarded in the face of potential ridicule, criticism, or loss of respect as a result of an unmediated presentation of oneself. “Risking vulnerability” therefore refers to a deliberate choice to place oneself into an emotionally vulnerable position. Often, a skilled actor draws upon observation and personal experience to achieve a performance of an emotionally vulnerable character that appears authentic and “truthful.” However, the more successfully the actor is able to embody the experience of emotional vulnerability within her portrayal of the character’s emotional state, the more likely she is to be lauded by spectators, critics and peers as an actor worthy of respect. Paradoxically, it is the actor’s display of

emotional vulnerability within the context of the performance that serves to reinforce her status as an authoritative and commanding professional. In contrast, an actor risking *personal* emotional vulnerability subjects some aspect of her personal identity to potential ridicule, criticism, or loss of respect.

In her autobiographical play *Well*, Lisa Kron, a New York performance artist, is the lead character. During an opening scene that begins in an informal mode resembling a pre-show announcement, Kron reads from note cards. She explains that she will be presenting “a multi-character theatrical exploration of issues of health and illness.” It is *not*, she insists, a play about her and her mother (Kron, 2006, pp. 11-12). As the play moves forward, Kron attempts to deliver a series of scenes featuring prepared, authoritative interpretations of certain episodes in her life that turn out to be very much about her relationship with her mother. This plan does not succeed. The play is unexpectedly interrupted by events that appear to be unplanned incursions from “real life.” Ultimately, the story she wants to tell about her personal history is eclipsed by conflicting interpretations of what happened and she loses control of the play altogether.

Although *Well* has been compared to Pirandello’s explorations of the intersection between fiction and reality (Brustein, 2004; Feingold, 2004; Rooney, 2006), Kron’s work stands apart from Pirandello’s largely due to her willingness to risk personal emotional vulnerability. Unlike an actor cast as the character Doctor Hinkfuss in Pirandello’s *Tonight We Improvise*, Kron appears onstage as herself. In addition to the sixty-one separate accounts of this play in the data set (more accounts than any other in the study), I was able to view a videotaped performance of the playwright performing in *Well*’s original Broadway production. Having written the play about herself, Kron was obviously in a unique position to

play the role. However, what made many critics consider her performance to be exceptionally courageous was that she appeared to risk presenting herself on stage as unmediated, without any indication of distance from the “real” Lisa Kron. What I witnessed in the videorecording of Kron’s own performance (corroborated by many informants in the study) was a convincing level of sincerity that Kron brought to her portrayal of herself. The Lisa Kron in *Well* was unmistakably passionate about the real Lisa Kron’s personal issues, with no indication that her words were anything other than an accurate account of her views. She appeared to struggle sincerely to be the hero of her own story, framing interpretations of events that validated her point of view, yet she designed the script to reveal personal shortcomings. She subjected herself, on a very personal level, to being patently vulnerable to critique as egocentric, petulant, and controlling. As a playwright and performer, she deliberately undermined her personal credibility, authority, and even likability (at one point in the script, Lisa leaves centre stage to sit at the top of the stairs and pout when she does not get her way). Her script generously allows the actor playing Lisa’s mother to appear more appealing than Lisa herself and, in the startling yet gentle dénouement, it is Lisa Kron’s real-life mother who imparts the show’s final words of wisdom.

What is the cost Kron pays by deliberately exposing herself as an unreliable, or at least highly suspect, interpreter of her own life history, and what does she have to gain from this exposure? The cost is that she reveals herself, not the character she plays, to be as humanly flawed as anyone in the audience. This alone derails her position as an authority on the material she is ostensibly delivering to the spectators, and brings her into a more equitable relationship with them. She stands before them as a daughter harbouring a conflicted attitude about her actual mother, perhaps like many among the audience. But what

she gains is more than solidarity with the spectators. Because the core action of the play is the conflict between Lisa's determined struggle to maintain the validity of her point of view, and a progressively apparent revelation that her interpretations are questionable, the audience members are constantly forced to assess what they see rather than take the story-as-delivered for granted. The spectators' direct relationship with the material itself is enlivened and deepened when their confidence in the reliability of its source is shaken. Respondents were overwhelmingly keen to note that Kron skillfully demonstrated self-observation and self-awareness without seeming self-absorbed or self-obsessed. In my reading of the staging, the distinction is grounded in her personal risk-taking. By genuinely and good-humouredly (the show is exceedingly funny at her expense) interrogating her personal flaws, it becomes difficult to consider the work egocentric or self-flattering. This personal risk-taking deflects the show from becoming a self-glamourizing delivery-system for her opinions. Rather, it generates an opportunity for the spectators to engage more directly with the struggles she faces.

3.2 Risking personal emotional vulnerability—group identity

Australia's Back to Back Theatre, based in Geelong, Victoria, is a touring company composed of a core ensemble of artists with intellectual disabilities. Respondents commenting on the company's production of their original play *Food Court* made special note of the unexpected and harshly unflattering self-assessment of disabled people by the disabled actors themselves. In this production, the actors risked personal vulnerability in the presentation of their group identity as disabled people.

Food Court's narrative follows two of the company's female actors as characters who cruelly humiliate, abuse, physically and psychologically threaten a third female character. They force her to strip naked and dance while they and others watch and taunt her. The other women then beat her to the floor and kick her. A male actor comes to sit beside her on the ground and talk. The spectators' initial hopes that he will be her compassionate ally after this ordeal quickly dissolve as his ambiguously worded conversation with her is veiled with threats of violence and rape. After he leaves, the young woman rises, puts on her clothes, and delivers Caliban's "Be not afeard" speech from *The Tempest*. Nearly all reviewers and commentators describing *Food Court* reported how truly astounding it was to witness the disabled performers presenting themselves as capable of such searing brutality.

Applied theatre projects, along with other arts-based community cultural development programs (such as collaborative mural-creation or cultural music events), typically promote positive images of marginalized groups as part of the work of countering prevalent negative stereotypes. Over a decade into the twenty-first century, it is still rare to see any person with an intellectual or developmental disability (or actors with other disabilities) performing onstage. When artists with disabilities are seen in a performance, their work commonly leverages excellence of performance skills, articulate social critique, and humour to "challenge cultural misrepresentation and reshape the [dominant culture's] disability narrative" (Abbas, Church, Frazee, & Panitch, 2004, p. 1). In other words, an effort is made to celebrate the strengths and capacities of disabled people and their value as full and contributing members of society. What is decidedly unconventional is for actors with disabilities to lay claim to the more disturbing thoughts and actions that run through the darker side of the human psyche. In Back to Back's online statement of artistic rationale, the

ensemble explicitly resists the compulsion to “preserve [their] own integrity” (Artistic Rationale, n.d.). The actors in the ensemble perform from within their identities as disabled individuals. When they present themselves as themselves, they do so with full knowledge that they are inevitably going to be perceived first and foremost as people with disabilities, second as actors. In this “pitilessly honest” (Respondent 37) production, they demonstrate to the general public their potential as disabled people to be “evil, despicable, [and] brutal” (Respondent 38), in place of creating work that might serve to showcase themselves as appealing, loving, and worthy. In contrast to Lisa Kron’s personal risk of vulnerability in *Well*, the actors in *Food Court* risk fracturing a sentimental public appraisal of disabled people’s cultural identities.

The *Food Court* actors’ self-interrogation of their community was described by one respondent as “unsparing” (Respondent 45). To spare someone or something is to choose to not engage: to choose to avoid. Sentimentality can be understood as unsparing as it withholds critique in favour of a vision of the way one might wish things to be, or perhaps only the most appealing assessment of what is being presented. An unsparing, unsentimental presentation of one’s own cultural group invites a deeper examination by deliberately dispensing with sentimentality. For members of any group, especially a marginalized group, there is a serious risk involved in choosing to expose themselves with an unvarnished honesty that belies an idealizing or self-promoting stance. If they are customarily subject to critique and misrepresentation by dominant cultural images and discourse, they may feel inclined to take an authoritative position to defend the positive aspects of their cultural identities rather than providing damning ammunition to those who would dismiss them. Yet paradoxically, the willingness of the actors in *Food Court* to display this unsentimentalized

and uncompromising self-assessment made a deep impression on the spectators, exploding their preconceptions.

3.3 Decentred or lowered status

In one instance in the data, the actors' authority in relation to their audience was reduced neither by virtue of derailing the spectators' perceptions of the actors' personal credibility, nor by the actors creating an unsentimental presentation of themselves; the actors' authority was reduced by virtue of their youth. The story reported in the data was a second-hand account of an extraordinary performance that took place one evening near the Polish-Lithuanian border. In the late 1980s, as the era of Poland's communist rule was waning, a small band of theatre performers—families, friends and children—travelled together from Warsaw heading east along rural country roads in search of some understanding of what the coming spirit of freedom might mean to them. The moment of aesthetic arrest in the story is tied to the cultural environment in which the travellers found themselves when they arrived in the village of Sejny:

They, on that border, had lived with danger and fear, and even hatred, for centuries. Their place had been controlled by the Russians, the Ukrainians, the Germans—Napoleon, Hitler, Stalin. Mushroom pickers who went into the forest sometimes crossed a border by mistake, and were never seen again. Many had been swept away in wars and purges. There were families in that town who had not spoken to their neighbors their entire lives, and even for generations. The Jews had almost all been killed, or driven away. The Russian Old Believers kept completely to themselves. Everyone despised the Gypsies. The Poles would not talk to the Germans who had been stranded there after the war, and the Ukrainians had been left behind when the border of their country had suddenly shifted to the east many generations ago. (Stafford, 2005, para. 16)

The theatre band stayed for a time in the village, visiting with the people there and listening to their stories, as their children befriended the children of Sejny. After a while, the actors

devised an idea for a performance. As a first step, they volunteered to clean the abandoned synagogue—now a fertilizer warehouse—at the centre of the village. When the place was ready, the theatre band invited people from the village to gather at the synagogue one evening.

They kept to themselves, in little groups around the edges of the great open room: Old Believers, Gypsies, a few Germans, Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Poles, and the three Jewish families who had somehow survived the war. Just whispering, wondering what was to happen, looking up at the tall windows, the high space so silent.

Then the two great doors were opened at dusk. Into the room in silence walked thirty children, each carrying a candle. Silent, silent. The children came first to the little cluster of Jewish people, and one of the children said, “We are the children of Sejny. We have never heard you sing. Will you teach us a song?”

Silence. A few of the people looked at each other. The candles. The children. There was an exchange of glances, a few words in Yiddish. Then there was a song, a most amazing song that climbed into the space of that building. A few Jewish voices were singing in that space again, singing a song that no one else had ever heard. Their voices grew stronger and stronger. And the candlelight began to shine in everyone’s eyes.

What was happening? What had happened to history, to hatred, to fear?

When that song was finished, there was a very unusual resonance there. We all felt it. And then the children turned to the Gypsy people.

“We are the children of Sejny. Will you teach us a song?”

Oh . . . the most amazing song. Wild, wild words and rhythms. Something from the mountains, from the dark, from India, maybe. From the heart of those, and of everyone. We were all amazed. And then the silence, and the candles, the children.

It only took an hour, maybe a little more. The children moved around the room with their candles, and their question: “Will you teach us a song.” And by the time they had asked for a song from the Old Believers, the Ukrainians, the Germans, the Poles, the Lithuanians—by the time their candles were burning low—after that one turn around the room by the children—we all knew the village would never be the same. (Stafford, para. 19-26)

What happened in the village of Sejny that evening? In the face of generations-long resistance among all these people to engage with one another, what contributed to the shift? In my interpretation, the success of the interaction is linked to a subversion of the actor-as-authority contract brought about due to the subordinate position of the children. The children of Sejny lacked any authority or command. Their genuine invitation to the adults to teach them songs was situated from a location of humility and vulnerability. The adults and elders of Sejny were not presented with the “commodity” of a performance, nor put into the position of responding to it. When the children approached them from a position of vulnerability, the lesser status of those who lack and need what others possess, reconfigured the contract between performer and spectator and opened the possibility for a new and vital encounter. In section 3.7, below, I examine how the special properties of this venue also contributed to the emergence of that remarkable encounter in the village of Sejny.

3.4 Abdicating authority of command—the actor as steward

An important feature of the actor-as-authority contract involves the implication that the actors are the commanders of the event. Having prepared the performance, actors as commanders of the event deliver it to the spectators. The data show that a willingness on the part of the actors to relinquish this authority in favour of an open-ended encounter can be tremendously gripping for an audience. When actors adopt a position of stewards or guides to an encounter that appears to have a life of its own (and attendant unpredictability), the audience’s relationship toward the actor as deliverer of a prepared commodity is subverted. This orientation of “steward” rather than “commander” opens a potential for spectators to engage more deeply and directly with the theatrical encounter.

A vivid illustration of this seemingly paradoxical balance between orchestrated plan and receptivity to anything-can-happen is evident in the play *An Oak Tree*, created and performed by British actor Tim Crouch. The play's narrative contrasts the pain of a family whose child was accidentally run over by a car with the pain of the car's driver who killed the girl, then fled. For each performance of this highly unusual approach to a two-hander play, Crouch works with an actor in the second role who has never seen the show and is not familiar with the script. This format is rare but not unique. In Rebecca Northan's acclaimed *Blind Date*, the Canadian actor plays a Parisian woman in a red clown nose named Mimi. For each performance, she invites a randomly selected man from the audience to have a date with her on stage (see McGinn, 2010). Producers of Crouch's *An Oak Tree* are required to recruit a different actor to play opposite Crouch each time he does the show. For an hour just prior to curtain, Crouch meets with the actor to explain what will happen and to allay concerns. He explains that he will give step-by-step instructions of what to do during the performance. The show proceeds with the audience fully aware that the second actor is operating on faith with no rehearsal or any real sense of what will happen. During each performance, Crouch side-coaches the second actor with unconcealed verbal instructions about what to do and say. He shares a clipboard with selections of dialogue, or whispers his partner's lines into a mic (relayed to the volunteer actor through an inconspicuous headset).

Crouch's design of this play and his presence in performance has been characterized as inhabiting a "spirit of sacrifice and generosity and courage" (Prendergast, 2007). What is being sacrificed is the authoritative presentation of a fixed commodity. At each performance, Crouch risks that this unrehearsed event will unfold without a catastrophe. His gracious personal presence and his sure hand as an actor and writer help both the audience and his

fellow actor to feel confident that this journey together into the unknown is being led by a confident guide, an experienced fellow traveller. By abdicating his position as the authority assigned to deliver the commodity of the performance, he reconfigures his relationship with the spectators. He emerges as a steward of the theatrical encounter who is engaging the audience in partnership with him.

Both actors' willingness to risk vulnerability on a personal level reflects a deliberate choice to relinquish their position of centrality—to re-orient themselves into a decentred position in relation with the spectators. By explicitly exhibiting their personal (not their characters') flaws, limitations, or lack of authoritative command, they reduce their privileged status in the moment of the theatrical encounter. If the relational contract between actor and spectators can be understood as a presentation and reception of the theatrical product or commodity, and if the spectators tendency is to rely on familiar cues to identify, categorize, and assign meaning to this product in order to determine their responses, this disruption of the actors' role in the equation destabilizes that transaction.

3.5 Fostering connection through believable characters

Creating exceptionally believable characters in performance was another way in which actors subverted the actor-as-authority contract. The data reveal that when spectators became less conscious of an individual onstage as an actor delivering a role and instead felt they were observing a believably real person, the spectators' relationship with the performance was imaginatively reconfigured into a person-to-person encounter. Authenticity was associated with actors who were themselves representative of a personal experience or culture (e.g., actors who are cancer survivors in plays about cancer or immigrants in plays

about immigration). This is often considered one of the strengths of applied theatre performances that include actors from culturally specific or identity-based communities. Authenticity was additionally associated with actors (and writers) who relayed the experiences of real people through careful and precise evocation. This quality is elegantly characterized by critic Charles Isherwood (2006) who describes Jayne Houdyshell's performance and Kron's playwriting in *Well*:

The character is written with the meticulous care that can arise only from intimate observation combined with deep affection. Ultimately what moves me most about the performance—and the role—is the way it enshrines such ardent observation, raising it somewhere close to the level of art. Ann Kron is observed and presented with an honesty, a rigor and an understated compassion that recall the work of the great documentary photographers who capture unexpected moments of beauty on the fly. (para. 16-17)

Black Watch offers an additional example of professional actors whose performance skills made them credible stand-ins for their real life counterparts. In the play, the characters' words are, for the most part, the words of real soldiers. Playwright Gregory Burke constructed the play from verbatim texts that he gathered during interviews with members of the Black Watch regiment. Although the men in *Black Watch* were actors not soldiers, they were by all accounts so resolutely authentic in their portrayals that audience members responded to them as if they were the real thing. One respondent described how, as a result of this play, she saw soldiers as more human than she ever considered them to be. Interestingly, several times throughout the play, the actors shifted into “non-realistic” performance modes, two of which were singled out in many of the accounts. In one sequence, as individual soldiers “wrote” heartfelt letters to their loved ones at home, the actors expressed their words non-verbally through a gestural language. In another scene, tensions among men in the squad led to a brawl in which the realistic physical actions of a

fistfight were elevated into a stylized movement sequence. Still, the actors' characterizations were routinely described as authentic and believable. Christopher Hart (2008) admits:

Not once in two hours do you remember you're watching actors. You think you're watching Scottish squaddies, square-bashing, on ops, "on the pish" – the energy and conviction of the ensemble is astonishing [. . .] The language is filthy, furious and comically hyperaggressive, and even the fight scenes are convincing. Usually in theatre, it is when the violent squalor of real-life brawling is rendered by some ludicrously balletic mime that the illusion of "real soldiers" breaks down and you are reminded that you are watching actors. Here, a sequence of unarmed combat is a compelling vision of synchronised and patterned aggression. (para. 4)

New York Times' critic Ben Brantley (2007) also noted these specific moments in the play and concurred that stylization did not have to distance the viewer from a feeling of authenticity:

The stylistic range and unerring appropriateness of the choreography throughout are astonishing, from the silent tableau in which the soldiers respond to letters from home with their own stylized sign languages to the martial ballet in which the men work off their restlessness by fighting one another. . . . [But] the dances here are less a matter of an imposed thematic vision than an evocation of individual lives harnessed together. (para. 13-14)

In these and other accounts in the data, the respondents' feelings of personal connection with the characters, soldiers who appeared to them as believably "real" people, were not hindered by a hyper-real display. Brantley's characterizations of the "unerring appropriateness of the choreography" and the avoidance of "an imposed thematic vision" offer clues to understanding how authenticity in performance can sustain a non-realistic frame. In my reading, he is describing staging choices that sacrifice an artist's conscious theatrical display of performance technique or genre (e.g., slapstick comedy, modern or balletic dance choreography, or other performance modes customarily associated with

theatrical presentation) in favour of commitment to gesture that is grounded in precisely evoked human expression.

A corroborating example of a physically exuberant performance that was anchored in an honest, affectionate, and credibly drawn character can be found in accounts of Declan Donnellan's production of *Twelfth Night*. Reviewers were uniformly astounded during the so-called "Gulling Scene" in which Malvolio, played by the handsome young actor Dmitry Shcherbina, is tricked by a forged letter into thinking that the Countess Olivia loves and desires him. Commentators noted that this scene is nearly always played for its comedic potential, with the actor playing Malvolio progressively responding to the letter with actions designed to provoke laughter at the character's foolishness. Shcherbina was extreme in his physical response to his reading of the letter, and yet his reactions were stripped of affect: they appeared heartfelt and utterly human. It was this dedication to authenticity that prompted critics, and the initial respondent, to feel more deeply engaged with the experience and perspective of the character.

II Subverting the Spectator-as-Recipient Contract

3.6 Reconfiguring the venue

Reconfiguring the performance venue played a significant part in reconfiguring the spectators' conception of the event and their expected role in relation to the actors. The traditional configuration of a Western theatre space delivers cues that serve to reinforce spectators' understanding of their position as recipients in the theatre encounter. The physical layout of seats in a darkened auditorium all facing a lit stage clearly delineates the roles of deliverer and receiver (see Schechner, 1988 on the sociometric design of theatres). As

evidenced in the data, adjustments made to the venue that shifted this relationship between actors and spectators forged a quality of complicity between the traditionally separate “stalls” and “stage.”

Performances were held in public spaces not traditionally associated with theatre performances: a church (*Dracula*), an abandoned synagogue (“the children of Sejny”), or shopping centres, train concourses, and public plazas (*small metal objects*). Traditional theatre spaces were sometimes reconfigured or entirely re-imagined (*Our Town*, *The Labyrinth*; *Orlando Furioso*). The reconfigured and re-imagined spaces signaled to the spectators that they were party to an event that was not abiding by the rules of theatre as they had previously understood it. The design of the place itself—with all of its attendant cultural associations signaling expectations for how the spectators are to relate to the event and the performers—was rendered as unfamiliar. The spectators were forced to ask anew: what is my role here?

Throughout the data, a very simple yet significant staging choice emerged that served to reconfigure the spectators’ relationship to the event. Physical proximity was used to foster a sense of affinity between audience and performers. When the physical boundaries between performance space and audience space were diminished, the perception of the theatre encounter shifted. Physical proximity disrupted the notion that the play space in theatre exists as a platform for those in the observation space to consume the commodity of the performance. The reconfigured venues signaled that the play space encompassed everyone; actors and spectators inhabited it jointly. As one reviewer of *Our Town* characterized it: “We were all of a piece” (Sommer, 2002).

For David Cromer's production of *Our Town*, the performance space in New York's Barrow Street Theatre was completely gutted and reconfigured, substantially increasing the physical proximity between performers and audience. The actors' playing space in the centre of raised seating on three sides included the areas between rows of seats. The virtually non-existent boundary between actors and audience was blurred further by the choice to keep the house lights illuminated for most of the show, dimming and brightening appropriately to fit with different times of day during the course of the play. *Black Watch* was similarly performed with spectators seated on both sides of the action, which took place in and around them. The immersion of spectators in the play space was intensified in *Orlando Furioso* brought to New York in 1970 by Rome's Teatro Libero. Staged in a promenade style inside of an enormous aerial-balloon-like tent, the spectators moved around the open space following the action and drawn into it as it unfolded. In his enthusiastic account, theatre critic John Lahr (1973) attempts to capture the quality of the experience of immersion in the theatre encounter:

Swirling through the standing audience on platforms reminiscent of the medieval platen, the actors tower above the people in the audience and hurtle dangerously between them. Instead of one plot and one platform, there are many. The audience cannot "sit still" or absorb the "through-line" of action. The density of the event forces them to open themselves up to the total theatrical experience. Entering *Orlando* is like comprehending a Pollock painting; where the meaning is the action. The audience must accept it, find a place to begin, then follow the energy. No one will see the same thing; no action is repeatable. Watching *Orlando* is like gazing into cut glass—a refraction of brilliant contours. Thought, theme, and texture come after the experience: *Orlando* sweeps an audience up in the precipitous thrill, size, and mystery of the moment. Delight disregards temporary confusion: the audience learns to adapt to the rules of the event. They are players in a game they find irresistible. Theater becomes sport; and in one of those rare festival moments of which only the stage is capable, the theater becomes an exemplary action, bringing people together in a new way. (pp. 4-5)

Establishing such an unconventionally high level of physical commitment on the part of the audience can stir resistance. Critic John Simon (1970; 2009), for example, makes no secret of his contempt for these productions of *Orlando Furioso* and *Our Town*, holding fast to his conception of what a “proper” theatre experience should represent. His was the minority view in the data. The majority found themselves surprised by the ways in which these reconfigured theatrical encounters pierced their preconceptions about the meaning of the plays and their relationships to the material. Another significant example of a reconfigured venue was *The Labyrinth* created by Taller Investigacion de la Imagen Theatral of Colombia. Part theatre, part performance-based installation, it blurred the boundaries between spectator and performer altogether. One by one, the spectators entered a performance space that was not a reconfigured or re-imagined theatre but rather a purpose-built labyrinth. *The Labyrinth* will be addressed more fully in Chapter 6.

3.7 Neutral space

The evening of singing facilitated by the children of Sejny in Poland took place in a former synagogue that had been cleaned and “reclaimed” as neutral space (Stafford, para. 18). The performers—the children and the families they invited to sing to (and with) them were in close proximity with no physical barriers between them. I have associated the low status of the children as a significant factor in the conditions that promoted the adults’ willingness to engage with one another. This story also illustrates that the neutrality of the venue may be a significance element in staging that destabilizes the spectators’ perception of themselves as recipients of a commodity. Although the synagogue had long been situated in the centre of the village, its use as a fertilizer warehouse indicates that the building had, for

all intents and purposes, fallen out of ready association with the small number of Jewish residents in the village. According to the story it had not been used as a synagogue since before the war (Stafford, 2005). When the theatre group cleared and cleaned it, they created a space that was familiar to the residents and yet also held no clear contemporary link to one particular group. If, after many years of disuse, the “newness” of the reclaimed chamber was perceived by the residents not as the Jewish “territory” but as a relatively neutral space in the village, the neutrality of the venue might well have fostered the potential for a new level of engagement among people who stood so divided.

3.8 Enveloping the spectators in the game

At first glance, Back to Back Theatre’s production *small metal objects*, appears to emphasize the distinction between performance space and observation space. Paradoxically, the venue also serves to subvert the spectator-as-recipient contract. The show is performed in large public spaces populated by lots of people (e.g. the concourse of a train station, shopping centres, and public plazas). In the midst of these public spaces, the theatre company erects a set of bleachers to hold 200 people. As ticket holders find their seats, each person discovers a high-quality headset placed under the bench. The audience members, all wearing headsets, look out at the sea of passersby. When the play begins, voices are heard in the headsets. At first it appears to be some kind of radio drama and then, gradually, the listeners begin to spot the sources of the voices they hear. The actors, fitted with tiny head mics, are in among the milling crowds, carrying on their dialogue and actions mostly unobserved and unnoticed by everyone around them. It is an extraordinary dynamic between spectators and actors. The spectators are unmistakably positioned in a separate realm sitting on the bleachers, observing

the play as it unfolds, but the event has been orchestrated so that actors and spectators are in cahoots in game that encircles them exclusively. Performances of *small metal objects* typically draw those who attempt to take advantage of a large captive audience on bleachers by busking or cavorting at the base of the stands to draw attention to themselves. The play goes on despite the hijinks. The buskers or passing extroverts may be entertaining, but they are not in on the game. The aural link between actors and listeners implicitly defines their mutually shared play space as it excludes all those outside the game.

3.9 Spectators as allies or pupils

The spectators' experience of the play as a mutual encounter with the actors was further influenced by staging choices that positioned the audience as allies with one (or more) of the actors or characters. Barbara McAlpine (2008) describes her initial annoyance at the interminably long, repetitive and loudly droning bagpipe sequence that begins *Black Watch*. After a while, the sound itself forced her to engage more deeply with the experience of the men in the play:

Eventually I reasoned the necessity of the monotonous droning I absorbed. It wasn't an overture in the traditional sense of theatrical contrivance - it was unspoken script. Continuing long after I thought long enough was too long, the bagpipes spoke of futility and gloom. What a brilliant ploy! I wanted to leave, but like the Black Watch Regiment in a strange and disquieting zone, I couldn't and wouldn't. The bagpipes and their persistent repetition suggested to me the idea that our war is a hole with no satisfactory conclusion, only persisting for its own sake. Being tripped into the hole and falling like Alices, the Black Watch Regiment landed in a bewildering war zone for no apparent good reason. The now-familiar opening pipes, then, introduced a Scottish heartbeat of confusion, fear, bravado, and anguish. In the end, they spoke volumes and provided the only consolation available. (p. 273)

McAlpine characterizes this aural experience as fostering her sense of empathy with the soldiers, analogously giving her a tiny emotional flavour of what it might be like for them.

The first lines of the play are delivered by an actor playing a Black Watch veteran who vehemently mocks the possibility of empathy from audience members who have not gone through the experience of fighting in Iraq themselves. Then, following this opening salvo, the audience is introduced to another character who, as a stand-in for the playwright and the audience, genuinely wants to learn about the soldier's experience in the war. The play continues in a vein of invitation to the spectators to become immersed in the world of the soldiers. The play invites them to witness the events as allies of the soldiers.

An invitation for spectators to be allies with a character on stage was crystallized in one arresting instance during a performance of *Medea* that took place in the 1980s at the outdoor theatre at Epidaurus in Greece. Epidaurus seats about 17,000 people, and yet it offers a sense of intimacy between actors and performers that is unrivalled for its size. Due to the craft of its design and the unusual properties of the limestone seating area, words spoken on its stage in a normal tone of voice can be heard with utmost clarity from every position in the amphitheatre. This affinity between actors and audience via the virtual proximity that is produced by these exceptional acoustic properties, was taken to an even deeper level in *Medea*:

About three-quarters of the way through the play, Medea kills her two children offstage, and their cries of horror and for help are heard by the audience [. . .] just after Medea kills the first child, the onstage Nurse calls for quiet—she hushes the audience with her exclamation of “Did you hear that?” [. . .] the entire audience at that moment fell absolutely silent—and in that silence, we heard the cry of the second child. There was then a little kick-pause, and that audience of 17,000 people, packed in like sardines, made an audible groan that lasted for 2-3 seconds—and the hair stood up on the back of my neck. I believe what was happening was that the audience was being made to feel complicit in the murder of Medea's children—we also knew what Medea was going to do; we also stood by and did nothing; we also let it happen. (Respondent 9)

Here, a dimension was added to the experience of mutuality among actors and spectators in the theatre encounter. In a curious parallel to the *small metal objects* mics and headsets, the architecturally enhanced acoustics at Epidaurus helped to reduce the gap between stage and stalls by allowing each actor to speak to each individual member of the audience with an almost personal directness. However, this intimate relationship was deepened when the nurse, who is not in a position to stop the murders, drew the spectators into her own complicity as a bystander. It is noteworthy that the respondent wrote “we *also* knew. . .we *also* stood by. . .we *also* let it happen” (italics added). The nurse was not standing in judgment of the spectators; she was enfolding them into her experience of anguish and helplessness within the fiction of the play.

A striking contrast to the nurse’s invitation to treat the audience as allies occurred in the final moments of Peter Brook’s *US*, a 1968 Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) play about the Vietnam War:

BOB enters, carrying a small table with a black box on it. He wears black gloves. He opens the lid of the box, and releases several white butterflies. They fly out into the auditorium, and over the actors. He reaches into the box and takes another one or two butterflies and throws them into the air. Then he pulls a lighter from his pocket, lights it, takes out another butterfly and holds it in the flame. We cannot tell if it is real or false. As it stops burning he freezes, as do all the actors. The house lights have come up. The actors stay immobile until everyone has left the theatre. (Kustow, Reeves & Hunt, 1968, p. 184)

It is evident from Brook’s (1968) written reflections that the company’s intent was to stage an image—an “incoherent cry”—that captured feelings of anguish and impotence forced by the contradictions of the war in Vietnam. Speaking to the actors during the development of the play, Brook suggested that forcing discomfort on the actors and audience alike, expressing the tension between the reality of the war in Vietnam and life in the UK might

crack open a yet undiscovered channel of response to an impossible situation. Based upon reactions in reviews and letters, many of the audience members who attended *US* were gripped by this image, but it was received as an affront. In a letter to *The Times*, Brook himself wrote, “some audiences saw in [the actors’] immobility nothing but hostility, self-righteousness, accusation. Some took the silence as an insult, others as an evasion” (p. 211). A common thread throughout the responses to this moment in the play is the spectators’ resistance to the feeling of having been emotionally manipulated and accused by the actors of complicity: in the death of the butterfly or, by implication, in the deaths of the people of Vietnam. The actors were perceived as assuming a position of superiority, standing apart from the spectators as though they were lecturing pupils. By and large, the spectators felt that the image of the burning butterfly and the silence that followed was presented to them as an arrogant judgment about their inaction, or as a dare to take action.

Immolating what appears to be a live butterfly in a play is an emotionally charged staging choice. In the words of one reviewer, its intensity “alienated in the wrong way,” (Jones, 1968) prompting many spectators to dismiss the material. A significant difference between the conclusion of *US* and the nurse’s entreaty in *Medea* at Epidaurus is the vagueness in the RSC actors’ relationship with their audience. It was clear that “Bob” was the deliberate and methodical perpetrator of the awful act. What was unclear, as he was doing it, was his attitude toward the spectators. In the closing moments of the play it was evidently unclear what any of the other actors’ attitudes were: toward the burning butterfly, or toward the spectators. The finale of *US* was intended to be as fraught with ambiguity as the Vietnam era itself. Jean-Paul Sartre (1968), reflecting on the play, tried to address its ultimate ambiguity:

The play ends and the spectator, sent back to his solitude, leaves with a confused despair made up of shock fury and impotence. There has been no conclusion and after all what is there to conclude? It is true that the war in Vietnam is a crime. It is also true that the Left is quite incapable of doing anything. (p. 200)

Despite the acknowledged ambiguities of the times, the ensemble was challenged by playwright Arnold Wesker (1968) for having created this powerful and painful image with no clear purpose. He suggested that the actors had, in fact, established a specific relationship with their audience and that assuming a posture of ambiguity at the end was irresponsible.

You cannot hammer at an audience for three hours, demanding it look at you, listen to you, think about you then in the last minute expect it to react. You don't jeer at people you've paralyzed because they can't walk. (p. 205)

Under Brook's guidance, the RSC actors in this final scene of the play tried to find a language of theatre that might cut through the audience's dulled mediated sensibilities about the British and American attitudes concerning the war in Vietnam. In this case, the effectiveness of that theatrical language was curtailed when the staging gave the impression that actors were treating spectators as their pupils rather than as their allies in a mutual encounter with difficult material.

3.10 Explicitly re-negotiating the contract with the event

In some instances in the data, the spectators' relationship to the event was more subtly reconfigured by explicit or implicit re-negotiations of the implied contract between spectators and event. Reconfiguration of the spectator's contract was made explicit in a children's theatre production of *The Pied Piper of Hamelin* in Pittsburgh in the early 1960s. The traditional role of the spectators as observers was upended when the actor playing the

Piper led the actors playing children off the stage and up the aisle to the back of the house. The matinee audience of children, apparently acting on their own, rose as one and followed the Piper and the other actors out into the lobby. The Piper, improvising, led the audience out the front doors of the theatre, around the block, and back into the building through the rear stage door. What led to this level of engagement on the part of the audience of children? What led to their impetus to become physically involved in the play? That season at the Pittsburgh Playhouse, an actor in character as the Blue Fairy from *Pinocchio* appeared on stage at the beginning of all the children's shows. She explained the rules of the game for the young audiences. She encouraged them to respond however they felt. If they wanted to laugh, they were given permission to laugh. If they wanted to cry out, that would be fine. In other words, the unspoken contract to sit quietly and receive the material was explicitly renegotiated. When the Pied Piper made his exit with the children of the play, the children of the audience understood that they had permission to behave as they saw fit. The decision to join the exodus may have started with one outgoing child, but evidently all felt it was a reasonable course of action to join in the game.

3.11 Implicitly re-negotiating the contract with the event

Implicit renegotiation of the spectators' contract with the theatre event occurred during the "Mississippi Freedom Summer" of 1964 when members of The Free Southern Theater were touring their adaptation of Martin Duberman's *In White America*. One evening in Greenville, Mississippi, the show began as it always did:

When the house got as full as we thought it might get, Denise Nickolas, who always planted herself about midway back on the house right aisle, would start singing, "Oh, Freedom. Oh, Freedom! Oh Freedom over me! Before I'll be a slave, I'll be buried in my grave, and go home to my Lord and be Free!"

One by one, from different places in the house the other actors would join in the singing and we'd all advance in an informal processional to the playing area to assume a freeze in predetermined postures on the stage. When we were all in place Gilbert [Moses], who also directed the play, would have the first line, the house lights would dim and soon the audience would realize that we were the actors and that the evening was under way. (Respondent 39)

This night was different. As the actors rose to join in the singing, so did a large gentleman from the audience. He joined the processional with a "thorough commitment to his self-determined role," taking a position centre stage alongside the rest of the actors, looking out at the audience with pride. Gilbert Moses stepped over to him, and said a few quiet words inviting him to return to his seat. He did, and the actors continued with the performance. Later, the man admitted he had been drinking before he arrived, but explained that in the moment, it made sense to him: "When I came up there I knew exactly what I was going to say but when those bright lights came on everything went out of my mind!" (as reported by Respondent 39). The individual who sent this account suggested that the look and feel of the way that play began was very much in the mode of the civil rights mass meetings of the times. The relationship between the social change activists and the residents of the towns and cities they visited was absolutely in line with what transpired that night. Local men and women of colour in the American South, unaccustomed to taking a stand, were finding the strength and courage to speak up and be heard. The rest of the audience, who knew this man but did not know the actors, appeared perfectly willing to accept the premise that one of their own should be moved to stand and join the action of the play. It seemed to make sense to them as being well within the cultural context of the time and place.

As a result of the explicitly presented contract during the pre-show presentation of *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*, and the implicitly presented contract cued by the cultural context

of *In White America*, the audience in each case received permission to shift their conception of the event. The respective staging choices gave them permission to engage as co-players in the encounter.

Summary

An undeniable aspect of theatre's appeal is its vitality as a living experience. The form is virtually defined by its ever-present potential for subtle variations from one performance to the next. Yet, in this study, when seasoned theatregoers were asked to describe their most vital experiences watching plays, many of the performances they recalled were those in which the performance as a fixed event—made by the artists and delivered to the audience—was challenged, subverted, or reconfigured. These performances stood out for them as exceptions to an orientation towards theatre performance that, as Susan Bennett (1990) reminds us, reaches back to Horace: “The audience is marked as the recipient of the poet's work” (p. 4). All manifestations of staging choices described in this chapter can be understood as contesting that traditional orientation in one manner or another. Whether as a result of actors unseating their own roles as authoritative deliverers of the play, or staging that turns an experience of consumption into an experience of mutual encounter, staging that subverts or re-configures the theatre performance as a set, deliverable commodity—from the stage to the stalls—becomes more vital and memorable.

Discussion

As Ric Knowles amply demonstrates in his book, *Reading the Material Theatre* (2004), spectators receive messages that prescribe their expected relationships to the theatre

encounter long before they even enter the theatre building. At the first sign of a poster, newspaper listing, or even the first hearing of a play's title and genre, the stage is quite literally set. Potential attendees pick up cues that delineate how the experience they are about to meet is related to other categories of experiences they have had in the theatre. Embedded in these cues are implied expectations about their role as recipients in the transaction. In Western theatre, the dominant orientation of a theatre experience as a largely one-directional relationship passing from artists to audience members is made clear in Richard Schechner's (2006, p. 215) "performance quadrilogue," a representation of a performance process rendered graphically as a rectangle twice bisected by crossing diagonal lines (Figure 7).

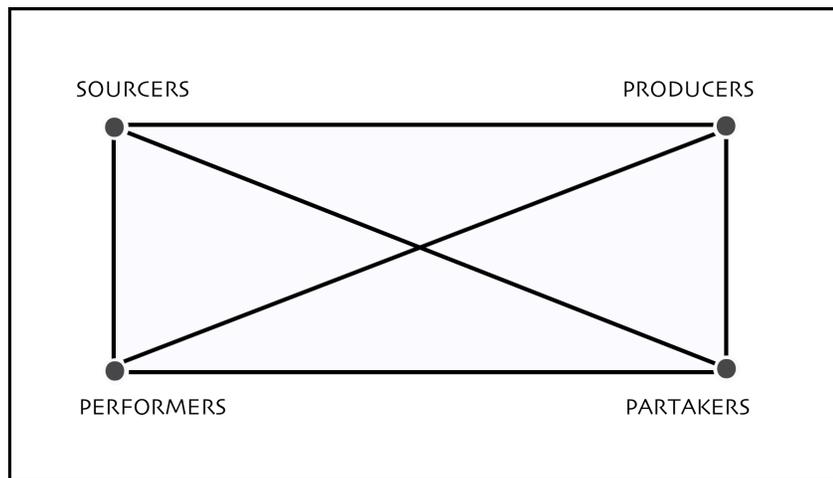


Figure 7. The performance quadrilogue. From Schechner, 2006, p. 215.

Each corner of the performance quadrilogue is labelled: "sourcers," "producers," "performers," and "partakers." Schechner describes how mainstream theatre favours what he terms a "Z-path" around the quadrilogue (Figure 8).

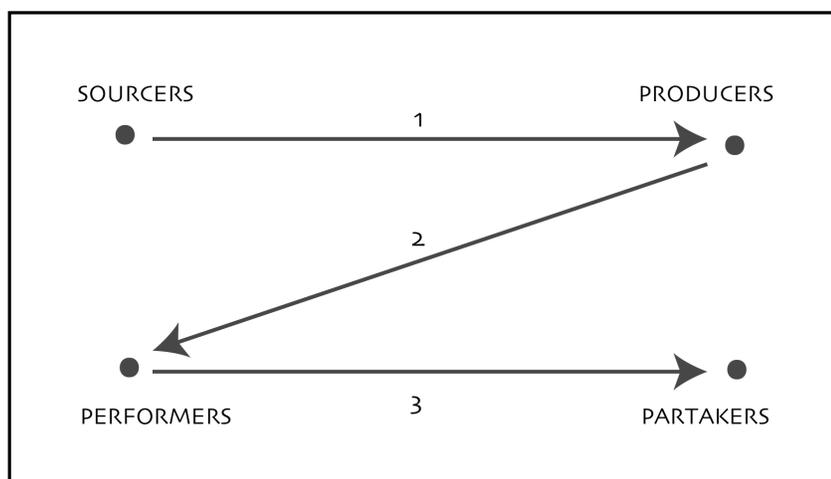


Figure 8. The Z-path around the performance quadrilogue. From Schechner, 2006, p. 215

By this he means the experience begins in the upper left hand corner of the quadrilogue with sourcers: those who create or assemble the material. Sourcers are generally playwrights, but can also be actors when they are in the position of generating collectively devised scripts. The process next moves across the top of the rectangle as the source material is turned over to producers: the creative team of directors, designers and actors, etc., who interpret and translate the source text into a living performance. At the culmination of the producers' work, the process continues down the sloping left angle of the Z as the material is turned over to actors whose responsibility it is to perform the rehearsed material on stage. The process reaches its final destination on the Z-path by crossing to the lower right hand corner where partakers, or audience members, receive the actors' performance at the culmination of this progression. The Z-path embodies a contractual relationship among all involved. It explicitly defines roles within a conception of an encounter that I have termed a theatre-event-as-commodity, to be delivered by the actor-as-authority, to the audience-as-recipient.

The staging choices I have presented in this chapter fundamentally unsettle the

Z-path relationship in the theatre encounter, and they are all linked by a common thread. They all interfere with the cues that signal to the audience what their part in the transaction should be. Staging that subverts or reconfigures the “contracts” is not intended to bewilder an audience by denying them any indications about their expected roles, or by giving them conflicting indications about the parameters of the experience. Rather, the staging strategies that emerged from the data show how the actors are able to redefine their relationships with the spectators so that the experience is shifted into a new category, apart from the constraints of traditionally imposed expectations and habitual responses. This relational sensibility toward theatre is embraced by Michael Boyd, the current Artistic Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company, who believes “The future of theatre — it’s going to be about an event. A sharing. A very direct, honest communication” (as cited in Kavner, 2011, para. 10).

I began this chapter with an examination of some exceptional moments in performance associated with actors who, by revealing certain aspects of their personal or group identities, risked subjecting themselves to ridicule, criticism or loss of respect. The link between publicly taking a personal emotional risk and furthering an enlivened, vital engagement among people is a recurring theme in the work of theatre scholar and playwright Julie Salverson. In her research and practice, Salverson addresses the difficulty of making oneself authentically available and present to others. She sees great potential for an individual to instigate an ethically grounded mutual encounter through an unlikely act: risking vulnerability. For Salverson (2008), the attitude of committing oneself to a public display of personal risk is embodied in “the impossible bravery . . . of the clown” who exhibits “truthfulness and a willingness to engage in the face of failure” (pp. 245-246). It requires enormous courage for a clown to present herself to an audience without relying on a

fully prepared sure-fire gag or “funny character” that will presumably assure success in her bid to make an audience laugh. The clown shows courage in the face of palpable fear that if she fails, she *herself* will be subject to criticism, not the “bit” she has prepared. Salverson makes a convincing case that it is this unabashed embrace of the risk of personal exposure that creates a space for others to feel willing to take a “step forward” and engage in an encounter with the one who has taken the initial step of showing vulnerability (p. 246).

I agree with Salverson that the clown’s willingness to risk exposure has intriguing potential as a model for actors who embrace staging choices that risk diminishing their personal authority or reveal unsentimentalized aspects of themselves. Someone who is willing to make himself available by taking these kinds of risks stands a chance of reconfiguring the actor-audience relationship, shifting the experience from the delivery of a commodity to mutual engagement. As Salverson writes, “The goal is relationship, not success” (p. 246).

Risk of exposing vulnerability will be radically different from person to person and from one situation to the next. When Nicola Cavendish played Mae West in Claudia Shear’s *Dirty Blonde*, the middle-aged professional actress with a Rubenesque figure bared her breast in one scene. In a cultural environment that barks insistence about what women’s bodies “should” look like, this physical exposure was a personal risk for Cavendish. She reportedly asked her costume designer if he could supply her with one of “those little things that you put under your breasts so they point to the moon instead of to hell the way mine do” (Thomas, 2004). When residents of Belfast, Ireland, volunteered in 1999 to be actors in an applied theatre project, they all took personal risks. The play, about a marriage between a Protestant and a Catholic, was produced in the immediate wake of the peace agreement that ended ‘the

troubles' (Moriarty, 2004). The participants exposed themselves to criticism from families, friends, and neighbours for their decisions to associate with those so long considered their enemies. In October, 2011, an ensemble of prisoners at Canada's William Head Penitentiary worked with choreographer Ingrid Hansen and her associate Anne Cirillo to create and perform *Chalk*, an evening of butoh-inspired dance theatre. The show, performed for the other inmates and (on separate occasions) for members of the public, included scenes in which the men displayed sincere expressions of fear, longing, and weakness in an environment where risking vulnerability is not common.

All the permutations in this chapter on subverting unspoken contracts in the theatre encounter can be understood as different manifestations of actors taking a risk to be available and open to an audience. To clarify the broader connection between personal availability and fostering an ethically grounded mutual encounter, I turn again to Julie Salverson. The premise of traditional theatre as a fixed, deliverable experience is reflected in Salverson's (2001) reading of what philosopher Emmanuel Levinas calls "the said." In Levinas' characterization, "the said" is the definitive presentation of what is: the finished package, the object, the dispensing of evidence from one individual to another. Levinas distinguishes "the said" from what he calls "the saying," which represents the more dynamic *act* of offering. He describes "the saying" as a stance of openness, of generosity, and of exposure. "The saying" is considered an unfinished undertaking. Because it is an act in process, it allows a space for meeting between the one who extends "the saying" and the other who engages with it as an open-ended offer. One recognizes elements of "the said" throughout the implied contracts of actor-as-authority, and spectator-as-recipient. These transactions involve the dispensation and receipt of definitive, closed elements. By contrast, performers who deliberately lower their

own status as the authority re-envision the venue as a space of encounter among allies and fellow players, and establish conditions that create a performance as a living event discovered and constructed in the moment, all exhibit qualities of “the saying.” When the actors choose to meet the audience with a stance that is open and available, the result is a powerfully revived experience in the theatre encounter.

Implications for teaching

When considering staging that would involve actors taking personal emotional risks, there must be no equivocation that any decision about the type and level of risk taken must be entirely in the hands of the actors themselves. Given the enormous variation of what personal risk means from one person to another, the actors may reflect upon what it is they *would* express to their audience if only they were not afraid of being personally criticized for expressing it. This line of inquiry will lead them to identify the parameters of that dangerous terrain and to consider what they would be willing to do in performance to express it despite that fear of being judged.

As described in the discussion section above, one may devise staging for all the sub-categories in the chapter by considering a simple question: How might the status of the actors or the performance space itself be subverted or reconfigured to reflect a stance of availability and openness to the audience? What staging choices will promote a conception of the play as an event in process: an event that is being created in the moment? This does not imply that a play must be improvised from one performance to the next. For example, choices about the orientation of the performance venue can foster a sense for the spectators that they are participants in the game without physically drawing them into “audience participation.”

When devising the play, the ensemble may ask what implicit or explicit cues will make it clear to the audience that the relational transactions between spectators and audience members that are typically experienced in theatre are not in effect during this production?

The ensemble may ask how the authoritative status of the performers as deliverers of a product may be lowered, subverted, or re-configured, making them into stewards or guides of the play as a living experience.

In closing, a useful source of inspiration for devising a play that embodies an open and available relationship between actors and audience can be found in Richard Schechner's classic text "6 Axioms for Environmental Theatre" (1968). Schechner's first axiom is a straightforward reflection of the premise of this entire chapter: "The theatrical event is a set of related transactions." Then, challenging the notion that a theatre must be divided into separate areas for actors and audience, his second axiom reads "All the space is used for performance; all the space is used for audience." Here he asserts that, "Once one gives up fixed seating and the bifurcation of space, entirely new relationships are possible." The third axiom encourages actors to consider that, "The theatrical event can take place either in a totally transformed space or in existing, non-traditional venues, asserting their "freedom to [transform] a space—creating an environment or negotiating with an environment, engaging in a scenic dialogue with space." In axiom four, Schechner challenges the traditional "framed picture" of the proscenium stage when he suggests that "Focus is flexible and variable." He introduces the term "multi-focus" to mean allowing different elements of a performance to occur simultaneously on stage. Alternatively, "local focus" means that, depending upon where one sits, one will experience different elements of a play. Schechner's fifth axiom reads "All production elements speak in their own language." Subverting the primacy of

language in the traditional idea of a play, this axiom promotes the potential for meaning to be embedded in a wide variety of media expressed through multiple means. The sixth axiom contends “The text need be neither the starting point nor the goal of a production. There may be no text at all.” Here, the idea of the play’s text as commodity is subverted and re-configured. Schechner declares that artists “engage with the play, they don’t present it.”

Chapter Four

Compelling

I must first attract their attention. If I have their attention, I can gain their involvement. Then I have a chance for their investment and from that their concern. If I have their concern, I have hope for obsession.

Dorothy Heathcote
(as cited in Morgan & Saxton, 1987, p. 22)

Introduction

Dorothy Heathcote knows a thing or two about drama. An acclaimed pioneer in the use of drama in education, Heathcote has been introducing innovations to classroom teaching for more than half a century. Although her pedagogical approaches have many dimensions, all her work follows from a simple yet radical premise. In the laboratory of the classroom, teachers must establish circumstances that make students *want* to know more. The path that leads to the students' "obsession" with the subject being studied begins by attracting their attention. While actors in applied theatre projects are not teachers, and their audiences are not students, the mechanisms in Heathcote's pedagogy that serve to draw students into an irresistible impulse to care about the topic at hand function in much the same way as certain staging choices function for spectators. In the instances described in this chapter, the spectators' fore-sight—their comfortable assumptions that they know all they need know about whatever they encounter in a play—met with staging so compelling it radically increased the depth of their personal investment, concern, and even obsession with the play's characters, situations, and topic.

Nine sub-categories of compelling staging choices emerged in my analysis of the data. Respondents reported being particularly moved by seeing one or more individuals on

stage perform a loving or generous act despite a challenge that made it difficult to do. I call this staging choice, *display of generosity or love that requires personal sacrifice*. Language or physical action that was exceptionally funny obliterated the tenacious presence of the spectators' fore-sight. Preconceptions were swept away when spectators were overcome with *hilarity*. An onstage *display of injustice or unfairness* triggered the spectators' intense personal investment in the wrongfulness of the treatment given to victim(s). Images or behaviours that violated accepted social norms (taboos) were unsettling to audiences. While sometimes distancing the viewers, the incorporation of *taboo* in staging occasionally served to dislodge the spectators' preconceptions through the sheer force of shock. Spectators' levels of engagement spiked when the physical equanimity of the actors' bodies was disoriented. I call this staging choice *the destabilized body*. Staging that incorporated exceptionally arresting images or sounds so captivated spectators with the power of *beauty*, their preconceptions and assumptions were temporarily eclipsed. Just as poetry and storytelling uses language to captivate the listener or reader, respondents were captivated by particular moments in plays in which language was used to describe images evocatively. I call this staging choice *cultivating an image through language*. The use of language to produce suspense, by cultivating an image of something dramatic that was about to happen, similarly increased the level of spectators' investment in the action or characters. I call this staging choice *cultivating suspense through language*. In several instances in the data, respondents were deeply affected when they felt a *personal connection to the experience* of the character(s) or situation(s) in a play.

Compelling

4.1 Display of generosity or love that requires personal sacrifice

A distinction emerged in the data between the display of what I have identified as a generous or loving act, and displays of sentimentality. Many reviewers of David Cromer's *Our Town* noted that directors of this frequently-produced play often rely on sentimentality to seduce audiences into feeling an emotional attachment to the show's characters and circumstances. Cromer's decidedly unsentimental production was among several plays in the study that were admired for avoiding sentimentality. Indeed, *Our Town* in particular prompted derision among critics about the overly common use of sentimentality in other productions. Sentimentality functions by presenting a character who is the *recipient* of loving act, prompting spectators to feel a sympathetic connection to that character and to co-experience the emotions as the character experiences them. Presenting characters flushed with emotion in order to stimulate replication of that emotion among the spectators was described by critics as an easy route to captivating an audience, but it was considered superficial: a feel-good gloss. In contrast, the effectiveness of several accounts of aesthetic arrest in the data turned on the spectators' admiration for someone who took steps to *perform* a loving act. When characters expend effort to make a personal sacrifice that genuinely appears to be driven by regard for the value of another person or idea, spectators find it inherently compelling. Because generous or loving acts took many different forms in the data, this section includes multiple examples illustrating the range of ways these staging choices were incorporated into performances.

The demonstration of a generous act on stage was the central element in one respondent's description of a free dance performance that took place in 2000 in New York's

South Bronx neighborhood. Professional choreographer-dancer Arthur Aviles was in the midst of an energetic solo when the audience was witness to an unexpected event. A local homeless man named Mike made his way over to the stage, and then stepped up onto it. The respondent described the frisson she felt ripple amongst members of the audience. How would Aviles react? How would he handle Mike interrupting his performance? Aviles graciously and wordlessly welcomed Mike to join him in the piece as a fellow dancer, and they finished the dance together. Like Jill Dolan's (2005) "utopian performatives" that "feel like utopia in the present of performance" (p. 33), what Aviles did realized a vision of what a world embodied by generous or loving acts might look like. The contributor wrote: "That moment changed me forever and [now, ten years later] continues to motivate most of what I do and how I think about almost everything" (Respondent 2). By extending a welcome to this man, Aviles sacrificed the primacy of his own artistic presentation and treated the man as someone worthy of his respect despite all cultural expectations to the contrary. The effectiveness of this remarkable event can also be attributed to the perception by the audience that a "real life event" had interrupted the frame of the performance, a type of staging choice examined further in Chapter 7.²

A subtle yet deeply affecting loving act within the fictional world of a play was at the heart of a 2009 site-specific community-based show in the town of Cuyk, in southeastern Holland. The script was based on interviews with people from Cuyk; it was written and delivered mostly in their dialect, and featured neighbourhood residents in the roles. The

² This moment of aesthetic arrest was, in fact, somewhat staged. Before submitting her story to this study, the woman who witnessed the event contacted Aviles' dance company to confirm some details about the performance. She learned to her surprise that the events she saw unfold originally took place during an open rehearsal. At that time, Aviles responded just as did in her description. Afterward, Aviles extended an invitation to Mike to attend the performances and, if he felt so moved, to repeat what he had done spontaneously. Mike accepted the offer and returned on several occasions to re-enact his original impulse. (Respondent 2)

performances took place in an apartment where audiences of twenty people at a time (also mostly residents of the neighbourhood) sat on benches. A scene began with an older woman, Mia, who spoke directly to the audience. She embodied the kind of ease and naturalness—as described in the previous chapter—that made her scripted lines about her life and family appear to be as spontaneous as a conversation with friends who had stopped by for a visit and some tea. A short while into the scene, a young Moroccan named Hassan briefly entered the room while on his way to try to repair a laundry machine elsewhere in the apartment. When he left, Mia spoke to the audience about him. “He is one of the good ones,” she said. She “can see it in their eyes.” When Hassan returned and sat with Mia for a cup of tea, he asked her about the sad song she always sings. She was not forthcoming, but in the conversation that followed, the audience learned that two of her children were dead. Then Hassan wondered aloud if he might ask her about something:

HASSAN: Suppose, right, just suppose . . . I had something with your granddaughter . . .

MIA: (almost chokes on her cigarette). What?

HASSAN: I was afraid of that. You don't like it.

MIA: I didn't say that. I used to have a lover from the South myself when I was young. Beautiful brown eyes he had. Just like you. We used to meet at the station . . .

HASSAN: You don't have to tell me the details.

MIA: Don't worry. So you're in love with my granddaughter?

HASSAN: Yes, and she with me.

MIA: You know something, Hassan. I have to get used to the idea of having a Moroccan in the family. You're one of the good ones, so that is not the issue. But still, a Moroccan in the family. That I have to live to see that day.

(Noise comes from the apartment above. A long and insistent doorbell rings)

MIA: Can you go have a look, Hassan. Check if everything is OK there. There is so much violence in the world today. In the old days you could let your kids go wherever they wanted. Until the day comes that you realize that is no longer possible. (HASSAN gets up, about to walk away) You know, Hassan. My son was murdered by a Moroccan. (silence)

HASSAN: (softly) Sorry.

MIA: You don't have to be sorry for that. You didn't do it.

HASSAN: No . . . (He walks out)

MIA: You know. That was the first time I was able to say that to anyone.

(Respondent 25)

The contributor of this story wrote about the affective power of the intimacy of the venue, and of the complete authenticity of the actor playing Mia. He also acknowledged that the moment was made exceptionally striking due to the sense of love that permeated the scene, including Mia's line telling Hassan about the circumstances of her son's murder:

We can understand the motivation behind the line. We sense that even Hassan understands. We sense the love she feels for Hassan even as she says these lines. We sense that Hassan needs to hear them if he's ever going to have a serious relationship with Mia's granddaughter. Some truths cannot afford to stay buried. The multiple subtle meanings of her seemingly xenophobic, even racist line communicate through the setting, the intimate atmosphere, the personality of Mia that radiates, her attitude to Hassan, the way their relationship unfolds, and the way this scene is dramaturgically constructed. (Respondent 25)

It is clear to the audience that reaching out to Hassan with honesty and directness about her closely shielded history is difficult for Mia to do, and yet she does it. As the respondent notes, what the audience sees is someone who extends her trust as an overture toward building a relationship. Given her personal history, it is a gesture of love that belies how she might be expected to feel toward a Moroccan in The Netherlands who is in a relationship with her granddaughter. When Mia discloses to Hassan the secret of her great sadness that

came at the hands of a Moroccan, she is generously treating him as a person worthy of respect.

A loving act is not the same as an accommodating act. Many of the positive responses to the original production of *Well* involve commentary on actor Jayne Houdyshell's deeply affectionate portrayal of Lisa Kron's mother, Ann. Nearly everything that Ann does is grounded in caring and concern for others. The play is peppered with her small parental loving gestures toward her daughter, toward the ensemble of four "hired" actors, and even toward the audience (when she first appears, she asks the audience members if they would like some refreshments from her pantry). In the final moments of the play, after the other actors have mutinied against Lisa's treatment of her mother and left the show, only Lisa and Ann are left on stage. As Lisa becomes rigidly determined to finish the performance as scripted, she lays the blame for her own illness on her mother. It is then that the biggest seismic shift in the world of the play occurs. Jayne Houdyshell breaks character and talks to Lisa as a friend. The moment is gripping. The scene is very confrontational; Lisa is near hysteria as she blurts out her feelings about her mother, and Jayne adamantly refuses to back off from her decision to stop enabling Lisa. However, throughout the scene, Jayne is clearly operating from a position of love and caring. She behaves as a supportive mentor who intervenes to stop a friend's self-destructive behaviour. The scene is played so that it appears that Jayne's act of breaking character and stopping the show mid-scene is difficult for her, and yet she does it. She confronts Lisa firmly in the spirit of a tough loving kindness that guides the play toward Lisa's ultimate redemption. The staging of this scene will be examined in further detail in Chapter 7.

In one remarkable instance in the study, it was the actors' personal demonstrations of love and sacrifice toward an *idea* that moved respondents. In the mid 1990s, an amateur community group from Louisiana journeyed to Canada to take part in a large international Acadian reunion in New Brunswick. Their contribution to the festival was characterized as “an under-rehearsed, un-inspiring production of a trite Acadian play—retelling the traditional Evangeline story” (Respondent 17). It was not until the show was over that the impact was felt:

The large cast consisted of what seemed like 10-12 actors. At the end of the play, after some polite applause, the director came out, Bottom-like, not to apologize for the play, but to thank the actors and crew—this of course added to the amateur aspect and lack of magic. Nonetheless, as I wrestled to try and leave the theatre, I realized that while he was speaking, the actors, crew, volunteers began to emerge gradually in small groups out of the wings . . . there were what appeared to be nearly a hundred people involved. There were kids, young adults, middle-aged, and more senior people. He described that they began to rehearse nearly 9 months ago in preparation for this production. At first it was only 5-6 actors from one small town outside Lafayette. But then, through word of mouth, relatives from nearby towns became interested, so they joined. Actors began to bring their children to rehearsals. Grandparents came to babysit so they attended regularly . . . essentially an entire community was formed around this play. These individuals were all Acadian descendants who had been in Louisiana for over 2 centuries. Their ancestors and roots were of course in Acadia—New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. As he described their story of coming together, the kids on stage were pushing and shoving and giggling, some of the adults were hugging in congratulations, some were in tears about the show. The director described how proud he was of this group . . . how they boarded 3 buses to journey for 3 full days to return HOME to their roots. There was not a dry eye in the theatre as we witnessed this powerful story . . . we in the audience were by and large all Acadians. We know the history of our people being expelled/deported in 1755, and here were these families brought together by theatre, returning to their roots 2 centuries later! Most had never laid foot in Acadia, yet they claimed being Acadian/Cajuns. The moment of 5-10 people bowing on stage, then a few more emerging from the wings, a few more, a few more, a few more, until the stage was filled by “our distant cousins” will forever remain for me as a powerful experience in the theatre. (Respondent 17)

Surely, every amateur theatre production is constructed on a foundation of the participants' love; the very word "amateur" is a direct translation of "one who loves." And yet, this production offered something that far exceeded these Acadian Canadians' expectations of a typical amateur play. The respondent reports that there was "not a dry eye in the theatre as we witnessed this powerful story." I maintain that the experience was so moving precisely because the audience members witnessed a cast and crew demonstrating their enormous level of respect and love for the *idea* of Acadia as something valuable and worthy of pride. The participants' circumstances—their great physical and temporal distance from their homeland—meant that the loving feelings they had for Acadia were translated into a physical act: the sheer effort required to mount and then bring their *Evangeline* to New Brunswick. It was this gesture of love for their shared homeland that made such a moving impression on the Acadians in attendance.

Another variation of actors offering a gesture of love and sacrifice that extended beyond the frame of the play was evident in David Grindley's 2007 revival of *Journey's End* in New York (a remount of his 2004 London production). The 1928 play is about the experience of British soldiers in the trenches of France near the end of the First World War. Nearly all the reviews singled out the exceptional staging of the curtain call. "A deeply moving end to a deeply moving play" (Lathan, 2004); "[a] shattering touch . . . a stunning set piece all its own" (Cashill, 2007); "the incredibly moving curtain call, the most stunning within living memory" (Hepple, 2004); "the very unusual curtain call when the director and his cast sacrifice some of the applause for a memorial image that theatergoers won't soon forget" (Meyers, 2007). *The New York Times*' Jesse Green (2007) details the story behind concluding moments of the play:

As written, the final image [. . .] is the collapse of the dugout in which its characters have spent the previous hours of stage time, now blasted into the ground by German fire. But that's not the end of the play as seen this season at the Belasco Theater on Broadway. "The effect was unaffordable," the director David Grindley said, "and a little obvious."

What he and his designers came up with instead is one of the most chilling curtain calls ever appended to a commercial drama. First, a black curtain wipes away the stage picture as the hellish sounds of battle roll forward over the audience. After what seems like an eternity but is really only 30 seconds, the cannonade is replaced by a "breath of bird song," as Mr. Grindley described it. When the curtain then flies out, the cast of 11 is standing in uniform in front of a painted backdrop replicating part of the Menin Gate memorial at Ypres, Belgium: rows and rows of names of dead soldiers. (Of the nearly 60,000 names at Ypres, only 6,000 fit on the backdrop.) As a recorded bugler plays "The Last Post" (the British counterpart to "Taps"), the audience members are silent [. . .] through two blackouts until the men at last remove their helmets, signaling that they are once again just actors, ready to accept applause. (para 1-2)

At the moment in the theatre encounter that is customarily reserved for giving tribute to the work of the actors, these actors stood quietly by—through two blackouts—in order to acknowledge the men who had actually perished. One can imagine the difference in tone had director Grindley raised the curtain on the painted backdrop unaccompanied by actors, and then had them enter for their bows after a moment had passed. Isolated, the staging choice would have been a final image-as-message from the director to the audience, followed by the traditional actors' bows. Instead, the actors' presence provided a relational dynamic with the audience. As twenty-first century actors, they stood figuratively alongside the rest of the twenty-first century inhabitants of the room expressing recognition, respect, and admiration for the sacrifices of the real heroes of the story. The actors' presence on stage, deferring their own time in the curtain call spotlights, demonstrated an unequivocal act of generosity and respect: a loving act.

Displays of generosity or love in the face of difficulty also appeared throughout *Black Watch*. The portrayals of the soldiers could hardly be considered loving in any conventional

way. Yet despite the constant abusive language and harassment of their fellow soldiers, what consistently captivated the audiences was the intensity of the soldiers' bonds with one another, revealing "a depth of human knowledge and fellow feeling that [made] it both real and contemporary" (Humphrys, 2006). Of particular note is the scene—described in the previous chapter—during which the soldiers silently stand "writing" their letters home using an unvoiced language of gestures. For a few quiet minutes these foul-mouthed soldiers cease their virtually unrelenting combativeness and push aside the harshness of their environment to search for words that will express their feelings for their wives and girlfriends. Stripped of verbal language, the particularities and nuances of the texts of the men's letters cannot be understood by the spectators. The audience is witness only to distilled demonstrations of the soldiers' love during a brief break from the unrelenting stress of combat.

4.2 Hilarity

Reports of sheer hilarity permeated many of the accounts in the study, including laughs from unexpected quarters, such as in this review of Deborah Warner's production of *Medea* with Fiona Shaw: "On the whole, it works because of Shaw's manic performance—which in part is extraordinarily, and intentionally, funny. Never have I seen a *Medea* that got so many laughs or proved so thoroughly entertaining" (Barnes, 2002, para. 7). One account in the data described an Oregon production of a "silly little comedy called *FrogWoman*, which starred various characters in green flippers and had little purpose other than to make the audience laugh" (Respondent 26). It had been in rehearsal during August of 2001, and premiered just days after the September 11 attacks on New York's World Trade Center.

Everyone was numb, and no one was sure whether it wasn't really a bad idea to be doing theater at all [. . .] At first, no one was sure they SHOULD laugh.

But pretty soon they couldn't help it. The dam burst, the laughter began, and it was an incredible release. The actors and the audience gave each other permission to laugh at a time when none of us was sure that laughter was either possible or proper. It was a deep and necessary reconnection with emotional normality. (Respondent 26)

FrogWoman, produced at that particular place and time, represents an extreme case of an audience constrained by expectations. The spectators were processing their responses to the performance in light of the recent horrific events, trying to identify for themselves what their proper position should be relative to the theatre encounter. Then the hilarity of the show pierced their measured assessments and drew them into a direct engagement with the material. The means of provoking laughter—physical comedy or language-based wit—varied widely in the accounts in this study. However it was achieved, humour that led to hearty audience laughter swept the audience up in the immediacy of the event and intensified their connection with the experience of the play.

4.3 Display of injustice and unfairness

Onstage displays of injustice and unfairness perpetrated on a character (or characters, or on a living creature) are powerful emotional triggers that draw the audience into caring more deeply about the victim(s) of the injustice. Spectators' outrage in response to the final image of Peter Brook's *US*, described in the previous chapter, was fueled by a general sensibility that it is wrong to light a living butterfly on fire. The finale of Francis Poulenc's opera *Dialogues des carmélites* (*Dialogues of the Carmelites*), when sixteen nuns are systematically executed, provides another example of a potent audience response to an onstage display of injustice and unfairness. Though the spectators' response to that scene is grounded in their emotional response to the injustice of the deed, I will argue in Chapter 6

that this scene achieves its exceptionally intense degree of emotional power by the addition of two complementary staging choices— affective punch and a subtraction heuristic.

A number of accounts in the data cite one particularly charged instance of injustice in Shakespeare that “sticks in the throat and . . . has made generations of readers and playgoers uncomfortable” (Gross, 1992, p. 89). The moment takes place during the trial scene in *The Merchant of Venice* when Antonio is petitioning for the terms of Shylock’s punishment. Among the various indignities in his request, Antonio’s penultimate requirement is that Shylock the Jew be forced to convert to Christianity. One respondent wrote that she had “seen about 18 productions around the world and in EVERY CASE that pronouncement gets a huge gasp” (Respondent 20). Other accounts describe similar reactions. An appalled reaction to this moment in the play was not universal. One writer specifically notes his astonishment at a number of spectators who laughed at this line during a production he witnessed. Another reviewer noted that an actor’s “perversely sympathetic” portrayal of Shylock led to “a palpable gasp of horror” from the audience in the conversion scene, but related that he had never experienced this before (Grosvenor Myer, 2001).

Outrage in response to that moment in the play is not an exclusively contemporary phenomenon. In 1880, Charles Dodgson (Lewis Carroll), who was a great admirer of Ellen Terry, saw her production of *Merchant* (with Henry Irving as Shylock) at least six times. Dodgson wrote to Terry to praise her work as Portia and went on to suggest politely that the reference to the forced religious conversion be cut:

It is a sentiment that is entirely horrible and revolting [. . .] a great artistic mistake. Its tendency is directly contrary to the spirit of the scene. We have despised Shylock for his avarice, and we rejoice to see him lose his wealth: we have abhorred him for his bloodthirsty cruelty, and we rejoice to see him baffled. And now, in the very fulness of our joy at the triumph of right over

wrong, we are suddenly called on to see in him the victim of a cruelty a thousand times worse than his own, and to honour him as a martyr.

(as cited in Collingwood, 1967, p. 183)

In short, Victorian audiences were drawn into fellow feeling with Shylock as a result of their outrage over this display of injustice despite the generally accepted anti-Semitism that marked the tenor of the times. In a 1993 essay, Peter J. Alscher offers a clever bit of alternate staging that would retain the inflammatory text but manage to dodge the audience's unease over the Christian conversion. The gist of Alscher's proposal is that Portia (in disguise as Balthazar the legal expert) should wordlessly signal her benevolence toward Shylock and her resistance to Antonio's demand. This, Alscher feels, would honour the Bard's script but cool the volatility in the scene. For the purposes of this study, volatility can be useful if the actors wish to create stagings of injustice that hook the spectators into experiencing a deeper level of engagement with characters and circumstances in a play.

4.4 Taboo

A variation on images of injustice or unfairness used to trigger the spectators' outrage is the use of imagery, action, or behaviour on stage that violates acceptable social norms. Commonly associated with the term "shock value," these triggers may include the incorporation of foul language, nudity, severe violence, sexual acts, bodily fluids, or other onstage displays considered culturally taboo for the audience present at that performance. While shocking the spectators ratchets up the intensity of the audience's experience during the theatrical encounter, it can easily backfire. In the wake of momentarily securing the audience's attention, the data revealed that this type of staging may very likely activate some

observers' antagonistic predispositions toward that taboo, ultimately distancing them from the play. This appears especially likely if the spectators feel the actors are attempting to provoke them. While this was certainly the case with the burned butterfly in *US*, several other striking moments in the data involved the use of shocking images that were generally considered to have successfully drawn the audience into a deeper engagement with the play. In each of these instances, the taboo was thoroughly incorporated as a necessary element in the advancement of the story or the fuller realization of the characters (e.g., the soldiers' incessant swearing in *Black Watch* and the violence in *Food Court*). Staging that successfully incorporated taboo involved the relational dynamic of actors treating the spectators as allies—not pupils—as described in the previous chapter (3.9). Typically, when the moment was orchestrated such that the spectators were exposed to the shocking material in conjunction with one or more characters who were similarly affected by it, it was received as an intense but necessary part of the play. It stood in comparison to instances in which the actors were clearly in control of the shocking material, wielding it in order to provoke a response among audience members. For example, when actors in The Living Theatre's 1968 production *Paradise Now* undressed, then fondled and caressed one another in a "love pile" followed by an invitation to the audience to come join them and chant "fuck means peace" with them, their stated intention was to radicalize that audience. Theatre critic and educator Robert Brustein describes this as an agenda that belies an alliance of mutuality with the spectators (as cited in Kershaw, 1999, p. 197).

The powerful use of taboo was also linked to the sub-category *hilarity*. Eric Idle of Monty Python fame (as cited in Zehme, 2006) describes how the biggest laugh his comedy group ever received occurred onstage during a 1998 reunion show held before a live audience

in Aspen, Colorado. A short while into the program, John Cleese explained that he had brought with him a funeral urn containing the ashes of Graham Chapman, one of their original members, who died of cancer in 1989. The men all stood respectfully and a man in a formal butler uniform came onstage with the urn. He placed it on a coffee table arranged in the centre of the group's semi-circle of chairs and hung a pasteboard picture of Chapman's face in front of it. Later, in the program, Python member Terry Gilliam casually swung his leg over his knee, kicking the urn and sending the ashes scattering across the stage. The audience erupted in a mix of alarmed disbelief and laughter, which grew as it quickly became obvious that this was a set up. The comedians leapt to their feet in a panic and began frantic efforts to sweep up the remains. The butler returned to the stage holding a small vacuum cleaner, and then Cleese licked a bit of the ash from his fingers. The comedians of Monty Python built their television and film careers on playful irreverence toward taboos. In this instance, however, their "biggest audience laugh" involved a staging choice that initially belied playfulness—it seized the audience's attention by what appeared to be an actual violation of a taboo shared by the actors and audience alike. The comedians then parlayed the audience's initial response into extended laughter.

4.5 The destabilized body

Imagine a pair of actors onstage. He sits. She stands. He rises and walks. She leaps. They lie down. She gets up and crosses the stage. He gets up and follows her. Throughout all this, the actors are physically stable in the sense that nothing is interfering with their ability to securely and confidently command authority over their own bodies. However, the data reveal that when the physical equanimity of actors' bodies becomes destabilized or disoriented, the

sight of that discomposure is inherently compelling to an audience. The destabilized body can be horrifically compelling, like the breathtaking moment in Cameron Mackintosh's *Les Misérables* when the stage platform slowly turns to reveal to the audience the aftermath of the battle. Hanging upside down on the barricade is the limp dead body of the revolutionary leader Enjolras, looking like a broken doll drenched in his own blood. Use of the destabilized body to intensify the dramatization of death also appeared as "an electrifying moment [that went on] for what seemed like hours" in Andrei Serban's 1976 production, *Fragments of a Greek Trilogy* (Respondent 19). During one point in the play, the actors playing guards dropped a young female actor upside-down onto a nearly vertical ramp: "she slowly slid, head first, hair fanning out toward the floor. Her body gave in to gravity in such tiny increments that she appeared to float and then sink" (Green, 1994, p. 48). In these two instances, the actors' bodies were upside down, but additional means of destabilizing bodies may involve actors' bodies drenched with liquid or mud, falling or severely off balance and at risk of falling, set aflame, or in other ways dislodged from a position of self-assured physical (or sometimes emotional) control. All promote conditions in which the spectators' experience of the play is intensified.

The destabilized body is also, of course, a common feature of slapstick comedy. The composure of characters is destabilized when receiving a gooey cream pie in the face or losing control of their equanimity in a pratfall. One entertainer who achieved international fame centred around what I am calling the destabilized body was the celebrated American gymnast Larry Griswold (1905-1996). An accomplished trampolinist, Griswold was renowned for his "Drunken Clown Act" in which his character tries determinedly to perform dives onto a trampoline, but keeps slipping and falling off the diving board:

He smiles at the crowd. Relaxing, he leans forward onto the other hand rail. It breaks away under his weight, and he tumbles downward, only to find himself hanging from the supports. With an arm wrapped around one pole and his foot wrapped around another, he discovers that his right index finger is caught in a supporting shock cord. In attempting to free his finger, he throws his body into a series of spastic gyrations. The non-stop laughter reaches a deafening pitch. (Loken-Dahle, 1997)

Though utterly in control every minute of his routine, Griswold kept audiences enrapt by the appearance that his physical equanimity was repeatedly destabilized. Whether invoked for its dramatic or its comedic potential, incorporation of the destabilized body in staging intensifies the level of the spectators' investment in the action or characters of a play.

4.6 Beauty

Another element that draws spectators into a deep connection with the play on an affective level is the presentation of exceptionally beautiful images on stage. The compelling aesthetic presentation of the staging eclipses the audience's preconceptions about the meaning of the play and increases their level of investment in the characters' lives or circumstances. In 2004, Nicholas Hytner's *His Dark Materials* at Britain's National Theatre received special notice for designer Michael Curry's stylized puppets. Respondents reported feeling drawn more deeply into the world of the play as a result of these stunningly beautiful creations on stage.

One respondent described a visually arresting staging that overwhelmed her expectations of a familiar scene by virtue of its compelling visual presentation. John Wood's 2004 production of *Macbeth* at Canada's Stratford Shakespeare Festival received mixed reviews, but all critics surveyed in the data expressed their acclaim for this particular scene, featuring Lucy Peacock as Lady Macbeth. The original respondent describes the moment:

Right before Lady Macbeth was going to enter the stage to deliver her “out damned spot” monologue, a tension grew in the audience. Many Stratford Festival goers are avid Shakespeare fans and I assume that most of us in the audience were anticipating the infamous scene. I swear that every single stage light came up at full at Lady Macbeth’s entrance. The audience let out a collective gasp, very loudly, bordering on a yelp. Lady Macbeth’s nightgown was a stark white and covered the entire stage. When she moved, the whole floor appeared to move with her, as the fabric was pulled by her movements. The white lights on the white fabric resulted in a blinding effect on the audience. When she was exiting the stage, she glided through the trap at centre stage, pulling the entire swath of white fabric with her. She appeared to dissolve into hell. The entire effect was astounding. After the show let out, there was a great buzz about that scene among the theatre goers. It was the most memorable performance of any Shakespeare I’ve ever seen.

(Respondent 40)

While not “beautiful” in any conventional sense of the word, it was undeniably the visual image of a lone actor wandering in a blinding sea of white fabric, and then drowning in it, that thoroughly gripped the spectators’ attention. The visual component of the staging added a robust new dimension to the audience’s understanding of Lady Macbeth’s madness. Beauty, in this context, may be understood as anything that the viewers find aesthetically captivating.

Amy’s View, originally directed by Richard Eyre at Britain’s National Theatre in 1997, is a play by David Hare that follows a mother-daughter relationship over the course of sixteen years. Along with the theme of family, it is a play about the vitality or evanescence of theatre as an art form compared with film and television. In Eyre’s staging, the final moments of the play entranced audiences with an astoundingly beautiful image. It provided them access to a deeply felt understanding of Hare’s vision of theatre as a form that is very much alive. The end of *Amy’s View* is set in a London theatre where Esme—a professional stage actor who is also Amy’s mother—stands with an actor named Toby. The audience sees the two of them waiting “backstage” as they prepare to make their first entrance in a play.

Playing characters who have just been shipwrecked on an island, they take turns pouring water over each other from a jug until they both become soaked, as if wet from the sea.

Duncan Wu (2007) explains what happens next:

After a moment in the darkness, they turn to the curtains, concentrated on the task ahead, waiting for the play to begin . . . [Then] the curtain began to lift. It comprised layers upon layers of silk that rippled out before them, billowing up like some enormous, endless sail, opening finally to reveal the darkness beyond. As this dream-like image filled the stage, the players stepped into the void.

It is very difficult to do justice to its visual impact in words, and impossible to evoke its effect on the audience. It was unbearably moving, and Eyre has rightly described its component parts as ‘contributing to a cumulative poetic force’ – all of which serves to underline the recognition that this kind of theatre is not about the construction of what we might call ‘realism’. ‘Part of the reason I love the end of *Amy’s View* is that it’s a pure piece of theatre’, Eyre has said. (pp. 86-87)

In an interview with Eyre, Wu recorded more of the director’s personal reflections on this staging:

There is nothing there on the stage; there’s a completely bare stage and two pieces of white silk. All it is is two pieces of white silk, lighting and sound, and you’re creating a storm and waves! And it somehow has an enormous emotional force, because it follows the action of the play and comprises a cumulative encompassing emotional event that ties into the whole use of the theatre in the play as a metaphor for human relationships. (pp. 86-87)

When Eyre describes this as “a pure piece of theatre” he is referring to the manner in which the staging reaches beyond the use of text to convey Hare’s conviction about the unique power of theatre. Rather than continue to hear about the transcendence of theatre in one of Esme’s passionate speeches, the audience experiences transcendence directly in a breathtaking image that embodies it. The success of this staging relied upon the ineffable beauty of that image, which caught up the audience in its magnificence. In the next chapter I

will argue that the effectiveness of this moment of staging was complemented by the way in which the beautiful image so perfectly embodied the idea that Hare sought to convey.

In addition to visual beauty, the data reveals that aesthetically compelling music, singing, and other sounds can play a significant role in raising the level of spectators' investment in the play. Some respondents noted that the use of sound to engage audience members left them feeling emotionally manipulated, especially when the staging relied on the listeners' prior emotional associations with something external to the play. However, in many instances, the physical sensation that the music produced in the listener in the moment of the experience was considered the source of its effectiveness. In the following example, a respondent recalled the first time he listened to the original cast recording of *Sweeney Todd*:

The Demon Barber of Fleet Street.

The opening number immediately captured me, mostly for the reverberations I felt physically. I had performed in musicals in high school, but this was nothing like those. The music worked on me at such a deep level, that I had to replay particular songs in an attempt to hold onto the feeling as long as I could. I don't remember even listening to the words much at first; it was the physical sensation that I sought to repeat with each playing. (Respondent 33)

Captivating sensations received through smell and touch also figured into the data, as they drew the audience into the play on an affective level.

4.7 Cultivating an image through language

The use of language to promote an audience's investment in the world of the play is clearly rooted in storytelling. Storytelling, like poetry, relies on words and the sounds of words to cultivate powerful images in the minds of the listeners. In several instances in the data, the actors drew on the power of language to reach members of the audience on an

affective level. For example, in his landmark book, *The Empty Space*, Peter Brook (1968) describes an indelible theatre experience he unexpectedly witnessed one bleak afternoon in Germany soon after the end of the Second World War.

Walking along the Reeperbahn in Hamburg on an afternoon in 1946, whilst a damp dispiriting grey mist whirled round the desperate mutilated tarts, some on crutches, noses mauve, cheeks hollow, I saw a crowd of children pushing excitedly into a night club door. I followed them. On the stage was a bright blue sky. Two seedy, spangled clowns sat on a painted cloud on their way to visit the Queen of Heaven. “What shall we ask her for?” said one. “Dinner,” said the other and the children screamed approval. “What shall we have for dinner?” “Schinken, leberwurst . . .” the clown began to list all the unobtainable foods and the squeals of excitement were gradually replaced by a hush—a hush that settled into a deep and true theatrical silence. An image was being made real, in answer to the need for something that was not there. (pp. 43-44)

The beauty of that delectable image of a table filled with food was not offered to the eyes and noses of those children in post-war Germany; it was described to them in words. For that young German audience, the words “schinken . . . leberwurst” conjured a palpable connection to the world of satiation and contentment that the actors sought to create.

Director Peter Carnahan (2008) explains how his personal revelation about the power of language on stage was prompted by seeing Tyrone Guthrie’s production of *Oedipus Rex* at Canada’s Stratford Theatre in 1957:

It used to be a cliché that in Greek drama all the real action happened off stage. Either the Greeks were squeamish or clumsy at dramaturgy. In Guthrie’s *Oedipus*, when the second messenger, played by Douglas Rain, came on to describe Jocasta’s suicide and Oedipus’ blinding of himself, he was, from the start, shaken. As the scene built and he remembered what he had seen, his terror mounted to the climactic lines: “he dragged the golden brooches from her dress and lifting them struck upon his eyeballs, crying out ‘You have looked long enough upon those you never should have known; henceforth you shall be *daaark!*’” [. . .] It was the most powerful moment I’ve ever experienced in the theatre, far more terrifying than if we had seen Oedipus actually perform the act, with all the necessary fakery and stage blood. The mind is where the theatre takes place. (p. 293)

With due respect to Carnahan, the mind is not exclusively where theatre takes place; more often than not, it takes place right on the stage. However, the poetic power of language to create vivid images in the minds of the audience members should not be underestimated as a means of drawing them in to a deeper relationship with the theatre encounter.

4.8 Cultivating suspense through language

In the 1946 Hamburg performance described above, when two clowns prepared to visit the Queen of Heaven, they cultivated an image that allowed the audience of children to relish the thought of all that food. As vividly as the children may have experienced it in their minds, they knew the food was not about to appear. They luxuriated in the sheer joy of imagining it. When the second messenger in Guthrie's *Oedipus Rex* described the awful deeds he had seen, these were events that had already taken place, and taken place elsewhere. Both the food, and the scenes of anguish and violence, existed as vivid but relatively static images in the minds of the listeners. A variation on the verbal presentation of these static images involves cultivating images in the minds of the listeners of things that are on the cusp of materializing. This is the realm of suspense in theatre: generating anxiety and increasing the intensity of the spectators' involvement in the theatrical encounter by encouraging them to imagine what is about to happen.

Audiences were utterly floored in the last seconds of Declan Donnellan's production of *Twelfth Night*, described in the previous chapter. In Shakespeare's final scene of the play, the prank played on Malvolio is revealed. Publicly humiliated, he storms off never to be seen again, but not before delivering his enraged but impotent parting line: "I'll be revenged on

the whole pack of you” (Act V, sc. i:384). In this production, the cue came, and yet Shcherbina’s Malvolio did not say his famous line; he just walked out of the scene. The play then proceeded as usual. The lovers were united by Duke Orsino’s proclamations, loose ends were tied, and the comedy rolled toward its conclusion. At the very last minute, however, Malvolio—head steward of Lady Olivia’s house—returned:

Malvolio appears with a tray of beautiful filled wine glasses and passes them around to the rest of the cast. As they stand together and raise their glasses high in a toast, Malvolio steps down to the apron and says his “cut” line: “I’ll be revenged on the whole pack of you!” It’s clear he has poisoned them. (Respondent 30)

The transposition of that one line was audacious in the way it categorically altered the ending of Shakespeare’s play, turning Malvolio’s empty threat into an act of deadly revenge. It drew audiences into an electric engagement with an alternative meaning in the play: the potentially severe implications of humiliating someone. However, the arresting power of the moment lay not in witnessing a *Hamlet*-like finale of a stage littered with corpses, but in cultivating an image in the audience’s imaginations of what was *about to happen*. In another account in the data, a respondent described a “spine-tingling moment” she experienced while seeing the original Broadway production of *Cabaret*.

It was a scene where a group of young waiters, all blond and shining, begin to sing a sentimental German folk song—and suddenly, thanks to the genius of Kander and Ebb, it changes to an almost martial rhythm and becomes the menacing “Tomorrow Belongs To Me”—all the more menacing, of course, because we know what that “tomorrow” brought. (Respondent 12)

“Dramatic irony” refers to conditions in which an audience is aware of something significant that a character or characters in the play have yet to learn. The moment in *Cabaret* was riveting because, in a cultural-historical variation of dramatic irony, the staging was able to

draw emotional power from the audience's familiarity with events beyond the characters' understanding. Like the "little kick-pause" in *Medea* at Epidaurus when the audience heard the cry of the first child and knew full well what was about to happen next, a cultivated image that taps into the spectators' existing store of knowledge can intensify their level of investment in the events of the play. Conditions are established such that the spectators experience the tension of knowing what is coming coupled with emotional associations based on their knowledge of what lies ahead.

4.9 Personal connection to the experience

Throughout the data, many respondents reported the affective power of experiencing an intense personal identification with a specific character in a play and with the circumstances that character faced. A character's actions in a play served as a model of behaviour that emboldened respondents to assess their own life choices and to chart a new course with conviction, sometimes immediately after seeing the performance. They observed behaviours in the play they recognized as mirroring their own, giving them a fresh perspective on their lived experience. In the words of one respondent, her experience of a play once unexpectedly reawakened a sense of self awareness and "removed the weight" of judgments she had imposed on herself regarding her own somewhat traumatic encounter with related circumstances (Respondent 27). The aesthetic distance provided by the theatre encounter freed her from that weight. Others described perspective-shifting insights they encountered as a result of a play giving them access—for the first time—to an intimate observation of the life experiences of someone from a culture they had previously only known from stereotypes. The experience was commonly described in these accounts as

having a long-lasting impact on the respondents' lives and life-choices. In none of these accounts could the actors performing the play have anticipated that particular spectators would be so moved by a personal identification with their character(s) or the play's circumstances. In all the accounts in the data that were reported as fostering a personal connection to the experience, the plays merely told stories that the actors, producers, playwrights, or directors felt were important to tell (e.g., standing up to sexism; the contours of abusive or supportive relationships; and the humanity that lies beneath a person's outward appearance). Telling stories about experiences that matter, with honesty and clarity, made a deep impression on these particular respondents who recognized the experiences in the plays as personally vital to them.

Summary

The staging choices presented in this chapter represent a unique niche within the five core categories of the study. While the other categories loosen the grip of fore-sight on spectators as a result of actors establishing *conditions* in the orchestration of the staging, the staging choices featured here involve *qualities* in the staging. In this chapter I have shown how enfolding the qualities of generosity or love; hilarity; display of injustice; taboo; the destabilized body; beauty; and compelling or personally relevant storytelling all serve to elevate the spectators' personal emotional investment in the events on stage. In these instances, it is the heightened level of interest that eclipses prior attitudes and assumptions about the material being presented. The inherently compelling nature of any of these staging choices offers theatre-makers a strong edge in their endeavours to create work on stage that is vital and engaging.

Discussion

A spectre is haunting academia—the spectre of affect. The paraphrase of Marx is irreverent but apt. Since the mid-1990s, academics in the humanities and social sciences have been showing increased interest in what has been called “the affective turn”: explorations of the role of autonomic bodily and emotional responses in human relations as compared to prior interest in analyses that are rooted in psychological or cognitive perspectives (see Clough & Halley, 2007; Gregg & Seigworth, 2010; Kosofsky Sedgwick, 2003). A special section of the forthcoming (Spring 2012) *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, will focus on implications of the affective turn in the field of performance studies. Guest editors Erin Hurley and Sara Warner have extended a call to scholars for essays addressing questions such as “By what various means does theatre produce, disseminate and transmit feeling, emotion and affect?” and “Are there kinds of theatre/performance that seems [sic] particularly affective, and why?” (www.jdtc.ku.edu). Reflecting upon questions such as these would appear to be appropriate in a discussion of the affect-based staging choices featured in this chapter. However, in place of pursuing a general examination of spectators’ responses to affect in performance, I will instead engage with an aspect of the question that I believe is more relevant to this study’s line of inquiry. I will address the ways in which affect functions to dislodge the grip of spectators’ preconceptions and assumptions. For this purpose, I extend the proposal that began this chapter, that a useful parallel may be drawn between the use of affect-based staging in theatre, and the pedagogical approaches used by Dorothy Heathcote and others within the context of drama in education.

To enlist students’ active engagement, educators in the field of drama in education give special attention to an opening gambit intended to capture the students’ attention.

Heathcote's term for this initial step is the "lure" and she considers it to be "the true pin on which the whole cathedral can be built" (Wagner, 1976, p. 92). The students' personal commitment to embracing participation in the drama begins when they encounter a powerful lure. A lure "arrests attention [creating] a sense that the matter in hand *must* be dealt with [and] it motivates the students to more profound levels of feeling engagement with the theme" (Clark, Dobson, Goode & Neelands, 1997, p. 132). Other scholars in the field extend Heathcote's fishing metaphor with the term "hook" (O'Toole & Dunn, 2002). The teacher must find just the right hook that will intrigue students and will unite them on a personal level with the topic being studied. According to Morgan and Saxton (1987), the prerequisite in any learning environment is that the learners are interested and curious about the subject. Inspired by Heathcote's pedagogy, Morgan and Saxton's taxonomy of learning demonstrates how capturing the students' initial interest leads to engagement and then to commitment. Cecily O'Neill, another central figure in the theory and practice of this work, is highly regarded for her ability to find exceedingly compelling, succinctly phrased lures that abruptly capture her students' attention, drawing them into a desire to know more about the drama unfolding in the classroom.

O'Neill (1995) also refers what she calls a "pre-text" in the pedagogy of drama in education. In my reading of this term, a pre-text serves a broader function than a lure or hook. The pre-text sets the stage for the classroom drama work—what she refers to as "process drama." As O'Neill describes it, the pre-text "activate[s] the meaning of the text of the process drama [launching] the dramatic world in such a way that the participants can identify their roles and responsibilities and begin to build the dramatic world" (p. 20). In other words, a story-drama that incorporates a pre-text is not self-contained; it includes a

significant role for the students in relation to its events and other characters in the drama. The pre-text frames the encounter in such a way as to make a place for the students to inhabit a significant position in the action of the drama and to invite them into it. In this way, the function and intent of a pre-text is related to the staging strategies I describe in the second section of Chapter 3 (Subverting the spectator-as-recipient contract). It parallels actors foregoing the presentation of a play to an audience as a fixed commodity, reconfiguring the performance so that spectators are actively made part of a mutual encounter. When a teacher foregoes telling students a pre-determined story and instead establishes a framework in which the story (as a classroom drama) has a place for students to enter into it, she accomplishes much the same thing. A pre-text can therefore be differentiated from a hook or lure, which serves specifically to make entry into the world of the story-drama something virtually irresistible to the students.

Each of the nine sub-categories described in this chapter can be understood as a lure or hook that figuratively grabs hold of the audience on an affective level. Spectators' predispositions to respond to a theatre experience based on the "rational" assessments and predetermined attitudes that comprise their fore-sight are overwhelmed by staging that compels their increased emotional commitment to the characters, situations, and circumstances in the play. While staging choices that amplify emotional identification may appear to be utter anathema to Brecht's vision of the theatre event as a place of assessment and critique, I propose that, on the contrary, it is possible to regard compelling staging choices as surprisingly conducive to the aims of Brecht's epic theatre.

Consider for example a performance in the early 1980s that incorporated a display of injustice and unfairness in its staging. Helen Nicholson (2009) writes of bringing a classroom

of her twelve-year-old students to a Theatre-in-Education program in Bristol, England. This was at the height of the outlawed anti-communist Solidarity trade union movement in Poland. Not far from the theatre—an arts centre near the Bristol dockyards—two actors in character as Polish workers flagged down the school bus en route and urgently pleaded with the children to hide them. In hushed tones, these “Polish trade unionists” explained their situation to the children while the bus was diverted to an old warehouse. There, the twelve-year-olds assisted the “Solidarity workers” in making anti-Soviet posters while learning more about Soviet-controlled Poland. In the midst of the work, “police” raided the warehouse. The workers were rounded up and the children were sent “back to England”: the arts centre that had been their original destination. What happened next is best related in Nicholson’s own words:

We were invited to give our impressions of our Polish “holiday” to reporters, whose inane questioning about the food, weather and nightlife *made the young people incandescent with rage*. They had a story to tell about social injustice, and the memorable morning ended with the young people recording their own commentaries on the TV footage of the events they had witnessed. (pp. 3-4 italics added)

Within this pedagogical context, the young people’s theatre experience was framed to draw them into caring deeply about the subject of the “performance.” When the actors boarded the bus as Polish trade unionists on the run, they established a pre-text that implicated the young people in the subject they were about to explore. But I contend that the irresistible lure in this encounter was delayed until the students’ arrival at the arts centre. The “reporters’” inane questions and blithe attitudes brought the students’ fresh encounter with the situation in Poland into sharp focus. The students’ “incandescent” feelings of outrage were sparked as

they saw these injustices summarily ignored. One cannot help but recall Brecht's (Brecht, 1964) characterization of the epic theatre's spectator:

I'd never have thought it – That's not the way – That's extraordinary, hardly believable – It's got to stop – The sufferings of this man appall me, because they are unnecessary. . . I laugh when they weep, I weep when they laugh.
(p. 71)

Brecht's antagonism was directed toward theatre that carried audiences away in feelings of sympathy toward the sufferings of fictional characters whose circumstances were accepted as natural, inevitable, and presumed to be unavoidable. All the staging choices described in this chapter operate by countering that tendency. Although relying upon the use of affect to achieve this aim, these staging choices serve to awaken the spectators and to dispel passive acquiescence to assumptions about the characters and circumstances in a play. Hilarity was shown to break through an audience's expectations that a real life tragedy (post-9/11 *FrogWoman*) or a classically tragic play (*Medea*) required a somber response. *Beauty* was used to wrench spectators into a new relationship with a very familiar character (Lady Macbeth), while the destabilized body and taboo rendered fictional character's deaths (in *Les Misérables* and *Fragments*) and comedic fare (Monty Python's reunion) as vivid and deeply felt. Language used for cultivating images (the second messenger's speech in *Oedipus*) and language used to cultivate images of what is to come ("Tomorrow Belongs to Me" from *Cabaret*) anchored the fiction in urgency. Though difficult to plan, plays that reflected the lives of spectators were reported as having significantly affected the spectators' real life choices.

Implications for teaching

Compared to the other staging choices presented in this study, integrating compelling staging into a production is paradoxically the easiest and the most challenging to accomplish. It is easy because, like the popular British colloquialism, each sub-category is “exactly what it says on the tin.” Beauty involves integrating beauty into the work; hilarity involves making the staging riotously funny; the destabilized body involves destabilizing the actors’ bodies. This simplicity, of course, belies the difficulty of putting these ideas into practice in real terms. In this section, I will defer offering definitive pedagogical strategies for increasing an ensemble’s capacity for conceiving and crafting compelling moments in their devised plays. Instead I offer some considerations for approaching each of the variations that I have outlined in this chapter.

An ensemble should be mindful that displays of generosity or love that require personal sacrifice are not merely dramatizations of general acts of kindness. These are acts that the audience should recognize as requiring a genuine sacrifice on the part of the characters or actors. To devise moments of staging along these lines, the actors would benefit from reflecting upon Jill Dolan’s (2005) marvelous description of what she calls utopian performatives.

Utopian performatives describe small but profound moments in which performance calls the attention of the audience in a way that lifts everyone slightly above the present, into a hopeful feeling of what the world might be like if every moment of our lives were as emotionally voluminous, generous, aesthetically striking, and intersubjectively intense. (p. 5)

While far from being prescriptive, this passage is a useful point of departure for an ensemble’s collective discussion on the ways in which a character or characters—or the

actors in a play—might enact such moments, overcoming the resistance to making a sacrifice embedded in our typically self-centred, non-utopian world.

Regarding hilarity, a story is told about the great English actor and theatre manager Sir Donald Wolfit. As he lay on his deathbed, a young actor in his employ is reported to have said to him, “Sir Donald, after a life so filled with success and fame, dying must be hard.” Wolfit replied, “Dying is easy . . . comedy is hard.” With this in mind, I can offer no easy way to integrate *hilarity* into the staging of a play other than for the actors to rely on the sometimes prodigious innate comedic talents of members of any theatre ensemble. The skills of good directors and writers with a knack for comedy are useful as well. An ensemble should be encouraged to consider integrating moments of hilarity in whatever play they create, regardless of genre or topic. If Fiona Shaw can send audiences into hysterical laughter as Medea, surely any play is fair game for incorporating hilarity.

When integrating displays of injustice or unfairness and taboo, an ensemble should be sensitive about their hidden agendas or motivations. As originally noted in section 3.9 (spectators as allies or pupils) and again in 4.4 (taboo), the effective use of these potentially explosive staging choices may hinge on whether they are being wielded to “teach a lesson” to the audience as if to pupils, or if they are being used to advance the story or to provide a fuller realization of the play’s environment, context or characters. The integration of taboo on stage is particularly challenging. When Sarah Kane’s play *Blasted* premiered in London in 1995, it was savaged by critics for what they considered to be egregious and reckless displays of taboo. Kane was attempting to use the force of taboo to break through spectators’ numbed responses to mediated televised images of atrocities in Beirut. Her play analogously linked those horrors to male-female relationships. When the play was remounted six years later

(after the playwright's death), high profile critics came forward to admit with regret that their reactions to the shocking staging had impeded their appreciation of the greatness of the play (see Hattenstone, 2000; Taylor, 2001). An ensemble wishing to experiment with the use of taboo would do well to proceed with caution.

The destabilized body is yet another extremely effective staging choice that can be challenging to achieve in practice. In simple terms, the challenge is rooted in destabilizing the actors' bodies without actually causing them harm. Larry Griswold's genius was his exceptionally advanced level of skill that allowed him to appear wildly out of control while remaining safe. Erin Hurley (2010) notes how professional tightrope walkers in Canada's Cirque du Soleil must address the common assumption among audiences that, as highly skilled circus artists, they are in such control that they are not in any real danger of falling. To keep the audiences engaged, the tightrope walkers build false missteps into their acts, which can be counted upon to raise roars of alarm from the crowds below in response to the potential destabilization of the performers' bodies (p. 29). An ensemble exploring the destabilized body may ask what they can incorporate into a play that challenges or appears to challenge the actors' physical equanimity without causing them harm or excessive discomfort.

For those who would like to integrate beauty into a play, I cannot claim to quantify what that would be. Instead I would encourage an ensemble to follow the wisdom of applied theatre practitioner and scholar James Thompson who, in his stimulating book *Performance Affects* (2009), writes:

The point here is not to say what beauty is, but to suggest the importance of asking different groups what beauty might be. Second, many discussions of beauty emphasise their incompleteness and, in fact, acknowledge that the inadequacy of any definition is a permanent and necessary feature of all

attempts to grapple with it. Rather than see this as a weakness, however, the struggle to understand beauty, and more particularly the experience of beauty, is an important part of its appeal. It stimulates a desire to know what it is (a sense of enquiry for an applied theatre project perhaps), at the same time as resisting any finality in that search. (p. 141)

A collective discussion of beauty, and its potential for vitalizing a play, can therefore be appreciated as a valuable and productive element in the creation of the work. An ensemble who chooses to create and integrate beauty into their performance according to what that word means to them would be advised to seek out ways to embed the beauty into the ideas of their play. Just as the idea of Lady Macbeth's madness was rendered in an astonishingly beautiful way, or the idea of the evanescence of theatre was expressed through the beauty of the final image in *Amy's View*, beauty may be considered not merely as decoration, but as the means to convey what is important to the actors. Dedication to the use of beauty to capture the essence of an idea can keep this staging choice rooted in its charged potential for breaking through the audience's preconceptions about the material in the play. The director of *Amy's View* expressed serious concerns that the final image in that play might be considered "an attention-grabbing piece of bravura staging" and nothing more. By focusing on the simplicity of the image, the evocative sound of breaking waves, and experimenting to find just the right timing, he felt he was able to achieve his goal. (Eyre, 2007, p. 139)

Cultivating an image or a sense of suspense through language is an elemental part of most theatre. Storytelling, as I noted in Chapter 1, is the sine qua non of applied theatre work. Any ensemble of actors may usefully rely upon the skills of storytellers in their group as they build opportunities into the play for richly told stories that will captivate their audiences with evocative images and suspense.

In order to foster a personal connection to the experience among audience members, one may only hope that individual spectators find the characters or circumstances in a play so vital in relation to their own lives that the play becomes a catalyst for them to embrace new perspectives on their own lives with vigour and inspired determination. Perhaps the best route to devising a play that offers this transformative potential is simply to abide by the classic first rule of playwriting: write what you know. It is of particular value to applied theatre directors to attend closely to the collective knowledge of a community-based cast and to respect the nuance of the truths they know about their own cultural situations and circumstances. Dedication to fostering a play that reflects accuracy of detail in what the community members know may very well resonate profoundly with those in the audience.

Chapter Five

Gest

“A theatre which relies on physical elements is at very least assured of clarity.”

Vsevolod Meyerhold
(1969, p. 199)

Introduction

Philosopher Denis Diderot once described the experience of seeing the sleepwalking Lady Macbeth desperately and silently repeating the motions of washing the murdered king’s blood from her hands. He wrote: “There are sublime gestures, which all oratory eloquence can never express . . . I am not aware of anything so moving in speech as the silence and movements of the hands of this lady. What an image of remorse!” (as cited in Ebrahimian, 2004, p. 52). While gestures are a significant part of any actor’s stock in trade, they are rarely characterized as sublime. An actor’s gesture seldom causes spectators to gasp with astonishment or to feel suddenly awakened to a new or richer understanding. However, among the accounts of aesthetic arrest in this study, respondents reported many instances in which some aspect of a character’s experience made an indelible impression by encapsulating a complex (and sometimes contradictory) human experience into a quintessential physical manifestation. In this chapter I examine how the gestures described in these accounts achieve their extraordinarily effective power.

The most suitable word for this category is not *gesture*, but a well-theorized term that forms one of the core elements of Brecht’s epic theatre: *Gestus*. John Willett, Brecht’s original English language translator, struggled to find an equivalent for the German term, which he described as a combination of the words *gist* (the essence of something) and *gesture*

(a physical action). Willett chose an archaic English word, *gest*, meaning bearing, carriage, or mien, and he translated its adjectival form *gestisch* as *gestic* (Brecht, 1964, p. 42). A gest is well-crafted physical manifestation of a character's relationship, emotional state, social circumstances, or experience. It directs the actor into a particular attitude that excludes all doubt and ambiguity about the incident in question (Weill & Albrecht, 1961). What distinguishes a gest from any other gesture an actor might use is the utter clarity it exhibits as it vividly reveals a particular point about the character's situation.

Brecht tells a story that epitomizes his conception of the gest. It appears in *The Messingkauf Dialogues* (1963) when, in the persona of one of his characters, he describes having seen and admired a play built around the use of gests.

The play they were performing . . . was like a great collection of gestures, observed with artistry: the quarry looking back over his shoulder (and the pursuer's look, too); the sudden silences; the hand that flies to one's mouth when one is about to say too much, and the hand that falls on the wanted man's shoulder; the extorted lie, the whispered truth, the mutual distrust of lovers, and much more. But what was so unusual was that the players never performed these ghastly episodes in such a way that the spectators were tempted to call out 'Stop'. The spectators didn't seem in any way to share the horror of those on stage, and as a result there was repeatedly laughter among the audience without doing any damage to the profoundly serious character of the performance . . . The spectators' laughter was . . . how an inventor might laugh on finding the solution after a long effort: it was as obvious as that, and he took so long to see it! (p. 72)

Three central points in this passage illuminate significant aspects of gests that are particularly relevant to this study. First, Brecht calls attention to the *artistry* involved in devising a gest. This is certainly corroborated in the data. Respondents consistently acknowledge the considerable skill required by actors and directors to conceive, craft, refine, and perform what are undeniably gestic moments in the staging. Second, the passage provides us with several marvelous indications of how relationships—what Brecht would describe as the

“attitudes” that people adopt toward one another—might be distilled into a single physical action. The hand that falls on the shoulder or the hand that flies to the mouth are obvious physical gestures, but this list helps us to imagine a far more broadly drawn conception of gesture. A sudden silence brought on by an unexpected turn of events, or a conversation reduced suddenly to a whisper can be understood in this context as gestural insofar as these are physically embodied actions. Though subtle, a facial expression associated with looking over one’s shoulder when threatened, or with telling a lie under duress, can also be understood as gestural. Third, Brecht describes the value of these gestures according to their capacity to thrust spectators into positions of intrigued recognition rather than mournful fellow-feeling. For Brecht, when a gesture renders the dynamics of a relationship with utter clarity, spectators are so taken by its self-evident accuracy that they find themselves confronted with the dynamics of the relationship itself, rather than becoming swept up in concern for the characters’ plights. This is precisely what makes the gesture such a valuable device in his epic theatre toolbox. Brecht casts the spectators’ responses in terms of an inventor’s delighted and astonished discovery of what he feels should have been obvious to him all along. A sudden revelatory understanding produced by a well-crafted gesture was repeatedly reflected in the data.

In my reading of Brecht, the experience of witnessing a well-crafted gesture is not unlike James Joyce’s description of encountering quidditas. According to Joyce, when a person suddenly perceives the unequivocal uniqueness of something he has never truly appreciated, he experiences an epiphany (1916, p. 250). I find this to be a striking parallel to Brecht’s view that a complex and often contradictory social relationship, stripped so decisively to a single gesture, leads the viewer to appreciate a renewed, or entirely new, comprehension of

that which is observed. Throughout the data, the expression of a variety of relationships, emotional states, social circumstances and experiences were effectively rendered in exceedingly distilled, aesthetically striking ways. The sheer clarity of these powerfully condensed staging choices served to eclipse the spectators' expectations, drawing them into a fresh appreciation of what they were witnessing.

Six subcategories of gests emerged in the study. Aspects of *relationships* between two or more people were distilled into gests. Individuals' *emotional states* were physically embodied in gests. *Non-naturalistic gests* exceeded the bounds of naturalistic representation. Gests were shown to accommodate the complexity of *contradictions*. *Scenic elements* in the staging were shown to embody ideas gesticly. As well, certain *production concepts* gesticly incorporated the overall idea of a production.

Gest

5.1 Relationship

In Giorgio Strehler's internationally acclaimed production of *The Tempest*, a central relationship in the play was startlingly embodied in a gest. First staged in Milan in 1978, its many aesthetically arresting feats of staging included a five-minute opening storm sequence that prompted one *New York Times* theatre critic to ask "When were you last so amazed and alarmed in a theater that you attempted to dive under the seat in front and lie there, mumbling little prayers for deliverance?" (Nightingale, 1984, para. 1). Strehler's production was quite self-consciously about the world of the theatre. Shakespearean scholar David L. Hirst (1993) notes that in this production, Prospero's master-slave relationship with Ariel paralleled the relationship between theatre director and actor, "often one of deep mutual love and trust, of

gratitude for the freedom given the performer, but also of resentment, of the will to be free and independent” (p. 84). Throughout the play Strehler used a particular staging device with great effectiveness to define the nature of this production’s Prospero-Ariel relationship.

Played by a woman (Giulia Lazzarini) as a white-faced Pierrot, dressed in a billowing white clown suit and skullcap, [Ariel] entered through the air at the master's call. But this Ariel flew on an obvious theatrical wire, hooked to a harness on the actress’s body, a vivid signifier of her peculiar slavery; she could fly but not fly away, and tugged and pulled at the cable when Prospero [Tino Carraro] denied her freedom. [. . .]Ariel, longing for personal liberation, nonetheless submitted to the mind of the controller, willingly performing balletic turns on the wire as signalers of active submission. (Kennedy, 2001, p. 307)

At times, Lazzarini’s Ariel used her capacity for flight on stage to exercise enormous power, such as when she swooped down from the flies screeching like a harpy, terrifying the shipwrecked sailors and audience members alike. The cable was a figurative collar and leash that physically embodied her complex relationship with her owner as both enabling and restrictive. In Shakespeare’s text, Prospero releases Ariel during the final moments of the play with the line, “My Ariel, chick, That is thy charge: then to the elements. Be free, and fare thou well!” (Act V, sc. i:317-319). At this point in Strehler’s production, Carraro beckoned to Lazzarini before completing his line: “Please you, draw near” (line: 319). Then, in what was described by Kennedy (2001, p. 309) as “the most powerful emotional moment” of a powerful production, the master reached behind the servant and unhooked her from the rigging, which was yanked away upwards and disappeared into the flies. “She stood surprised a moment, experimented with walking, then slowly and gleefully danced up the aisle of the auditorium, exiting through a spectators’ door” (p. 309).

The flying apparatus in Strehler’s *Tempest* provided far more than just an impressive stage effect. As a gestic device, it was not offering a metaphor for Prospero’s relationship

with Ariel; it was manifesting their relationship. After spending five acts helping to establish the dynamics of Ariel's "peculiar slavery," always tethered to Prospero's will, the harness and wire then offered Carraro an opportunity to perform another gest: the gest of liberating his slave.

A 2005 production of *Romeo and Juliet* at the Derby Playhouse in England was roundly derided for its "high-concept" design, which included a full-sized water tanker truck parked on stage, a Harley Davidson motorcycle, British colonial Capulets, French knight Montagues, a tattered U.S. flag, and skateboarding (see Hickling, 2005; Orme, 2005; Potter, 2005). Tucked in amidst this jumble of staging concepts was a brief subtle moment on stage—the performance of a gest—that was described as having awakened one respondent to a fresh understanding of a character she thought she knew well (Respondent 3). At the top of the play while Lady Capulet was downstage, Olivia Lumley as Juliet made her first appearance upstage remaining just out of her mother's sight. The audience saw Juliet chatting with the tanker truck driver on the sly and then "bumming" a cigarette from him, which she smoked with the attitude of a defiant teenage daughter. In an instant, this simple action reframed the traditional romantic conception of Juliet as a doe-eyed young girl, swept up by her first experience of love. Here was a disaffected fourteen-year-old, determinedly contentious toward her mother. For the remainder of the play, her rashness, the risks she took, and her decision to consort with the one boy most likely to displease her parents took on new meaning. It was not that smoking a cigarette made Juliet somehow more contemporary, and therefore relevant. The gest of sneaking a smoke while her mother wasn't looking enabled Lumley to express, in distilled form, Juliet's relationship with her mother and, by extension, Juliet's rebellious relationship with the rest of the world.

I saw Gabrielle Jourdan play Shylock's daughter Jessica in Trevor Nunn's 1999 production of *The Merchant of Venice*, where she performed a striking gest that embodied the significant cultural rift between the Jewish Jessica and the wealthy young Christian men and women in the play. In a brief scene in Act III, Jessica and her Christian lover Lorenzo are visiting Portia—a rich heiress—in her home at Belmont. Jessica, who has newly been introduced to Portia, bids her farewell with the line “I wish your ladyship all heart's content.” Portia replies, “I thank you for your wish, and am well pleased to wish it back on you: fare you well” (Act III, sc. ii:42-3). In Nunn's production, Jessica bounded across the stage as she delivered her line, enthusiastically throwing her arms around Portia, giving her a big bear hug. The male courtiers smirked at what they clearly considered to be a socially inept, inappropriately overblown show of affection. Dearbhla Crotty as Portia patiently waited until Jessica finished her hug and then, gently taking the Jewish girl's hands, she looked into her eyes and delivered her parting line with affection and kindness. The physical action of this gest perfectly captured how Jessica is utterly out of her depth in this social circle, and provided Crotty the opportunity to demonstrate Portia's grace and generosity of spirit towards Jessica despite the obvious imbalance of their social status.

Nine years later I witnessed Nunn re-use this gest with a twist in his 2008-2009 production of *A Little Night Music*. When the immature 18 year-old Anne (played in this production by Jessie Buckley) first met the worldly Desiree Armfeldt, Anne threw her arms around her idol, in an awkward bear hug that revealed to all present how unschooled she was in the social codes of the upper class. As Desiree, Hannah Waddingham, responded with a subtle smirk directed to Anne's husband Frederik, Desiree's former lover. In the moment of

Anne's hugging gest, the look that Desiree and Frederik shared made it vividly clear to the audience that Anne's age and inexperience separated her from their world.

5.2 Emotional state

Two respondents, writing on different plays, described the extraordinary impact created when an actor is able to express a character's complex emotional state in one concentrated, simple gesture. In both cases, the moment on stage clearly involved a relationship, but unlike the gests of relationship described in the previous section, these gests did not focus on illuminating the relationship between characters; the gests illuminated one character's feelings in response to another character's behaviour or actions.

In one account, a respondent reported how a particular image from the original Broadway production of *Les Misérables* has remained seared in his memory for twenty years. He noted that in the moment of performance he felt the impact of the actor's "small . . . specific and focused" gesture ripple through the audience. Frances Ruffelle played Éponine, a young woman whose good friend Marius is a handsome student revolutionary. During the song "In My Life," Marius gleefully thanks Éponine for having introduced him to another young woman, Cosette. When he reveals to Éponine that he has fallen in love with Cosette, he does not realize that he is breaking Éponine's heart; she herself has long been secretly in love with him. She turns away from Marius and sings the lyric, "Every word he says is a dagger in me." At that moment, Ruffelle "simply lifted her left arm from her side and then closed her fist . . . essentially squeezing her heart" (Respondent 17).

"Every word he says is a dagger in me." The lyric is a breathtaking metaphor. Ruffelle's gest, however, did not operate on the level of metaphor insofar as it did not draw

an illuminating comparison between two unlike things. Ruffelle could not literally show the audience Éponine's wounded heart, but her tightly clenched fist, roughly the same size as her heart and held centimetres away from it, was as close a visual approximation as possible. Her closing fist—squeezing her heart—gave form to what Éponine felt at that moment. It was the totality of her emotional state made concrete, captured in its essence, in a single gesture. It gave the spectators direct visual access to a distilled physical manifestation of her feeling.

Another vivid example of a character's complex emotional state expressed in a single gesture was offered by a respondent who described himself as an African American theatre professional with a long personal connection to Lorraine Hansberry's play *A Raisin in the Sun*. He wrote that although he has seen many productions of this iconic work in the African-American canon, and has great respect for its importance, he felt that the play has often been produced in lieu of other, different voices and perspectives in the African-American community. It was then with some reluctance that he decided to attend the Goodman Theatre production in Chicago in 2000. He was unexpectedly held utterly spellbound by the work of Irma P. Hall as Mama, the matriarch of the family. She infused her portrayal with such depth and nuance that he felt he understood "the depths of a mother's love" with new eyes, promoting a vastly deeper understanding of his own mother's love for him and for his siblings. It was as if Mama were *his* mother.

In the play, Mama's family is fiercely divided about what to do with a \$10,000 life insurance payment they have received following her husband's recent death. Each member of the family has a different idea of how the money can best improve all of their lives. A moment comes when Mama's son Walter Lee reveals that he secretly took over half of the money to invest in his plan for the family's future, and that the money is now gone—stolen

by his friend and business partner. This is how the respondent characterized what happened next:

Actress Hall took a moment to take in the information . . . then without warning . . . she went weak in the knees and CLUTCHED HER WOMB. To my eyes, she was in “hard” labor all over again. He had ripped her apart when she birthed him, now 35 years later she could still feel him (Walter Lee) ripping and shredding her womb. A mother will bear unspeakable pain for her children. I'll never forget that! Every time the play is even mentioned to me now . . . I love my mother with an almost unbearable love. (Respondent 29)

It is especially noteworthy that the respondent experienced this gest as a conduit to a deeper understanding of what his mother, indeed *all mothers*, will endure for their children, rather than feeling concern for that particular character on stage in that particular production. What is it that enables a well-orchestrated gest to produce this resonance beyond the frame of the play? Based on the accounts in the data, the key appears to lie in the sheer aptness of the gest. That is to say, the gest must do more than simply indicate a relationship, emotional state, social circumstance or experience. It is when the actors are able to create a gest that spectators recognize—and recognize as *a perfectly consummate embodiment of something they know*—that the exquisiteness of the image itself arrests the spectators’ attention. A single aesthetic image that uncannily distills a complex experience becomes, in Joseph Chaikin’s (1972) words, “a meeting point for the actor and the spectator” that compels the spectator to engage directly with the experience being presented (p. 113).

5.3 Non-naturalism

Helene Weigel’s signature role was Mother Courage in the play *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder* (*Mother Courage and her Children*), written by her husband Bertolt Brecht. Set during the Thirty Years’ War between the Protestants and the Catholics in central Europe, the

play follows twelve years in the life of a hard-bitten woman who, accompanied by her three children, traverses the countryside eking out survival by selling wares from her cart. In Scene 3, her eldest son Schweizerkas (Swiss Cheese) steals the Catholic soldiers' paybox and is caught. Courage has an opportunity to buy his freedom with a bribe if she can quickly raise the money by selling her cart, but she takes too much time haggling to get a better price, and Schweizerkas is executed. The soldiers bring his dead body to her, demanding to know whether she knew him. If she acknowledges that he was her son, the soldiers will shoot her and both of her remaining children, so she denies ever having seen him. Surrounded by soldiers, she cannot betray even a whisper of her feelings. Scholar and critic George Steiner (1984) saw Weigel in the role and describes what he witnessed:

As the body was carried off, Weigel looked the other way and tore her mouth wide open. The shape of the gesture was that of the screaming horse in Picasso's *Guernica*. The sound that came out was raw and terrible beyond any description I could give of it. But, in fact, there was no sound. Nothing. The sound was total silence. It was silence which screamed and screamed through the whole theater so that the audience lowered its head as before a gust of wind. (p. 354)

Weigel's *Silent Scream* is generally acknowledged as the quintessential Brechtian gest. It embodies the socially constructed circumstances that put *Mother Courage* into an impossible bind, pitting her maternal instincts against her instincts to survive in the midst of a harsh unending war. The contradiction ultimately explodes in a scream of grief that she must not permit herself to express. This example adds another dimension to the understanding of a gest. The gests described thus far—all remarkable for their precision and accuracy—are generally within the realm of naturalistic behaviour. Juliet's cigarette smoking, Jessica's and Anne's hugging, Éponine's squeezed fist, and even Mama's clutching of her womb, are all gests that could be considered believable as actions "ordinary" people might do. Even Ariel's

flying rigging could be considered believable within the context of Strehler's *Tempest* since that production was set in a universe filled with staging devices and very consciously theatrical conventions. What sets Weigel's gest apart from these others is the magnitude of its intensity; it categorically exceeds everyday expression. Clearly, a well-crafted gest is not limited to naturalistic physical gestures. These illustrations demonstrate the latitude available in the way gests can be conceived and executed.

5.4 Contradiction

Central to Brecht's conception of the gest is its capacity to enfold a contradiction of two apparently antithetical attitudes, making the paradox evident to spectators (Brecht, 1964, p. 198). Two plays in particular received attention for the ways in which exceptionally powerful moments on stage were the result of the unexpected confluence of two conditions respondents did not expect to see together.

So it was that the performers in *Black Watch* enacted a gest of hope and humanity in the final horrifying scene of the play. In the semi-darkness, through the cacophony of enemy fire, the soldiers marched together as many among them collapsed to the ground, shot by unseen snipers. In the pandemonium and chaos of the scene, the men were seen risking their lives again and again to fall out of ranks, run back to bear up their fallen comrades, and continue moving forward together. The original respondent wrote of seeing the soldiers as real human beings (a sentiment echoed by other commentators) after having been accustomed to thinking of them as an anonymous collective of stereotypical "GI Joe" fighting men. In this final scene they were indeed operating as a collective, in terrifying

circumstances, and at the same time were caring, individual men. Ben Brantley (2007) of the *New York Times* writes:

In the final marching sequence, as the men moved forward and stumbled in shifting patterns, I found to my surprise that I was crying. For this was no anonymous military phalanx. It was an assembly of men who, while moving in synchronicity, were each and every one a distinctive blend of fears and ambitions and confusion. They were every soldier; they were also irreducibly themselves. This exquisitely sustained double vision makes “Black Watch” one of the most richly human works of art to have emerged from this long-lived war. (para. 15)

Brantley does a fine job of articulating the dynamic he observed, and yet one cannot help but feel this is like someone trying to explain an automobile crash: the words fail. This complex expression of collectivity *and* individuality finds its best expression in the performance itself as a theatrical gest.

In *Food Court*, the young woman portrayed by Sarah Mainwaring was forced by her tormenters to strip naked and dance. They contemptuously taunted her while a crowd of onlookers gathered to watch, doing nothing to intervene. Several commentators remarked upon how astounded they were by the character’s untroubled response to this horrible persecution. Deflecting the attempts to humiliate her, Mainwaring performed a gest of freedom and joy in a dance that critics and other spectators repeatedly described as “beautiful.” The attitude she exhibited in that physical gesture of dance ran directly counter to the spectators’ expectations. Moreover, it resonated beyond the particular circumstances of the play to evoke the potential for choice that a person may exercise in response to oppression. An entire play may present such a theme, but in this instance, that dynamic was distilled into a single, powerful, visual image.

5.5 Scenic elements

Props, furniture, and scenery were employed in numerous accounts throughout the data in ways that are clearly gestic. For example, the dramaturgical conceit of *Well* is that Kron has prepared a presentation of various episodes from her life to explain to her audience the “truth” of what happened to her when she was in her twenties. She opens the show by coming to the front of the stage holding a small stack of index cards and reading from them. These cards, on which she has evidently organized her outline of the scenes she has prepared for the evening, physically embody that plan. They become a gestic prop. As discussed in Chapter 3, it becomes progressively clear that she is an untrustworthy autobiographer and she gradually “loses control” of both her authority over the other actors she has hired, and of her command of the play.

As the play moves along, she continues to grip the cards and wield them in an attempt to exert her claim to authority. At one point, her childhood nemesis “Lori” rips through a fabric curtain on stage right and marches up to confront Lisa centre stage. Lisa holds up the cards as a defence, quickly leafing through them to show that Lori does not belong there; Lisa didn’t write Lori into the play. Lori shouts, “I don’t care about your stupid cards!” and knocks them out of Lisa’s hand, scattering them onto the floor. Later in the play, one of the beds that has effortlessly glided on and off stage for the scenes in the allergy clinic gets stuck. Lisa’s authority over her play and the other actors is quickly evaporating at this point, and the bed becomes a physical manifestation of her inability to exert control. Throwing her whole body into the effort, she struggles to get the bed to budge so that the play can continue, but the bed refuses to comply. The two pieces of “stage business” involving Lori and the index cards, and Lisa’s struggle with the hospital bed, are extremely funny pieces of physical

comedy. Their effective power is rooted in the fact that they are both gestic, physically embodying Lisa's desperate attempts to maintain control of her play as it slips away from her.

Another well-crafted gestic scenic element is the image of the billowing, rising white silk curtains seen in the last few seconds of *Amy's View*. In the previous chapter, I presented this moment of staging as an example of the inherently compelling quality of beauty on stage. The image of the silk curtains in *Amy's View* also belongs in this chapter. The visual image of the curtains, like the astounding aesthetic presentation of Weigel's silent scream, was breathtaking in and of itself, but the real impact of both images resulted from the confluence of aesthetics and meaning. A core theme of *Amy's View* is that theatre is vital and thrilling. The director and designer of that production were able to conceive and produce a scenic gest that embodied a distilled and potent manifestation of the magical appeal of theatre. According to respondents, what so gripped the audience was the visual proof of theatre as an astonishing form that evinced playwright Hare's theme as self-evident.

5.6 Staging concept

David Cromer's *Our Town* offers an excellent example of a gest integrated into the staging concept of an entire production. I have previously noted the way in which the seating of the Barrow Street Theatre was reconfigured for this production to bring the spectators into more intimate proximity with the actors. The actors dressed in street clothing that blurred the distinction between them and the audience members. During the performance, the actors frequently walked in between the rows of seating, illuminated by house lights that remained on throughout the show. The scenery (much as playwright Thornton Wilder intended) was

composed of only a couple of tables and chairs in the central playing space. The production was stripped of folksy accents and sentimental stage pictures of a romantic bygone era. Many commentators remarked on how the production of this 1938 script (set in the early 1900s) seemed strikingly contemporary. It is an assessment articulated in critic John Heilpern's (2009) review: "How the new production appears to exist simultaneously in time past and present is some kind of theater miracle" (para. 18). Cromer's gestic staging concept required that the modern audience feel intimately included in the world of the characters and—especially during the first two acts—that they related to the environment of the play as something familiar, even humdrum. A central theme of *Our Town* is the human tendency to fail to appreciate life's simple pleasures. Wilder has his ingénue character, Emily Webb, come to understand this in Act 3. The act begins at the graveyard where Emily's ghost has just arrived after having died while giving birth to her second child. She asks the Stage Manager—a character who serves as the play's narrator and guide—for permission to return for just one day to the world of the living. She chooses the day of her twelfth birthday and, stepping into it, she comes to realize that during her years on earth she was woefully unappreciative of all the beauty and joy that can be found in everyday life.

Director Cromer's genius lies in the simple yet striking means he found to embody in a staging concept this "gesture" of Emily's shift from unmindfulness to appreciation. The gesture in this case is not the physical, corporeal gesture of an individual, like Éponine's fist-squeeze or Mother Courage's silent scream. In the broader sense of the word, it is a gesture in the dramaturgical movement of the play that tangibly distilled the essence of Emily's epiphany. As actor Jennifer Grace's Emily stepped into the morning of her twelfth birthday, the staging itself manifested an alternative way of experiencing the world:

The stage manager pulls back a curtain and there is a fully realized set of an early American kitchen. Bright realistic sunlight floods in from the back windows, so it's hard to make out the faces of Mr. and Mrs. Webb, but they are fully costumed; Mrs. Webb actually cooks an American breakfast [on a working stove] and the theater is filled with the smell of bacon and eggs; you can see the coffee steaming as it's poured. (Respondent 30)

Spectators were deeply moved by the experience of suddenly feeling firsthand appreciation for the beauty and wonder of the sights and smells of an ordinary morning in the Webb kitchen. The coup de théâtre that occurred when the curtain was drawn back transcended theatrical gimmickry. This was not a flourish for the sake of surprise and dazzle. The director and designer devised a staging concept that is gestic because it embodies Emily's shift in attitude and, indeed, embodies the playwright's core theme. Two acts of decidedly plain twenty-first century street clothes, a couple of chairs, tables, and rehearsal-style illuminated house lights quite literally set the stage for the sudden richness of the Act 3 reveal. This is a gest that physically manifests the *idea* of a shift in perception.

This achievement was not unique in the data. The staging concept of Back to Back Theatre's *small metal objects* was conceived as a way to situate the intellectually challenged actors amid a large crowd of unsuspecting passersby so that they would blend in, unnoticed, just as the disabled performers themselves go largely unnoticed by the general public. In both of these instances, a core theme of the play was embodied gestically into an overall production concept.

Summary

The data often include caveats from respondents that their descriptions fail to express the impact they felt from these memorable moments on stage. What is it like to feel newly

appreciative of the ordinary pleasure in the smell of bacon and eggs on the griddle, or to feel the crushing anguish of a broken heart, or in the face of savage denigration to find joy in one's state of absolute vulnerability? Dialogue, monologue, poetry, and song have all been used to express the depth of feelings such as these. All have unique strengths as modes of language: written, spoken, or sung. The singular power of gesticulation can be found in their capacity to render such complex and contradictory ideas in highly encapsulated, aesthetically arresting physical forms. Well-crafted gesticulation so perfectly manifest some aspect of a character's relationship, emotional state, social circumstances, or experience that the image astounds the spectator and in that instant dislodges the grip of the observers' expectations and preconceptions about what they are witnessing.

Discussion

In this chapter, I offer a reconsideration of Brecht's original concept of the gesticulation by demonstrating the effective power of so-called "ordinary gesticulation" to dispel spectators' cultural preconceptions. Readers will note that I have omitted discussion of what Brecht would consider the essential aspect of gesticulation: social relevance. Brecht is quick to distinguish between what he terms ordinary gesticulation and social gesticulation. He describes ordinary gesticulation as elements common to any work of art in which a person's human condition is presented with clarity but remains "abstract and generalized," e.g., "the look of a hunted animal" (Brecht, 1964, p. 104). Dismissive of ordinary gesticulation, Brecht requires the addition of a crucial social dimension. An ordinary gesticulation is transformed into a social gesticulation when it is constructed in such a manner that it reveals not just a person's human condition, but also the social circumstances that have imposed that condition upon him. This is the *sine qua non* of Brecht's epic theatre. He

demands staging that reveals to spectators the oppressive, contradictory, and typically unacknowledged mechanisms of social systems in order that they may be rendered available for assessment and critique. Furthermore, Brecht uses the term *gest* also to describe the overall attitude of the performer toward the role. This secondary meaning of *gest* describes an actor's consideration of how every one of his character's actions will cumulatively convey to the audience the social context of that character's motives, choices and limitations.

The majority of *gests* described in these pages are not social *gests*. One clear exception is Weigel's silent scream, which has been celebrated for the way it so astonishingly embodies Mother Courage's impossible bind, brought on by the ideology that shapes her social circumstances. Mama's clutching of her womb in *A Raisin in the Sun* also highlights the socially imposed limits to opportunity that lead Walter Lee to be so reckless with the family's insurance money. The remaining *gests* in this chapter are far less tied to oppressive social circumstances. Juliet's adolescent defiance toward her mother, Prospero's control and release of Ariel, the awkward hugs in *Merchant* and *Night Music*, Éponine's broken heart, the *Black Watch* squaddies' final march through sniper fire, Sarah Mainwaring's joyful dance, Lisa Kron's struggles with props, the billowing breathtaking curtains in *Amy's View*, the dramaturgical embodiment of appreciation in *Our Town*, and the virtual invisibility of the disabled actors in *small metal objects*, challenge the spectators' much more generalized cultural expectations and preconceptions about human relationships.

A key discovery in this research is that ordinary *gests* should not be dismissed as less relevant than social *gests* for theatre workers concerned with staging that promotes critical analysis by spectators. As evidenced in these many examples, ordinary *gests* can indeed serve a powerful function to dislodge the grip of fore-sight among members of an audience,

opening the potential for a broad range of cultural expectations to be challenged and seen anew.

The central challenge for actors seeking to find strongly grounded gests involves identifying physical manifestations of their characters' relationships, emotional states, social circumstances, or experiences. Brecht considered a play as a series of "individual occurrences" (*einzelgeschehnis*); the work of the ensemble members was to capture the essence of each occurrence with vivid specificity. In "Brecht and the contradictory actor," John Rouse (1984), makes reference to the extended amount of time that the director and the actors in the Berliner Ensemble took to experiment in rehearsal as they worked to conceive and refine their gests. Rouse writes: "Brecht's productions developed their fables so clearly, not because of any special magic, but because Brecht and his actors went to the trouble to understand and outline in performance vocabulary the story they were telling" (pp. 36-37). This remains the singular challenge for an ensemble of actors devising gests for an applied theatre production. They must ask themselves what are the individual occurrences that combine to form their play, and what staging choices will render the precise nature of those occurrences with utmost clarity?

Implications for teaching

Actors in an ensemble who wish to incorporate gests into their devised plays as described in this chapter should be encouraged to develop and exercise their individual and collective facility for conceiving, refining and performing gests. Prior to working on the development of a play, the actors can be introduced to theatre activities that will deepen their understanding of what constitutes an effective gest while simultaneously strengthening their

skills at crafting gests. I propose three different exercises to support this effort. First, actors may improve their skills by observing and discussing well-crafted gests in film and theatre as well as paying attention to gests performed by friends and strangers encountered in their daily routines. In a theatre workshop setting they can practice replicating the gests they have observed. Second, some of the theatre exercises developed by Augusto Boal are particularly useful for strengthening one's understanding of gests and providing opportunities for practice. Third, an exercise I developed using ordinary objects can help to elevate participants' capacities to create gests applicable to scenic elements and production concepts.

According to Brecht, gests are quotable. They can be reproduced by different actors and still retain their expressive power (see Benjamin, 1973, p. 28). As described above, this was evident in the gest of social ineptitude seen first in Trevor Nunn's *The Merchant of Venice* when Jessica hugged Portia, and then reproduced ten years later when Anne hugged Desiree in his remount of *A Little Night Music*. An excellent way for members of an ensemble to improve their skills at creating and performing gests is to identify quintessential gests in the work of others—gests that particularly resonate for the observers—and to practice reproducing them.

Brecht was a great admirer of Charlie Chaplin's work because of the way Chaplin was able to convey the Little Tramp's attitudes through gestures and facial expressions with exceptional skill and economy (see Weber, 1990). Watching Chaplin's films, one can read exactly what the Little Tramp is thinking and how he feels about the people and events he encounters. Here, "economy" refers to the performer's use of only what is absolutely necessary to the task. An ensemble will need to consider sources within their cultural context to identify performers that exhibit distinctive and reproducible gests. For actors in Western

cultural contexts, a plentiful supply of ordinary gests performed with economy can be seen in the award-winning films of Disney's Pixar Animation Studios. Any one of these films could well be described as Brecht described the play in *The Messingkauf Dialogues*: "a great collection of gestures, observed with artistry." For example, in *WALL·E (2008)*, the eponymous trash compactor robot and his companion EVE have only the most rudimentary indications of facial features or bodies, and they speak almost no lines other than saying their names. Yet, throughout the film, Pixar's animators achieve an extraordinary level of clarity in capturing the characters' attitudes about their relationships and emotional experiences through the economical use of precise, well-chosen gestures. The Pixar films are full of quotable gests. They present a contemporary, easily accessible source for observation, analysis, and reproduction of ordinary gests for practice building one's capacity to devise clear and precise gests.

Augusto Boal's Image Theatre offers excellent training for actors wishing to develop their capacity to devise gests. These techniques, exercises, and games are comprehensively described in Boal's book, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors (1992)*, as well as in *The Rainbow of Desire (1995)*. This continually evolving form of theatre as collaborative research generally involves the use of actors creating images with their bodies in tableaux (sometimes incorporating objects) that will give visual form to various aspects of their lives. The images they create may be static or they may be kinetic. There may be a progression of images, starting with a tableau reflecting participants' assessments of how things are, followed by an image reflecting their estimation of how they would wish things to be. Typically, a single volunteer will take the lead role in directing the composition of the image by working as a sculptor, physically positioning the others. This initial work may be followed

by group assessment and re-adjustment until all agree on the cogency of the image. Image Theatre has many permutations, including an exercise designed to incorporate contradictions between an individual's outward presentation of self to others and inward feelings ("Janaka's Double," also called "The Inside/Outside Image"), and an exercise designed to clarify feelings of ambivalence and ambiguity ("The Janus Sculpture"). Both of these exercises are described in *The Rainbow of Desire* (1995). Image Theatre exercises provide an excellent means of collaboratively formulating the physical manifestations of a character's relationships, emotional states, social circumstances, and experiences.

Years ago, in my own professional work as a theatre director with young untrained actors, I devised an exercise called "Investigating the Tools" (see Weigler, 2001, 23-29). I presented the actors with a large pile of common objects such as kitchen utensils, parts of toys, small musical instruments, random pieces of fabric, and so forth: the *tools* for making theatre in the exercise. I asked the actors to spend a few minutes working in pairs to investigate ways they might combine two or three of these everyday items—manipulating them as a puppeteer, or using them in relation to their own bodies—to evoke a mood or feeling, an environment, or relationship. At the time, I was interested in freeing the participants from their frequent reluctance to commit themselves to performance physically and emotionally. I discovered that these found objects not only allowed them to feel more confident in presenting their ideas, the objects significantly expanded the range of the actors' expressiveness and their capacity to convey great subtlety of meaning. Time and again I witnessed a twenty-second presentation that brought an entire group to a simultaneous explosion of belly-laughter as everyone recognized the astonishing specificity of one aspect

of a relationship, perfectly evoked. I have also seen thirty people simultaneously hold their breath at the singularly clear expression of a particular mood or an environment.

For instance, I once worked with two students who wanted to embody the quality of “fragility.” From the assortment of found objects I provided, they selected a large diaphanous teal-coloured piece of rayon and an egg that had been “blown” the way one empties Easter eggs before dyeing them. For their presentation, they simply knelt facing one another, holding the fabric as two people might prepare to fold a bedsheet together. The egg was at the centre of the fabric. As they shifted and lifted the corners, the egg pitched and rolled, was thrust into the air and was caught in the translucent teal, again and again and again. Everyone in the class knew the egg was blown and that there was no actual danger of messing the floor of the studio, and yet the performance was utterly spellbinding. This was not a representation or illustration of fragility, nor was it a metaphor. It was fragility itself physically manifested, and the gest prompted the rest of the class to revel in a re-awakened understanding of the meaning of the idea of “fragility.” Although I did not then use the term, I understand now that what this exercise does is to develop one’s capacity to conceive and create gests. Because it integrates scenic elements into the formulation of relationships, the exercise is particularly useful for offering actors opportunities to devise scenic and conceptual gests. The exercise “Investigating the Tools,” along with practice in observing and reproducing (quoting) well-crafted gests, and activities drawn from Boal’s Image Theatre can serve to increase community members’ facility in formulating and refining gests in preparation for devising a play or in the process of devising the work itself.

Chapter Six

Heuristics

But men are moved so much by preconceptions. It is not realities, circumstances, that astonish us; it is the concussion of what we should have known, if we had only not been so busy believing what we discover later we had taken for the truth for no other reason than that we happened to be believing it at the moment.

William Faulkner
(1949, pp. 24-25)

Introduction

The experience of astonishment described by William Faulkner in his short story, “Smoke,” epitomizes an entire category of moments of staging observed in the data. Faulkner’s revelatory concussion does not occur as a result of simply obtaining more information; the shock occurs as the apparent validity of one’s convictions collapses when new information suddenly makes the observer realize he has been wholly misled by his own self-imposed assumptions.

Borrowing a term from philosopher and educational theorist Harry S. Broudy, I refer to this core category as *Heuristics*. Broudy (1972) distinguishes between what he calls didactic teaching, an educational approach designed to relay a teacher’s knowledge to students through illustration and example, and heuristic teaching: “designed to promote discoveries by the pupil,” and “to manage instruction so that the student thinks for himself” (p. 252). In a heuristic approach, the teacher sets up conditions in a classroom such that students achieve insights themselves rather than gleaning understanding secondhand from the teacher’s knowledge and insights. While Broudy includes “discovery” in his characterization

of the student's learning through a heuristic, Emilia E. Martinez-Brawley (1977) counters that, in most classrooms, teachers set up conditions that will prompt students to make not just any discovery, but the specific discovery the teacher intended them to find. She emphasizes that the relevance of a heuristic approach is the "personally significant fashion" in which the students arrive at their own understanding (p. 85).

Broudy's concept of heuristics in teaching is linked to Socratic questioning and the problem-solving educational strategies articulated by John Dewey. Rather than explain a concept through illustration or example, a teacher presents students with a question or problem. The students struggle to work out a solution themselves and it is through that personal engagement that students are led to achieve their own insights. What I refer to as theatrical heuristics observed in this study were much more nuanced than a teacher's straightforward presentation of a question or problem to solve. However, like an educational heuristic, it was the introduction of a challenge that led the spectators to feel a direct, personal connection with the material in the play.

I suggest that the teacher-student relationship in Broudy's didactic teaching approach—using illustration and example—is often paralleled in theatre. Even non-didactic plays are fundamentally illustrative and rely on example when spectators engage with a play's themes vicariously by observing the characters as *they* experience a revelation or have an emotional response to events, or to other characters. In contrast, a variety of staging strategies examined in this study placed spectators in the position of undergoing a revelation firsthand, or experiencing an unmediated emotional engagement with the events of the play. In other words, the actors used approaches that prompted the spectators to achieve insights directly, rather than as a result of witnessing insights the characters achieved. As with

Martinez-Brawley's reflections on classroom teaching, these heuristic staging choices appeared to be designed to produce specific responses from the spectators.

An example of a heuristic staging choice can be found in Cromer's production of *Our Town*, described in the previous chapter. The way the script is written, Emily's phantom in Act 3 tearfully undergoes a personal revelation as the audience watches. After a short time reliving the morning of her twelfth birthday, she breaks away from her mother and, sobbing, she cries out to the stage manager:

I didn't realize. So all that was going on and we never noticed. Take me back—up the hill—to my grave. But first: Wait! One more look. Good-by, Good-by, world. Good-by, Grover's Corners . . . Mama and Papa. Good-by to clocks ticking . . . and Mama's sunflowers. And food and coffee. And new-ironed dresses and hot baths . . . and sleeping and waking up. Oh, earth, you're too wonderful for anybody to realize you. *She looks toward the stage manager and asks abruptly, through her tears:* Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it? —every, every minute? (Wilder, 1939, p. 138)

When performed well, it is a stirring speech and the audience members engage sympathetically with the sentiments of Emily's epiphany. They watch and listen as she experiences and verbalizes her heartfelt encounter with this new appreciation of life's wonders. Cromer's ingenious staging reconfigures the audience members' vicarious relationship toward Emily's experience. He severely reduces the audience's sensory stimulation in the intimate theatre arena for two acts and then suddenly thrusts them into a direct encounter with brilliant morning light illuminating Mama's sunflowers on the table and the evocative aromas of freshly percolating coffee and food sizzling in the frying pan, etc. The staging sets up conditions intended to lead the spectators to experience an unexpected firsthand appreciation of the marvelous things Emily describes in her speech. It is a theatrical heuristic and, judging by the volume of positive responses, a very effective one.

I have argued that spectators come to a theatre performance encumbered by preconceived attitudes regarding what they are about to see. Furthermore, that during the performance they look for clues that will confirm the “accuracy” of their assessments, solidifying their commitment to their existing interpretations. Finally, that this process of quickly determining the meaning of what stands before them—categorizing and containing it as familiar—inhibits their ability to be receptive to alternative interpretations. The power of a theatrical heuristic is premised on this tendency. Three variations of theatrical heuristics appear in the data. All draw spectators into an active confrontation with their own preconceived expectations.

In some instances, the staging deliberately lulled spectators into establishing one interpretation of events on stage, and then introduced a piece of information that forced them to reevaluate their own assumptions. I call this revelation-based heuristic mode *recognition*, the English translation of Aristotle’s term *anagnorisis*. I assigned names to three variations of revelation-based heuristic staging choices observed in the data. *Incidental recognition heuristics* involve a revelation of information that is completely incidental to the characters, but dramatically shifts the spectators’ appraisal of the circumstances. *Simultaneous recognition heuristics* involve revelations experienced by the characters and spectators at the same time. *Oscillating recognition heuristics* present a series of revelations that promote contradictory interpretations.

In other instances of heuristic staging choices, the spectators’ vicarious relationships with the characters and events on stage are overpowered by the introduction of inescapably intense, sense-based stimuli that impel audience members to experience a somatic (and often emotional) personal response. I call this heuristic mode *affective punch*. In the data, four

variations of affective punch engaged different senses among audience members: scent and taste; physical contact; sound; and the sounds of words (as well as emphatic use of pauses) in speech.

In further instances of heuristic staging choices, visual or linguistic cues that typically allow spectators to quickly assess, categorize, and confirm the validity of their interpretations of the events on stage are reduced—or entirely blocked. Following Kershaw (1999), I call this staging strategy *subtraction heuristics*. By mediating or withholding spectators' visual or linguistic cues, or by employing periods of silence, subtraction heuristics displace spectators' traditional approaches to assessing a play's meaning.

I Revelation-based Recognition Heuristics

In *Poetics* (trans. 1997), Aristotle describes *peripeteia* as a sudden reversal brought on by an unexpected change in circumstances. Aristotle felt that this most powerful element of tragedy was best coupled with anagnorisis: the shift from not knowing to knowing (p. 86). In his commentary on *Poetics*, George Whalley (1997) emphasizes that the experience of Aristotelian recognition involves more than simply becoming aware. Anagnorisis thrusts the protagonist into a shocking personal confrontation with the far-reaching implications of this new awareness. Oedipus' circumstances shift when the truth is revealed that he is neither the son of Polybus nor the son of a slave, but the son of Laius. Then it dawns on him what this means: the man he killed on the road to Thebes was his own father and he has been bedding his own mother. The experience of reversal is a thrilling element of the plot; the experience of recognition is the stuff of pity and terror.

The revelation-based recognition heuristics observed in the data placed the spectators in the position of experiencing a shocking realization themselves. These moments of staging all involved a revelation brought on by the introduction of new information. They often—but not always—led to a striking reversal. More importantly, though, the introduction of new information was orchestrated so that spectators were challenged to confront and radically revise their own assumptions and attitudes.

These heuristics operated on the principles of Koestler's bisociation, described in Chapter 1. Conditions were set up that fueled the spectators' tendencies to make assumptions and to be wholeheartedly led by them. The spectators were patently encouraged to establish an interpretation of what they were witnessing and to be thoroughly committed to what they assumed to be a valid interpretation. Then, at some point, a critical piece of information was introduced. This new information was not simply additive, that is, it did not just contribute to a fuller understanding of what was already known. The revelation of this new information made it suddenly clear to the spectators that they had entirely misinterpreted the observable facts up until that point. Moreover, this more accurate interpretation was not just a variation on their existing interpretations; it directly contradicted what they had assumed to be true. As with Aristotle's *anagnorisis*, a sudden reversal carries implications. Revelation-based heuristics challenge the spectators to engage actively not only with their own assumptions, but with the attitudes they have formed based on those assumptions. It forces them to realize that the attitudes they have formed are fundamentally flawed. Recognition heuristics encourage the spectators to achieve a jolting personal insight by establishing circumstances that foster their quick judgments and then abruptly require them to question the implications of their judgments and to recalibrate their own attitudes.

6.1 Incidental recognition heuristics

The powerful dramatic impact of Caliban's initial entrance in Giorgio Strehler's *The Tempest* in 1978 provides an excellent example of an incidental recognition heuristic. Just as Strehler's production was being launched, the director reflected on the story of the play. In his essay "Shakespeare, oltre *La Tempesta*" ("Shakespeare, beyond *The Tempest*," 1978; trans. 2002) he mused that the island was properly Caliban's home and that Prospero was the colonial invader in the equation. In the 1970s and 1980s, Europeans' acknowledgement of the destructive consequences of their collective imperialist past was gaining ground, and this certainly informed Strehler's reading of the play (Horowitz, 2004). Vaughan and Vaughan (1999) describe several other theatrical interpretations of Prospero as an invader/colonizer that took place in the U.K. during those decades (pp. 113-14). Strehler evidently harboured regrets from his first, 1947 production of *The Tempest* in which he had represented Caliban as a wretched, pitiable creature (Szlyk, 2006). In this, his second production, Strehler employed what can be understood as an incidental recognition heuristic to present a radically different Caliban to the audience. He provoked personal insights among the spectators by initially allowing them to indulge in a traditional imagining of Caliban as a barbaric monster: "A freckled whelp hag-born—not honour'd with a human shape" (Act I, sc. ii:283). He then caught them off guard with a sudden reversal that forced them to challenge their own assumptions.

Tino Carraro as Prospero initiated the scene, preparing for the encounter by taking off his wide leather belt as he called out: "We'll visit Caliban my slave, who never yields us kind answer" (line: 451-452). David L. Hirst (1993) describes the staging:

A roaring sound was heard under the stage, a trap-door was flung apart and slowly Caliban appeared. First one long arm, then another, emerged from the

hole in the ground and slowly a black shape crawled into view: something between an ape and a dangerous reptile. He remained in shadow well downstage, merely answering Prospero's commands with insults; but then he moved slowly into the light as he recalled Prospero's usurpation of the island, raised himself to full height and slowly turned to confront his master. His huge bright eyes were those of a young boy; his face and (virtually naked) body, seen for the first time, those of a handsome young man. (The two actors who alternated this role, Michele Placido and Massimo Foschi, are noted for their good looks.) Prospero, his belt raised threateningly, now looked the true savage. (p. 85)

Neither Prospero nor Caliban experienced reversal or recognition in this scene. It was the audience members who suddenly received new information—an unobstructed view of Caliban's beautiful body and face. This was the revelation that unexpectedly challenged their assumptions about the master-slave relationship in the play. In this case, their assumptions were grounded not only in traditional interpretations of Shakespeare's Caliban, but also in a culturally based premise that an unattractive physical appearance justifies mistreatment. A strikingly handsome young Caliban was a classic use of *verfremdungseffekt*, Brecht's concept of adding an unfamiliar twist to something familiar in order to call an audience's attention to their unacknowledged assumptions. Had Strehler given Caliban a more straightforward entrance, the spectators would have assessed, then accepted or rejected, the relative merits of this post-colonial re-visioning, but it would have lacked the personal impact that Strehler's actual staging choice delivered. Through the use of shadow and the actor's position during the scene's opening speeches, the director was able to impede the spectators' visual cues for long enough that they could settle comfortably into their traditional assumptions about Caliban-as-monster. Fostering the spectators' confident commitment to an attitude toward the events or characters, and then roundly unseating it, is the key to a recognition heuristic. In other words, it is not the new information per se (i.e., Caliban presented as a wrongfully oppressed Aboriginal youth) that carries the impact; the power of

the moment involves the experience of insight the spectators achieve when they are unexpectedly forced by the staging to confront their own unacknowledged preconceptions about their initial interpretations.

A similar dynamic was at work in *Turn Loose the Voices*, a collectively devised youth theatre production that I co-directed in the early 1990s. The episodic musical play was about the impact of prejudice and the value of diversity based on the experiences and collaborative research of a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic ensemble of twenty-one children and teenagers. Of the sixteen songs, scenes, dance pieces and monologues that comprised the show, one segment made an exceptional impact on the audience. Every evening during the post-performance discussions, audience members wanted passionately to talk about how this particular piece had affected them. I now realize that in collectively devising this fictional monologue, our group had stumbled onto the power of an incidental recognition heuristic.

The monologue was delivered by a charming Asian-American teenage girl who began by telling the audience that she had “been going out with Chris for almost a year now.” She described how her parents were not too happy about this “unconventional” relationship, and that even their friends were “weirded out” when they saw the two of them together. She spoke about how they had first met, and about the special connection they had felt beginning with their first kiss. At the end of the monologue she affirmed that despite the difficulties they faced, she and Chris were determined to stick together. Then, in her closing line, she used a pronoun for the first time in the entire speech: “Because I love her, and she loves me.” At every single performance, that line produced a clear and audible response—a gasp—heard throughout the auditorium.

In the early 1990s, openly lesbian and gay relationships were relatively rare in Portland, Oregon high schools. As evidenced by the spectators' candid post-performance conversations, the overwhelming majority of audience members had assumed that Chris was a teenage boy and that the reason the young couple was experiencing resistance from her family and their mutual friends was that Chris was not also Asian-American. The young woman presented a compelling image of a loving and thoughtful individual. As the spectators watched and listened, they unconsciously added a stance to their assumptions: "What did it matter if he was Caucasian or African-American or Latino? They were two young people in love; they should be allowed to enjoy their romance across racial lines and no one should hinder them." Then, of course, the young woman's incidental use of a pronoun made it clear that Chris was also female. It was instantly obvious that everything she had said from the beginning was clearly describing a same-sex relationship. Had that been obvious from the outset—had she described going out with "Mary" for almost a year now—the spectators would have responded according to their existing attitudes about same sex relationships. This heuristic staging choice put the spectators in the position of taking an imaginative stance supporting the young woman's right to love whomever she wished, and then having to come to grips with the implications of that stance when the reversal was revealed. *Turn Loose the Voices* was subsequently adapted from stage to video. One anti-racism trainer, who used it for more than a decade as a teaching tool for diversity awareness workshops, reports that the "Chris" monologue consistently received a similar response from workshop participants and served as an exceptionally effective catalyst for getting people to examine their attitudes about homosexuality (F. Portillo, personal communication, May, 2003).

In *The Tempest*, Strehler showed the audience an alternative way of understanding the Prospero-Caliban relationship. Since this interpretation was achieved by presenting an unconventional image of Caliban's physical appearance, misdirecting the audience's perfunctory assessments involved temporarily impeding their visual cues. In the "Chris speech," the monologue was a text-based story and so the temporary misdirection could be accomplished through deft orchestration of the text—use of a non-gender specific name and the delayed use of a pronoun.

In these examples, visual or linguistic means were employed to produce a similar effect. In both plays, the tendency for the spectators to quickly assess and judge ideas, and easily dismiss them, was circumvented. Misdirection allowed the spectators to indulge in their assumptions before revelation of an incidental piece of information triggered a reversal, leading to a recognition that forced them to question their own preconceptions.

6.2 Simultaneous recognition heuristics

In some instances, the moments of revelation observed in the data were decidedly not incidental to one or more of the characters in the play. The characters were very aware of the implications of the reversal, and audience members experienced the shock of the revelations right along with them. A significant feature of simultaneous recognition heuristics is the level of personal investment felt by the spectators. When Oedipus realizes that Jocasta is his mother, the idea is disturbing to spectators in the abstract. It is, however, essentially Oedipus' concern. The audience members share in his distress only sympathetically. In the simultaneous recognition heuristics I identified in the data, the moments were orchestrated so

that spectators were put in a position of having a personal stake in the reversal. When they experienced the shock of recognition, they felt its implications directly.

Several examples in the data qualify as simultaneous recognition heuristics. Among them is the startling reveal in Neil Jordon's 1992 film *The Crying Game*. The moment of recognition revolves around the growing romantic and erotic attraction between Fergus, a rumpled Irish Republican Army volunteer (played by Stephen Rea), and Dil, an alluring London hairdresser and part-time singer (played by Jaye Davidson). It is a difficult relationship for them both. Dil is still mourning the recent death of her lover, a British soldier, and Fergus is concealing from her the fact that he was complicit in her lover's murder. A little over halfway through the film, the intensity of their attraction builds to a point where they move toward sexual intimacy. Dil slips off her silk kimono and the camera reveals to the audience—at precisely the same instant it is revealed to Fergus—that Dil is actually male. The revelation unhinges Fergus and the moment became famous for causing theatres full of moviegoers to gasp in astonishment. The numerous accounts in the study describing that moment in the film (many of them in blogs) included those of individuals who wrote that they either suspected or saw through Dil's gender disguise from the start. However, the majority of the self-identified lesbian and straight male witnesses who described their intense response to the revelation testify to a common theme: they themselves found Dil sexually attractive. Indeed, Stephen Rea has noted that during the filming of *The Crying Game*, the heterosexual men on the crew who knew full well Davidson was male, admitted to being attracted to him because “he looked like their notion of a woman” (as cited in Corliss & Bland, 1993). Many straight men and lesbian bloggers describe sharing in

Fergus' shock of recognition because they were attracted to a character on screen they thought was a woman and were taken aback along with Fergus when the reveal occurred.

A fine example of a theatre production featuring a simultaneous recognition heuristic is David Auburn's *Proof* (2001). One contributor wrote that he saw the play on Broadway three times, first with Mary-Louise Parker as Catherine, followed by Jennifer Jason Leigh in the role, and then Anne Heche. He admitted that, "every time [Catherine's final line at the end of Act 1] knocked me out . . . and the audience always gasped." (Respondent 41)

In *Proof*, Catherine is a woman in her mid-twenties. She has dropped out of college after taking a few courses in order to care full time for her father Robert, a world-famous and irascible mathematical genius, lately incapacitated by mental illness. The play begins with a middle-of-the-night conversation between Catherine and Robert on the porch of his Chicago home. It ultimately becomes clear to the audience that Robert is present only in Catherine's imagination; he died of heart failure the week before. In the scenes that follow, the audience encounters Hal, Robert's former graduate student, and Robert's other daughter Claire, who has flown in from New York for the funeral. Catherine is very intelligent and also severely depressed. She is listless, with no direction in her life and is bitter about the sacrifices she feels she has had to make. She eats mostly junk food and often sleeps till noon or stays all day in bed. She is deeply concerned that her father's mental illness is genetic and that she may already be sliding into dementia. The "proof" at the heart of the play has two meanings. It refers to the assurance and demonstration of people's love for one another—in families and in romantic relationships. It also refers to a handwritten mathematical proof found at the end of Act 1 in a notebook that had been locked in Robert's desk drawer. Hal is exhilarated by its discovery:

HAL: . . . it looks like a proof. I mean it is a proof, a very long proof, I haven't read it all of course, or checked it, I don't even know if I could check it, but if it is a proof of what I think it's a proof of, it's . . . a very . . . important . . . proof.

CLAIRE: What does it prove?

HAL: It looks like it proves a theorem ... a mathematical theorem about Prime numbers, something mathematicians have been trying to prove since . . . since there were mathematicians, basically. Most people thought it couldn't be done.

CLAIRE: Where did you find it?

HAL: In your father's desk. Cathy told me about it.

CLAIRE: [to Catherine] You know what this is?

CATHERINE: Sure.

CLAIRE: Is it good?

CATHERINE: Yes.

HAL: It's historic. If it checks out.

CLAIRE: What does it say?

HAL: I don't know yet. I've just read the first few pages.

CLAIRE: But what does it mean?

HAL: It means that during the time when everyone thought your dad was crazy. . . or barely functioning . . . he was doing some of the most important mathematics in the world. If it checks out it means you publish instantly. It means newspapers all over the world are going to want to talk to the person who found this notebook.

CLAIRE: Cathy.

HAL: Cathy.

CATHERINE: I didn't find it.

HAL: Yes you did.

CATHERINE: No.

CLAIRE Well did you find it or did Hal find it?

HAL: I didn't find it.

CATHERINE. I didn't find it. I wrote it.

It is a stunning first act ending. Coincident with Claire and Hal, the audience is shocked by Catherine's revelation that she, not her father, is the author of the proof. I am convinced that the reason why the moment so staggers the spectators is that the playwright has relied on the audience members' unquestioned acceptance of a stereotype to ensure that most of them feel personally amazed by this revelation. The reversal enlists the power of a sweeping cultural- and gender-based assumption that mathematical genius is the province of wizened old male university professors, and not listless, directionless, and somewhat bitter single young women. Had Catherine been written as Robert's wayward son, not his daughter, the revelation would have been interesting, but not nearly as shattering; even a quirky son would have been seen as the "natural heir" to his father's genius. Like those who felt a jolt in *The Crying Game* due to their personal attraction to Dil, the spectators at *Proof* were taken aback due to their personal commitment to the sexist assumption that a young woman like Catherine would be incapable of writing this historically unprecedented, globally significant mathematical theorem. Simultaneous recognition heuristics present an unconventionally complex character by initially allowing the spectators to become secure in their conventional assumptions and attitudes about these characters and their relationships. In this instance, the assumption is that curmudgeonly Robert is the genius of the family. At the same time the audience is gradually introduced to his complexly drawn daughter Catherine. Then new information is suddenly brought forward that forcefully contradicts those assumptions, requiring the spectators to reconcile it with their existing attitudes.

6.3 Oscillating recognition heuristics

Some of the revelation-based heuristics found in the data reflect what I call an oscillating recognition heuristic. In these instances, the staging is designed to support a

particular attitude among spectators about one aspect of a character or relationship, only to then reveal a contradictory aspect, and then (sometimes) return to the original stance. This unsettled switching back and forth, which can occur throughout an entire play, serves to derail spectators' confident assessments about what they are seeing. David Mamet's *Oleanna* (1992) offers a mainstream theatre example of an oscillating recognition heuristic. The play, about a power struggle between a male university professor and one of his female students, continually produces reversals in the spectator's interpretation of the events as they unfold. "What's so infernally ingenious about 'Oleanna,' writes Ben Brantley in a *New York Times* review, "is that as its characters vivisect what we have just witnessed, we become less and less sure of what we saw" (2009). Irving Wardle (1993), writing on the original London production, agrees: "Options for short-circuiting the antagonists into black and white are rigorously obliterated" (para. 5).

In two separate plays in the data, an oscillating recognition heuristic was used to challenge preconceptions about persons with a disability. *Inside Al* is a 1987 one-act play by David S. Baker about the relationship between a high school student and an adult with cerebral palsy. Two actors wearing identical costumes play the same character. Al exhibits all the outward appearances of someone with this condition, while Inside Al stands nearby—invisible to all the other characters—and is able to articulate what the character is thinking and feeling. A similar approach was taken in *The Max Factor* (later retitled *On His Own Two Feet*) created in the 1980s by playwright Chris Hawes for The Dukes' Theatre-in-Education (TIE) touring company in Lancaster, England. In the play, Max is a teenage boy with cerebral palsy. It is difficult for the audience to understand him when he speaks. Occasionally, throughout the play, Max suddenly turns to the audience members (who in The

Dukes' production were all seated in a close circle around the actors), and talks to them unimpeded by his disability. He then returns to the world of the play and his outward appearance as a young man with a severe physical disability reasserts itself. The respondents who submitted the accounts of *Inside Al* and *The Max Factor* were deeply moved by the experience of seeing a sight they were familiar with—persons with disabilities—while also being periodically privy to the characters' unseen inner lives. Anthony Jackson (2007) describes his response to this staging:

[This] simple but stunningly effective device – suddenly [illuminated], for me, a fact that I had known intellectually (physical and vocal disability does not mean stupidity) but had never quite seen or understood in that empathetic a way [...] The theatre had not so much *taught* me, in the sense of conveying new information, but had thrown new light on something I thought I knew already. It had *dramatically* enhanced my understanding. (pp. 31-32)

In all three of these revelation-based heuristics, spectators are confronted with their own unexamined preconceptions when they are challenged to revisit the basis for attitudes they have held. However, an important distinction emerged in this third type of heuristic staging. Unlike incidental and simultaneous recognition heuristics, in which the moment of recognition turned on an abrupt revelation, these revelations were ongoing. In oscillating recognition heuristics, a perceptual tension is created when dueling interpretations are contrasted side-by-side, or oscillate from one interpretation to another throughout the play. This heuristic device creates a progression of revelations as spectators' initial interpretations about the characters continually collide with their revised interpretations, deflecting the tendency to settle on a single interpretation.

II Affective Punch

Recognition heuristics derail spectators' preconceptions through the use of staging that abruptly forces them to recalibrate their own assumptions on a cognitive level. Another type of staging makes use of what I call affective punch. These instances rely on spectators' powerful emotional associations with certain scents, sounds, responses to touch and even taste to overwhelm their preconceptions on an affective level. Affective punch heuristics pit the spectators' measured appraisals, preconceptions, and pre-determined attitudes about the relationships or meanings in the play against the potent feelings generated by their own senses in the moment of the experience. These heuristics impel audience members to experience a somatic—and often emotionally charged—direct personal response to the events on stage.

6.4 Affective punch—scent and taste

The surprise reveal in Act 3 of David Cromer's *Our Town* was an affective punch heuristic. Following nearly two hours of a visually starved rehearsal-like environment, the unexpected sight of the beautifully appointed kitchen set, the period costumes, and the brightly illuminated sunflowers on the table all served to overwhelm the spectators with a richness that elicited an emotional response from them. However, the master touch of this coup de théâtre involved the choice of having the character of Emily's mother, Mrs. Webb, fry bacon and eggs on a working stove alongside a steaming hot pot of real coffee. It was an experience that one critic wryly described as “an inescapable Smell-O-Vision moment” (Patterson, 2009, para. 8). The inescapability of the sense-based stimuli in this heuristic staging is significant. The use of aromas that fill the theatre in *Our Town* ensured that the

spectators could not easily ignore the sensation. In other accounts in the data, affective punch heuristics were variously directed to all five senses. In each case, they were used to trigger emotional responses among the spectators, temporarily overshadowing their analytic stances and making the experience an intensely personal one.

Experiencing a positive emotional response to the aromas in Mrs. Webb's kitchen is entirely predicated on whether or not one has fond associations with the smell of bacon, eggs, and coffee. The data held no accounts by self-identified vegans who may have been profoundly disgusted by the odours in the third act of *Our Town*. It is inevitable that spectators' emotional responses to affective punch heuristics will vary according to their individual associations with the sensorial stimuli presented. This was evident in one account of a play called *Arrangements*. The respondent noted that the impact of this moment was felt throughout the theatre, but surmised that the young women in the audience were likely to be more intensely affected by it due to the personal relevance it may have had for them:

The event in the play that caused the most extreme reaction every night was when a morbidly obese character ate 3 Power Bars together. The audience gagged and vocally reacted. I too found myself gagging the first time I watched it. While I will qualify my analysis by saying that the reaction may have been more extreme in the young women in the audience, it was my feeling that watching her eat stimulated a disgust reaction in the audience because *a part of our brain was eating it with her* and both experientially and emotionally, we feel disgust and shame at that kind of consumption, an experience the play hoped to question. The play did not discuss eating or shame or even the idea of being fat, but *created a reaction in its audience we couldn't help but think about*. We watch actors smoke onstage, beat each other up onstage, cry onstage, yet this consumption of food feels too close for comfort. [italics added] (Respondent 22)

Two comments in the respondent's text are particularly significant; they signal how the sight of something can generate an empathic viewer response associated with taste. She describes the experience as inescapable: it "created a reaction . . . we couldn't help but think about,"

and she felt that “a part of our brain was eating it with her.” Like the pervasiveness of the aromas in *Our Town*, this experience activated an intense empathetic response in the viewer. Even though the audience members at *Arrangements* did not taste the food directly, the inescapability of taste in this affective punch heuristic appears to have succeeded through involuntary projection. The unavoidable closeness of the sight of a person eating something horrible (or in this case in a disgusting manner) turns a removed experience of spectatorship into a very personal encounter.

6.5 Affective punch—tactile

When Richard Owen Geer was the director of Colorado’s Steamboat Repertory Theatre, he employed a creative use of tactile contact in an affective punch heuristic in *Dracula* during the company’s 1980-81 season. In the final scene, Mina and Van Helsing prepare to kill the vampire in his castle as he lies sleeping on his bier.

The actor’s body sat hidden inside the sarcophagus with only the head and arms visible atop it. The Dracula body stretched out below the arms: the actor’s real arms beside Dracula’s false body. Mina placed the stake on the false chest and Van Helsing drove it into the body. Beneath the stake a hose nozzle was connected to a three-thousand pounds-per-square inch compressed air bottle, that was opened as the stake was driven. The sound is exactly like a jet engine. It’s terrifying and makes you jump. A great wind blew out of Dracula’s chest and the wave of frigid air rolled across the audience. As the Count screamed, Mussorgsky’s thundering chords from the Great Gate at Kiev boomed, and aircraft landing lights blazed down through Angel Michael’s window to obliterate the scene in light. (Respondent 21)

A forceful combination of dazzling light, startling sound, and the physical sensation of a blast of cold air added an extra dimension to the audience members’ understanding of Dracula’s execution. Whatever preconceived images the spectators may have had about a vampire killing were instantly supplanted by an intensely personal and immediate experience. The

affective punch heuristic involved them in a direct tactile connection with the event on stage. Direct physical contact was similarly evident in the closing seconds of *Little Shop of Horrors* in its original off-Broadway production, which I saw in 1982. In the last song, the chorus warns the audience that the human-eating plant Audrey II is planning to take over the world. In that production, the musical number grew in intensity until an enormous puppet version of Audrey II burst onstage singing “Here I come for you!” in its deep bass voice. The panicked warning continued from the chorus: “Don’t feed the plants! Don’t feed the plants!” Then, on cue at the song’s climactic musical crescendo, dozens of wooden troughs hanging in the rafters throughout the auditorium above the audience seating opened simultaneously and down dropped hundreds of hanging fabric plant tendrils right in front of the spectators’ faces. Audrey II’s threat was suddenly made quite palpably incarnate.

Though audience members in these two accounts literally felt a “punch,” in each case it was clearly presented in the spirit of playfulness: an invitation to feel more intimately a part of the theatrical experience. Indeed, audience members at *Dracula* wound up demonstrating their appreciation for the invitation:

As good triumphed [right after Count Dracula was killed], the audience stood up. The play wasn’t over, but they stood. [. . .] People said that the play knocked their socks off. So it became a tradition during the run of the show that people would take off their shoes and throw their socks on the stage. (Respondent 21)

These heuristics temporarily dislocated the spectators’ analytic assessments about the moment on stage by capitalizing on the power of physical touch to activate everyone’s autonomic reflexes. They were the theatrical equivalents of haunted house operatives spooking visitors by reaching out from the shadows to grab hold of passing pant legs, accompanied by a startling “Boo!” The physical contact certainly contributed to making the

moments memorable and deeply felt, and yet they were also quite provocative. In each case, the physical contact was brief, allowing spectators to shift quickly from feeling alarm to recovering their equanimity and enjoying the thrill in retrospect. It is easy to imagine that an extended tactile “punch” would soon lose the delight of its appeal and begin to feel instead like an invasive violation of the spectators’ sphere of personal space.

6.6 Affective punch—sound

In contrast to these tactile examples, affective punch heuristics that relied on sound were able to activate a much more prolonged sense of fear and alarm among the audience members. For example, Back to Back Theatre’s *Food Court*, though not a musical, was performed with continuous live accompaniment by The Necks, an internationally acclaimed experimental jazz trio from Sydney. Respondents writing about this production made special note of the impact of the music. The sentiments of these appraisals were summed up in one description that acknowledged that the sound “dictates emotion and even the body’s physical reaction” (Mark, 2009). The overwhelming cacophony in the final battle scenes in *Journey’s End* and *Black Watch*, and the opening storm sequence in Giorgio Strehler’s *Tempest* were all given special mention by respondents for having contributed a major role in generating visceral, emotionally charged feelings of distress and alarm. In many cases, what rendered the experience exceptionally gripping was not just high volume, but the ways in which sound was used to unsettle the audience members’ composure. When the frightening harpies descended shrieking from the flies in *His Dark Materials*, the sound of the creatures’ “broken-winged flap” was described as making terrifying stage moment even more “unnerving” (Taylor, 2004). In these and many other cases, sound was used as more than an

illustration: it unsettled the spectators' rational assessments by engaging their emotional states, dispelling their preconceived notions of the events on stage.

Among the stories in this study, the use of sound as an affective punch heuristic was most precisely calibrated in the offstage sound of the guillotine blade in John Dexter's 1977 Metropolitan Opera production of Poulenc's *Dialogues des carmélites* (*Dialogues of the Carmelites*). While many other accounts describe the power of sound to activate a generalized emotional response, this production focused feeling in a very specific way. The opera's story is based upon actual events that took place during the French Revolution. On the 17th of July, 1794, just ten days before the end of the Reign of Terror, an entire community of sixteen Carmelite nuns from Compiègne, in northeastern France, was accused of unlawful allegiance to the Catholic Church. The following day they were transported by tumbrel cart to Paris. During the journey of over an hour they sang several hymns including "Salve Regina." After arriving in the public square, they continued to sing together as they were individually ushered up the steps of the scaffolding to be executed by guillotine (Bosco, 2009).

The initial respondent who submitted an account of John Dexter's staging is herself an opera singer. In 1977, she was a young student who saw the Metropolitan Opera production while in rehearsal for her own university's production of *Dialogues of the Carmelites*. She and her fellow voice students, who drove to New York to attend the performance, were intimately familiar with the music and knew full well how the opera ends. The set for this production was very simple: an enormous white cross on the deck of the stage. She describes what she saw and what she felt:

At the final scene each singer walked slowly upstage to the top of the crucifix, disappeared [offstage] between two supernumeraries dressed as French

revolutionaries, and then a few seconds later came the awful sound effect of the guillotine. Nothing could have prepared me for the shock of seeing and hearing the moment of the first guillotine drop in a live performance. The entire audience in the opera theatre gasped as one. As the scene progressed I could hear genuine distress from people near me. I was aware that my heart rate had gotten faster. One of our party was sobbing. She explained later that she was following the vocal line that she would be singing in our production and felt more and more distress as her character onstage got closer to her death moment. At the final curtain, which drops a few bars after the final guillotine slice on the neck of the opera's heroine, the audience was completely still. There was no sense of preparing for the standard opera audience applause with the usual yells and bouquet tossing. But it was the moment when that first whoosh and thud of the guillotine sound effect happened that I think was a moment of arrest. I don't know how many people were in the house but my sense was that absolutely everybody was feeling the same shock together. Most of us at that performance knew the work, or had read the synopsis. We all knew what to expect in that scene but it was the enormity of the emotions experienced watching something so heart-stoppingly dramatic and distressing that, I think, stopped us from realizing we were in a theatre at a performance on a Saturday afternoon in New York. The following month we took our production to the University of Windsor for our first performance of the opera. My character was one of the last nuns to die and as I stood on the stage singing the *Salve Regina* I could hear members of the audience reacting the same way that the audience in New York had. There is something incredibly sad about that last scene - the sound of women's voices singing a Latin hymn as one by one they are executed. (Respondent 23)

The finale of *Dialogues of the Carmelites* is considered to be one of the most affecting scenes in all opera and John Dexter's *New York Times* obituary lists this production of it as one of his greatest achievements (Gussow, 1990). The decision to stage the beheadings offstage was not Dexter's first choice—the opera company's budget was especially limited that season and so he could not afford to have a large guillotine built as he had originally wished (as cited in Langley, 2009). Ironically, Dexter's innovation ultimately became the standard against which all subsequent stagings of this opera have been—and continue to be—measured. Some directors have made a conscious departure from his established tradition, for example by having the nuns jerk their heads downward at the moment of the guillotine sound

and then assume angelic poses as the lighting shifts dramatically (Mandel, 2001). Canadian-born director Robert Carsen, who has staged the opera in both Vienna and Milan, had his nuns perform a stationary dance of synchronous stylized gestures before individually dropping their heads and collapsing to the ground at the sound of the blade. It was a choice that received mixed commentary from opera reviewers; some were derisive, some more appreciative (see Lash, 2008; Myers, 2008). One online reviewer describes having witnessed several productions of the opera and reports on his surprise and delight at finally seeing a version (at the Santa Fe Opera in 1999) with an actual guillotine wheeled on stage. He writes of how well the effect was handled, that they didn't "mess up" the timing and that "[although] the basket was too small to contain so many nuns' heads, they really looked as if they were falling into the basket" (Nakamura, 1999). It is a telling description insofar as it is rational and detached. Reviews of these onstage enactments—stylized or realistic—of the nuns' executions were united by their considered appraisals of the relative artistic merits of one interpretation versus another. All of that commentary stands in stark contrast to the reviews of Dexter's staging, which, like the initial respondent's submission, are almost uniformly characterized by personal admissions of being intensely moved. These reviews articulated their responses in terms such as "awful" (Respondent 23); "horrid" (Tommasini, 2002); and "heart-stopping, utterly emotionally distressed and exalted" (Jswell, 2009). This distinction in tone lends credence to the capacity of affective punch heuristics to dislocate the spectators' analytic assessments and to make them feel, at least temporarily, an intense personal investment in the moment on stage.

Four related characteristics contributed to the effectiveness of Dexter's staging as an affective punch heuristic. First, the director allowed spectators the experience of anticipation.

He showed the nuns' emotional final walk to the rear of the stage, but he then restricted access to the image of the event itself. Spectators were prevented from coolly comparing their preconceived notions of what death "looks like" to a staged enactment, and then assessing it for better or worse. Denying audience members visual or linguistic cues that offer an easy route to evaluating and rendering judgment about a moment on stage is the primary mechanism of the third heuristic approach described in this chapter: subtraction heuristics.

Second, the effectiveness of the "punch" was supported by Poulenc's score, which is written so that the sound of the blade is timed to strike jarringly off the beat of the music. The sound is aesthetically unsettling when it literally interrupts the vocal beauty of each singer in mid voice. In the words of one reviewer, the dreadful sound is "at brutal odds" with the rhythm of the singing (Wolf, 1999). It seems quite merciless and patently unfair that the women's voices are obliterated with such callous disregard. Furthermore, the inherently compelling display of injustice onstage (see 3.3) also contributes to activating feelings of distress and dismay among members of the audience.

Third, these two sounds—the nuns' voices and the falling blade—are both gestic. The generalized idea of the nuns as spiritual women is physically embodied, distilled into a chorus of beautiful voices. The mercilessness of their execution is made singularly manifest in the horrible unyielding sound of the guillotine blade. When these two gests meet—angelic beauty and ruthless horror—and horror prevails, the complexity of the story is honed into a series of single affective gestic "punches." Additionally, the staging sets up a heuristic by systematically removing the nuns from the stage. The beautiful sound of all the women's voices is progressively reduced until only a single solo voice is left. Then her voice, too, is

silenced. The heuristic allows the audience to revel in the exalted sound of the singers' voices and then feel the direct personal loss of that beauty when it is methodically ripped away and a stage once filled is left barren.

Fourth, the sound of the slicing blade amplified over the speakers was alarming. It produced among the listeners a visceral response that circumvented cognitive assessment by appealing directly to their emotional sensibilities. In this instance, the compelling power of this awful sound was applied to a very specific purpose. Incorporated into an affective punch heuristic, it increased the level of the spectators' personal engagement with the nuns' executions.

6.7 Affective punch—words and pauses

A variation on affective punch that emerged in the data involves the sounds of words and emphatic use of pauses in speech in ways that belie conventional understanding of how meaning is expressed through language. The plays of Harold Pinter were cited as particularly striking examples of how an actor in character may wield words and pauses as a mode of attack or seduction toward other characters. In his *Casebook on Harold Pinter's the homecoming* (1971), critic John Lahr admires this capacity of Pinter's to craft dialogue that gives actors rich opportunities to find a "resonance of meaning in the orchestration of silence, pitch, and syntax" (p.123). To clarify the point, Lahr cites Suzanne Langer's oft-quoted passage from *Philosophy In a New Key* in which she reflects on the aural significance of words in poetry: "Though the material of poetry is verbal, its import is not the literal assertion made in the words, but the way the assertion is made, and this involves the sound, the tempo, the aura of associations of the words" (as cited in Lahr, 1971, p. 130). This

characterization of the impact of the sounds of the words themselves is reminiscent of Louise Rosenblatt's (1978/1994) notion of the "aesthetic stance" a listener takes toward the hearing of language, compared to the "efferent stance" toward the literal meaning of the words.

Affective punch, then, is clearly not limited to "sound effects," music, and song. Its effectiveness as a heuristic can also be extended to enfold dialogue and monologue, when the sounds of actors' words and placement of pauses are carefully chosen for their potential to elicit emotional responses among spectators beyond the meaning of the words themselves.

III Subtraction Heuristics

Where an affective punch heuristic overwhelms, a subtraction heuristic withholds. The various emotional associations of an affective punch heuristic lead spectators to experience an intensely personal reaction to events onstage that render their preconceived expectations pale and irrelevant by comparison. Subtraction heuristics work in the opposite manner by limiting the visual or linguistic cues that allow spectators to form cursory assessments. Subtraction heuristics increase the level of audience members' personal investment by forcing them to take a more assertive role in the theatrical encounter.

The finale of Dexter's production of *Dialogues of the Carmelites* clearly made use of affective punch heuristics. Audience members felt an emotional response to the systematic loss of the beautiful sounds of the women's voices as they were aurally ripped away by the horrible unyielding sound of the slicing guillotine blade. The sound of the blade was made even more distressing by striking jarringly against the measured pace of the singing.

However, as I have shown, responses in the data indicate that hearing the sound of the blade

and the sudden cessation of the nuns' voices without being able to see it happen made the experience especially intense.

What fueled this intensity? Many of those who wrote about moments in plays that had frustrated their ability to see clearly what was happening or to understand it clearly through language, reported experiencing a similar reaction to these impediments. Respondents described feeling vulnerable, they felt precarious, and they also felt a surprising sense of immediacy in the moment of the theatrical encounter. They expressed a new awareness of the constraints imposed by their customarily easy access to visual and linguistic modes of understanding. The implication of these revelations is that having the ability to see clearly what is happening, or to comprehend it through language, can actually reduce one's sense of vulnerability, instability, and intense feeling of presence.

6.8 Subtraction heuristics—sight mediated or sight denied

Baz Kershaw (1999) has written cogently about a theatre performance he attended in Wales in the 1990s. It succeeded in creating an exceptionally memorable experience in large part by “subtracting sight” (p. 209). Kershaw writes: “The key aesthetic tactic of *The Labyrinth* is to subtract and displace. It subtracts sight, and so shifts the locus of perception from the gaze on to hearing, touch and smell” (p. 209). He argues that we are accustomed to feeling confident in our stance as the “subject” when surveying the “objects” of the world through our visual assessments. However, he continues, this stability is thrown off balance when that capacity for visual assessment is disrupted. Forced into relying on less familiar means of making interpretive assessments (e.g., hearing, smell, touch) we are rendered far

more vulnerable. This vulnerability and lack of quickly achieved certainty leads us to become more intensely present with what we encounter as we navigate unfamiliar terrain.

In his essay, Kershaw was responding to a highly unconventional touring theatre production he attended called *The Labyrinth* (also known as *Ariadne's Thread*) performed by about twenty actors from the Colombian theatre company Taller Investigacion De la Imagen Dramatica. When Daniel Meyer-Dinkgräfe's final year drama students at the University of Wales Aberystwyth were asked to name the one theatre experience that had made the greatest impression on them during their several years in the program, nearly all of them were quick to identify this production. Meyer-Dinkgräfe (2005) has outlined just a fraction of what his students experienced in their ninety-minute to two-hour theatrical encounter:

[The theatre company] created a labyrinth of pathways within the theatre space, leading to individual defined spaces, such as a children's nursery, a schoolroom, a space covered with sand where a performer dressed as a gypsy would sit by a real fire and perform magic spells and manipulate the fire. Spectators went through the labyrinth on their own, groping their way along the black cloths in total darkness, sometimes guided by performers' touch or sound, encountering various 'characters' in the defined spaces, and experiencing a wide range of smells, sounds and touches without being able, in many cases, to see the origin of the sensory impression. In one installation, spectators had to crawl through a well-lit, comfortably padded 'umbilical cord', leading to a pitch-dark end where they had to slide downwards into the unknown. Some were initially too afraid to take the risk, but returning was impossible. At the end of the slope, they ended up in a large mass of unroasted coffee beans, stroked and comforted by a performer. (p. 144)

When participants in *The Labyrinth* were occasionally plunged into individually experienced encounters in the pitch-black passageways, the subtraction of sight destabilized their visual certitude, amplifying their need to rely on their lesser-used senses. However, their entire journey was infused with scents, sounds, and tactile experiences, surrounding them as they made their way through the maze. In some of the chambers, visual cues were available but

made oblique and challenging. For example, visitors in a room called “Virgillo” were required to look at what lay ahead of them through a mirror’s reflection instead of seeing it directly, or they saw their own reflection in a mirror shift unexpectedly:

Eventually you arrive in the Minotaur’s lair, where there is so little light that you think you see him everywhere, but then suddenly there he is on the other side of a glass screen - huge furry head and horns on the naked body of a man. A brilliant trick of light and he alternately appears to have your head and then your body, a disconcerting effect but soon you find he responds to your every movement and you develop a dance with him, a slow ecstatic dance. (Kershaw, p. 206).

In *Back to Back’s Food Court*, a young woman in a suburban mall is accosted, verbally abused and physically beaten by tormentors who, among other things, force her to strip naked and dance while a half a dozen other characters stand by and watch. The theatre ensemble faced a challenge presenting this material to audiences whose lives were routinely saturated with horrific images of violence and abuse, both real and fictionalized, on YouTube, in cinema, and television. They met this challenge by incorporating a subtraction heuristic. In this further instance of what I have termed a subtraction heuristic, audience members’ direct access to visual clarity was mediated with lush alternatives provided in its place. Denied the primacy of their traditional visual assurances, audience members proceeded gingerly on unfamiliar ground, engaging their other senses as they experienced the newness of a fresh encounter.

The play begins with the actors downstage in plain sight in an exchange that several respondents characterized as a very comedic opening. The action turns distressing when two of the women start taunting a third. As the scene intensifies, the encounter moves further upstage (from the food court to the forest outside) and continues behind a gauzy proscenium-wide scrim. For the remainder of the play, this semiopaque barrier mediates the audience’s

visual access to these events. The actors, only partially discernible, become “shadows and colours, smudges in a forest of incredible [projected] animation” (Mark, 2009). The actors’ dialogue, too, is mediated. Though their voices are amplified through microphones, they are not always easy to understand. All the words they speak are projected as text onto the large scrim over their heads.

Food Court is a play riddled with disturbing images. One reviewer expressed his gratitude for the scrim because it provided some distance between him and the “horrid scenario” (Jackson, 2009). However, several others felt the separation engaged them as it mediated the realism. The subject matter was called repulsive while at the same time the projections and shadows of the blurred, luminous, dreamlike world of the play (supported by the haunting improvised music of the jazz ensemble) were called intoxicating. In this way that subtraction of the audience’s clear view, when replaced with less familiar routes to attaining comprehension of meaning, draws the audience into a deeper personal encounter with the events in the play.

6.9 Subtraction heuristics—language mediated or language denied

In several accounts in the data, respondents commented on their surprisingly positive response to being denied the ability to easily comprehend through language the meaning of a play. One respondent wrote about attending his first opera, *The Bartered Bride* by the Czech composer Bedrich Smetana, performed in the Slovak language at the Bratislava Opera House. It was, he wrote, “a life changing moment” as he was astounded by the realization that the richness of the experience emphatically transcended his expected attachment to grasping the meaning through words (Respondent 15). A similar sentiment was expressed by

an experienced acting teacher and director whose encounter with Robert LePage's eight-hour, non-linear production of *The Dragons' Trilogy*, performed intermittently in English, French, and in Chinese, radically shifted her understanding of how audience members can engage with a play (Respondent 28). Brantley (2006), reviewing Donnellan's Russian language *Twelfth Night* considers it a "glorious surprise" that the production "transcends the verbal . . . [making] the heretical case that the essence of Shakespeare isn't exclusively linguistic. Shakespeare's first language," Brantley proclaims, "is not English, after all; it's Theater" (para. 8).

Commentary on the mail call sequence in *Black Watch* consistently identified that wordless scene as one of the most moving in a very moving play. The soldiers all receive letters from their wives and girlfriends in Scotland. Positioned all over the stage, they first read and then begin to write back. The audience does not hear the words they write. Each man drops the pages he has read to the ground and then stands privately composing the sentences of his own letter home by mutely using his hands in a silent gestural language. Spectators are denied access to the specific details of what the soldiers tell those they love. Their words cannot be gauged against a hundred other expressions of love that have already been seen in novels or poems, in films, on television, or in other plays. This subtraction heuristic requires the audience members to receive the meaning of the soldiers' expressions of love in a new way—in a mode they are unaccustomed to navigating. Through denial of verbal language, audience members are drawn into a new, unfamiliar territory where they find themselves more fully present and connected to the soldiers' experience.

6.10 Subtraction heuristics—periods of silence

Periods of silence in performances that created opportunities for spectators to pause briefly in a mode of receptivity can be understood as subtraction heuristics. In some cases, the silence created a space for audience members to register what had just happened. For example when the children's voices in postwar Hamburg filled the theatre with the sounds of their joy after hearing the list of foods that the clowns would petition to get from the Queen of Heaven: "The squeals of excitement were gradually replaced by a hush—a hush that settled into a deep and true theatrical silence" (Brook, 1968, p. 44). The final mortar blast that kills all the soldiers in *Journey's End* was followed by a haunting silence, as was the silence in Deborah Warner's *Medea* with Fiona Shaw: "*Medea* literally takes your breath away; in the silence that follows the murder of the children, you can hear the audience agape, gasping, sobbing for air" (Feldman, 2002). After the last nun is executed at the end of *Dialogues of the Carmelites*, the director who builds in a few moments for the audience to sit in a deep silence before the stage manager brings down the final curtain, is employing a subtraction heuristic.

In other cases, a pause in the forward momentum of the play allowed audience members to register what was about to happen. Such a moment of silence was created by the nurse in *Medea* at Epidaurus when, after the cry of the first child was heard offstage, she said to the audience urgently "Wait—did you hear that?" and for a few seconds 17,000 people were stopped cold with anticipation before hearing the offstage cry of the second child. In still other cases, silence created a space for the audience to be present with the events onstage as they were happening. A notable instance of this appeared in *Los Faustinos*, Cornerstone Theater Company's South Los Angeles adaptation of Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor*

Faustus. When the character of Martin was shot, his assailant fired the gun from across the stage. The actors froze as the character La Muerte (Death) took the bullet from the barrel of the gun, then walked it slowly and silently across the stage, before placing it in Martin's chest, killing him (Lead 1). The silence of that long walk gave audience members a break from the fast pace of a realistic scene to feel starkly present with the experience of a murder in the play.

A silence that allows an audience to register what is about to happen can also take a humorous turn, as evidenced by a comment made by Lisa Kron (Weisman, 2006) in an interview she gave describing the way she dramaturgically constructs her work.

After I'd been performing for seven years, I had this moment on stage . . . where I was telling a story I'd told many times. And when I got to the punch line, I understood all of a sudden, that I should wait, and let the audience fill in the next line in their minds. And there was an enormous laugh as the end of the joke formed in the audience's heads. (p. 37)

As any comedian will affirm, monologue-based comedy is actually a dialogue between the performer and the audience. Kron's understanding of the pause—the silence that allows the audience to meet her in the story she tells—is emblematic of the use of silence employed in subtraction heuristics observed throughout the data. The meaning in these instances is not conveyed through an image or text. The image or text is withheld so that the audience members are given the opportunity to make a discovery themselves.

Summary

In section 3.6 (Reconfiguring the venue), I showed how physically reducing the distance between performers and audience members draws spectators more intimately into the world of the play. In *Orlando Furioso*, *The Labyrinth*, and the story told about the

children of Sejny, theatre as spectator sport was transformed into something that, to varying degrees, verges on theatre as participatory sport. Spectators are placed virtually in the midst of the play as it unfolds, and that physical proximity fosters their complicity in the encounter, shifting their status as observers into more active engagement. Heuristic staging choices also draw spectators into active participation, but in a different way. The spectators' confidence that their existing interpretations are valid and well founded means that they are unlikely to commit to being receptive to alternate interpretations. Heuristic staging choices entangle spectators into making a commitment in two ways. Recognition heuristics draw them into taking an imaginative stance towards something on stage before revealing information that undermines the foundational assumptions of that stance. When it is resolutely demonstrated that their assumptions are flawed, their re-evaluation of that initial stance and associated re-commitment to an alternative stance feels deeply personal. Spectators are also entangled in making a commitment to a fresh interpretation of something they consider already known when the theatre encounter engages them on an affective level. The proof that their preconceptions are faulty is affirmed by their own emotional and imaginative responses to sense-based stimuli incorporated into the staging.

Discussion

Spectators may feel that they already know everything they need to know about a teenage lesbian relationship, a disaffected daughter of a genius, a young man with cerebral palsy, or a wise Shakespearean sorcerer and a villainous monster. When new ideas—new ways of considering characters or relationships—are presented in a play, spectators assess what they see for clues that will help them to categorize the ideas according to what they already feel and think about these things. Perhaps more than any other of the core categories in this study, heuristic staging choices dislodge spectators' preconceptions by confounding their predetermined attitudes so firmly anchored in unquestioned habit.

Heuristic staging choices provide alternatives to actors presenting ideas or emotional experiences in a play by relying on the audience members' vicarious relationships with the experiences of the characters. These staging strategies succeed by setting up conditions in which spectators feel direct personal encounters with the events on stage, leading them to achieve their own insights. Revelation-based recognition heuristics, affective punch heuristics, and subtraction heuristics all employ different mechanisms to achieve these ends.

Revelation-based recognition heuristics can be understood as a kind of cognitive Jujutsu. A Jujutsu fighter defeats a larger, stronger foe by turning the superior force of his enemy's power against him. In this case, the enemy is the spectators' powerful drive to rely on their preconceptions to make quick assessments about the meaning of the events on stage, inhibiting potential for much receptivity to alternative interpretations. These heuristics capitalize on that tendency and on the powerful force of those preconceptions by allowing them free reign. Spectators are given cues that encourage them to feel confident that their assessments are accurate and well founded. Then, new information is introduced that makes

it obvious to the spectators that their initial interpretations were clouded by their own assumptions. Spectators are forced to re-calibrate the meaning of what they see on stage, and they are also forced to examine the basis for their own assumptions. It is in this moment of self-reflection that the spectators experience a personal insight. The force of personal or culturally-based preconceptions is what gives revelation-based recognition heuristics their power. For example, if *Turn Loose the Voices* were performed in a place or an era in which spectators assumed that high school students were likely to have gay or lesbian romances, no initial preconception would take hold and so the concluding revelation would fizzle. An audience member who had never seen or read *The Tempest* would harbour no expectations about Caliban and would not feel the shock of Strehler's re-imaging of that character. To succeed, these heuristics must be orchestrated around a topic that is likely to engage the context-specific preconceptions of its audience members.

If a revelation-based recognition heuristic can be likened to a Jujutsu fighter turning the power of his opponent's own force against him, an affective punch heuristic can be understood metaphorically as a big bruiser heavyweight boxer. The spectators' preconceptions and assumptions do not stand a chance in the ring against stimuli that trigger spectators' far more powerful autonomic and emotional responses to sights, sounds, smells, imagined tastes, and physical touch. When these elements are introduced within the context of a play, they sweep aside spectators' vicarious relationships to the characters' lives in favour of intensely personal encounters with the events occurring on stage. These heuristics often succeed due to the power of culturally specific connotative associations that link the sense-based stimuli to specific emotional responses. If spectators do not have an association

with the scent, sound, or sight presented in the staging, or if the association is not what the actors anticipate, the affective punch will likely wither or backfire.

Extending my combat metaphor, a subtraction heuristic is equivalent to switching off all the lights in the sporting arena. In the pitch-black darkness, a fighter cannot rely on customary means of assessing where his sparring partner stands, and so he becomes exceptionally attuned to the encounter. To land punches or to avoid them, he listens for the creak of the floorboards and the sound of his opponent's breathing; he attends to scents, and to the motion of the air around him. In a subtraction heuristic, when visual or linguistic cues are mediated or withheld, they are replaced by alternatives that keep the audience members engaged in other ways. A fighter in the darkness by himself would become bored and annoyed; it is the presence of someone else in the ring coming at him that enlivens the encounter. Similarly, if a subtraction heuristic merely denies or mediates easy access to visual or linguistic meaning, the spectators may easily become mystified, then bored and annoyed. These heuristics engage audience members by offering rich and enticing alternatives in place of visual and textual clarity.

Implications for teaching

The central structural element of a recognition heuristic is that, lacking the revelation of a single crucial piece of information, one could legitimately infer two starkly different interpretations of a single event (a character's identity, relationship, circumstances, etc). The jolt occurs when, in sudden retrospect, the spectators realize how the only thing that impeded them from recognizing an alternate interpretation was their own self-imposed set of assumptions.

To create a performance that incorporates an incidental, simultaneous, or oscillating recognition heuristic, the ensemble may consider what aspect of a character, relationship, or circumstance in the play defies dominant cultural assumptions. Referring to this aspect as *X*, they could then pose several questions:

- In what ways (visual, linguistic, or dramaturgical) might be audience's access to *X* be temporarily withheld?
- In what way might the audience's confident commitment to adopting an attitude reflecting dominant cultural assumptions towards *X* be encouraged?
- Under what circumstances might *X* be revealed?
- How might the revelation of *X* be incidental to a character's actions?
- How might the revelation of *X* be a surprise to one or more characters?
- How might *X* be alternately revealed and then withheld (and revealed again)?

To create performance that incorporates affective punch it is useful to return to the conception of gest as I have described it in the previous chapter. How does a physical "gesture" capture the essence of a thing? One may then ask how this notion of gest could be expanded to enfold a wider conception of aural and other sense-based gests. I have already described how the idea of the nuns' spirituality in *Dialogues of the Carmelites* is made gestic in the chorus of their beautiful voices and how the mercilessness of their execution is made gestic in the awful unyielding sound of the guillotine blade. An ensemble could reflect on the particular aspects of the characters, relationships, circumstances in their play and endeavour to capture the qualities they see with gests that are grounded in aural, aromatic, tactile or even visual representations. When Emily in Cromer's *Our Town* cries out for what she has lost, she names these things: her mama's sunflowers and food and coffee. Cromer and his team transferred these words into gests and delivered them through a cluster of sense-based

affective punches. An ensemble could also be encouraged to investigate the ways in which the gests of characters, relationships, and circumstances could be expressed in the sounds of words and the silences between them.

To create performance that incorporates a subtraction heuristic, an ensemble may initially consider what visual or linguistic cues solidify the audiences' confidence that the material being presented on stage is something they are familiar with and have all seen before. The ensemble may consider how to mediate or withhold elements of these visual and linguistic cues, always keeping in mind that the key to subtraction heuristics is the presentation of alternatives that offer audience members rich substitutes to visual or linguistic cues in a play.

Chapter Seven

Touching the live wire

The easy conscience with which Gemier at the beginning of the century made his actors come into the auditorium, and cross it in order to get up on the stage, demonstrates the innocence which authors used to have. They thought at the time that the stage was an illusory place, a mirage, and that the characters who went to it by walking through the aisles, because they shocked the audience, would persuade them of the reality of the play. All of a sudden, for all the men of the theatre of our generation . . . the theatre ceased to be realistic. Because we want reality and to achieve it we have to go to the limit, there being no other way of doing so (we provoke real sentiments by real events) or else we must realize that a dramatic representation has a perfectly illusory character, but in that case as its structure is unreal, it is for this very quality that we have to exploit it, as the negation of reality . . . and not as an imitation of it.

Jean-Paul Sartre (1968, p. 201)

Introduction

Touching a live electrical wire is a violent metaphor, and indeed a palpable sense of danger or threat permeates this category. I use *touching the live wire* (or a *live wire* moment) to refer to spectators' encounters with something in a play that galvanizes the experience with a vivid, personally significant sense of reality. In this chapter I examine a variety of staging choices in the data in which elements identified with real life made incursions into the fictional world of the theatre. These moments in performance transgress the boundary that differentiates how people respond to material in a play versus how they respond to incidents in their own lives. The staging creates an experience that approaches what Herbert Blau (1987) has identified as the "sacred ground" where the unmediated reality of the spectators' world, and the fictional world of a play, meet at "a single vanishing point" (p.

173).³ For philosophers, phenomenologists and others, there are legitimate questions regarding the nature of “real life” and “reality.” For the purposes of this chapter, I intend these terms simply to refer to the objects and individuals one encounters in one’s life as compared to the illusion of reality that exists within the fictional world of a play being performed.

It can be a startling experience when a fellow member of the audience becomes embroiled in the fictional world of the play. For example, in Pirandello’s *Tonight We Improvise* (1930/1987), the play starts with sounds of chaos coming from behind the closed proscenium curtains. In the orchestra section, a man with a loud voice asks: “What’s happening up there?” Someone in the balcony calls down: “Sounds like a fight.” Another person chimes in from one of the box seats: “Maybe it’s all part of the show.” These audience members continue to chatter about their opinions about the ruckus backstage until a man bursts in from the rear of the auditorium. He rushes up the aisle and climbs onto the stage to apologize for the disturbance (pp. 8-9). It is possible to stage this opening so that it all seems perfectly genuine, so that those in the audience—at least those unfamiliar with the play—are briefly fooled into thinking that they are witness to an actual public conversation. These moments, though, are fragile. The appearance of reality evaporates the instant suspicion arises that these spectators are, in fact, actors in on the game; the play quickly reasserts itself as an illusion.

In contrast to Pirandello’s play, the incursions of the real into the realm of the fictional described in this chapter rarely involved attempts to *convince* the audience that a play’s characters were real people. Instead, the staging embraced the fiction of a play, incorporating

³ I am indebted to Professor Marvin Carlson for directing me to Blau’s ruminations on this point.

theatrical conventions to tell the story. Then, at a certain point, an element of the real world was introduced that starkly contrasted the illusion, causing spectators to respond to something on stage as they might respond to something in their daily lives.

Six variations of staging emerged in which apparently real world elements made incursions into the fictional world of a play. *Minimal incursions* have previously been identified in the sense-based elements of affective punch and the undeniably real elements that play a part in taboo and the destabilized body. *Going off the rails* describes moments in which it appears that the planned performance has been unintentionally interrupted by events of the real world with all its attendant unpredictability. *Deliberate breach* involves moments on stage in which the incursion of reality into the fictional world of the play is marked by a palpable sense of volition. *Real world bodies enter the fictional world* describes what happens when the fictional world of a play is presented in an aesthetic frame that requires the audience's acceptance of non-realistic theatrical conventions. That fictional frame is then fractured by the sudden juxtaposition of one or more elements anchored in the real world. *Now you don't see it, now you do* reflects the instances in which the play remains grounded in a fictional world, but a palpable sense of the real world is made present within that fiction. *The world of the play shifts* is what I call instances in which the entire aesthetic frame of the play shifts from one level of reality to another in full view of the spectators.

Touching the live wire

7.1 Minimal incursions

In every theatre production, some elements of the real world appear. At the very least, the actors' bodies are evidence of the real world onstage. The very materiality of real

furniture, props, and other scenic elements serve to enhance the verisimilitude of the fictional world. However, as described in the previous chapter, the use of sense-based stimuli, such as the smell of bacon and eggs being fried, the feel of a blast of frigid air, or the sound of a guillotine blade, engage the spectators' autonomic and, in many cases, their emotional responses more intensely than mere observation of realistic props, sets and costumes. Staging choices incorporating affective punch provoke an inescapable affirmation among the spectators that the world on stage is linked to the real world of their lives. Similarly, in sections 4.4 and 4.5 (taboo and the destabilized body), elements of the real world were shown to make brief incursions into the fictional worlds of plays. An audience member may wonder if the shirts, pants or skirts the actors wear are costumes created to simulate reality or are their actual street clothes, but the body of a naked actor is irrefutably anchored in the real world. A body on stage submerged in water is real. A body on stage hanging upside down is real. Fire burning on stage is real. All of these things may be effects engineered with the use of hidden harnesses or controlled pyrotechnical devices to render them safer for the actors, but the very requirement of safety measures is evidence of the risk of the potential harm (or discomfort) they present. These staging choices enhance the realistic illusion of the performance, making it more vivid for the spectators. They help to achieve what Shklovsky sought in art: they "make the stone *stony*" (1990, p. 20). I have classified these types of staging choices as minimal incursions because their presence supports the "realness" of the world on stage without actually disrupting the integrity of the fictional frame. In contrast, the other staging choices associated with touching the live wire temporarily or permanently disrupts the theatrical illusion of the performance.

7.2 Going off the rails

A quality of danger is embodied especially vividly in going off the rails, which describes instances in which the integrity of the play's fictional frame appears to fracture. In these moments of staging, it seems to spectators that the planned event of the theatre presentation has been disrupted by the advent of some unplanned external circumstance. As a result, events appear to be unfolding anarchically, ungoverned by premeditated design. In section 3.4 (abdicating authority of command) I described instances in which the actor(s) purposefully stepped back from the role of authority and instead adopted the role of steward, guiding the event as a relatively open and equitable encounter between actors and spectators. Going off the rails reflects a different dynamic. In these moments of staging, the spectators feel that anything might happen and, at least temporarily, that there is no one in control.

Lisa Kron, who believes that the most exciting moments in theatre occur when "something falls apart" (Lunden, 2006), builds her plays around this kind of experience. Her work has been characterized as having "a live-wire appeal" (Rooney, 2006, para. 11) and willingness to "[dance] continuously with failure" (Rosenblum, 2008, para. 3). It is a theatrical sensibility that appeared elsewhere in the data as well. Fiona Shaw's *Medea*, for example, was described by critic Clive Barnes as embodying "a sense of ineffable danger" (2002, para. 8). Yet Kron's dramaturgical constructions are not actually anarchic; they are carefully considered and skillfully executed. Chicago critic Sarah Terez Rosenblum (2008) notes that Kron "doesn't just break the fourth wall, she dynamites the whole building. But she does it with utter awareness and utmost control. She flings [the yo-yo] to the floor as the only way to ensure its triumphant return to her palm" (para.3). This was typical of the

accounts I have characterized as going off the rails, in which the moments were orchestrated to give the outward appearance of chaos but were, in fact, designed.

In two of Kron's early plays, *101 Humiliating Stories*, and *2.5 Minute Ride* (2001) she is the only person on stage. The apparent incursions of the real world in these plays seem to emerge capriciously, unguided by any conscious plan. Kron (2001) describes the development of her use of this approach to scripting and staging while workshopping

101 Humiliating Stories:

The first thing [director] Jamie Leo said to me about this piece was, 'You can't just talk about humiliation in the past tense. We have to see you actually being humiliated.' And so we developed a series of moments where things go wrong, either because of something external like a phone call or papers falling off a music stand – or because of some internal failure – like sudden anxiety over how the audience will feel when they realize there aren't really 101 humiliating stories, or an overpowering urge to sleep. Each one of these breaks is meant to feel completely real, like a horrible mistake that should make the audience feel, for a moment, as if they're watching a theatrical car crash. (p. 43)

In these moments of humiliation, Kron allows herself to look foolish, risking personal vulnerability as described in section 3.1 (risking personal emotional vulnerability—individual identity). Here, an extra layer is added to that vulnerability. Kron's intention is to give the impression that the papers cascading to the floor, that her initially futile attempts to get the attention of the sound operator in the booth, or that her brief fit of narcolepsy are not part of the play as it has been written and rehearsed. The moments are designed as if elements of "real life" have interceded and the show as planned has "gone off the rails." The audience's sense of events on stage as real comes as a result of witnessing the actor engaging with what appear to be unplanned events.

In her play *2.5 Minute Ride* (2001), Kron raises the stakes further, making the real life incursion much less of a frivolous matter. She does this by relying on a strategy that is linked to a traditional rhetorical device known as *aposiopesis*. Aposiopesis refers to a speaker momentarily or completely halting in the midst of delivery, evidently unable to proceed as a result of being overcome by a personal response to the content of the speech itself (e.g., by modesty, fear, anger, or some other emotion). The use of aposiopesis is intended to lend weight to the subject of the speech by demonstrating its power to overwhelm even the speaker. Kron's one-woman play *2.5 Minute Ride* is about her family, in particular about her father's life, and her journey accompanying him to Auschwitz to see the place where his parents died. Kron summarizes the arc of her play:

I start out with the goal of telling the story of my father's life and experience, thus fulfilling my self-imposed duty as the witness and preserver of his lost world. In the telling, it begins to dawn on me that this is not a duty I can fulfill. [I come to] a broken-down place where I am entirely unmoored for a long, horrible moment until, out of this crisis, something new and unexpected surges out of me. (p. xii)

The stage directions surrounding her moment of aposiopesis precisely embody the quality of going off the rails: "There is a long, very long, still pause—an almost unbearable silence—as she realizes the thing she's about to say" (Kron, 2001, p.25). In the midst of her performance, as she begins to recollect the experience of standing in the gas chambers with her father, it occurs to her that she is out of her depth. She stops herself in the middle of her description. The stage directions continue: "The following feels like an actual break from the play. The audience should have the disconcerting feeling that the woman has abandoned her performance persona and is speaking spontaneously and directly to them" (p. 26). She rattles on with a desperate speech to the audience, ultimately blurting out something she had not

realized about herself. “Pause, stunned at her own revelation. All of a sudden the woman realizes she has totally exposed herself. Not sure how she got here or how to get out of it, she is at a total loss. She really has no idea what to say next. This should be a truly horrible moment” (p. 27).

The “truly horrible moment for the audience” is a recurring motif in Kron’s stage directions. She aims to achieve the experience of extreme awkwardness on her part and also on the part of the spectators. They are thrust into the position of being bystanders, witnesses to a fellow human being who is caught up by real-life circumstances out of her control. Kron recognizes that a moment like this offers more than just potential for comedy. She explains that it permits her stage persona to engage deeply in feelings without resorting to sentimentality.

My work seeks the places where we stumble, where we are derailed by awkwardness, grandiosity, pretentiousness, vanity. It looks for the humanity lurking in the crevices of human behavior, and in so doing, creates a bond that makes room for certain assumptions to be challenged. (2001, p. xiii)

The moments of awkwardness that Kron designs into her plays cause her characters to stumble when something unexpected happens that transgresses the boundary between reality and illusion. Rather than create characters who express nuanced aspects of their humanity within the fiction of a story, she creates opportunities for elements of the real world to make incursions into the world of the play. The strength of these moments is located the way they enable Kron to reveal her personal humanity to the audience as she responds to what has happened as a real person might respond to unanticipated events.

Two accounts of what I call going off the rails describe different productions of Peter Weiss' *Marat/Sade*.⁴ One respondent attended a performance directed by Mervyn Thompson at New Zealand's University of Canterbury in the summer of 1969. The second respondent saw the original Royal Shakespeare Company's production directed by Peter Brook. The first respondent related how the play itself was a revelation, filled with ideas, events, and images that challenged the very foundations of the conservative values he had been raised to support. Among all the remarkable aspects of the production, he singled out what was for him the most arresting moment. It took place during the inmates' riot at the conclusion of the play:

[Some actors] escaped into the auditorium, running up the two aisles (something that I had not often experienced at that time), and one actor monkey-ran up the middle of the central block of seating, leaping with hands and feet across the backs of the seats. After this, the kind of conventional thinking I had been brought up with was not enough to account for, explain or understand the thrill and excitement and shock and terror and exuberant loss of control of that experience. (Respondent 13)

It is unlikely that the actors who leapt across the seating and ran up the aisles expected to convince the spectators that they really were inmates at Charenton Asylum in 1808. Indeed, Beckerman (1990) explicitly characterizes the inmates' attack upon the audience in *Marat/Sade* as a failure in dramaturgy, claiming that a contemporary audience simply cannot make the imaginative leap to "believe that [they] are the French audience in attendance" (p. 119). The transgression of the line between the fictional and the real did not hinge on the actors trying to fool the audience into believing they were those historic characters come to life in 1969 New Zealand. The arresting element was the wild abandon exhibited in the invasion of the spectators' space. Dangerously uncategorizable and

⁴ *Marat/Sade* is the commonly used shorthand name for Weiss' play. The full title is: *The persecution and assassination of Jean-Paul Marat as performed by the inmates of the Asylum of Charenton under the direction of the Marquis de Sade*.

potentially physically threatening, it exceeded the bounds of the theatrical frame of a performed event as it was understood at that time and place by that spectator. This respondent's account of the experience signals an apprehension that what was happening and about to happen was as unpredictable and raw as a real life encounter. This is a core attribute of going off the rails: the staging demands that spectators shift their attitudes toward the play and respond as they might respond to an unpredictable event in their own lives.

The respondent who saw Brook's RSC production of *Marat/Sade* also commented on the riot scene at the end of the play. For him, the exceptionally arresting moment on the stage came during that final melee when an inmate started to sexually assault one of the nuns in attendance at the asylum. The female actor playing the nun was costumed in an authentic looking French nun's habit of the era. The male actor grabbed her and pinned her to the ground while she struggled and screamed with terror. As he began to rip away her clothing, the audience saw the female actor's contemporary underwear beneath her skirt (Respondent 43). That was the factor that made such a memorable impression on the respondent. In that instant, the scene of actors performing as lunatics running wild in a fictional work seemed suddenly to careen out of control. For the entire performance, this vital and challenging play had kept intact the aesthetic frame of its story, set in a French prison-asylum in 1808. The unexpected view of the actor's modern underwear was the only violation of that aesthetic frame. This was not an idle anachronism in the costuming. Because the illusion of the theatrical frame was literally ripped away in the midst of a violent act, the sight of the woman's personal (not costume) underwear destabilized the image of her assault as merely part of the fictional world of the play and called into question the degree of actual danger that the woman on stage was facing in that moment.

Another respondent described the experience of going off the rails in a very different way while watching *The Lorca Play*, a collectively devised adaptation of Federico Garcia Lorca's *The House of Bernarda Alba* in Toronto in 1992. It is ironic that reviewer Liam Lacey (1992) faulted the production for being too “controlled, elliptical and, ultimately, too clinical” (p. D9). According to co-director/writer Daniel MacIvor, during the course of play, three periods were set aside for the actors to create improvised scenes that changed at every performance. MacIvor (personal communication, September, 2009) remembers the sense of heightened immediacy in the “anything can happen” energies of those scenes that seemed to gain momentum in the intensity of their unpredictability as the play progressed. It was during the last of these scenes one evening that this respondent reported his experience of the play. The scene began on a dimly lit stage with the actor playing the youngest daughter, Adela, appearing from the shadows:

[She walked] slowly toward the audience in almost complete darkness quietly repeating the phrase ‘come here and let me feel you’ assumedly to her lover Pedro with whom she is having a clandestine affair against her mother’s wishes. As my eyes adjusted to the dark and I was able to make out the outline of the actress’ body, it seemed to me that she had one hand down the top of her dress and one hand up the bottom of her dress and was beginning to masturbate as she moved toward us excruciatingly slowly. Titillated by this image, I began to lean forward in my seat to try and get a better look and to confirm that what I thought was going on was, indeed, what was happening. I swear I could feel the rest of the audience leaning forward with me but I have no actual proof that this is true. After a seeming eternity in this state of not quite knowing and craning forward to see, the lights suddenly came on and Adela’s mother, Bernarda, was standing there staring at her. Adela did indeed have her hands down her underwear and inside the top of her dress but this titillating image was instantly transformed into one of awkwardness and humiliation. Feelings which I shared on a very deep level as I felt that I, too, had been caught leaning forward in my seat and that my clandestine voyeurism had been fully exposed to my fellow audience members. Adela’s shame and my shame were inextricably bound. I had not only witnessed a scene of secret sexual longing followed by exposure and shame but had actually been implicated in it by my own ACTUAL participation. This was

the most searing and electrifying moment I have ever experienced in over 30 years of attending theatre. (Respondent 24)

Clearly, a subtraction heuristic was operating in this moment of staging; the spectators' limited ability to see and hear drew them into close attentiveness with Adela's actions. It is significant that, according to MacIvor, the audience had been conditioned throughout the evening to feel that anything, including the unconventional and unexpected, was liable to happen during these segments. In other words, these segments had an element of unrestrained real life about them. The ephemerality augmented by the dim lighting and the barely whispered words made this moment on stage feel elusive and uncontrolled. The respondent's description of how the experience triggered his prurient impulses, followed by the experience of feeling guilty for having been caught in the midst of his gaze was not the reaction of a spectator in relation to a character in a scene. He was reacting as a male voyeur to the sexualized content of what the woman on stage was doing: enrapt by the feeling that he was witness to a chance encounter with something forbidden, freed by the anonymity of the darkness to indulge his gaze, and then struck by shame when the lights suddenly exposed him. All these elements can be characterized as a spectator's engagement with a real event, far more than as an engagement with the fictional events of a play.

7.3 Deliberate breach

Examples in the data of deliberate breach involved volition. Unlike the apparent anarchic instability of going off the rails, there was no mistaking in these instances that someone was introducing an element of the real world into the fictional world of the play with a clear intention to do so. Moreover, these moments of transgression were marked by a

quality of irreversibility. In the act of stepping over a line, something of relative consequence was often literally destroyed. Significantly, the destruction was not carried out for the sake of shock; these violations were directly linked to a transgression. During the act of crossing a boundary, some element that contributed to defining the world of the play as it had been defined was irrevocably destroyed, violated, or removed. In my reading of the data, this signaled the palpable incursion of a real life event into the illusion of theatrical presentation. A key feature of deliberate breach is that the staging incorporates an implication that the matter at hand is so significant it merits the choice to destroy the illusion of the play, literally or figuratively.

In the data, a notable exception to the destruction of something as a result of a shift into a different level of “reality” was in the final scene of Peter Brook’s *US*. In section 3.9, I addressed aspects of the problematic nature of this moment on stage, during which an apparently live butterfly was immolated by a cigarette lighter. Like other examples of deliberate breach, this moment on stage emphatically implied that the actors were not dealing in illusion but were grounding their actions in real life or, in this case, what appeared to be a real death. An actor who intentionally kills a living creature onstage, even though it is “just” an insect, performs an irrevocable act that decisively dispels the conventions of theatrical illusion by involving very real consequences. As Sartre (1968) wrote in his reflections upon seeing *US*, “something really happens: something alive dies and dies suffering” (p. 200). (Brook has always avoided revealing whether or not it was a real butterfly that the actor burned.) According to critiques by many respondents, the butterfly’s immolation seemed singularly intended to be provocative. To many, it seemed abjectly offensive and unjustified to kill something on stage in order to make a point about the public’s diffident response to

the Vietnam War. In that same year, similar audience reactions were produced in the U.S. when Ralph Ortiz attempted to kill two live chickens on stage and Charlotte Moorman attempted to destroy a violin during a performance (see Jill Johnston, 1968). In other instances of deliberate breach in the data, when the destruction did not involve a creature's death and when the act was clearly the byproduct of a passage across levels of reality, it remained a gripping way to access the audience's sense of the fiction on stage as a real event.

The materiality of fabric often provided a literal barrier that could be breached by being ripped, sliced open or whipped away. It is a particular feature of fabric that it can easily be cut and, once cut (even if the gash is stitched together), it can never again be returned to its original undamaged state. The physical destruction of a fabric surface during a performance belies the spectators' expectation that a play's scenic elements are re-used from one night to the next. Although one might well assume that a fabric surface destroyed in a play will simply be replaced for each performance, I would argue that at the moment of its destruction, this perception is counter-intuitive, especially if the fabric surface appears expensive or in some other way sacrosanct. The event of ripping or slicing through something that seems valuable—accompanied by the affective punch heuristic of the sound of cloth being torn—seems inordinately real within the context of a fictional play. It carries the impression of an act being carried out without regard to subsequent performances. In three instances in the data, fabric was incorporated as an integral part of a scenic element that contributed to delineating the world of the play. When it was cut, torn, or ripped away, the integrity of that world was violated.

The first example was observed in Giorgio Strehler's 1972 production of *Re Lear* (*King Lear*). Designer Ezio Frigerio created a circus arena with a muddy sawdust floor

partially covered by wooden planks. An upstage cycloramic circus tent wall encircled the playing area. Strehler describes the setting: “A theatre/a world. A theatre space which becomes a world; a circus/a world. A circus ring, a cosmic ring for the dramatization of life and history” (as cited in Hirst, 1993, p. 78). For five acts, this playing space was the container for a bizarre circus world existing in a unique universe, one in which the old men were dressed as clowns, the younger men wore black clothing, and the Fool was “a combination of Chaplin, Pierrot and some wild and naughty schoolchild.” That scenic environment was established and remained a constant visual image throughout the play. The final scene, described as “overwhelming and complex,” violated the integrity of this circus world when the canvas was loudly ripped open upstage centre and Lear, carrying Cordelia’s body, emerged from back stage through this tear in the fabric tent wall (pp. 78-79).

The second example took place in *Black Watch*. The opening scene is set in a pub in Fife, Scotland. The world of the play is represented naturalistically with an apparently real, full-sized pool table is positioned in the centre of the room. The veterans’ conversation with the interviewer who has come to learn about their experiences in Iraq is abruptly interrupted by a blackout, followed by the explosive sounds and flashes of a barrage of gunfire. The men scatter offstage in all directions, leaving the pool table in a dim light. A knife blade is thrust up through the felt fabric of the table from inside and tears an opening. From within the table, two soldiers in full camouflage uniforms emerge and stand, rifles at the ready, watching for snipers. The scene has shifted to Iraq.

In the third example, fabric literally defined the world of the play. Back To Back Theatre’s *Soft* addressed the ethical issues surrounding pre-natal screening, especially concerning decisions about aborting a foetus if it is learned that the child will be born with a

disability. The scenic environment for *Soft* was an enormous fabric womb-like tent filled with air, set up in the centre of a vacant warehouse. The show was performed with spectators sitting close to the actors inside this soft, intimate enclosure, which seemed to breathe as the walls gently billowed. The fabric walls doubled as a canvas for projected images and text. The addition of sound and music created a very sensuous experience. In one critical scene, set in a medical clinic, a doctor informs a young couple that amniocentesis has determined that their child will be born with Down Syndrome. The couple decides to terminate the pregnancy. At that precise instant, the entire fabric covering (which seconds earlier had been unhooked by stagehands from its anchorpins all around the base of its circumference) is whipped away and the audience members find themselves sitting in the centre of the harsh environs of a cavernous warehouse.

The fabric in each of these very different productions: the circus tent world of Strehler's *Lear*; the naturalistic setting of a pub in *Black Watch*; and the womb-like chamber of *Soft*; all contributed to the coherence of those respective plays as self-contained theatrical realms. That is, the audience was implicitly asked in each case to accommodate the theatrical illusion according to the imaginative parameters that defined the world of that play. Had these various entrances been made in a more conventional manner—through a door or arch, or even up the aisle of the auditorium—they would have been operating within that self-contained theatrical realm. Instead, the entrances of *Lear* and the *Black Watch* soldiers, and the startling removal of the fabric walls in *Soft*, violated the integrity of each play's fictional world by ripping, or slicing open, or abruptly whipping away what had been established as a defining element of its aesthetic boundaries.

Not all instances of deliberate breach were as physically violent as these. At the end of *Well*, when the actor playing Ann breaks character to speak in her own voice to Lisa,⁵ the moment is gentle by comparison, and yet similarly fraught with a sense of irrevocability. It figuratively destroys an illusion that has been securely fortified up until that point. In the original production, the role of Ann exhibited a dynamic that was entirely different from the other actors because, in comparison, the illusion of Jayne Houdyshell as Ann Kron was so carefully wrought. From the first few moments of the play, the idea that Jayne *is* Ann was established: “That is my mother there in that La-Z-Boy recliner,” says Lisa, and the believability was evidently very seductive. This is a rare instance in the data in which spectators were passively encouraged to accept that a fictional character was an authentically real person. It was a passive attempt because no explicit attempt was made to disguise the truth. Michael Feingold (2006), writing in *The Village Voice*, notes: “You can see from the playbill that the person you're watching is not Ann Kron but the actress Jayne Houdyshell—though Houdyshell is so warmly convincing and maternally adorable in the role that at some moments it’s hard to believe the playbill.” He concludes his review by admitting “Houdyshell is so completely there that I’m halfway tempted to start a rumor that ‘Jane Houdyshell’ is only a pseudonym for Lisa Kron’s mother.” It was the overwhelming conviction of the critics that Houdyshell was thoroughly believable as Ann Kron. It therefore came as a huge shock when the illusion was abruptly dropped at the height of the final scene:

(Suddenly, the actor playing Ann—Jayne—breaks character.)

Jayne: Wait a minute wait a minute wait a minute. *(To the audience)* I know this is jarring. I’m sorry. I need to say something.

Lisa: You...what?

Jayne: *(To Lisa)*: I need to say something to you.

⁵ The actor, of course, speaks playwright Kron’s lines, not her own words.

Lisa: Uh—

Jayne: (*Continuing, over Lisa; to the audience, a little amazed and almost giddy at her own behavior*): This is crazy. I'm sorry. (*To Lisa*) I have to tell you something. . .

Lisa: (*Panicked that something has happened to Jayne; really asking her*): Oh my God, Jayne, are you okay?

Jayne: Yes, but—

Lisa: What? What?

Jayne: The ending—I can't do it. It's all wrong. (Kron, 2006, p. 73)

The dialogue continues along these lines. Jayne gently but firmly encourages Lisa to abandon the play she has written and face her fears about her relationship with her real mother. The final moment of the play finds Lisa on stage alone, reading a short speech to the audience that the *actual* Ann Kron wrote in the late 1960s as part of her work promoting racial integration. The authenticity of this piece of text is an evocative link with reality and it marvelously resonates with the theme of the play. The single most live wire moment of authenticity, though, the breathtaking incursion of the real into the illusion, comes at the moment when Jayne breaks character. Much like the earlier examples of scenic elements that delineated the world of those plays, the relationship between Lisa and Ann anchors the world of this play. *New York Times* critic Charles Isherwood (2006) writes: “Ms. Kron's crafty writing in ‘Well’ sharpens the impression that, in the case of Ann, we’re watching actual experience unadulterated by artistic tampering.” Thanks to the sterling performance of Jayne Houdyshell and the authentic quality of her lines that mother-daughter relationship seems unimpeachably real, especially in contrast with Ann’s relationship with the other characters, all of whom respond to Jayne as if she is Lisa’s actual mother Ann. Simply put, Jayne Houdyshell earned perception by the audience that she was sincerely responding as herself by having so convincingly embodied the character of Ann Kron for the entire play up

to that point. Her deliberate act of breaking the illusion of what had seemed so real then became endowed with gravity and significance.

7.4 Real world bodies enter the fictional world

In three accounts in the data, spectators were initially allowed to become accustomed to non-realistic theatrical conventions that delineated the fictional world of the play. Then, abruptly, that fictional world collapsed when one or more people appeared whose very presence challenged the integrity of the fiction.

The first example of this was seen in Julie Marie Myatt's play *Boats on a River*, directed by Michael Bigelow Dixon at the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis in 2007. The play concerns the aftermath of sexual trauma in the lives of three young Cambodian girls who had been enslaved into prostitution and now live in an NGO-operated shelter in Phnom Penh. The girls, ages five, eight, and thirteen, were played by adult actors. This was a perfectly reasonable theatre convention to employ in the telling of this story. Ethically, it would have been problematic to ask girl actors of those ages to play child prostitutes recently freed from the horrific experience of the sex slave trade. It is easy to imagine, also, that given the sexualized content of the scenes, seeing actual little girls on stage playing these roles would have made the production quite distressing to watch. The reviews of the adult actors were generally positive:

The eldest, a thirteen-year-old named Yen, is played by Jeany Park with a sexualized strut that masks her terror [. . .] Mayano Ochi and Rebecca J. Wall infuse their young characters with ever-increasing wonderment and vigor. They look out the window at schoolchildren with bicycles and uniforms, and believe that one day, they might be able to have that kind of life, too. (Kleiman, 2007)

Playwright Myatt spent time in Cambodia researching material for her script. The production integrated video clips of images of the city streets that she made during her travels, as well as recordings of traditional Cambodian music (LaVenture , 2007). While the play certainly benefitted from the authenticity contributed by these elements, the *live wire* coup de théâtre was reserved for the last few moments. By the end, the eldest girl Yen was gone, and only Lida and Kolab remained in the shelter. They learned that a caring mentor had brought them gifts: bicycles of their very own, just as they had dreamed of having. Gleefully, they rode around the stage making figure eights. They rode off into the wings and then immediately rode back on again but this time, instead of adult actors, the audience saw two little Asian girls, ages five and eight, riding around the stage on child-size versions of those bicycles. That was the end of the play.

The audience members quite often gasped in response to this deceptively simple coda. Spectators who had spent two hours watching the story framed within the perfectly acceptable theatrical convention of adults playing children, abruptly found themselves confronting the sight of those little girls' tiny bodies and instantly reviewing the real life implications of everything they had just witnessed. No attempt was made to fool the audience into thinking these girls were actually rescued child prostitutes—they were clearly stand-ins for the real—but that was not the point. The live wire impact of the moment was the jarring appearance of the children on the bicycles. Director Dixon describes the experience as turning “visceral” at that final moment of the play (2009). However engaging the story and performances had been for the audience up until that point, it had remained within the realm of a play. It had been grounded, as Blau (1987) put it, “in the truth of illusion” (p. 164). The unexpected emergence of real little girls thrust the spectators into a radically different mode

of relating to the story. It demanded that they relate to what they had just seen as they might relate to the sight of actual girls in those circumstances. The director and playwright did not attempt to support the appearance of verisimilitude in the play by introducing real girls into the roles; it was the juxtaposition of the real with the illusion that fractured the fictional frame. Michael John Garcés, the artistic director of Los Angeles' Cornerstone Theater, was amazed by the final image of the play: "In that moment," he writes, "Julie says everything she wants to say about the play without having to really say it" (Hart, 2008, p. 36).

The other two instances of real world bodies entering a fictional world employed theatrical conventions much more stylized than having adults portraying children. One involved a Japanese kabuki play performed in a large tent pitched in New York City's Damrosch Park on the grounds of the Lincoln Center complex. *Natsumatsuri Naniwa Kagami* (*The Summer Festival: A Mirror of Osaka*) was a centuries-old play brought from Japan by the Heisei Nakamura-za company under the direction of Kushida Kazuyosh. *The New York Times'* Ben Brantley (2004) sets the scene for the style of the work:

All the characters, male and female, are played by men, in keeping with Kabuki practice. They are as mannered and symbolic as figures in Japanese woodcuts, with expressions that even in moments of anguish and ecstasy are fixed, clear and serene. You can determine a person's essential nature by the curl of his drawn eyebrows or, in the case of a nasty old man, by the set of his face-concealing hat. Yet the longer you watch the performers, the more you sense a complexity beneath the semaphoric gestures and grimaces, underscored by the tense percussive and meditative string sounds of the onstage musicians, hidden behind bamboo screens. (para. 8-9)

Brantley went on to describe the show as "rock 'em, sock 'em theater that keeps the adrenaline pumping" (para.14). The production was full of extraordinarily thrilling moments of staging, including several that definitively fit the categories described in these chapters

(proximity, reconfigured venue, affective punch and the destabilized body to name a few). For the purposes of this section, I examine only the startling final image.

At the climactic end of the epic play (condensed for Western audiences from an entire day to a meager three hours) the hero fights off a legion of attackers in stylized kabuki choreography. He is successful against them all, but at the last moment a battery of constables descends on the scene to apprehend him for the murder of the villain (a dramatic plot point earlier in the play). In this production, police sirens coming from outside the tent were heard just prior to the entrance of the constables. Damrosch Park is on the corner of Amsterdam Avenue and West 62nd Street in Manhattan's Upper West Side, so the sound of sirens was nothing unusual to New York audiences. The hero (played by the celebrated kabuki actor Nakamura Kankuro) and his companion fled out the back flap of the tent, then immediately ran back in again, chased by over half a dozen fully uniformed NYPD officers. The policemen tackled the fully-costumed kabuki actors as they might tackle a couple of Bowery hoodlums, laid them out on the ground of the stage floor face down and handcuffed them, wrists behind their backs. The play was over. Nakamura Kankuro rose and the rest of the cast, including the policemen—all of them now obviously recognizable as actors in the company—joined him for the curtain call.

Three hours of rich theatricality in the confines of a tent acclimated the spectators to a world quite distant from their daily lives. The live wire in this case was the unexpected incursion of something that was a familiar sight on the gritty streets of New York (and on television, and in film) but it was acutely out of place in the realm of *Natsumatsuri Naniwa Kagami*. Yet, here is a man in a story who is apprehended by the police. The audience's cultural awareness of what it means to be taken down by a real cop carried far more impact in

the moment than had it been an arrest carried out by constables dressed in seventeenth-century Japanese costumes. The moment did not hinge on convincing the spectators that these were real policemen arresting the actor. It was the collision of two worlds that made the hero's arrest vibrant, alive, and graspable for the spectators on a personal level across a cultural and temporal divide.

The other instance of real world bodies entering the fictional world also, coincidentally, involved realistic police uniforms. In 1995, Cornerstone Theater produced a contemporary adaptation of Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, set in the Watts neighbourhood of Los Angeles. *The Central Ave. Chalk Circle*, adapted by Lynn Manning and directed by Bill Rauch, brought together racially and economically mixed audiences with its artistry and searing relevance. Rob Kendt, a theatre critic for *The New York Times*; *The Los Angeles Times*; *Newsday*; *Variety*; and *Back Stage West* considered the experience of seeing that production to be a pinnacle of his ten years reviewing Los Angeles theatre: "As much as I've loved or been excited by other theatre experiences, *Central Ave.* represents, in my book, the gold standard of all that theatre can be, not only for artists but also for audiences" (2003).

The narration in this production was split between Azdak in Act 1 and Gertha Gibson (Grusha in Brecht's original) in Act 2. Playwright Lynn Manning reimagined Azdak (played by Shishir Kurup) as a visual artist and Gertha (played by Sándra Layne) as a maintenance worker. Designer Lynn Jeffries created a fantastical non-realistic visual aesthetic—each act suited to its narrator—that took a sharp turn in the final scene. Sonja Kuflinec (2003) explains:

In the first act [. . .] the production had a cartoony, expressionistic feel. Jeffries constructed the props and costumes pieces from cardboard, paper, and

chalk, the medium of Azdak's artwork (and a play on *Chalk Circle*). In the second act [. . .] the aesthetic reflected a janitorial world, with duct tape handcuffs, crushed soda can police badges, and judge's robes made from plastic garbage bags. In the final scene in which Gibson and Azdak appear together and neither narrates, the aesthetic reverts to realism. (p. 138)

Kuftinec notes that in a play addressing critical community issues, this use of highly imaginative scenic elements exemplified Brecht's concept of *verfremdungseffekt*.

Throughout the play, social dynamics of injustice and oppression were brought into clearer focus when familiar scenarios were rendered strange in these whimsical settings. In the final scene, after the audience had become accustomed to the playfulness of the world in this story, the unexpected appearances of actors in LAPD uniforms, official police badges, and an authentic looking judge's robe were startling by comparison. These realistic elements that might have been taken for granted as part of the conventions of any other stage performance (actors playing cops), suddenly took on more resonance. They were recognized for what they were—symbols of authority—just as the fanciful soda can badges and garbage bag robes had been (Kuftinec, 139).

7.5 Now you don't see it, now you do

In the instances of touching the live wire described thus far, the galvanizing impact of the staging was often marked by a perceptual shift that dissipated theatrical illusion by moving from one level (fiction) to another level (reality). An alternative type of live wire staging that emerged in the data infused moments on stage with a palpable sense of real life even as they remained within the realm of theatrical illusion. They exhibited a dynamic sense of liminality: existing betwixt and between the fictional world of the play and real life.

The name I assign to this staging, *now you don't see it, now you do*, derives from a reviewer's description of a "gasp-producing" moment in one play that operated in this fashion (Simonson, 2008). The name refers to something patently non-realistic in a performance that audience members have consented to ignore for the sake of accepting the fictional reality that governs a play (e.g. presence of a fourth wall). Then, in this type of staging, the theatrical convention is briefly dropped. Thus "now you don't see it," becomes "now you do." The stark contrast of the convention's abrupt absence makes spectators suddenly conscious of their collusion in creating the fiction up to that point. The play continues without the convention in place for a matter of seconds or—in some cases—minutes, before it is restored and the illusion takes hold again. During the period of reality unveiled, the events on stage are starkly grounded in the real world of the spectators, and yet in these instances the fictional world of the play continues to move along, creating a brief overlay between fiction and reality. The experience becomes charged with a palpable connection to the real world without irrevocably fracturing the illusion of the entire enterprise.

Marvin Carlson (2003) evocatively describes just this kind of overlay in performance. He recalls an unforgettable experience he had while seeing Laurence Olivier as James Tyrone in the British National Theatre's 1971 production of Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night*:

Olivier, climbing onto a table to unscrew an overhead light bulb, paused a moment, looked out into the auditorium with the light close to his face. In that chilling instant the living actor, the character, and the situation opened a glowing window into infinity. (p. 211)

Here was the fictional James Tyrone: a sixty-five-year-old patriarch in the living room of his Connecticut home. And here was the real Laurence Olivier: a sixty-four-year-old actor performing on a London stage. For just a moment though, in the disorienting light of the naked bulb, the man was Olivier *and* he was Tyrone. While the convention of the fourth wall slipped away for an instant and the audience saw the man on the table looking directly at them, Olivier remained James Tyrone, planted within the world of O'Neill's play. Carlson describes the experience as a "theatrical nexus" (p. 211), associating it with Herbert Blau's notion of the meeting of "life and death, art and life, the thing itself and its double" (p. 211; see also Blau, 1987, p. 173). Herein lies the key to what differentiates this kind of onstage overlay from, for example, a common Shakespearean aside. An aside operates as part of an acceptable theatrical convention that allows a character within a play to turn away from the action and address the audience directly. The National Theatre's production of *Long Day's Journey* was, by contrast, anchored within the theatrical convention of the fourth wall. When Olivier momentarily dropped that production's fundamental convention, and allowed the audience to see him seeing them, he was able to inhabit a position on the threshold between actor and character. The live wire experience briefly filled the fiction with a stark sense of reality.

The experience of now you don't see it, now you do extended into several minutes in one scene from a very different National Theatre production. For Nicholas Hytner's 2003 staging of *His Dark Materials*, the three novels of Philip Pullman's epic fantasy story were ambitiously adapted into two three-hour plays. In the central world of Pullman's trilogy, a "dæmon" is the equivalent of a human soul. Living outside but always near a person's physical body, dæmons take the form of animals that are specifically suited to each

individual's essential nature. Children's dæmons constantly morph from one kind of creature to another, finally settling on a particular animal once the child reaches puberty. Hytner and his designers faced many challenges staging this massive production; chief among them was the question of how to stage the characters' dæmons. They solved the problem by creating a variety of gorgeously designed puppets, manipulated by puppeteer-actors in plain sight, dressed all in black clothing, their faces covered by black balaclavas. The theatrical convention that enabled the "reality" of the dæmons to flourish involved an implicit invitation to the spectators to disregard the puppeteers. Margaret Mackey (2009) describes the effect:

The power of the audience's theatrical imagination is strong enough to overwhelm specific incarnated information about the actual bodies on the stage. The puppeteer holds the [. . .] puppet and his arm makes it move; the voice comes from the actor not from the toy. Yet audiences appear to find it relatively effortless to ascribe all the elements of life to the puppet in terms of engaging with the story being enacted on the stage. The ontology of the make-believe is triumphant. (p. 79)

The heroine of the play is eleven-year old Lyra Belacqua, played in the original production by Anna Maxwell Martin. From the first scene in the play, Maxwell Martin's Lyra was never apart from her dæmon Pantalaimon, whom she calls Pan, played by Samuel Barnett. Barnett's black costume integrated pockets containing various puppets representing Pan's different physical manifestations. He skillfully manipulated them, always remaining intimately close to Lyra. Late in the second of the two plays, Lyra arrived at the outskirts of the land of the dead. There, in a stunning moment of staging, she came face to face with the personification of her own death. Standing beside her, as he had been for the entire play, Samuel Barnett suddenly lifted up his black balaclava to reveal his face and spoke to Lyra as her death.

The fundamental theatrical convention in this production that no notice would be taken of the puppeteers was securely cemented in the imaginations of the spectators. The power of this live wire moment came as a result of Barnett shattering the solidly established theatrical illusion that had for hours rendered him invisible. And yet, as the character of Lyra's death, he remained solidly within the world of the play. During that brief time, the real person "Samuel Barnett" and the fictional character "Lyra's Death" inhabited the stage together. In contrast to examples found earlier in this chapter, this incursion of reality into the play was not irrevocable. When that scene was over, Barnett lowered the balaclava and, for the remainder of the play, the illusion of Pantalaimon as an independent living creature reasserted itself (Mackey, p. 79). It is a feature of the startling experience of now you don't see it, now you do that it subsequently allows the audience to return again to now you don't see it.

In another account in the data, a traditional theatrical convention was so thoroughly engrained in the audience's expectations that dropping it made an enormous impact on the spectators despite the fact that the withdrawal of the convention took place within the first few minutes of the show. Reflecting upon this "defining moment" in the play, critic Robert Simonson (2008) writes, "If it's possible for theater audiences to swoon in these cynical times, they do so here" (para. 2). The production was the multiple Tony award-winning 2008 revival of *Rodgers & Hammerstein's South Pacific* at New York's Lincoln Center.

Simonson describes the moment on stage:

This nonprofit theater has made much of its decision to employ a full complement of orchestra musicians at a time when pits are being pared down to the core. And Lincoln Center makes it clear at each performance in the most dramatic way possible. At the beginning of the overture, just as the violins introduce the lushly melodic lines of "Bali Ha'i," the stage floor above the musicians' heads begins to recede, drawing back to reveal every one of the

pit's 30 members. At least one person on the Lincoln Center Theater staff jokingly calls this gasp-producing moment [. . .] the "802 reveal," referring to the musicians' union local, to which all the players belong. [Director Bartlett] Sher knew he had found a showstopper with this "now you don't see them, now you do" sleight of hand. (para. 1-2)

Much of the commentary regarding this production focuses on the public's resigned expectation that the music in a twenty-first-century Broadway musical will inevitably be stripped of its richness due to the typically small size of contemporary Broadway theatre orchestras. I was able to see *South Pacific* at Lincoln Center myself and, despite knowing ahead of time about the "802 reveal," I found it to be an astonishing experience. When the apron first opens, the audience sees only a few musicians. It is mildly intriguing. Then, as the apron continues to roll back, one sees more, and more, and more until at last the thirty-person orchestra seems enormous, and the grandeur of the sound is thrillingly robust. The audience did gasp. I was personally struck by what I can only describe as a sense of the *humanity* of the many musicians in the pit, all of them actively producing the sound of the overture with their instruments. In retrospect, it seems surprising to report this as unusual in any way, since a full orchestra in other contexts would be taken entirely for granted. In this case, however, the realness of the multitude of musicians seemed overwhelmingly palpable.

In both *Long Day's Journey* and *His Dark Materials*, Lawrence Olivier and Samuel Barnett were initially hidden within conventions that supported the illusion that they were not real people. When they shattered that illusion—each in their own way—they earned their status as being perceived by the audience as real people on the stage. Similarly, the musicians in *South Pacific* were hidden within the convention that musical accompaniment appears mysteriously unbidden in the world of a musical, and is unnoticed by those singing on stage. Musicians do not exist as real people in that world. When the stage apron rolled back at the

Lincoln Center, the musicians earned their status as being perceived as real people, external to the reality of the play. For a brief time, their real world existed in parallel to the fictional world of *South Pacific*. When the apron rolled forward again, the illusion re-established itself.

7.6 The world of the play shifts

In this sixth type of live wire staging, the plays initially exhibited cues that enabled audiences to determine the nature of the world in which that play was set. In other words, spectators assessed from the opening moments whether the production was grounded in the world of “kitchen-sink realism” or a fantastical world, or somewhere between. Then, right in front of the audience, the world of the play shifted to a different kind of theatrical world. Spectators were forced to abandon their expectations as they followed the play and characters into a new territory, an alternate genre, a different level of reality.

In one such account, a respondent described an unforgettable shift that took place during the first minutes of Peter Hall’s 2002 production of *The Bacchae* at Britain’s National Theatre. Actor Greg Hicks walked onto the stage—barefoot and stripped to the waist—wearing loose white pants. Resting on the ground centre stage was a majestic full head mask of Dionysus, complete with a large golden pair of bull’s horns. Hicks approached the mask, lifted it up, placed it on his head, and began to deliver Dionysus’ opening speech to the audience. At first he was standing on the stage as an ordinary man—an actor—who appeared to belong in much the same world as the audience members at the National Theatre. Then, upon donning the mask, Hicks assumed the mantle of that other extraordinary being in full view of the audience. As he “became” a Greek god, the stage “became” the fictional world of

The Bacchae. What stood out as remarkable for the respondent was the shiver-producing *transition* in this moment on stage. Rather than starting the play already anchored in the illusion of the fictional world, Hicks began by being anchored in the real world and then he moved into the illusion, figuratively inviting the audience to follow his transition into that world (Respondent 44).

A much more subtle transition from a “real world” into a fictional world was seen in the 1994 film, *Vanya on 42nd Street*, directed by Louis Malle. The film begins with a montage showing images of a crisp morning in New York City. One sees the actors from the film as themselves, all converging on Times Square, individually or in pairs, walking on foot or emerging from the subway. They meet in front of an abandoned theatre on 42nd Street—the New Amsterdam—for what turns out to be a rehearsal of Chekhov’s *Uncle Vanya*. Wallace Shawn, who is cast as Vanya, has invited a couple of guests to watch the rehearsal, and director Andre Gregory welcomes them. Once inside, the actors begin to settle in for their rehearsal, drinking coffee from paper cups and catching up with one another in idle conversation. Phoebe Brand sits at a table talking with Larry Pine about something that seems perfectly ordinary. Gradually it becomes apparent to the viewer that this is no ordinary conversation: it is the opening scene between Nanny and Dr. Astrov in Chekhov’s play.

The transition is seamless and it takes a moment to realize that the world of the film has indeed shifted from a rehearsal hall to a Russian home. Owen Gleiberman (1994), reviewing the film for *Entertainment Weekly*, addresses the effectiveness of this breathtaking transitional device:

A gimmick? Yes, and something more. What [Malle Gregory and Shawn] have done is to burn away the melancholy 19th-century dullness that virtually defines productions of this play. The performers here don’t look or behave like “Chekhov characters.” They’re acting, to be sure, but they’re also

themselves—they read the author’s words with all the wit, narcissism, and painfully exposed nerves, the cocky, ironic sensuality, of their late-20th-century personalities. (para.3)

In contrast to Peter Hall’s *Bacchae*, the transition here from the world of the real into the world of the play (on film) is not electrifying; it is virtually invisible. While Hall was able to spark a sense of *live wire* realness by creating an atmosphere of majesty in the transition into the world of the Greek god Dionysus, Malle and his team created a sense of realness in their fictional world by crossfading the real with the fictional, blurring the distinction so that the fictional seemed grounded in the tone and tempo of real people’s lives. The viewer figuratively slides into Act 1 of the distant nineteenth-century world of *Uncle Vanya*, taking it to be as natural and familiar as any contemporary conversation over morning coffee.

In both of these examples, the transition moved from a real everyday world into the fictional world of a play. A third example in the data was considered extraordinary as it moved from one fictional world into a strikingly different world. In 1996, the German director Karen Beier mounted a production of *A Midsummer’s Night’s Dream*, bringing together actors from all over Europe. In her staging, all the actors spoke Shakespeare’s lines in translation in the language—and in accordance with the performance styles—of their own countries. Among the many remarkable elements of this multi-cultural *Midsummer* was the transition from the court to the forest. The characters in the court all wore somber contemporary business attire and carried briefcases. When the shift began, the sound of a “rather grotesque Felliniesque circus motif” was heard and the actors, facing the audience, began taking off their suits. Under these clothes were brightly coloured circus clown costumes. From their briefcases, the actors produced and put on wigs and red noses (Respondent 6). The world of the play veered off in an entirely unexpected direction and any

expectations the audience may have had toward this play melted as they strove to keep up with the new direction it had taken.

Summary

The staging strategies I have examined in this chapter are not grounded in an attempt to create realism *per se* on stage. Rather, the fictional aesthetic realms of the plays are embraced save for specific moments in which an element is introduced that appears to be grounded in the real world. The effectiveness of these staging choices is predicated on the assumption that spectators adopt attitudes toward the circumstances of fictional characters that are categorically different from the attitudes they adopt toward the circumstances of real people. As Radford and Weston (1975) note, the death of a fictional character may move us—we may weep for Anna Karenina or Mercutio—but an encounter with the death of a real person has a different kind of impact on us. In previous chapters I have argued that spectators unconsciously project their pre-conceptions onto the theatre encounter. They “contain” the experience presented in the play as something already known or at least familiar to them, and they confidently adopt attitudes toward what they see based on their pre-determined associations. The instances I have identified as touching the live wire force spectators to recalibrate their attitudes toward the fictional frame of the play by introducing something on stage that appears to be anchored in the real world. These staging choices thrust the spectators into an experience in which the theatrical encounter becomes charged with a real-world sensibility that transgresses the boundary between illusion and the spectators’ lives. At that moment, the material in the play cannot be easily dismissed as fiction; it demands a real life response.

Discussion

The task of galvanizing an audience's perception of a theatre event by fostering a real-world sensibility is not easily achieved. It is the nature of theatre that the audience tends to perceive anything presented within the context of a play as part of the fictional world of that play. As Herbert Blau (1987) puts it, "there is nothing more illusory in performance than the illusion of the unmediated. It can be a very powerful illusion in the theater, but it *is* theater, and it is *theater*, the truth of illusion, which haunts all performance" (p. 164). He rightly asserts that no matter how much "authenticity" fills a stage, it is difficult to dismiss the simple fact that one is watching a play. Ultimately, it is received as a fiction set apart from the real lives of the spectators.

Philosopher William James once asked, "Under what circumstances do we think things are real?" (as cited in Goffman, 1974 pp. 1-2). If James' question about the general nature of perception were restated within the context of theatre—and specifically within the context of this chapter—we might ask, "under what circumstances do spectators think things on stage are real enough to warrant a response normally accorded to events in real life?" The resilience of the fictional frame resists attempts to fracture it. Joseph Heller is one of many playwrights who have tried. In his early play, *We Bombed in New Haven* (1968), Heller leaves blanks in the script for the actors to fill in with personal details:

Henderson: [to the audience] Did any of you people see me in _____?
names a work in which he actually appeared.

Bailey: I did. You stank.

Henderson: Aaah, what do you know? The closest you ever came to the real stage was _____. *When possible Henderson's remark should . . . correspond to the known experience of the actor playing Bailey.* (as cited in Goffman, p. 389)

Goffman (1974) points out that this Pirandellian theatrical device, which in fact predates Pirandello by 300 years, can seem clumsy and clichéd (p. 389). He notes that when a character in a play explicitly calls attention to his own agency as someone who can break the fictional frame, the audience's perception shifts to accommodate the twist. The play is merely understood as now belonging in a slightly different fictional reality—one in which the actors speak to the audience (p. 400). Theatre phenomenologist Bert O. States (1985) agrees. The introduction of elements that challenge the fictional frame of a play rarely harm the illusion; the audience members simply re-adjust their expectations to accommodate (p. 183). My interpretation of the data suggests that although a play may be resilient enough to maintain coherence in the illusion despite creative attempts to fracture it, the very presumption of coherence is its Achilles' heel. In short, the play is perceived as a performed event—or production—that has been orchestrated *by someone* according to a deliberate, coherent plan. When Schechner describes performance as “restored behavior” (2006, p. 34), it has been restored *by someone*. In Goffman's terminology, the production is “bracketed” (p. 251). That is to say, it has a starting point, a finishing point, and an intended course that moves from beginning to end, all put into effect *by someone*. Even in the case of an entirely improvised play, someone has mounted the production with an intention and a (presumably) coherent plan in mind. The events in our real lives are marked by different considerations. Unless we subscribe to belief in fate and a divine plan, interruptions and unplanned detours to our established routines and expectations are perceived as uncalculated and accidental incursions. These are the markers we associate with our real lives.

The world of the play may therefore be usefully distinguished from the world of the production. The world of the play is the fictional realm of the characters. The world of the

production can be understood as the playwright's and all the artistic, technical, and administrative team's work to present the play. The world of the play is tremendously resilient; the world of the production is relatively fixed. The fractures in touching the live wire are almost universally fractures in the world of the production. When something genuinely appeared to disrupt the coherence of the planned theatrical event, spectators perceived it as associated with a real-life occurrence.

In *2.5 Minute Ride*, Kron crafts her play so that, as a performer, she appears to be caught off guard and overcome by her own unanticipated emotional breakdown. The coherent world of the production is therefore compromised. During the riots in *Marat/Sade* and the scheduled moments of improvisation in *The Lorca Play*, individual performers seemed as if they were "going rogue." In the New Zealand *Marat/Sade*, for example, the actor playing an escaped inmate appeared out of control as he leapt across the proscenium line into the audience; in the London production of that play the actor playing an escaped inmate also appeared out of control in his physical assault on the other actor. In *The Lorca Play*, the actor playing Adela appeared to be carrying the moment beyond the expectation of propriety. These actors seemed to be, in the immediacy of the moment, departing from the coherent plan of the production. On a small scale, spectators' perception of actors "corpsing" may similarly be understood as departures from the coherent plan of a production. Corpsing refers to actors being so overcome by mirth (or alarm at forgetting a line) that they temporarily lose their ability to maintain their characters. In that moment, the audience sees an incursion of the real world of actors-as-people that appears to derail the coherence of the production as planned.

As evidenced in virtually all the illustrations in this chapter, fractures in the world of a production can be deliberately orchestrated and still give the appearance of an unplanned real-life incursion. A noteworthy example of a highly orchestrated fracture can be seen in the 1983 Broadway production of Noel Coward's *Private Lives*. The play is about two married people who unexpectedly meet their former spouses. This revival was specifically produced as a vehicle for its co-stars: twice married and twice divorced celebrity actors Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor. In Act 2, Amanda (Taylor) asks Elyot (Burton) "Are we going to marry again, after Victor and Sibyl divorce us?" Burton took a long pained look out to the auditorium. He then shared a sustained "inside" joke with the audience for several minutes, picking up a pillow from the divan and biting into it as if to resist having to answer her. The spectators were beside themselves in peals of laughter (Respondent 4). This seeming fracture in the coherent plan of the production was deliberately staged. Director Milton Katselas made no secret of his intention to milk the parallels between fiction and real life (Brennan, 1983). Yet the impact of the moment was based in the appearance that Burton the man was violating the plan of the production by pausing the play to comment on his personal relationship with Taylor.

Is it manipulative or fraudulent to fool audience members into believing that unanticipated forces have fractured the plan for the production, so they feel they are encountering a real event? Critic John Simon (1972) argues that the attempt is suspect, and possibly unethical. I would argue that it is no more manipulative or fraudulent than passing off an actor as a Danish prince or a cardboard headband as his father's crown. The same holds true for the use of minimal incursions such as affective punch, taboo, and the destabilized body. These staging choices are as much the building blocks of theatre-making

as costumes, lights, or any acting techniques. They serve to make the play a vivid experience for the spectators.

Implications for teaching

Bert O. States humorously describes a mad world that might be imagined by Jorge Luis Borges, in which enthusiastic directors stuff every theatre production with real-world sensibilities: “plays with ticking clocks, running fountains, and child actors with pet dogs” (p. 195). It is certainly not my intention to encourage overuse of live wire staging. This would, as States wryly warns, too quickly devolve into a crisis of novelty. However, should an ensemble wish to explore the potential for devising plays that include the staging choices described in this chapter, they may consider several questions.

To enhance the verisimilitude of the mimetic world of the play without interfering with the integrity of the fictional frame, the actors could introduce minimal incursions such as the use of affective punch (6.2), taboo (4.4), and the destabilized body (4.5). Suggestions for ideating, refining, and incorporating staging utilizing these elements can be found in their respective sections.

When considering staging in the sub-category of going off the rails or deliberate breach, the ensemble may reflect on their role as creators of the performed event—the production. They will devise a presumptive plan for the event that goes awry. Conceptualizing the presumptive plan is the first step. They may ask, “What is our plan? What do we, as producers of the event, want to accomplish?” They then ask, “What are the risks we are taking in presenting this production?” This is followed by the next question:

“What could possibly go wrong?” What “goes wrong” is the element that appears to disrupt the coherence of the planned theatrical event: their “presumptive” plan.

Devising this type of live wire staging is intimately connected to the very first staging choice described in Chapter 3. In that section, actors were asked to consider how they might subvert the actor-as-authority contract by risking personal vulnerability. This staging choice similarly involves a genuine willingness to reveal one’s personal or group vulnerability, and every actor who wishes to pursue this course will need to decide what level of personal vulnerability he or she is willing to take. Personal vulnerability is relevant here because, at the point at which the “presumptive” plan is thwarted, one or more of the actors is revealed as unprepared, caught off guard, vulnerable.

For example, Kron’s presumptive plan in *2.5 Minute Ride* is to chronicle with authority her father’s experience visiting the place where his parents—her grandparents—were killed. When she realizes in the midst of performance that she is unable to meet the challenge of this task, her inadequacy is revealed in front of the audience. In point of fact, a core aspect of her play is her inadequacy—anyone’s inadequacy—to represent with authority the overwhelming complexity of another person’s experience with severe trauma. Kron’s play is an excellent example of the way in which introducing a live wire fracture is suited to instances that call attention to the limitations of theatre to represent difficult subjects with authority. Again, recalling Chapter 3, if the presumptive plan is based in what Levinas refers to as “the said,” the live wire fracture is an “unexpected” eruption of “the saying.” A play may be designed to give the impression that an ensemble intends to use theatre to present a definitive truth to an audience, only to have the confidently prepared package disintegrate. An ensemble may design the fracture to come as a result of a volitional choice on the part of

one actor—a deliberate breach—or as a result of the apparently spontaneous anarchy reflected in going off the rails.

In the section on deliberate breach, the image of fabric being torn or cut was shown as a vivid application of the principle that when something of apparent value is destroyed onstage, it is perceived as a live wire experience. An ensemble may reflect upon how to convincingly fake the destruction of a thing which is in some way considered inviolable or sacrosanct. Alternatively, the ensemble may budget for the actual destruction and replacement cost of the item during each performance. The actors should be mindful that faking the destruction of a scenic element can be tricky. For example, the existence of sugar-based breakaway glass is familiar enough to most theatergoers that it registers comfortably as illusion. In contrast, the tearing of fabric is a testament to the spectators' understanding that the destruction of fabric cannot be faked.

If a deliberate breach is to exceed the limited impact of a minimal incursion, some aesthetically significant element that defines the world of the play will be irreversibly destroyed. This choice should not be taken lightly. The actors must determine what significant reason merits the destruction of something that contributes to the coherence of the world of the production. In *Black Watch*, for example, the challenge is to make a transition from a presumably familiar and “safe” place—a pub in Fife—to a dangerous world on the battlefield in Iraq. The transition includes flashing lights and the sound effects of machine-gun fire, both of which are familiar theatrical fare. The introductory scenes are decisively separated from the remainder of the play when the live wire edginess of a knife pierces the fabric of the pool table from inside and cuts a gash from which the fully uniformed soldiers emerge. Similarly, Lear is anguished at the end of the play when he discovers Cordelia

hanged. In the bizarre circus world of Strehler's production of *Lear*, the ripping open of the fabric tent wall slams that moment into a real-life sensibility.

To create a performance that incorporates now you don't see it, now you do, the ensemble may review theatrical conventions in their play. Which conventions will they incorporate to support the aesthetic premise of the world of their play? We have seen, for example, how the National Theatre production of *Long Day's Journey* relied on the most conventional of Western naturalistic theatre conventions: the fourth wall. Myatt's *Boats on a River* required audiences to accept adult actors as children. *Natsumatsuri Naniwa Kagami* relied on a host of stylized kabuki conventions in the telling of its story. *The Central Ave. Chalk Circle* invited audiences to relish the fun of cartooned costumes and scenic elements or designs constructed from janitorial supplies. *His Dark Materials* implicitly encouraged its audiences to ignore black-clad puppeteers, while *South Pacific*'s audiences accepted that in its world, musical accompaniment appears when people wish to sing. The ensemble may identify the conventions embedded in the play they are devising and determine a point in the play where the convention is temporarily or permanently suspended. They must determine what significant reason merits the destruction of a convention that contributes to the coherence of the world of the production. When an ensemble wishes to introduce a moment in which the world of the play shifts, similar considerations will be involved. The actors may first examine what conventions will support the aesthetic premise of the world of that play, and then design staging that will transition to the use of that convention in full view of the audience.

Chapter Eight

Conclusions and contributions

Overview

The theatrical staging choices I have presented in this dissertation all serve to interfere with what Canadian writer John Gray (Conrad, 1999) calls the “guard at the gate of the mind.” Gray conceptualizes unconscious filters in human perception as a sentry, stationed at the edge of one’s awareness, defiantly refusing entrance to any idea that cannot be assigned a predetermined meaning and interpretation (as cited in Carruthers, 2010). What Gray describes as a guard at the gate, Martin Heidegger calls *vorsicht*, or fore-sight, which carries an additional sense that these predetermined meanings and interpretations are cumulatively forged by unremitting exposure to the pervasive ideologies of the dominant culture. Through a process of analyzing specific moments in theatre performances that were described as having fostered audience members’ receptivity to revising their preconceptions, I have identified and mapped how certain staging choices function to resist or even overcome the guards at the gates of the spectators’ minds.

My aim was to organize theories that emerged from this study into an accessible format, a lexicon that would present readers with a vocabulary for achieving theatrical literacy in staging choices that dislodge the grip of fore-sight. This lexicon offers no formulas to substitute for good playwriting, stage direction, design, or acting. Rather, it details a variety of considerations that an ensemble of community members—working independently or in partnership with professional artists—may bring to bear when devising a play about their lives and cultural perspectives. The overarching intention of this research is to provide a means for community participants to enter into more equitable collective creative partnerships with professional artists in co-created applied theatre projects. Furthermore, it is

my hope that others will use these findings as points of departure for continued explorations of the ways in which the staging of plays can actively promote vital encounters between performers and their audiences.

Summary of the core categories

Five core categories emerged from analysis of all the moments of aesthetic arrest in the study. In chapter 3, I showed how an ensemble of actors may reconfigure spectators' relationships with the theatre experience by interfering with unacknowledged "contracts" embedded in traditional Western theatre that tend to limit an audience's potential for a vitalized encounter. In chapter 4, I demonstrated that inclusion of certain inherently compelling staging choices can eclipse the spectators' reliance on assumptions and preconceptions by elevating their interest in—and concern for—the events and characters in a play. In chapter 5, I proposed that when actors are able to embody their insights about relationships and social circumstances through startlingly precise gestures, the spectators' preconceptions are forced aside by the sheer clarity of the aesthetic demonstrations. In chapter 6, I described how certain staging choices can operate as heuristic devices, promoting spectators' revelations about the material and anchoring their insights in personal experiences that counter their preconceived conceptions. In chapter 7, I provided illustrations of staging choices that galvanize spectators' experience of a play by rendering the theatre encounter as something that appears to be vitally connected to their real lives.

Contributions to contemporary understandings of theatre theory

In addition to the discovery of five core categories, the research process led to six key discoveries that contribute to contemporary understanding of theatre theory. These include new perspectives on: traditional conceptions of audience reception theory; the use of affect in relation to Brecht's vision of the epic theatre spectator; the effectiveness of "ordinary" gestures, as distinguished from social gestures, to dispel spectators' cultural preconceptions; the introduction of personal vulnerability on the part of actors to alter spectators' relationship with the event; the use of Aristotle's *anagnorisis* (recognition) to dispel cultural spectators' preconceptions; and spectators' perceptions of the difference between illusion and reality in performance.

The first discovery relates to the process of spectators making meaning from a play. One commonly accepted view of meaning making in theatre is the semiotic notion that artists embed specific meaning into a work through signs that are subsequently read or decoded by spectators during performance. A competing view is that spectators make meaning as their individual prior experiences meet the artists' work in the very moment of the theatre encounter. In this study, I bring a third, complementary perspective to these views by renewing attention to the extent to which spectators' culturally based pre-conceptions and assumptions decisively influence and limit their responses to the theatre encounter. I have supported the significance of unseating spectators' (or readers') unconscious projections of their preconceptions as a necessary prerequisite for achieving more vital meaning making in the theatre experience. This research indicates potential for a broader application of the theoretical contributions of Viktor Shklovsky, Bertolt Brecht, and others who address the

importance of responding to the perceptual blocks associated with habit and acquiescence to ideologically-based assumptions.

The second significant contribution challenges the presumption that use of affect in staging is generally considered counterproductive to fostering Brecht's ideal of the epic theatre spectator. I have argued to the contrary that in many of the staging choices described throughout the dissertation the use of affect can indeed dispel spectators' passive acquiescence to their assumptions about characters and circumstances in a play. The use of affect appears throughout chapter 4, (Compelling); chapter 6, (Heuristics); and chapter 7 (Touching the live wire). In each instance of affective staging, the spectators' emotional charge led not to sympathetic stasis, but to vehement outrage and concern. These indications of the use of affect to thoroughly engage the epic theatre spectator merit further investigation.

The third discovery is also linked to Brecht. In his essay, "On Gestic Music" (Brecht, 1964), Brecht dismisses "ordinary" gests as being less useful than "social" gests as a means of promoting social critique among spectators. This devaluation of the social relevance of ordinary gests is considered to be conventional wisdom. However, throughout chapter 4 (Gest), I provide multiple illustrations that demonstrate how even so-called ordinary gests can serve to shatter spectators' cultural preconceptions by delivering quintessential physical embodiments of a character's relationship, emotional state, social circumstances, or experience. If the performance of an ordinary gest during an applied theatre production is able to move audience members to reevaluate their preconceptions about characters from cultural milieus different from theirs, it makes a socially relevant contribution.

The fourth significant contribution extends the potential for applications of key ideas in the work of Julie Salverson, who writes on the significance of introducing vulnerability on

the part of actors to dramatically alter spectators' relationships with the theatre encounter. In chapter 1 (Subverting [or reconfiguring] the contracts), I offer a complement to Dr. Salverson's work by indicating a range of practical approaches to decentring the primacy of the actors' status. All of these staging strategies serve to reconfigure the relationship between performer and audience, and to encourage the potential for more vitalized encounters in performance.

The fifth contribution reconceives Aristotle's *anagnorisis* (recognition) as a heuristic staging strategy. In chapter 6 (Heuristics), I show how this ancient theatrical device achieves renewed relevance when it can be employed to unseat the foundations of spectators' cultural preconceptions. By establishing conditions in staging that initially encourage spectators to indulge in their assumptions, and then introducing information that leads them to experience a disorienting dilemma, *anagnorisis* has the potential to lead audience members to radical reappraisals of those assumptions.

The sixth discovery is a hypothesis that emerged as a result of examining the phenomenon of spectators' perceptions that a "real life" event was unfolding during a play. My interpretation of the data is that a significant distinction can be drawn between "the world of the play" and "the world of the production." When staging appears to interrupt the coherence of the world of the production (i.e., the organized event that is being presented, not the world of the play itself), it creates the impression among spectators that a real event is making an incursion into theatre encounter.

Contributions to grounded theory methodology

This project demonstrates three useful contributions to the continuing development of grounded theory methodology. Along with offering a fresh approach to collecting data from a geographically diverse pool of informants, and an innovative technique for obtaining informed consent from study participants, the project shows how a grounded theory methodology may be usefully applied to generating theory about artistic, aesthetic phenomena by redefining the notion of “rich data.”

Grounded theory projects typically involve soliciting and engaging participation from informants during person-to-person interviews or focus groups. Involving a purposive pool of respondents from among geographically widespread, high profile professionals and academics can present a challenge for grounded theory researchers, or any researchers, when the potential informants’ participation competes with their prior commitments and pressing deadlines. To address this challenge, I combined direct mail (and e-mail) solicitation with a research website. Expressly designed to be graphically compelling and easily navigable, the initial query and the website intrigued many busy professionals who contributed their time, effort, and expertise. Furthermore, I considered the data received by these relatively brief accounts to be only the initial data set in the study. By requesting that the informants include specific details about the theatre, city, and year of the production they saw, I was able to triangulate their accounts with extant texts in critics’ reviews and in the literature. I have shown how the use of a dedicated research website can extend Glaser’s (1978) support for relying on extant texts in a grounded theory study. A website can facilitate the ease with which a wide pool of informants may submit contributions to a study online. These initial data can then serve as leads to uncovering a larger pool of extant data.

This entire project is based on the pursuit of achieving equity in relationships. Like Freirean pedagogy that is built on a foundation of mutual trust and respect, the intent of this project is to promote more equitable relationships among community participants and applied theatre artists. The same dedication to establishing mutual trust and respect among partners is built into the informed consent process that is a necessary component all of university-sponsored research. A researcher must not see informants merely as resources for data that can be extracted for his research purposes. A rigorous informed consent process is intended to ensure that both parties are clear about the relationship that is being established in the research project and are apprised of the risks and benefits all parties face. That said, it can be a delicate matter for a researcher to determine when in the process of relationship building she should ask a potential informant to read and sign a typically lengthy and detailed ethical consent form. The logistics of introducing this step in the process can prove to be particularly awkward when responses are solicited online from individuals who live in geographically distant locations and who are unknown to the researcher. These individuals may view the task of reading, signing, and sending a consent form to the researcher as an obstacle to their participation, rather than recognizing it as an obligation of ethical research practice. For the project, I employed a creative approach to this challenge. Inspired by the clickable license agreement forms associated with computer software updates, the website incorporated a consent form that resembled these familiar web-based procedures. Visitors to the research website who clicked on the tab to submit a story were initially directed to a scrollable ethical consent form, and were only advanced to the story contribution page once they had given consent by electronically signing the form. This electronic pass-through facilitated an

effective ethical consent process in a project directed to geographically distant individuals who were technologically literate in a research process that presented minimal risk.

With this project, I have introduced a redefinition of what may be considered rich data in grounded theory. Kathy Charmaz (2006) writes, “Rich data are detailed, focused, and full. They reveal participants’ views, feelings, intentions, and actions as well as the contexts and structures of their lives” (14). The implication in Charmaz’ definition is that rich data are associated with the participants’ responses to the phenomena being studied. However, by requesting informants to describe moments of aesthetic arrest in theatre performances, I was choosing to focus primarily on the staging event itself. In other words, my analysis emerged from constant comparison of what informants were responding to from one play to the next, rather than constant comparison of the informants’ “views, feelings, intentions, and actions.” For example, a description of the staging in an intimate community-based play in The Netherlands was compared to the events that unfolded in the Bronx when a homeless man was welcomed to the stage by a professional dancer. These two descriptions were compared to the staging of actors during the curtain call of a Broadway play. The respondents’ feelings intentions, and actions figured in the analysis, but it was the coding of what was happening on stage during these reportedly exceptional moments in performance that led me, in that instance, to theorize a sub-category about the significance of displays of generosity or love requiring personal sacrifice. I have demonstrated that a grounded theory methodology can be usefully applied to analyses of theatrical productions by considering multiple descriptions of staging among many different productions to be rich data.

Contributions to applied theatre

Laurie McGauley (2006) characterizes artists' work in community in terms of a broad continuum of intentions on the part of the artists. At one end of this continuum one sees artists whose own artwork is informed by—and intended to express—what they interpret as a community's voices, visions, and concerns. At the other end of the continuum are artists working in partnerships with schools, advocacy agencies, or other sponsors who employ theatre as a pedagogical tool. Philip Taylor (2003) enumerates some of the various motives of these artist-teachers: to raise awareness among students or community members; to teach concepts; to examine social behaviours; to change states of oppression; and to foster positive self-esteem among participants (p. 20). As one moves toward the centre of this continuum from either direction, one sees artists progressively inviting more active involvement from community participants in the co-creation of the work. According to McGauley, what is radically new in recent years is what she frames as an *ethical space* positioned at the very centre of this continuum. It is here that artists and community participants meet to forge their relationship as creative co-authors. It is a meeting space of "participation, transaction and negotiation" that represents "a fundamental shift towards a notion, and a practice, of an inter-subjective, shared creation of meaning that we are still struggling to find a language for" (p. 7-8).

I do not claim that the lexicon of theatrical staging theorized and presented in this study will elevate novice participants to the same level of expertise as professional artists. However, when community members increase their theoretical and practical knowledge of multiple ways in which they may express their cultural perspectives through performance, they become more fully able to join in creative conversation with artists as they co-author

their play. This study represents my contribution to ongoing efforts among applied theatre artists to identify strategies that will enable them to meet community members in that ethical space of full partnership.

Contributions to radical pedagogy

I hope to have been able to make a small contribution to the important legacy of the teachings of Paulo Freire. One of the many ways his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and subsequent teachings transformed the world was by offering people the means, through access to literacy, to take control of defining their individual and cultural self-identities, to “name” themselves and to put a name to the social processes at work in the world around them. This study adds a new dimension to this pedagogical endeavour. Because all the staging choices presented in this lexicon are designed to dislodge spectators’ fore-sight, the actors are not only presenting themselves on their own terms (for example through devising brilliant gesticulations). They are also orchestrating theatrical staging that holds the potential for audience members to become more receptive to the performers’ cultural perspectives by establishing circumstances that inhibit the audience members’ preconceptions and assumptions. To clarify, I return to Julie Salverson’s admonition, quoted in Chapter 1, about the relationship between theatre artists, performers, and audiences.

When theatre artists and members of a community negotiate how the telling of stories will occur, both parties are attempting to set conditions of reception that will urge and allow both participants and the eventual audience to be impacted and changed by what they hear, resulting in changes to not only attitudes but also to behaviour. A climate of witnessing thus involves not only receiving someone’s story, but allowing ourselves to be changed by it. (1996, p. 182)

When applied theatre artists promote practice that is designed to give voice to community participants, and that voice is constituted as giving community members the discursive means to make themselves heard—listened to and understood—that discursive capacity includes more than mastery of expression. It also enfolds knowledge of how to provide an environment that enables listeners to be receptive to that hearing and, potentially, to take up a stance of obligation toward it. Here I am reminded of Barry Lopez’ account of the Inuktitut word for storyteller. To the Inuit, writes Lopez, a storyteller is *isumataq*, which he translates as “the person who creates the atmosphere in which wisdom reveals itself” (1986, p. 298). *Isumataq* represents the heart of this study’s contribution to radical pedagogy. The capacity to conceive and articulate one’s cultural identity to other people on one’s own terms is a core aim of Freire’s pedagogy. The capacity to create the atmosphere in a theatre encounter that enables others to *hear* one’s voice takes that radical pedagogical aim one step further.

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Appendix A
Query letters and data collection website
Query letter directed to most recipients

Dear _____,

I am collecting data for a study about those rare and unforgettable occasions during a theatre performance in which something happens onstage that manages, in a single moment, to produce among the spectators a sudden and unexpected emergence of personal insight, or the radical re-assessment of a long-held assumption. I am writing to you with the hope that you may recognize this phenomenon from your years of attending theatre, and will find my project intriguing enough to give me the benefit of your experience and a bit of your time.

I plan to develop a theory and conceptual language regarding these exceptional moments of theatricality: what some have called “moments of *aesthetic arrest*.” I propose to challenge conventional wisdom, which states that their impact is inextricably linked to the time and place where they are performed. By collecting diverse accounts of this phenomenon and then coding and analyzing what happened on stage in each one—and what led up to it—I hope to determine whether a pattern can be found in the way these moments unfold. If such a pattern can be found, I believe it may reveal a clearer understanding of the conditions that contribute to their effectiveness, regardless of the production’s cultural context.

As an applied theatre/community-based arts practitioner, I am interested in sharing this knowledge with community project participants in order to foster their independent capacity to orchestrate powerful moments of theatre to convey their perspectives to others.

If you have witnessed one or more of these moments in the theatre (or if you are familiar with an historical example of it) and would like to participate in the study, please visit my website: www.aesthetic-arrest.com and leave me a description. Submissions will be kept confidential: no other visitors to the website will be able to read them. I will be pleased to send you a summary of my findings upon completion of the study. Finally, if you believe that any of your colleagues may be interested in participating as well, please share this query with them or direct them to my website where the request is repeated, alongside more detailed descriptions of my background and the study’s rationale and methodology. If you have any questions, you are welcome to contact me or my supervisor, Dr. Warwick Dobson.

Thank you very much for your time and support. Your contribution will be greatly appreciated.

Query letters and data collection website

Query letter directed to community-based theatre practitioners

Dear _____,

I've been a community-based theatre director, producer and playwright all of my professional life. Some years ago, I produced a show with youth in which we created a brief moment of staging that had a profound effect on the audience night after night for the entire run. I later learned that some people had given a name to this remarkable theatrical phenomenon that stops the audience in their tracks, and opens up for them the possibility of understanding something in an entirely new way. It was called a moment of *aesthetic arrest*.

I recently decided to enter a doctoral program to come to grips with the experience of aesthetic arrest in performance, and to see if I could develop a theory and conceptual language to better understand it. I feel that if artists working with community members to create plays were to have a shared conceptual language about how these moments on stage can be created, they could have a more equal partnership in co-authoring their shows. Familiarity with a conceptual language about creating powerful moments onstage could also foster the community members' independent and ongoing capacity to orchestrate work that effectively conveys understanding about their lives, their concerns, and their cultural perspectives. I am currently collecting data for my study in the form of stories about instances of aesthetic arrest, and I am hoping that you will find my project intriguing enough to give me the benefit of your experience and a bit of your time.

I am wondering if you have ever witnessed a single brief moment onstage that managed to produce among the audience members a sudden and unexpected emergence of deeply felt insight, or the radical re-assessment of a long-held assumption? By collecting diverse accounts of this phenomenon and then coding and analyzing what happened on stage in each one—and what led up to it—I hope to determine whether there are patterns in the way these moments unfold. I believe such patterns may reveal a clearer understanding of the conditions that contribute to the effectiveness of moments of aesthetic arrest.

If you feel inspired to contribute to the study, please visit my website: www.aesthetic-arrest.com. Submissions will be kept confidential; no other visitors to the website will be able to read them. I will be pleased to send you a summary of my findings upon completion of the study. Finally, if you believe that any of your colleagues may be interested in participating, please share this with them or direct them to my website where this invitation is repeated, alongside information about my background and the study rationale and methodology. If you have any questions, you are welcome to contact me or my supervisor, Dr. Dobson. Thank you for your time and support. Your contribution will be greatly appreciated.



I was stunned—

I saw that show years ago and I've never forgotten
what happened at the end of act one...

Suddenly I got it

seared in my memory

I was taken aback when I realized how I'd always assumed...

All of us in the audience
were stopped in our tracks

Right at that moment, I felt a deep sense
of what it must be like for them...

Appendix A

Query letters and data collection website

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Hello and welcome.

My name is Will Weigler. I am a doctoral candidate in Applied Theatre at the University of Victoria in Canada. For my dissertation research, I am looking for stories about those rare and unforgettable moments in theatre in which something happened onstage that managed, in a brief moment, to produce among members of the audience a sudden and unexpected emergence of deeply felt insight, or the radical re-assessment of a long-held assumption. Variations on this phenomenon have been called: a stop; a coup de théâtre; a moment of aesthetic arrest. By collecting diverse accounts of this phenomenon and then coding and analyzing what happened on stage in each one—and what led up to it—I hope to identify patterns in the way these moments unfold. I believe such patterns may reveal a clearer understanding of the conditions that contribute to the effectiveness of these remarkable moments of theatricality. To find out more about me or the study rationale and methodology, follow the links below.

If you have ever been witness to this phenomenon (or if you know of an historical example), and would like to contribute to the study, please click on the 'submit a story' button below. You will first be asked confirm that you've consented to participate, a requirement of my university for this research study. Messages will be kept confidential: no other visitors to the website will be able to read them. If you have any questions, you are welcome to contact me by e-mail: [REDACTED]@[REDACTED].a or telephone: [REDACTED]4, or you may contact my doctoral supervisor, Dr. Warwick Dobson by e-mail: w.[REDACTED]@[REDACTED].a or telephone: [REDACTED]1.

Thank you very much for your time and support. Your contribution will be greatly appreciated.

Will Weigler, doctoral candidate
Department of Theatre, Faculty of Fine Arts
University of Victoria

about the Rationale about the Methodology about the Researcher submit a Story

Aesthetic-arrest.com Welcome Page

Appendix A
Query letters and data collection website

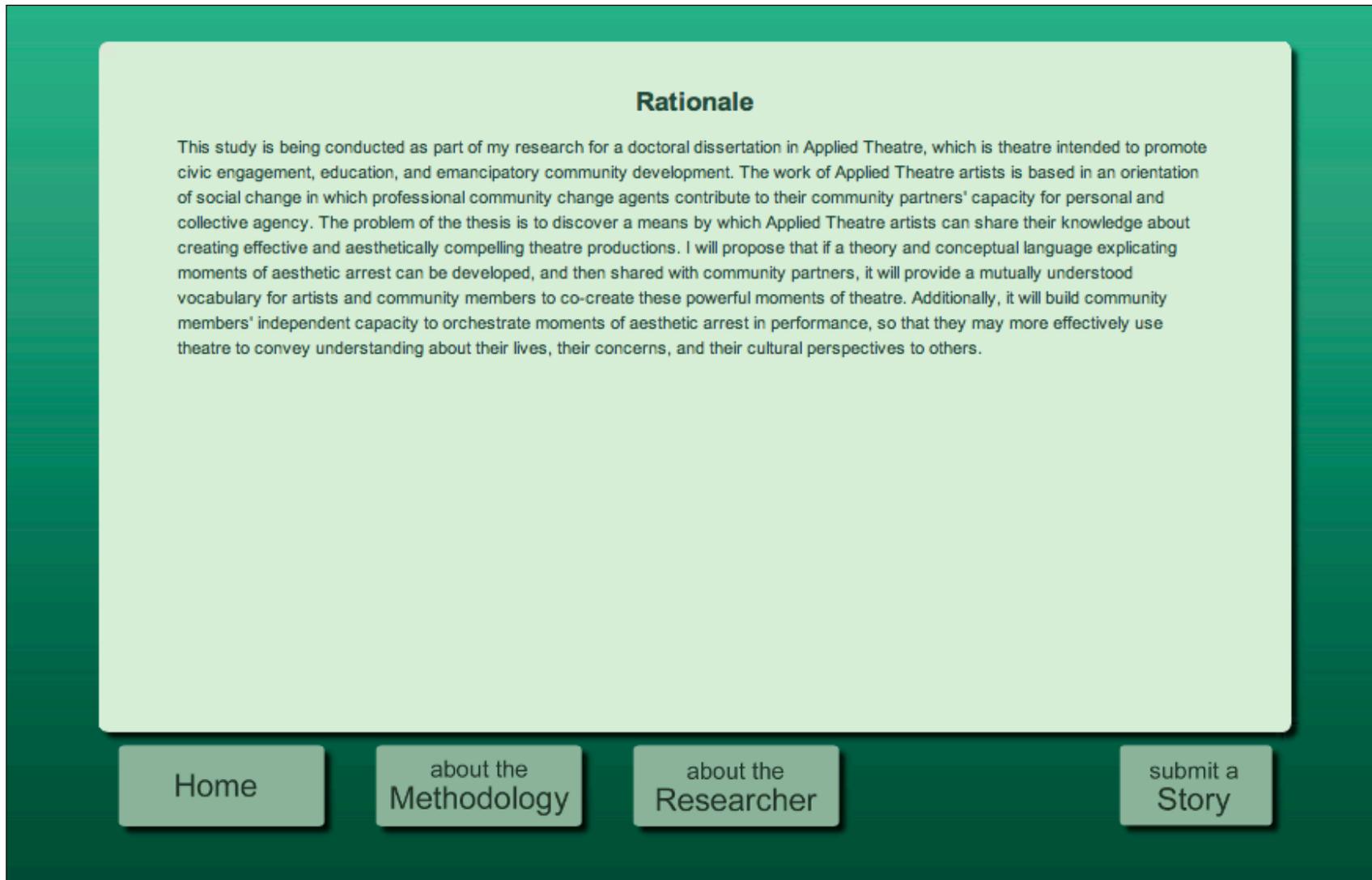
Hello and welcome.

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Will Weigler, doctoral candidate
Department of Theatre, Faculty of Fine Arts
University of Victoria



Aesthetic-arrest.com Rationale Page

Rationale

This study is being conducted as part of my research for a doctoral dissertation in Applied Theatre, which is theatre intended to promote civic engagement, education, and emancipatory community development. The work of Applied Theatre artists is based in an orientation of social change in which professional community change agents contribute to their community partners' capacity for personal and collective agency. The problem of the thesis is to discover a means by which Applied Theatre artists can share their knowledge about creating effective and aesthetically compelling theatre productions. I will propose that if a theory and conceptual language explicating moments of aesthetic arrest can be developed, and then shared with community partners, it will provide a mutually understood vocabulary for artists and community members to co-create these powerful moments of theatre. Additionally, it will build community members' independent capacity to orchestrate moments of aesthetic arrest in performance, so that they may more effectively use theatre to convey understanding about their lives, their concerns, and their cultural perspectives to others.

Methodology

First person accounts of aesthetic arrest submitted to this website will comprise the preliminary data set for the study. Once respondents identify moments of aesthetic arrest in specific theatre productions, I will conduct a database search for additional accounts by others who witnessed and wrote about these same productions: theatre reviewers, diarists, letter writers, interview subjects, etc. I am assuming that if a particularly outstanding moment of staging in a production deeply affected a lead informant, other witnesses to that production will remark upon that moment as well. These written accounts will comprise a second data set. I will attempt to contact the authors and interview subjects of these accounts, and will invite them to participate in the study by submitting a direct account of their recollections to the website. These accounts will comprise a third data set.

As individual accounts of this phenomenon become progressively available through website submissions and my historical research of extant writings, I will analyze them in a [grounded theory study](#): coding, memo-writing, sampling, and sorting in order to formulate a conceptual language and generalizable explanatory theory.

Home about the Rationale about the Researcher submit a Story

Methodology

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Researcher

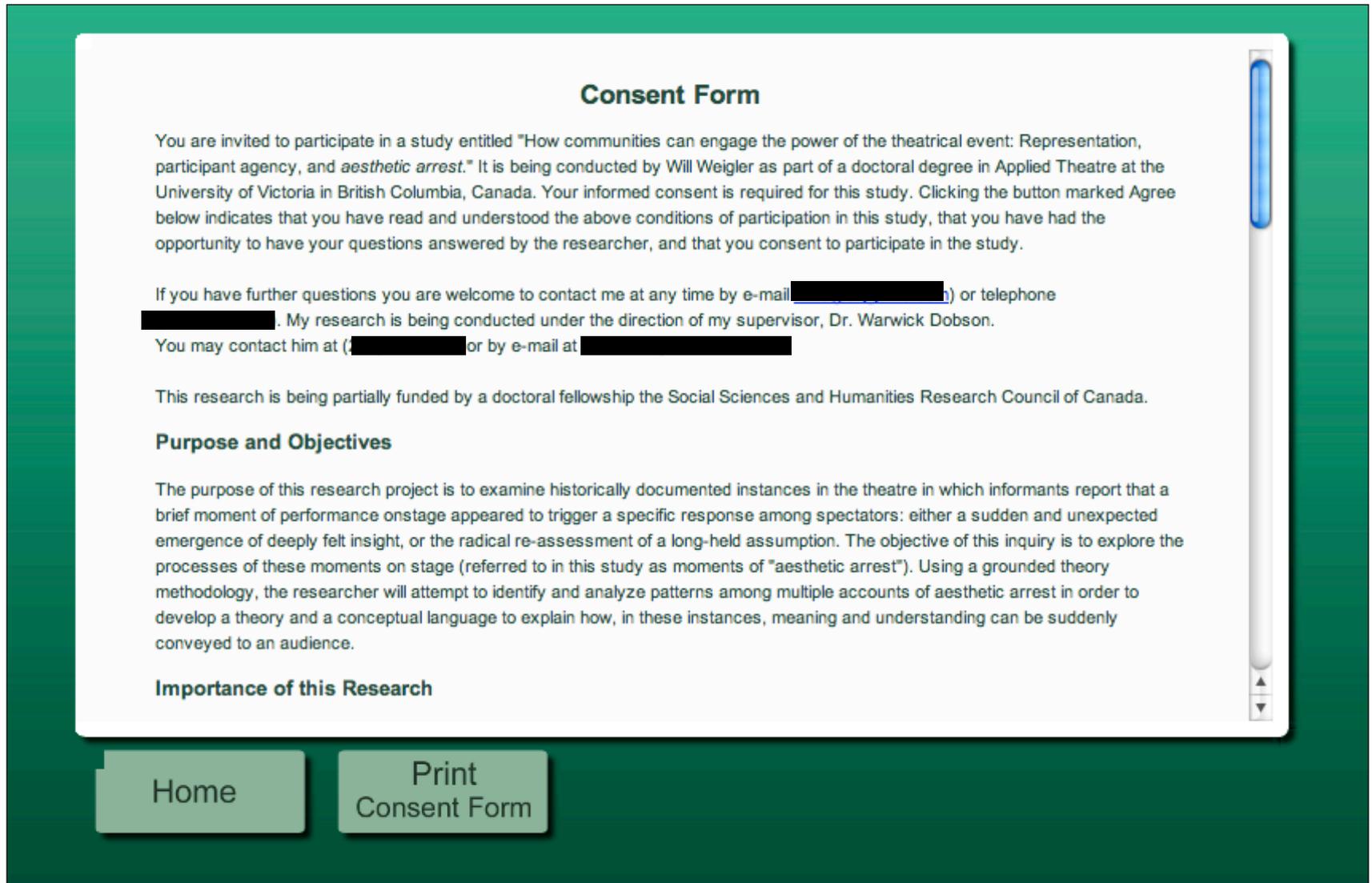
Will Weigler is a doctoral candidate in the Applied Theatre program at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada. Will has been a community-based theatre director, teacher, and playwright for over twenty-five years. He is the author of the award-winning book [*Strategies for Playbuilding: Helping Groups Translate Issues into Theatre*](#) and was an editorial staff member for the book *We Are Strong: A Guide to the Work of Popular Theatres Across the Americas*. His most recent project, just prior to beginning his doctoral program, was a large-scale musical play called [*Common Wealth*](#) produced in collaboration with the local Settler and First Nations communities in a small logging town and reservation at the foot of the Cascade mountains in Washington state. The play, involving an intergenerational cast and crew of native and non-native residents, explored the experiences of both communities: their historical relationships with each other, and their relationships with the mountains, forests and rivers that surround them.



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Researcher

Will Weigler is a doctoral candidate in the Applied Theatre program at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada. Will has been a community-based theatre director, teacher, and playwright for over twenty-five years. He is the author of the award-winning book *Strategies for Playbuilding: Helping Groups Translate Issues into Theatre* <link to online book review> and was an editorial staff member for the book *We Are Strong: A Guide to the Work of Popular Theatres Across the Americas*. His most recent project, just prior to beginning his doctoral program, was a large-scale musical play called *Common Wealth* <link to: http://www.earthwatch.org/newsandevents/pressreleases/2005_press_releases/06_01_05_skagit_play.html> produced in collaboration with the local Settler and First Nations communities in a small logging town and reservation at the foot of the Cascade mountains in Washington state. The play, involving an intergenerational cast and crew of native and non-native residents, explored the experiences of both communities: their historical relationships with each other, and their relationships with the mountains, forests and rivers that surround them.



Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a study entitled "How communities can engage the power of the theatrical event: Representation, participant agency, and *aesthetic arrest*." It is being conducted by Will Weigler as part of a doctoral degree in Applied Theatre at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada. Your informed consent is required for this study. Clicking the button marked Agree below indicates that you have read and understood the above conditions of participation in this study, that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher, and that you consent to participate in the study.

If you have further questions you are welcome to contact me at any time by e-mail [redacted] or telephone [redacted]. My research is being conducted under the direction of my supervisor, Dr. Warwick Dobson. You may contact him at ([redacted] or by e-mail at [redacted]

This research is being partially funded by a doctoral fellowship the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this research project is to examine historically documented instances in the theatre in which informants report that a brief moment of performance onstage appeared to trigger a specific response among spectators: either a sudden and unexpected emergence of deeply felt insight, or the radical re-assessment of a long-held assumption. The objective of this inquiry is to explore the processes of these moments on stage (referred to in this study as moments of "aesthetic arrest"). Using a grounded theory methodology, the researcher will attempt to identify and analyze patterns among multiple accounts of aesthetic arrest in order to develop a theory and a conceptual language to explain how, in these instances, meaning and understanding can be suddenly conveyed to an audience.

Importance of this Research

Home Print Consent Form

Appendix A
Query letters and data collection website

You are invited to participate in a study entitled “How communities can engage the power of the theatrical event: Representation, participant agency, and *aesthetic arrest*.” It is being conducted by Will Weigler as part of a doctorate degree in Applied Theatre at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada. Your informed consent is required for this study. Clicking the button marked Agree below indicates that you have read and understood the above conditions of participation in this study, that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher, and that you consent to participate in the study.

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Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this research project is to examine historically documented instances in the theatre in which informants report that a brief moment of performance onstage appeared to trigger a specific response among spectators: either a sudden and deeply felt emergence of understanding, or a sudden shift in attitude. The objective of this inquiry is to explore the processes of these moments on stage (referred to in this study as moments of “aesthetic arrest”). Using a grounded theory methodology, the researcher will attempt to identify and analyze patterns among multiple accounts of aesthetic arrest in order to develop a theory and a conceptual language to explain how, in these instances, meaning and understanding can be suddenly conveyed to an audience.

Importance of this Research

This research is being conducted as part of a doctoral dissertation in Applied Theatre: i.e. theatre intended to foster civic engagement, education, and emancipatory community development. The outcome of this analysis is intended to contribute to professional Applied Theatre practitioners' efforts to share their knowledge about creating effective and aesthetically compelling theatre productions with non-professional community participants. I will propose that if a theory and conceptual language explicating moments of aesthetic arrest can be developed, and then shared with community partners, it will provide a mutually understood vocabulary for artists and community members to co-create these powerful moments of theatre. Additionally, it will build community members' independent capacity to orchestrate moments of aesthetic arrest in performance, so that they may themselves effectively use theatre to convey understanding about their lives, their concerns, and their cultural perspectives to others.

Participants Selection

I am seeking to identify examples of a phenomenon that is generally considered to be quite rare: those exceptional experiences in the theatre that are unforgettable because of the way they so suddenly and so radically affect the spectators' established understanding. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are professional in the field who has seen a great deal of theatre in your lifetime; I am hoping that you will recognize the phenomenon I am researching and will be able to direct me to examples of it for my analysis.

What you are being asked to do

If you agree to participate voluntarily in this research, you will compose and submit a brief note on this website describing one or more instances of a moment of aesthetic arrest you have experienced personally—or have read or heard about—along with the name of the production, the theatre, city, and date (or as much of that information as you can recall.) If you believe any of your colleagues may be interested in participating in this study, you will be asked to direct them to this website so that they may have the opportunity to participate in the study as well.

Risks and inconvenience

There are no known or anticipated risks to you from participating in this research. Participation may cause you some inconvenience, including the time it takes to consider, draft, and send me a message, or the time it takes to forward my query to other potential respondents.

Benefits

If you would like to receive a complementary copy of a summary of findings, I will be pleased to email it to you upon completion of the study. On the submission page that follows, you will find a check box where you can request to have a copy sent to you. If I am successful in developing a conceptual language and theory to explain the conditions that promote moments of aesthetic arrest in performance, your contribution will have furthered scholarly research on the production and reception of meaning in theatre performance, as well as adding to the store of resources available to Applied Theatre practitioners working to promote the creative capacity of community members.

Anonymity, Confidentiality, and Disposal of Data

I am the sole researcher on this study and will be the only person with access to messages left on the website. Your message will be kept confidential. All electronic records of participants' submissions will be kept in password protected computer files, and all printed copies will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. All submissions will be electronically deleted or physically shredded at the conclusion of the study. You will be given the option to indicate whether you give me permission to reproduce (without attribution) some or all of your personal account of a moment of aesthetic arrest in the text of the final study verbatim, or if you would prefer for me to paraphrase your story. (Please note that once contributions have been submitted electronically, you will be unable to withdraw them.)

Dissemination of Results

I anticipate sharing the results of this study in the dissertation itself, a summary of findings, published articles, scholarly conferences, professional development workshops, web-based formats and, possibly, a book adapted from the dissertation.

Appendix A
Query letters and data collection website

In addition, to contacting me or my supervisor directly, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca).

If you give me permission to contact you should I need clarification about something in your contribution, please type in your e-mail address below; otherwise leave the e-mail box blank. Type Email address _____(Optional)

Type Name:_____

<PRINT CONSENT FORM> (for your records) [prints document or sends copy to e-mail]

<I AGREE>[submit button sends researcher e-mail of consent form and advances visitor to <submit your story> page.

In addition to contacting me or my supervisor directly, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca).

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Type Email Address: (Optional)

Type Name:

I Agree

Aesthetic-arrest.com Consent Form Page text (bottom of form)

Appendix A
Query letters and data collection website

Name of the show:

Name of the theatre:

Name of the city:

Year and month:

Please use this box to type or paste in your description of an exceptional moment in a theatre performance that that prompted a sudden and unexpected emergence of insight, or a radical re-assessment of some "truth" you had taken for granted. It doesn't matter whether the moment you describe was intentionally orchestrated or if it seemed unintentional. Obviously, you can only speak for yourself, but I would like to know if you have the impression that the experience affected many people in the audience and, if so, what it was that gave you this impression. Describe what you saw, and the reaction it prompted in you, as well as anything else about the experience you would care to add. (For an anecdote about an historical instance of aesthetic arrest, use the next box.)

[Home](#)

Appendix A
Query letters and data collection website

Name of the show _____

Name of the theatre _____

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Year and month _____

Please use this box to type or paste in your description of an exceptional moment in a theatre performance that that prompted a sudden and unexpected emergence of insight, or a radical re-assessment of some “truth” you had taken for granted. It doesn't matter whether the moment you describe was intentionally orchestrated or if it was unintentional. Obviously, you can only speak for yourself, but I would like to know if you have the impression that the experience affected multiple people in the audience and, if so, what it was that gave you this impression. Describe what you saw, and the reaction it prompted in you, as well as anything else about the experience you would care to add. (For an anecdote about an historical instance of aesthetic arrest, use the next box).

<YES> The researcher may reproduce my text verbatim (without attribution) in the final study.

<NO> The researcher must paraphrase my text (without attribution) if it appears in the final study.

<send> (sends me e-mail of consent form and advances visitor to thank you page *unless* yes no button wasn't selected)

When you press SEND, you will be given an option to contribute an additional story. (If yes or no button *wasn't* selected, the following prompt appears)**Please select yes or no to the question about permission to reproduce your story.**

<home> (returns visitor to Welcome page]

Thank You

Thank you, again, for your time and support. Your contribution is greatly appreciated.

[submit another Story](#)

If you believe any of your colleagues may also be interested in participating in this study, please tell them about it and direct them to this website: www.aesthetic-arrest.com

If you would like to receive a complementary summary of the findings when the study is complete, please enter your name and e-mail address below.

Name:

Email:

[Request](#)

Will Weigler

[Home](#)

Aesthetic-arrest.com Thank You Page

Appendix A
Query letters and data collection website

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Thank you, again, for your time and support. Your contribution is greatly appreciated.

<Submit another Story> [redirects to <submit Your Story> page]

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Name _____

Email: _____

Request [button] (If a report is requested, the following line appears): **I look forward to sending you the results of my study.**

Will Weigler

Aesthetic-arrest.com Thank You Page text

Acting: credible-believable	Foreshadowing	Personal connection
Affection	Fracturing/Interruption/ Rupture	Polyvocal and decentering
Ambiguity/specificity	Garlanding	Preconception/expectation
Anticipation	Generosity	Proximity: audience close to actors
Appeal or draw (seduction) drawn in	Gestus	Puts text into context
Appearance of injustice and unfairness	Gimmicks: good and bad	“Real” and mediation of “the real”
Audience aware of what is coming	Group versus individual	Respectful
Audience/actor contract: complicity and dialogic	Heuristic	Revelation
Encounter	Honesty and authenticity	Reversal: <i>peripetia/anagnorosis</i>
Blurred boundary	Hope, comedy, beauty, shifts to horror/horrible	Risk/danger/vulnerable “the saying”
Bravery	Humor/funny: comedy	Semiotic signs-referents
Building community	Image	Sensation
(Children as) Emissaries	Impact on spectators	Sentimentality and anti- sentiment
Complexity and depth	In the moment/immediacy	Shifting worlds
Continuum from ‘real’ to verisimilitude, to stylized/theatrical/artifice and onstage conventions	Intimacy	Silence/sound withheld
(Critics) resistance to innovation	Language/withholding of language	Simplicity
Death on stage	Love	Skill
Demonstration: model of conduct	Likability/warmth	Sound/music
Diminishment	Limiting the visual/gradual diminishment or appearance	Staging language
Drive/momentum	Manipulation vs. promoting reflexivity	Structure
Emotions	Meaning	Suddenness: the jolt
Engaging	Mediating/withholding	Unpredictable
Ethics	Meta-theatricality/diegetic	V-effect (strange-making)
Fluid	Modes	Venue
Forced on audience	Moments of AA from one performance to the next	Visibility of staging: lack of artifice
	Movement and physicality	Whipping up
	Off the rails	Witnessing and confessing

Annotated list of moments of aesthetic arrest described in the study

All URLs listed in this appendix were retrieved on July 21, 2011.

101 Humiliating Stories and *2.5 Minute Ride* by Lisa Kron both feature moments in which the main character appears to be **going off the rails** when unplanned events make incursions into the world of the play. In the former, they are somewhat frivolous. In the latter, Kron employs a theatrical equivalent of the rhetorical device *aposiopesis* when she seems to become overwhelmed by her own distress at an unexpected onstage realization.

A

Amy's View by David Hare was originally directed by Richard Eyre at Britain's National Theatre in 1997. In this production, Hare's theme about the electrifying potential of theatre as a living art form was palpably embodied in a **gestic scenic design**. The final seconds of *Amy's View*, is the beginning of a play-within-a play. Breathtakingly **beautiful** layers of silk curtains rose and billowed as two actors stepped onto "their" stage.

The National Theatre archives include a videocassette of *Amy's View* accessible to the public. Reference # RNT/SO/2/2/220

Arrangements by Ken Weitzman is a dark comedy about a fraught relationship between two sisters, Donna and Ros. At one point, Donna, who is morbidly obese, crams three powerbars in her mouth and eats them all at once. As an **affective punch heuristic**, the sight of her doing this produces an audible reaction from spectators who experience an empathetic response of disgust as they watch it happen.

B

The Bacchae was directed by Peter Hall at Britain's National Theatre in 2002. In the opening seconds of the performance, Greg Hicks walked onto the stage as an actor, barefoot and stripped to the waist, wearing loose white pants. He picked up a full head mask of Dionysus, placed it on his head and began to deliver the opening speech. Rather than entering as a masked character, the actor figuratively invited the audience to follow him as **the world of the play shifted** from everyday reality to the extraordinary world of the *The Bacchae* right before their eyes.

The National Theatre archives include a videocassette of *The Bacchae* accessible to the public. Reference # RNT/SO/2/2/138

The Bartered Bride by Bedrich Smetana, was produced at the Bratislava Opera House in 1999. The respondent who described seeing this production did not understand the Slovak language and the theatre provided no super titles in his native tongue. Yet he felt utterly connected to the experience as the result of a **subtraction heuristic**.

Black Watch by Gregory Burke was produced by the Scottish National Theatre for the first time in 2006, directed by John Tiffany. Eight specific moments of aesthetic arrest were noted in this remarkable touring production. The actors playing soldiers in the Black Watch regiment were consistently praised for the authenticity they brought to their roles: **fostering connection** (with the audience) **through believable characters**. The playing space, between two banks of bleachers and on scaffolding in close proximity to the audience, immersed the spectators in the performance, **reconfiguring the venue** from the distance to the action one experiences in a proscenium theatre. Through skillful playwriting, the experience of a soldier's life in war is resolutely presented as unfathomable-to-outsiders, and yet the play opens an invitation to spectators to be witness to the events of the soldiers' lives as **allies, not pupils**. The soldiers' unrelenting foul-mouthed cursing is an example of **taboo** that keeps the audience on edge. In one scene, the men receive letters from their loved ones back home and "write" letters in reply using an unvoiced language of gestures. The audience is witness to men who, although living under a constant barrage of stress, put it all on hold for a few minutes during these **displays of love in the face of difficulty**. The silent letter writing is also an instance of a **subtraction heuristic**, since the audience cannot rely on language to understand specifically what the men are communicating to the ones they love. Early in the play, the transition from a suddenly darkened pub in Scotland to the battlefield in Iraq is accomplished by two fully uniformed commandos emerging from within the pool table. They pierce the surface of the pool table fabric with a knife, slicing a gash in it. The very real destruction of the apparently ordinary pool table is a **deliberate breach** of the fictional world of the play. In the final scene of the play, the men enact a **gest** of hope and humanity in direct contradiction to the onslaught of death and destruction coming at them from all sides by unseen snipers.

A DVD recording of the play, including the BBC Scotland documentary *Black Watch: A Soldier's Story* was released in 2008 by John Williams Productions. A videorecording of the entire play is available online in 11 parts. Keywords: "Black Watch Play" or begin watching at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A4cIV-e1wcU>

Blasted by Sarah Kane was first produced at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs in 1995, directed by James Macdonald. The play incorporates **taboo** images of brutality in male-female relationships as a means to break through audiences' numbness toward atrocities of the war in Bosnia.

Blind Date was created and performed (largely improvisationally) by Rebecca Northan. The show was first seen in an early version at Toronto's Harbourfront Centre in 2007 and later played in New York and elsewhere. Wearing a red clown nose, Northan portrays a French woman named Mimi. At each performance she invites a randomly selected man from the audience to have a date with her on stage. Subverting the **actor-as-authority contract**, Northan co-creates the performance anew each time she does it. She is a **steward** of the event, **abdicating authority of command**.

A brief video about *Blind Date* featuring a few clips from a performance is available online. Keywords "Rebecca Northan" and "Blind Date."
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MMY654ptwsg>

Boats on a River by Julie Marie Myatt was originally directed by Michael Bigelow Dixon at Minneapolis' Guthrie Theater in 2007. The play revolves around the lives of three small girls rescued from forced prostitution in Cambodia. Three adult actors portray the children. By the end of the play, 13-year-old Yen has gone, leaving five-year-old Lida and eight-year-old Kolab at the shelter. The final image shows them gleefully riding bicycles in figure-eights around the stage. They ride offstage, then immediately back on again. But when they return to continue their figure-eights, the audience sees an actual five-year-old and an actual eight-year-old riding on their little girls' bicycles. It is an instance of **real world bodies entering the fictional world**.

Bonjour, la, bonjour by André Brassard was directed by Michel Tremblay at Montreal's Saidye Bronfman Centre for the Arts in 1976. The action all takes place with the characters seated around a gorgeous big supper table virtually with no movement for the entire play. The respondent was taken by the sheer **beauty** of the scene as it was presented and direct engagement with a **taboo** subject: sibling incest.

C

Cabaret by John Kander and Fred Ebb features a moment in which a group of young Germans sing what appears to be a sentimental folk song. The song shifts into "Tomorrow belongs to me" foreshadowing the rise of the Nazis. As with instances of dramatic irony, audiences familiar with twentieth-century history know something that the characters do not know. Hearing this song **cultivates suspense through language**.

The original 1966 Broadway cast recording is available from Columbia Records. The song as it was performed in the 1969 Allied Artists-ABC Pictures film is available online. Keywords "Cabaret" and "Tomorrow belongs to me."
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bs5bnVoZK4Q>

The Central Ave. Chalk Circle directed by Bill Rauch and adapted from Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* by Lynn Manning was produced by California's Cornerstone Theater in 1995. The first act featured a playful scenic and costume design aesthetic created from art materials. The second act was also fanciful, with settings and costumes created from janitorial supplies. The third act was a stark contrast, reverting to realistic costumes and set pieces, including police uniforms. It is an example of **real world bodies entering the fictional world**.

Chalk was an evening of butoh-inspired dance theatre created and performed in 2010 by inmates at Canada's William Head Prison working in collaboration with applied theatre practitioners Ingrid Hansen and Anne Cirillo of Snafu Dance Theatre. With only a thin sheen of powdery white makeup, the prisoners **risked personal vulnerability** exposing their inner thoughts and feelings in a performance for the public and for their fellow inmates.

"The children of Sejny" is the name given by writer and educator Kim Stafford to an unconventional performance that took place in the village of Sejny near the Polish-Lithuanian border in the late 1980s. A group of theatre workers collaborated with the children of that village to create an encounter among village adults and elders who rarely engaged with one another across cultural divides. The children invited each group of elders

to teach them (and the others at the gathering) a song. By virtue of the children's **low status**, and the **reconfigured venue** where the performance took place, the young people successfully created an atmosphere of openness, risk-taking, and mutual encounter among all present.

The Crying Game directed by Neil Jordan in 1992 features a **simultaneous recognition heuristic** that astonishes those audience members who discover an unexpected surprise at the same instant as the character of Fergus.

The Crying Game is available on DVD from Miramax Films.

D

Dialogues of the Carmelites by Francis Poulenc was directed by John Dexter at New York's Metropolitan Opera House in 1977. The audience responded to the **affective punch** of the horrid sound of an offstage guillotine and the **subtraction heuristic** of not being able to see the nuns being executed. Additionally, the **display of injustice** when the nuns were executed was embodied in a **gest** as each of their beautiful voices were brutally cut off in turn.

The videorecording of Dexter's production is not available commercially, but a clip of the finale is available online.

Keywords: "Poulenc" "Dialogues of the Carmelites" and "Finale"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GcUXp-fpiD0&feature=related>

Dirty Blonde by Claudia Shear was produced by Canada's Belfry Theatre in 2003 and directed by Roy Surette. Nicola Cavendish played Mae West. At one point she provocatively opened her blouse to flash her breast. This Rubenesque middle-aged actor demonstrated **risk of personal vulnerability**.

Dracula produced by Colorado's Steamboat Repertory Theatre during the 1980-81 season was mounted in a church while the company's theatre was undergoing renovations. Director Richard Owen Geer employed **sound, light** and **tactile response** in an **affective punch heuristic** during the scene when Mina and Van Helsing kill the vampire. At the moment they plunged the wooden stake into Dracula's heart, bright lights shone through the windows above, organ chords boomed, and a compressed air canister shot a piercing blast of frigid air out across the audience from a hose hidden in the sarcophagus.

The Dragons' Trilogy was originally produced Théâtre Repère in 1985 and directed by Robert LePage. At a performance in Chicago in the early 1990s, a respondent reported having a similar experience to the respondent who attended *The Bartered Bride* in Slovakia. *The Dragons' Trilogy* is an eight-hour, non-linear performance in French, Chinese, and English. The respondent's diminished ability to comprehend the words led to a richer experience in this **subtraction heuristic**.

E

Evangeline is a traditional Acadian story. In the mid 1990s, an amateur theatre group journeyed from their home in Louisiana to perform *Evangeline* as part of a large international Acadian reunion in New Brunswick. It was after the performance of their play that the audience of largely Acadian Canadians realized just how much dedication and effort it had taken for this group to make the long trek north. Most of the people involved in the production of *Evangeline* had never been to Canada, and yet it was clear that they felt being Acadian was a beloved part of their self-identity. This **demonstration of love that required personal sacrifice** was exceptionally moving to the audience.

F

Los Faustinos by Bernardo Solano was Cornerstone Theater Company's 1994 South Los Angeles adaptation of Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, directed by Juliette Carrillo. In a dramatic moment in the play, the character Martin Faustino is shot. In this production, La Muerte (Death) took the bullet from the barrel of the gun, then walked it slowly and silently across the stage before placing it in Martin's chest, killing him. In this **subtraction heuristic**, the period of silence during that long walk gave audience members a break from the fast pace of a realistic scene to feel starkly present with the experience of a murder in the play.

Food Court by Back to Back Theatre involved actors who **risked vulnerability regarding their group identity** as people with intellectual/developmental disabilities. In *Food Court* they played people with disabilities who were shown as capable of horrid brutality and savagery. In one scene, actor Sarah Mainwaring performed **a gest of contradiction** when she responded to tormentors who tried to humiliate her character by forcing her to strip naked and dance. In response, Mainwaring danced with a sense of freedom and joy. The violent images in the play were mediated by a gauzy scrim in a **subtraction heuristic**. An experimental jazz ensemble, The Necks, provided a musical soundscape that supported the action onstage with sound-based **affective punch**.

Fragments of a Greek Trilogy incorporating scenes from Euripides' *Medea*, *The Trojan Women*, and *Electra* was directed by Andrei Serban at New York's La Mama in 1976. It featured an arresting scene with a **destabilized body**. In a segment from *The Trojan Women*, a young actor was dropped head first down a near vertical ramp and slid down it aching slowly.

FrogWoman by Christopher Danowski was produced by Stark Raving Theatre in Portland, Oregon, and directed by Sarah Hardy. The silly comedy was in rehearsal in late August of 2001 and the performances coincided with the attack on the World Trade Center that year. Most of the country was in a state of bewilderment following the events of September 11 and the audience was not at all sure whether laughter was appropriate. The sheer **hilarity** of the performance cut through their hesitation and the laughter rang out.

G

Larry Griswold (1905-1996) was an accomplished trampolinist renowned for his “Drunken Clown Act” in which he appeared to be completely out of control and in physical danger of slipping and falling off his diving board scaffold. Griswold’s **destabilized body** kept audiences enthralled.

A video clip of Griswold in his 1951 appearance on the Frank Sinatra show is available online. Keywords “Larry Griswold.”
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T89HO_qIMyo

H

His Dark Materials adapted by Nicholas Wright from the novels of Philip Pullman premiered at Britain’s National Theatre 2003, directed by Nicholas Hytner. In this richly theatrical epic production, a few instances of aesthetic arrest included a scene when dozens of spectres from the land of the dead made an entrance that was unsettlingly effective through the literal use of smoke and mirrors. In a **subtraction heuristic**, the audience saw the spectres coming toward them through a fog-filled stage. But the audience was actually seeing enormous mirrors on stage; the spectres were coming from behind them, down the aisles from the back of the auditorium. Another astonishing moment of aesthetic arrest involved actor-puppeteer Samuel Barnett who remained onstage for virtually the entire play operating various puppet manifestations of the character Pantalaimon. Dressed in black, the puppeteer’s face was hidden by a black balaclava. After hours of watching the play, the audience had grown accustomed to the theatrical convention of ignoring his physical presence onstage. They were floored when, without warning, he lifted the balaclava from his face and became a **live wire** presence in an instance of **now you don’t see it, now you do**. Designer Michael Curry’s puppets were acknowledged for being especially **compelling** as a result of their **beauty**.

The National Theatre archives include a videocassette of parts one and two. They are accessible to the public. Reference # RNT/SO/2/2/219 and RNT/SO/2/2/220

The Homecoming by Harold Pinter demonstrates the power of **words and pauses used as affective punch**.

A film adaptation featuring much of the original London premiere cast is available from The American Film Theatre Collection. A boxed DVD set of the 1973-74 season, which includes *The Homecoming*, was released by Kino International in 2008.

I

Inside Al by David S. Baker features a character with cerebral palsy. Al’s outward appearance visually reinforces attitudes the audience members may have toward a person with a disability. Another character, Inside Al, stands nearby Al throughout the play and expresses what Al is thinking and feeling. Audience members may find themselves thrust back and forth between their habitual responses to the sight of a person with a disability and the insights they gain by access to Al’s inner thoughts. It is an **oscillating recognition heuristic**.

In White America was The Free Southern Theater’s inaugural show. Adapted by the company from Martin Duberman’s script, they toured the production to sixteen southern cities and

towns during the “Mississippi Freedom Summer” of 1964. The performance began when the actors, who were seated among the audience members, rose one by one and began to sing the Civil Rights song, “Oh Freedom!” It was a powerful opening to a play, and one that **implicitly re-negotiated the spectators’ contract with the event** by implying that the performance was in the same vein as political meetings of the time, meetings that often incorporated singing. One night in Greenville, Mississippi, a man in the audience was carried away by the moment. He stood to join the actors in singing and walked with them to take a place on the stage.

J

Journey’s End, about British soldiers in the trenches of France at the end of World War I, was written in 1928 by R.C. Sherriff. David Grindley’s 2007 revival (a remount of his 2004 London production) was noted for its exceptional curtain call. All the characters are killed by a German bomb in the final seconds of the play. Grindley staged the explosion in the dark with the curtain quickly rung down, followed first by an extended silence, and then the sound of birds. It was a **subtraction heuristic**. Next, the curtain rose to reveal an enormous reproduction of a portion of the Menin Gate memorial at Ypres, Belgium, showing the names of thousands of soldiers killed in that war. The actors, in costume, stood at attention on the stage, deferring their time to take bows to honour the real heroes of the story. Through two blackouts they remained there, demonstrating a generosity of spirit instead of grabbing the spotlight for themselves. A small sacrifice on their parts, but a sacrifice nonetheless. It was a **display of generosity or love that requires personal sacrifice**.

K

King Lear directed by Giorgio Strehler in 1972 featured an arresting moment at the end of the play when the back wall of the fabric canvas tent that had established the boundary of the illusionary world of the play was ripped open in a **deliberate breach**. Through the gash came Lear, distraught, carrying the body of Cordelia.

L

The Labyrinth was created in the 1990s by Taller Investigacion de la Imagen Theatral of Colombia, directed by Enrique Vargas. Part theatre, part performance-based installation, the *The Labyrinth*, also known as *Ariadne’s Thread*, blurred the boundaries between spectator and performer. The spectators entered a labyrinth that mediated and denied visual and linguistic cues. It unsettled their equanimity and their easy capacity to assign predetermined attitudes toward what they encountered. It was a performance grounded in **subtraction heuristics**.

Enrique Vargas is now based in Barcelona where he is Artistic Director of Teatro de los Sentidos and continues to explore the trajectory of his earlier work in Colombia.

The company’s English language website is:

http://www.teatrodelosentidos.com/eo/index.php?idioma=EN_EN

A Little Night Music by Stephen Sondheim was directed by Trevor Nunn first at the Menier Chocolate Factory and then the Garrick Theatre in London's West End. In 2008-9, Nunn demonstrated the quotability of a **gest** of being unskilled in social mores that he had used ten years earlier in a different play. In this production, 18-year-old Anne Egerman threw her arms around her idol Desiree Armfeldt in an awkward hug that made it vividly clear how unschooled she was in social codes.

Little Shop of Horrors is a rock musical by composer Alan Menken and writer Howard Ashman. The original 1982 off-Broadway production, directed by Ashman at the Orpheum Theatre, featured a **tactile affective punch**. In the last second of the rousing finale, which warns that the human-eating plant Audrey II is planning to take over the world, hanging fabric plant tendrils dropped from the flies into the seated spectators' faces and laps.

Les Misérables produced by Cameron Mackintosh, includes an unforgettable image in the staging. When the platform turns to reveal the aftermath of the battle, the audience sees that Enjolras, the leader of the students' crusade, has been shot and his **destabilized body** hangs upside down on the barricade drenched in his own blood. In another moment from *Les Misérables*, a respondent reported having seen the original cast with Frances Ruffelle as Éponine. During the song "In My Life," Éponine learns news that breaks her heart. In a **gest** that epitomized her emotional state, Ruffelle brought her hand to her chest and closed it in a fist that embodied her wounded heart.

Long Day's Journey into Night by Eugene O'Neill was produced by Britain's National Theatre in 1971. Directed by Arvin Brown, it starred Laurence Olivier as James Tyrone. In this production, when Tyrone climbs onto the table to unscrew a light bulb to reduce the electricity bill, Olivier looked out at the audience for a brief moment, piercing the theatrical convention of the fourth wall in this otherwise naturalistic play. It created a liminal moment of **now you don't see it, now you do**.

The Lorca Play was a collectively devised adaptation of Federico Garcia Lorca's *The House of Bernarda Alba*, created in Toronto in 1992 under the direction of Daniel MacIvor and Daniel Brooks. It featured a **live wire** moment in which Valerie Buhagiar as Adela appeared to be **going off the rails**. Barely seen in the dim light on stage, she seemed to be doing something improvisationally that went beyond the expectation of propriety. A respondent was drawn into close attention in this **subtraction heuristic**.

M

Macbeth was directed by John Wood at Canada's Stratford Shakespeare Festival in 2004. Lucy Peacock played Lady Macbeth. In the familiar sleepwalking scene, the audience was stunned when all lights came up to reveal Peacock in a white nightgown that covered the entire stage. She wandered, with the fabric following her, until the end when she sank through the trap door centre stage drowning in the sea of white. It was her madness embodied in a **scenic gest** that was also breathtakingly **beautiful**.

Marat/Sade by Peter Weiss was directed by Peter Brook with the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1964, and later by Mervyn Thompson at the University of Canterbury, New Zealand, in 1969. For two respondents, the riot in the asylum at the end of the play created the impression of **going off the rails**. In the former, a male actor playing the character of one of the inmates attacked a female actor playing a nun. As she struggled beneath him, the female actor's contemporary underwear was seen beneath her skirts, adding a **live wire** quality of threat to the fictional sexual assault. In the latter, an actor playing the character of an inmate ran off the stage during the melee and leapt like a monkey across the backs of the seats. His apparent out of control behaviour unhinged the spectators' expectations of a play's illusion.

The Max Factor (later retitled *On his own two feet*) was written by Chris Hawes for The Dukes' Theatre-in-Education (TIE) program in the UK in the 1980s. As with *Inside Al*, the title character is initially viewed by the audience as a person with a disability, but then the actor playing Max suddenly turns to the audience members and talks to them unimpeded by his disability. He then returns to the world of the play and his outward appearance as a young man with a severe physical disability reasserts itself. This pattern is then repeated in an **oscillating recognition heuristic**.

Medea by Euripides was staged in the 1980s at the outdoor theatre at Epidaurus in Greece. 17,000 spectators fell silent when, after the cry of the first child being killed was heard off stage, the nurse turned to the audience and said: "Did you hear that?" A brief pause followed as the entire audience was gripped in anticipation of what they knew was about to happen. The offstage murder and the **period of silence** was a **subtraction heuristic**, while the nurse's expression of complicity with the audience's helplessness enlisted them as **allies, not pupils**.

Medea was directed by Deborah Warner at the Brooks Atkinson Theatre in 2002 with Fiona Shaw in the title role. Shaw demonstrated both the electrifying quality of **going off the rails** and unexpected **hilarity** in a customarily serious play.

A videorecording of this performance is available to researchers at the Theatre on Film and Tape Archive at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center. Catalogue # NCOV 2687 (Restricted use.)

The Merchant of Venice is renowned for the trial scene in which Shylock is forced to renounce Judaism and convert to Christianity. This **display of injustice and unfairness** frequently provokes a strong response from audiences. When *The Merchant of Venice* was produced at Britain's National Theatre in 1999, directed by Trevor Nunn, it featured the gest described above in *A Little Night Music*. Jessica displayed the **gest** of being unskilled in social mores of the well-to-do Christians when she threw her arms around Portia in a big hug.

The National Theatre archives include a videocassette of this production accessible to the public. Reference # RNT/SO/2/2/75

A Midsummer's Night's Dream was directed in Dusseldorf in 1996 by Karen Beier. Her production featured an ensemble of actors from all over Europe who performed the play in nine languages. In an astonishing scene, the transition from court to forest involved actors

changing from drab business attire to fantastical clown outfits in full view of the audience, inviting the spectators to watch as **the world of the play shifted**.

A videorecording of Beier's production called *Sommernachstraum* was made by Dusseldorfer Schauspielhouse and German TV in 1996.

Monty Python's Eric Idle reports that the comedy troupe's all-time biggest audience laugh came during a 1998 reunion show in which Python member Terry Gilliam appeared to have broken a serious **taboo** by accidentally kicking over an urn of the ashes of their late friend and colleague Graham Chapman. The audience was briefly taken aback and then overcome with laughter when they realized it was a practical joke.

The reunion show is available online. Keywords "Monty Python" and "Live at Aspen." <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JpL12ilpDnQ>

Mother Courage and her Children by Bertolt Brecht was a core part of the Berliner Ensemble's repertoire. In the title role, Helene Weigel created one of modern theatre's most enduring moments when she embodied the contradiction of her character as a profit-motivated businesswoman in wartime and also a mother. The silent scream is a **non-naturalistic gest** of the irreconcilable contradiction of her grief and the constraints of her social situation.

N

Natsumatsuri Naniwa Kagami (The Summer Festival: A mirror of Osaka) was produced in 2004 at Lincoln Center complex by the Heisei Nakamura-za company under the direction of Kushida Kazuyosh. The production was filled with moments of aesthetic arrest including the startling **live wire** ending when the hero and his companion were tackled by what appeared to be New York City police officers. It was an instance of **real world bodies entering the fictional world**.

O

An Oak Tree created and performed by Tim Crouch is an instance of an actor **abdicating authority of command by serving as steward of the encounter**. Crouch performs this two-hander with an actor who does not know the play and must rely on Crouch's guidance and coaching.

A brief clip from a performance is available online. Keywords "An Oak Tree" and "Tim Crouch." http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gIf3a49W_iI

Oedipus Rex directed by Tyrone Guthrie at Canada's Stratford Theatre in 1957 featured a scene with Douglas Rain as the messenger who tells the story of offstage events, chillingly **cultivating an image through language**.

Oleanna by David Mamet presents the audience with an **oscillating recognition heuristic** by progressively revealing information that shifts the viewer's attitude about what is happening in this relationship between a male university professor and his female student.

A DVD recording of the film adaptation of *Oleanna* featuring William H. Macy and

Debra Eisenstadt is available from MGM.

Orlando Furioso was brought to New York in the 1970s by Rome's Teatro Libero. Staged in a promenade style inside an enormous aerial balloon-like tent, the spectators moved around the open space following the action and drawn into it as it unfolded. The show **subverted the spectator-as-recipient contract** by creating a performance space that invited participation in the encounter. The actors also displayed **awareness of the artifice** when they operated the mechanics of the staging and engaged in the play as they might engage in a game.

Our Town by Thornton Wilder was produced in 2009 at New York's Barrow Street Theatre, directed by David Cromer. The production featured a **reconfigured venue**: the theatre space was converted to have audience members on three sides in close proximity with the actors (who also performed in amongst the spectators' seating). The entire production concept was designed around a **gest** of Emily's shift from unmindfulness to appreciation. A mundane, rehearsal-like atmosphere shifted suddenly into a rich and textured atmosphere when Emily's ghost stepped into her twelfth birthday. An **affective punch heuristic** added to the experience as the audience smelled the aromas of a freshly cooked breakfast.

P

Private Lives by Noel Coward was produced on Broadway in 1983 with Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor in the leads. The show had a built-in **live wire** moment when Taylor (as Amanda) asked Burton (as Elyot) if he thought they would re-marry each other. Burton played the moment for laughs, wincing for the benefit of an audience who recognized the obvious reference to the actors' real lives.

Proof by David Auburn closes the first act with the revelation of a startling surprise that it was Catherine, not her father, who is the author of the mathematical proof. The effectiveness of the moment is grounded in a **simultaneous recognition heuristic**. It is given heft by audience members' internalized sexist assumptions about the expected gender of a mathematical genius.

A DVD recording of the film adaptation of *Proof* featuring Gwyneth Paltrow is available from Miramax Films.

The Pied Piper of Hamelin was produced as a children's play at the Pittsburgh Playhouse in the early 1960s. An actor playing the Blue Fairy began the show by laying the groundrules for the young audiences. She expressly invited them to react as they saw fit. In one performance they took her instructions to heart and unexpectedly rose en masse to join the "children of Hamelin" following the Piper up the aisles and into the lobby. The Blue Fairy had **explicitly re-negotiated the participants' contract with the event**.

R

Romeo and Juliet was produced at the Derby Playhouse in England in 2005, directed by Stephen Edwards. In the opening moments of the show, Olivia Lumley as Juliet performed a **gest** that embodied an unconventional interpretation of her character. Just out of sight of her

mother, Juliet “bummed” a cigarette from a truck driver and smoked it with the attitude of a rebellious teen.

A Raisin in the Sun by Lorraine Hansberry was produced at the Goodman Theatre in 2000, directed by Chuck Smith. In the role of Mama, Irma P. Hall performed a **gest** of anguish when overcome by dismay that her son has stolen the family’s insurance money. She fell to her knees, clutching her womb—the memory of the pain of her son’s birth newly revived.

S

Sweeney Todd: The demon barber of Fleet Street by Stephen Sondheim and Hugh Wheeler is filled with songs that produced in one respondent sustained physical sensations from the very sounds of the music. He reported that the music is compellingly **beautiful** and captivating.

The original 1979 cast recording with Len Cariou and Angela Lansbury was re-issued in 2007 in a two-CD set by Sony Masterworks.

small metal objects, produced and created by Back to Back Theatre **reconfigures the venue** wherever it tours by transforming public space into performance space. The audience members are enveloped in the game through the technological device of headphones that place them in cahoots with the actors in the midst of a public arena.

Two clips from the production are available online. Keywords “Back to Back Theatre” and “Small Metal Objects.”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EUS-h6d4MmE&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TR4kP7dmIuY&NR=1>

Soft was produced and created by Back to Back Theatre. It **reconfigures the venue** by creating an unconventional performance space in a large, inflated, tent-like balloon. The spectators experience a **live wire** jolt when, at a crucial turning point in the play, the entire fabric shell that surrounds them is whipped away in a **deliberate breach** of the fictional world of the play.

The Tempest was produced at Milan’s Piccolo theatre in 1978, directed by Giorgio Strehler. It featured a relationship between Prospero and Ariel embodied in a **gest**: a flying harness that imprisoned Ariel as Prospero’s servant and also allowed Ariel great freedom and power. At the end of the play, Prospero unhooked the harness in a **gest** of liberating his slave. In this production, Caliban’s entrance occurred first in shadow. The audience heard but could not clearly see him. Expectations about a traditional characterization of Caliban as a monster were unseated when the young actor stepped into the light in an **incidental recognition heuristic**.

Several clips from the production are available online. Keywords “Giorgio Strehler” and “tempesta.”

An extended version of the opening storm sequence:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Znmlz66Hz8A>

A shorter storm followed first by Prospero and Miranda, and then Prospero and Ariel:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fqApV0drfvw&feature=related>

Rodgers & Hammerstein's South Pacific was produced at Lincoln Center 2008, directed by Bartlett Sher. During the overture in the opening moments of the show, and also just before intermission, the apron of the Lincoln Center stage drew back to reveal a full orchestra pit of musicians. They filled the auditorium with a robust sound. The theatrical convention that musicians in a musical are figuratively invisible was overturned in this instance of **now you don't see it, now you do**.

The entire production is available online in 12 parts via Live from Lincoln Center.

Keywords "South Pacific Lincoln Center part 1"

Part one begins at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jR1in9Q6_Lo

T

Twelfth Night, produced in Russian by the company Cheek by Jowl and directed by Declan Donnellan, featured Dmitry Shcherbina as Malvolio. He played the "Gulling Scene" in an unconventionally sincere manner, displaying an authenticity to the character that **fostered connection with the spectators through the believability of his portrayal**. In the final scene, a transposition in the text left the audience shocked as they projected in their imaginations what was about to happen. It is an example of **language cultivating suspense**.

Turn Loose the Voices was created in Portland, Oregon by an ensemble of children and teenagers under the direction of Will Weigler and Chisao Hata. In one memorable scene, a teen-age girl tells about her loving but unconventional relationship with "Chris." At the end of her monologue she incidentally uses a pronoun for the first time and the audience realizes that Chris is also female. It is an **incidental recognition heuristic**.

U

US was created and produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company under the direction of Peter Brook in 1968. At the end of the play, one of the actors appears to light a living butterfly on fire in a **display of injustice** that provoked many audience members.

V

Vanya on 42nd Street is a film directed by Louis Malle. The opening scenes of the actors preparing for rehearsal shifts seamlessly into the play itself in this example of **the world of the play shifts**.

A DVD of the film is available from Columbia Pictures.

W

Well by Lisa Kron features several **gests** of loss of authority, including some stage business involving a deck of notecards that appear to have the scheme of the play all worked out; they

are knocked out of Kron's hand by a character who shows up in the play uninvited. Also, a piece of stage scenery—a rolling bed—gets stuck, thwarting Kron's plan. The play demonstrates a **live wire** moment at the climax when an actor who has **fostered connection with the spectators through the believability of her portrayal**, makes a **deliberate breach** by what appears to be a difficult decision to step out of character as she enacts a **display of generosity or love that requires personal sacrifice**.

A videorecording of *Well* is available at the Theatre on Film and Tape Archive at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center. Catalogue # NCOV 2846 (Restricted to qualified researchers.)

The Wedding Play was produced in Belfast, Ireland, shortly after the peace agreement ended a long period of confrontation between Catholics and Protestants in that region. Amateur actors of both faiths demonstrated personal emotional risks to work together in this play after such antipathy.

Performances with unknown names

A 2009 site-specific community-based show was performed in the town of Cuyk, in southeastern Holland. The script was based on interviews with people from Cuyk; it was written and delivered mostly in their dialect, and featured neighbourhood residents in the roles. The performances took place in an apartment where audiences of twenty people at a time (also mostly residents of the neighbourhood) sat on benches. The play featured a moment in which an older Dutch woman called Mia **demonstrated an act of generosity and respect** toward a young Moroccan man called Hassan. She extended trust toward him despite her deeply felt pain stemming from when her son was killed by a Moroccan.

In 2000, professional choreographer-dancer Arthur Aviles was in the middle of a dance performance at The Point (a cultural and community development organization in the Hunts Point section of New York's South Bronx). A homeless man in the audience made his way to the stage and stepped up onto it. Aviles wordlessly invited the man to join him in the dance and they completed it together. Aviles **displayed an act of generosity that required** him to **sacrifice** his status as the focus of the dance.

In his book *The Empty Space*, Peter Brook describes a performance he witnessed in 1946 postwar Germany. For an audience of underfed children, two clowns on a stage used **language to cultivate an image** of wonderful foods that for a brief while filled and satisfied the children's imaginations almost as much as real food would have done.