Platform: Journal of Theatre and Performing Arts

Editors
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Submission Information
Platform: Journal of Theatre and Performing Arts is published biannually. Contributions are particularly welcome from postgraduate researchers, postdoctoral researchers, and early-career academics in theatre and performing arts. We welcome the submission of academic papers, performance responses, photo essays, book reviews, interviews, and new dramatic writing. *Platform* also welcomes practice-based research papers.

Papers should not exceed 4500 words (including notes and references). Practice-based papers should normally include images in j.peg format. Reviews should be around 1,000 words. Photo essays should not exceed 2000 words and 10 pictures. All contributions should be formatted according to the MLA style guidelines and should include a 200-word abstract of the article submitted as well as the article itself.

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Editorial

Since at least the early 1990s, theatre and performance scholars have conceived of the audience not just as an anonymous body of receivers, but as co-producers; this has been especially evident over the last few years. References to audience experiences as participatory, embodied, or otherwise 'active' in the creation and development of meaningful artistic experience has become increasingly common. Scholars of philosophy and the visual arts are making significant evaluative advances in this regard – Jacques Rancière, Nicolas Bourriaud and Claire Bishop are pertinent examples – and theatre and performance scholars are starting to take up these valuable theoretical tools. This issue of *Platform* celebrates the multifarious approaches to spectatorship and participation prompted by a diverse mix of emerging and developing theatre and performance forms: from rehearsed readings of works in progress, to the participatory challenges of 'immersive' theatre and socially engaged art. This edition considers spectatorship as a practice and looks to question or reorient notions of authorship and agency. Approaching what it is to be 'engaged' in theatrical practice, as a spectator or participant, the papers in this edition consider how intimacy and distance are being reformulated in both practice and research; they grapple with the mechanics of audience reception and propose critical lenses appropriate to a diversifying spectrum of spectatorship practices. Further, this edition brings together articles from both practice and research in an effort to demonstrate the variety of critical positions emerging in studies of spectatorship and participation.

This edition employs critical models valuable to the study of spectatorship and participation in a cross-disciplinary vein concomitant with a shifting conceptual landscape. Further troubling the simple binary between 'active' and 'passive' spectatorship, famously problematised by Rancière, this edition serves to highlight the inherent activity of all spectatorship whilst drawing conceptual limits around different participatory forms. The themes surrounding spectatorship and participation are not catch-all and this edition shows that it is useful to approach such performances on a case by case basis.

Rand Hazou's article 'Intermedial Voices' offers a reading of Australian theatre company Version 1.0's *CMI (A Certain Maritime Incident)* (2004). The article explores the effects on spectators of presenting documentary material through multimedia and theorises an 'intermedial' approach to spectatorship. This is useful not only for interpreting the mechanics of audience reception in such a context, but also for stimulating a fresh reflection on Version 1.0's representation of refugee and asylum policy in Australia at the turn of the millennium under John Howard's controversial leadership. A second approach to the mechanics of audience reception is offered by Jane Turner's 'Diegetic Theatre,' which reinvigorates the theoretical concept of 'diegesis' as a means of approaching the conceptually slippery practice of immersive theatre. Using examination of narratology as a tool, Turner interrogates *Iris Brunette* (2009) by Melanie Wilson and *Whisper* (2008) by Proto-type Theatre, arguing that narration is used to place the spectator both inside and critically outside of the theatre event.

John Bray's 'What's Wrong with this Play?' deals with new play development in the United States. The article explores the role of the audience as diagnostician and the extent to which audience involvement at staged readings facilitates or hinders the developmental process. Instead of asking how the spectator's claims to authorship and agency might be developed within a participatory context, Bray suggests that in the context of a rehearsed reading, audience empowerment might hinder the fruition of play texts as a result of structural limitations imposed at the level of production. This is an important point to make, as current debates on audience engagement tend to take for granted the positivity of

empowering audiences, without accounting for any negative artistic impact that this may have. Bray asks how the United Kingdom system of play development may be influenced by the U.S. model, and in doing so articulates important Anglo-American ties, strengthening future considerations and conversations on developmental processes from the perspective of the playwright.

The Artists' Documents section brings together accounts of two participatory events from the perspective of those involved in their creation. Allison Wyper's 'Witness: Notes from the Artist,' reports on a participatory performance which took place in the U.S.; it also evokes transatlantic connections, but in a politically and ethically charged context. The work was created in response to the notorious images of detainee abuse from within Abu Ghraib prison. The performance is documented here as a photo essay, created by the artist, that visually and textually comments on the implications of participation in both art and political systems. The artist interrogates differing levels of agency and subjectivity forged through audience interaction and complicity within performative acts of violence. Similar themes are approached in the second contribution to our Artists' Documents: Astrid Breel's 'Emancipating the Spectator.' Breel offers a reading of the artistic process behind photographer Manuel Vason's participatory project, *Still Image Moving* (2010). Through the author's involvement as artist facilitator, this photo essay presents and explores concepts of authorship and empowerment, examining what happens when the subject of a photograph is able to assert control within the act of image-making.

In view of the increasing challenges to arts research, *Platform* would especially like to thank the Royal Holloway Department of Drama and Theatre for their continuing support, both financial and practical. We are, as ever, extremely grateful for all the hard work of our peer reviewers, as well as those who have contributed book reviews to this edition. *Platform* will soon be searchable via EBSCO, an international academic database; our appreciation therefore goes out to EBSCO for their acknowledgement of the journal in their global network. As always, we would like to thank Routledge and Palgrave Macmillan for providing us with recent titles for review. Finally, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to all our contributors, who have shared their research and practice.

Adam Alston, Charlotte Hammond and Emer O'Toole
(Editors)

Notes on Contributors

John Patrick Bray is a lecturer in the Department of Theatre and Film Studies at the University of Georgia. He earned his PhD in theatre studies at Louisiana State University and his MFA in playwriting at The Actors Studio Drama School at The New School. John is a member of The Dramatists Guild of America and he is an Equity Membership Candidate.

Astrid Breel is a performance artist and PhD student at the University of Bristol. Her research examines the relationship between artist and audience and explores different forms of interactivity and participation. The interests driving her work as a performance artist are the way people communicate and interact, the performance of self in different circumstances and the performativity of social media communication.

Clara Escoda studied at the University of Barcelona and then pursued an MA in the humanities at Hood College (Maryland, USA), with a concentration on African American literature. She is lecturer in English and drama in the University of Barcelona, where she has completed her PhD thesis, supervised by Dr. Mireia Aragay, entitled 'Collapse as Resistance in Martin Crimp's Theatre.' She has published articles on Martin Crimp's plays and the ethics of testimony and witnessing.

Rand Hazou is an Australian/Palestinian academic and theatre facilitator. In 2004 Rand was commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme to travel to the occupied territories in Palestine to work as a theatre consultant running workshops for Palestinian youths. Rand's PhD from La Trobe University examined the latest wave of political theatre in Australia dealing with asylum seekers and refugees. In 2011 he was awarded a Cultural Leadership Skills Development Grant from the Australia Council for the Arts to develop the 7arakat or Harakat Project.

Karen Quigley is lecturer in drama and theatre studies at the University of Chester. She is currently completing her PhD at King's College, University of London. Her research examines the 'unstageable' in theatre and performance, questioning the implications of the word's historical and contemporary use. Karen also works as a lighting designer and is a co-founder of Dropstitch Productions, now Theatre On Call.

Poppy Spowage has recently finished an MA in theatre and performance at Queen Mary, University of London. Poppy works as a project manager and administrator for People's Palace Projects. Her work and research focus on the economic, political and aesthetic structures that facilitate socially engaged performance.

Konstantinos Thomaidis holds a BA in theatre (acting) from the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece, and a MA in physical theatre and performance from Royal Holloway, University of London (RHUL) where he is currently completing his doctoral thesis on voice pedagogy for actors. He has worked as a visiting lecturer at RHUL and Central School of Speech and Drama.

Tamara Tomic-Vajagic is a dance researcher whose interest in movement stems from her visual art practice. Her current doctoral research at the University of Roehampton in London explores the ballet performer's agency in non-narrative choreography from the second half of the twentieth-century onwards. As a lecturer at Roehampton's Department of Dance, Tamara

teaches undergraduate and postgraduate modules focusing on issues of ballet and dance analysis, and visual culture in dance.

Jane Turner is a principal lecturer at Manchester Metropolitan University working in the Department of Contemporary Arts. She studied intercultural theatre and spectatorial practice for her PhD at the University of Wales, Swansea. Her ethnographic research has focused on performance in Bali. She has published work on Eugenio Barba, applied theatre practice, contemporary theatre analysis and, most recently, performance and spirituality.

Allison Wyper makes live performance that destabilizes the familiar from a feminist, activist perspective. Bridging contemporary practices including performance art, theatre, dance and conceptual art, she generates a dynamic hybrid genre that vitalizes the performance space as a site of critical action. Collaborators include Guillermo Gómez-Peña and La Pocha Nostra, Sara Shelton Mann, Hancock & Kelly Live, Maria Gillespie, Michael Sakamoto, Kinodance Company, and Katsura Kan. www.allisonwyper.com

Intermedial Voices: Documentary Theatre and the Refugee Experience in Version 1.0's *CMI (A Certain Maritime Incident)*

By Rand Hazou

Abstract

This paper examines the potential role that media technology can play in the presentation of documentary material on stage. Using the 2004 production of *CMI (A Certain Maritime Incident)* by the Australian theatre company Version 1.0 as a case study, this paper focuses on key 'intermedial' moments in production, moments in which the asylum seeker experience is both mediatised and mediated by various technologies incorporated into the production. In October 2001, an Indonesian people smuggling vessel code named the SIEV X (Suspected Illegal Entry Vessel) sank in Australian patrolled waters resulting in the deaths of 353 asylum seekers. Accounts from the survivors of the tragedy were incorporated into the *CMI* production. Version 1.0's intention was to distance the personal accounts of asylum seekers by using digital projections and a computerised voice to strip the refugee testimonies of any human presence. However, despite Version 1.0's efforts to highlight the absence of asylum seekers and their voices in the production, *CMI* enacted an immediacy that was deeply involving for audiences. By situating *CMI* as an intermedial performance, the impact of the SIEV X survivor accounts on audiences can be read in terms of hypermediacy resulting from the simultaneous juxtaposition of the written text of survivor accounts appearing on screen, the heavily mediatised survivor accounts spoken aloud by simulated voice software, and the corporeal presence of the performer's body positioned onstage as a corpse and a symbolic reminder of the drowned bodies of the asylum seekers. Despite Version 1.0's specific intention not to enact a testimonial transaction where audiences would be compelled to engage as witnesses to what could be perceived as the authentic testimony of asylum, I argue that the intermediality of the production and the use of digital technologies produces a hypermediacy that works to both expose and engage the audience's desire for immediacy: the desire for an unmediated, direct, and transparent engagement with an asylum seeker's story.

Introduction: Australian Asylum Policy and the Resurgence of Documentary Theatre

Between July 1999 and December 2001, approximately 9500 asylum seekers arrived on Australia's shores seeking sanctuary and protection.[1] The conservative liberal coalition

[1] Since the development of Australia's official refugee policy, the vast majority of refugees resettled in Australia fit under the category of 'offshore refugees.' Offshore refugees are generally individuals who have fled persecution and have spent time in refugee camps run by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). The UNHCR processes asylum applications using the Refugee Convention criteria and appeals to signatory states to make appropriate resettlement of those granted refugee status. Offshore refugees differ considerably from onshore asylum seekers. Onshore asylum seekers include those 'authorised' non-citizens who arrive in Australia on valid visas, either as students, tourists or performers and who then apply for political asylum while in the country. Yet more controversially, onshore asylum seekers also include 'unauthorised'

government at the time, led by John Howard as Prime Minister, responded to this particular group of asylum seekers with a series of policies marked by what has been called a politics of exclusion (Carrington; Corlett; Fiske).[2] Under Operation Relex, the Government deployed the military to 'deter and deny' asylum seekers trying to reach Australian territories by boat (Corlett 56; Marr and Wilkinson 172). Asylum seekers attempting to engage Australia's protection obligations were physically excluded from the mainland, and transported to detention centres on Christmas, Nauru and Manus Islands under the terms of the 'Pacific Solution' (Fiske 221). Those asylum seekers who managed to penetrate the cordon of military security erected to deny them entry faced a range of administrative, legislative and bureaucratic exclusions (Carrington 187). The policy of mandatory detention ensured that asylum seekers were excluded and segregated in detention centres far removed from Australia's urban centres while their applications for protection were processed. Changes to legislation introduced by the Howard liberal coalition government restricted the rights of asylum seekers to access the courts for judicial review of migration decisions. Legislative changes also severely narrowed down the definition of the term 'refugee' used by the Federal Court and the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) in determining refugee status (Corlett 65-66; Manne and Corlett). Research for this paper was primarily concerned with documenting the Australian theatre's response to the Howard liberal coalition government's asylum policies.[3]

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arrivals who generally enter Australia without valid visas by boat. Although the vast majority of asylum seekers arrive with the appropriate documentation by air, the arrival of unauthorised asylum seekers appears to stir the emotions of the Australian public to a heightened level of anxiety and fear (Neumann 54).

[2] In response to the peak in numbers of boat arrivals seeking asylum, the Howard coalition government of the time introduced the 'Pacific Solution' which excised Australian territories from the migration zone, prohibiting asylum seekers arriving on Christmas, Ashmore, Cartier and Cocos Islands from applying for protection.

[3] It should be noted that Australian asylum and refugee policies have undergone considerable changes in recent years with the election to office of a Labor government under Kevin Rudd in 2007 who officially abandoned aspects of the 'Pacific Solution.' Under the leadership of current Prime Minister Julia Gillard, the Labor government has formulated new asylum policies including the expansion of the detention centre on Christmas Island and the introduction of what has been called a 'Malaysian Solution,' which will see asylum seekers deported back to Malaysia in a deal aimed at disrupting people smuggling operations.

These policies of exclusion were made possible largely as a result of a successful media censorship and misinformation campaign that served to provoke hostility and indifference to the plight of asylum seekers among the Australian public.[4] Journalists were prohibited from entering detention centres, except on occasional guided tours and only after signing agreements not to interview or film detainees or staff (Mares, *Borderline* 12). The government restrictions were considered so severe that, in 2003, Reporters Sans Frontières (Reporters without Borders) downgraded Australia's rating on its International Press Freedom Index. Australia fell from the twelfth to the fiftieth position in the ranking of countries by the degree of freedom with which reporters are able to carry out their work (Romano 187).

While journalists were constrained from reporting about detention centres and the impact of government policies on asylum seekers, these same restrictions proved to be a compelling provocation that incited theatre makers into action. Responding to the deficit of public information about asylum seekers and detention centres, theatre makers such as Alice Garner, Ros Horin, Linda Jaivin, and Nigel Jamieson, to name but a few, went to extraordinary lengths to visit detention centres, to meet asylum seekers and detainees, to document and record their stories, and to disseminate their experiences and accounts in performance. As a corrective to the government's media censorship and control, the Australian theatre witnessed a resurgence in various forms of documentary theatre engaging with the plight of asylum seekers in Australia (Gilbert and Lo 191; Jaivin 61; Litson).

Peter Weiss traces the development of the documentary theatre form to the 'realistic theatre of actuality' associated with Russian agit-prop, the experiments of Erwin Piscator and the didactic plays of Bertolt Brecht (247). The term 'documentary theatre' is said to have been coined by Piscator, whose political theatre epics not only utilised written documents performed in direct address to the audience, but also incorporated projected films and

[4] See Corlette; Gale; Klocker and Dunn; Lawrence; Leach; Pickering; Saxton.

photographs into the theatrical event (Irmer 18). Indeed, there is a direct connection in the development and genealogy of political theatre and documentary theatre and the advancement of technological media during the twentieth century. As Derek Paget notes, Brecht and Piscator recognised the ability of emerging media technologies of the twentieth century to replicate 'actuality,' a recognition that provoked a series of theatre experiments investigating the interface between theatre, technology, and politics (44).

The development of documentary theatre is directly linked to technological innovations in the media, the profusion of new media technologies in the public sphere, and the encroachment of these new technologies on theatre. Given these connections, this article examines the impact of media technologies on the presentation of documentary material on stage. Using the 2004 production of *CMI (A Certain Maritime Incident)* by the Australian theatre company Version 1.0 as a case study, this paper focuses on key 'intermedial' moments in production, moments in which the asylum seeker experience is both mediatised and mediated by various technologies incorporated into the production. Although the incorporation of electronic media into performance has a long history of practice and associated theatre scholarship (Auslander; Birringer; Copland; Jensen; Phelan), this article principally draws on explications of media and performance as outlined in Freda Chapple and Chiel Kattenbelt's edited volume *Intermediality in Theatre and Performance*. In this paper I will attempt to assess the impact on audiences of the staging of accounts by asylum seekers by examining the 'immediacy' and 'hypermediacy' that can result in intermedial performances that stage the interface between the live and the mediatised. While immediacy in performance relates to an effort to make mediating technologies transparent, hypermediacy refers to the way viewers are often made aware of the digital technologies mediating their viewing experience. Despite being confronted with the various technologies that can impinge on audience reception, and despite the potential that these technologies might act as a kind of barrier – distancing the

audience from material being presented – I argue that the simultaneous inter-play between the actual and the virtual, the corporeal and the mediatised, produces a hypermediacy in the production which evokes an immediate emotional response from audiences. By situating *CMI* as an intermedial production, I argue that despite the mediating technology (or perhaps precisely because of it), the intermediality of the staging produces paradoxical effects of propinquity and engagement; this produces a hypermediacy that works to both expose and engage the audience's desire for immediacy – the desire for an unmediated, direct, and transparent engagement with an asylum seeker's story.

CMI (A Certain Maritime Incident)

In the lead-up to the Australian federal election in October 2001, Howard government ministers sparked a political controversy when they alleged that asylum seekers rescued from a sinking Indonesian people smuggling vessel had thrown children overboard in an attempt to secure safe passage to Australia. In this same month, a vessel code named the SIEV X (Suspected Illegal Entry Vessel) sank in Australian patrolled waters resulting in the deaths of 353 asylum seekers.[5] The 45 passengers who survived the incident were rescued by Indonesian fishermen and transported back to Indonesia. The details surrounding the 'Children Overboard Affair' and the sinking of the SIEV X were later investigated by a Senate Select Committee in an inquiry called *A Certain Maritime Incident* (2002). This inquiry became the subject of a dark satirical performance entitled *CMI (A Certain Maritime Incident),* which premiered on 26 March 2004 at The Performance Space in Sydney.

Presented by Australian theatre company Version 1.0, the group-devised project involved the distillation of some 2,200 pages of transcripts from the Senate Select Committee's inquiry. While Version 1.0 presented material distilled from the transcripts of

[5] The X denotes 'unknown'.

the Senate Select inquiry that was 'quoted verbatim,' the company remains reluctant to describe the production as a straightforward piece of 'documentary drama' (Dwyer 131). This reluctance is due in part to the company's acknowledgment of other refugee documentary theatre works staged in Australia during this period such as Sidetrack's *Citizen X* (2002), Ros Horin's *Through the Wire* (2004), or Company B's *In Our Name* (2004). As artistic director of the company David Williams explained, such works share the perceived role of letting 'the hitherto silenced voices of refugees speak' (124). In contrast to other documentary theatre productions that purport to facilitate direct access to asylum seekers and their stories, *CMI* instead aimed to highlight the very absence of asylum seeker voices from the inquiry. The limitations of Senate Select Committee's powers to implement the principle of habeas corpus meant that asylum seekers were denied the opportunity to be present at the inquiry to face their accusers and respond to the allegations of their misconduct. Although refugees held in detention centres on Nauru and Manus Island were invited to give testimony via radiotelephone, they declined the offer after advice from the Department of Immigration that it could not guarantee that their testimony would not adversely affect their claims for asylum in Australia (Williams 125-26). As a result, the Select Committee did not hear testimony from any asylum seekers, despite purporting to be an investigation into their alleged conduct (125). As Williams explains, *CMI* set out 'not only to inform its audience about the absence of asylum seekers from the inquiry, but to stage this absence' (126).

Using various digital technologies, the enactment of the absence of asylum seekers in *CMI* finds its most significant realisation towards the end of the performance, with the staging of several accounts from survivors of the sinking of the SIEV X. Before examining the impact of the staging of these survivor accounts on audiences, it may be useful to introduce the conceptual framework that will inform the analysis of this key scene by examining the 'intermedial' nature of the production.

The Intermediality of *CMI*

The term ‘intermedial’ is generally used to describe the incorporation of digital technology into theatre practice, and the presence of film, television and digital media in contemporary theatre. Several forms of media and digital technology were incorporated into the staging of *CMI*. In collaboration with Perth’s Performance Video Intervention (PVI) Collective, *CMI* integrated the use of Ex-Sense lie-detection software into the performance, software which analyses digitised voice for pauses and other indicators of deception (McCallum, 'CMI Introduction' 139). In several scenes a computer monitor is positioned onstage that is hooked up to a microphone that several performers use to deliver evidence to the inquiry in their capacities as ‘witnesses’ and ‘senators.’ Throughout these scenes, the lie-detection software can be seen running on the computer monitor, providing audiences with a visual ‘readout’ of the veracity of the statements offered by the different speakers. The production also incorporates a video montage by Samuel James, including images of Parliament House, the interior of an unnamed vessel, various images of the rolling surface of the ocean, and shots of a receding coastline, all of which are projected onto a large screen positioned at the back of the performance space (Filmer; Trezise). In act one, during a scene in which Commander Banks submits photographic evidence to the inquiry, a photograph of an Indonesian fishing vessel overloaded with asylum seekers appears on a large television monitor positioned onstage. In act two, a live camera feed captures the various ‘theatrics’ of the senators, with assorted close-ups of the performers appearing on the large television monitor. Finally, the accounts from the survivors of the SIEV X are not only incorporated into the staging by being read aloud by the computerised voice software, but the words of the survivors also appear in text scrolling across the large screen that forms the backdrop to the playing area (Dwyer et al., 'A CMI' [video]).

What is particularly useful about the concept of the intermedial is that it addresses the incursion of the mediatised within live performance, offering a theoretical framework with which to attend to the possible impact of the mediatised survivor accounts staged in *CMI*. In their edited volume *Intermediality in Theatre and Performance*, Freda Chapple and Chiel Kattenbelt offer an explication of the intermedial which circumvents much of the troubled territory surrounding the debate regarding live theatre versus mediatised performance as epitomised by the opposing views of Phelan and Auslander.[6] Chapple and Kattenbelt define 'live performance' as 'the simultaneous physical presence of the performer and the spectator in the same space in the moment of here and now' ('Key Issues' 22). In contrast, 'mediatised representation' is defined as 'utilising recording and playback technologies, no matter whether what is recorded is played back at (nearly) the same time or at a later moment' (22-33). The authors also differentiate between the 'mediatised' and the 'mediated,' arguing that all forms of communication are mediated by signs but not necessarily mediatised by technology. With this, the authors provide a useful general conception of the live and the mediatised; 'live means "absence of recording" and mediatised means "absence of live"' (23).[7] Having laid the conceptual groundwork, I want to return to assess the impact on audiences of the staging of the SIEV X survivor accounts, by examining the 'immediacy' and 'hypermediacy' that can result in intermedial performances that stage the interface between the live and the mediatised.

[6] In *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (1993) Phelan defines an ontology of performance by valorizing the presence of the live body and the ephemeral qualities of performance as that which cannot be recorded and re-produced. In *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatised Culture* (1999), Auslander critiques Phelan's position and definition of 'liveness,' arguing that the very concept exists as a result of mediatisation and that there are no longer clear cut or hierarchical distinctions between the 'live' and the 'mediatised.' These two positions have established an assumed opposition of the live and virtual within performance studies, a binary which is usefully teased out by Chapple and Kattenbelt..

[7] Although the authors concede that the concept 'live' can be used in a broader sense to refer to live television and video, they assert that while such audiovisual media may be played-back at the same time, performers and spectators are nevertheless separated in space (Chapple and Kattenbelt, 'Key Issues' 23).

Immediacy and Hypermediacy

According to media and cultural theorists Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin, 'immediacy' is a common feature of digital media, whereby digital technology is made 'transparent' so that the viewer is no longer aware of confronting a medium but instead stands in an immediate relationship to the material being viewed (24). In contrast to the notion of 'immediacy,' the authors argue that digital media can also be characterised by 'hypermediacy,' which seeks to make viewers aware of the medium being used, and which works to remind viewers of their desire for immediacy (34). A simple example of hypermediacy might be the way 'lens flare' is sometimes inserted into animated movies as a visual effect. Lens flare sometimes occurs when light is reflected off a camera lens, creating a scattering effect sometimes appearing as a 'halo' when a camera pans across the sun or a light source. In recent animated movies, lens flare is a contrivance that can often be deliberately created by animators to help create the sense that what the viewer is seeing is somehow more 'real.' As Bolter and Grusin make clear, the two categories of immediacy and hypermediacy are to an extent mutually linked: 'If the logic of immediacy leads one either to erase or to render automatic the act of representation, the logic of hypermediacy acknowledges multiple acts of representation and makes them visible' (33-34). The authors also note that although hypermediacy and immediacy are opposite manifestations, they share the similar desire 'to get past the limits of representation and to achieve the real' (53). They define this pursuit of the real not in metaphysical terms, but rather as it relates to the viewer's experience, as that which evokes an immediate emotional response: 'Transparent digital applications seek to get to the real by bravely denying the fact of mediation; digital hypermedia seek the real by multiplying mediation so as to create a feeling of fullness, a satiety of experience, which can be taken as reality' (53).[8]

[8] While Bolter and Grusin appear to conflate the terms 'mediation' and 'mediatisation,' Chapple and Kattenbelt offer a useful differentiation between the 'mediatised' and the 'mediated,' arguing that while all forms of communication are mediated by signs, not all are necessarily mediatised by technology (Chapple and Kattenbeltm, 'Key Issues' 23).

Following Bolter and Grusin, Andy Lavender argues that the simultaneous co-existence of distinct media in intermedial performance can produce effects of immediacy that are deeply involving and more deeply pleasurable for spectators (56). Utilising a phenomenological approach, Lavender examines the 'visceral nature of spectatorship,' assessing the impact of staged elements in terms of their 'felt charge' (64). In intermedial performances, Lavender attributes this charge to the hypermediacy arising out of the simultaneous inter-play between 'the actual and the virtual, the corporeal and the mediatised' (65). He argues that it is in the very interface between the actual and the virtual, the corporeal and the mediatised, that spectators often find themselves enjoying or being drawn into intermedial performance (55).

Staging the Absent Body

The absence of asylum seekers was staged in a potent reminder at the beginning of the performance, when audiences entering the performance space were forced down a narrow corridor in which the actors lay motionless and naked. The audience were forced to step over the naked bodies in order to reach their seats, and the bodies of the actors became a powerful symbolic reminder of the asylum seekers drowned in the sinking of the SIEV X. Although the SIEV X tragedy was not originally intended to be a part of the Senate Select inquiry, the committee reluctantly examined the event largely as a result of the advocacy of retired diplomat Tony Kevin, who appeared before the committee to question the extent of Australia's involvement in the circumstances surrounding the sinking of the vessel (Williams 126-27). Although Kevin submitted several witness accounts from survivors of the SIEV X tragedy to the inquiry, the accounts were never read into evidence (McCallum, 'CMI Introduction' 141). In contrast to the workings of the inquiry that seemed to diminish the impact of the SIEV X tragedy and make the drowned asylum seekers inconsequential, the

opening of *CMI* makes the corporeal reality of the drowned bodies difficult for the audience to dismiss.

The enactment of the absence of asylum seekers in *CMI* finds its most significant realisation towards the end of the performance, with the staging of several accounts from survivors of the sinking of the SIEV X. In the performance, the survivor accounts of the SIEV X tragedy are projected onto a large screen in text form, while a computer text-to-speech engine simultaneously reads the accounts aloud. As the narration of the disaster begins, the performers strike the stage, erasing any trace of the inquiry, and substituting the main table used in the inquiry for a mortuary slab. One of the actors (Stephen Klinder) strips and lies naked on the mortuary slab while a pair of actors clean, tag, and prepare his body for storage. As the corpse is prepared, the disturbing survivor testimonies continue to be read out in the emotionless computer monotones: 'The boat broke up within seconds; the waves washed the family members apart. I saw a woman giving birth in the ocean, I saw my brother being washed away by the waves, I called out to him but saw him crying' (Dwyer et al., *CMI* 175). The computerised voice works to strip the survivor testimonies of any human presence, and as the survivor testimonies end, the audience contends with the visual impact of the washed and naked corpse lying still and silent before them (Figure 1). The silent corpse becomes a powerful symbolic reminder of the actual bodies of the asylum seekers that drowned in the SIEV X tragedy, the significance of which has been washed out of the original Committee's inquiry.

The last sentence of the survivor testimonies is looped, echoing repeatedly, 'I never imagined that the boat would sink … I never imagined that the boat would sink … I never imagined …' (Dwyer et al., *CMI* 175). This repetition seems to compel audiences to imagine what it must have been like for the survivors of the tragedy, struggling to survive in the cold ocean waters as the drowned bodies of women, children and loved ones floated

in the darkness around them. The echoes of the last sentence haunt the closing scene when the body lying on the mortuary slab speaks for the last time as Senator Cook, Chair of the Senate Committee, announcing the departure of the other senators and the ending of the official hearing. As John McCallum notes, the final scene powerfully suggests that the departing senators have wiped their hands of the whole affair, and that 'the testimony of the SIEV X survivors, frighteningly mediated, is left lingering, heard only by the audience' (McCallum, 'CMI Introduction' 141).

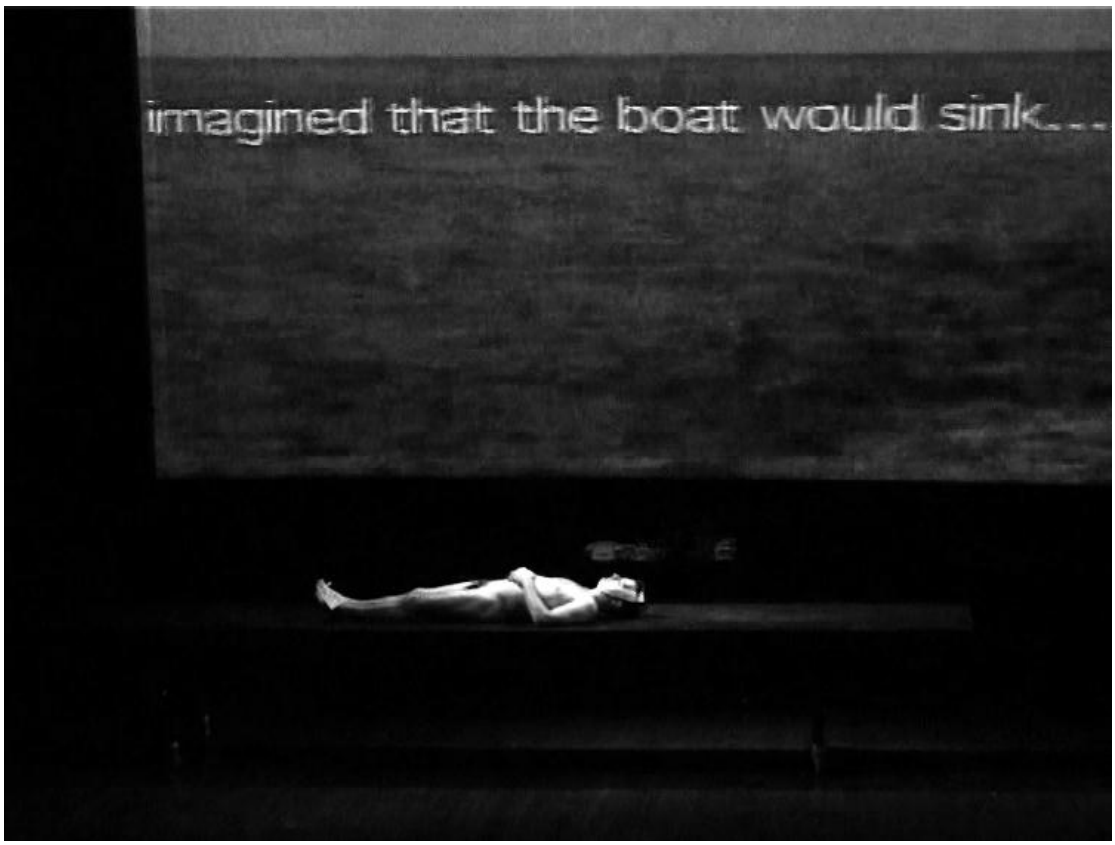

Fig. 1: Stephen Klinder as the corpse of a drowned asylum seeker in Version 1.0's *CMI* (2004). Courtesy of Version 1.0.

As evidenced by several reviews and as confirmed by various personal audience accounts, the final staging of the SIEV X survivor testimonies had a profound effect on audiences. In her online review, Rebecca Meston indicates that the ending engendered a deeply physical response: 'at the end […] neither my friend nor I could leave our chairs; our

legs too jelly-like to move, our hearts strangely beating out of control' (n.p.). Sarah Stephen recounts how at the end of the performance an audience member was overheard whispering to a friend, 'We killed them. We could have gone and rescued them, and we didn't' (n.p.). What has also inadvertently emerged through the staging of the SIEV X survivor accounts is the willingness of audience members to coalesce the various survivor accounts of the SIEV X tragedy into a single narrative, mistakenly believed to be the witness statement of a single survivor (Filmer; McCallum, 'Human'; Rose; Trezise).

The multiple effects on audiences of the staging of the SIEV X survivor accounts are somewhat surprising, given the company's specific intention not to represent directly the experience or views of asylum seekers. As Dwyer explains, no matter how much an audience might want to 'lean into a performance about these issues, ready and willing to bear witness,' Version 1.0 was never inclined to recount the experiences of asylum seekers by enacting an 'embodied presence' that would function as 'the warrant for a sense that some authentic dialogue is occurring' (134). Yet 'lean' is exactly what audiences did, not only willing to bear witness, but eager to grasp hold of what was perceived, by some, to be the authentic testimony of an asylum seeker hitherto made silent and absent. This occurred despite Version 1.0's efforts to distance the survivor accounts by stripping them of any human presence with the simulated voice computer software. Despite Version 1.0's efforts to highlight the absence of asylum seekers and their voices in the production, *CMI* enacted an immediacy that was deeply involving for audiences. How can the impact of the staging of the SIEV X survivor accounts be understood in the framework of intermediality?

By situating *CMI* as an intermedial performance, the impact of the SIEV X survivor accounts on audiences can be read in terms of the hypermediacy produced in the performance. This hypermediacy results from the simultaneous juxtaposition of the written text of the survivor accounts appearing on screen, the heavily mediatised survivor accounts

spoken aloud by the simulated voice software, and the corporeal body of the performer positioned onstage as a corpse and a symbolic reminder of the drowned bodies of the asylum seekers. By acknowledging and making visible these multiple acts of representation, *CMI* produces a hypermediacy that works to both expose and engage the audience's desire for immediacy: the desire for an unmediated, direct, and transparent engagement with an asylum seeker's story. In the context of a production that seeks to highlight the absence of asylum seeker voices, this desire for immediacy attains an added urgency. This, coupled with the 'feeling of fullness' and the 'satiety of experience' that hypermediacy entails, evokes an immediate emotional response from audiences, leading them to ascribe a sense of authenticity, immediacy, and reality to survivor accounts that are staged in a highly mediated, mediatised, and simulated manner.

By exposing and engaging the audience's desire for the immediate, the staging of the SIEV X survivor accounts also solicits the kind of empathetic pity common to humanitarian representations of asylum seekers and refugees. As Peter Mares points out, when viewed from a distance, displaced people are often portrayed as helpless victims who are deserving of compassion and assistance. Yet when asylum seekers make their way to the developed world seeking protection, asylum seekers are often transformed from 'passive objects of compassion into untrustworthy actors who provoke a sense of fear' (Mares, 'Distance' 330). Moreover, as Liisa Malkki suggests, humanitarian representational regimes often reduce refugees to the image of a mute suffering body, to an 'anonymous corporeality,' which not only reinforces a sense of a universal primordial humanity, but which also works to 'depersonalise' refugees by stripping their predicaments of political and historical specificity ('Speechless Emissaries'). The staging of the SIEV X survivor accounts in *CMI* unwittingly replicates some of the underlying characteristics common to these humanitarian representational regimes. The mediatisation of the survivor accounts simulates the distance

that Mares identifies, conjuring up representations of asylum seekers as 'helpless victims' deserving of Australian compassion and assistance. The staging of the silent and naked corpse not only operates as a powerful symbolic reminder of the drowned asylum seeker bodies, but also functions as a symbolic representation that reflects an 'anonymous corporeality' through which the predicaments of the asylum seekers are leached of historical and political specificity. The use of the voice-simulated computer software diminishes the specificity of the survivor accounts even further, eliciting a sense of universal humanity, evoking a sense of empathetic pity, and leading audiences to merge the separate asylum seeker narratives of the SIEV X tragedy into a single amalgamated witness account.

Kattenbelt points out that when media technologies are incorporated in live performance, instead of providing effects of transparency and immediacy, quite often such technologies are used 'to extend the lyrical and epical modes of representation, for the sake of the *intensity of experience* and the reflexivity of thought' (my emphasis, Kattenbelt 37). The intermediality of the performance provides audiences with hypermedial effects that are deeply involving and engaging. Moreover, the potential political consequences of this affectivity cannot be easily dismissed. Weiss contends that political documentary theatre 'takes sides,' demanding affective judgement from audiences in a process that rejects the kind of 'objectivity' used by ruling groups to excuse their actions (251). As political documentary theatre, the kind of judgement and engagement that CMI engenders from audiences emerges from the intermediality of the production.

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Diegetic Theatre as a 'Place' for the Theatricalised Spectator

By Jane Turner

Abstract

This article explores two theatre events that are considered here as examples of diegetic theatre. The two events, *Iris Brunette* (2009) by Melanie Wilson and *Whisper* (2008) by Proto-type Theater have been selected as they both use narration as a strategy to create an 'immersive' theatre experience, specifically second person narrative. They are positioned here as examples of diegetic as opposed to mimetic theatre. The 'immersive' experience is achieved by offering the spectator a position of participant observer, a position whereby the spectator is positioned physically inside the fictional matrix as an active participant as well as critically outside the theatrical event as an active observer. This immersive 'place' might have the potential to create a sense of interplay and connectedness between spectators and performers that resonates experientially for the spectator, but also has the effect of opening up a critical space where the spectator can evaluate the fictional world and 'characters' encountered. The article will initially draw on ideas derived from Kristeva, as well as Lehmann and Pavis, to contextualise the theatre events whilst also engaging with ideas drawn from narratology.

This article seeks to critically consider a form of contemporary theatre that engages with narration as a theatrical strategy and has the effect of producing a diegetic as opposed to mimetic theatrical event. The two theatre events being discussed here are Melanie Wilson's *Iris Brunette* (2009) and Proto-type Theater's *Whisper* (2008). Both theatre events focus specifically on the ways in which narrated text has the potential to generate a collaborative theatrical experience where the spectator appears to be integrally involved as both a participant and observer. This spectatorial position or 'place' is created in both examples being discussed here because the spectator occupies the fictional space as a result of the narrative voice speaking in the second person 'you.' This directly implicates and connects the spectator to the event. The argument being made here is that diegesis, in

conjunction with an 'immersive' experience, paradoxically offers the spectator a theatricalised 'place' that is both dynamic and critically reflective.

Fig. 1: Melanie Wilson in *Iris Brunette*, Battersea Arts Centre (2009). Courtesy of Ed Collier.

The notion of 'immersive theatre' being explored here differs from the recent spate of theatre events produced in England by companies such as Punchdrunk and Shunt. Similarly, the spectator is implied to be 'in role' but a key difference is that shows such as those produced by Punchdrunk require the spectators to actively follow the action being played out by actors across a range of theatricalised spaces. In such productions, as Sophie Nield and her posse of 'Spectators' note, the spectators' experiences are often 'pre-occupied with staying safe/invisible/out of the way/on top of the story' (Nield 533). In both theatre events being examined here the spectator remains immobile, in a 'place' that encourages an interplay of imagination and sensory experience evoked by narration.

Kristeva states that modern theatre fails to exist as it has no 'place' and fails 'to constitute a communal discourse of play (interplay)' (277). It is this sense of 'place' that I am arguing is created in these examples of diegetic theatre. The liminal space created between reality and fiction is a theatricalised space, or more specifically, in the instances of *Iris Brunette* and *Whisper*, a re-enchanted space that has the potential to 'constitute a communal discourse of play' (Kristeva 277) and as such, in Kristeva's terms, theatre is reinstated as an affective 'place' for both performers and spectators.

The performance *Iris Brunette* by Melanie Wilson (2009)[1] is set in a small rectangular space with a row of seats pushed against the four walls enclosing the space; there is an empty space at each corner and two small, low, circular tables positioned at the edges of the space with a pile of salt at the centre of each table. Audience and performer occupy the same small enclosed space that contains no evident theatrical set, costume or props; however, the space is theatrically transformed and an immersive experience created through the use of narration, sound, lighting and smoke effect. The limited audience of twenty enter the space and take a seat. An eerie sound fills, or consumes, the space and a theatrical 'fog' envelopes both space and spectators. Out of this 'fog' appears the figure of Iris Brunette, played by Melanie Wilson (see Fig. 1); on the walls indeterminate shapes emerge in gold and scarlet. She begins her narration, plunging us into a fictional world inspired by the experimental 1960s film directed by Chris Marker *La Jetée*. She echoes the film saying that this is a 'dateless world.' The space becomes a café 'thick with people… with just the space in between that begins to

[1] The performance of *Iris Brunette* being discussed here was performed at the Axis Arts Centre on 9 October 2009.

fill up.'[2] As a spotlight above each of our seats lights up, Iris Brunette points to us and introduces each of us as a designated character in her narrative: The Ship's Captain, The Cartographer, An Iconoclast and others. Iris is as indeterminate as the images on the walls as she weaves a narrative from fragments of identities that she conjures with us in the space. As a spectator, the narrative experience was like being woven into a web. Iris the narrator became my eye/I as we searched seas of faces for a particular face: a lost loved one perhaps? I was woven into the world as, having been given a 'character' in the café, I was asked to engage in a dialogue with Iris Brunette. I faintly recall our exchange but vividly recall her holding my hand and reading my palm. While the spontaneous and ephemeral dialogue I shared with Wilson has faded, the touch of her hand, the haptic experience of the performance, remains vivid.

Whisper by Prototype Theatre (2008)[3] is performed in a seemingly more conventional theatrical frame, although the frame is recognisably cinematic. The three performers on the stage are masked by a gauze screen stretched across the stage frame. The auditorium is darkened and the performers' speech is mediated through microphones and received by the spectators through individual sets of headphones, thus creating a disjunctive space for the spectators between what they see and hear. Both performances play with explicit reference to narratives derived from detective fiction and both construct a noir-like quality using narration, light and sound. Further film connections are evident in the way in which *Whisper* deconstructs spectatorial experiences more familiar to cinema audiences. The concept of diegesis being explored here is more evident in cinema

[2] A short extract from the performance can be seen on Melanie Wilson's website: www.melaniewilson.org.uk

[3] The performance of *Whisper* being discussed here was performed at the Alsager Arts Centre.

than it is in theatre and the relationship between the diegetic reality and the spectatorial experience is different. As Morkham and Staiff argue, cinematic diegesis is a diegetic reality that the viewer actively chooses to enter during the cinematic experience, whereas in the theatre events discussed in this article the spectator is immersed and more actively implicated in the narrative. Morkham and Staiff's appraisal of the spectator's perceptual experience as alternating between two separate but related sets of information, 'that derived from reality of the world at large, and the commensurable but surrogate reality of the diegetic worlds on the screen' (301), does, however, usefully support the argument being made here. Diegetic theatre, I argue, offers the spectator a different experiential 'place' that subverts the normative viewing experience by placing the spectator inside a narratorial world that is not coherent and thus requires the spectator to make choices and reflect on perceptual notions of time, space and reality.

In *Whisper* all the movements and gestures are discerned as shadows projected from behind the screen-like gauze (see Fig. 2). Shadowy figures continually come in and out of focus as I attempt to connect the voice from the headset to the shadows on the stage. Three silhouettes are captured in boxes of light behind the gauze and I hear three voices narrating in the second person as they take me on a claustrophobic journey from an interior domestic space into the darkened streets of a city. In a similar way to *Iris Brunette*, *Whisper* pulls me into a fiction while simultaneously reminding me of the theatrical illusion. Proto-type Theater describe their event as playing with Foley sound[4] and thus the audience sees the sources of the sound effects that reinforce the illusion of

[4] See the Proto-type Theater web site: www.proto-type.org, See also, Peter S. Petralia's 2010 'Headspace: Architectural Space in the Brain,' an article that provides an insight into the making of *Whisper* and the binaural research that formed the basis of the theatre experiment.

the fictional world we inhabit. The narration refers to 'dripping water' and I see shadowy figures behind the gauze pouring water slowly into a saucepan close to a microphone. The sound connects to the voice I hear through the headphones and is transformed into the 'dripping water' in the apartment described in the narration. Similarly, I see the performers creating the sound of hissing gas by blowing up balloons and slowly releasing the air into a microphone. The narratorial voice positions me in a psychonarration: 'a narratized discourse representing a character's thoughts' (Prince 80). In this instance the discourse is narrated in the second person so the voice I hear tells me where 'I' look, what 'I' think and where 'I' turn. The narration takes me through the building where 'I' live and recalls my memories of a woman in another apartment who tried to gas herself. The narration disorientates me as it continually shifts between different voices always speaking in the second person; these voices sometimes place me in the fictional now and sometimes in a fictional past. The shifts into sequences that are remembered are accompanied by a sound motif and a shift in the lighting to warm tones; the 'real' time is lit by colder, blue tones. However, there is also a blurring between these different fictional places as the figures in separate boxes of light diffuse and I lose track of what is memory and what is occurring 'now.' The narratives bleed into each other and it becomes more and more difficult to create conjunctive links between the narrative voices and the activities behind the gauze. The disorientation is reinforced by the theatrical trickery of light and gauze. As figures retreat upstage towards the light source they become larger, disfigured and monstrous. It is as though I am always on the edge of a nightmare.

While the immersive strategies used by both theatre events differ, both defamiliarize a spectator's normative viewing position, whilst imposing another, and consequently create a participatory 'place' for theatricalised play. The 'place' being argued for here is a communal place that, like carnival, allows us to be other than ourselves but also reinforces a sense of shared identity through collective experience.[5] In order that the two theatre events can be perceived to offer a theatricalised 'place' to the spectator, this article argues that the notion of diegesis, specifically in the form of a diegetic theatre, opens up such opportunities to play.

In both instances cited here the immersive theatrical experience could be described as pleasurable, one might even say seductive, as both performances create a fictional matrix that combines intrigue and allure. Yet both events also create a sense of anxiety. The spectator is always first and foremost an actual spectator, a witness to a theatrical event; however, in these instances the experiences are non-conventional. In *Whisper* the sensory engagement is heightened by the use of headphones and disoriented by the obscured figures behind the gauze. *Iris Brunette* uses spatial intimacy to both engage and disorient the spectator. Both theatre events play on an edge that immersively engages the spectator in both experiences of anxiety and pleasure. Pavis notes that enjoying theatre 'distances us from signs and meaning, and pitches us into sensations of presence and of balance, which attempt to neutralise any intellectual aspect of theatre experience. What emerges is an "energetic" criticism of semiology' (313). He describes

[5] While Marie-Madeleine Mervant-Roux uses the term 'community' in relation to twenty-first century theatre that operates to, in her words, 'erase or blur the distinction between stage and audience' (229), I use the term collective. Collective is preferred here to describe the opportunity offered to me and fellow spectators by both theatre events to engage in a shared experience in a context that places me in a fictive space where, although I am static, I am collectively participating in the generation of a fiction.

this criticism as a circuit, a flux of impulses, an intersubjective space where actor and spectator are seen as both subject and object. He says, '[t]he attention we bring to bear on stage materiality is reinforced by a denial that reminds us incessantly that we are at the theatre and that we perceive only forms and matter' (313). Both theatrical events immerse the spectator in a dream world where proximity, either auditory or spatial, has the effect of dissolving the distance between our sense of ourselves as spectators, and participants; however, the close proximity of the other spectators and the foregrounding of theatrical devices also have the effect of reminding us that we are in a theatricalised space. As so often is the case in dream worlds, we are unable to change or determine the course of the event. Although inside the event, we remain powerless to act in a meaningful way in terms of controlling the narrative direction of the performances. In both events the spectator is given a 'character' and there is no choice of narrative journey for that 'character.' However, both performances create fictional worlds that are elusive and the narrative journeys are fragmentary. So, paradoxically, while there are prescriptive aspects of the immersive experience, becoming an 'other' in these texts allows for gaps, escape routes, and spaces to reflect on what is of value and important to us as individuals outside of the fiction while simultaneously being in the fiction.

The function of theatrical mimesis has been radically called into question in relation to many contemporary theatre performances and the traditional concept of drama is not so much challenged, as disregarded in favour of other structuring strategies. As Lehmann states, 'new theatre begins precisely with the fading away of this trinity of drama, imitation, action. It is a trinity in which theatre is regularly sacrificed to drama' (37). Both theatre events are postdramatic as they embrace different creative strategies

and do not seek to set themselves in a position that is oppositional to a normative dramatic theatre, especially in relation to the generation, use and status of theatrical text, but do employ a range of writings that derive from non-dramatic contexts. Similarly, the events conform to what Lehmann describes as 'state,' a term he uses to denote theatre that is opposed to or offers an alternative to action. He says, '[t]he state is an aesthetic figuration of the theatre, showing a formation rather than a story (68).

Fig. 2: Alice Booth, Gillian Lees and Andrew Westerside in Proto-type Theater's *Whisper* (2008). Courtesy of Peter S. Petralia**.**

Prince, in *A Dictionary of Narratology*, defines distinguishing features of the different positions that both literary narrator and reader can occupy within a diegesis and his terms are here being applied to the positions of spectator and performer in a theatre

event or 'state.' The spectator takes on the role of narrate: a player in the interplay of fact and fiction; an authorial audience, that is, one who is aware that the event is fictional; and, finally, a 'narrative audience,' for whom the reality of the fiction is accepted. Prince points towards the difficulty in distinguishing between a 'narrative audience' and narratee in literature (61). The theatrical events cited here demonstrate that these positions are not either/or but both/and as the audience simultaneously occupies different roles during the theatre event. As well as being the actual audience, the audience takes on the role of narratee and, in some instances during *Iris Brunette*, this role can include participatory unscripted/unrehearsed exchanges of dialogue with the character of Iris Brunette. We are ensnared in her journey, her search for a man she spied across a café, a man she has lost track of in a war, in a strange city. At points in the performance she turns to the 'characters' and engages us in what appears to be impromptu conversation. I was designated the role of The Cartographer in Iris Brunette's narrative. At one point in the performance she sat by me and asked for my hand: that is, the hand of The Cartographer. She held my hand and read my palm, asking me questions concerning what I thought she should do. My responses did not change the course of the narrative but the act of participation shifted my sense of immersion in the world and created an intensely affective experience. As the storyteller, Wilson creates a discourse between herself as the narrator and the spectator as narratee. The discourse shifts on the one hand between interchangeable positions taken by the real author (Melanie Wilson), the implied author (Iris Brunette,) and the narrator (Iris Brunette), and on the other between the real audience, the implied audience (the characters in the café and other places in the fictional landscape) and the narratee (members of the audience). Both Wilson and her audience

shift between being subject and/or object within the fictional world of *Iris Brunette* and first person/second person within the narration.

Iris Brunette demonstrates the complexities of a diegetic theatre event further by creating an intradiegetic and autodiegetic narrator. Melanie Wilson is author of *Iris Brunette* and performs the role of an intradiegetic narrator who conjures up the place and characters who populate Iris Brunette's world; this narrator occupies the fiction as she appears to be a character reporting on rather than being in the diegesis. Melanie Wilson also occupies the space as an autodiegetic narrator when she speaks as Iris Brunette, who is a primary character in the diegesis; at these points she speaks in the first person (Prince 9).

Peter S. Petralia, the writer and director of *Whisper*, states that he was interested in exploring the possibility of creating alternate ideas of time and space through the use of headphone performance, '[c]reating an 'inner-gaze' though the use of second-person voice (you) and/or introspective text, which softens the focus of the audience/participant and places them at the centre of the work' (97). While Brecht was interested in exploring a narratorial position in theatre, he was wary of allowing the spectator to be theatricalised: that is, cast as a character in the fiction.[6] What the theatre events here illustrate is that such narrative strategies can open up new discourses about writing, speaking, text and audience. Ironically, while I enjoy the experience of being inscribed in a theatrical world, the more I am implicated as a participant in the textual world, the more anxious and/or sceptical I become. As a narratee I am bestowed with knowledge, beliefs,

[6] Brecht's Lehrstück plays offer a similar position but it is evident that these plays were not conceived as being performed to an audience as a theatre event but were deemed to be didactic exercises.

values and feelings by the narrator and, as the spectator within the fiction, I am characterised with these attributes; however, I may reject or question these attributes and this can lead to a greater sense of interplay, not just within the fiction but, more specifically, in the relationship between the fiction and the real. Theatre that tends towards a concern with diegesis, that is with telling stories, and bestows the spectator with the role of narratee (one who temporarily embodies a character) supports characteristics of Brecht's conception of theatre in terms of foregrounding the position of narrator, although the diegetic strategies cited here demonstrate how the current theatre practices have moved beyond Brecht and found ways to theatricalize the spectator. Spectators are immersed in the fiction in order to become reflexive and critical of the experience.

Derrida puts forward a position that might be referred to as the 'revenge of writing' (*Writing and Difference*). He comments that speech is contaminated by traces of writing; however, it is the written-ness of the utterance, the overt textuality of the speech that is of specific interest in these examples of theatre. My argument does not follow Derrida nor, conversely, argue for a theatre where writing is contaminated by the utterance, by speech, but rather it supports a theatre where textuality allows the written-ness to surface. The textual fragments evoke a particular literary landscape that the spectator and performer can imaginatively engage with: a landscape that while familiar is not fixed or closed. Textual landscapes that feature spoken text, written text and mediatised 'live' and pre-recorded visual texts are a common feature in many contemporary theatre performances, as is the theatrical space that draws on literary forms of writing and is also foregrounding textualisation. What is of particular interest here is

the effect that the spoken text potentially has on the spectator/audience. The whispered voices heard through the headphones in *Whisper* connected me to the shadowy figures behind the gauze. Petralia says that the use of headphones in *Whisper* has the effect of blurring the boundary between the performance space and the receptive space of the audience. The performance is brought closer to an audience member in a personal, tangible way as it focuses on the sensory gap between sight and sound (97). The interplay of audio and visual scores conjure up late night journeys through urban spaces where I get glimpses of the interior domestic spaces that are other people's lives. There is a pre-recorded spoken text in *Iris Brunette* that drifts in and out of the theatre space. This disorientates the spectator, as at times it becomes difficult to determine Iris as someone present and speaking in the space and this other Iris who speaks from another space. These texts have the potential to directly affect the spectator. I am connected to the theatricalised space and am tangibly transported to another fictional space. The performances are aesthetically coherent in themselves and suppress a tendency towards a dramatic schema, although they playfully tease the spectator with fleeting encounters with 'characters' and 'story.' Elinor Fuchs supplies a useful descriptor that can be applied to the theatre works being examined here: 'The weaving of fragments never coalesces into an illusionistic reality with plot and character, yet coheres because the texts behind the text are a part of our cultural narratives' (169).

Iris Brunette plays with our recognition of a fictional world and allows us, the spectators, to join her and play in the world conjured up. While there are numerous potential plots and characters that could be followed, ultimately we do not follow any one plot or become any one character. Similarly, *Whisper* infers narrative pathways and the

shadowy outlines of possibility and recognisable characters, but these momentary manifestations disappear. We are merely passing tourists whose gaze and interest flirts tantalisingly with the possibility that what is happening to the people behind these doors, walls, windows may be important, significant, and dangerous. Susan Sontag (*Regarding the Pain of Others*) argued that the proliferation of information in the modern age has not left us desensitised to the ills of humanity, but has overwhelmed and disempowered us. With so many fragments of narrative to organise and align with the obscured figures on the stage, the spectator is left to find a tangible form and a stable perspective that allows the textual knot to be unravelled and ordered. While there is pleasure in being on the outside, pleasure in the position of voyeur, there is also a parallel frustration in only having a partial view: a frustration in being denied access beyond the surface, to follow the story and find out what happens next. As a spectator here I think I am experiencing an individual journey as I am shut away from my neighbour, isolated in my seat with headphones on, in the darkened auditorium, voices whispering to me, never demanding anything of me but to turn this way or that, to hear or see, or to remember. But there is also an anxiety: am I hearing the same voices as my neighbour? Am I tuned into the same frequency? While the experience is mediated through technology and recreates a now typical transient experience of travelling through peoples' lives, I am confronted by my complacency, my tendency not to act, not to become involved. I think I can escape the persistent whispering voices in my head by removing the headphones, only to realise that the whispering is pervasive. The disembodied voice of the narrator is not in my head but is an extension of the voices we have all created that habitually textualise our thoughts and experiences. The performance here works with a diegetic structure and the challenge

to the audience to do more than listen and watch is a consequence of the separation of sensory experiences. There is pleasure in the experience offered to the audience here, but also displeasure in that the potential interplay between art and life results in the exposure of our current inertia. The sensory gap and the insistent whispered voices in the head of the spectator create a very particular place for the spectator: a place that offers pleasure because of the sensual vocal qualities used by the performers. However, the experience also invokes a sense of resistance. If we as spectators do not resist and critically reflect on the character we play in the world, we condone the voyeuristic behaviour and the apathy of the narrated character 'you.' The spatial and sensorial disjunctive strategies employed in the performance all contribute to a decomposition of the theatre experience, or what Lehmann describes as 'the unconscious of spoken theatre' (149).

Iris Brunette, as a vehicle for non-conventional storytelling, employs a heightened formal literary-ness. The performer uses narration to conjure a world of enigma, mystery and nostalgia that she generously offers to the audience as an experiential journey. There is, as a result, a slippage between the formal literary text and an illusion of spontaneous dialogue that again lends itself to a diegetic structure. Derrida challenges theatre to escape its dependence on writing. He problematises the relationship between spoken text and written text, placing them in an oppositional rather than dialogic relationship; again, we should be seeking a both/and position that celebrates and embraces this slippage between that which is written and that which is spoken. The text here does not operate on a mimetic level but employs a diegetic framework as there is a narrator who conjures a fictional world where fleeting figures, shadows and ghosts of characters are partially embodied by the spectators. As spectators we are not transformed, but we are transported

by the power of the narrative and the theatricalisation of the space to this very other world. Initially the worlds of both performances are redolent of scenarios drawn from film noir and espionage novels and offer a sense of escapism; however, in both instances the 'other' world, while initially seductive, creates a sense of anxiety as the spectator becomes aware through the narration that the worlds inhabited are plagued with loss, despair, betrayal and paranoia.

We are participants/observers in these worlds and as such we are integral to the making of the theatre event in that moment and thus responsible for our inertia and passivity. The conclusion to *Whisper* narrates that we look in the mirror and are 'smiling' and are 'the happiest we have ever been' despite the narration that has led 'you' to place a rope around 'your' neck and jump from a window. Perhaps it was all a dream and we are lucky to have escaped unscathed. But the intensity of the narration here, and in *Iris Brunette*, has 'penetrated into the body' (Petralia 108) and I am left with a sense of dis-ease. If I am integral in the making of the event then I am left with a sense that I can 'act' differently. We are reminded by both theatre events that while theatre is about a live encounter between a performer and spectator the traditional normative relationship between performer and spectator has here been dispersed and replaced by an affective state of reflection. As spectators we do not remain on the outside of the event but become subjects of the fiction and as such also become objects of the spectatorial gaze. The idea of the theatre event as a reflective mirror has turned inwards and trapped us in its gaze; it appears to ask us what we will do. There is a strange paradox at work here: the immersive engagement of the spectator as subject does not initially reinforce the immediacy of the event as a living present but gives us licence to experience some other time and a sense of

being temporarily elsewhere. However, my experience was to fight against this immersion, as I was not 'the happiest I had ever been.' The performance space in *Iris Brunette* incorporated the space where the spectators sit and while we are not required to move, the performance absorbed us and mis-recognized us as 'other' people in an 'other' place. As a spectator I was beguiled by the prospect of my presence being integral to the fictional world. At the same time, I realised that while my involvement was necessary, I was impotent to change the course of events.

Wilson's performance also contains an 'epilogue:' an audio performance titled *Mari Me Archie* where we are invited, with the help of Iris, to transform our own environments into fictional landscapes. On this audio walk, actual places, figures, dialogue and events within our own environments have the potential to be acts of espionage, betrayal and thwarted love: the substance of literary fiction. *Mari Me Archie* takes the headphone strategy, discussed here in relation to Proto-type Theater's *Whisper*, and extends the diegetic world of Iris Brunette more specifically into our actual world. It encourages the participants to blur the distinction between their real lives and textualise the world around them. While the textualisation of actual places and people may be seen to encourage the notion of the hyper-real, the consciousness of the act again creates a critical distance that allows us to consider the ways in which peoples' lives are appropriated as narrative. *Mari Me Archie* is an important partner experience to *Iris Brunette* as it not only extends Iris's world but also extends the process of critical reflection.

The examples of contemporary theatre cited here evoke a different sense of critical engagement due to their event-ness, what Pavis has called an 'energetic' criticism

(313) that focuses on the experience, not the intellectual fixing of meaning, or what Lehmann calls a 'rage of understanding' (Lehmann 88). The radical forms of textualisation explored in these works invite us to question the concept of mimesis and its synonymous relationship with theatricality. Either we need to re-think what we understand mimesis to represent or we need to more fully acknowledge the theatre event as an art form that is separate from the art of the dramatist and notions of the dramatic. As Lehmann remarks, 'the absence of mimesis of action' does not mean the end of theatre, as 'theatrical need is not fixated on action alone' (78).

In the position of narratee, the spectator/audience of these events is offered a different sense of connectedness. Although we are, as one of the voices in *Whisper* says of us, 'out of sync with reality,' we are also connected to the others present in terms of the intimacy of the shared experience. Both performances provoke us to consider our intersubjectivity, our place within shared stories, and shared lives. David Edgar stated in 1988 that the future of theatre was in carnival: a space where the spectator merely had to step off the pavement to be transported into the carnival world (287). In this place we are both participant and observer and are encouraged, through an immersion in language, to sensorially experience our intersubjectivity and to both think and act. So, while Kristeva argued that modern theatre was waiting for a 'place' and that this would occur with the re-making of language (281), what the work here demonstrates is that there is a vital interplay that implicates the spectator more integrally in the theatrical discourse. Thus it is not just the theatre but the spectator who needs to be re-accommodated with a place.

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'What's Wrong with this Play?': Workshops, Audiences, and Horizons of Expectations.

By John Patrick Bray

Abstract

What is the role of the audience in new play readings? Studies such as 'The Gates of Opportunities' by David Dower and *Outrageous Fortune: The Life and Times of the American Play* by Todd London, Ben Pesner, and Zannie Giraud Voss, examine, and to some extent question, the role of the playwright in the American theatre as the larger production apparatus has taken precedence over the playwright function. In this article, I will consider the limitations of new play development in the United States, focusing on the role of the audience, and how the conditions of reception situate the audience in the role of diagnostician, looking for problems with a script, rather than in the role of spectator. I will then consider the ideological constraints of developmental programs to highlight how the system of new play development, which has come to be identified by playwrights as 'developmental hell,' may be working against the notion of artistic values.

In the summer of 2010, I finally gained a production of my play *Liner Notes* as part of an Off-Off Broadway festival in New York City. I began writing the play in 2001 while an MFA student in playwriting. The play was developed in three classes (two playwriting courses and a process lab) over the course of two academic years. Having crafted a draft that met my satisfaction, I began pursuing production. I should be clear that I see a script as a 'blue print' for production or a 'code-book' for human behavior. Any script, I believe, can change (and change for the better) during a rehearsal process, or in a forum where the work is read with other theatre practitioners (actors, directors, and designers). A writer can discover any issues of clarity, where a scene might be overwritten, and where the actors, directors, and designers can create their own stories within the groundwork that the writer has laid. However, a script ultimately needs a production,

and a staged reading, despite the best intentions of the companies that create developmental programmes, is a disappointing surrogate.[1]

My script was a semi-finalist for the Christopher Brian Polk Award at the Abingdon Theatre in 2004, and it received additional workshops with The New School for Drama, The Actors Studio, Epic Repertory Theatre at The Players' Club, and the 3 States Theatre Company (3STC), and three open-to-the-public readings. The script was finally produced by the re:Directions Theatre Company as part of the 2010 Planet Connections Theatre Festivity Off-Off Broadway. It had taken *nine* years to gain a full production.

This example should sound familiar to playwrights working in the U.S. Dan O'Brien, whose play *The Cherry Sisters Revisited* was produced as part of the 2010 Humana Festival, told me that his play had been through a number of workshops in five years: with Yaddo (a writer's retreat), Primary Stages, the Irish Repertory Company, The Actors Company Theatre, Stage 13, Perry-Mansfield at Steamboat Springs, and then with the Actors Theatre of Louisville, which had conducted a workshop of the play at Louisiana State University prior to moving to production (O'Brien, Email). The play had been through seven workshops in five years.

O'Brien and I are fortunate in that our works have actually been produced. However, an examination of the various biographies of contributors to *The Dramatist: The Journal for the Dramatists Guild of America,* reveals that a playwright is likely to boast more readings, residencies and awards – the awards being more often staged readings – than full productions. Indeed, over the years a number of developmental workshops have emerged in the United States

[1] In the U.S. a staged reading may be performed at music stands or a table; it may have elements of blocking, it may have props; it may have been rehearsed once, or it may not have been rehearsed at all. In short, 'staged reading' is a much more open term in the U.S., as opposed to 'rehearsed readings' and 'staged readings' as used in the UK to indicate whether or not a work has motion (staged) or not (rehearsed). When I use the term 'staged readings,' it will be used to indicate that a work is read – whether at a table, or with some blocking – before an audience.

with the aim of helping or guiding a playwright, such as the O'Neill Conference and The Playwrights Center in Minneapolis; furthermore, a number of regional and not-for-profit theatres have started offering staged-readings open to the public (akin in appearance to the rehearsed reading in the United Kingdom, insofar as actors are seated at a table or behind stools), in which the audience is asked to discuss the play post-reading.

In this article, I want to consider the role of the audience in new play development in the United States. I will begin with a look at the scholarship of Mary Luckhurst, who suggests that the model of United States development may be adopted by the U.K. I will then consider some of the current issues with new play development in America. I will suggest that the audience at a staged-reading in the U.S. is situated not as a spectator, but as diagnostician, who seeks to identify (and sometimes, prescribe) issues within the play as written.

In *Dramaturgy: A Revolution in Theatre,* Mary Luckhurst suggests that the current rehearsed reading culture in the U.K. finds its inspiration in the staged readings featured in developmental programs in the U.S. (209-16). In the United States, a number of nonprofit theatres have a developmental wing, in which a literary manager (who may double as a dramaturg) either solicits scripts, or accepts unsolicited scripts, which are given a reading before the public. In the United States, there is the implicit suggestion that if a play is given enough development, it may one day be 'production ready,' a very subjective term with no clear criteria. Luckhurst considers some of the issues of new play development. In her interview with Steve Waters, playwright and lecturer in playwriting at the University of Birmingham, Waters suggests:

> New play development is often inherently reactionary. If it's about making the play 'work,' then it can too often result in conversations about the 'well-made-

> play.' But Edward Bond's *Saved* and Sarah Kane's *Blasted* broke with convention and didn't 'work' – in ways that turned out to be revolutionary. (214)

If it is true that the model for new play development in the U.S. is being inherited by the U.K., then Waters' suggestion that new play development is 'reactionary' and champions the 'well-made play' aesthetic, is not without some merit. In *Dream Machine: Thirty Years of New Play Development*, Douglas Anderson conducts an exhaustive history of new play development in the U.S., from the decentralization of the theatre, through the creation of The O'Neill National Playwrights Conference in the 1960s (and its various emulators), to the financial crumbling of Off-Broadway in the late 1980s. In his conclusion, Anderson laments:

> I began this study fully prepared to scream about the scandalous lack of opportunity and financial support for new work. I was quickly disabused. What the industry lacks isn't opportunity; it is taste, intelligence, and vision. It doesn't lack funding, but appropriate management of its re-sources. There's no dearth of talented writers. But we've institutionalized some damaging developmental formuli, placing the creative process in predictable, uncreative environments. (82)

The 'formuli,' as suggested by Anderson, are based on a system created by the O'Neill National Playwrights Conference, the most visible (and controversial) developmental program in the United States. With the O'Neill Conference, seven or eight scripts are selected out of seven to eight hundred during an open submission process, and the work is developed over the period of a week, culminating in a staged-reading. Many of the playwrights who have had work developed at the O'Neill have gained regional and Broadway productions (August Wilson is one example of a playwright 'discovered' at the O'Neill).

Anderson notes that the 'O'Neill system' promotes the idea that, when it comes to developing a new work, 'massive input is helpful, […] massive on the spot rewriting improves a

text,' and 'directors can be randomly assigned to texts and respond to them with creativity and insight.' He also puts forward the notion that 'a public debate with audiences and a wide array of conference members is valuable' (64). The first point, that 'massive input is helpful,' and the final point, which involves 'public debate with audiences,' both suggest the beginnings of 'developmental hell,' which will be discussed later in this study. Anderson also notes that during talk-back sessions, the playwrights made 'choices to please everybody,' and as a result the structure of each play 'became linear,' while a play that is experimental 'doesn't stand a chance' (64-65). The notion that an audience needs to nurture playwrights by debating with them suggests that the audience can both diagnose the problems found in the play (that is, the reasons why the play does not 'work,' suggesting a culturally coded knowledge of the well-made play formula) and suggest how to fix the problems in order to make sure the play is structurally sound. As Anderson notes, with developmental programmes, plays 'start to look like other plays' (65).

The predictable, uncreative environment has become home for the U.S. playwright. How is this environment created? Is there a figure in the apparatus of theatre production (or development) responsible for this? Studies such as *Outrageous Fortune: The Life and Times of the New American Play* by Todd London, Ben Pesner, and Zannie Giraud Voss and *Gates of Opportunity* by David Dower conclude that artistic directors and literary managers have become more conservative in production choice due to economic constraints. Staged readings for the public may serve two purposes: the work is performed (although, not produced), and the organization hosting the reading benefits by appearing more grant-friendly. Jeremy Cohen, the recently appointed Artistic Director of The Playwrights Centre in Minneapolis, argues that

regional theatres are in fear of losing their subscriber-base, which constitutes (mostly) an older audience that may be put off by new works and new aesthetics:

> Development is all good, but we need productions right now. We've got to get on regional theatres and push them through their fears of producing new works, because if we don't we're going to let [issues of] money be the dying out of great new theatrical work, and we can't let that happen. (Cohen, Interview)

What damage is being done to American plays through the system of new play development? According to playwright Steven Dietz, playwrights in the U.S. have adapted in order to write for the reading, rather than production:

> Many of these plays [in staged readings], viewed later in full production…do not begin to match the magic of their script-in-hand predecessors. The reason is simple. Our playwrights have, with the adaptability of cockroaches, learned to write brilliantly to fit the form – and in today's theatre, more often than not, the given form is not production; it is the staged reading. (43)

Furthermore, for Dietz, there is a 'wealth of these well-made plays because we have a wealth of staged reading writers' (43). Key to his conversation is that the 'well-made' aesthetic, as calcified at the O'Neill, has haunted developmental programs in the United States, resulting in writers who are creating works in a single aesthetic (the well-made, psychologically driven, realistic play). By 'haunted,' I am referring to the term used by Marvin Carlson in *The Haunted Stage*. Carlson states: 'Derrida and others have argued that all texts are in fact haunted by other texts and can be best understood as weavings together of preexisting textual material – indeed, that all reception is based upon this intertextual dynamic' (17). Furthermore, when compared to other literary arts, drama 'has always been centrally concerned not simply with the telling of stories but with the retelling of stories already known to its public' (17). In other words, a play in creation is coded by a playwright who is familiar with previous works, just as an audience who

receives the play is coded with a horizon of expectations based on its knowledge of pre-existing works, and decodes each work it encounters in accordance with these expectations. In short, the audience, haunted by previous experiences with plays, will guide the playwright in making crucial artistic decisions with the play.

The Role of the Audience

One of the key concepts with developmental workshops at not-for-profit theatres is that the audience has a voice in the creation of a play. For example, in a recent e-blast from a non-profit theatre in New Jersey, a staged reading was advertised letting potential audiences know their help is vital in the redrafting of the script:

> For those of you who are not familiar with staged readings, they are a large part of the development of a new play and we hope to bring many plays to you in this forum. Actors perform the play with minimal rehearsal and read with 'script in hand' so it can be heard by the audience, playwright and director for the first time as they receive feedback on the new work. (South Camden)

The e-blast concludes:

> We invite you to join us for this unique experience as we allow our audience members to engage with theatre in a new way and have a part in the development of a new American play. (South Camden)

This invitation highlights the practices of a number of theatres which have developmental readings: the first, actors read with their script-in-hand; the second, because there is minimal rehearsal, there may be some movement, but still without any props, set, lights, etc.; finally, the audience is invited to give feedback to the director and playwright who are present the night of the reading. Although this is certainly not a new way for audiences to engage with work-in-development, the reading is presented to the community as if it is something exciting and new.

The assumption is that their remarks will help the playwright, thereby shaping the play. In short, the audience is being invited to the reading because the playwright needs its feedback in order to gauge what is working and what is not. The audience is a problem-solver.

Another way to view the invitation is to suggest that the audience is being asked to attend the development of a work, in order to decide whether or not the play-as-read should be moved forward to (a hypothetical) production. If we view this as the case, then the audience member at the reading/talk-back session becomes a potential consumer of the play in full production: a problem-solver whose role is to iron out the quirks prior to deciding whether to spend any more time (or money) on this piece of theatre industry based on his or her opinions of the reading. If the audience member is a potential consumer, then how much of the fully-realized play (i.e. what the play may look like when fully produced) the audience actually sees becomes essential in order to attract interest (financial or otherwise). Because staged readings are presented 'bare bones,' with actors holding a script in hand, this creates a problem: the diagnostician/potential consumer is only getting a blueprint. That is to say, a full production presents codified bodies moving fully in space, while the staged reading usually has the actors looking down toward a script (occasionally at one another, but certainly with limited 'connectedness'), while sitting and turning pages. The spectator has very little to *look at* vis-à-vis the visual, dramatic action. If the diagnostician suggests that 'something is missing' in the work they have just heard, it would be the additional elements that make it a fully realized production; however, music stands, which performers use to hold their scripts, as sites of performance, may confuse the spectator, as they represent 'performance' (when used at a concert, for example) while holding back the actor/performer.

Taken to an extreme, the room the reading is held in could support the notion that something is missing from the experience of the staged reading. As Ric Knowles has argued in *Reading the Material Theatre*, 'space itself exerts its influence, silently inscribing or disrupting specific (and ideologically coded) ways of working, for practitioners, and of seeing and understanding, for audiences' (62-63). In other words, having a reading in a physical space – whether in a darkened theatre, a rehearsal room, or a theatre space with the set of another show behind the actors – impacts on the audience's reception of the work. Space operates as a context for the reading of performance; the context is an ideological construction that guides the decoding process of an audience.

Knowles provides an example of how the introduction of a table at a rehearsal of Judith Thompson's *Sled* created a new power dynamic, in which the rehearsal moved from 'an exploratory workshop involving a designer, actors,' and 'script assistants' who were 'all working with the playwright-as-director in the exploration and evolution of an experimental, expressionist script, growing and spreading throughout the undifferentiated rehearsal space,' into 'a proscenium-like performance space with a defined separation between the actors and the audience' (61-62). Although Knowles is suggesting that this dynamic changed the nature of a rehearsal, I would suggest that the placement of actors at a table or a music stand creates a different power dynamic than that of a full production. I suggest that this has to do with the body being still at a table, making very little contact with other actors, and very little contact with an audience. In short, an audience receiving the play has a horizon of expectations based on encounters with preexisting works – that is, the play is haunted by other works, as suggested by Marvin Carlson. Based on this 'intertextual dynamic,' an audience will guide a playwright to make decisions which, according to Douglas Anderson, make the plays more linear (Carlson 17;

Anderson 64-65). The furniture used at a staged reading (which may include music stands) hides the performing body from view, holding back the energy of a piece, giving the impression that something is inherently lacking in the play. If the audience is situated as a problem solver (as South Camden implies via an invitation to be part of the development process), then there are a number of factors that will reinforce the role; these include its previous experiences with plays and the power dynamic of the reading body with other reading bodies (obscured in part from the audience's view). If this is the case, if the performing body is obscured (in a proscenium style arrangement), and if Anderson's notion that plays at readings look like other plays holds true, then how can a playwright navigate the talk-back session?

For some, there are practical ways to consider an approach to the feedback environment. Playwright Jeffrey Sweet has stated that 'Improperly run talk-backs are often either worthless or destructive,' and furthermore, the playwright should be prepared to 'sit through a lot of advice, mostly well-intended but also often aggravating' (Sweet, 'Feedback'). This 'advice' is the audience's way of solving problems it finds in the script, in order to be a part of the play's development. Sweet reminds the writer that talk-backs are 'required by the grant that is subsidizing the series, or they are a part of a theater's desire to increase the audience's emotional investment in the company' ('Feedback'). Therefore, 'talk-backs are for the audience' in two ways: first, asking audiences for help with a script may ensure that they will see the fully realized production (pre-consumer); and second, as Sweet suggests, 'the opportunity to instruct and enlighten artists can be very satisfying' for audience members (diagnostician) ('Feedback').

Playwright and teacher David Rush has also suggested that the playwright and facilitator of the stage reading have a meeting beforehand in order to ensure that the audience session does not stray directly into problem solving (Rush 53-54). Furthermore, when he acts as a facilitator at

a student reading, he has 'worked with the writers long enough to have a sense of the play' (61). Writing in 2000, Rush offers the anecdote:

> Last summer, a writer had created a minor character to add comic relief to the intense story of euthanasia. The audience had found this character attractive, and the writer was tempted to give him more jokes. When I sense this coming, I stop the discussion and ask the writers to take me back to the beginning of the process. I ask them to define for me what the play is meant to be, to tell me where it came from, and so forth. I ask if this is still the play they want to write. (61)

Having a dialogue with the playwright can create confidence that the writer knows his or her work before approaching the diagnostician audience. By meeting beforehand, the facilitator and playwright can keep the conversation on track, which, for Rush, means that the audience can simply state what they saw and heard, rather than be given a platform to diagnose and prescribe a remedy.

What becomes problematic is the notion that an audience is asked to assume a role in which its assistance is needed in shaping a play, rather than supporting a company through patronage and trusting that the company is producing works which may enlighten, entertain, or at times even challenge an audience's expectations. Because development has become commonplace in the U.S., it is likely that a play will be shepherded through more than one developmental program without the possibility of production. This has become known as developmental hell.

In Rona Edwards and Monika Skerbelis's *'I Liked It, Didn't Love It': Screenplay Development From the Inside Out*, the authors note that the term 'developmental hell' was 'used often by producers and writers to explain the lengthy amount of time it takes to get a movie produced' (2). The process of development is a means to ensure a large box-office return. In the theatre of the U.S., developmental hell is the process by which a script is brought through

various workshops with different theatre companies (and therefore, different audiences), and changed accordingly (as, with the O'Neill model, 'massive input is helpful,' (Anderson 64)), but without a production. This series of readings creates a scenario similar to 'test audiences' in the movie industry, as each audience brings with it its own horizon of expectations, its own aesthetic preferences, and its own coded notions of community, which then operate to 'fix' the conventions of the script which do not immediately meet the community's needs.

Because of the finances involved with production, most theatres of the U.S. are non-profit, and rely on individual and corporate donations in order to operate. This creates a scenario in which the content of the play has to be 'appropriate' for a general audience, as theatres have an ethical responsibility to corporations, corporate stock-holders and consumers, individual donors, and potential and actual subscribers. As Bob Jude Ferrante, the Managing Director of Sanctuary: Playwrights Theatre has noted, 'Risk is the enemy of anyone who runs an organization' (Ferrante Interview).

Conclusions on the Role of the Audience

As I have argued throughout, talk-back sessions at staged readings guide the audience in diagnosing and repairing the script, as the readers are either seated behind a table or at music stands, a site of another kind of performance, with their (un)coded bodies obstructed from view, giving the sense that something is missing. The playwright and the rest of the development and production team need to recognize this when presenting a work. A reading may be an art-object (as David J. Eshelman argues in 'The Art of the New Play Reading'), but it is, in the end, a poor surrogate for a fully realized production. While I do not mean to suggest that every play that is written should be produced, I do want to suggest that if a company is willing to present a play to

an audience, it should be committed to producing the play. A single community can and should be involved with a dramatic work, but leading a play from one location to another creates a developmental hell akin to the Hollywood motion picture industry. I asked the literary department at the Royal Court Theatre if they would consider audience response at a reading when selecting their season and received the following response:

> We very, very rarely do public readings and the idea that we might take direct public response into consideration would be considered very odd (and very 'movie industry'). We do, of course, take account of audience reaction during preview performances but in the actual selection of the program we back our own judgement. (Email)

The email above alleviated some of my concerns regarding new play production in England. England has a reputation for being an extremely new-play and new-playwright friendly country, and it is my hope that it will remain as such. Taking this email into account, I am hopeful that if the U.K. is to learn anything from the U.S. model it is to avoid bringing in the audience too early. Rehearsed readings, after all, should be for the playwright working *with* the rest of the company. The culture of developmental programs in the U.S. has created new power dynamics in the theatre, as well as a new role for the audience: the potential consumerist/diagnostician.

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Witness: Notes from the Artist

By Allison Wyper

Abstract

Witness is a participatory performance for one audience member at a time in which the viewer is configured as accomplice to the performance event, a ritual in which power is borrowed, trafficked, and stolen. Within this intimate encounter we are challenged to acknowledge our participation in acts of violence and exploitation, and to confront our responsibility for the other. Witnesses are asked to act, to sign their names, testifying that they have willingly taken part. The question then lingers: in what exactly have they taken part? This essay is part artistic statement and part performance documentation and analysis of a project which was made in dialogue with over one hundred and fifty individual participant Witnesses in five different venues between 2010 and 2011.

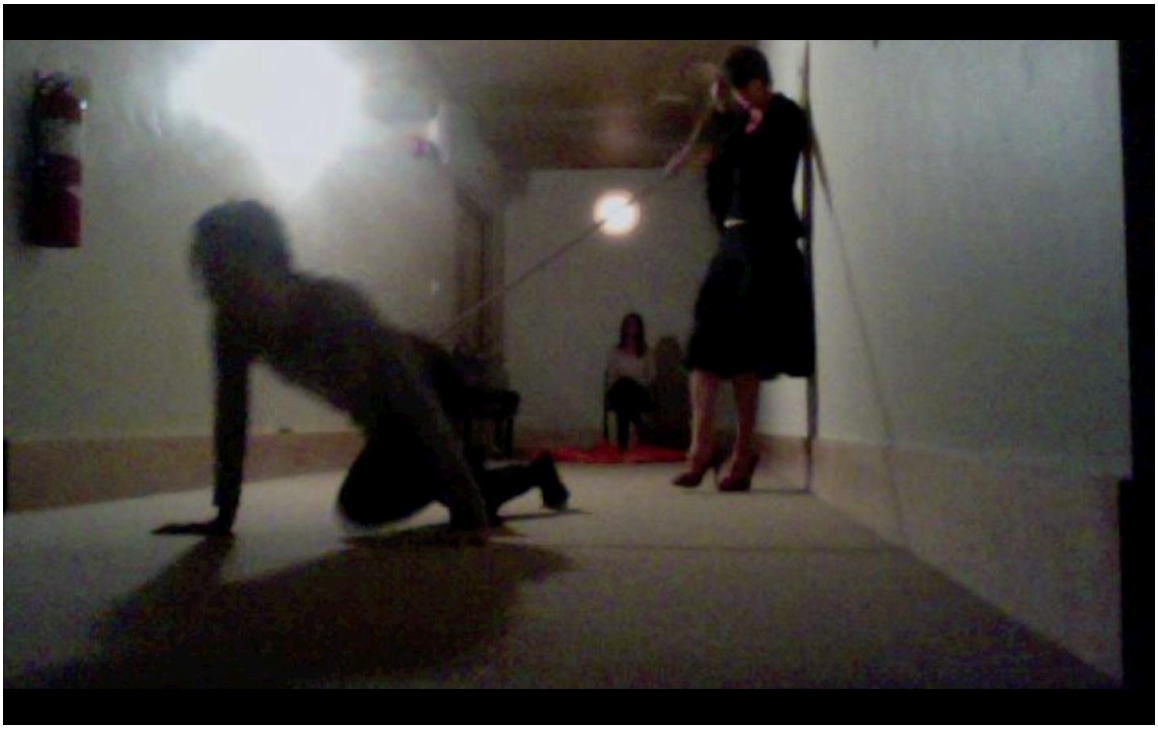


Fig. 1: *Witness*, UCLA (2011). Courtesy of Allison Wyper.

Witness is a performance for one audience member at a time in which the viewer is configured as accomplice to a ritual in which the tenuous mantle (or blindfold) of power is borrowed, trafficked, and stolen. The single viewers enter a small room resembling a torture chamber where they are asked to participate in a performance at times beautiful, erotic, and violent, a ritual they cannot understand, with implications that reach beyond the immediate moment. Within this intimate encounter we (performer, choreographer, and witness) are challenged to acknowledge our participation in acts of violence and exploitation, and to confront our responsibility for the other. As we separate, a trace of the other lingers.

Acknowledging My Complicity

Witness is about the viewer making a choice, taking action, and deciding what position to take in relation to violence/atrocities/torture/war/exploitation being performed in his/her name. I made this piece as part of a series of works (the solo performance *My Husband, My Country*[1] preceded it in 2007, see Fig. 2) that deal with my feelings in response to the infamous Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo photos and the situations they bring to light, in which I am directly implicated as an American, both as torturer and oppressed. As a dissenting American, as a vocal anti-Bush American, and as an activist, I felt betrayed, manipulated and misrepresented by my country. At the same time, I am not being tortured. I cannot speak for those individuals who are, and I cannot begin to comprehend – let alone empathize with – their situation. So, what can I do? What will I do?

[1] *My Husband, My Country* is a solo dance theatre work confronting my ambiguous relationship with a country I know and love in the face of the inhuman brutality of Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib, and other sites of illegal torture. In this piece I confront my own pain, anger, and guilt over being implicated in torture, as an American, by visiting the violation on myself. Through my character I play both the victim and the torturer – but here the victim is an American housewife and the torturer an abusive husband. Thus I seek to begin to comprehend the pain of prisoners of war through the mode of domestic violence, wherein I am both the violator and the violated.

Fig. 2: Allison Wyper in *My Husband, My Country* (2008). Courtesy of Liz Filippone

'Your body has become not yours only, nor left my body mine only' (Whitman 160). Images of the prisoner enter me, leaving a deep scar. I am haunted, inconsolable, sick with guilt as crimes against humanity are perpetrated in my name. *Witness* is a ritual dedicated to the victims of wrongful incarceration and torture whose images have been imprinted into us – we cannot erase them, wash them off, or cut them out. The performers surrender sight and touch, and give up their voices in invocation, calling forth the always excluded, the disappeared, the voiceless, the erased. Movement and imagery are born from these ghost memories of grief, anger – even love.

We cannot feel another's pain. It is non-transferable. To represent people's pain is, often, to reproduce the violence enacted against them.[2] How disturbing, then, when one identifies more readily with the one who inflicts pain, perhaps because on some level we know that we are implicated in their offenses. By virtue of my wealth, I admit, I am implicated in another's poverty. By virtue of your consumption, you might confess, you are implicated in another's exploitation. Because in the U.S. we are marked as potential victims of terrorist attacks, we are implicated in the perpetuation of a 'War on Terror.' By virtue of our citizenship, let us testify, we are implicated in official acts of violence enacted by our government.

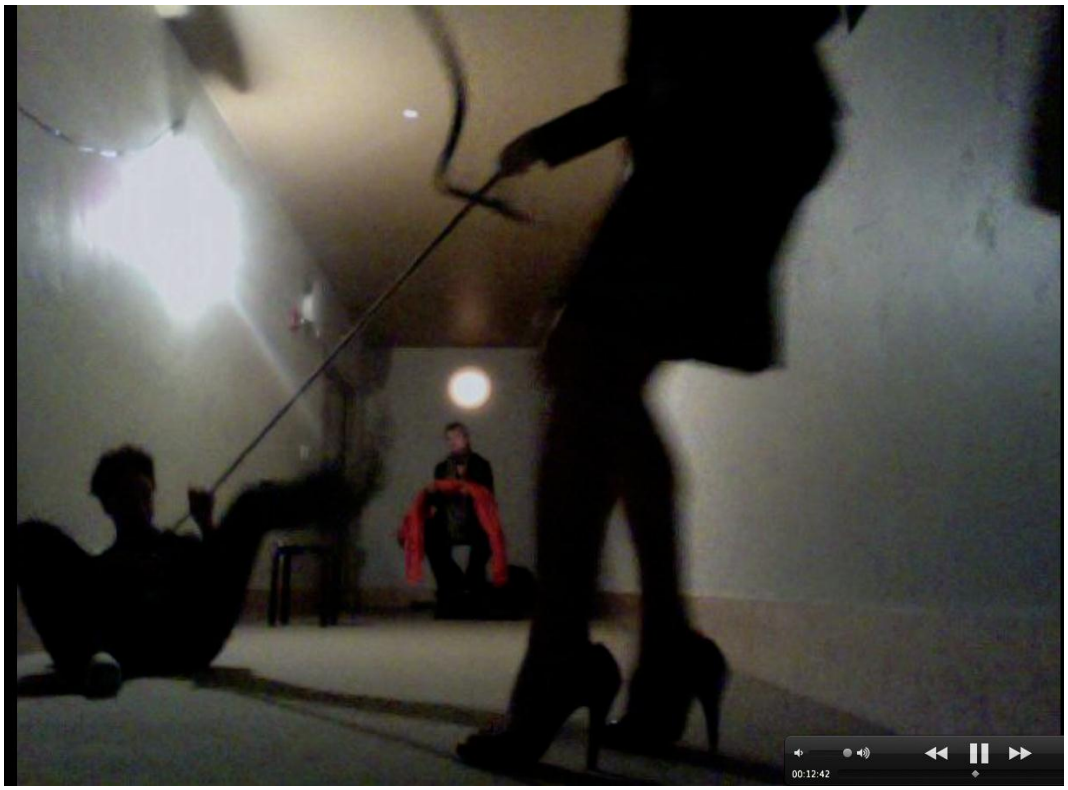


Fig. 3: *Witness,* UCLA (2011). Courtesy of Allison Wyper.

[2] Wendy S. Hesford, in her analysis of the Abu Ghraib torture photos and their reception in contexts ranging from protests to galleries **(**'Staging Terror'), references Holocaust studies and the idea of 'traumatic repetition' which 'produces a second order of trauma […] at the level of technique' (32). Trauma studies scholars have recently debated the ethics of reproducing trauma in order to 'work through' it. Dominick La Capra, for instance, advocates an approach of 'empathetic unsettlement' as an alternative that would allow one to put oneself in another's position without usurping their place (qtd. in Hesford 34). Hesford uses the 'traumatic real' to 'articulate trauma's resistance to transparent symbolism, and also the cultural fascination with and historical demands for its documentation' (32) while allowing the possibility of critical repetition, whether hegemonic or counter-hegemonic (34-35).

Every day violent actions are performed in your name without your consent. This is the core of *Witness*. Howard Zinn's provocative book title advises: *You Can't be Neutral on a Moving Train*. Like Zinn, I act from my belief that inaction is implicit consent. *Witness* confronts you with the fact that you are part of a system that you may not understand, may not agree with, but of which you are already an agent. Suddenly you find yourself the protagonist of a 'bad script' (Taylor 220), perpetuating the master narrative because you are trapped within it.[3]

Torture

In *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry writes that torture is a performance wherein the extreme physical pain of the prisoner is converted into a spectacle of the torturer's power and, by extension, that of the dominant regime. As on the stage, all objects become props, taking on symbolic significance. In the torture chamber (the 'theatre' of torture), all objects become weapons; even the walls and floor become weapons. The body of the prisoner is used against him/her when it is forced into stress positions. The torturer usurps and absorbs the voice of the prisoner, declaring, 'Your screams and forced confession can and will be used against you.'

'Power is cautious,' Scarry writes. 'It covers itself. It bases itself in another's pain and prevents all recognition that there is 'another' by looped circles that ensure its own solipsism' (59). The torturer denies the emphatic realness of the prisoner's pain, drawing himself away from embodied sentience into the detached spectacle of his own power. He further assures his

[3] In 'Trapped in Bad Scripts: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo' Diana Taylor argues that because they were already cast in the role of 'mothers,' the demonstrations by these Argentine mother-activists reinforced the masculine hegemonic narrative of the state even though their demonstrations were intended as civil disobedience. 'Thus the Madres were trapped in a *bad script*, a narrative activated by the junta and which they themselves, no doubt unconsciously, reenacted' (my emphasis, Taylor 220).

dispassion and averts sympathy by creating a new fiction of his own suffering. He, after all, is forced to witness these painful acts as part of his duty. [4]

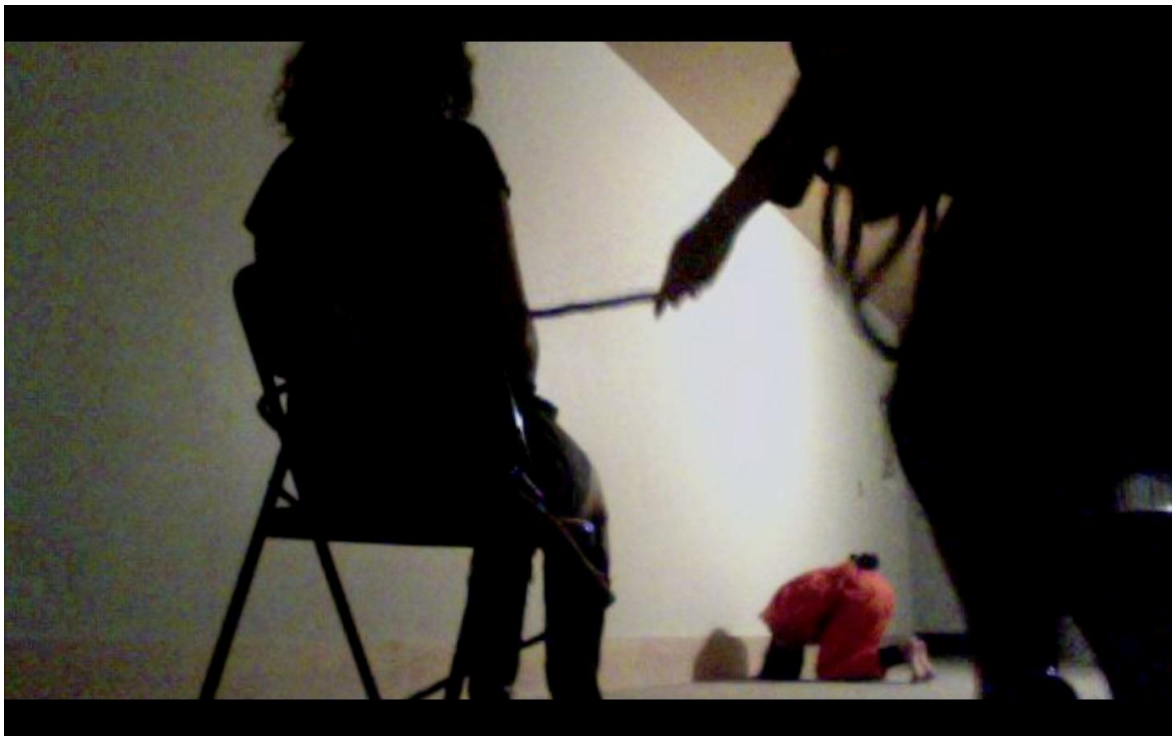


Fig. 4: *Witness,* UCLA (2011). Courtesy of Allison Wyper.

In *Witness*, as we watch others we are also conscious of being watched; our behavior is policed both from without and from within. I – the choreographer, the torturer – witness Sonia, my performer, my victim, blindfolded, moving through a choreography of stress positions, her hands behind her back, endlessly whispering an invocation (*Your body has become not yours only…*) into the walls, as if calling forth the ghosts of victims past. I watch her, as the Witness watches me, commanding and correcting Sonia. The Witness watches me as others outside the

[4] Scarry cites Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* in which Arendt explains that in World War II Germany, Himmler regularly spoke of the horror of having to watch, let alone perform, acts of torture and genocide in pursuance of duty, directing pity toward the soldier and away from the prisoner (58-59).

room witness her through a television monitor, see her as I bind her to her chair, see Sonia lying prone at her feet, crawling up her body. As Sonia whispers her invocation into the Witness's ear, begging her to repeat it back, I record their urgent exchange on cassette tape. The Witness agrees to participate, unsure exactly what action her assent sets in motion (Fig. 4).

Where Scarry's torturer draws himself away from the prisoner, his power extracting him from any embodied animal pity, here our Witnessing bodies are shared and our positions unstable (*...Nor left my body mine only...).* The Witness is asked to sign a liability waiver, record her name on tape, and vow to remain in the theatre for the duration of the performance. She is catalogued, archived, documented, and monitored. She is asked to take Sonia's leather gloves, place her hands in the noose-end of a rope and be tied to her chair, all the while being recorded, monitored, and watched. The Witness has no stable vantage point from which to stand and gaze in horror. She cannot stand because there is no stable ground to stand upon. She is literally bound to her position 'center stage.' If she gropes for hands to hold her up, she finds that they are also her hands, and she is holding up the other, who is also herself. Her body has become not hers only. Like the secretary who types the prisoner's confessions, these floating pronouns have disembodied her, re-embodied her, and cast loose the anchor of her subjectivity (Fuentes).

How *Witness* Works

Audience members sign up online for individual half-hour showings. On the day of her appointment, the single viewer arrives at the performance space, where she is asked to fill out a liability release form, then remove her shoes and place any other personal items in a box for the duration of the performance.

Fig. 5: *Witness*, UCLA (2011). Courtesy of Nguyen Nguyen.

She enters a small room equipped with a video camera that projects her image on a TV monitor outside for passers-by to see (Fig. 5). Inside this small room the viewer participates in an interactive performance tailored specifically to her. Like a participant in Stanley Milgram's infamous obedience experiments,[5] she enters into a set of protocols and (in this case, theatrical) conventions that she recognizes, that in fact presuppose her passivity, so that when commanded to intervene, she must decide when to help, when to disobey, and when to just let things happen. As she leaves, she is handed a survey asking her to evaluate her own participation (Fig. 6).

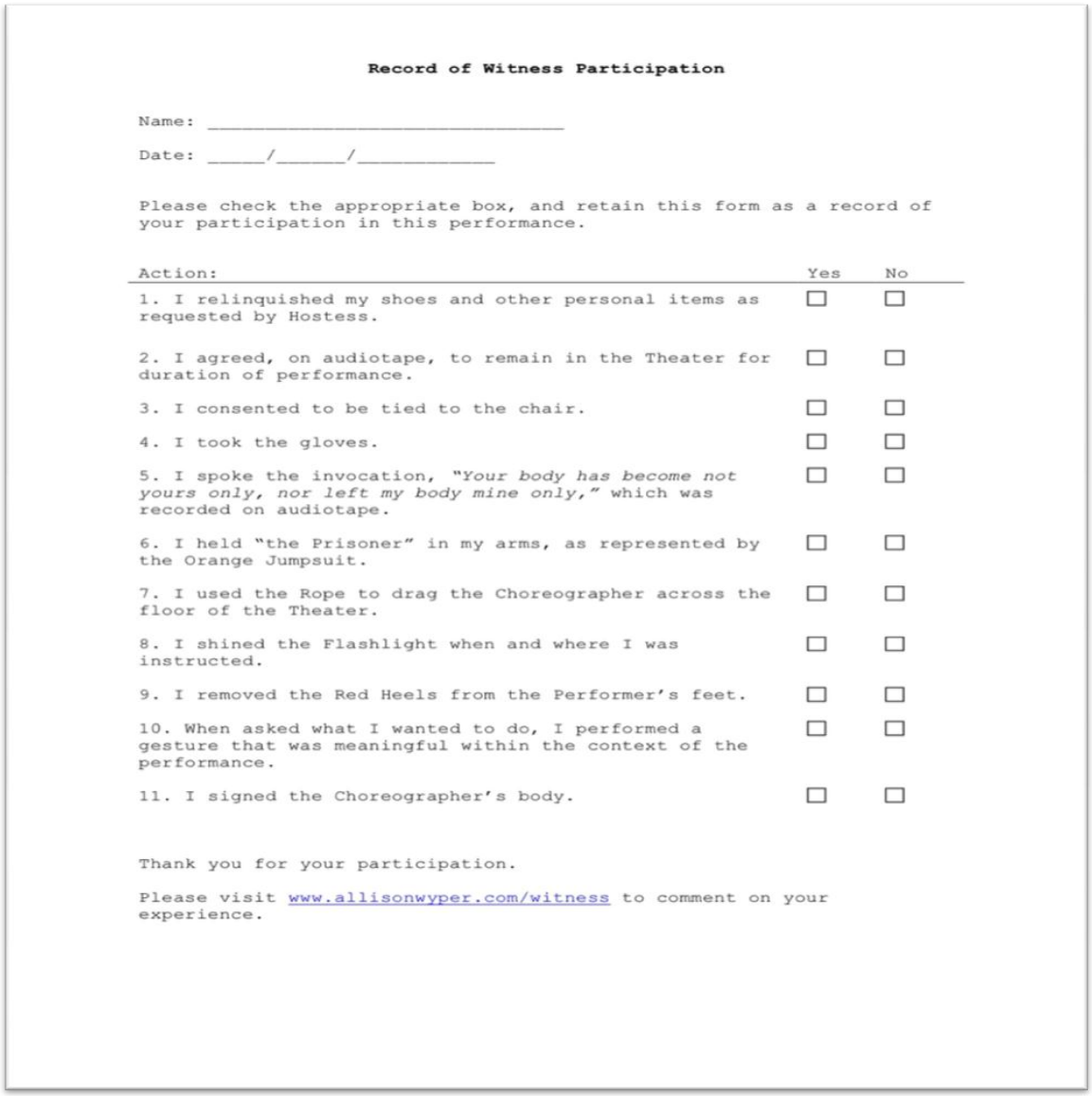
Did I remove my shoes? (Yes or No.)

[5] Stanley Milgram conducted a series of experiments in the early 1960s that focused on why people (specifically men) obey authority. In his experiments his subjects were instructed to participate in a scientific study on the effects of punishment on memory and learning by administering what they believed to be painful electric shocks to a passive victim in an electric chair. He found that most of the men complied willingly, without significant moral objection, and arguably under no significant threat or coercion. Milgram claimed his experiments helped explain why Nazi soldiers were so easily compelled to perform the atrocities they did (Helm and Morelli 321-22).

Did I shine the flashlight when and where I was instructed?

Did I use the rope to drag the choreographer across the floor of the theatre?

Throughout this performance the Witness is repeatedly asked to act, to sign her name (ultimately on my body), and to record her voice on tape, testifying that she has taken part. During this performance she repeatedly confronts her inhibitions, asking, *how far am I willing to go, to get involved? How much will I risk?*



Record of Witness Participation

Name: _____

Date: _____/_____/_____

Please check the appropriate box, and retain this form as a record of your participation in this performance.

Action:	Yes	No
1. I relinquished my shoes and other personal items as requested by Hostess.	☐	☐
2. I agreed, on audiotape, to remain in the Theater for duration of performance.	☐	☐
3. I consented to be tied to the chair.	☐	☐
4. I took the gloves.	☐	☐
5. I spoke the invocation, *"Your body has become not yours only, nor left my body mine only,"* which was recorded on audiotape.	☐	☐
6. I held "the Prisoner" in my arms, as represented by the Orange Jumpsuit.	☐	☐
7. I used the Rope to drag the Choreographer across the floor of the Theater.	☐	☐
8. I shined the Flashlight when and where I was instructed.	☐	☐
9. I removed the Red Heels from the Performer's feet.	☐	☐
10. When asked what I wanted to do, I performed a gesture that was meaningful within the context of the performance.	☐	☐
11. I signed the Choreographer's body.	☐	☐

Thank you for your participation.

Please visit www.allisonwyper.com/witness to comment on your experience.

Fig 6: Record of Witness Participation. *Witness* UCLA (2011).

Examples of Witness Tactics

At the climax of the performance, the performers ask the Witness, 'What do you want to do now?' The Witness is instructed: 'perform a gesture or a series of gestures that you feel need(s) to happen now.' The following table roughly defines the range of participant behaviors based on my interaction with approximately 150 Witnesses.

Tactics: *Types of responses**	**What the Witness does:** *Examples of behavior***
Conversation or speech	Asks questions. Makes impressive speeches or otherwise performs (usually liberal) politics. Critiques or comments on the choreography (i.e. 'goes meta').
Counter-performance	Eagerly puts on costume and performs for the camera (either keeping with the themes of the piece, or diverging into other material entirely).
Restoration or making amends	Makes performers hug, dance, or apologize to one another. Might participate in hugging, dancing, apologizing. Asks the performers what they want to do.
Silence	Chooses to 'do nothing,' or asks to sit silently for the entire time.
Enacts revenge	Takes sides, and punishes either the Performer or the Choreographer (ties them up, etc.)
Humor	Makes jokes. Sings children's songs (e.g. 'Row, Row, Row Your Boat').
Full compliance	Does everything the performers tell him/her to do.
Restore balance	Asks Choreographer to put her clothes back on.
Symbolic engagement	Performs a ritualistic rite involving costumes & props, such as ritual burial, to disempower the weapons of violence.

	Dresses him/herself in props and costumes and performs an action that invokes the spirits of (usually) the victims or performs some symbolic action of closure.

[*] *Note: Sometimes one Witness will employ a range of tactics, not just one: for example, performing his/her liberal politics in a display of equanimity by vowing not to hurt the performers if they vow not to hurt one another. A counter-performance may also be an attempt to restore balance, if, for example, the Witness takes off her/his clothes and dresses the choreographer in them, then puts on the orange jumpsuit and goes on hands and knees before the camera.*

[**] *All of these actions have been performed by actual Witnesses.*

Witnessing

This performance works from the point of view that witnessing is a function of community. Here we understand witnessing as watching ourselves watching, knowing that our watching is a task given to us, our social duty to one another. It marks that something indeed took place, a rite was performed, a change was made, a confession given, a vow taken (or broken), a wrongdoing perpetrated, a crime committed, a spirit felt, a knot tied, an initiation performed. The embodied presence of the Witness changes the thing witnessed. The event is as it is because the Witness is there, thus the event witnesses the Witness.

The Witness is traditionally positioned at a remove from the oath, crime, or execution. The Witness is distant from the act. Witnesses observe, and in their observing the act is consecrated (or exposed). The Witness is the eye of the community, embodying the many. Under the gaze of the Witness, grievance is aired, vows are spoken, vice is purged, and justice is enacted.

Witnessing is also a choreography that we give to the participants, carefully positioning them in relation to our bodies, our costumes, and the props ('weapons') with which we perform

our ritual, our own act of witnessing. As Witness Marcela Fuentes observed, 'In this piece, witnessing is our score, the corporeal script that cracks open the role of the spectator, summoning the ethical dimension of watching a controversial event. In *Witness*, the supposedly neutral viewer becomes a co-participant in the action' ('One Viewer' n.p.). An orange prison jumpsuit laid at the Witness's feet becomes at once her shadow, a corpse, a supplicant, and an invitation to wear it and inhabit the body of the victim (Fig 7).

Fig. 7: *Witness*, UCLA (2011). Courtesy of Nguyen Nguyen.

Confronting our Limits

This performance asks us to reflect upon our limits of engagement. What actions do we take when we encounter injustice? Do we protest with a hundred other activists? Give money to the woman on the street corner? Help a bullied performer retaliate against her aggressor by dragging her aggressor across a room with a rope (Fig. 8)? Whose side do we take? How do we perform pity, empathy, identification? Adrian Piper describes the process of identification across difference as 'modal imagination:' that is, our ability to 'extend our conception of reality – and, in particular, of human beings – beyond our immediate experience of the indexical present. This leap is a necessary condition for experiencing compassion for others' (qtd. in Kester 77). It is how our contingent identities of self might be shifted and reformed through dialogical encounter with someone different. But witnessing, and the critical reflexivity that I maintain it demands, is far more complicated than sympathizing with a victim. 'So far as we feel sympathy,' Susan Sontag writes, 'we feel we are not accomplices to what caused the suffering. Our sympathy proclaims our innocence as well as our impotence. To set aside the sympathy we extend to others beset by war and murderous politics for a reflection on how our privileges are located on the same map as their suffering, and may – in ways we might prefer not to imagine – be linked to their suffering […] is a task for which the painful, stirring images supply only an initial spark' (102-103).

It is my hope that *Witness*, in its raw intimacy, is a potent participatory intervention. Compassion and disgust, pleasure and control, love and pain, play themselves out on the razor's edge of fear and desire in this intimate space. These acts of brutality, albeit 'staged,' are performed in front of you: you touch the rope, you look us, the performers, in the eye, together we touch and feel. The Witness is asked to become a performer, to intervene, and finally to

decide what happens next. S/he is asked to act, with us, in the space, to come up with an ending, to make a symbolic gesture, and perhaps even to fail and thus confront the fact of failure.

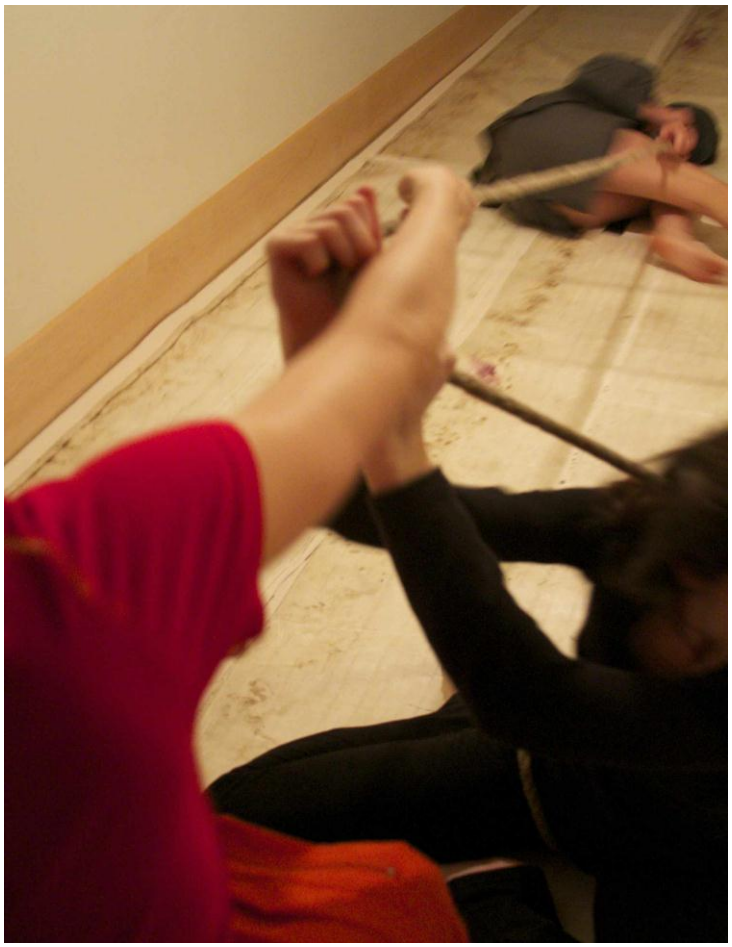


Fig. 8: *Witness*, UCLA (2011). Courtesy of Nguyen Nguyen.

I imagine that as we part we each carry within us the stinging hum of touch, the burn of rope, the chill of blindfold, painfully recalling how easily we slipped from watching into doing, from the role of Witness, to torturer, to victim and back again. Would we have done these things if we were not set up? Are we unconsciously doing them all the time? Am I torturing without my knowledge? Yesterday I might have said no, but today I am not so sure. My sense of self has been ruptured and I am not only me. The ink of your signature has entered my bloodstream (Fig.

9). The fibers of the rope you pulled have hardened my skin, changing the shape of my hands. Your silence rings in my ears. 'All is recall'd as we flit by each other,' Whitman sings (*Leaves* 160, line 4).

> You give me the pleasure of your eyes, face, flesh, as we pass, you take of my beard, breast, hands, in return, / I am not to speak to you, I am to think of you when I sit alone or wake at night alone, / I am to wait, I do not doubt I am to meet you again, / I am to see to it that I do not lose you. (Lines 7-10)

Fig 9: *Witness*, UCLA (2011). Courtesy of Nguyen Nguyen.

In Defense of Disorientation

Ambiguity (simultaneous pushing and pulling, attraction and repulsion) is a tactic that allows me to destabilize familiar systems of representation and power dynamics. Disorientation (white noise, blindfolding the Witness, and seemingly arbitrary power shifts) is another. For example, the mechanism that causes power to shift (from oppressor to victim, from watcher to watched) must remain hidden in order for the shift to be unpredictable in relation to the Witness. This piece is not about knowing *why* power shifts; it is about experiencing the slippery contingent nature of power, agency, domination, and authority, in order to recognize that there might be agency when none is perceived, and to question the idea of concrete moral or political authority at all. *Witness* approaches what Claire Bishop has termed 'relational antagonism,' that is, a dialogical encounter that presupposes a divided subject and is 'predicated not on social harmony, but on exposing that which is repressed in sustaining the semblance of this harmony […] thereby provid[ing] a more concrete and polemical grounds for rethinking our relationship to the world and to one another' (79). This work combats the citizens' perceptions of their own powerlessness and lack of responsibility in relation to injustice. Inaction is not impotence; it is the performance of consent. The notion that sympathy excuses inaction, that I am a good guy because I feel for the victim or contribute financially to the good guy cause, is here obliterated.

In *Witness*, shared/exchanged roles (Witness, victim, oppressor, performer) set up a freeing mobility of spectator identification that crosses perceived borders between good and evil, producing an ambiguous sense of simultaneous freedom/agency and guilt/culpability. This exchange and mobility supports the theme that your body is not only your own. The victim's body is the property of the oppressor. The victim's body is abused by the torturer. The pain in the body of the watched elicits pain in the watcher's body – but this pain is only the faintest echo of

the original injury, something closer to nausea (a symptom of disorientation). Each wound is my wound. In this performance, no one occupies a discreet and isolated position – that privilege is relinquished upon entry. You may not hide in the background, nor in the darkened house of the theatre. Instead you are hyper-visible, in close personal proximity to the performers and at the same time captured on film (recorded) and a surveillance monitor (live video feed). In this intimate proximity the problems of the world are in your lap, in your hand, looking you in the eye. The television turns its gaze onto you, scrutinizing your every gesture.

Fig 10: *Witness [re:mixed]*, Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (2011). Courtesy of LACE (Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions).

Power and Agency

In *Witness*, power is signified by verticality (heels, the right to stand up) and by the privilege of watching (via camera or the blindfold-free eye). Power is also evoked through the extreme sexuality of costuming (particularly my tight business suit and red stiletto heels) and the

eroticism of the choreography. The first major shift of power in the room occurs when Sonia takes hold of my body, transfers her blindfold onto me, and then cradles my tense body to her chest and dances with me. This seductive dance happens a foot away from the Witness, who enjoys not only the brief respite from acute participation, but also the consumption of erotic spectacle. The usurpation of power by the formerly victimized Sonia is not peaceful or utopian, however. Shoving me violently against the wall, she assumes my role as torturer, and her position of power is shared with the Witness who holds the flashlight, the rope, the gloves – the instruments of domination – as I am literally stripped of my power, down to my underwear. At the climax of this coup the Witness points the flashlight at my body as I crouch on all fours, in a posture of utter defeat and humiliation. At this moment the ultimate aggression of the Witness is in her gaze, which echoes my gaze when I looked at those infamous photos for the first, second, tenth time, and the gazes of millions like me. With each look, this violent act of humiliation and abuse is replicated, repeated, over and over again.[6]

Power is also signified in this performance by the undeniable authority of theatrical convention: the artist is the boss, and you will do what she says because your participation is expected in the theatrical exchange. More precisely, you come to the theatre in order to be entertained or pleasured. That is to say, you come to consume. If the artist asks you to do something, you comply only because you expect to be rewarded with a pleasing or entertaining spectacle. Your participation is ultimately a conditional and self-gratifying gesture. Over all of the individuals in the theatre, the institution (UCLA, for example) retains supreme legal

[6] In *A Field Guide for Female Interrogators*, Coco Fusco performs an extensive analysis of how female sexuality and sexual violence by female officers has been employed in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Guantanamo Bay by U.S. Military Police in their interrogations of prisoners, usually in order to shame prisoners into submission or confession. Fusco additionally makes an argument that sexuality and sexual consumption of the female body can deflect ethical scrutiny, and that the sexualized body in this context becomes a spectacle, obscuring serious understanding of the torture that the U.S. routinely performs

authority, as signified by the mandatory release forms and modifications to the choreography to ensure the viewer's safety. And then of course there is the inner voice of moral authority that follows you home, your record of participation hidden in your pocket.

Fig. 11: *Witness*, POW!POW!POW!, Action Art Festival (2010). Courtesy of Nora Raggio.

So, where is the agency here? This concern has haunted me throughout my creative process. What if Witnesses leave this piece feeling freshly burdened by the reality of their guilt and implication, and feeling that no matter how many letters they write or dollars they donate they are ultimately powerless? Where is the activist efficacy in a project that refuses to engage with neoliberal narratives of socioeconomic development that have supported projects like the Peace Corps for decades, not to mention more conservative notions of charity and brotherhood? In the end, I have to trust that critical reflexivity is productive for an activist project like this. I have to trust that there is more danger in the cozy self-satisfaction of the first world bleeding-

heart consumer than in the dethroned, dizzy, nauseous acknowledgement of our participation in acts of atrocity.

Fig. 12: *Witness [re:mixed]*, Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (2011). Courtesy of LACE.

Of course Witnesses can also leave this piece totally unaffected and content in their worldviews. *Witness* is different from the kind of agit-prop political theatre that leads the viewer directly to an inevitable conclusion of pointed outrage. Far from presenting a political point of view writ large, *Witness* presents entirely contradictory information, disorienting rather than orienting the viewers, making them aware of their own complicity, and yes, depleting their agency in the process. In *Witness* you are exposed to the ways in which your agency is compromised. *Witness* challenges the liberal notion of agency itself. The challenge becomes: how do you exercise your agency strategically so as not to compromise your moral beliefs? As Fuentes puts it, 'the performance turns compliant spectators into accountable witnesses' ('One

Viewer' n.p.). You have crossed the threshold, surrendered your voice, sight, and body, and now, you must act.

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Emancipating the Spectator: Participation in Performance

By Astrid Breel

Abstract

This article is an artist facilitator's response to audience collaboration in Manuel Vason's *Still Image Moving*: a participatory community art project which took place in Bristol, December 2010. The response is one of scepticism towards the rubric of audience 'empowerment' in socially engaged art, but it aims to be constructive in assessing what space there might be for such an empowering practice to emerge. By addressing empowerment in relation to authorship, concepts of ownership and different ways of conceptualising the audience within the artwork, this article looks to examine the possibilities for an equal and empowering collaboration between artist and participating public. With reference to examples from *Still Image Moving*, this article looks to establish a personal and critical reflection on the mechanics of the relationship between Vason and a participating public by drawing on the documentation of participant responses and a theoretical framework on the themes of ownership, authorship and empowerment.

This article discusses *Still Image Moving*, a participatory community project by Manuel Vason in Bristol, December 2010. The project was co-produced by InBetween Time Productions and the Bristol City Council Neighbourhood Arts Team. In this project, Vason and a team of artist facilitators took to the streets of Bristol to engage passers-by, inviting people to participate in the creation of an image with Vason. These images were projected at the end of each day on the side of a shipping container that was home to the project, as well as on large central buildings in Bristol.

Still Image Moving visited four urban Bristol communities over twelve days: the city centre, Bedminster, Stokes Croft and St Paul's. The intention was to engage non-traditional arts audiences by creating an interactive intervention in urban Bristol communities. The project engaged 'artist facilitators,' who approached potential participants and engaged them within the project, as well as helping them generate ideas for their image. InBetween Time Productions described the role of the artist

facilitators as helping to 'get members of the community involved' in artistic endeavours whilst 'deepen[ing] the encounter' between artists and potential collaborators ('Call for Artist Facilitators'). I was one of the artist facilitators and attended a two-day workshop with Vason, which made clear the importance of the encounter with each individual participant. Vason specifically explained that a successful interaction did not necessarily need to produce an image that could be projected. I also introduced a feedback structure, consisting of 3 questions[1] on a consent form that all participants completed, as well as the opportunity to interview participants and the artists involved, in order to examine the experience of the participants. Drawing on the documentation, this article examines the politics and ethics of collaboration with an audience in *Still Image Moving* in the light of my own experience as an artist facilitator.

Fig. 1: Mat Kauhanen, *Still Image Moving* (2010). Courtesy of Mat Kauhanen and Manuel Vason

[1] These questions were: What does the image represent for you? How would you describe your experience in creating the image? What level of artistic ownership do you feel over the image you created?

This is Mat Kauhanen. He is losing his hearing after having been a DJ for 12 years. The day before this image was taken he found out that his hearing will get progressively worse and that he will be completely deaf in 5 years.

The 'empowering creativity of collective action' (Bishop, 'Social Turn' 179) is often taken for granted within participatory work, specifically work set in a community environment. The aims, description and outcomes for this work, which sets up a collaboration between artist and participants, often overreaches reality and is rarely critically examined or evaluated.[2] I would like to suggest that the aims and ambitions of collaborative work, specifically socially engaged and community practices, are in need of careful scrutiny. A strategy to evaluate a project and analyse the experience of the participants is needed, particularly if the outcomes are to be described as 'empowering.' This notion of empowerment needs to be examined critically, in order to discover whether we can believe in the 'magic formula' of social collaboration and participation to automatically produce it, or whether it is dependent on less tangible circumstances. With Claire Bishop, perhaps we ought to be wary of how socially engaged art is documented, particularly when such documentation 'asks us to take its claims of meaningful dialogue and political empowerment on trust' ('Social Turn' 183).

With the rise of participatory, relational, collaborative and experiential practices, where audience participation is arguably the end product of the work, it is necessary to critically analyse these practices, as both artists and scholars, by discussing the experience of the participant. Supporting the idea that a collaborative experience offers more than visual engagement alone, Dwight Conquergood (149) advocates an engaged and embodied experience as creating participatory knowledge.

[2] This being said, companies such as WildWorks are currently exploring new methodologies of evaluating this type of community practice (personal communication, 22/09/2011).

The participant-performer relationship is key to any discussion of experience or empowerment and most works simply invite the participant to accept and interact within the parameters of the art project (Beech n.p.).

The terminology ordinarily used when discussing socially engaged and community work is problematic (as indicated with reference to Bishop above), with words such as empowerment being emotive and difficult to pin down. Although this phraseology is often used within project descriptions for funding bodies and organisations, it is too generalised and suggests the work is solely created for social impact (Bishop, 'Social Turn' 180). Although this article attempts to examine notions of empowerment, it will divide this term into ideas of agency, authorship and ownership in relation to *Still Image Moving*: elements which can produce a sense of empowerment.[3] The concept of authorship is key to this discussion, as it attempts to assign the role of artist to the participant. I hope to elucidate how the artist consequently functions as a co-author and facilitator to the collaboration process.

Empowerment and Authorship

In *Still Image Moving*, the audience were supported in their collaboration by a group of artist facilitators. The facilitation, although consistently positive and supportive, juggled two opposing perspectives: helping the participant to fill the opening left in the work for the participant to make decisions, and the artist's desire to create the most interesting image possible. In response, Vason and the artist facilitators created an improvised and responsive methodology, adapted to each participant and his or her need.

[3] In Bishop's *Participation*, she acknowledges three continuities behind the 'empowering' participatory impulse: the creation of an active subject, authorship and collective responsibility (12).

Fig. 2: J. Alexander in *Still Image Moving* (2010). Courtesy of J. Alexander and Manuel Vason.

This is J. Alexander. She wanted to do 'a very powerful image,' but had no ideas to start from. Looking around the container for inspiration, she liked an image of four hands framing a face. Vason suggested recreating this image, which was agreed on. As they were getting ready, J. rolled up her sleeves so they would not be seen. In doing so, she revealed a series of scars on her arms. Vason asked if she would mind the scars being in the image, suggesting to her it would make it more powerful. This raises the problematic ethical issue of the artist potentially manipulating the participant to create the image he wanted, which could end up being as much a disempowering as an empowering experience for the participant. Whilst I acknowledge the potential for coercion created within the artistic frame under the authority of Vason as an artistic-enabler, I would argue that the supportive environment in which such decisions are made ultimately downplays the threat of coercion. J. said she was happy to show her scars and Vason directed the gesture in the final image. In this process, J. chose the image to recreate, and it was adapted in response to her physicality to become an image that, although directed by Manuel, was inspired by J. This links back to the theme of authorship; the artist as the sole creator is complicated by means of dialogue. What emerges is an improvisatory model of authorship premised on artist and collaborator interaction.

To put the project into context, it is useful to see how Vason's 'performance photography' might feed into an understanding of authorship. *Still Image Moving* is an interesting project in relation to Vason's practice, representing a handing over of authorship and agency to the object/subject of the photograph. Before working with performance artists, Vason trained as a fashion photographer. This type of photography has a strong tradition of treating the bodies of the models as objects.

Body and performance art, as well as performance photography,[4] has the opposite approach to the body displayed within the work; the work is 'owned' by the performance artist.

Vason has worked with many performance artists and challenged the boundaries of collaboration in performance photography. In *Live Gallery* (2001-2003), participants in sites such as a swimming pool, hospital and homeless hostel were invited to have their portrait photographed and displayed in the building. In *Exposures* (2002) and *Encounters* (2007), Vason collaborated with a series of performance and live artists to create images inspired by their practice, rather than directly of the work that they produced.[5]

Still Image Moving hands over agency in a similar way to *Encounters*, but to a different kind of collaborator. It invited the (non-artist) inhabitants of four Bristol communities to participate, as in *Live Gallery*, but to create something in collaboration that reached far beyond a portrait. Photography was both the tool for participation and the product of that interaction. In conversation with me in October 2010, Vason said that the project aim was to create a space for people to tell their fantasies and thoughts, which would then be developed into a theatrical photograph performed to camera. Many participants had no experience in performance or photography and over half of the audience came to the project wanting to participate but without an initial idea. Here Vason would converse with the participant. This conversation would be translated into a theatrical photograph, partly inspired by the props and images within the shipping container and the sites and locations available

[4] Philip Auslander proposes two forms of performance photography: documentary (representing the traditional relationship between the event and the documentation) and theatrical (a record of a performance that never took place (2). Theatrical photographs are often referred to as 'performed photography.'

[5] Some of these images depart from the current practice of the artist. Alice Maude-Roxby has written about these collaborative images, arguing that from intense collaboration and 'drawing from the conceptual and aesthetic vocabulary associated with the artist's practice, a new work is realised' (54).

nearby. The vital difference between the collaborators in *Encounters* and those of *Still Image Moving*, is that the former possessed a conceptual and aesthetic vocabulary, whereas the latter came (mostly) without preparation, creating an unequal standing with the artist. This inequality arose mostly from the difference in preparation and experience of creating theatrical photographs. Also cultural hierarchy often assumes that a creative vocabulary influenced by popular culture, rather than the academic study of art and philosophy, is less prized, which can leave participants hesitant or reluctant to collaborate.[6]

The discussion of a term like 'empowerment' to describe the result of socially engaged and community practices is consequently challenging, in part because of the difficult issues which arise around the relationship between empowerment and authorship. The rise of this type of work can be attributed in part to a government interest in funding work that improves social conditions and engages communities, beside the fact that many artists prize engagement with perceived social ills quite apart from this.[7] Within much socially engaged practice, the work created by the artist is constituted by an engagement with a participating public, rather than any final object or performance. Paul O'Neill discusses participation as an end product, arguing that 'the function of the artwork is to create situations of potential agency for the co-productive processes initiated by the artist' (4). In order to examine these situations of potential agency and their result or effect on the participant, it is necessary to interrogate procedures, forms and consequences of collaboration, rather than solely examining the ethical treatment of the audience members.

[6] This was apparent in the response of the participants in *Still Image Moving*, both within conversation with the participants as well as their written responses. For a contextual discussion, see Dave Beech's *Include Me Out!*

[7] For examples, see Grant Kester on WochenKlausur in his *Conversation Pieces* and Bishop on Santiago Sierra in 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics.'

Generally, empowerment appears to describe the engagement of the community or participants in the project, but also promises something more ethereal, alluding to a positive result in the lives of the participants. This promise is rarely analysed, described or critiqued, other than commenting on the way the audience was treated. This seems to assume that providing the audience is treated with respect, their lives will be improved. As an artist facilitator in a project like *Still Image Moving*, I would suggest that proving the realisation of such a promise can be fraught with difficulty. Instead, a critical focus on the content of the work, together with the structure and site for the audience, would be more productive, combining the sites for potential agency with the audience response to the opportunity presented.[8]

We might define the kind of authorship at play in *Still Image Moving* as 'collaborative.' *Still Image Moving* intended to focus on an exchange with the participant, with photography as the means to facilitate this engagement. Socially engaged projects such as this offer the participating audience the chance to collaborate with the artist and co-author the work. This is often described as placing the audience in the place of, or alongside the artist, and helping the audience express their latent creativity. This means that the work is created and viewed by a network of audiences, participants, collaborators and spectators, with the boundaries between each appearing to collapse. I wish to define participants and collaborators in *Still Image Moving* as individuals involved within the project, where spectators are those viewing the outcome, or process, of the work. The audience is the overall group of people involved within the project, whether they are participating or spectating.

If we contrast participation with collaboration, where does that leave the audience in this work? *Still Image Moving* attempts to collaborate with its

[8] Bishop ('Social Turn' 179.) also indicates a move away from a simple ethical critique, calling for an approach that allows work to be discussed as critical art, whilst taking any social effect produced into account.

participating audience. Collaborators are distinct from participants. As David Beech suggests, collaborators 'share authorial rights over the artwork that permit them, among other things, to make fundamental decisions about the key structural features of the work' (*Include Me Out!* n.p.). Decisions over key structural features of the work are more difficult to share than the decision about the content of an image, especially when a collaborator joins late in the process (it would have been impossible for an audience member to decide where the images were to be projected, for instance, due to technical and logistical issues). Moreover, each photo is a part of the overall work, for which the possible situations have already been constructed and authored by Vason. The project then is situated in between Beech's definitions of participant and collaborator, extending an open invitation to collaborate, but within the (wide) parameters of the project. *Still Image Moving* invited a collaboration of ideas in order to complete the project with the participant, whose behaviour was facilitated. Instead of being a beholder or respondent to the work, the participant was an active agent in the process. The exchange was more important than the final photograph. The project attempted to position the participant on the same level as the artist, to suggest an equal collaboration and a handing over of agency to the participants: an aim fraught with difficulty.

Audience and Ownership

A criticism of participatory work like *Still Image Moving* is that it frequently asks more of its audience than it is capable of giving.[9] The artist assumes (or hopes) that the audience member will be able and willing to fill the place that has been left in the work for the participatory act, but the artist has still authored the situation: 'The point … is that participation always involves a specific invitation and a specific formation

[9] See Dave Beech's *Include me out!* n.p.

of the participant's subjectivity, even when the artist asks them simply to be themselves' (Beech, *Include Me Out!* n.p.). *Still Image Moving* dealt with this issue in a positive way, by allowing the participant to contribute to different capacities, with a team of artist facilitators to assist. This collaborative act attempted to hand over agency and, significantly, offered ownership of the image to the participant. *Still Image Moving* had a large opening in the work for the participant to make decisions about the concept, framing and content of the image whilst attempting to create a flexible situation. This resulted in a range of images that were a collaborative effort between the artist(s) and the participants, with the minimum amount of prescribed parameters. The collaboration, and with it the promise of authorship, agency and ownership, lay in the decision-making process. This is where potential agency is created, by offering the opportunity to take decisions on the content, subject and location of the photograph created.

Fig. 3: the Jutton Family in *Still Image Moving* (2010). Courtesy of the Jutton Family and Manuel Vason.

This is the Jutton family. They came to participate without preconceived ideas and conversed with two facilitators about family activities, playing games such as visual consequences, which led to a suggestion of doing a physical version of the game by the facilitators. At this point, Vason joined the process and suggested doing a take on a Victorian portrait. The family agreed and Vason suggested objects for each of the family members to hold. The idea originated from Vason and differed from the initial suggestion that had been directly inspired by what the family had said. The participants went along with this idea and subsequently adopted it as their own. Although they described it as the photographer's image in their feedback, they also said that in placing the dog at the centre and the choice of props for the kids, the image was very representative of their family. This exemplifies how the project created room for a variety of interactions. Participant collaborators took part in the creation of an image, acted as performing subjects in the process of taking the photographs, and ended up enjoying the additional role of spectator to the projections of the images.

There were two distinct participating audiences in *Still Image Moving*: passers-by and those in the know, and this impacted on the process and images created. The passers-by required more assistance to make decisions, and it would be the artist who would suggest and respond to any ideas and frame the image. Those in the know, who were often artists themselves, had been able to prepare ideas and were better placed to collaborate in the process, using their aesthetic vocabulary. This presented a collaboration that was more equal, as there was creative input from both sides from the beginning. For those like the Jutton family, the decision making process was less equal, although the final product still reflected its subjects and did produce a sense of ownership of the space. The participants stated in their feedback that when they walk down Gloucester Road they remember the project and it makes

them smile. 'Ownership' has been a recurring theme in my documentation of *Still Image Moving* so far, even in those instances where participating subjects could be said to have had very little impact on the creative process. With most encounters, Vason suggested and responded to ideas and themes that fitted within his aesthetic vocabulary, leaving many participants agreeing to his suggestions, rather than arriving at ideas together.

After the image was finished, the participants were asked how much ownership they felt they had over the image created. Of the seventy seven answers:

- 9 stated they had no ownership
- 13 described it as 'some'
- 25 said half, 50% or 'shared'
- 17 stated 'a lot'
- 8 felt total ownership

The responses were therefore wide ranging, with some recognising the process as collaborative, others feeling they only 'took part in creating' the image and some stating that they 'came up with the ideas' and therefore felt complete ownership. This varying response even happened within groups, with members giving differing feedback on their perceived levels of ownership. There were two groups that participated which were bigger than the others. The responses of one group (of nine participants) to their claims for ownership ranged from 'none, maybe 2%' to 'entirely' and 'our original idea that we moulded.' Within the other large group (of five participants), one person claimed to be 'the main character' whereas the rest stated none or little ownership of the image.

Fig. 4: Jordan Johnson in *Still Image Moving* (2010). Courtesy of Jordan Johnson and Manuel Vason.

The image above is particularly informative in documenting how participants might have been encouraged to feel ownership over their image. This is Jordan Johnson. He spent a day with the project, bringing a broken Play Station 3 which had 'transformed into an ugly paperweight' for him. He had a clear idea of wanting to smash it, to show his dissatisfaction with his technological dependence. Vason suggested setting fire to it, but he was adamant that he wanted to smash the PS3. He bought a sledgehammer, and through further discussion decided it would be more dramatic to add flames to the destruction. Vason directed the image, including lights and flash, to get the precise moment of destruction. Jordan's response to the collaboration was very clear; he felt very present within the process and that the idea originated from him, but that the artist did the ultimate framing, as Vason arguably possessed the skill and experience in that area. When asked what level of ownership he felt, he replied 'I hope that part of myself is conveyed within the image yet the framing and final impression is that of the artist.' He felt that the person doing the

framing was allowed to sign the work, though in a conceptual framework it was his idea that authored the work. It is this preliminary claim to authorship, within the broader frame of Vason's collaborative offer, that encourages collaborators to feel a sense of ownership over the resulting image.

Different types of ownership need to be separated here: ideological ownership, authorial ownership and legal ownership. Within many socially engaged projects, the ownership of the project will be presented to the participants in an ideological sense, to both engage them and attempt to leave a legacy. Authorial ownership defines the artist behind the work and who is allowed to sign it. Legal ownership is related to the ways a work can be distributed and displayed.

Still Image Moving showed a clear attempt to hand over ideological authorship, agency of representation and legal ownership to the participant. This was done in two ways: firstly, an invitation was extended to collaborate on the image, supported by the facilitating artists, and, secondly, each participant was required to sign an Attribution Share Alike Creative Commons license[10] to allow for the image to be projected in public.[11] A digital copy of the image was also emailed to the participant. This symbolically reiterated the ownership of the image by allowing the participant to publish, remix, tweak and build upon the image, as well as being credited on any publications of it. This recognises the importance of giving the audience member agency over their own image and offers them some degree of ownership over the project by allowing them rights over their photographed image that models might otherwise have been denied. This is a departure from other projects by Vason, whose documentary photographs of performances are consistently credited

[10] This license is often compared to open source software licenses. Further detail of the Creative Commons licenses can be found at http://creativecommons.org/licenses/.

[11] This was a requirement set up within the project, as the law only requires this type of protection when photographing children under 16. Where children under 16 were involved, their parent or guardian was required to sign the license for them.

to him. His collaborative images within projects such as *Encounters* are credited to the artist and Vason, as the photographs in *Still Image Moving* are credited to the participant and Vason. There is a significant difference between these two projects, which lies in the power structure. Vason has set up the exchange before the participants become involved. Unless the participant comes with a full idea, which is literally represented, the artist will put a significant amount into the final product. Vason's images possess a certain style, something visible in all the images created during the project. This becomes problematic when positioning the audience as artist. This questions whether it is possible to place the participant in the artist role, and whether this creates critical art or an ethical process within a community project.

All this suggests that the idea of ownership is complicated: something not quantifiable by the process of the project, which invokes a highly personal feeling and response. All the images I was involved in as an artist facilitator were co-authored on different levels. The final result in each originated in the participant's raw idea or inspiration. In each case they also had agency over their representation through the collaborative process, the choice of the final image and the agreement to project the final image, through the signature on the Creative Commons License.

Conclusion

As suggested, a way of evaluating socially engaged practice that combines the ethical treatment of the audience with critical evaluation of the final work is necessary. This methodology needs to examine participant authorship within the project and claims to 'empowerment,' their ownership of the final work, the status of the audience as participants or collaborators and the audience response. It needs to be a critical response to the work, which takes into account both process and final work (one

possible dual approach uses what O'Neill describes as a time-based approach of the process together with the traditional art-object critique of the work produced (8)).

Returning to the contentious term of empowerment, and whether this is a useful term to describe or promote socially engaged work and community projects, I would argue that the term empowerment is too ambiguous. As Bishop ('Social Turn' 183) has stated, it puts too much emphasis on social collaboration as being inherently positive, creating an uncertain term unsuitable for critical examination. The idea of ownership is already something very personal, as indicated by the participant responses. It would be more productive to analyse the effect of a project in terms of the potential agency created, the balance of ownership and the offer of authorship, combined with the audience response. As Bishop ('Social Turn' 180) argues, community work has been mainly critiqued on the ethics of audience participation and not as a work of critical art. Socially engaged practice requires a different approach to critically presented work, but this needs additional evaluative criteria.

Still Image Moving created potential for participant agency by giving them the opportunity to author the photograph, offering various forms of ownership over the final image and presenting the process as a collaborative endeavour. The overall framework of the project was pre-decided by Vason, but the parameters for participation were wide. Some participants took up the offer of authorship over the project more than others, but this made it possible for anyone to engage on a level they felt comfortable with. The legal ownership, with the use of the Creative Commons license, is something that more socially engaged work could employ, in order to make it clear to their participants that the work created is, at least partially, theirs.

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Book Reviews

***Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* by Shannon Jackson**

London: Routledge, 2011, 299 pp. (softback)

By Poppy Spowage (People's Palace Projects)

Shannon Jackson's account of the recent 'social turn' contributes to an evolving conversation around what socially engaged theatre work can do and how it does it. Jackson collapses the boundaries between contemporary, socially engaged and participatory performance, the premise being that all performance is social. *Social Works* tackles this thesis by revealing the mixed social, political, institutional and aesthetic economies that support performance and engage different publics with the practice. At a time of economic, political and social change, the field of socially engaged performance has to respond to the pressing task of finding alternative ways of articulating the value of aesthetic projects. *Social Works* offers a refreshing and rigorous take on performance practice, at a time when much critical theory has established oppositional relationships between the social and the aesthetic, the effective and the affective.

Approaching performance 'as a site of group coordination in space and over time,' Jackson distances the term 'social works' from a discourse of care (3). Using an array of examples, mainly from the field of visual art and contemporary performance, she treats all performance as 'social work.' In this way, Jackson destabilises hierarchies that exist between applied and contemporary performance, in both research and in practice. This interdisciplinary approach to performance, theory and research aims to unsettle

'some of the binary frames that many use to judge both social efficacy and aesthetic legitimacy' (45).

Littered with lively examples, and following a logical trajectory, each chapter explores a different element that supports performance practice, be that aesthetic, institutional, technological, political, social or economic. Jackson's approach reveals that artistic endeavours are always supported by multiple systems: public/private, aesthetic/social, independent/institutional. *Social Work*'s exploration of these overlapping and interdependent systems concludes that all performance practice engages publics to some degree. Jackson's study of Mierle Laderman Ukeles, offers a particularly effective example of the interdependent systems that support practice. Jackson describes how Ukeles took to creating large inflatable structures, detaching herself from the spatial and temporal constraints of traditional artistic institutions. To create these large structures, Ukeles worked in heat-sealing factories in New York and Philadelphia. Jackson demonstrates how Ukeles' 'quest for independent art forms [produced] new forms of dependency, dependencies upon labour, expertise and resistant material' (85). Using examples from throughout Ukeles' career, *Social Works* asks its readers to consider public and private, social and aesthetic, life and performance worlds as complex, overlapping and competing.

Jackson illuminates inherent tensions between artistic practice and critical theory. Her premise is that 'if our critical language only values agency when it is resisting state structure, then we can find ourselves in an awkward position when we also want to call for the renewal of public institutions' (9). Jackson revisits old arguments but offers a fresh perspective on theoretical debates, such as the discussion between Claire Bishop

and Grant Kester in *Art Forum* (2006), which explores the ethics of community performance. For example, using the work of Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset, Jackson unpacks Bishop's assertion that critics should be concerned 'about art within state-based structures of instrumentalization that receive "prioritised government funding" rather than art staged in "the relatively neutral or staged confines of a gallery space"' (195). Elmgreen and Dragset's collaborative performance/installation works, which have been predominantly located in a 'relatively neutral' gallery space, illuminate how public and private support structures interact. Elmgreen and Dragset's pieces – which include *Social Mobility* (2005), *Reg(u)arding the Guards* (2005) and *The Welfare Show* (2005-6) – 'make clear their discontent with welfare principles' (194). Yet, as artists who have relied on social welfare, Jackson reveals how Elmgreen and Dragset's aesthetic and artistic flexibility was supported by the system of public security that their work critiques.

As Jackson examines the 'paradoxes around artistic privacy and publicity, private funding and public funding' throughout *Social Works*, 'it becomes clear that art-making as a supported and supporting apparatus is also in need of a third way – perhaps several third ways – to respond to art's heterogeneous mixed economies' (27). In her final chapter, Jackson offers Paul Chan's *Waiting for Godot New Orleans* (2006) as an alternative approach to performance practice. Jackson argues that Chan's project embraced mixed public/private, aesthetic/social, and independent/institution economies to its benefit: 'Not a project that chose between private or public sponsorship or made its case for either capitalism or socialism, *Waiting for Godot in New Orleans* mobilized within an economy that remains decidedly mixed' (236). Chan's project had three parts:

social engagement, a provocative aesthetic encounter and the support of both private and public sponsorship. Jackson uses *Waiting for Godot in New Orleans* to demonstrate that it was Chan's ability to exploit these interdependent support systems that enabled the project to mobilise the public in post-Hurricane Katrina New Orleans.

Arts in the UK and the US are experiencing public-expenditure cuts and being encouraged to utilise philanthropic support systems. Jackson offers a timely intervention: performance is presented as an 'art of "interpublic coordination," and as such, a reminder that no one can ever fully go it alone' (9). Chan's *Waiting for Godot New Orleans* is presented as an example of an alternative way of approaching performance practice. To a degree, Jackson creates a bridge between explicitly socially engaged practice and contemporary performance. However, as a renowned contemporary artist, Chan's work remains situated in a contemporary art world. It would be insightful to see Jackson's thesis explored across a wider array of performance genres and draw on examples from community or mainstream performance.

One support system in *Social Works* that lies unexplored is documentation. Texts, evaluation, reports and critical theory play a huge role in supporting artistic practice. In a time of fiscal restraint, it is urgent that artists and organisations, as well as theorists, find alternative ways of accounting for the artistic and social value of performance. It seems *Social Works* might only be the beginning of a more complex and sophisticated means of accounting for the ways in which performance engages publics.

Jackson's study provides a convincing and fresh perspective on the mutually dependent relationship between art and publics, and is a useful and provocative text for academics, researchers and students. *Social Works* acknowledges the systems that support

practice and often remain unexamined. Yet, in a time of social, economic and political change, scope remains as to why and how such an approach to performance could be useful for theorists, artists and publics. Theoretically, *Social Works* 'challenges strict divisions about where the arts ends and the rest of the world begins' (15), but the dense and heavily populated prose leaves the boundaries between critical theory and the rest of the world firmly intact.

***Voice Onstage and Off,* 2nd Ed. by Robert Barton and Rocco Dal Verra**

London: Routledge, 2011, 429 pp. (softback)

By Konstantinos Thomaidis (Royal Holloway, University of London)

Any fair review of Barton and Dal Vera's second edition of *Voice: Onstage and Off* for the readership of an academic journal must be a balancing act between the explicit purposes of the book at hand and the enquiries that can be posed to it by a scholarly milieu. In other words, if one is to recommend this invaluable work, not only to practitioners, but also to theorists of the vocal phenomenon, then one also has to unearth the connections between the practices promoted by the authors and their correspondent critical frameworks.

Barton and Dal Vera have produced a refreshing revision of the already popular first edition of *Voice* (1995). Grounded in years of professional experience, the book is openly designed for an audience of practitioners. Drafting an almost encyclopedic overview of the predominant pedagogy, the authors admit in their preface that the 'purpose of this book is to wade through what is out there to make sense, connect,

simplify, alleviate fears, and help the reader to become a better shopper' (xxvi). Following this premise, the ensuing chapters do not claim to mould a new training regime; rather, they deal with such fundamentals of voice training as the discovery of one's personal vocal profile, the remediation and fine-tuning of the vocal instrument, language elevation, and the 'planning of your voice future' (394).

The new edition manages to accommodate the needs of students from diverse backgrounds who mostly tend to prioritize distinct learning modalities: the auditory, the visual or the kinesthetic. Throughout the book the reader is encouraged to experiment with technological equipment, ranging from simple recorders to software for spectograms (123) or a small home studio (413). For the visual learners, four cartoon figures, the voice cook, the voice shrink, the voice doc and the voice coach, annotate the material with colourful tips. The same style of learning is facilitated by a frequent use of tables, offering key advice on classical speech (290-97), geographic accent sources (316-19), or commercial demo examples (338-39). Similarly, albeit not as frequently, students are invited to incorporate physicality in their vocal drills, including their warm-up (40-45), yoga-inspired resonance exercises (126-28), and breathing patterns extrapolated from Alba Emoting (217-24). A companion website has replaced the CD which once accompanied the volume. Although currently under construction, the website will provide access to demos, audio examples and downloadable forms – its interactive character making the book equally suitable for in-class explorations as well as for private study.

Employing a succinct and reassuring tone, the book fully conveys Barton and Dal Vera's teaching ethics, an ethics of light-hearted depth. While acknowledging the daunting nature of voice-related shifts and the dedicated effort required from the trainee,

the authors encourage change and monitoring of progress through a relaxed and humorous stance. For instance, actors are advised to face nasality by naming it Nadine (the 'N' sound directly alluding to the unresolved problem) and checking if she's 'still here, still uninvited' (400). Likewise, when transferring the state of relaxation and alignment from floor exercises to standing, the students are reminded that: '[y]ou can't spend your career on your back (unless you change careers)' (406). This consciously playful attitude goes hand in hand with deep knowledge: nasality and alignment in these instances are treated with clarity and detail, but within a framework of playfulness fears can be alleviated, preconceptions eradicated and fresh methodologies tested in practice.

In addition to its unquestionable usefulness for all those involved in theatre making, the frequent pointing to other directions in voice literature showcases an ethos of generous inclusiveness (see, among others, the lists on pronouncing dictionaries (179-80), accents resources (313-15), and voice-over resources (348-51)). In this strand, it is Chapter 7, 'Selecting your system' (357-93), which is revelatory of the writers' intentions and the breadth of their research. This section constitutes a broad overview of the five cornerstones of modern conservatory speech training: Edith Skinner, Arthur Lessac, Cicely Berry, Kristin Linklater and Patsy Rodenberg (358-81). The backbone of their teaching and the nucleus of their ideas are cross-examined and even displayed in comparative tables (374-81).

It is here that I think the potential academic interest in the book lies, since this section can be used as a lens through which one might dissect how UK/USA pedagogy understands the relation of voice to the body. In the work of these prominent figures, the voice is understood as affected by the intimate connection between the physicality of the

trainee and their psyche (Berry 11-17; Linklater 7-11; Lessac 13-17; Rodenburg 3-15). The teachers' task is to facilitate a process of *deconstruction*. Put differently, they work with this basic principle in mind: growing up in the West is a process of dis-connection from one's body and disengagement from the self. This becomes obvious in the limits and tensions one considers as inherent in one's voice. For these pedagogues, training should therefore be a process of doing away with cultural encrustations, through initial isolation of the bodily mechanisms involved in voicing and the well-respected remedies of relaxation and effortlessness.

This scenario also forms the backdrop to *Voice*. A 'from psychological blocks to the efficient use of the self' formula underpins the entire chapter on healing (184-84) and is encapsulated in several other parts of the book (see 6-10, 184, 300). In reviewing the marked achievements of the most widely employed pedagogies, Barton and Dal Vera's book almost begs the questions: what if we change the underpinning scenario? What if we avoid the notion of blocks altogether? What if we do not aim at an efficient body/voice, but at an exhausted or excessive body/voice (as in the paradigms of Grotowski and Staniewski's lineages)? This is by no means to imply that Barton and Dal Vera's methods are not perfectly suited to the exigencies of the current theatre marketplace; to the contrary, as a performer, I have already inserted some of their ideas into my everyday training repertoire and, as a teacher, I foresee their validity in the classroom. On top of that, and not in opposition to that, as an academic, I see *Voice* as a crucial point of departure towards a re-imagining and re-examining of how we work as pedagogues and what critical discourses inform our choices.

Before concluding, let me re-iterate: there is a fine line between what the book proposes and what a scholar can make of it when researching the complex territory occupied by both practice and critical thinking. As to the exclusive realm of speech training, Barton and Dal Vera's book is one of the most rounded and inspiring contributions to the field. What is more, they make the case that the book is only the first stop of a 'lifelong journey' (395). Despite their accomplished analysis of all major aspects of vocal work and their comprehensive classroom and DIY suggestions, the authors rightly insist on presenting their textbook as the very beginning of an ongoing engagement with the professional voice. And as such, it is a thoroughly recommendable place to start.

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***Performance Theatre and the Poetics of Failure: Forced Entertainment, Goat Island, Elevator Repair Service* by Sara Jane Bailes**

London; New York: Routledge, 2011, 228 pp. (hardback)

By Karen Quigley (University of Chester)

The idea of a 'poetics of failure' found me thinking about Bob Dylan's 'Love Minus Zero/No Limit.' In this song, written in 1965, Dylan warns us that 'there's no success like failure,' and this could be an interesting epigraph to Sara Jane Bailes' new monograph. *Performance Theatre and the Poetics of Failure: Forced Entertainment, Goat Island, Elevator Repair Service* sits easily alongside an emerging body of (successful) performance studies practice and scholarship that could be thought about in terms of failure studies. Exploring various aporia of theatre and performance, theorists and practitioners have been making a success of failure, as it were, carving out new ways of thinking about (among other things) the slippages between audience (and performer) expectations and what actually ends up happening on the stage. Bailes' work makes an interesting contribution to this discourse, discussing three 'performance theatre' companies of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries with an appealing synthesis of theoretical exploration and practical experience.

Following an introduction in which she clearly outlines her definition of 'performance theatre' (which, for Bailes, combines the self-awareness and un-re-presentability of performance art with the imaginative worlds and ensemble work of stage drama) and discusses established notions of the failure of representation (influenced largely by the work of Samuel Beckett in the mid-twentieth century), Bailes looks at the

invisibility of labour in professional theatre, the capitalist commodification drive of (mostly) mainstream theatre, and the question of where a poetics of failure could situate itself in relation to these ideas. Using an interesting theoretical encounter between Bertolt Brecht and Walter Benjamin, and employing punk and slapstick as initial examples, Bailes discusses the ways in which an intentional practice of and discourse on failure can operate politically, resisting conventional representations of the world and brushing against the grain of commercial success by which achievement is so often measured.

To bolster her accomplished and detailed analysis of Forced Entertainment's work since its formation in 1984, Bailes discusses at length the political and social climate of 1980s Britain and the politics of Margaret Thatcher, who envisaged for citizens 'a culture of winners,' in which 'everyone else – the losers one supposes – was destined to sink to the bottom' (81). Amongst others, Forced Entertainment's devices of showcasing the labour of performance, exploring the 'exhaustion of possibility within a technique' (77) and spotlighting the figure of the (in this case intentional) amateur performer, helped in inventing worlds outside of Thatcher's ideal.

The chapter on Goat Island focuses mostly on the idea of the impossible, a recurring theme in the group's work, in which '[o]ne not only imagines the impossible; one begins to *make* it' (111). Via a discussion of Ernst Bloch's idea of 'possibiliz[ing] the possible,' Bailes examines the group's aim 'to perform activities and tasks that from the outset appear difficult to accomplish within the temporal and spatial limitations of live performance' (112), by using a variety of techniques that push the physical, spatial and temporal limits of performance in new directions.

The work of Elevator Repair Service explores issues of translation across forms and formal genres, as well as the idea of the accidental and the obstacle. For this group, whose recent work has included the staging of various literary works (in their entirety) from F. Scott Fitzgerald to William Faulkner, the '*discoverability* of theatre' is paramount (149). The exploration of ways in which the literary imagination can translate to the public spectacle of theatre is undertaken through a discussion of music theorist Edwin Prévost's notion of 'dislocatory practice.' This idea privileges the unanticipated and the dislocated use of the body or the text in artistic production, and asserts 'awkwardness…as a new kind of competency' (152). The practice creates obstacles for the performers, a sort of failing representation which engenders 'a desire…to grow out of it and to make something with it' (152).

Performance Theatre and the Poetics of Failure provides an interesting and informative study, both of the work of the three companies explored and of Bailes' central thesis: questioning the value of 'successful' representation and suggesting other avenues of exploration. Her mixed methodology, combining philosophical and theoretical analysis with her observations of the companies at work in the rehearsal room, is both engaged and engaging. However, a recurring thought is that the very word 'failure' begins to do less and less work for Bailes as a central term as the book continues. I am creating broad and generalised thematic brushstrokes of her often deft and delicate thesis, but the discussion of Goat Island's 'impossibility' and Elevator Repair Service's 'awkwardness' caused me to question how well the word 'failure' functions here. It is made clear that Forced Entertainment explore the failure of representation, the failure of the performance to conform to expectations, and the failure to accomplish. However, I

remain unconvinced that 'failure' is a useful umbrella term under which to gather such diverse concepts as impossibility and awkwardness in performance theatre. Perhaps, as all three are used for their individual merits within their respective case study chapters, an additional, more overarching term or concept could have been found with which to draw the three together more tidily.

Additionally, in her discussion of Forced Entertainment, Bailes speculates that '[b]y opening up a discussion of failure, one can begin to interrogate rather than deny the difficulty of stage representation' (12). Aligning this with Forced Entertainment's style of 'exposing the artificiality of the theatre predicament' (69), she begins to create a poetics of failure that, for me, is sometimes lacking in her discussion of the other two companies' work, well-informed and well-written though it is. Nevertheless, the fact that the English company continues to enjoy significant commercial and critical success at home and abroad rather jars with Bailes' previous framing of these 'performance theatre' companies as anti-hegemonic and even anti-capitalist. She wisely steers the argument away from these economic matters, focusing instead on her thesis of aesthetics, technique, and therefore the idea that '[a]s theatre fails, it negotiates the conditions of production so that failure surfaces as an alternative way of playing the game' (77). Be that as it may, the commercial triumph of this company that, for Bailes, 'runs on the energy of undoing its own objective' (70) cannot but send me back, for a moment, to 1965. Dylan follows up the line 'there's no success like failure' with 'and failure's no success at all'. He should keep an eye on the ticket sales for Forced Entertainment's next tour.

William Forsythe and the Practice of Choreography: It Starts From Any Point **edited by Steven Spier**

London: Routledge, 2011, 186 pp. (softback)

By Tamara Tomic-Vajagic (University of Roehampton)

Steven Spier's recently published (and long awaited) book, *William Forsythe and the Practice of Choreography*, covers a range of themes allowing for deeper understanding of the choreographer's multifaceted artistic practice. Owing to the editor's subtle approach to structuring, the collection of articles is put together in a way that allows the reader to roam through Forsythe's world, gently guided by a network of sophisticated thematic threads. Written by several key analysts of the choreographer's pursuits, the range of articles provides an extensive insight into Forsythe's investigations of choreography as an organisational operation, his (dis)engagement with the ballet as a form of movement language, and the extensions of these core principles as found throughout his practice.

Since his artistic breakthroughs in mid-1970s and early 1980s, much has been written about Forsythe as a key contemporary choreographer, but Spier's publication is the first scholarly collection to be published in English. Until this compilation, the most important volume was a special issue of the journal *Choreography and Dance*, edited in 2000 by Senta Driver, published during Forsythe's Ballett Frankfurt era. Spier's book follows after more than a decade, and since then significant shifts have occurred in Forsythe's practice, not least in his dance institution (Ballett Frankfurt folded in 2004, and The Forsythe Company was established in 2005). Due perhaps to the anticipation created by this wait, a first glance at Spier's table of contents seems somewhat

anticlimactic – out of twelve articles, five have been published elsewhere in English already. These include Forsythe's own analytical piece 'Choreographic Objects,' published on two websites[1] as well as in the recent catalogue for Hayward Gallery's exhibition *Move: Choreographing You*, curated by Stephanie Rosenthal. For the reader, it is unclear whether the number of reprinted articles is the result of a long publishing turnaround, or whether the editor felt that it was important to have what he considers as the seminal writing on the topic together in this collection. In his introduction, Spier sparks the reader's interest in Forsythe's practice, but an outline of his own editorial vision would also be useful.

The rest of the book oozes novelty, often illuminating aspects of the most recent period of Forsythe's work. There are important articles by Gerald Siegmund, Mark Franko, Chris Salter, and two of Forsythe's dramaturges from different periods, Heidi Gilpin and Freya Vass-Rhee. Spier himself gives us an insight into Forsythe's choreographic installation, developed as a form of community art. He also discusses the choreographer's lesser known activities in Theater am Turm (TAT) – Forsythe's second Frankfurt playground during the crisis period of Ballett Frankfurt. By illuminating this uncertain time, Spier allows us to see the seeds that grew into some of The Forsythe Company's later concepts.

While the inclusion of previously published articles at first may be disappointing, greater scrutiny reveals Spier's careful dialogue with the material presented: he edits the book as an attentive reader and expert architect, building the collection by drawing upon threads established in previous works (starting with a reflection on questions raised in

[1] The article is published on *Synchronous Objects* (http://synchronousobjects.osu.edu), Forsythe's 2009 collaborative project with the Ohio State University, and also on The Forsythe Company's web presentation of *Choreographic Objects* (http://www.williamforsythe.de/essay.html).

Driver's volume). Some contributors – Caspersen, Driver, Sulcas and Spier himself – we encounter in both collections, and their new articles in many ways follow up on their earlier interests. For example, in the articles by Driver and Sulcas (and also Franko as a fresh contributor in Forsythe discourse) we revisit the Ballett Frankfurt period, and these discussions create threads that lead toward Forsythe's later investigations (sometimes quite directly, as in Sulcas's updated critical analysis). The bridges between the two periods are drawn even more clearly in the first article by Siegmund ('Of Monsters and Puppets' 20-37), giving us a profound understanding of the choreographer's complex relationship with the construct of ballet as a language and part of the Western theatrical tradition. Similar connections are to be found in Salter and Vass-Rhee's discussions of Forsythe's use of sound and music, as the editor gently nudges us towards several areas of focus after the broader discourse. For example, Vass-Rhee's article on music introduces the theme of the performer's process, which is then elaborated in the subsequent articles (Caspersen, 'Decreation: fragmentation and continuity' (93-100); and Spier 'Inside the knot that two bodies make' (101-111)). There is a sense that the reader is making a full circle in Siegmund's second article, 'The space of memory' (128-138), as well as in Gilpin's 'Aberrations of gravity' (112-127): both bring us back to the Ballett Frankfurt era, but by now we are fully aware of very complex connections that can be found between the various strands of Forsythe's practice. Both Gilpin and Siegmund make the reader look deep into Forsythe's credo: the core of choreographic art is the principle of organisation (of bodies in space, or organisation of the space within a single body). Spier, in his own article, 'Choreographic thinking and amateur bodies' (139-150),

explains how these principles are extended to Forsythe's non-theatrical choreographic installations intended for communal spaces.

I anticipate that many readers will find the exploration of Forsythe's relationship with music a particular highlight of this book, as this area is discussed in greater detail here than it has been elsewhere. Salter's article, for example, focuses on the choreographer's use of music in the Ballett Frankfurt period, using the example of Eidos:Tellos (1995) to explicate a method of structuring sound environments that transforms 'the position of music and sound in relation to dancing bodies' (57). Vass-Rhee's article discusses the multiplicity of visual and aural counterpoints using an example from Forsythe's more recent choreography, *Three Atmospheric Studies* (2006).

As the book is written by people deeply involved in Forsythe's practice, it is factually sound throughout. The only fault in this regard is a very small one: I disagree with Spier's suggestion that, with the exception of a somewhat notorious collaboration with the Royal Ballet in 1996, Forsythe's work had not been well known in the United Kingdom before 1999 (140). In fact, *In the Middle, Somewhat Elevated* premiered at the Royal Ballet as early as 1992, and the full version of *Herman Schmerman* was present in the company repertory in 1993 and 1994. Further, both ballets toured the UK prior to 1999. Nevertheless, with The Forsythe Company's lack of a traditional archive,[2] Spier's comprehensive, updated and fully credited chronological list of the choreographer's works at the end of the book will be an indispensable tool for many researchers.

[2] The Forsythe Company has no archive at the present moment, and few works are presented in archival form – (*Synchronous Objects for One Flat Thing Reproduced* is one). A more traditional holding exists as The Loss Project by Valerie Preston-Dunlop at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance in London, with documentation on the creative process and performances of *The Loss of Small Detail* (1991).

Overall, Spier's book is a very well-rounded collection of texts, particularly significant for its tracing of sophisticated concepts that span across Forsythe's opus and various aspects of his practice. The collection in its entirety leaves one with a nuanced understanding of evolutionary links and common core principles found in two distinct periods of Forsythe's Frankfurt career. Spier's book provides impressive new contributions by individual authors, and, further, the articles collectively illuminate the elusive aspects, or the connective tissue, of Forsythe's practice. By devising an insightful and instructive textual structure, Spier walks the reader through this choreographic space, like a tour guide of an enchanted building, himself choreographing a kind of Forsythian dance-exploration for the reader to get lost in.

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***Theatre & Feeling* by Erin Hurley**

London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, 88 pp. (softback)

By Clara Escoda (University of Barcelona)

Theatre and Feeling testifies to the resurgence of an interest in the body and phenomenology within recent scholarship on drama and theatre studies. The book sets out

to establish feeling as a research object and method, and to challenge cultural hierarchies within theatre studies, which typify a Western tradition, such as the privileging of emotion over the corporeal, or the affective qualities of performance. In order to establish feeling as a methodology, Hurley reinterprets previous scholarship on feeling and emotions such as Arlie Hochschild's *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (1983), or Sarah Ahmed's *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), and applies them to the theatre to the effect of capturing the type of social and political work theatre does in 'making, managing, and moving feeling in all its types' (9).

The book is comprised of eight chapters, each of which assesses the centrality of emotions to theatre in very different ways. The discussion ranges from an introductory overview of the authors or playwrights who have dealt with the centrality of feeling to theatre, to a compelling attempt to describe the neurological basis of feeling responses. Finally, Hurley aptly undermines some of the prejudices associated with acting, as a typically 'embodied' profession, which the West has associated with the 'feeling body' (69).

In the third chapter, entitled 'Types of Feeling,' Hurley crucially begins by offering a useful description of the three types of feeling operative in the theatre, namely affect, emotion and mood (10). Affect refers to 'an organism's autonomic reaction to an environmental change' (17). It is an 'uncontrollable, individual experience [which] may result in an emotional expression' (17). Emotion, on the other hand, is a 'reflection on or conclusion-drawing from the evidence presented by our bodies and interpreted with the aid of contextual cues' (18).

Essential to Hurley's argument is the notion that feeling tends to be understood from an evolutionary perspective; that is, Western society 'grafts a hierarchy of feeling onto a hierarchy of development' (16), privileging emotion over affect, which tends to be ascribed to women and to people of colour. These hierarchies within capitalist society – where 'emotion ranks over affect, human over animal, and mind over body' – underpin a hierarchy of cultural forms within and sustains a broader, culturally specific hierarchy that 'elevates white over black and male over female' (53).

One of the main aims of Hurley's project, indeed, is to show that theatre may contribute to enacting resistance to capitalism by undermining the hierarchies that lie at the basis of capitalist economy. At this point, and in what is justified through a somewhat dualistic argument, Hurley claims that the 'feeling-technologies' (40) of theatre can be used either in order to produce a type of theatre that abstracts or sublimates feeling and the body or, alternatively, so as to produce an embodied type of theatre which may contribute to unifying the division between mind and body, reason and emotion, fundamental to a capitalist economy.

The book's third chapter, 'Feeling as the Purpose of Theatre,' is a central one which offers an especially good example of Hurley's main argument outlined above. In this chapter she claims that theatrical forms themselves can contribute to producing rational spectators who are divorced from their embodied experience or, by contrast, can dignify the human body and contribute to creating embodied spectators. Drawing on Aristotle's *Ars Poetica*, Hurley claims that theatrical forms may be divided between forms that 'profit,' whose goal is to 'benefit the audience usually by offering an instructive example,' and forms that 'please' (39), which aim to amuse spectators.

Within the first category, exemplified by Greek tragedy, fall those forms which 'tend to downplay or redirect their affective influence on the spectator. They address the mind as though it has no physical extension, and the emotions represented in and activated by the plays tend to be the so-called cognitive emotions' (59). Within the second category, or forms that please, are forms like melodrama, which activate affects and emotions.

Melodrama emerged during the industrial revolution, in a context in which working-class industrial workers were not considered as feeling, resistant and embodied individuals, but as bodies of capital and labour. Melodrama, instead, redefined the individual as characterised by the ability of being bodily responsive to the environment, as well as to the value of feeling and affect. Thus, when workers patronised the theatres, they were in fact asserting the value of feeling and the body, that is, the essential dignity of all human bodies/individuals beyond the hierarchies created by capitalism. Melodrama, Hurley argues, 'drew back together in a pleasurable and positive way what had been forced apart by industrial labour practices, namely feeling and the body' (55).

Hurley's book is fascinating and well-argued, yet such a division according to the form of various plays is problematic, since forms that please, like melodrama, are also stereotypical in their depiction of affects and emotions, and they often reproduce the same hierarchies between feeling and effect, male and female, they seem to undermine. In this respect, Hurley offers the example of Douglas Jerrold's *Black Ey'd Susan*, where affect is ascribed to women of colour in order to construct the superiority of the white man. Thus, as Hurley herself admits, melodrama tends to 'confirm, *at the level of feeling*, the dominant moral ethos of the culture' (62).

Such a division is excessively dualistic or binary, since it excludes the possibility that 'profit' forms may be performed or interpreted in ways which subvert or work against their own tendency for abstracting the body. In the same manner, forms that please, while emphasising and valuing affect, may tend to relegate it to women, to reproduce stereotypical gender patterns, and to confirm things as they are, thus reproducing oppressive, capitalist hierarchies. While it is crucial to realise that 'profit theatre,' which has traditionally been discursive and has privileged rationality, thereby relegating affect to women, tends to be the culturally valued form of theatre, forms that 'please' are equally problematic.

Perhaps what is needed is not the inclusion of particular forms *per se* into theatre studies and university curricula, but rather further research into how different playwrights, stage directors, or even the structure of specific plays, may use the feeling-technologies of theatre in order to denounce how capitalism disembodies individuals through the imposition of docile identities. How can playwrights or stage directors, by contrast, address spectators as resistant, embodied subjects, in whom body and mind, impulse and reason, feeling and affect, do work in unison? How can they subvert the Western tendency to value reason and the male self over and above the needs of the body and the rights of the Other?

Theatre and Feeling successfully establishes feeling as a methodology. Through its clarity and precision, as well as through its well-chosen examples, Hurley makes theatre and feeling accessible to a wide readership. The book thus delights while breaking new ground in the field, particularly regarding the crucial issue of how the feeling-technologies of theatre may contribute to a pedagogical, ethical programme. Most

importantly, the book highlights the necessity, in the age of global capitalism, for further research into a feeling-based approach to the politics of performance.

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