



and then,
you act

Making Art in an
Unpredictable World

Anne Bogart

and then, you act

And Then, You Act contains eight new essays on art, theater and the collaborative creative process by award-winning theater director, Anne Bogart. Where her last book, *A Director Prepares*, detailed the process of preparation for an artist, this book is about the importance of action during times of difficulty, whether personal or political.

Each chapter contains advice and personal insights toward a more emboldened form of art-making, considering the themes of context, articulation, intention, attention, magnetism, attitude, content, and time.

In this profound and impassioned meditation on the role of the artist in a post-9/11 context, Bogart argues that art is more necessary and powerful than ever.

Anne Bogart is the Artistic Director of SITI Company, which she founded in 1992 with Japanese director, Tadashi Suzuki. She is also Professor at Columbia University where she runs the graduate directing program.

and then, you act

making art in an
unpredictable
world

anne bogart

First published 2007
by Routledge
270 Madison Ave, New York, NY 10016

Simultaneously published in the UK
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 2007 Anne Bogart

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2007.

"To purchase your own copy of this or any of Taylor & Francis or Routledge's collection of thousands of eBooks please go to www.eBookstore.tandf.co.uk."

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilized in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Bogart, Anne, 1951–

And then, you act: making art in an unpredictable world / by Anne Bogart.

p. cm.

1. Acting—Psychological aspects. I. Title.

PN2058.B58 2007

792.02—dc22

2006023495

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 0-203-96550-7 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN10: 0-415-41141-6

ISBN10: 0-415-41142-4

ISBN10: 0-203-96550-7

ISBN13: 978-0-415-41141-7 (hbk)

ISBN13: 978-0-415-41142-4 (pbk)

ISBN13: 978-0-203-96550-4 (ebk)

This book is dedicated to the members of SITI Company.

contents

Acknowledgments	viii
Introduction	1
1 Context	7
2 Articulation	17
3 Intention	30
4 Attention	51
5 Magnetism	63
6 Attitude	93
7 Content	106
8 Time	126

acknowledgments

Special thanks to the members of SITI Company who make my dreams palpable and continually incite me to honesty and action. Appreciation also to the graduate directing students at Columbia University who encourage me to expand and develop the notions and ideas found in the book. Thanks also to the generosity of the Rockefeller Foundation's Study Center at Bellagio on Lake Como in Italy where the process of writing the book began.

I wish to express endless appreciation to Rena Chelouche Fogel who read closely, helped edit the manuscript and lived through my struggle to write with infinite grace, patience, and love.

Thanks also to Charles L. Mee Jr., Norm Frish, Jocelyn Clarke, Brian Kulick, Ellen Lauren, Debra Winger, David Williams, Jaan Whitehead, Sabine Andreas, R. Justin Hunt, Talia Rodgers, and Liz O'Donnell.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the contribution of Peter Sellars who inspired many of the ideas in the chapter entitled "Content" by his recent articulations in public.

introduction

I always took for granted that the best art was political and was revolutionary. It doesn't mean that art has an agenda or a politics to argue; it means the questions being raised were explorations into kinds of anarchy, kinds of change, identifying errors, flaws, vulnerabilities in systems.

(Toni Morrison)



The South African writer Antjie Krog described meeting a nomadic desert poet in Senegal who described the role of poets in his culture. The job of the poet, he explained to her, is to remember where the water holes are. The survival of the whole group depends on a few water holes scattered around the desert. When his people forget where the water is, the poet can lead them to it.

What an apt metaphor for the role of the artist in any culture. The water is the history, the memory, the juice, and the elixir of shared experience. I want to keep this notion in mind while examining the role of the artist in our present climate.

My previous book of essays, *A Director Prepares*, detailed the process of preparation and groundwork for an artist. But preparation is only useful in relation to the ensuing action. This book is about action during times of difficulty, whether personal or political.

Love is not a feeling. No matter how much you feel, love means nothing when unrelated to action. Love is action. In order to engage in effective action you must first find something that you value and

put it at the center of your life. When you put your life into the service of what you value, that action will engender other values and beliefs. Through engagement, things happen. Movement is all. Keep moving and yet slow down simultaneously. In Latin this is known as *festina lente*, “make haste slowly.” Inside of this paradox, you make a space where growth and art can happen. Within the framework of art and theater you will find a special freedom and the space and time to explore complexities. It does not cost you anything. It costs you your life.

You cannot expect other people to create meaning for you. You cannot wait for someone else to define your life. You make meaning by forging it with your hands. It requires sweat and commitment. Working toward the creation of meaning is the point. It is action that forges the meaning and the significance of a life.

And it is critical to have some direction and be clear about certain impossible goals that you are trying to achieve if you hope to achieve some of the possible goals. And you must be bold enough to speculate, postulate and imagine on the basis of partial knowledge. At the same time you must remain open to the very strong possibility that in fact you are way off the mark.

We are living in very particular times that demand a very specific kind of response. No matter the immensity of the obstacles—political, financial or spiritual—the one thing we cannot afford is inaction due to despair.

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, people in the United States awoke in a profound and palpable silence. In German the word *Betroffenheit* aptly describes the feeling. Simply translated, the word means shock, bewilderment, perplexity, or impact. The root of the word *treffen* “to meet” and *betroffen* is “to be met” and *Betroffenheit* is the state of having been met, stopped, struck, or perplexed. I see it as the shock of having been met, stopped abruptly in the face of a particular event.

Don Saliers, a professor of theology at Emory University suggests that the silence that follows a violent event is similar in quality to the speechlessness of a powerful aesthetic experience. He describes a space and a time engendered by the shock of the event where language ceases. We are left only with an awareness of the limits of language and the limits of what can be taken in. In this gap definitions disappear and certainty vanishes. Anything is possible—any response, any action

or inaction. Nothing is prescribed. Nothing is certain. Everything is up for grabs.

In the case of post-9/11, patriotism rushed in to fill the gap of this fertile and palpable silence. Patriotism served as a way to replace disorientation and *Betroffenheit* with certainty. And certainty, if taken to its extreme, always ends in violence.

As it turns out, this manufactured certainty did, in fact, lead to violence and more violence. Self-perpetuating aggression became its own *raison d'être* and the battle is worldwide, ugly, and nearly impossible to stop. U.S. citizens were told that any criticism of the War on Terror was unpatriotic. And yet, the concept of an open society is based on the recognition that nobody is in possession of the ultimate truth. When one is in touch with the complexities, it is impossible to be certain. If we fail to recognize that we may be wrong, we can only undermine any action done in the world.

The artist's job is to stay alive and awake in the space between convictions and certainties. The truth in art exists in the tension between contrasting realities. You try to find shapes that embody current ambiguities and uncertainties. While resisting certainty, you try to be as lucid and exact as possible from the state of imbalance and uncertainty. You act from a direct experience of the environment.

Significant political events always drop a lens between the environment and the perceiver. Generations view the world according to the most dominant lens. The Great Depression, for example, permanently altered the way that vast numbers of Americans saw their own lives and fortunes. The McCarthy era produced insidious paranoia and a general suspicion about left-wing political convictions. The events of September 11th 2001 also changed the lens. For many, the event intensified the feeling of separation from the rest of the world. For others, the sense of isolation was replaced with an acute sensitivity to the globe's interconnective tissues. If, as the Buddhists suggest, the art of life is the art of adjustment, then what are the necessary adjustments for artists working in the present climate? What needs to change in light of the new lens? How can we stay connected to our own culture and remember where the water is? How can we work in the theater within an atmosphere of fear and hostility and constantly attempt to reveal the water supply of our humanity? How can we nurture the necessary courage, energy, and expression in the face of adversity?

I look to history, literature, science, and aesthetics in order to figure out how to function positively and effectively within the present environment. I have found many practical ideas and stimulating encouragement in the process. The research has been helpful and gives me courage and hope in the day-to-day reality of running a theater company and directing new productions.

Leonard Bernstein, the composer and conductor, suggested that a musician's response to violence should be to "make the music more intense." This is what I want to do. I want to make the music more intense. Not just loud but also eloquent, expressive, magnetic, and powerful. I look around at the American theater, and I see it mostly steeped in an old-fashioned aesthetic and performed on weak knees. I want it strengthened, emboldened, wild, persuasive, and relevant to the issues of our time. We need courage and a love of the art form. Powerful theatrical productions, brave writing, and radiant acting can galvanize and profoundly transform expectations about how broad the spectrum of life can be beyond daily survival. In a culture where daily human hopes have shrunk to the myriad opiates of self-centered satisfaction, art is more necessary and powerful than ever.

Rather than the experience of life as a shard, art can unite and connect the strands of the universe. When you are in touch with art, borders vanish and the world opens up. Art can expand the definitions of what it means to be human. So if we agree to hold ourselves to higher standards and make more rigorous demands on ourselves, then we can say in our work, "We have asked ourselves these questions and we are trying to answer them, and that effort earns us the right to ask you, the audience, to face these issues too." Art demands action from the midst of living and makes a space where growth can happen.

One day, particularly discouraged about the global environment, I asked my friend the playwright Charles L. Mee Jr., "How are we supposed to function in these difficult times? How can we contribute anything useful in this climate?" "Well," he answered, "You have a choice of two possible directions. Either you convince yourself that these are terrible times and things will never get better and so you decide to give up, or, you choose to believe that there will be a better time in the future. If that is the case, your job in these dark political and social times is to gather together everything you value and

become a transport bridge. Pack up what you cherish and carry it on your back to the future.”

Near the end of the twentieth century, the Dalai Lama was asked if he would want to return to the earth in another century, even though it is certain that poverty, pollution, and overpopulation will make the planet a miserable environment to inhabit. “If I could be useful,” was his response.

In a violent culture sidetracked by the attraction of fame, success, and individuality, this notion of being useful feels radical. Can art intend to be useful? Art is an exquisite and extravagant waste of time and space and a world complete unto itself. The product contains the process of engagement, struggle, and achievement that made it come to life. And yet the irony is that art is indeed useful in deep and enduring ways.

The poet Joseph Brodsky describes art as the oxygen that might arrive when the last breath has been expended:

A great writer is one who elongates the perspective of human sensibility, who shows a man at the end of his wits an opening, a pattern to follow... Art is not a better, but an alternative existence; it is not an attempt to escape reality but the opposite, an attempt to animate it.

In the United States, we are the targets of mass distraction. We are the objects of constant flattery and manufactured desire. I believe that the only possible resistance to a culture of banality is quality. To me, the world often feels unjust, vicious, and even unbearable. And yet, I know that my development as a person is directly proportional to my capacity for discomfort. I see pain, destructive behavior, entropy, and suffering. I dislike the damaging behavior and blindness of the political sphere. I watch wars declared, social injustices that inhabit the streets of my hometown, and a planet in danger of pollution and genocide. I have to do something. My chosen field of action is the theater.

In order to “make the music more intense,” you must first examine your intentions. If the motivation for action does not transcend the desire for fame and success, the quality of the results will be inferior. If your aim is intense engagement rather than self-aggrandizement,

the results will be richer, denser, and more energetic. The outcome of an artistic process contains the energy of your commitment to it.

Next, recognize the basic necessary ingredients. The classic recipe for effective theater is threefold:

- 1 you need something to say;
- 2 you need technique; and
- 3 you need passion.

Like a milking stool, if one of the three legs is missing, the stool will topple over and be ineffectual. It is as simple as that.

Each chapter in this book considers and examines tools for action—for making the music more intense: context, articulation, intention, attention, magnetism, attitude, content, and time. I hope that my thoughts and digressions are useful in the field of action.

chapter 1

context

We are here, there, not here, not there, swirling like specks of dust, claiming for ourselves the rights of the universe. Being important, being nothing, being caught in lives of our own making that we never wanted. Breaking out, trying again, wondering why the past comes with us, wondering how to talk about the past at all.

(Jeanette Winterson)



The crash of empty cardboard boxes falling off a shelf sounds differently to a New Yorker on the day, week, or month post-9/11. The view of a skyscraper causes different associations before and after the brutal event. After that September morning, the lens through which these images and sounds were perceived had altered. The context shifted.

Radio Play is the SITI Company staging of Orson Welles's 1938 radio play *War of the Worlds*. Adapted from a story by H. G. Wells for radio by Howard Koch, *War of the Worlds* was first broadcast on the foggy fall evening of October 30, 1938, as a Halloween thriller, or as Orson Welles put it: "The Mercury Theatre's own radio version of dressing up in a sheet and jumping out of a bush and saying 'boo!'" Welles and his company Mercury Theatre on the Air unwittingly frightened millions of American listeners who took the transmission seriously and thought that Martians had actually invaded Earth. In the context of pre-World War II paranoia, the program terrified a nation. Thousands fled their homes in panic. In New York City, swarms of

curious and frightened citizens crowded the streets. In the town of Grover's Mill, New Jersey, the local water tower was pumped full of buckshot as frightened believers fired at what they thought was a giant Martian war machine.

During the 1999–2000 season, SITI Company performed *Radio Play* successfully in many cities across the United States. Staged in the fictional setting of a radio broadcasting studio, we wanted to suggest all of the terror of the invading Martians without using any special effects. Audiences enjoyed the story and our austere approach to telling it. A second tour to fourteen cities across the United States was planned to begin in the middle of September 2001. Then came 9/11. As the smoke lifted from downtown Manhattan, the new context transformed the meaning and affect of the play, bringing with it a new intimacy and relevance. The lens radically refocused the fiction. A number of venues around the country tried to cancel the engagement because the content was now too relevant and too close to their communities' present anguish. Even though I managed to convince many theaters to keep their commitments, privately I also was worried.

Several days after 9/11 we began pick-up rehearsals on East Fourth Street in the East Village for the *Radio Play* tour. The studio, belonging to New York Theatre Workshop, filled with smoke that wafted up from downtown. As the actors moved through the play, I heard the familiar lines in a new light: "Now the smoke's spreading faster. It's reached Times Square. People are trying to run away from it, but it's no use. They're falling like flies... Now the smoke's crossing Sixth Avenue...Fifth Avenue...a...a hundred yards away...it's fifty feet..." Previously, these words felt safely at a distance. In the new context, through the new lens, the words touched raw emotions abrasively.

What would our play mean to an audience through the lens of recent events? I wondered if the performance would be helpful or an irritant to the present pain.

As it turned out, the tour was well received and did indeed feel useful. Audiences around the country seemed to crave being in a room together, moving communally through a fictional experience that harmonized with their present ambiguities. The identification of community and the comfort of being together joined with the relevant content struck a chord. They invariably wanted to linger afterwards

and talk. *Radio Play* touched more intimately upon the dark emotional spaces within the context of the present climate. The narrative took on new meaning and seemed to exercise a more useful and necessary role in the public arena.

Semiotics, the study of signs, is useful in understanding the role of context. Semiotics examines how meaning is created and understood. Semioticians classify signs and sign systems in relation to how they are transmitted. Juxtaposition is one of the basic building blocks in the generation of signs. In visual language, juxtaposition of imagery contributes to the creation of context and meaning.

When the Berlin Wall toppled in 1989, the world held its breath for a brief moment while the eastern bloc countries suspended political certainty and were suddenly free to choose their future. Western capitalism was not the inevitable solution to the abrupt lack of political authority. In a moment of mass wakefulness, people stood on the wall's debris in a state of political, social, and emotional arrest. Anything was possible.

I felt a similar potential in the *betroffenheit*—the sense of surprise, powerlessness, and grief after the horrors of 9/11. We awoke, looked around, shared compassion and a willingness to make necessary sacrifices. The doors swung wide open.

Unfortunately, the vulnerable and soulful condition of shock in the fall of 2001 was quickly subsumed by patriotism. Rather than using the psychic arrest to identify a new sense of responsibility in the world, the U.S.A. entered Afghanistan and then Iraq. The perpetuation of violence with violence put an unfortunate stop to a significant look at who we are and our responsibility in the world. The new global context has not yet altered our lives as much as it needs to. Americans were not yet ready for catharsis. We have not made the necessary adjustments. But art can help us to do so. And it is not too late.

In the post-9/11 context, essential life and death issues feel closer to us as we contemplate getting on a subway or an airplane. We seem to be undergoing a profound paradigm shift where religion, values, and meaning must be examined from fresh angles.

Recently I directed *Death and the Ploughman*, a play written by Johannes von Saaz in Bohemia in 1401 during a paradigm shift in human history when the theretofore-accepted medieval sensibilities—faith,

the meaning of life, religious hierarchy, and authority—were suddenly called into question, leading to the start of the Renaissance. Since the premiere of our production in 2004, we continue to tour nationally and internationally because people want and need to see it. We found that in our current context the play speaks directly to present ambiguities and manages to shed light in the dark places of our collective psyche. The story is compelling and universal but also timely. A man loses his beloved wife in childbirth. Bereft, he goes to Death and asks for recompense. What ensues is a profound assessment of why we live, what life is about, and why we die.

The words “Please give my love to Richard,” mean one thing in the context of a casual meeting on a street corner and something quite different when spoken by a person on their deathbed. The context in this case signifies the meaning of the words. In the language of semiotics, meaning is born when the “signifier” (in this case, the circumstance) meets the “signified” (here, the words).

Try this experiment: close your eyes and imagine a young man holding a child in the middle of an empty field. Now mentally erase the image. Next, picture a semicircle of soldiers standing, guns poised, in an open field. Again, clean the slate. Finally, put the two images together: visualize a semicircle of soldiers surrounding the man and child in the middle of a field. The meaning has changed radically simply by the juxtaposition of these disparate images. In the language of semiotics, the man with the child might mean, or signify, “family.” The soldiers signify “war.” When you put the two together, the signified and the signifier, you have created a “sign,” or meaning, with a much greater impact and complexity: “the tragedy and human cost of war.”

During the worst hours of the Yugoslav conflict, a Bosnian production of the American musical *Hair* became a popular draw in the war-torn city of Sarajevo. Every night, audiences struggled across dangerous bombed-out streets to file into a damaged theater to experience a Yugoslav adaptation of this 1960s anthem of a play.

In 1992, a reporter from the *New York Times* made the trip to Sarajevo to cover the production and its extraordinary impact on audiences. He described the palpable necessity for such a musical within the context of this war-torn country. The song “Let the Sun Shine In” was a particular highpoint of the show. People sang along, emotions

high, with obvious enthusiasm for its message. The song resonated to this audience in the framework of their very particular day-to-day struggles.

At the end of the article, the reporter noted that a Broadway producer had seen the production and was contemplating bringing it intact for a commercial run in New York.

I read the article, astonished at the American producer's lack of imagination. He clearly understood nothing about context. Imagine an audience in a commercial theater in New York City in the late 1990s before the attack on the Twin Towers. This imported production would have none of the meaning that it provided the Sarajevo audiences.

One of the basic functions of art is what the Greeks named *catharsis*. According to Aristotle, catharsis is a purifying and cleansing of the emotions brought about through the evocation of intense fear and pity in an audience. The etymology of the word "catharsis" also suggests, "to shine light in dark places."

Meaningful theater experiences do shine light in the dark places of the soul. To engage catharsis it is necessary to be sensitive to where the dark places are to be found at any particular moment. And this demands sensitivity to context.

The artist's job is to get in touch with the dark places of the soul and then shed light there. Sharing the process with others is the point. Within the context of our post-Cold War, post-9/11 climate, shedding light in newly fecund dark places is a valuable activity. The dark places of the soul that haunt our dreams are understandably matched by the tendency to shut out the issues with the busy work of the daylight hours. But without looking into those dark places, as Carl Jung suggested, we will lose touch with our essential humanity.



The spirit of liberty is the spirit that is not too certain that it is right.
(Learned Hand)



The truth does not exist as one thing; rather, it is a tension between opposites. The philosopher Hegel stated that all human development

is driven by the conflict of opposites. He called this dynamic *dialectic*. It is the artist's job to live in the space between oppositions while articulating compelling fictional worlds from the extreme state of this dialectical uncertainty. A context, in that it is always juxtaposed to a particular event in space and time, further complicates the tensions of opposites. Context is never simple and rarely logical. It can be rife with irrational ambiguities. And yet, the fictions that we create can help us to organize our relationship to the world and find wider clarity and conviction. Hearing the song "Let the Sun Shine In" within the complications of a war-torn Sarajevo made a certain crazy logic and sense to those who experienced it.

Art reimagines time and space, and its success can be measured by the extent to which an audience can not only access that world but becomes engaged to the point where they understand something about themselves that they did not know before.

The fictional world of a play usually differs from the context in which it is performed. *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, is set in Verona, Italy, but when first performed the context was Elizabethan England. The fictional world of *Hair* is New York in the hippie 1960s, but the context of the performance is Sarajevo during a war or Michigan in 2006.

A consciousness of context will significantly impact your selection of themes, issues, and subject matter, as well as choice of venue and community. We always see the world around us through the current lens of our particular cultural and political moment. A lens is the focusing apparatus of a given circumstance. The lens magnifies certain aspects of the environment and obscures others. In late 2001 an entirely new lens replaced the previous one and redefined almost every aspect of life in the United States.

The translation of page to stage is the translation of the logic of ideas and words into the logic of time and space. To imagine and then articulate the fictional world, or context, of the play is helpful to designers, producers, actors, public relations, and everyone involved in the process. In what context does the play live?

When bringing a play into the present moment, try to imagine the fictional context in which it might best unfold. Is it the present? Is it a historical moment in the past? Is it an imaginary country and society? It is this fictional context that will inevitably meet the actual context in which the performance takes place.

A new play is different from one that has a performance history. The framework of a brand new play is the context of the world into which it is born. The task is primarily to make sure that the play can be clearly heard and seen. There is no need to create a context inside of a context. But because classic plays carry the baggage of their own histories, interior context becomes an issue.

Two vital questions to ask in approaching a classic play: “What was the energy of the very first production?” and, “Who needs to perform this play now?” The original New York production of *Hair*, for example, channeled the revolutionary energy of the burgeoning peace and love movement of the 1960s. For *Hair* in Sarajevo, twenty-five years later, the actual context of the war-torn country engendered the energy and vitality that miraculously mirrored the first American version of the play. As for “who needs to perform this play?” it was clear in the Sarajevo production that the Bosnians needed to perform the play. No fictional underpinning was necessary to invoke up the original energy.

To find answers to the two questions, I look at the context of the very first production as a key to finding a corresponding context in which the play might happen in the present climate. What follows are two examples.

I directed Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *South Pacific* in 1984. Based on short stories by James Michner, the original musical *South Pacific* opened in 1949 when the United States was still reeling from the experience of World War II. The framework of the musical, the issues, and the situations were well known to audiences of that time. These audiences responded with wild enthusiasm, partially due to the wonderful music and book and also because the work addressed the tension caused by the insecurities and hopes of the moment.

But for me, the question was how to harness the original energy of the first production of *South Pacific* into the context of 1984. I asked myself, what does this musical mean in the contemporary climate? What is the significance of performing it at this time? Once I identified the original force released in the birth of the musical, the question became how to channel that energy?

As it happened, in 1984 the United States sent troops to Beirut and Granada. An international crisis ensued. What would happen, we asked, if our production of *South Pacific* were performed by the actors

as a graduation ceremony at a clinic for young war-damaged men and women? What if this clinic could help these men and women who had suffered traumatic experiences in Beirut and Granada to reintegrate back into American society? And what would it be like if, as a graduation ceremony from the clinic, the clients of this clinic performed *South Pacific*? The roles would be distributed based upon each individual's particular traumatic experience. For example, if a young man had lost his best friend in the trenches, he would be assigned to sing the song "Ain't Nothing Like a Dame," because it is essentially a male-bonding song. The act of performing would serve a therapeutic function. In our production, each actor played a "client" who was then cast by the fictional clinic to perform one or more characters in the musical *South Pacific* as part of a graduation ceremony.

The enthusiastic reception to *South Pacific* surpassed our expectations. We spoke to contemporary audiences, and I wager that our production was also true to the spirit of Rodgers and Hammerstein's masterpiece. We changed nothing in the music, story, or characters, except for the fictional context in which the story unfolded. I believe that we managed in this way to harness something of the actual energy of the very first production. We did not imitate the appearance of the original but, through a careful examination of context, we found an useful container.

I decided to direct Maxim Gorky's *The Lower Depths* because I loved the ensemble nature of the piece and I was interested in its fictional context. The play takes place in prerevolutionary Russia in the middle of winter, which was then an environment of great poverty and struggle and where the characters could express love only through violence. The emotionality and the story drew me to it. I wanted to spend time with the play, learn from it, interact with it, and then share that journey with audiences. But the obstacles I faced were particular. I had the opportunity to direct the play with undergraduates at New York University. How could these young actors tap into the brutal yet beautiful energy of the situations found in Gorky's play? How could these fairly pampered students find the necessary maturity and expressive cruelty to embody such characters and their particular situations?

In the East Village of New York during this time, a brutal skinhead punk scene thrived, featuring hard-core rock clubs, slam dancing,

skin-piercing, and late-night carousing. Here, too, I found love expressed through violence. What if, I wondered, a group of skinhead punks found a copy of Maxim Gorky's *Lower Depths* and became infatuated by it? What if they decided to act out the scenes on a deserted outdoor basketball court in the East Village during the winter months? What if each skinhead punk chose their favorite character and came dressed in what they imagined a prerevolutionary Russian/East Village look might be? What would happen when they played out the situations within the play?

And so, the actors played skinhead punks who enacted the play in search of a certain spiritual alchemy. Through the fictional contextualizing of this classic play, I believe that we found a spirit parallel to Gorky's intentions. We entered through the back door in order to get to the front.

Context can be misused. Benetton ads, for example, use shock images that have nothing to do with clothes in order to establish a brand. Emaciated African children, aborted fetuses, a dying Aids patient, and the blooded shirt of a dead Croat soldier make audiences stop in their tracks to pay attention to the name of the clothing company.

Recently, Benetton released a billboard photo of a Catholic priest in full dress kissing a nun on the lips. "It was a joke, to show that the habit doesn't make the priest," says Luciano Benetton, the C.E.O. of the company. It was banned in Italy after Vatican protests but won the Eurobest Award in Britain. "Our photos have a fantastic effect on public opinion." He said, "We wanted to probe emotions and stir debate, and we did."

In 1990, the director/choreographer Martha Clarke worked with writer Charles L. Mee Jr. on a production entitled *Endangered Species* until a dispute about the moral responsibility around contextual issues caused a rift. During the process, Clarke decided to include images of Auschwitz in the production. Mee insisted that the images be intersected by a certain textual responsibility toward the meaning of Auschwitz. This did not interest Clarke and so Mee and she agreed not to continue working together on the production. In the context of collaboration, it is vital that responsibility for the creation of meaning within an artistic framework is shared.

Charles L. Mee Jr. wrote a play for SITI Company entitled *bobrauschen-bergamerica* inspired by the visual artist Robert Rauschenberg. We

rehearsed and premiered the play at the Humana Festival of New American Plays in the spring of 2001. Designer James Schuette came up with a striking set design: the entire production would be played upon an immense American flag. In the context of the pre-9/11 world, this seemed absolutely fine. We opened, and the play was successful enough to be booked in several arts centers around the United States and festivals in Europe. And then we learned what the play means in a post-9/11 context. Suddenly doing a play about America on the signifier of an American flag changed the meaning of the play to audiences everywhere. In the United States, the play was experienced as a great relief from the stress of the times. The performances felt like celebrations. On the other hand, in France, in the context of the very left-wing intellectual theater at Bobigny, just outside of Paris, the event was fraught and difficult. French audiences watched the revelation of the set—an American flag in all its glory—and the subsequent high jinks of the performance. For them, it was painful and complex. I do not know if in this context the French saw the flag as a demonstration of patriotism or as a critique of a nation. I do not know if their difficulty was in any way useful or meaningful.

As we continue to tour *bobrauschenbergamerica*, I am hypersensitive to the shifting and clashing contexts that greet every performance. The international festival circuit, for example, is an odd artificial context created where cultures are on view and compared, and meanings become a fluid currency. And yet, I find the confusion of contexts positive and hopeful. The Japanese director Tadashi Suzuki once stated, “International cultural exchange is impossible—therefore we must try.” I agree with all my heart. The impossibility of seeing beyond one’s own cultural context is a political act in the world and has the potential to break down the rigid assumptions surrounding us.

The charge of our times is to consider context, to consider the context in which we make theater now. Context can shift subtly or tip abruptly. Where are the dark places, the unexamined corridors of the soul now? What are we dreaming about at night but do not dare to think about during the day?

chapter 2

articulation

Words are too awful an instrument for good and evil to be trifled with: they hold above all other external powers a dominion over thoughts.

(William Wordsworth)



One of the most radical things you can do in this culture of the inexact is to finish a sentence. Notice what a vibrant act in the world this can be. Feel the power of finishing a sentence. And yet, it is difficult to complete a sentence. Worlds conspire against it. Listen to people speaking around you. Inarticulate people are not dangerous to any political or societal systems. Political agenda has conspired against a citizen's ability to speak. Words are dangerous and they can be powerful. It takes effort and stubbornness to finish a sentence.

But words can give access to what now may seem unattainable. Learn not only to use words but also to find your own words. Doors that seemed shut will open with the correct combination of words. Your own words may not arrive easily or immediately but eventually, with stubbornness and sweat, they will appear.

Robert Brustein founded the Yale Repertory Theatre while running the Drama School at Yale University. Ten years later, invited by Harvard to establish a new theater and acting company in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Brustein approached the President of Harvard and described his wish to establish a school to train young theater artists in conjunction with the newly formed American Repertory Theatre.

The President was not enthused. “We do not believe in art schools in conjunction with our university,” he said. Brustein left the meeting still determined to found a school. After a while, he went back to the President and said, “I want to found a *conservatory* for theater training.” Again, the President did not concur. “We do not sponsor conservatories,” he said. Brustein left but still was not ready to give up. Finally, he returned to the President and said, “I want to found an *institute* for advanced theater training.” This time, the President responded positively. “Yes, we do support institutes. This can happen.” And thus began the American Repertory Theatre Institute for Advanced Theatre Training. Robert Brustein persevered until he found the right words to access the kingdom.

Words are powerful. Specific words and combinations of words are the keys that will unlock realms that seem closed off. Find your words that accurately describe what you are attempting. If you don’t find the right words at first, keep trying new ones. You will locate the keys that fit and unlock the door. Find the words that can communicate to others the feats that you are trying to realize.

Perceived by the business-friendly government of the United States as consumers rather than citizens, we are not encouraged to speak. In fact, we are persuaded not to speak, because articulation poses a threat to corporate interests. Public schools, when facing severe budget cuts, removed most departments of fine arts, music, theater, and language curricula. Government support for the arts is almost nonexistent. This has engendered a civilization which is not only afraid of artistic expression, but also one in which many consider artistic expression a subversive activity. In the commercial arena, language is dumbed down, commodified, and cheapened. What do “Think different,” “Just do it,” and “The real thing” really mean? Mostly we are encouraged to be happy solipsists, mired in the desire to buy endlessly obsolescing products sold by a very small number of the same corporations that call the shots on a global level. Because of this and for reasons of participation, survival, and resistance, it is important to learn how to articulate effectively and often.

Articulation is expression, communication, speaking, pointing, verbalization, clarification, and enunciation. Articulation is a stroke on the canvas, an eloquent gesture, a harmonic chord, a lucid description. Articulation is ultimately the attempt to make something clear. It

is the grammar of all expression and is it very difficult to do well. Articulation is the opposite of doodling. Pablo Picasso said, “Creativity is first of all an act of destruction.” A necessary tool in the creative act, articulation is an aggressive, expressive act in defiance of death itself.

Articulation is born from the attempt to create bridges from the realm of private suffering to the outside world. From the heat of experience, you signal to others. Fueled by thought and feeling, its objective is clarity. Words and sentences articulate but so do many sorts of actions and inaction.

The irritations of daily life and the aggravations of social and political difficulties are frustrations that can be harnessed and transformed into the energy necessary for expression and articulation. Aim for clarity even in an atmosphere of insecurity and change.



The grace of human life is not to lack insecurities, but to turn them to good use.

(Julius Novick)



As the only female brought up in a navy family, my future was not taken very seriously. Unlike my two brothers who were sent to first-rate schools and primed for big lives in the military, I was expected to become the wife of a naval officer. Enrolled in mediocre schools, I felt ignored and neglected, and this angered me. But I learned to channel my anger into the plays that I worked on in high school. Working on these productions became a creative outlet for frustration and feeling. In the theater, I found a site of grace. The theater demanded creativity and helped me to survive and construct fruitful bridges to other people and their experiences, uniting the parallel universes of the private realm and the public sphere.

I did not entirely realize the usefulness of frustration until, well into my thirties, I lost the job of Artistic Director of Trinity Repertory Company and visited my parents in Maine. Over dinner, my mother asked me what I would do next. I told her that I planned to buy a house. She looked at me with a haughty expression and said, “You

cannot do that. How do you expect to manage that?" I was furious, but I contained the feeling. It wasn't until later that evening, alone in a motel room, that I realized that this particular anger would fuel two entire productions! It is possible to channel the gnawing anger, irritation, and frustration into an act of creation. The frustrations of living do not need to make you ill; rather, they can be transformed into the energy necessary to articulate well.

Life is imperfect. The nagging annoyances and frustrations, the aches and pains of living, can either eat you alive or you can use them to advantage. Aggravation and anger can be harnessed into useful energy in service of expression. The process is alchemical. You can transform the random frustrations into poetic shapes that may inspire others. I concentrate my frustration, my random feelings, my fear, and my anticipation and put it to work in the art of articulation. The frustration generates a storehouse of energy useful in locating the necessary stubbornness and courage, patience, and energy for creative expression. The transformation is a kind of spiritual alchemy.

An actor, too, in the moment of expression, juggles complex resistances and irritations. First comes the resistance to the crucial yet frightening state of imbalance, or flight, where articulation occurs. Many actors find any excuse to avoid this leap. And yet, the task for each actor is to speak clearly, to articulate, from a state of imbalance and to carve the experience while in flight. The playwright David Mamet wrote that what all actors are most afraid of is the scene. When an actor hesitates, starts over, takes pauses and extra breaths, all in avoidance of speaking the words, articulation stops. To act in between the lines rather than riding the words and the thoughts, thinking quickly and crafting the experience in mid-air, is to miss the point of articulation.

As an actor, you craft and articulate each moment in response to the moment you are in and the input you have received from your surroundings. For example, you speak differently from the person who just spoke to you. Like a jazz musician, you respond to the spatial and temporal moments, riffing, scatting, and filling in blank spaces that open up in the moment in the way that a boxer knows an opening in the heat of a match. And so, the audience receives something beyond the meaning of the words. The audience is the receptor of a real act of juggling and articulation in the crisis of the

present moment. If speaking does not threaten your own stability, your ability to stand, then you probably do not have a good enough reason to speak.

How does the actor juggle? Create a body and a state that would say the particular words of the play and then speak. Say the words. The words are explained to the audience by the condition of the body. This is not an emotional condition, rather it is an expression of the amount of energy that you are trying to access for yourself. Energy is the result of setting up oppositions in the body. Starting with a compression of energy, you hear, compose, and speak all in the same instant. For an actor, the moment of expression is not about the meaning of the words. The audience will make meaning from the playwright's work. The situation engenders a physical state and from that state, you speak. You articulate. And then you refine the expression as it gushes forth. You multitask and allow expression to burst forth. It is all breath. It is a physical body in search of freedom. This is the essence of articulation.

The more that you can manage to be specific, the more articulate you will be. After all, you are not just generating energy; you are crafting and articulating the energy into communication, into art. The most important ingredient in articulation is specificity of action, word, and sound. The specificity of your articulation must match the specificity of the playwright's words.



If you cannot say it, point to it.

(Ludwig Wittgenstein)



To signal in the face of the ephemeral is an act of heroism. The pointing, the signaling, is what matters. If you cannot find the words to describe what you are attempting, point at it. When you can point articulately in a specific direction, others will know where you are headed. They will help you in the journey. The pointing is the point.

The choreographer Mary Overlie studied for several years with an elderly ballet teacher she referred to as "Miss Hamilton." Already in

her late thirties by the time she began her work with Miss Hamilton, Mary was not at all interested in a career in ballet. The study nonetheless informed Mary's postmodern sensibilities.

The aging Miss Hamilton ended her days ill and fading from life in a hospital, but she insisted that Mary visit her regularly to continue the instruction. In the hospital room, Miss Hamilton watched Mary dance and corrected her verbally. When she could speak no more, could only blink her eyes and move her fingers, Miss Hamilton still insisted that Mary dance. She taught right up to the moment of her death. She signaled life in her dying. Invested in the continuity of ballet, Miss Hamilton pointed until her last breath.

In the theater, articulation encompasses far more than the words. It is signs, symbols and, particularly, metaphor. You point to something by finding metaphors for it. The metaphor carries the meaning. The metaphor allows the receiver to fill in with their imagination.

I like to think of metaphor as a truck. Originally it was an Ancient Greek word meaning "transfer." *Meta* implies "a change" and *pherein* means "to bear, or carry." Thus, the word "metaphor" itself means "a transfer of meaning from one thing to another." The truck, the container, the metaphor, or the carrier, transports the meaning.

In the theater, we use metaphor to articulate what is most difficult to express or painful to realize. During a solar eclipse when you want to look at the sun, knowing that staring directly at it will ruin your eyes, you use a piece of cardboard to protect the safety of your eyes and watch the reflection of the event on the cardboard. A metaphor functions in this manner. It allows us to look at intense issues without burning our eyes. Metaphor is pointing indirectly in order to look at something directly. It is an articulate use of misdirection. But also metaphor adds deeper, more subtle and complex levels of meaning. A great metaphor is an articulate metaphor. The theater is an art form that employs metaphor consistently and constantly.

In Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*, for example, the object of the glass menagerie carries within it ideas about family, relationships, community, myth, precariousness, and fragility. The fact that the menagerie is made of glass, with its cool manufactured shapes, gives you a sense of what that family is all about.

The Buddha said of his teaching:

I must state clearly that my teaching is a method to experience reality and not reality itself, just as a finger pointing at the moon is not the moon itself. A thinking person makes use of the finger to see the moon. A person who only looks at the finger and mistakes it for the moon will never see the real moon.



This is your life. You are a Seminole alligator wrestler. Half naked with your two bare hands, you hold and fight a sentence's head while its tail tries to knock you over.

(Annie Dillard)



Utterance, articulation, and expression are also a response to absence. Speaking was born as an act of survival in desperate moments. Speaking originated as an action in pursuit of the primal requirements for life: sex, food, and survival. In the act of speaking, of finding expression for experience, the idea of past and future were born. Language and stories allowed the human species to escape the here and now. By telling stories about the past we begin to imagine a future and find a language for the present.

Speaking is the final act in the attempt to communicate; the ultimate signal that you resort to when you have tried everything else. Finally, when the entire organism has attempted to signal an idea, you speak. When you cease to signal to the outside world, you have begun the process of dying.

German filmmaker Wim Wenders invited several major film directors to participate in his 1982 documentary *Room 666*, including Jean-Luc Godard, Werner Herzog, Michelangelo Antonioni and Rainer Werner Fassbinder. In a rented hotel room in Cannes during the yearly film festival, Wenders placed a camera and a constantly running television set and asked each director to enter the room alone, turn on the camera and address the future of cinema. *Room 666* is full of shared insight and knowledge about filmmaking.

The German director Rainer Werner Fassbinder, when his turn in the room came, switched on the camera and haltingly attempted to

speak. His sentences were fragmented and incomprehensible. Finally, after a few grunts and a gesture of futility, he abruptly turned off the camera. End of section. Also, end of Rainer Werner Fassbinder. Within several weeks of the incident, he was dead. It is unclear whether his death was due to a drug overdose or suicide, but either way, his failure to articulate indicated that his life was close to an end. He had given up signaling. When you give up signaling, your life is ostensibly over.

Fassbinder had been one of the most exciting and prolific filmmakers of the second half of the twentieth century. His films are passionate, vicious, dark, sardonic, and provocative. From a theater background and working with a devoted company of actors, Fassbinder directed over forty productions between 1969 and 1982; most of them feature films, a few television specials and one huge 931-minute television miniseries *Berlin Alexanderplatz*. He signaled throughout his life loud and clear, belligerent and angry, loving and hopeful. As illustrated in the film *Room 666*, Fassbinder, for whatever personal reasons, gave up speaking. And soon afterwards, he was dead.

When we use the wrong words or weak words or abusive words, or assume that the words we inherit are good enough rather than embarking upon a close examination of the vocabulary, we are cheating ourselves of a wide range of experience and expressivity.

For example, I have found that the word “want” is often misused in the American theater environment. This simple word has created an unnecessary hierarchy. How often do you hear a director say, “Now I want you to move stage left,” or an actor who asks, “Is this what you want?” This small word has already, just by irresponsible use, set up a parent–child dynamic in the rehearsal hall. Is a rehearsal about doing what the director wants?

If an actor asks me “Is this what you want?” I usually want to give up and go home. What I want is often a little perverse and has nothing to do with the play. What about what the play wants? What would happen if we speak differently to one another? Will the hegemonic system in a rehearsal room change? Is a director’s job simply to know what he or she wants? And is an actor’s job to do what the director wants? Is it the actor’s job to please the director? I do not believe this to be necessarily true. A rehearsal can be a mutual

attempt to find something for which neither party has any easy answer. The actor's job in the rehearsal room can be to articulate rather than to please. Let us examine the way we speak in the creative process. What are the words that will engender a collaborative, nonhierarchical, creative environment?

The words we use to collaborate and create are political and have consequence. Jaan Whitehead, the Board Chairwoman of SITI Company, wrote an incendiary article for *American Theatre* magazine, discussing the words theater people choose to describe themselves. She suggests that the words we use mirror our sense of self and worth and that we have become the victims of the weak words we choose. She encourages us to establish new words to describe ourselves. For example, in the American theater, we call ourselves "nonprofit" or "not for profit," which is like introducing yourself, declaring, "Hello, I'm Non," or, "Hello, I'm Not." And why do we call the money we work so hard to raise *unearned* income?

Jaan Whitehead, in her article, threw down the gauntlet to the American theater in suggesting that we mind the words. But in order to change the way we speak, we must change the way we see ourselves. We must change the way we think. Clarity of intention and thought will help us to find the right words. Clarity of thought leads to clarity of expression.

Learn to be articulate, discover your own words, and describe what you believe in. Stand up and articulate what you are rather than what you are not. These activities will give greater force to the way your art meets the world; it will alter the way you frame the world and it will help to define and describe what could be. The performance of articulation is a positive action in the world. It will cause change.

George Lakoff, a cognitive linguist, explains how the Republicans have used cognitive linguistics to win ideological battles. He posits that the Republicans, the conservatives, use language much more effectively than the Democrats. The Bush Administration, for example, is coaxed to say "9/11" whenever the word "Iraq" is used, in the same sentence. The power of this juxtaposition is incalculable.

Lakoff is attempting to address the way that Democrats use language and words. He refers to "framing" and "reframing" in cognitive science. Framing is a mental structure that we use in thinking. All words are defined relative to frames.



Reframing is telling the truth as we see it—telling it forcefully, straightforwardly and articulately, with moral conviction and without hesitation. The language must fit the conceptual reframing, a reframing from the perspective of progressive values. It is not just a matter of words, though the right ones are needed to evoke progressive frames.

(George Lakoff)



Rather than saying “The war against *terror*,” Lakoff suggests that Democrats should say “the war against *terrorism*.” *Terror* implies an unconquerable magnitude of primal feeling. *Terrorism* is more containable and more accurate. The conservatives framed the discussion about stem-cell research by adding the word “embryonic”—“embryonic stem cell research”—which evokes the image of an unborn baby. In fact, the stem cells used for research are exceedingly early in development and are not embryonic in any sense. In fact, technically, the stem cells are blastocystic, meaning a small mass of cells that results from several days of cell division by the fertilized egg. Not yet an embryo.

Lakoff encourages us to articulate our ideals: “Frame what you believe effectively, say what you believe and say it well, strongly and with moral fervor.” Words are powerful, and the words we choose predetermine their reception. Artists need to begin to redescribe themselves and to practice it daily. We should reframe our place in the world. If we name our companies, “On a String,” for example, does this determine our economic worth? Why not use big words that take up a lot of space? Why not describe the big dreams?

If you can describe what you imagine, I believe that the universe will begin to find the shapes to contain your dream. The effort it takes to imagine an action in the world or a project or a dream house is the first step toward its realization. Describe it.

At a dinner party in Manhattan I found myself seated next to the Canadian filmmaker François Girard, in New York to raise financial support for his next project *The Red Violin*. I had seen his previous film

32 *Short Films about Glen Gould* several times and admired his artistry and radical methods of storytelling. At one point during the dinner, he turned to me and asked if I wanted to hear the story of *The Red Violin*. Flattered and thrilled, I agreed. “A great craftsman, a maker of violins, loved his wife immensely,” he began, “and when she died unexpectedly he, in his grief, painted the violin he had been working on with her blood.” Girard went on to describe, step by step, this violin’s journey through time and space, from one person, from one country and one century to the next. Breathless, I hung on to every word. I noticed that he watched closely and made adjustments in the telling in response to my listening. Later on in the evening, I realized that I had become part of what made his work possible. There was nothing special about me that made him want to tell me the story; rather, this was precisely how he realized a project. He turns to the person next to him, whoever that might be and wherever he is, and begins to speak the project into existence. He develops the story by telling it and by noticing how it is received. Not only was he working on his screenplay, this was also the way to garner financial support. He literally talked his film into existence.

I once considered fundraising an obligatory activity divorced from the artistic process. I have come to understand that fundraising can, in fact, be part of the creative act. Fundraising is an action that can help to speak a project into existence. François Girard helped me to grasp this notion.

Due to the withdrawal of government subsidy in the current political and cultural climate, finding support has become a more time-consuming necessity. But you can also see it as the opportunity to describe and redescribe a project. Fundraising is action. Consider the pursuit of support and raising money as a part of your artistic process. It is not a burden. It is a way of meeting people, building community and articulating ideas, concepts, and intentions. Envision fundraising not simply about raising money but as part of both a cash and noncash economy. Anyone who contributes to the realization of a project is part of the community of sponsors. In doing this you will find the people who will become connected to the root system of your work. How extended can the root system of your work be? In the many interactions, you will find an actual basis of support and an ongoing development of an initiative.

If you have an idea for a project, by the time that you have described it to forty people it will be a better idea. The idea will change and develop because possible backers might need it to be something slightly different in order for them to participate. So the idea matures and deepens. The development occurs simply in the effort to get it done. The sponsors are not simply giving money or resources or information to you and you alone; rather, they are contributing to something that will be shared by many. They are a dynamic part of the process. See this as the aim of your effort to describe and redescribe something into existence.

The act of speaking and describing connects you to all those who have spoken before. You are a spokesperson for those who have gone before, who are now dead. Much description is in fact an act of redescription. The Greek artists and dramatists, for example, were not attempting to create anything new. Rather they meant to reconsider and rearticulate what already existed. Their great works of art and literature were an attempt to reimagine and retell the stories passed down to them. We too are the inheritors of a rich history of human achievement and folly. There is really no need to come up with anything new. Redescribing what you have inherited will engender all the novelty and originality you crave.

Is it possible that art is more than personal expression? If you recognize that your voice contains all the voices that came before you, then you will realize that when you speak you do not speak alone. All the people who made your presence possible on earth speak with you. When you begin to recognize and understand where your voice comes from and begin to explore this, you will realize how immense that voice really is.

My personal challenge is to access the voices of certain giants. I chose, for example, Bertolt Brecht and Gertrude Stein as my art parents. Many of my projects for the theater are an attempt to animate the voices of dead Americans: Stein, Orson Welles, Leonard Bernstein, Emma Goldman, Herman Melville, Andy Warhol, Joseph Cornell, and others. I choose literary voices, scientific voices, and historical events to which I want to be connected.

The art of theater is about living outside your own skin and identifying with the ancestors who empower you to speak. Articulate, describe, and redescribe, find your own words, finish sentences,

transform the irritations of daily life into expression, point, signal in the face of the ephemeral, frame what you believe and say it well. And this is why the theater keeps on compelling artists and audiences to gather together. We are asked to stand up in the present moment and to speak courageously for those who came before, to speak against the familiar currents, from a state of imbalance and as articulately as we can manage.



And so each venture
Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate
With shabby equipment always deteriorating
In the general mess of imprecision of feeling,
Undisciplined squads of emotion. And what there is to conquer
By strength and submission, has already been discovered
Once or twice, or several times, by men whom one cannot hope
To emulate—but there is no competition—
There is only the fight to recover what has been lost
And found and lost again and again: and now, under conditions
That seem unpropitious. But perhaps neither gain nor loss.
For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business.

(T. S. Eliot)

chapter 3

intention

The most demanding part of living a lifetime as an artist is the strict discipline of forcing oneself to work steadfastly along the nerve of one's own most intimate sensitivity.

(Anne Truitt)



To create demands a certain undergoing: surrender to a subconscious process that can yield surprising results. And yet, despite the intuitive nature of the artistic process, it is of utmost importance to be aware of the reason you create. Be conscious about what you are attempting or tempting. Know why you are doing it. Understand what you expect in return.

The intentions that motivate an act are contained within the action itself. You will never escape this. Even though the “why” of any work can be disguised or hidden, it is always present in its essential DNA. The creation ultimately always betrays the intentions of the artist. James Joyce called this invisible motivation behind a work of art “the secret cause.” This cause secretly informs the process and then becomes integral to the outcome. This secret cause determines the distance that you will journey in the process and, finally, the quality of what is wrought in the heat of the making.

For example, listen to a song. Does the singer mean “listen to me” or “listen to this?” The singer’s intentions are “visible” in the singing. If a singer means, “listen to me,” the singing is about the singer. If the song springs from a genuine devotion to and interest in the

music, the singing will be about the song. “Listen to this!” The song will sing.

Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? These age-old journalist’s questions form the investigative spine for this chapter about intention. Among the questions you need to ask: *Who* are your colleagues? *What* are you tempting/attempting? *When* does the art happen? *Where* does your work belong? *Why* do you create? *How* do you proceed?

Who are your colleagues?

It is not theater that is indispensable but: to cross the frontiers between you and me; to come forward to meet you, so that we do not get lost in the crowd—or among words, or in declarations, or among the beautifully precise thoughts.

(Jerzy Grotowski)



Look around you right now and see who is there. These particular people around you at present are the key. They are your collaborators for now. They will serve as mirror, engine, necessary resistance, and inspiration. They are your material and your means. With them, you begin to generate work. Without them, you are nothing. In the process of working with these people in your present circumstance, you will meet other people, and the circle around you will expand, alter, and redefine itself again and again.

The temptation to wait until the perfect situation and the right people are in place before you make your best effort is simply avoidance. Do not wait. Your dedication to the given circumstances, right now, will eventually bring you closer to others who share your own belief and commitment. If you do not commit fully to the people with you now, like-minded others will never show up.

Learn to love, admire, respect, and appreciate the people with whom you work. These colleagues, partners, and coworkers provide the necessary keys to your own development and growth. An attitude of respect will prevent the specter of neediness from raising its ugly head. Neediness is never attractive and rarely productive. If an actor’s

intention is only to please, this intention will also be visible in his or her performance. An audience will sense the underlying desperation and neediness.

Are needy people ever really attractive? Are you drawn to a person who tries too hard to be liked? Is a painting that longs for acceptance ever truly compelling? Is a piece of music that aims to sell a car something that will develop a love of music? While it might be fascinating to watch desperate performers on a reality TV program trying to be the most interesting in a group, there is something of a freak-show quality to the event. Similarly, if a production's primary intention is to be loved, the audience will experience the characteristics of a production desperate for love. This tautology might be entertaining for a while, but it will be quickly forgotten.

Should an actor reach out to the audience or should the audience be drawn to the actor? Which is more attractive? How the actor and audience converge reflects radically different artistic intentions. One of the remarkable characteristics of the paintings of the seventeenth-century Baroque-era painter Rembrandt van Rijn is the way each work beckons the viewer to come close. It does not aggress. It does not shout. There is little showiness. The painting does not come to you. You go to the painting. With very little outward spectacle, the work seizes your attention. And once up close, you discover something deeply compelling in the composition, in the colors, in the details, that draws you even deeper into the image. What at first glance seems like softness or lack of definition opens up to reveal a depth and precision that touches us across the distance of centuries. An invitation is issued. We respond and move closer. The paintings are not needy.

Are you attracted to people who want to change the circumstances or to those who have accepted them? I find that the most attractive individuals are those caught up in a heat of living, deeply engaged and tempting the limits of their given circumstances. Commitment to life generates energy and an inner resolve that in turn creates a dense and attractive magnetic force. Find colleagues who are alive, committed, and engaged. To meet them, you need to cultivate an ingredient that serves as a magnet to such people: enthusiasm.

The etymology of "enthusiasm" is instructive. The word comes from the Greek expression, "to be filled with or possessed by God." Enthusiasm for an art form, for humanity, or for a particular project,

lends great presence to an undertaking. Benjamin Disraeli said, “Every production of genius must be the production of enthusiasm.” Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, “Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm.” Enthusiasm is contagious, and it is a necessary ingredient to sustain the creative process.

At a dinner party recently, a tall distinguished man introduced himself, or so I thought, as an architect. Later in the evening, I found myself next to him. “How wonderful to be an architect!” I exclaimed. “There is just so much excitement and innovation in your field right now.” He demurred and explained quietly that actually he was not an architect any longer. He had left the field. “How could you leave architecture?” I asked him. “There is so much going on! Look at Zaha Hadid, Toyo Ito, Daniel Liebeskind, and Frank Gehry and so many others. Look at what they are doing!” I am an amateur architecture enthusiast and was eager to talk about the biz. “Oh, well,” he said, “those people you are describing all have something I do not have.” “What?” I asked. “They have enthusiasm,” he said sadly, “which is an absolutely necessary ingredient if you expect clients to lay out vast amounts of money to realize your designs.”

To feign, pretend, or fabricate enthusiasm is very difficult. If you are not genuinely “filled with God,” others will sense this and find you out. So, the question is, how to cultivate enthusiasm? I believe that you cultivate enthusiasm by planting a garden; the garden is your body through which enthusiasm can pass. You keep the perceptual mechanism sensitized and the antennae out. You stay close to “the nerve of one’s own most intimate sensitivity.” Place yourself in situations where you are most likely to receive novel signals—a museum, nursing home, foreign city, dance hall, hospital, stock market, or fish market—whatever raises your pulse. You let God fill your being. Then, much like Tom Sawyer who convinced his friends that painting a fence would be the most exciting thing to do on a hot summer day, you point to a fence to paint. You find colleagues via your cultivated enthusiasm. Without enthusiasm, “There is no there there,” as Gertrude Stein said about Oakland, California. In order to gather colleagues, there needs to be a meeting place, a fence to paint. An invitation is issued. You approach one another in the arena. Commitments are made. Transformation has begun. And then you share this cultivated enthusiasm with the outside world.

Finally, in considering “who are your colleagues,” try to imagine that, in fact, there is no human being who is a director, or an actor, or a playwright, or a dramaturg, or a designer. Rather, think of these functions as roles rather than specific people. I am not a director; rather I am a person who can step into the role of director. I can play that role, see from that perspective, and act from that point of view. Being a director is a function rather than a person. It is a way of seeing, analyzing, creating meaning, and contributing to the situation. While it is true that the person who writes the play deals with real crisis moments while wrestling with the contents of a page of dialogue, and the person who renders the design is usually the one who has practiced this craft for years, and it is usually the actor who ends up meeting the genuine intensity of an audience’s gaze, still, try to think about these roles as fluid. This will change your attitude to the process. If, in rehearsal, an actor may step into the director’s shoes, or the director might suddenly be the sound designer, or the sound designer the dramaturg, if you see these roles as fluid, more can be accomplished in the space of a creative period. This will also lead to less desperate territoriality about the possession of specific roles. The work, the play, the theme, and the creative process guide the rehearsal rather than individual egos.

What are you tempting?

On the very first day of all of her acting classes, the eminent actor and acting teacher Stella Adler told a story. She described how on vacation in Florida, at a swimming pool, she watched a man try to persuade his young daughter to jump off the diving board into the water. The little girl trembled at the edge of what seemed a great precipice as her father repeatedly encouraged her to make the leap. “Come on, you can do it honey!” the father shouted. The little girl, clearly frightened, finally cried out, “But Daddy, I’m trying!” At this point, Stella Adler turns to her class of aspiring actors and says, “Isn’t that what we are all doing? Aren’t we all just trying? Isn’t that the point?”

The basic, underlying intention, as Stella Adler suggests, is that we try. In the trying, we attempt a miracle. I’ve been thinking about the value of trying, attempting, and tempting. I like the word “tempt” even more than “attempt.” What are we doing? What are we tempting?

To tempt can imply a risk before possible destructive powers. It means to invite or attract. Tempting embodies risk and daring. A risk is a leap in the dark, a jump off a high diving board and a necessary ingredient in every artistic endeavor. With no risk or leap, the available energy deflates rather than multiplies. It takes energy and courage to meet an obstacle or to tempt a miracle. When our intention is “to try,” we are required to awaken sleeping parts of ourselves and to tempt in more extremes. Rather than looking for safety, we will attempt flight, just like the little girl jumping off the diving board.

The stage is a place where the stakes are raised intentionally. A body is put in crisis intentionally. For an actor, it should cost something to walk across the stage. In art, every task should cost something to accomplish, and the stakes can always be lifted higher. Stepping upon the stage should feel like jumping off of a high diving board at an Olympic pool. The baseline intention to try requires you to draw away the thick veil of inertia and habit that surrounds your daily life. Equipped with the incisive blade of the intention, fueled by courage and persistence, and armed with an idea, you go to work. With this approach, something is bound to happen.

Assuming now you are now poised to leap, and that the underlying intention is to try, what next? Let’s look deeper into intentions. What are you doing? What are you tempting? Intention affects choice of subject matter, aesthetic and expressive possibilities, and the framework of an audience’s interaction with what you make.

Early in his career, during the apartheid period in South Africa, the playwright Athol Fugard faced a decision: what to write about. The ongoing apartheid condition interested him a great deal and became one of the possible subjects. Another option, the Afrikaner situation, was also fraught with relevant issues and drama. Finally, after analysis, Fugard chose to write about the apartheid situation rather than the Afrikaner because he recognized that the issues surrounding the apartheid situation were larger and more complex than the problems of the Afrikaners. Fugard chose to enter a more challenging and difficult arena. His intentions were clear. He intended to grapple with the big issues from the high-dive of the difficult circumstances in his country.

The theme, issue, or question that you choose to address is the magnifying glass that amplifies every effort you make. What are you doing? What are your intentions? Do you intend to function from the

safety of what you already know, or can you welcome the experience of exposing yourself to less comfortable, more complex issues? The choice of subject, theme, or issue directly reflects your intentions and becomes the arena in which the match will be conducted. For Athol Fugard, the apartheid situation posed a much larger problem and arena. His intention, to encounter the problem, became the point.

Intentions are also reflected in aesthetic issues. I find James Joyce's notion of kinetic or static art very useful. Kinetic art, he suggests, moves you. Static art stops you. Which do you intend? Do you want to "move" every audience member to feel and think the same thing at the same moment? Or do you want to "stop" them by finding oppositions that trigger diverse associations, thoughts, memories, and emotions?



A true artistic image gives the beholder a simultaneous experience of the most complex, contradictory, sometimes even mutually exclusive feelings. It is not possible to catch the moment at which the positive goes over into its opposite, or when the negative starts moving toward the positive. Infinity is germane, inherent in the very structure of the image.

(Andre Tarkovsky)



It is easy to elicit tears. If you want to make people cry, if that is your intention, this is fairly simple to accomplish, because the theater is a storytelling medium where emotions can be easily manipulated and massaged. The question is, what is the value of these tears? What are you doing with the audience? Are you after a Pavlovian response that is quickly forgotten or a complex recognition that sends reverberations into lives?

I weep easily. But what is the value of my tears? Are the tears about compassion or are they an automatic affective response? Do they wash a stained conscience or cleanse or lighten a heavy heart? Or do the tears merely reinforce self-pity? What are the intentions behind the trigger?

And what about laughter? Are you after an easy "ha-ha-ho" or are you more interested in ripples of uncontrolled yelps? The genre of

elicited laughter also reflects intentionality. Again, is it possible to create a moment on stage where everyone in the audience feels exactly the same thing at the same moment, or to set up the circumstances that unlock diverse associations in every single audience member. One trigger is fascistic, making the respondent feel small and manipulated, closing people down. The other trigger is humanistic, encouraging disparate responses, opening people up.

Personally, I find it more interesting to trigger associations in the audience than psychologies. The way to do this is to set up oppositions rather than answers. For example, if one person nods “yes,” while another person is shaking the head “no,” you have set up an opposition. And in the space of this opposition there is room for the audience to dream. I am after diverse responses. I want individuality in the audience rather than conformity.

The following are my own responses to the question “What are you tempting?” These are my intentions:

- I am looking for signs that trigger associations rather than psychologies.
- I am trying to find moments on stage that are simultaneously surprising and inevitable.
- I am aiming for line drives rather than home runs, consistency rather than flash-in-the-pan theatrics.
- I am attempting to bring thought, conscience, and perspective to event.
- I want to make theater that would look ridiculous on film or television.

The intentions in an artistic process are also reflected in formal choices. This is what I refer to when I write, “I want to make theater that would look ridiculous on film or television.” The language of the theater is expressive and metaphoric as distinct from television, which is mostly a descriptive medium. And yet, our profession often confuses languages and ends up using the descriptive language of television on the stage rather than the expressive language that the theater does best.

Look around you right now. Are you reading this book in a room? Are there other people present? How would you stage this very moment for the theater and how would you present it to a television

camera? You can stage a description of this moment, which is what television does best, or an expression of it, which, although it might look ridiculous on television, theater can achieve very successfully. For the camera, it would probably be most effective to replicate exactly what surrounds you now, the same spatial relations, objects and shapes, identical gestures and furniture. For theatrical expression, which can encompass subjective, emotional aspects of this moment, shapes can shift and metaphor arise. For example, for an expressive, poetic, subjective staging of this moment, you might be sitting precariously on a high narrow stool grasping a gigantic, bright yellow book while your right hand shakes uncontrollably. Which do you intend, a description of the situation or an expression of it? Description is prose. Expression is poetry.

The theater is one of the few art forms that moves easily between poetry and prose. But it is imperative to choose which language you intend to use at each moment. Is your intention to describe or express? Prose and poetry transpire from different parts of the brain.

Try to remember a nursery rhyme. Notice that your eyes move up and to the right (some people to the left) in order to recall it. To access poetry or rhyme, we switch brain function. We log on to a different part of our brain. The left hemisphere is usually linked to prose. The right hemisphere is related to rhyme and poetry. Description is prose. Expression is poetry. Most pedestrian movement is prose while dance is poetry. Speaking is prose while singing is poetry. To switch modes, you switch brain function. But you can choose. You can access both sides of the brain to write in the languages of the stage.

When does the art happen?

The composer John Cage suggested that if you want to see theater, sit on a park bench and put a frame around what you see. Your intention makes it art.

Art is intentional pressure. The intention of making art creates a pressure. Pressure creates intentional art. For John Cage sitting on a park bench, the pressure of his attention makes what he sees art. In a pressurized environment, the molecules begin to move and alter what is observed.

I watched a rehearsal once at the Public Theater in New York City. The director spent hours telling the actors exactly what to do. The actors learned their blocking from the director. The air in the rehearsal hall felt stale and heavy. No art was happening as far as I could see. I guess that the actors assumed that the art would start when the audience arrived.

What is a rehearsal? When does the art start? Does art happen only with an audience present? Is rehearsal a place and time to practice moves or is it a site of collaborative conception? Each artist's answer to this question reflects distinctly different intentions in the creative process. I believe that it is possible for art to occur in the rehearsal room. A director can bring an intensity of gaze that forces the actors to create in the present moment. By treating the time and the space in an intense and demanding way, a rehearsal room can become the site of creation, where flight occurs. The assumption that a rehearsal is where the director tells the actors what to do while the actors store up that information is simply an avoidance of the actual crisis of effort and concentration needed to make art.

When does the art happen? The art happens in the midst of flight. It does not happen from a state place of equilibrium or balance. Recently I saw my friend the opera singer Lauren Flanigan in concert at Carnegie Hall. I watched her sitting onstage while others performed. She looked rather plain and ordinary. And then came her moment. She stood and launched into vocal flight. She leapt into thin air with no guarantees. And the flight magnified her effort and made her magnificent. She became a magnified presence, gorgeous and attractive, a human being in flight via the voice. She carved the song in mid-air. Lauren Flanigan understands on a conscious level that the art happens in the midst of a leap, from imbalance, this site of temptation. The leap itself is an unconscious act of faith made possible by the consciousness of intention. The art happens when you intend it to happen. It happens when you leap with intention.

Where does your work belong?

In 1991, I was invited to direct a production at the San Diego Repertory Theatre in southern California. Asked to choose the play, I carefully considered the context of the theater and its audience. Housed in the

basement of the Horton Plaza Shopping Mall, the theater is a popular draw among urban professionals in the San Diego area. What play would speak to a subscription audience in the basement of a mall? I chose *The Women*, Clare Boothe Luce's screwball comedy from the 1930s, not only because I love the play, but also because I felt that it might appeal to a southern California shopping culture. The play sprang from the biting pen of a very smart and angry woman who climbed her way to the top of the heap at a time when women were expected to be wives and not much more. The play is vicious, poignant, and very funny, which seemed appropriate for a San Diego Rep audience.

The characters in *The Women* are rich, spoiled housewives and their female servants. During auditions, I found sixteen fierce, diverse, energetic, talented, and expressive women who would look fabulous in 1930s clothes, and we dove happily into rehearsal. Everything went well until the second preview. In the culture of theater, second previews are known to be sobering, and this second preview proved to be no exception. The audience sat lifeless and unresponsive in the basement of the mall and provided no energy or engagement. I watched sixteen glorious women enact the hysterically funny story with nothing coming back at them. I became, perhaps understandably, depressed. That night I took a red-eye flight to New York and sat stunned and miserable in the plane and considered the dilemma. What would I do when the next regional theater with a subscription audience asked me to suggest a play? What nonthreatening light fare is there left for me to direct? *Harvey*? I found myself rebelling: "O.K., I will move to Saratoga Springs in upstate New York and people will have to make pilgrimages to see my work. I will find my own audience." But then, of course, the pejorative word "elitist" crossed the screen of my brain. This worried me.

In fact, it turned out that the second preview audience was only that, and the performances in San Diego were generally received with much enthusiasm, but the question remained close to my heart: "Who or what is my audience?"

Not long afterwards, in Toga Mura, Japan, during the inaugural summer of the newly formed SITI Company, I was in rehearsal for our very first production, Charles L. Mee Jr.'s *Orestes*. Toga Mura is a village high up in the "Japanese Alps" where the remarkable theater

director Tadashi Suzuki created an artistic home for his company as well as a center where artists from around the world are invited to work and perform. At the time, I was just getting to know Mr. Suzuki. One day at lunch, hearing that we might be doing a run-through of *Orestes* that afternoon, he asked if he might attend the rehearsal. I said, "Of course," not knowing what lay in store.

The actors, hearing that Suzuki would be in rehearsal, grew nervous about the presence of this man they both feared and admired. I, too, became a little apprehensive. As we began the afternoon rehearsal, Suzuki padded into the back of the rehearsal space and sat quietly, not even watching, mostly reading along in a translation of the play on his lap. As the run-through progressed, I watched the stage in great dismay. All I could see were the mistakes and flaws. "What have I been doing all this time in rehearsal?" I kept asking myself. "How could I let so many unexamined moments go by?" The actors, too, seemed to be sweating more than usual and pushing and not differentiating the moments. With the run-through over, Mr. Suzuki thanked me sweetly and padded out. I called an end to rehearsal and we all went off rather depressed.

"What just happened?" I asked Leon Ingulsrud as we walked afterwards in the quiet hills surrounding Toga Mura. Leon, a 6 foot 4 inch redhead from Minnesota who speaks fluent Japanese had by then been a member of Suzuki's company for seven years. As Suzuki's interpreter, he had been privy to a great deal of Suzuki's thinking and practice. "Why did Suzuki's presence in the room make everyone so nervous?" I asked in frustration. Leon then explained to me that when Suzuki speaks to an actor, he uses words like "a professional will see this in your work." Actors feel the integrity and intensity of a professional's eyes upon them.

How strange, I thought. As an American I tend to ask "What would Mr. and Mrs. Joe Subscriber see here?" rather than "What would a professional see?" That Suzuki looks at an actor from the point of view of a professional was, for me, a radical notion. What an interesting cultural difference and a contrast in intentions! American culture is based upon a tradition of populist thinking. We *intend* that the lowest common denominator can understand and appreciate everything. In our rehearsals, we ask, "But will it play in Peoria, Illinois?"

The journey from *The Women* to *Orestes* brought me great insight about the issue of “where does your work belong?” After the difficult second preview of *The Women*, I concluded that I needed to find my own audience, that is, one to whom I could speak without difficulty and who would understand me easily. I thought that since my theater audience cannot be found in a mall in southern California, I would have to look elsewhere. But this turned out to be an error in thinking. I learned from Suzuki’s visit to our *Orestes* rehearsal, and the ensuing conversation with Leon Ingulsrud, that one does not speak to a particular audience; rather you speak to a particular part of each individual audience member. You do not have your own audience; rather you address a specific component of the human experience in every audience. I did not need to move to Saratoga Springs and wait for my audience to arrive; rather, every audience can be my audience, and I am speaking to a very specific part each person.

An audience quickly senses the intentions of the creators. An invitation is issued early on in a production, and audiences are free to accept or reject. They sense which part of their experience is being addressed and what part of their brain and imagination is meant to play along.

In rehearsal, the director’s job is to be the actors’ very first audience. If I attend to the stage as a “professional,” then the actors, consciously or unconsciously, generate work that communicates to those discriminating, responsive and wide-awake parts of me. And this, in turn, I ask of the audience. I ask for them to attend with heightened sensibilities and discrimination. This is now my conscious intention.

I work internationally because each and every time I leave the country I am confronted with my own assumptions about what the theater means and how it functions. When in Japan, around Tadashi Suzuki, the lessons are particularly poignant. I am faced with my assumptions about what a rehearsal is, what a director’s job is, what a play is, what an audience is and how a production is supposed to function in the world. I am faced with these assumptions because his notions of all these aspects of the theater are different than mine. The differences in assumptions are personal and they are cultural. And so, in Japan, I must continually examine my inherited assumptions and decide what I want to keep or discard and what I want to reexamine. My intentions are brought into question.

Ultimately, it is not for me to say where my work belongs. Perhaps one's audience exists long before you decide who they are. Your lifetime is the process of locating them. You cannot predetermine who they are or when or where they will show up. You clarify your intentions and then do the work.

Why do you create?

The depth of your reasons for action influences the quality of the act as well as the energy of engagement. The *why* determines the value of the *what*. For this reason, it is essential to examine the reasons that motivate you. Stay close to the *why*. What are your intentions? Why do you choose a particular play? How heartfelt is your drive? Why is this action necessary? The *why* forms the pedestal upon which the work rests and not only predetermines the persistence of your action, but also guides your hand and gives force to the outcome.

My friend Morgan Jenness admired Mother Teresa, now Blessed Mother Teresa, and at difficult personal junctures, the mere thought of her provided inspiration. Although now a playwright's agent, Morgan worked for many years with the legendary producer Joseph Papp at the New York Shakespeare Festival in New York City. One day, feeling especially depressed about her sense of uselessness in the world, Morgan heard that Mother Teresa would be in Manhattan. She dropped everything and headed to the Indian Embassy in the hope that she might appear. Standing outside the embassy, Mother Teresa did emerge, surrounded by an entourage, and Morgan managed to capture her attention. She stopped, turned, looked at Morgan right in the eyes and asked, "What can I do for you?" In the midst of her surprise and awe, Morgan described her work in the theater and how she had lost her will as she did not see any usefulness in it and then and there declared her determination go to India and be of use. Mother Teresa spoke sternly, "There are many famines. In my country there is a famine of the body. In your country there is a famine of the spirit. And that is what you must feed."

Morgan, reminded by Mother Teresa about why she should continue working in the theater, went on to exert a powerful influence on the field of the American theater and continues to do so. Her dedication to emerging playwrights is unwavering and as solid as it

can possibly be. She offers their plays and their efforts the full force of her attention and intelligence. The basic sturdiness of her concern and intentions are always crystal clear and palpable.

When you know what the point is, what your intentions are, then all other decisions radiate from this fundamental core, this reason to act. I like to think that Morgan Jenness functions in the world as effectively and generously as she does because her intentions are of the spirit. Her intentions create the pedestal from which she acts. The pedestal gives her action solidity and force.

It is also possible to discuss the intentions of an entire collective or collaborative team. The members of SITI Company, for example, agree upon certain basic tenets or core values that animate action and change. We agree on the *why*. When you know what the point is, what your intentions are, then all of the decisions can be made based upon these agreements.

When I started SITI Company, I wrote a mission statement. Every year we reexamine the mission to make sure that it still feels right. If the mission is lucid enough, then the day-to-day, moment-to-moment decisions, however large or small, are possible because of the clarity of the central intentions of the organization. Even questions such as where to put the garbage or how to design an office layout emerge from the central agreement shared by a group of people.

A collaboratively based theater company led by Anne Bogart, SITI's mission is:

- to create bold new productions;
- to perform and tour these productions nationally and internationally;
- to train together consistently;
- to train theater professionals and students in an approach to acting that forges unique and highly disciplined artists for the theater;
- to create opportunities for artistic dialogue and cultural exchange.

Armed with these central agreements, SITI Company can move forward. A basic understanding about the intentions behind an endeavor supports collective action. Even if a member does not agree with a decision, at least there is an understanding about why the choice is made. Ownership in the *why* is central to positive collective action.

In the years before the dissolution of Communism in eastern Europe, Gardzienice, a Polish theater company founded in 1976 by Artistic Director W odzimierz Staniewski, brought folk operas to tiny villages spread around rural eastern Poland. It was the road trips that consolidated the ensemble and brought the idea of building a theater—an annex of a seventeenth-century manor house and a historic mill near Lublin where the company resides to this day.

The company trained hard, running 10 miles every morning regardless of weather conditions, combining rigorous physical and vocal training with rehearsal and production. Besides making theatrical productions, their main work was to conduct research into folk culture and ethnic and anthropological studies. Each year, the company loaded several carts drawn by oxen and headed out to the small outposts of Poland to find a primarily peasant audience. Upon reaching a village, the company offered a performance for the villagers if, in return, the villagers would perform too. If the villagers agreed, Gardzienice set up to perform their show. They sang and danced for the community in the hopes that in return the villagers would share their ancient melodies, dances, and nearly forgotten stories.

Documentary filmmaker Mercedes Gregory made a film about Gardzienice before she died tragically of cancer in 1988. She traveled with the company and recorded their forays into scattered villages. I had the privilege of seeing this film in New York City, presented by the Artistic Director Staniewski himself. The film documented the company's intense training, their elaborate journeys through Poland and some of the performances for villagers in the tiny rural towns. At the end of a performance, the actors always turned to the audience and asked for a presentation in return.

After one performance, it was the villagers' turn to participate, and the camera moved around the audience and then closed in on two elderly women struggling, between them, to remember a song. At this moment, Staniewski stopped the film, pointed at the two women, and stated emphatically that this little interaction encapsulated the reason his theater company existed. Everything that they did, all the training, all the daily sacrifices were done in order for these two women to remember a song.

I gasped at the specificity and clarity of Gardzienice's mission. The intention, the *why*, is precise and heartfelt. Determined to be part of

preserving a rapidly disappearing culture, Staniewski and his colleagues found an action in the world to match their interest. They believed in the power of memory and culture. Their findings during those experiences in the Polish hinterlands became a basis for their approach to acting and understanding of traditional folk cultures. They reached for humanitarian and spiritual values through hard work, music, movement, words, theatrical space, and an emphasis on indigenous culture. They found, cultivated, and restored expressions and techniques through the songs and dances from earlier times.

Art is an act of the spirit. It asks you to be a conduit for something larger than yourself. You listen to voices from the past in service of the common culture you share with those around you. With an understanding of the *why*, then Heaven and Earth will move in response to your action. I believe this to be the fundamental grace that allows for action in our difficult times.

How do you proceed?

A man with a clear head looks at life directly, realizes that everything is problematic, and feels himself lost. And this is the simple truth, that to be alive is to feel oneself lost. And he who accepts this has already begun to find himself, to be on solid ground.

(Ortega y Gasset)



We tend to compare ourselves to other people's versions of success rather than our own. The ubiquitous cultural assumptions that define personal success are insidious. The expectations of parents, teachers, popular magazines, and corporate culture contribute to the confusion. We compare how we are doing with other people's professional and personal trajectories. This is a false gauge and a waste of emotional energy.

A newspaper reporter asked several Chechen soldiers why they bothered to struggle for independence. Russia is so large and powerful, how could they possibly hope to succeed in their mission?

“You don’t understand,” the soldiers replied. “We are successful because we are fighting.”

Even though it is much easier to adapt to other people’s expectations, it is imperative that you define your very own version of success. Without the extra effort and imagination needed to find the right words to describe your notion of success, you will be a victim of other people’s assumptions about what success means. Once you recognize and can articulate your intentions, you can move forward.

Perhaps your definition of success is two elderly women in a rural village who remember a nursery rhyme. Or maybe it requires a Tony, an Obie or an Academy Award. Does a standing ovation denote success? Is the opportunity to realize another show success? Is being on television success? Is financial reward success? What is it? Say it. Own it. Only then can you start to see your actions clearly and stand behind your work.

My own definition of success is to contribute to the DNA of the theater. My intention is to challenge the notion that the television camera is the arbiter of what is real in the theater. I want to connect to the past and to the future by making a contribution in the present. I want to be useful to others.

I believe that if you are making art in these difficult times, you are already successful. The act is the point, more so now than ever. To make theater in our present climate is a utopian act. If done in the proper spirit, with the right intentions, the theater can be an act of courage and articulation, a positive action in this convoluted world.

How to proceed? Besides finding your own definition of success, cultivate permission; celebrate accidents; continue to study; take responsibility for the atmosphere; hold on tightly, let go lightly; and undergo often.

Cultivate permission

In a “not for profit” arena we spend a great deal of time and effort strategizing and fundraising. We work hard for the privilege of artistic freedom. When we finally do get into a rehearsal studio, we have truly earned the right to be there. But then what? What are our intentions? I believe that it is imperative to cultivate permission, to call upon the wild raging child that lives within us. This is not only

our right, but also our responsibility. No one else will give us this permission. We must allow ourselves enough permission to make extreme choices and bold leaps of faith.

Celebrate accidents

Accidents are one of the most valuable commodities in the creative process. The creative act is a conscious process fed by the unconscious. The filmmaker Robert Altman considers accidents an integral part of his process. “Think of your five favorite moments in any of my films,” he said in an interview, “and I can guarantee that those five moments were accidents. I didn’t plan for them. On the film set I create the circumstances in which these accidents can happen.” Sigmund Freud speculated that there is no such thing as an accident. This forces the question, how do you relate to events that are out of your control? What is your attitude to accidents? If a fire-engine siren just happens to pass by the building during a passionate love scene, how do you hear it? It might just be the best sound cue imaginable. If someone trips on stage in rehearsal, perhaps the trip contains the energy necessary at that moment.

In rehearsal for a production of *Moby Dick* during the late 1970s, the actor George Kahn, out of intense frustration, literally ran up the side of a wall. The director, Ric Zank said, “Keep it.” Most directors would have stopped the rehearsal and talked until feelings were soothed. Instead, Ric Zank said, “Keep it.” And so, indeed, at a specific moment in every performance of *Moby Dick*, George Kahn had to run up the side of the wall. Imagine the energy necessary to repeat that “accident.” In order to accomplish the feat, Kahn had to summon all of the fury of that difficult rehearsal. In this way, the accident was celebrated and became useful in the process.

Continue to study

The more you know, the better you can imagine. Art is always an expression of philosophy and point of view. Being part of the evolution of an art form demands that we study history, forge philosophies, see the present without the baggage of inherited assumptions, and develop the capacity to receive the world in an open and sensitive

way. Only with receptivity and ensuing articulation can we produce and share with audiences moments that can pierce through time and find eternity behind it.

Take responsibility for the atmosphere

The force and quality of attention and expectations can engender an atmosphere of rapture. As a director, it is my responsibility to determine the politics and the values in the room. I can insist upon justness, mutual respect, and listening. I can create a nonhierarchical environment in which creation is a collective act. Our shared links to the history of ideas, aesthetics, literature, and human striving is forged by practice and respect. The ensuing atmosphere of rapture radiates to audiences and then out into the world.

Hold on tightly, let go lightly

If the work is too controlled, it will feel constricted and lifeless. If there is too little control, it will be chaotic and hard to see and hear. Agree to celebrate the paradox of firm decisive action and letting go all at the same moment. You do not lead the work. The work leads you. You must be willing to discard vast amounts of material at any moment. I need to work with people who are willing to do this.

SITI Company Sound Designer Darron L. West spent an entire night creating one sound cue for our show *Small Lives/Big Dreams*. In rehearsal the next morning we tried it out and it did not work. He never complained about jettisoning the cue. In fact, it took him only a minute to know that all his work had not paid off and it was he who suggested getting rid of it. Darron's intentions are always devoted to the good of the show. He lets the work lead. He can hold on tightly and let go lightly.

Undergo often

When you pick up a large stone, you meet its resistance. You undergo the sensation of its substance and the physical opposition of gravity. A play, like a stone, offers resistance. The mass of a play contains complex situations, characters, and themes. Audiences as well as the artistic

team undergo the pain and delight of meeting the play. The experience asks something of you, asks for your muscle and mind. You bring to the play the person you have become so far in your lifetime.

The effort that it takes to make the work is the point. The quality and intensity of the team's effort combined with the attentiveness necessary in the heat of engagement becomes part of the product. The participation of everyone involved in the realization of the project makes the experience exponentially richer. The collective undergoing on the part of the artistic team brings about productions that engage audiences in ways that are participatory rather than passive.

In the theater, we create experiential journeys for audiences. In the midst of experience is born encounter. We are meant to be in the room together, undergoing experience, undergoing other people, undergoing ideas, undergoing metaphor, undergoing history, and undergoing life.



I work in the basement.
 That's where I keep all my materials
 for my work.
 And I think:
 What am I doing?
 I've lost my way
 why don't I give it up?
 there are times I get so lost
 I don't know what to do
 I've gone so deep, so far
 I don't know if I'll ever find my way out again
 and then: what's the point?
 is this useful?
 does anyone care?
 I get up on the morning
 some days I just weep and weep
 is everything I do just written on water?
 but what else can I do?

(Charles L. Mee Jr.)

chapter 4

attention

The moment one gives close attention to anything, even a blade of grass, it becomes a mysterious, awesome, indescribably magnified world in itself. Almost an “unrecognizable” world.
(Henry Miller)



Although raised in the Episcopalian church, I did not learn the meaning of the word “episcopal” until a recent Sunday afternoon driving in upstate New York during a heavy snowstorm. I drove slowly, hanging onto the steering wheel, eyes tightly glued to the windshield. I found a sermon on a local radio station and listened to the minister as a way of grounding my nervous mind. The sermon began: “What do children pray for around the world, no matter what their religion, culture, or language? What words do they choose? All children address God with the same wish: ‘Please watch over mommy, watch over daddy and please watch over me.’ Children crave, more than anything, God’s attention.” The minister went on to explain that the word “Episcopalian” is derived from the Greek *episcope* meaning “to watch over.” *Epi* means over and *scope* is to look at or examine something, as in a telescope. An Episcopalian is one who “watches over.”

Watching over demands passionate presence and availability and absolutely no desire for any one thing in particular to happen but plenty of will to stay present. Like a hunter in wait for the appearance of a wild animal, the waiting is dynamic.

Watching over is the basic ingredient in creating as well as seeing theater. The etymology of the word “theater” is, “a place of seeing.” *Theatron* is Greek, *thea* means eyes and *tron* place. Watching over a rehearsal means to be present with sensitivity and acute attention to the differentiation and change that happens moment to moment. The quality of an audience’s attention is also a determinant in the “success” of a show.

Attention is a powerful tool. It can be used and misused, consciously or unconsciously. The quality and depth of one’s attention is ultimately what counts most in every situation. Attention is, after all, one of the few aspects of life that one can control. The only gift we can give to a situation is the force of our attention. We can control attention and we can control the quality of our attention. When attention is compromised, the outcome is weaker.

Attention is not the same as consciousness. Physiologically, attention is the ability to consciously select certain features from the vast array of sensory signals presented to the brain. Sensation, awareness, past experience, and reflection (self-awareness) all participate in the phenomenon of attention. This integrated consciousness modulates conscious states and directs them, finally arriving at mental focus and interest.

Martin Heidegger suggested that every event is shaped by the presence of the observer. Intense watchfulness is what generates a pressurized environment, the cauldron, in which chemistry occurs. As quantum physicists like to say, reality happens when you look at it. And how reality happens depends on how you look at it. The quality of attention you give to something determines what it becomes.

It feels satisfactory to be seen, to be considered, to be watched over. I lived in West Berlin long before the wall was dismantled, and I occasionally made trips into East Berlin. This was a complex process that required time and patience with long, slow-moving lines in a dingy basement space between the two cities. I experienced an odd pleasure every time I stood before the East German official who examined my passport. He sat at a desk, looked up and studied me carefully. He looked at the passport photo and then at me. I found his gaze very satisfying. He was not looking with personality or desire. He was just looking. I wonder about the power of being looked at. Not seen, but looked at like a tree, a flower, a river, a fish in that river.

Attention can also be abused, exploited for its destructive power. To stare at someone with no sense of respect or sensitivity to his or her dignity or personal space makes the object of this attention feel small and inconsequential. Even worse, a “hate stare” can cause pain and suffering. Hate stares are often racist or sexist. To look at someone or something as “lesser” than you constitutes an act of aggression and control. The sociologist Erving Goffman calls this kind of interaction “uncivil attention.” Aggressive, violent, and destructive, uncivil attention turns people into objects. This attention is degrading.

A theater director’s primary job is to watch over rehearsal with extraordinary attention and a fierce wakefulness. An actor senses the quality of the watching and, consciously or unconsciously, ascertains the extent and depth of the director’s interest. Ultimately, you cannot fake attention.

The actress Tina Shepard, once a member of Joseph Chaikin’s legendary Open Theater, paid me the biggest compliment I have ever received as a director. She said, “You and Joe are the only two directors I have ever worked with who make me sweat just walking across the stage.” I could never hope for higher praise. What she means is that she could feel the heat of our attention and sensed our hope and belief that she might discover something extraordinary while simply crossing the stage.

And yet, I do give an actor room to maneuver. I do not concentrate all of my attention on the actor; rather, I attend to the environment surrounding the actor. I do not look too hard in any one particular direction for the solution or answer. I soften my field of vision in order to make room for something to occur. I believe that an audience is affected by the quality of attention that a director brings to a rehearsal process. The director is, after all, the very first audience.

Bruce Sundlun, the former Board Chairman of Trinity Repertory Company, met a U.S. senator who would learn everyone’s name within ten minutes of walking into any room. Sundlun asked the Senator how he did it. “Bruce,” said the Senator, “When you meet someone, what are you thinking about?” Sundlun shook his head, and the Senator continued, “You are thinking about yourself. You are thinking about the impression that you are making.”

Attention, watching over or observation demands an interest and engagement in something that is outside of yourself. Attention is

about going beyond self-interest but at the same time remaining intensely in tune and responsive from within.

Julia Child, food enthusiast and author of many cookbooks, learned while living in France that the French are highly attuned to social nuance. She elaborated: if a tourist enters a food stall in Les Halles in Paris, thinking that he or she will be cheated, the salesman will happily oblige. But if he senses that his customer has taken a genuine interest in his produce, he will just “open up like a flower.” She said, “I quickly learned how to communicate. If I wasn’t willing to spend time to get to know the sellers and what they were selling, then I wouldn’t go home with the freshest head of lettuce or best bit of steak in my basket.”

Julia Child suggested in this anecdote that if you expect to be robbed, you will be robbed. Expectations create experience. What do we expect to hear or see at any moment? Does the expectation cause the thing to happen? Do our expectations about a person affect their behavior?

The psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion advises his patients to enter a session with no memory and no desire. In the artistic process as well, a wide-open yet responsive attitude is your best ally. You cannot make things happen; you can only create the circumstances in which something might occur. You do this by bringing your attention to the issue at hand with no memory and no desire. You watch over the proceedings with the highest level of discrimination and wakefulness that you can possibly manage.

Sigmund Freud distinguished two types of attention: focused attention and hovering or free-floating attention. In focused attention you tune out the surroundings and concentrate on one thing at a time. The free-floating attention attains a distance but also requires presence. A free-floating attention is what you use when you drive a car. You soften your gaze and take in the myriad bits of information and juggle them intuitively.

I cannot force creation in a rehearsal. But I can control the circumstances that surround the creative unfolding. I can shift intuitively between free-floating and focused attention. I can determine the atmosphere of the room; I make sure the space is clean, that we start and end on time, that there is a courteous attitude, et cetera. Attention cannot compel results or impose an outcome. You make

space for something to happen. You set a place at the dinner table for an unexpected guest.

In rehearsal a director needs to be full of the same life that an actor requires in performance in front of an audience. The director must be fully present, spontaneous, and ready to switch directions, responsive to every minuscule change, sensitive to energy shifts, ready to laugh. In short, the director must be wildly alive and present.

Actors can contribute the gift of their attention to one another in rehearsal. This multiple attention magnifies the intensity of every action on the stage. When each individual in the room is mutually caught up in the moment-to-moment struggles and discoveries, leaps of daring and risk are more likely to happen. An atmosphere charged with hope, support, and attention is a pressurized and rarified atmosphere in which discoveries are more apt to occur. The shared bond of attention and mutual respect is a useful elixir in the creative process.

Gisela Cardenas, a young director from Peru, wrote a letter to theater director Ariane Mnouchkine asking permission to participate in some way with her internationally acclaimed company, *Le Théâtre du Soleil*. Finally, six years later, she received a reply. Invited to join a workshop lead by Mnouchkine at the *Cartoucherie*, a former munitions factory in Vincennes near Paris, Gisela headed for France. She found herself one of 200 participants invited from around the world. Because of the sizable number, most of their time was spent watching a few actors working onstage. Patience was a key ingredient. Several actors worked onstage at a time, guided by Mnouchkine in lengthy improvisations. Everyone else watched, many hours a day.

One day, as the actors struggled in a scene with unsatisfactory results, the work on stage ground to a halt. Frustrated and tense, an exasperated Mnouchkine finally turned to the 200 participants on the bleachers and implored, “You must wish with every muscle in your bodies that these actors succeed.”

Gisela Cardenas described that day of sitting and wishing for the actors to succeed as both exhausting and exhilarating. She said that she had never worked so hard in the theater. She is convinced that the combined effort and wishing of 200 people helped the actors onstage to break through their difficulties.

Can expectation predetermine success or failure? Does the quality of attention significantly alter the outcome? Are actors really helped

by the good wishes of the audience? Do fans at a baseball stadium contribute to the score? Does expectation create experience?

An audience brings with them certain expectations. Spending a great deal of money for a ticket to a Broadway show can affect the way you watch. The presence of a big star in the cast can also lend monumentality to the event. The audience arrives with higher hopes, greater expectations, and brings with them a sense of event.

I attended Peter Brook's staging of Georges Bizet's opera *Carmen* in Paris at his theater Les Bouffes du Nord in 1986. Even though the show had been sold out for months in advance and everyone in the crowd in front of the theater already held tickets to the performance, a noisy battle broke out even before the doors to the theater opened. Because there were no reserved seats, people scrambled at the entrance, straining to get in first and find good seats. The rain poured down outside the theater and hundreds of ticket holders engaged in an active physical battle, swinging umbrellas aggressively at one another. Insistent shouts and demands rang out. By the time the audience got seated, the accelerated expectations guaranteed the success of the evening.

The theater makes witnesses of the audience. A witness is not a bystander, but rather a perceiver whose presence makes a difference. A witness has a role to play and can verify and testify that something indeed did happen. A witness at the scene of a crime or at an accident can report back and redescribe the event for evaluation. Being a witness makes you responsible. Once an observer, you have become a participant.

Initially, an audience is attentive to one another. They learn from each other how to watch a play. They give or withhold permission to relax, to move, laugh, or respond. Then, by the power of their attention, they can give an actor permission to make unexpected leaps of flight. An actor listens to the audience's listening, and with that barometer reading, tunes his or her performance. A generous audience can allow an actor to try out new things. An intolerant or impatient audience can bring discoveries and adventure to a halt.

Attention can engender rapture. Rapture is a euphoric transcendent state in which one is overwhelmed by delight and unaware of anything else. The rapture of attention can be self-perpetuating and can multiply indefinitely. For example, a singer's voice causes a spine-chilling thrill in the audience. The reverberations of that thrill returns to the singer

who in turn feels permission to take more risks and this, of course, feeds the audience's happiness and the cycle repeats again.

Quantum physics established mathematically that the act of observation alters what is observed. A principle called superposition claims that while we do not know what the state of any object is, it is actually in all possible states simultaneously as long as we do not look to check. It is the measurement itself that causes the object to be limited to a single possibility. To observe is to disturb. The act of reaching out and touching atoms can lead to uncontrollable disruptions.

Erwin Schrödinger's famous cat experiment proposes an analogy to show how superposition would operate in the everyday world. A living cat is placed in a thick lead box. Then a vial of cyanide is tossed in and the box is sealed. We do not know if the cat is alive or if it has broken the cyanide capsule and has died. Since we do not know, according to quantum law the cat is both dead and alive. It is only when we break open the box and learn the condition of the cat that the superposition is lost, and the cat becomes one or the other (dead or alive). The cat wasn't simply found dead when we looked at him; he died precisely *because* we looked at him. Observation killed the cat.

The word "observation" comes from the Latin *observare*. *Ob* means "over" and *servare* "to guard, to watch over, to protect, look to, attend to, to keep, to follow, to perceive, to notice." I like the notion of observing as guarding or serving or protecting (think about the word *conserve*). In the case of Schrödinger's cat, observation is a matter of life and death.

The playwright Charles L. Mee Jr. defines a director as the person in the room who can maintain the anxiety of possibility and uncertainty the longest. At the moment it becomes unbearable you begin to shut down the possibilities by making choices. To me, directing feels like juggling. You juggle individual and group psychologies, spatial arrangements, timing, and meaning. You try to keep as many things up in the air as possible at the same time. You strain for a sense of ease, lightness, and quickness, the way a great juggler does. You try to be precise and open at the same time. You constantly ask, "What is happening?" You try to be in service to something bigger than yourself. Perhaps that is what Mee means by the anxiety of possibility and uncertainty.

Artists, all artists, strive to cultivate receptiveness and attention in each and every step of the process. The job of an artist is to explore

the realms of the half-conscious, where the indefinable and the inexpressible reside. The task is always to look beyond the obvious.



One can travel the world and see nothing. To achieve understanding it is necessary not to see many things, but to look hard at what you do see.

(Giorgio Morandi)



An experiment conducted in 1968 in an elementary school in San Francisco tested the hypothesis that in any given schoolroom there is a correlation between teachers' expectations and students' achievement. In other words, individuals respond to unspoken expectations placed upon them by others. When teachers expect students to do well, they tend to do well; when teachers expect students to fail, they tend to fail. I believe that this experiment is useful in thinking about attention and expectations in the artistic process.

For the experiment, students were given an intelligence test at the beginning of a school year. Then the testers randomly selected 20 percent of the students—without any relation to the test results—and reported to the teachers that these 20 percent of students showed remarkable potential for intellectual growth and could be expected to blossom in their academic performance by the end of the year. The teachers were asked not to let on to anyone the results of these tests. What happened in a short time was miraculous. The students who were pointed out by the testers *did* start to excel. The teachers did nothing but pay attention to them differently and *see* them in a new light. Eight months later, at the end of the academic year, all of the students were retested. The 20 percent who had been selected showed significantly greater results in the new tests than the other students who were not singled out for the teachers' attention. This means that the change in the teachers' expectations regarding the intellectual performance of these allegedly "special" students had led to an actual change in the intellectual performance of these randomly selected young people.

As part of this experiment, the teachers were also asked to rate students on variables related to intellectual curiosity, personal and social adjustment, and need for social approval. Yes, you guessed it, the 20 percent of students who were expected to bloom intellectually were rated by teachers as more intellectually curious, happier, and in less need of social approval.

The experiment with elementary students is a reminder about the responsibility and power we wield in attending to others. We should be sensitive to our own expectations and develop an awareness of the impact of others' attention on us.

A director is the litmus paper upon which the actor tests her or his ideas. The director attends to the actor who tries things out. In turn, the actor can read the effect by checking on the qualitative effect upon the receptor, the director. The director needs to be willing to be affected by the action of the actor.

But not all directors use attention in the same way. Diverse varieties of attention make for different kinds of directors. Here are three examples:

- 1 One kind of director's talent is in the force of his or her vision. In these rehearsals, actors flourish by giving over to the magnetism of the director's idea, conception, and imagination.
- 2 The second kind of director is able to see each individual in the room. These rehearsals are about recognizing progress on an individual basis.
- 3 Finally, there are directors who can recognize and are guided by the available inspiration in the room and allow the room to be lead by whoever is inspired and in the "flow" at the moment.

Listening is a basic ingredient of attention, and it can be learned and practiced. Listening is fueled by interest and curiosity. It is a discipline and an action in the world, and the results are nearly magical. Hearing can restore. To be heard, really heard by another person, is to be healed.



Listening is a magnetic and strange thing, a creative force...when we are listened to, it creates us, makes us unfold and expand.

(Brenda Ueland)



There is a difference between hearing and listening, and the distinction is anatomical. Hearing is basic and physical. Listening is complex and cognitive. The ears hear. The brain listens. The body hears and the mind listens. Hearing happens physiologically in the parts of the ear that receive and perceive sound. Listening, on the other hand, is born in the interaction of brain functions and synapse and neuron events that interpret the sound. Attention and consciousness are brought to bear upon the signals, and added to that is the imagination. The process starts with attention and then extends into the complex cross-referencing of the brain, including memory, perception, images, thoughts, imagination, and consciousness. The pathway travels from sensation to feeling to imagination to thought.

Many years ago I visited a friend who had opened a high-end audio-equipment store in Boston. Drawn to one of the new items on sale—an impressive tape recorder designed for filmmakers—I asked my friend if I could try it out. I slung the machine over my shoulder, put the headphones on my ears, held the microphone in my hand and began to listen to the extraordinary sounds going on in the store. Everything sounded distinct and colorful. Then I opened the door onto the street and listened to traffic. “Wow!” I exclaimed, “Listen to these sounds, they are amazing and intricate and differentiated—like a symphony!” After moving around with the microphone inside and out and listening with astonishment to the myriad sounds, I suddenly realized that I could have the exact same experience without the headphones and fancy equipment. With the help of the high-tech machinery, I had been listening rather than hearing. Listening is an action. It is an encounter with the world. Martin Buber wrote: “All actual life is encounter.” For a few moments in that store, after this realization, I woke up to the power of the human perceptual capabilities.

Listening is a creative act, and it can be an act of love. To pay attention changes us and changes the object of our attention. Wooing and courting generates the erotic energy. Our attitude toward an event contributes to what the event becomes. We are part of the equation.

The one gift we can give to another human being is our attention, and that attention, in turn, allows the possibility of change. We can

be available and open to their change. Which means concurrently that we will change too. The gift we give is not to hold onto some way we have decided that this person is. Perhaps this gift of attention is also a gift of love.

As the culmination of a month of workshops with directors, writers, and actors at the Perseverance Theatre in Juneau, Alaska, I put together a show with samples of the work we had done together. In the first performance, a young actress had trouble with a monologue she spoke directly to the audience. I suggested to her that we rehearse it the following afternoon. The next day we rehearsed in a small dressing room at the back of the theater. After a while, the actress performed the monologue beautifully for me. I asked if she was ready to do it for an audience that night. She looked dismayed. "But now you know what to do!" I said. She looked at me sadly and said, "It is different doing the monologue for you here in this little room. I can do it here and now because you love me. The audience doesn't love me." I had to explain to the actress the necessity of transferring her hope of being attended to lovingly by me to the audience. Her expectations can determine the outcome.

To watch over a rehearsal with sensitivity, wakefulness, a love of the art form, enthusiasm, and the deepest wishes for success is the point. Being an artist is about being violently awake and sensitized, attentive and responsive.

I do not sit down when I direct because when I sit my body is disconnected from the breath, energy, and rhythm of the stage. My whole body needs to be connected to the stage, not just the neocortex of my brain. My body is the barometer that takes the temperature of the air at every moment. When I need to rest, rather than sitting down, I lean on a high wooden stool. The script is positioned on a music stand so that I can see the stage and the page at the same time. When necessary to refer to the text, I can move my eyes without losing touch with the stage. I stay connected. I try to be one with what is happening and to surround the stage with my attention.

Two popular films, *Smoke* and *Blue in the Face*, both made by filmmaker Wayne Wang in 1995, transformed a nondescript street corner in Brooklyn into an intensely attractive site just by the force of his attention and interest. Both films were shot in a tobacco shop on the

busy, normally overlooked corner. The filmmaker chose to look with fresh eyes at a place that denizens of the neighborhood had long ignored. As Wang brought the force of his interest and attention to this location, the neighborhood indeed did turn out to be special. The smoke shop became a microcosm of the macrocosm of an entire social system. The force of attention is contagious and places a new lens on what is normally disregarded or taken for granted.

Attention is an action and it can be learned and practiced. It is a way of touching the world. It is part of the recipe for making “the music more intense.”

chapter 5

magnetism

John Robin Baitz: I was just thinking that you still manage to write with some kind of miraculous hope.

Athol Fugard: You've got to. Implicit in the act of creation on the part of the artist is: I make it because I want to share it with you. At the end of my process you are waiting for me... Pascal says "Imagine a cell in darkness and the inmates of the cell are shackled together. Every morning at dawn, the door opens and the person at the end of the line is taken out and executed and the door is closed. Those left behind read their fate in the opening and closing of the door every day. It is a metaphor of the human condition." That is Pascal.

Camus comes to that paragraph and says, "There is no question about it—that is an image of the human condition. What do we do during those 24 hours between the opening and closing of the door? Do we cry? Or do we tap the next person in the chain and say 'What's your name? I'm Athol Fugard. Who are you?'" And that's how we create meaning. At the end of my process you are waiting. And that is the act of faith. That is the hope that every artist has.



During my brief tenure as Artistic Director of the Trinity Repertory Company in Providence, Rhode Island, I spoke at many local institutions including libraries, Elk and Rotary clubs, colleges, and universities.

The point of these visits: to entice new audiences into our theater. I wanted to sell the idea of theater and illustrate its compelling qualities. I also just wanted to persuade people to buy tickets and subscriptions.

In preparation for these speaking engagements, I found myself wondering why, after all, do people attend the theater? What compels them to leave the safety and comfort of their homes and head toward a public setting where they share oxygen and experience with crowds of strangers? What draws audiences? Why is theater necessary? What human needs does the theater fulfill that compels attendance? What makes the theater attractive and magnetic? Perhaps, I thought, if I could figure this out, I might be able to entice people to buy tickets.

Because theater has survived for so many centuries, I figured it must exert some essential magnetic power of attraction. Magnetism is a physical and affective energy or force that unites elements across space and time. What human compulsions and needs does the theater uniquely satisfy? After much thought, I arrived at seven compelling forces inherent to theater that attract people to it: empathy, entertainment, ritual, participation, spectacle, education, and alchemy. Then I realized that, without exception, all the truly significant and galvanizing theater I had seen used all seven in the same production: the Performance Group's *Mother Courage*, Martha Graham's pieces, productions devised by Ariane Mnouchkine and Le Théâtre du Soleil, the epic early works of Robert Wilson, the plays during the 1980s at the Berlin Schaubühne. The list goes on. All of these productions share one thing in common: all seven attractive forces are triggered within one experience.

Could it be possible, I wondered, that the more of these magnetic qualities intrinsic to theater that are activated within a given production, the more compelling the event? Most contemporary American plays employ only one or maybe two of the attractions, which may explain why theater so often feels less powerful and intense than other art forms. Perhaps as the theater capitalizes on the power of multiple magnetic forces fundamental to the art form—empathy, entertainment, ritual, participation, spectacle, education, and alchemy—theater-going will become increasingly potent, irresistible, and attractive.

The theater is, at its core, democratic: a field fed by countless amateur companies, stand-up comics, parlor singers, and street performers. Its roots are ancient, primal, and rich and keep us in touch

with one another on a deeply visceral level. Transcendent experiences in my theater-going life were visually engaging *and* emotionally stimulating, intellectually arresting *and* entertaining, tragic *and* hopeful, political *and* personal, spectacular *and* intimate, sophisticated *and* dumb, ugly *and* beautiful. Challenged to use my entire life, everything I had ever felt, thought, and imagined in order to engage, I am present in a shared space with actors who are reaching to tempt the impossible. These miraculous journeys make room for me within them and I return altered by the experience.

Magnetism in art is the force that draws people toward it. This chapter examines the seven ingredients that make the theater attractive and irresistible. It is about the magnetic nature of the art form. As we examine empathy, entertainment, ritual, participation, spectacle, education, and alchemy, keep in mind the exponential powers of all seven when combined in one production.

Empathy

Art is most pleasurable not when it closes us down, narrows our perceptions and sympathies, draws boundaries of appropriateness or goodness, but when it opens us up.

(Charles L. Mee Jr.)



However ambitious, theatrical, or politically engaged, the heartbeat of a play must be personal and intimate. This intimacy is the production's empathic base line—its core and its attraction. A visually arresting, intellectually challenging, or dense production demands concomitant intimacy and vulnerability. Empathy allows an audience not only to enjoy the big theatrical brushstrokes but also to identify and relate to the event personally. The human heartbeat serves as the red thread through any theatrical labyrinth and will lead to the vulnerability at center of the event. This humanity allows an audience to access the experience personally and intimately.

Empathy is the ability to identify and understand another person's situation or to transfer your own feelings and emotions to them. It is

a remarkable trait that distinguishes humans from animals and is made possible by complex interactions in our wildly adaptable brain. A combination of awareness and imagination stimulates empathy. The subjective reaches out to the objective and from this action consciousness and feeling, thinking and imagination are brought to bear on present circumstance.

The German word for empathy, *empfinden*, suggests incisive action. *Ein-fühlen*: to feel into. To arrive at empathy, you *enter feelingly*. Empathy in this sense is not something that happens to you; rather, it is an action that you take in the world. You will yourself into another person or event.

The most renowned plays written in the past hundred-plus years are praised for their capacity to stimulate an audience's empathy for the characters and their situations. When Hedda Gabler picks up a gun, for example, we thrill at her insane courage and identify with the necessity for her act. This identification is empathy. We reach outside of ourselves toward understanding and appreciation for the actions of others. We see ourselves reflected in other humans, other situations, places, and eras. I believe that the capacity to empathize is a positive and creative act. It stems from a very deep and sacred human need to commune with the world through the imagination.

I attended a loud, aggressive, and theatrically ambitious production conceived and directed by the wildly talented young Reza Abdoh entitled *The Hip Hop Waltz of Eurydice* at the Los Angeles Theatre Center with my friend and then partner Tina Landau. Orpheus was played by a bald woman on a motorcycle and Eurydice by a long-haired man in drag. The play featured extensive video footage, an athletic capoeira chorus, a 15-foot high dildo and loud, loud music. Despite the visual and aural assault and intense theatricality, I was tremendously touched and moved. After the curtain call, I turned to Tina, pointed at a tiny photograph in the program showing Orpheus and Eurydice, heads tilted tenderly toward one another, and said, "Look Tina, that's us!" Notwithstanding the aggression and high decibel noise, the show was, at its core, a delicate love story about two individuals devoted to one another. I felt that it was about me; it was about us. Not simply a spectacle, the play invited me to identify and empathize with the delicate nature of the characters and their situations. The core attraction was the empathetic pull it had on me.

Empathy is a putting-together, a going-out, a joining. It involves compassion and creativity. It is an act of the soul reaching out and becoming part of the world. The feelings that result from the empathetic act are a by-product of this physical and mental action. When we lose our capacity to empathize, we lose an essential part of our humanity.

Recently, on a bus in Manhattan late at night, I watched an impatient woman verbally abuse the bus driver: "Where are you going? Don't you see you've made a wrong turn? Don't you know what you are doing? I want to get off here. No, here." The woman seemed incapable of empathy or making space in her imagination for the situation, the driver, or anyone else on the bus. In her mind, she had cast herself on an island, alone and misunderstood. The world is a lesser place when compassion or the ability to empathize are lacking.

Can art encourage people to create a more empathetic relationship to the world? I believe that it can. The visual artist Bill Viola created a video installation entitled *Heaven and Earth* in 1992. Simultaneously political, philosophical, scientific, technological, and deeply personal, it triggered in me intense empathy.

Two video images face each other, not touching, mid-air in the center of a room, one facing up and one down, placed in such a way that you have to bend over to see one and then the other. The top image is Bill Viola's mother on her deathbed, the bottom his newborn son. The silent videos reflect into each other, a contemplation of birth and death and the precarious connections between generations. The birth face and death face reflect and contain each other. Life itself seems to exist in between the crucial moments of life's entrance and exit in the space between the two monitors.

By transforming his intense personal experience into an artwork, Viola placed his singular experience on a universal plane to share with others in the space of a museum or gallery. Via empathy he helped me to reimagine bodily life and its turning points. His deeply personal meditation became my meditation; his subjective experience triggered my own subjective experience.

In a rehearsal process, the actor, too, needs to know how to negotiate and use empathy. A performer is the empathetic magnet for his or her counterpart, the audience, and serves as a dilated human presence in the maelstrom of a play. A workshop participant once asked

about how to succeed as an actor in an aggressively imagistic production. SITI Company member Will Bond responded to the question, and I found his answer valuable. Bond suggested that when cast in a play full of elaborate visual stimuli, or overlapping scenes and noise, or both, it is helpful to locate the most human action available within the given circumstance and place every ounce of attention on that. “Put all of your concentration on lifting a teacup,” he said, “otherwise you will be defeated by the theatrical assault.” This focus and concentration serves to magnify the human presence and make it the center of the action. The actor becomes a celebration of human existence in the midst of the onslaught and whirl of events.

Mainstream American theater criticism is geared toward a playwright’s ability to stimulate empathy. It is then no coincidence that the majority of contemporary American playwrights concentrate their energy and imagination on creating empathy above all other possible attractions that the theater can provide. Not encouraged by the critical establishment to consider spectacle, alchemy, participation, ritual, or education, the writers assume that the theater is predominantly a vehicle for empathy.

While empathy is infinitely human, deeply satisfying and encouraged since Aristotle, it is only one of the attractive forces that the theater can ignite. While the memorable theater experiences do include empathy, there can be more.

Entertainment

The human appetite for song and dance is fundamental to the DNA of theater. All significant theater artists share an irrepressible streak of showmanship. Even rigorously intellectual innovators such as Bertolt Brecht, known for his detached and cerebral posture, could never resist the allure of song, a joke, or an amusing juxtaposition. The Ancient Greeks interspersed their plays with songs and dances. Humor and showmanship are irresistible and a sign of health. Who does not value and appreciate the ability of a performer to make us laugh despite ourselves? No matter how intellectually, politically, or aesthetically sophisticated, an evening in the theater does not feel complete without that song or dance. Showmanship, entertainment, and diversion help us to deal with difficulties more easily.

The Romanian director Andrei Serban once told me that despite his great interest in work with actors, he was frustrated by the theater. “Why?” I asked. “Because it does not really happen on the stage. It happens in the audience’s head.” “Then why do you continue working in the theater?” I asked. He shrugged his shoulders, “Because I’m a showman,” he sighed.

The French word for entertainment, *divertissement*, implies, “to be diverted.” In the course of our daily lives, we crave diversion from the repetitive everyday patterns that dampen our awareness of being alive. Part of what entertainment can achieve is to deflect the angst and drag of daily woes and habitual thinking. Seeing parallel situations deflects our attention from our own misery. We need distraction; we want to be tickled, toyed with, ridiculed. We crave levity.

While driving long distance in a car and listening to the radio, I heard the British director Peter Brook speak to the National Press Club in Washington D.C. He described a village in Africa where every season the men head out to hunt and return days later laden with food for the community. After a big feast on the evening of the return, the younger men enact comical episodes from the hunt to everyone’s amusement. They make fun of the elder members of the tribe and act out hilarious examples of their hubris, pride, arrogance, and cutthroat competition. The message is ridicule and criticism but served up with great humor and hilarity. Then Peter Brook paused, and added, “And this criticism is the basic function of the theater. And it must be supported and subsidized by the leadership.”

Humor is a necessary and vital aspect of life and of art. People with no sense of humor are missing the point, and those with the most developed sense of humor have often undergone the most horrific life experiences and personal trials. Somehow the extreme difficulties they have undergone engender a worldview that is wider, more generous and compassionate. The absurdities and paradoxes of the human state seem to be accessible and visible to those who have suffered.

Dijana Milosevic, the Artistic Director of Dah Theatre, a Serbian company from Belgrade, spoke to a group of theater students at Columbia University. She described the work of her company during the 1990s, the wartime years of Serbian aggression in the former Yugoslavia, and described how Dah functioned and what they managed to accomplish during that dark period. She proposed that

American theater artists in a post-9/11 environment are confronting similar challenges to what she faced under the militant regime of Slobodan Milosevic and have a lot to learn from the Serbian experiences. She suggested that art and performance in a climate of aggression and destruction could be powerful. The key, she offered, is humor. In difficult times, humor is the most effective tool to bring to the table. It generates breath and release. Humor can instigate change.

She described the winter of 1996 when the people of Belgrade, sick of Milosevic's tyranny and aggression, took to the streets, determined not to leave until the government gave in to their protests and returned the city to its inhabitants. The citizens were met with an equal number of soldiers and police whose job was to stop them from gaining access to the streets. The deep-freeze middle of winter made the situation even more miserable. To disorient the soldiers, the protestors decided to generate as much noise and rowdy inanity as possible. People raced home and returned with buckets, bullhorns, bells, and other noisemakers to blow, strike, and bang. Noise, impromptu lectures, and laughter filled the cold streets for weeks on end. The soldiers lined up, guns in hands, until they were rendered completely confused. Although trained to deal with violence, they had no available response to humor. Ultimately confused and defeated, the protest succeeded. The Belgraders finally took back their city and the beginning of Milosevic's fall had begun. Hegemonic systems are accustomed to countering violence with more violence and force. Humor is a tactic that seems out of left field, but it can be very effective. Milosevic's army and police, at a loss, did not know how to respond to the protesters' humor. Humor can be a helpful ingredient in making the "music more intense" in our present political climate.

The body holds physical and emotional tension. By engendering shaking, laughter allows the body to move. From a physical point of view, laughter, through breath and sound, allows the diaphragm to let go. The body shakes and releases noise, and also releases tensions. It is worth noting that the Shakers and Quakers found release in the phenomenon of the body shaking. Most cultures have developed systems for physical release such as whirling dervishes and shamanistic possession.

Humor can instigate insight and can show us who and how ridiculous we are. But entertainment is so much more than just humor.

An ancient Sanskrit treatise on art, the *Natya Shastra*, suggests that all good theater accomplishes three tasks simultaneously:

- 1 it entertains the drunk;
- 2 it answers the question “how to live?”; and
- 3 it answers the question “How does the universe work?”

Ritual

Elias Canetti, in his book *Crowds and Power* asks, “Why do people go to church?” and answers, “Not to pray to God, but rather, to stand, sit and kneel simultaneously.” Canetti’s hypothesis about religion is relative to the theater event in some very basic ways. The ritual of theater-going does not begin when the house lights dim, rather it starts much earlier.

From the moment an actor awakens on the morning of a performance, he or she begins to prepare, consciously or unconsciously, for the meeting that will occur that evening across the footlights. The rendezvous is with someone as yet unknown—the audience. The day is a journey, both for actor and audience members, toward the occasion of performance, toward facing one another across an energized space.

For an audience member, the ritual of theater also includes invitations, exchange of money, dressing up, a journey away from the home, a meal, and social encounters, not to mention the performance itself. The ritual can extend beyond the curtain call to include a post-performance social gathering or discussion. The following day, an audience member describes something about the production to a friend. The ritual of theater-going not only occurs in the moments of the performance, but also extends forwards and backwards in time.

People are drawn toward one another in ecstatic arenas where they are able to move through specific shared forms together. This ancient and enduring ritualistic aspect of theater is one of the central attractions of going to the theater. Like heading to church, the action of going to the theater is itself part of the attraction.

Ethnographers define ritual as a repeated sequence of standardized symbolic acts in which humans seek specific outcomes. Rituals may be conducted by specially qualified individuals such as priests, sorcerers,

diviners, or by ordinary people. They may be public or secret and may be performed to preserve the status quo or to bring change.

Ritual is essentially a form of communication. A performance is also a form of communication. It is an event or process conveying actions or behavior for the purpose of communication. Two elements are indispensable in the act of communication: an “emitter,” who performs, and a “receptor,” who receives or observes. The doer/actor and the receiver/audience are the ingredients necessary for ritual and performance to happen.

Ritual, also like performance, is a liminal event. The word “liminal” comes from the Greek *limnos*, or threshold. A liminal space is a state in between, or a transition between different states. A liminal space is not useful or productive in any concrete or materialistic fashion. It is a transitional space, neither practical nor constructive, in the realm of day-to-day living. Like the space of a doorway between rooms, it lacks concrete definition because even though it conveys something from its previous stage, it has not yet become the new one. In ritual, religion, and theater, it is a space in between where symbolic acts are played out.

In the original theater configuration, people formed a circle in space. Then someone entered into the midst of the circle and performed a poetic evocation for the benefit of those assembled—a dance, a song, an extended cry upon which the soul flew. In Greece, these circles happened on threshing floors—semicircular flat surfaces near terraced hillsides—that then became the prototype architecture of the Greek amphitheater. Traveling in Greece today, you can see threshing floors still in use and imagine how they served as a space around which people gathered and enacted thrilling fictions.

Drama rose out of a combination of the proliferation of democratic public forums in Ancient Greece and the musical presentations that were central to the great religious festivals. The word “tragedy” originated in the Greek word *tragodiai*, “goat songs.” Originally to purge human failings, goats were sacrificed on altars while people watched. Later, actors replaced the goats in a more sophisticated and emblematic kind of sacrifice. The actor playing Agave, for example, in Euripides’ *The Bacchae*, becomes the martyr for civilization’s foibles and sins when she kills her son Pentheus in a drugged ecstasy and then realizes what she has done. The actor is the emblematic or stand-in martyr for all those watching. He or she suffers the goat’s fate in a symbolic way.

The author Charles Brandt suggests that confession is as basic a human need as food and shelter. Is it possible that drama is a public extension of the human penchant to confess? A play might be understood as a collective confession of a nagging issue related through the theme or story of a play, revealing hubris, pride, folly, or deep-seated fear or shame. The audience witnesses a symbolic tale that is, at least in some archetypal sense, a mirror of their own lives and the lives of their families and friends. In the end, the audience feels cautioned by what they have seen and heard but also purged of negative emotions. Without a real flesh-and-blood sacrifice, the deed of expulsion and redemption is exacted. As if having rid their bodies of poison, the audience returns to their own lives with quiet insight.

Like the Greek theater, later the church became the place where people could go in order to reveal the dark parts of their souls, the sins, the cheating, and the longings. Stories were told; people were recognized, forgiven and, finally, redeemed and accepted back into the community. This ecclesiastical ritual was a way to resolve anxieties and for communities to stay connected.

It is this unspoken religious dimension that gives the theater its depth. The drama has always risen out of public worship. Even the most secular theater exudes aspects of the communal religious experience: a large gathered community who laugh, cry, sing and perhaps applaud together. The bonds of community are strengthened in a renewed consciousness of its own momentary existence. The oceanic feeling of belonging, ecstasy, and total participation that many experience in the midst of ritual is part of the draw. Brain scans reveal evidence of the physiological/psychological effects of ritualistic activity: the repetitive rhythms, sounds and tones harmonize the left and right hemispheres of the cerebral cortex.

Athletic feats, virtuosic singing and dance satisfy yet another aspect of ritual: human experience craves flight or the proximity of human flight. In song, the soul flies on the voice; in dance, the soul flies in the body. In Haitian dancing, for example, a woman who performs with virtuosity and beauty is considered touched by a goddess. The receiver or “receptor” of these events gets spiritual satisfaction from proximity to talent and skill. All are caught up in the rapture of the moment.

A shared space between the “emitter” and “receptor” is an intrinsic ingredient to ritualistic action. Within this communal public space, rituals such as sporting events, concerts, weddings, and plays are performed according to shared rules within a known set of applications. In the theater, it wasn’t until Richard Wagner insisted on turning off the lights in the auditorium that the stage became the sole lit space while audiences sat in the dark. Until then, theater architecture joined the audience and the stage in a contiguous circle. Visit a Renaissance theater or even an eighteenth- or nineteenth-century theater and notice how the architecture included the audience in the event of the play.

Participation

The spectacle is not a collection of images, rather it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images.

(Guy Debord)



The theater is a gym for the soul, the intellect, the imagination, and the emotions. I go to the theater for a workout, to be active with my entire empathetic and perceptual system. I want to be put through my paces. A play sharpens and develops the skills of both the actors and the audience. The skills that are developed by art are the skills of patience and imagination. At the end, I want to be glowing—exhausted, exhilarated, and exercised from the experience. I want to be awake and engaged. I don’t want to be numbed or manipulated. I can get plenty of that from 500 channels on television.

I also love to go to the movies. I buy popcorn, lean back and allow the images and the event to wash over me. Mostly lured to the cinema to consume, I glory in that indulgence. On the other hand, I am drawn to the theater to lean *forward* into an event, to participate in it. This need to participate, to lean forward, is one of the basic ingredients that make the theater experience unique. When you lean forward you become an active participant. And this movement engenders a kind of ownership on the part of the audience.



Viewing a performance is action.

It is work.

The audience, just like the actors, must be active during a performance.

(Eugenio Barba)



In our present climate, it is more useful to look for participants rather than spectators. We live in a culture that encourages passive spectatorship, and there is certainly enough spectatorship to go around. The nightmare of our society right now is submissive consumption: people watching their lives go by, watching the government drift by with the assumption that a citizen's only job is to be a good audience. The theater can offer an alternative to passive spectatorship. It excels in qualities that make for real democracy.

I met a young woman who worked as an intern for Pepsico Summerfare, a performing-arts festival in Purchase, New York (about forty minutes north of Manhattan), which brought world-class performances to local audiences during the 1980s. She described "The Beethoven Experience," a weekend where several thousand people came to spend two days immersed in the world of Beethoven and his Ninth Symphony. One of her jobs was to photocopy 2,000 copies of the "Ode to Joy" chorus. During the weekend, audiences attended symposia, lectures, an exhibition, and open rehearsals, all relating to Beethoven's life and the composition and performance of his Ninth Symphony. She described a rehearsal open to the public where the conductor took time to explain to the audience what he was after with the orchestra. During one particular moment of the symphony he showed how he calls on the string section for more intensity. The weekend concluded with a final performance of the Ninth Symphony. When the orchestra arrived at that particular passage, and the conductor called for more intensity from the string section, the young woman said that the entire audience leaned forward *simultaneously*.

"That's it!" I cried, when I heard the description of the audience leaning forward as one. This is participation! This is the essential

ingredient of the theater experience! You lean forward as one, rather than leaning back.

How does an audience enter into this social arrangement? How do people engage with a play? How do we reach across really complex and differing understandings about why we are alive and what we are meant to do on Earth? How do we engage with one another? How does a community agree enough to bring a play into existence in the moment of its performance? These are the issues at the heart of the art form. These are the issues that really matter. This is what the theater does by putting these questions in the forefront.



The more you leave out, the more we see ourselves in the picture, the more we project our own thoughts onto it.

(Bruno Bettelheim)



In the theater you need to activate a real sense of participation in the present moment, in the room, in the heat of the action. The question is, how rich can this experience of participation become? Participation is multidimensional. But you have to make room for the audience—not only room for their bodies, but also room for their imaginations. Theater, at its best and most true to itself, invites the audience to play an active role.

Ezra Pound wrote about poetry and the role of the poet: “The artist seeks out the luminous detail and presents it. He does not comment.” He means that the reader must be an active participant. The reader must fill in the blanks and make of the poem what he or she will. Pound did not make it easy for the reader. His symbols tend to be obscure and difficult, and he did not footnote his process or offer the reader any familiarity with his sources. Sometimes he used symbols whose meaning often only Pound understood. The reader must make his or her own creation in the very act of reading.

In the theater, if you supply a complete world with all the details, then the audience has nothing to do but accept the illusion and become passive. If, on the other hand, you substitute a microphone

stand for a tree or a bowl of water for an ocean, the audience suddenly has some imaginative work to do. And this is the intensely pleasurable work of using the brain and the imagination to construct narratives and associations. This action reinforces a sense of community in the audience because each member uses his or her imagination as an individual, but in completing the picture it becomes a shared work, a shared experience, and a genuine act of participation in the play.

If you want the audience to be an active participant, leave blanks for the audience to fill in. I think of the audience as a detective and the artist as the criminal. The artist/criminal leaves behind clues at the scene of the crime. If you leave too many clues, the detective/audience will lose interest. If you leave too few, they will get lost. You have to leave a trail of clues with just enough information missing.

By the time that the Polish director Jerzy Grotowski coined the term “active culture,” he had abandoned theater, as we know it. In his search for an alternative to the theater’s separation of actors and audience, he imagined the theater’s therapeutic function via the actor’s unmediated encounter with the spectator, in direct confrontation with him, and somehow “instead of” him or her. The actor’s act, according to Grotowski, is an invitation to the spectator. This action could be compared to an act of the most deeply rooted, genuine love between two human beings. While the actor may work hard in rehearsal to discard blocks and affectation in order to speak and move clearly and reveal the themes of the play, the meeting can only occur in the encounter with an audience. Onstage, unmediated by cameraperson, makeup artist or director, the actor is suddenly and unavoidably face to face, in direct and immediate confrontation, with the audience. The proximity is intimate and inescapable.

As part of a two-year research process funded by the Pew Charitable Trust, I had the opportunity to investigate the role of the audience in the theater. Working with the literary staff of the Actors Theatre of Louisville on the venture, which we entitled the Audience Project, we brought in a group of “civilians”—nontheater folks—who agreed to attend a minimum of two rehearsals, one technical rehearsal, one performance and to take part in a post-show discussion from the stage with the general audience who had come to see the SITI Company production of Noel Coward’s *Private Lives*. I conducted

ongoing discussions with the members of the Audience Project about the theater, the craft of acting, and the role of the audience, often resulting in penetrating dialogue. These sessions were always taped and transcribed for future use. One year later, the Audience Project process culminated in a production entitled *Cabin Pressure* that drew on the experiences and research.

Particularly interested in examining the tender and circular line between actor and audience member in performance, we asked: What is an audience? What is the creative role of the audience? What is the responsibility of the audience to the actor? What is an actor? What is the actor's responsibility to the audience? I posed these questions to the SITI Company actors at the beginning of the process. I wanted us to start with no preconceived notions or assumptions about the answers but rather to experiment freely and play with possible variations on the theme.

At first disoriented by the presence of members of the Audience Project in rehearsal as we struggled to find our way through *Private Lives*, the SITI actors complained about the discomfort of the situation. The actors took me aside and pointed out that a rehearsal, for them, is a vulnerable phase, and they felt that they should be able to make mistakes freely without "civilians" watching. They asked about their responsibility to the visitors and wondered how to relate to these interlopers in the room. These questions, for me, provided the initial insight into the relationship between audience and actor: the director is the very first audience and the only person that the actors need to have a relationship with until the production is ready. At a certain moment, usually the first preview, the director can turn the actors over to a "general" audience. In order to continue with this project, I told the actors that they were responsible only to the quality of their link to me. They had absolutely no responsibility to the visitors. "Think of yourselves like athletes in training," I suggested, "with fans watching from the stands. Just pay attention to the 'coach' and to one another."

The next year we returned to Louisville and constructed the devised piece *Cabin Pressure* based on the members of the Audience Project and their experiences in the room with us. Being in the room with us in rehearsal for *Private Lives* changed the Audience Project members' experience of the play in production. When I asked about

the change, the word that arose most often was “ownership.” The members felt an ownership in the production unlike walking in off the street to see a show. Familiarity breeds ownership. Individuals in the Audience Project were on the actors’ side in ways that perhaps sports audiences relate to the athletes. The situation felt familiar enough to engender a sense of belonging. The ownership encouraged them to lean forward during the performances. They felt freer to be participants.

If we are creating a theater for participants, then we have to cast the audience. Who is out there? How to find them? How to connect with them? How many interesting ways can you engage with an audience? How do you invite them into the process? The Audience Project taught me that the more information we can share with an audience about the process, rules, hopes, dreams, and intentions, the more audiences will feel the space to participate and, indeed, complete the circle.

Participation is the deliberate act of undergoing. When you are willing to go through something difficult, the experience will shape your life and form a basis for real understanding and empathy. The general and cultural lack of willingness to go through anything difficult is why America is missing out on most of what life has to offer at the moment. People are floating through a life as spectators without the participation and struggle that might shape their lives in more constructive ways.

It is easy to create something that people like but that they have forgotten about by the time they find their car in the parking lot. If you have asked them to participate, if you have asked them to use themselves and their brains and hearts in the process, if you make them feel needed, then the effort will create a sense of ownership. There will be the feeling that something has been undergone. Experienced. At its core, art is experience. A work of art asks for something from the viewer. The necessary sweat of engagement and participation is rejuvenating and purposeful. The struggle gives life purpose and opens up the possibility of renewal.

Ultimately it is the leaning forward, the participation of the audience, that allows for the real event of theater to occur. The real event is an encounter, a meeting, an engagement, a summit, a collision, collusion, collaboration, or congress of souls. The event is the meeting

between actor and audience and it is this encounter that forms the nucleus of the theater experience.

Expectations play an immense role in an audience's willingness to participate. Audiences arrive at director Peter Brook's productions, for example, anticipating a miracle. Imagine to what extent these grand hopes and expectations inform the success of the evening. I understand why Brook likes to bring his plays to prisons and schools to perform for audiences with no expectations. I am sure that he needs some unbiased response to his work to keep things in perspective.

If an audience expects an event, the event is more likely to occur. Expectations create experience. For example, a celebrity cast in a show guarantees heightened expectations on the part of the ticket buyers. The price of a seat can have a significant effect on expectations. What then does an audience bring to a magician's act or a tarot-card reader? Is the expectation and desire for the magic to work part of the result?

One summer evening in the 1970s in the seaside town of Woodshole, Massachusetts, I took a walk along a road next to the harbor and passed an old church building that had been transformed into a theater. Near the entrance, a red banner waved in the wind with the words "Show Tonight!" The people strolling by, taking in the evening and the sea breeze, seemed to revel in the communal event surrounding them. An excitement and anticipation that something very special was going to happen that evening—a play, a show—permeated the vicinity. That evening, I recognized the social, communal, and participatory nature of the theater. We cast a spell of mutuality.

Spectacle

Human beings crave spectacle. We long for physical proximity to phenomena larger than ourselves. Why do we watch the Macy's Thanksgiving Parade each and every November? Why are we attracted to the spectacle of a wedding or a royal coronation? Why are we drawn to a sunset, to Niagara Falls, to a multiple car crash? We need and desire to experience things larger than ourselves and are thus drawn toward spectacles that, in turn, satisfy something deep-seated within us.

Spectacle exerts a magnetic force, and it is physical. The sight of the sea draws us toward it. The vista of earth meeting water and air functions as a physical magnetic. Humans are physically drawn toward the spot where the four elements meet. The display of nature stimulates the compelling collision feeling of the small/intimate meeting the large/infinite. In the days of cannons and horses when combat was conducted on battlefields, before war technology made direct spectatorship unsafe, watching a battle from an adjacent field satisfied the need for spectacle. In many cultures people watched armies go at one another with relish and even brought picnics to thoroughly enjoy the spectacle. The crowds that gathered during the French revolution for the guillotine executions brought their intimate daily world close to the spectacle of death and dying. Proximity to violence engenders a sensation of control.

The spectacle of the stage can be very powerful and magnetic. As the size of the movie screen shrinks to the dimensions of a home entertainment system, the spectacle of a live theater event becomes singular and remarkable, extra-special and particularly attractive.

The theater as “a place of seeing” is uniquely able to fulfill the powerful craving for spectacle. With a consciousness of its power and a responsibility for its magnetic qualities, a vigilant use of spectacle can add a poetic dimension to the theater event.

Theater is a “place of seeing” not only for the audience but also for the actor. Not only is the theater about an audience seeing, it is also where an audience witnesses an actor seeing. What an audience sees is the actor seeing. Pentheus in Euripides’ *The Bacchae* faces the Seven Gates of Thebes, and we watch the actor see the spectacle of each of those seven gates, each one new, each different. The better the actor, the more differentiated the seeing. The drama is a drama of unfolding sight.

The act of seeing, which is also a form of listening and hearing, changes you. According to the philosophy of Martin Buber, it is possible to meld who we are with what we see. If we approach it properly, we can become the tree rather than only beholding the tree. This reaching out and melding is a phenomenon that can be practiced regularly in art, which teaches us to see.

Visual composition came easily to me. Perhaps it is something that one is born with. Arthur Sainer, theater critic for the *Village Voice*,

reviewed the very first show I directed in New York City in 1974, an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. The critique has haunted me ever since: "A visual intensity without inner necessity," he wrote. To this day I still awaken in the middle of the night with his words echoing in my head, "Visual intensity without inner necessity." Arthur Sainer pointed out a true weakness in my work that I have been struggling with ever since.

Ultimately, spectacle is a powerful tool in art, but it is also dangerously seductive. Pretty pictures are fairly simple to compose. The director Richard Foreman once said that while he finds it easy to make something beautiful, it is much more difficult to create something truly ugly. We live in a culture with an appalling onslaught of crass imagery and spectacle in the form of mass propaganda and economic marketing. We do not need to add to this glut without an awareness of our own responsibility.

How to deal responsibly with imagery in a society of spectatorship? How to insure an "inner necessity?" These questions are central to the development of a proper relationship to spectacle. Examine the issue of spectacle carefully. Young artists are often praised for their special visual acuity and a recognizable signature. Both are dangerous and limited. Study spectacle and learn to understand the different concepts about how sight relates to the brain and mind.

The eyes are linked directly to desire. When you are hungry and on the street, for example, you only see bakeries. Capitalism engendered societies where the eyes became the dominant sense. We see something and we want it. And then we limit our seeing to what we want. We get obsessed with what we want and then that is all that we see. In a consumer culture saturated in imagery and spectacle, we are seduced into constantly desiring and buying. Glossy magazines hypnotize us with objects of desire, lifestyles of desire, houses, dining-room furniture, poolside frolicking. People leaf through glossy magazines relishing the longing, constructing fantasies based on the available visual bait, bathing in the spectacle of possibility, of what might be.

Learn to recognize the attraction, magnitude, and seductive power of imagery, visuals, and spectacle. Be sure to back up the images with substance. Images of the Holocaust, for example, might be attractive in some perverse way. They can fascinate, appall, attract, and stop viewers in their tracks. The images are powerful and cause an easy

response. If you choose to use images of the Holocaust, you need to balance the strength of the visual imagery with a rigorous counter-critique and wakefulness to the complexity of the theme. In a glut of images, which new ones will you put into the world?

The French filmmaker Michel Bonnemaison found the idea of putting more new images into the already inundated world offensive and irresponsible. Many of his remarkable films borrow from already existing footage to construct new narratives. Thus, he found his own way of being accountable to the glut and spectacle of imagery.

Education

Anyone who thinks there's a difference between education and entertainment doesn't know the first thing about either. All entertainment has a curriculum.

(Marshall McLuhan)



At its best, the theater speaks with a contagious exuberance, “Look at this!” “Listen to this!” “Have you ever thought about this?” “Have you ever met these people?” “Aren’t they amazing?” “Aren’t they ordinary!” Artists grab you by the collar and invite you to catch their particular disease of fascination. The theater traffics in the very positive human appetite for learning about life, people, history, philosophy, science, the world, and the universe.

Sometimes I go to a play simply because I want to learn something. This curiosity about “the other,” about what lies outside of my grasp, the desire to reach out and incorporate new information and insight is, I believe, a sign of life. The action of learning creates synapses in my brain, and this movement of neurons and electrons is what keeps me alive. When I stop learning I stop living.

The word “education” is not sufficient to capture or express the magnetic draw of learning about “the other.” The word feels too dry, too formal, and too academic. The dictionary definition for “education” is not encouraging: “the field of study that deals mainly with methods of teaching and learning in schools.” I do not think that art

is a school and I do not believe that artists are teachers. They are, on the contrary, learners. The etymology of “education” shows a little more promise: the Latin root, *educare*. E-ducare, to lead out. Also, *enkyktilos*, or “circular,” suggests something less academic than teaching and learning in schools. The idea of the circular process of sharing and receiving feels more accurate.

The Greek philosophers’ notion of *eudemonia*, or human flourishing, feels even closer to the human need to incorporate the “other.” Literally, the Greek for *eudemonia* means “having a good guardian spirit,” but in a less literal sense, it suggests a life devoted to the acquisition of flourishing. Aristotle posits that a human being does not pursue *eudemonia* for the sake of some further goal, but rather for the pleasure of the act itself. The act of human flourishing is the point. To marvel is the beginning of knowledge, and not to marvel the first step toward ignorance. So the Greeks said.

The practice of learning leads to *insight*. Insight implies looking within and finding a new way of understanding. For example, Mike Leigh’s films, such as *Vera Drake*, *Career Girls*, and *Secrets and Lies*, teach me about the breadth and depth of love and devotion. At first the characters in his films seem to me unattractive and unlikable. But by the end of the film, I have fallen in love with each one, and I care ardently about what will happen to them. Leaving the theater, I look at everything around me with a more open gaze. People on the streets who I would normally ignore, I see with sympathy and interest. Mike Leigh’s films incite humanity and compassion.

French theater director Ariane Mnouchkine’s appetite for history, politics, and world cultures has been a constant source of inspiration to me. Starting in the 1960s with her company Le Théâtre du Soleil and continuing on to the present, she made work about the French Revolution, World War II, Greek history, and the multinational immigrant population. She has tackled Shakespeare, Molière, Wesker, Euripides, Aeschylus, and Gorky, bringing her in-depth study of performance traditions from world cultures into the mix. Her approach to theater is a celebration of what theater can do. The productions are pageants of color, movement, music, language, feeling, and stories intimate and vast simultaneously.

It may be true that everyone needs a person in the world to model him- or herself after. As a director, Ariane Mnouchkine has been this

person for me. For years I attended her productions, usually at the immense Cartoucherie in Vincennes just outside of Paris. Her international company is an inspiration to me, her collaborative methods instructive, and her international reach remarkable. I could always look to Mnouchkine for encouragement, simply by example. Her productions are often very long, engulfing an entire evening or sometimes several days. The plays are investigations into subjects that clearly intrigue her and her company. I always manage to find Mnouchkine somewhere in the theater at intermissions. I walk up to her, grasp her hand, and thank her. What I mean to say is, “Thank you for years of inspiration. Thank you for being the person I think about when I lose courage. Thank you for giving me courage by example.” But all that I usually manage is a simple “thank you.”

A ten-hour play about Cambodia entitled *L’Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk, Roi du Cambodge* (*The Terrible but Unfinished History of Norodom Sihanouk, King of Cambodia*), created and performed by Le Théâtre du Soleil, directed by Ariane Mnouchkine and written by Hélène Cixous, managed to encompass the political complexity, agony, and ecstasy of several decades of history and people who lived through the tormented years of the Pol Pot regime. I found the production miraculous because, despite taking on the immense task of a difficult historical moment, the Soleil company found ways to make it immensely personal. *Sihanouk* was one of the productions that managed to achieve simultaneously all seven human needs which this chapter examines: empathy, entertainment, ritual, participation, spectacle, education, and alchemy.

Interested in the history of the country now known as Cambodia, then Kampuchea, Mnouchkine and her collaborators embarked upon a project of study and insight over several years. From 1983 until 1985 when the piece premiered, the company traveled to Cambodian refugee camps, scrutinized the international players, and studied details of the enormous and horrible story that led to the near eclipse of a civilization. Focused in particular on the real life of Prince Norodom Sihanouk, heir to the throne of Cambodia, writer Hélène Cixous wrote scenes based upon historical material and countless improvisations conducted by the actors and Mnouchkine.

I saw the production several times in Paris and loved its synthesis of spectacle, politics, history, and personal stories. Although it did not

feel at all didactic, I learned a great deal about these significant historical events. I traveled through the many lives and episodes of this sad and valiant story via the poetic medium of the theater. The production took place on an immense raised stage that occupies one half of the Cartoucherie with very few props and scenery. The story unraveled through the bodies and voices of the magnificent company of actors. The ten-hour duration of the production felt necessary to the unfolding decades of events. I was part of an audience that learned together about people and events in an expressive physicality utterly native to the language of the theater.

To this day and almost completely due to *Sihanouk*, I follow the news about Cambodia closely. It was as if I had caught a disease at the theater—a disease of interest and curiosity. The production was not an imitation of a history book; rather, I learned about the history of Cambodia from a passionate company who united the audience with the Cambodian plight through the language of theater.

A human being needs stimulation and information. Psychologists and brain specialists hypothesize that this is an innate need, required for the proper maturation, development, and functioning of the nervous system. I need others to point the way, to open my awareness of and appreciation for the world. I am dependent upon the influence of others to show me where and how to look. Or listen. John Cage taught me how to appreciate silence by his enthusiasm for it. There are people who grab you by the collar and say, “Look at this!” “Listen to this!” Perceptions widen when you look through the eyes or listen with the ears of a passionate aficionado.

I visited St. Petersburg in Russia as part of the research process for Deborah Drattell’s new opera *Nicholas and Alexandra*. The designers as well as the composer made the trip with me. One day we took an excursion to Czarskoe Selo, the summer palace of the czars, in the town of Pushkin, about 28 kilometers southwest of St. Petersburg. I leaned back in the van, watching an endless parade of buildings. Everything, to me, appeared as a blur of indistinguishable buildings. It was not until the scenic designer, Robert Israel, pointed out how buildings built throughout Stalin’s regime contrasted from those constructed during Khrushchev’s period in power that I really began to notice or grasp the significance of the architecture in a historical sense. Due to Robert Israel’s generous act of pointing, the architecture

suddenly became a fascinating symphony of difference. The Stalinist aesthetic seemed elegant, stately, and full of sophisticated detail, while the Khrushchev buildings were massive, flimsy, and unattractive. I saw how architecture could be a reflection not only of aesthetics but also of philosophy and worldview. And I knew that I would never look at the buildings in the same way. It is others who teach us how to see. If we are open to influence, we can be altered by another person's point of view. Our lives can be enriched and widened by the act of putting on an alternate set of eyes.

You cannot educate people about anything, but you can point articulately at what excites you. The interaction between the object of your pointing—the theme or subject—and the sensibilities of the receptor is what educates. Education as interaction stimulates novel impressions and encourages an altering and a widening of perspective. “Influence” is a beautiful word and lies at the heart of education. The word shares an etymology with “influenza.” Describing the sudden onset of fever, the Medieval Latin *inluentia* literally meant influence because of the belief that epidemics were due to the influence of the stars. I like to think of catching the disease of interest. And the most effective art is like a contagious disease.

As a child brought up in the U.S. Navy, I was raised on Walt Disney movies. Not until my high-school French teacher, Jill Warren, took the class to see a Scandinavian film entitled *Elvira Madigan* did I first encounter a serious art movie. After this experience I was never the same. I remember the love story underscored by Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 21 and scenes of star-crossed lovers who found one another despite the obstacles placed between them by an imperfect world. For me this was the beginning of my journey toward art. Jill Warren pointed the way for me with personal excitement for something that she loved. I caught her disease. She influenced me in a way that altered my life.

And this is what an artist does. Not setting out to educate anyone, but filled with enthusiasm about an idea, a subject, a person, or historical event, charged by the disease of interest and a passion about something, the process begins. Later, others catch this *influenza*.

Theater is, in the best sense, a form of tourism. You choose to go on a particular expedition because you think it might be interesting or diverting or it may enrich your life. The tour, the journey, is supposed

to be safe and promises to offer new experiences and perhaps perspectives. You walk uphill toward the Parthenon and hear about the history of Ancient Greece and realize how the birth of democracy has affected your own culture and your own life. In making new associations, the networking of your brain alters and your scope about life widens.

I joined a group of American theater artists invited to Prague by the Archa Theatre in the newly formed Czech Republic. We arrived at the airport and were picked up by two Czech artists who insisted upon taking us to what they considered the “real” Prague before bringing us to our hotel in the middle of town. We drove to an apartment complex outside of the city built during the Communist era. The landscape and the inhospitable buildings were bleak and harsh. We walked around the area, through the buildings, and spoke with some inhabitants before we continued on our journey to the much more picturesque and historic old Prague. “We wanted you to see the real Prague first,” our guides told us. “The Prague that we inhabit.” Once again, I was grateful for their act of pointing. The Prague experience taught me to treat tourism and education with suspicion. Always try to find out the deeper realities that surround any issue, place, or historical event.

I believe that the impulse to learn is a life-giving and life-sustaining drive. The theater can satisfy this need to learn, this desire to flourish, in unique and remarkable ways. Great theater journeys educate. I never initiate a project unless there is the chance that I might unearth new territory. In the process of study and discovery, hardened prejudices are questioned and assumptions must evaporate. Ultimately, our job is not to teach others but to learn with them.

Alchemy

The theater, which is *no thing*, but makes use of everything—gestures, sounds, words, screams, light, darkness—rediscovers itself at precisely the point where the mind requires a language to express its manifestations.

(Antonin Artaud)



Magic is often considered a form of entertainment, but I believe that its ancient roots in alchemy suggest far more complex and intriguing characteristics. The human experience craves an occasional exposure to magic. The desire to be in the presence of enchantment is basic. Magic activates the miraculous: feats of disappearance and transformation, one substance transforms into another in front of your very eyes.

The practice of magic and alchemy incorporates elements of both religion and science. Alchemy is the process of transmuting a base metal into gold and requires precise weights and volumes of acids, bases, and catalysts as well as the recitation of holy passages and prayers. Magic and alchemy are based upon the belief that unseen forces or spirits permeate all things in the universe. Control of these forces gives humans direct influence on the forces of nature.

A rabbit pulled out of a hat is almost always satisfying because it seems to celebrate the mysterious nature of existence by addressing a certain innate desire for renovation. It conjures up the idea of supernatural powers that lend an inexplicable quality to the deeds performed. Magic and alchemy are part of the magnetism that draws us toward the theater. To watch someone transform from an ogre to a prince, from a stingy bastard to a generous loving uncle gratifies the hope for one's own personal transubstantiation.

The theater is an ideal vehicle for magic and alchemy because it can ask an audience to make an investment of imagination. Antonin Artaud used the phrase "the theater and its double." What you see has an equal counterbalance in the unseen, the parallel realities of material existence and then what is created simultaneously in the audience's imagination. Ask an audience to supply their imaginations, and the results will transcend anything that you can ever afford to put physically onto the stage. And this conjuring is a kind of magic. It is a magic performed by the audience based upon clues that you offer them.

During the late 1970s I saw a performance of the remarkable puppeteer Robert Anton before he died tragically young, an early victim of AIDS. Anton allowed only eighteen spectators per performance because of the diminutive size of his finger puppets made it imperative to be close enough to see the detailed porcelain features of the puppets' faces. The puppets inhabited beautiful landscapes also created by Anton—mountains and castles in and around which the

romantic narratives unfolded. The exquisite puppets and Anton's intricate manipulations of them invited audiences into a fantasy world unlike anything I had ever experienced. The most remarkable moment came about three-quarters through the performance when Robert Anton removed the puppets and played a scene between two bare fingers. This scene, between his two fingers, was the most emotionally rich and transporting of all. Robert Anton taught me a huge lesson about the theater and the alchemy of the mind's eye: the audience's imagination is the best source to tap into and the most successful way to tap into it is through bare and minimal suggestion.

Anton could not have begun the performance with two bare fingers. The audience would not have been ready to make the imaginative leap. By way of the captivating story, his intricate design, razor-sharp technique, and exquisite timing, he brought us to a cliff and then invited us to jump over. He conjured magic with the substance of our imaginations.

The ancient convention of revelation is a key ingredient of theatrical magic. Revelation has many manifestations. A curtain lifts up to reveal a beautiful landscape. This visual magic is revelation of space. A homely librarian takes off her glasses and lets down her hair to expose a great beauty is revelation of character. A cloth swept away to uncover a large bouquet of flowers is revelation of object.

The alchemy of time and space is part of the basic grammar of the theater and brings magic into existence. An audience's sense of time can be altered. Dimension and scale can be changed. One color dissolves magically into another. A person transforms into a bird via flight. All these changes are alchemical.

I saw a production of *The Boys Next Door*, a comedy by Tom Griffin about a group of mentally challenged men living in an assisted-living home. One very shy and awkward man falls in love with a woman who is equally challenged. He invites her to his home for a dinner date. He prepares the best he can and the evening proceeds awkwardly, tenderly, and full of hope. At one moment he turns on some music and the two begin to dance. A mirror ball descended in this production and the two lumpy awkward characters straightened up and began to waltz beautifully, like gods, to the music, while the mirror ball tossed shards of light around them. When the music ended, they collapsed back into their respective shy shells as if this

dance had never happened. This is magic. It hints at the potential worlds within us all.

The question is: What is the least that you can put onstage in order to allow the most space for the audience's imaginative participation? What will release the power of the audience's fantasy? The mind-meld alchemy happens when the stimulus of the staged event meets the spectators' imagination.

At the height of his career, Elvis Presley's hips became a problem. Female audiences were driven into bacchanalian madness at the sight of his hips swaying to the music. Serious meetings among record executives were held to discuss the issue. Forbidden to move his hips in front of television cameras while the cameramen were not allowed to film him below his waist, Elvis Presley found a solution. He moved one finger suggestively and drove audiences wild into a frenzy of desire and delight.

The words "yonder tree" in a script do not necessarily dictate that the set designer must construct a tree. The audience can turn any vertical line in space into a tree if the circumstances are set up correctly. Words are signals to the audience's imaginative abilities. They are keys to the kingdom. And the kingdom does not only occur on the stage. The kingdom is the imaginative space created in collaboration with the audience. First of all, there must be a signal so that the audience knows that they are set free to interpret the event. What ignites thought, association and imagination? Words can do it. Space can do it. Gesture can do it. Sound can do it. And best of all, it is a combination.

Space does not have to be descriptive, literal, or representational. Space can be magical and alchemical. Space can be transformative. In a digital experience, using the technology of virtual reality for example, you turn your head to the left and a vision of the world to the left comes into being. Turn your head to the right and a different vision appears. Your body's movement enacts a digital change in the environment. With virtual reality this happens electronically. On the stage it can be accomplished physically.

When I directed William Inge's *Picnic*, I approached the play as the young character Millie's dream. Millie became the sorcerer who could change the space for the audience simply by changing her focus. A neighbor named Mrs. Potts lives next door. But in our production her house did not need to stay in the same place all the

time. Mrs. Potts' house could change position based on where Millie was. Millie, in her own backyard with her back to her house, looks to the left and she creates the space of Mrs. Potts' house. Later, when Millie is in the front room of her house facing the street, if she looks to the right, well, that's where Mrs. Potts' house materializes. The picnic grounds are conjured by the way the actors treat the space. This is magic. This is nonrepresentational space. Space can alter magically. Mrs. Potts' house is not made with wood or plaster. It is created in the audience's imagination.

With the right alchemical-dramaturgical logic, a cardboard cutout shape of a crown can become the symbol for the entire British Empire in the audience's imagination. The cardboard cutout functions like the screen in a cinema. The audience is the projector. Language is the film itself. The audience projects upon the screen to complete the image. The audience imbues the power of the imagination onto blank shapes.

I directed Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill's *Seven Deadly Sins* at the New York City Opera in the late 1990s. The most difficult and pivotal scene came at the center of the piece, a confrontation between two sisters who are perhaps the same person. We staged the scene in many, many different versions, none of them right, until Lauren Flanigan and Ellen Lauren, who played the sisters, came up with the perfect, and I believe only, solution. They simply ran in a circle. By that moment in the production, the audience could complete the picture themselves. The rest is magic.

chapter 6

attitude

Things are not difficult to do; rather what is difficult is to put yourself into a state to do them.

(Constantin Brancusi)



The attitude you choose at any moment predetermines the quality and success of your endeavor. Cultivate attitude. Be purposeful and conscious in choosing the appropriate attitude for each and every occasion. The writer Simone Weil recommended the practice of treating whatever happens to you as the object of your desire. This is an example of a choice of attitude. Attitude, like attention, is one of the few things in life that one can control and be responsible for. The right attitude can bring you closer to the coursing currents of time, place, and action.

Walking in the Austrian Alps with my friend the German actress Sabine Andreas, the concept of attitude surfaced. Speaking in German and discussing the craft of acting, Sabine referred to an actor's necessary *Haltung*, its plural *Haltungen* as well as *sich verhalten*. *Haltung* means attitude, position, or posture. Roughly translated, *sich verhalten* means to behave in a certain way. The words describe a conscious or unconscious physical and mental posture in relation to other people, surroundings, or situations.

I found the notion of *Haltung*, or attitude, useful in thinking about acting, directing, art, and even life in general. In the United States, attitude is considered a negative trait: "I don't have an attitude!" you

might hear someone say defensively. But to cultivate the right attitude, or position, can significantly contribute to the outcome of any action.

Bertolt Brecht's notion of *Gestus* also means *Haltung* or attitude: What is your attitude to something or somebody? By *Gestus*, Brecht did not mean gesticulation or explanatory or emphatic movement of the hands but rather the particular posture, the tone of voice or facial expression found within, for example, an argument between two characters. Brecht believed that it is the actor's business not to express feeling but rather to "show attitudes" that underlie any phrase or speech. *Gestus* is also the attitude in body language we use in communicating with others. Attitude is the basic posture that informs any particular transaction between people and conveys specific attitudes toward others.

Attitude offers an effective way to resist the stranglehold on the American theater of Lee Strasberg's Method, an approach that encourages a solipsistic emphasis on affective memory and purely inner experience in acting. While the Method approach can be effective for the camera, I believe that it robs the theater of vitality. As an alternative to the Method, using attitudes can offer a dynamic approach to acting, more outwardly directed and responsive to other people. In the Strasbergian model, the actor retreats from the world to regurgitate personal memory in service of feeling. Using *Haltung*, or attitude, your attention is turned outwards toward the immediate surroundings that, in turn, send back fresh and valuable stimulus and information.

Sich verhalten is not static or unchanging; rather, it is responsive, fluctuating, and active. Attitude is an outgoing energy that is responsible to and altered by whatever it meets. An actor, through the spontaneous utilization of attitudes, constantly balances *feedforward* and *feedback*.

Cybernetics, the comparative study of automatic control and communication networks formed by the nervous system and the brain, uses the terms "feedforward" and "feedback." Feedforward is the influence of a system on an environment, and feedback is an environment's influence on the system. If you play volleyball and are facing the direction of a ball that is sailing in your direction, your outwardly directed energy and availability to meet the ball successfully is the feedforward. The sensations you receive back from this outwardly directed activity constitute the feedback. The balance shifts back and forth between output and input.

I own an old Tiffany clock, inherited from my grandparents. It is a clock that must be wound by hand once a week. One day, in my haste and insensitivity, I wound the clock too hard and it broke. My hand had not sensed the millisecond that the winding had reached its limit. I executed the move with plenty of feedforward—intent and will—but experienced very little feedback. I turned it too aggressively and the mechanism broke.

The French director Ariane Mnouchkine proposes that an actor needs to be “concave and convex” and describes receptivity as active. The mark of a great actor is the ability to balance feedforward with feedback. An actor with a lot of feedforward and not enough feedback comes across as aggressive and invulnerable. Although we may be impressed by their prowess, ultimately it is hard to find empathy or interest in their situation. An actor with too little feedforward and an excess of feedback merely seems narcissistic or lethargic. Again, you do not care about them. An effective actor extends out into the world and at the same time allows him- or herself to receive impressions back and be changed by the experience. As an audience, we viscerally live through the actor’s sensual taste of the moment’s returns.

I watched an episode of the television program *Inside the Actors’ Studio* with the cast and writers of the comedy sitcom *Will and Grace* as guests. At one point, the creators of the show were asked where the name *Will and Grace* came from. “Oh,” answered the head writer, “from the philosopher Martin Buber: the will to go out and the grace to receive.” I bolted upright when I heard this. Buber’s notion of will and grace has everything to do with acting, I thought. The will to go out is feedforward, and the grace to receive is feedback.

Acting is about the dynamic play of extending out and receiving back: will and grace. The balance between the two actions determines the quality of the acting. An actor with plenty of will but no grace appears stiff and tense in his or her effort to extend outward without finding the necessary counter-reciprocity that engenders grace. Grace without enough will is solipsism or self-involvement. The necessary will to go out must be balanced by the grace to receive. This is the balance between effort and surrender. You put out a particular amount of energy, not simply for the power of the effort, but also for the ensuing transformative experience.

It is easy to coast through life rather than to continually find the will to reach out into the world. To reach out is a risk. There is little grace in a life that never extends out beyond the boundaries of the self.



Relation is reciprocity. My You acts on me as I act on it. Our students teach us, our works form us... How are we educated by children, by animals! Inscrutably involved, we live in the currents of universal reciprocity.

(Martin Buber)



When attracted to someone, you probably adopt a very particular attitude in his or her presence. You expand, take the temperature of the room and then make adjustments based on the information received back, either from body language or direct interaction. With reciprocity, you act correspondingly. Perhaps you move closer. With a negative response, maybe you move away. Based on what you discover, your attitude adjusts and changes. Then, if you lose interest, your attitude or *Haltung* toward this person alters completely.

Apply this notion to the moment-to-moment work of actors on stage in a scene. The outwardly directed, responsiveness, the diversity of attitudes are sharp contrasts to Strasberg's inner directionality. Using attitudes, the air is electric, moments are differentiated and the stakes are actual and present.



Each day we wake slightly altered, and the person we were yesterday is dead.

(John Updike)



I think of the relationship between an actor and director like that of an astronaut and the control tower. The actor is the astronaut and the

director is in the control tower. The astronaut experiences disorientation, giddiness, glimpses a spectacle of the universe that no one else has ever seen. In return, the control tower instructs, "Try it a little to the left!" The astronaut makes the adjustment and then reports back on the effect of that action. The experience on the part of the astronaut is not solipsistic. It is shared. The journey is experienced for humankind. It is experience for the benefit of others.

The actor too goes out into space for all the rest of us. He or she puts their antenna body out into the universe in order to receive impressions and then reports back about those impressions from the heat of the encounter. The actor becomes one with the experience.

I remember the actor Alan Cumming playing the role of the M.C. in a production of the musical *Cabaret* at the Roundabout Theatre in New York City. His joy and sensuality was generous and therefore contagious. His experience of pleasure was for the benefit of everyone in the room. He took the journey for us and we, the audience, were invited to participate through an imaginative connection with him. As an actor, Cumming manages to balance feedforward and feedback exquisitely and successfully on the stage, and this is part of his charm and appeal.

To receive grace, it is not enough to enter outer space or to step onto a stage. You have to arrive with real curiosity and a need for the information, as well as a sensitive-enough perceptual organism to register the effect of the encounter and, for an actor, you need to be able to share these impressions with the audience. Simone Weil wrote, "Grace fills empty spaces, but it can only enter where there is a void to receive it. We must continually suspend the work of the imagination in filling the void within ourselves."

In an elevator in a hotel in Stamford, Connecticut, my hand slipped from the button indicating the floor I wanted to an adjacent Braille symbol. As I touched the Braille, I realized how little I could differentiate between the tiny metal dots compared to a blind person who would be reaching out for the necessary information. If my feedforward had been functioning at a higher level, my experience of the dots and the patterns would have been more discriminating. If I had been more receptive or more outwardly directed, the feedback from the touch would have been of a higher quality and differentiation.

One of the central tenants of the Buddhist "Eightfold Path" is *right attitude*, a mental state where compassion and peacefulness replace

hateful thoughts. The “Eightfold Path” also includes: the right effort, the right understanding, the right speech, the right action, the right livelihood, the right mindfulness and the right concentration. The word “right” maintains several meanings, including an ethical, balanced middle way. When things go “right,” we often experience a special feeling that confirms that this is the correct decision or action. Right effort, also relevant to the discussion of attitude, means the cultivation of enthusiasm and a balanced positive attitude. The amount of effort should not be too tense or impatient, nor too slack or laid back. Like the tautness of strings on a musical instrument, too tight or too loose compromises the quality of the sound. Right effort should produce an attitude of steady and cheerful determination.



And once a boy has suffered rejection, he will find rejection even where it does not exist—or, worse, will draw it forth from people simply by expecting it.

(John Steinbeck)



Attitude affects every action in daily life. When you make a date with someone you do not respect, you will probably approach the encounter with a careless attitude. Due to this careless attitude, it is almost certain that the meeting will not be worth mentioning. On the other hand, before a romantic rendezvous, when you feel a deep investment in the outcome, you will probably cultivate an attitude of great interest and excitement. This attitude predetermines your openness, interest, and responsiveness to the individual and influences your appearance, speech, and action. The chances for a passionate and successful encounter are much higher. Similarly, with a business or work-related meeting, if you arrive with an already defeated attitude, the result will follow suit. Usually, if you expect the best, the best will happen. If your attitude assumes that the encounter is a waste of time, the encounter will be a waste of time.

I had the pleasure of directing Plácido Domingo in the role of Rasputin in a new opera entitled *Nicholas and Alexandra* at the Los

Angeles Opera in 2004. Domingo is the Artistic Director of the Los Angeles Opera as well as of the Washington Opera. He performs, conducts, and plans seasons. He is a very busy man who has chosen his attitudes. Invariably he would arrive in rehearsal just off a plane, on a tight schedule and after little sleep. “Plácido,” I would say to him, “you must be exhausted.” But he never seemed exhausted. “I am doing exactly what I want to be doing. I am very lucky,” he often replied. One of the big scenes in the opera is Rasputin’s death scene. During the course of the scene, he is poisoned, bludgeoned, stabbed, and shot, which meant that Domingo had to fall down, stand up, fall down, and stand up countless times while singing in a high tenor voice. In rehearsal, Domingo never did less than full voice, full enthusiasm, and every single one of the moves.

The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein suggested that there are two possible approaches to life: one from the attitude of gratefulness and the other from ungratefulness. Attitude is a choice we each can make at every moment.

The choice and cultivation of attitude affects every aspect of our work in the theater. To choose the attitude that fundraising is an art form, part of the artistic process rather than a chore, a problem, or an endless obstacle, changes the process of fundraising profoundly. You can choose to see it as action, as opportunity. The artist Christo insists that there are no such things as problems, there are only situations. Start to see fundraising as a chance to meet people and describe your vision. Fundraising is action. It is not a burden. It is a way of building community and clarifying ideas, concepts, and intentions.

Theater people tend to have an inferiority complex. Following the Buddhist rationale, I suggest that we have not cultivated the *right* attitude. Why do we name our companies “On a String,” “Out of Luck” or “Small Change?” Why do we walk into the room like somebody’s poor uncle? This attitude is a self-perpetuating nightmare. What would happen if we simply changed our posture? What if we stood up straight and proud? I believe that it would change a lot.



Prepare to be lucky.

(E. B. White)



There are many ingredients to attitude, including temporal (timing) and spatial (distance) issues, your expectations, your ability to adjust, to be exact, to have restraint, and to combine doubt with readiness.

Readiness might be what Jerzy Grotowski called “pre-expressivity” and Eugenio Barba names “sats.” Both refer to the quality of energy just preceding an action. In archery, for example, the quality of the moment before releasing the arrow determines the success of the shot. This feature of readiness and availability is an intrinsic component to attitude. Actors can sensitize themselves to sats or pre-expressivity through training. The success of an action is determined by the quality of the moment before the action.

The stage designer John Conklin helped me relate attitude to spatial placement or distance. According to Conklin, our perceptions are sabotaged by a standard, prescribed middle distance. Columbia graduate directors share a class with New York University graduate designers. Conklin and I are part of the faculty. The directors and designers divide into workgroups that collaborate together to design lights, costumes, and a set on paper and with cardboard-box models for a collectively assigned play. One evening in class, while looking at the scenic designers’ work, Conklin began to chastise the students for standing at a standard distance from the models. “Get up close or move further away. This is the only way you will be able to see anything,” he intimated. “You can see nothing from the middle distance!”

In our culture of manufactured paranoia and consent, we are indeed ambushed by middle distance. Middle distance creates a kind of buzz. A blur. The Fox News Channel, for example, and even CNN, produces an annoying buzz that makes it hard to hear, see, or think in a differentiated manner. Middle distance ambushes your perceptions.

As an antidote to the buzz, listen below the buzz. Move in close. Then, alternatively, make distance. Alternate near and far. Study an issue in great depth. Or move away and see the context in which it resides. If you remain at middle distance from whatever issue you are grappling with, the middle distance itself will diffuse your perceptions and lead you to feel lost. You will get stuck. Nothing will matter. Because it makes everything seem vague and general, the buzz, the middle distance, leads to inaction. Engagement from the middle distance feels futile. But when you lean in or reposition yourself

by changing your distance and posture, the movement itself helps to clarify issues.

The idiosyncratic and wildly talented pianist Glen Gould described the sensation of ecstasy in performance. Ecstasy, he noted, is not simply intensity or rapture, but is rather the sense of being next to oneself. *Ex/stasis* is the state of being outside oneself, looking in. It is possible to cultivate an attitude that is close and distant, warm and cold at the same time. An artist in the heat of work needs to be simultaneously intimate and removed. Intuition functions best with investment and passionate detachment.

Two twenty-first-century photographers, Thomas Struth and Andreas Gursky, share in common an obsession with shooting images from a great distance. Both eschew the standard spatial and temporal stance in order to propose different ways of perceiving. Both contemplate the science of observation through an objective approach to subject matter. They alter their attitudes in order to find new clarity in seeing.

Struth's photographs encompass and focus details that are too numerous for the human eye to capture in an instant. In *Milan Cathedral (Interior)*, for example, you see visitors who are engaged in many different activities. The composition captures both the complexity of the cathedral's celebrated architecture and the many separate vignettes of the individuals present at the moment the photograph was taken. The vision is wide, multifaceted, and complex, but by looking at it you start to see organizing principles.

Large in scale and brilliantly lit, Andreas Gursky's subject matter ranges from sporting events to stock exchanges, factories, and libraries. Gursky reorders the world according to his own visual logic using digital technology. In one of his photographs, the traders on the floor of the Singapore Stock Exchange all wear the same shade of red, yellow, or blue jacket. This manipulation of color creates what Gursky calls "assisted realism." With this alteration, we are able to take in an unusually inclusive yet simultaneously wide view of the world.

In both cases, experiencing their photographs engenders the sense "information overload equals pattern recognition," a phrase that Marshall McLuhan borrowed from IBM. Through extending out to the macro, one begins to see the issues and relationships in a clearer light, or, above the buzz.

In contrast, the painters Jenny Saville and Catherine Murphy dedicate inordinate amounts of time and attention to the close-up. Saville's paintings, for example, examine flesh from so close a viewpoint that even though you know that it is part of a body, you cannot make out the whole figure. Murphy paints in agonizing detail: a hole in the ground, swept-up debris in her studio, stains on a tablecloth, shorn hair in a sink, the fabric of an armchair, a necklace on a back. She notices with such detail and penetration that each strand of the hair, each piece of debris, is shocking. She makes you observe more finely. You learn to pay better attention. At first, you are drawn in and then, through the force of your attention and your ability to metaphorize, you can see the macro in the micro. She gives great dignity to details that most of us just pass by without noticing.

These artists' work makes me think about our spatial and temporal posture in the theater vis-à-vis the stage. Our attitude, stance, and position determine the outcome of our endeavors. It begins in the rehearsal room. How do we approach the arena where we play out human dramas? How do we walk toward the stage? How do we step onto it? What is our attitude to space itself and to one another?

Many American theater artists share the disease of low expectations. The stage is treated like any other place. It is not cared for or attended to with any sense of potential for the exceptional nature of space. Actors hang out and eat and chat in the same arena that discoveries are supposed to be made. In rehearsal, a low-stakes attitude is too often the norm. The expectation is that at some point during the rehearsal, perhaps after hours of doodling, something will happen.

Since plays often deal with a daily life in crisis, the mistake is often made that in the theater we should match the daily-life situations with a daily-life attitude. I believe that this is a mistake. If we approach the arena of a living-room drama, for example, as gladiators entering the stadium, the results would be more magnetic. This does not mean that we have to behave like gladiators, it's just that the energy that fills the quotidian shapes will be imbued with power and wakefulness.

Perhaps a boxing ring can be a helpful analogy for the stage. The inherent danger in boxing makes the space a site of heightened attention. The floor must be spotless, dry, and uncluttered. Because of the physical danger of the sport, temporal and spatial issues are crucial. Timing and distance become key issues. The attitude carried

into the ring by the boxer is monumentally important. If we bring a sense of heightened stakes and danger into a rehearsal, the results will be more intense and exciting.

The ingredients that constitute a specific attitude in the artistic process are complex combinations of elements that sometimes seem paradoxical or contradictory. For example, an attitude can embody trust *and* suspicion, experience *and* innocence, action *and* restraint, uncertainty *and* exactitude.

It was Friedrich Nietzsche who first articulated the role of doubt and suspicion in the artistic process:

My writings have been called a School for Suspicion. ... Truly, I myself do not believe that anyone has ever looked into the world with such deep suspicion, and not only as an occasional devil's advocate, but every bit as much, to speak theologically, as an enemy and challenger of God.

Nietzsche harbored the suspicion, for example, that all human relationships are driven by the desire for power over others. This suspicion fueled many of his philosophical investigations. According to Nietzsche, approaching with suspicion and doubt is showing healthy respect to the potential power of the subject.

The Italian director Giorgio Strehler said that what he learned from Bertolt Brecht was to approach everything with an attitude of doubt. Strehler, one of the most exuberant men of action the theater world ever knew, rarely appeared to be plagued by doubt. But the combination of doubt and his intense enthusiasm for the art form contributed to the dense magic of his many theatrical escapades.

A director's job is to believe in the collaborators who are drawn into the creative arena, and this belief in people demands an attitude that expects the best from them. This posture is a kind of cultivated naïveté. The ability not to know—cultivated innocence and inexperience—ultimately makes space for development and change. And yet, combined with this innocence, there must also be a fierceness and determination. An attitude that combines belief, innocence, and fierceness is a potent combination.

During the 1980s I saw a play in an abandoned factory building in Berlin. The production began out-of-doors with a scene staged on a

rooftop. The audiences stood in the courtyard below, watching the actors perform elaborate abstract moves above them. After that, the play continued inside.

I stood in the courtyard, attempting to watch the actors on the rooftop, but my focus kept shifting to a man in the courtyard simply fixing his bicycle. Because the play had been running for weeks, the denizens of the area were accustomed to audiences and went about their normal lives. This man turned his bicycle upside down and intently went about fixing the gears. I could not take my eyes off him. He was far more fascinating than any of the actors in their colorful costumes moving along the rooftop. This was a lesson in attitude. The man's attitude was precise and riveted and therefore riveting. The performers' attitudes were, in comparison, general. Exactitude concentrates and magnifies an action.

Exactitude is another ingredient in the mix that makes for effective attitude. Inexperienced artists are often afraid to be exact because they worry that they have not yet made the right choice. And yet, what makes something feel "real" is the exactitude itself, rather than the correct choice. Exactitude is the point. The result of working without exactitude is fuzziness and generality. The man fixing his bicycle taught me that precision engenders presence.

Restraint is the final key ingredient in our examination of attitude. To practice restraint in the heat of battle, in rehearsal, allows the process to unfold properly. The battle might be with your own impatience, an actor's haste, a dramaturg's insecurity, a deadline, distractions, laziness, despair, fatigue—the list goes on. If you charge in at every opportunity to solve or settle the problem or force something to happen, then you have left no room for anything but your own ego. To hold back, to tame, to wait like a hunter waits for prey rather than rushing around, stomping through the undergrowth, will yield richer, deeper results.

Civilization is, after all, restraint. We think of being civil as being polite, but originally the meaning had a less gentrified feel. Civilization comes from the Greek, "politics." A society that has a high level of culture and social organization is civilized. To be civil is to approach the world with restraint.

Action both in the civilized world and the artistic process asks that you neither run headlong into nor away from conflict. You stay in the

room and you work through the issue in stages. The director Peter Sellars suggested that perhaps being American means staying in the room no matter what; and he practices this. Sellars never avoids the audience's difficulties with his work. He greets them as they leave the theater, introduces himself, and begins a dialogue.

Consciously choose an attitude. Learn to adjust. Do not leave the room. Stay connected. Show restraint. Cultivate sensitivity to temporal and spatial issues. Rather than spewing forth generalities, concentrate the energy and then, be precise.

chapter 7

content

What is good to know is hard to learn.

(Aristotle)



Art asks certain basic questions: Is your life opening or closing at this moment? Are you awake? Are you doing anything more than surviving? Or is the world shutting down around you? The theater is always about what it means to be alive now, present at this particular moment in the theater. No matter what century created it, a play always concerns the contemporary world right now—a high-density magnifying lens through which we can see our own times, our lives, our problems, and our assumptions. *Hamlet* signifies what *Hamlet* means now. The issues of *Hamlet* reflect the context and landscape of the current environment.

And theater is ultimately also about community. It is in the heat of a shared experience that an audience becomes its own society. You are here with a whole lot of other people. Can you handle that? We are a community of people dealing with each other, challenging each other. The theater is about social systems and how individuals in communities function in concert. Can the planet be shared or does it just belong to me?

In Ancient Greece, when Homer narrated stories, he evoked the past. One voice reported history. But when Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and others, placed two or more people on a stage together, the audience found themselves in the presence of real relationships

happening in the *present* moment. The theater is the only art form whose subject matter, the content, is society itself.

Sophocles wrote about the great warrior Philoctetes who, exiled from his country, is abandoned on the island of Lemnos, where he remains sick in heart and body. Many years pass, and his countrymen decide that they need his help to win the Trojan war. Philoctetes finally puts his pride and rage aside and agrees to join them because he understands that life is only valuable in relation to others.



A poor exile,
Deserted, friendless, and though living, dead
To all mankind.

(Sophocles)



We live only in relation to one another. Other people and our traffic with them is what makes us who we are. While all art concerns the interconnectedness of the universe, the theater has to do with the interconnectedness of people. The content of theater is other people.

Content is the meaning or message contained within a creative work as distinct from its container, exterior appearance, façade, form, or style. This container can be many things including a vase, a story, a physical shape, or a metaphor. Content is not the form that contains, rather it is the matter contained by form.

One of the major issues facing the American theater is the privileging of form over subject matter. Conservatories and training programs teach technique, or a very watered-down idea of technique, but young theater artists are rarely encouraged or challenged to grapple or wrestle with issues and content. At best, actors are taught how to tackle a character in a play, but they are not asked: “What is a play?” “What is its function?” “What does this play mean now?” “Why is it necessary?” “How does it intersect with the world in which it is being performed?”

Due to specific cultural and historical episodes, including the blacklisting of artists during the 1950s and a generally widespread

and long-term fear of art, the American theater has become profoundly solipsistic, looking inward more than outward to the world it inhabits. To a certain extent, content in the theater in the United States, when not reviving musicals from its past, has dwindled to issues surrounding personal problems and relationships. The larger social and political contexts have been exiled from content. Many theatrical institutions worry more about survival than about the choice and risk involved in tussling with the issues actually relevant to individuals living in the particular culture and society at the moment. Increasingly self-centered, we mistakenly buy into the notion that to keep the theater alive we must give paying audiences plays about what they already know. And now, largely due to this misjudgment, what people know about now revolves around their own lives and desires. Staring at our navels, we have lost the habit of and appetite for grappling with broader issues. We mistrust what we do not know and what is not familiar, and yet these subjects are exactly what can broaden our spheres of awareness.

Economic and political insecurities combined with the fact that cultural institutions are concerned primarily with survival issues over art produce theater that lacks vitality, courage, and boldness—exactly the qualities that make the art form necessary and attractive. The substance is weak. Content is missing in action. This climate of fear and mistrust of art discourages productions that grapple with tough issues which might be uncomfortable to the constituency. Rather than engagement, the field is concerned with employment, safety, and assurance. Producers think about money. Audiences expect the product they paid for.

Meanwhile, where is the subject matter? What are we making theater about? How do we choose a theme or play? How does the choice of subject matter affect the process and result? How can we learn anew to take on the big issues? This chapter investigates these questions.

Content is about connectedness. Your choice of content connects you with the history of the world and of human endeavor. The issues you choose to engage in and the manner in which you pursue and expand these connections determine the profundity of the journey for both you and the audience.

The more substantial and complex the subject matter, the more will be asked from you in the journey, and the more you will sweat

in the process. The cost is real and it is personal. Interaction with significant content informs and alters your perceptions of the world. The engagement is alchemical, life-giving, and connects you to the global community and to the history that precedes you as well as to future generations who will be informed by your experiences.

In order to examine issues about content, I have broken down this chapter on content into five thematic suggestions for practical application:

- 1 Begin with necessity.
- 2 Develop perception.
- 3 Find out what is missing.
- 4 Learn what you need to know.
- 5 Develop patience.

Begin with necessity

The mission is to stay hungry. Once you *need* to know, you can proceed and draw distinctions. From the heat of this necessity, you reach out to content—the play, the theme, or question—and begin to listen closely, read, taste, and experience it. You learn to differentiate and interpret the sensations received while engaged with content. The perception forms the basis for expression.

Have you ever been so curious about something that the hunger to find out nearly drives you to distraction? The hunger is necessity. As an artist, your entire artistic abilities are shaped by how necessity has entered your life and then how you sustain it. It is imperative to maintain artistic receptivity and responsiveness to this curiosity and necessity. It is our job to remain in this state of feedforward as long as humanly possible. Without necessity as the fuel for expression, the content remains theoretical. The drive to taste, discover, and express what thrills and chills the soul is the point. Creation must begin with personal necessity rather than conjecture about audience taste or fashion.

Under the communist regime in Czechoslovakia, playwright and activist Václav Havel spent many years in prison for his political actions and convictions. Later, when he became the President of the Czech Republic, he suggested that it would be useful to be put back

into prison for a period of time every year just to remember what freedom feels like. Perception is linked intimately to necessity. How many of us who have never tasted imprisonment really, really know what freedom feels like? How can freedom be a necessity without the experience of its lack? To truly taste water we need to know extreme thirst. Necessity is personal and it is intimate. The depth and breadth of the interaction with content is dependent upon an intimate link to the necessity for action in the world. To interact with content you have to develop your perception, and that process is fueled by curiosity and necessity.

Not long ago, walking through the wet streets of downtown New York City, I ducked into an N.Y.U. dormitory on Fifth Avenue to get out of the rain. In the lobby, fifty or so students were hanging out, draped over couches, careless and comfortable. In the midst of the crowd, a man and woman, both deaf, were engaged in an animated discussion using sign language, facial expression, and their entire bodies to converse. These two radiated life to such an extreme that they made everyone else seem like the walking dead. I was enchanted by their evident appreciation for the power of relationship and communication. For these deaf individuals on that rainy day, due to their desire for communion, necessity was present. The stakes were high. They had found freedom and the pleasure of interaction with one another. The obstacle of deafness heightened the prize of communication. Does surmounting an obstacle heighten the perception and appreciation of it?

We make art in order to connect and communicate with the world around us and with other people. In the theater, we cordon off spaces where special meetings might occur. We invite an audience into this place and hope that something will happen. What helpful obstacles do we offer those audiences? How do we cultivate their necessity? How do they participate in creating the content? What is at stake in the meeting? How high or low is the bar set? An audience can always sense the stakes and how high or low the bar is set. Consciously or unconsciously, they adjust their own abilities to conform to the level.

The questions that arise every single time a performance occurs are, "Can these issues be spoken of? Is it possible tonight for this person to have a conversation with that person? Can we, together, arrive at a different and more layered perspective? Can we find language

for issues that crave to be addressed and as yet have no language?" If these basic issues are faced sincerely, there will be the presence of necessity.

One of the weaker characteristics of the American system of rehearsal is the tendency for actors and directors to wait for the audience to arrive before raising the bar. When an actor says, "You will see it on the night," it means that he or she will connect to the necessity for communication only in performance. We have the audacity to ask an audience to pay and we need them to make it necessary.

How high do you set the bar when you enter a rehearsal hall? What necessity walks in the door with you? And then, what are you doing? Is a rehearsal about finding and practicing the blocking? Or is it about discovering the necessary energy required to embody the character and illuminate the play? In performance, an audience senses an actor's reason and necessity for being on stage. The depth of and degree of that necessity are palpable, and this drives their expression. Energy and necessity generate presence.

For me, the theater's function is to transform sleep into wakefulness. I want the audience to leave the theater more alive than when they arrived. My job is to set up the circumstances in which this change or alchemy can occur. The responsibility for this transformation starts with me. I try to be awake and present in the rehearsal room, attentive to what happens there. I treat the room and those in it with the utmost care and respect. In return, I demand a high level of alertness, responsiveness, and consideration for every aspect of our shared time.

A rehearsal is a time and a space where we attempt to generate enough energy to meet another person in the heightened arena of a dramatic situation and, within that crisis, to speak with clarity. Rather than conserve energy, a rehearsal should require actors to produce sufficient energy to incarnate the play. The ability to act, good technique, is not enough. There needs to be a drive, a necessity to act, in order to overcome the natural obstacles of inertia and fear.

It is imperative to work with people who are committed because dedication, or lack of it, shows up in performance. Stakes and necessity are visible to an audience. Those who work from necessity are searching for something, trying to find a foothold in their own lives, on their own terms, as they activate the energy of a play. Even commitment to personal excellence and advancement can result in

more powerful and energetic work than without it. The stakes inform everything. What are you attempting? What are you tempting? What is at risk?

What is at stake in art in our present global context is nothing less than the human necessity to adjust to a fast-changing world. We are either connected or cut off, and art can connect us. A media-saturated environment such as ours provides a critical moment for the theater, in particular to provide a space where people can come together and learn “how to live” and “how to proceed.”

The arts are most indispensable in the midst of cultural, political, and scientific paradigm shifts. It is at these moments that risk, innovation, expression, and dramatic leaps of imagination are critical and necessary. The last major paradigm shift, around 1915, ushered modernism into being. The cubist movement in painting around that time helped to introduce new ideas and concepts about time, uncertainty, and relativity. Even those who never saw Picasso’s paintings were affected and changed by his cubist studies. Because culture is porous, pervasive, and contagious, artistic influence penetrates every aspect of daily life. Art generates articulate shapes that render paradigm shifts tangible and feasible to vast numbers of people.

Partially initiated by the new “all-at-once-ness” of our lives brought on by scientific innovations in computer science, we are presently undergoing another paradigm shift. Artists are responding to the accelerated debate about how we are supposed to adjust to the speed and efficiency of technological communications. For example, in a series of cubist-like Polaroid constructions, which he called “joiners,” the visual artist David Hockney experimented with montage using Polaroid snapshots and successfully embodied our new experience of time and space. In one montage, an entire story through time is graspable inside a single frame. His work makes the disorienting sensations of our own all-at-once lives at the beginning of the twenty-first century comprehensible.

Another one of the major issues of our time is diversity. How many communities can you be a part of or recognize? The issue is not “Can I work in my little community?” but “What points of solidarity can there be across the communities?” We need to learn to recognize how many communities there are in your life and how many ways you are part of these communities. Our lives are multiple

by definition, so anything that emphasizes and exercises that multiplicity is important in the context of our present climate. Art addresses these issues.

Develop perception

Ultimately, the role of art is to wake us up. Routine takes the place of life so easily. The senses resign, numbness enters. Our job as artists is to sharpen our perceptual mechanism on a daily basis in order to venture out into the world with curiosity to receive, perceive, and report back. And yet the present culture of overabundance has dulled our perceptual mechanisms enormously. Because of our responsibility to depth-dive and then surface with fresh visions about the human situation, it is critical to find innovative and effective ways to develop observation and discernment.

The United States is, at present, culturally starved. Almost everything produced by the commercial arena insults our intelligence: reality TV, fast food and books written for dummies; these are all an overwhelming insult to our perceptual facility. Art, news, and entertainment largely reflect the surface rather than what is inside; form rules over content. We tend to judge things by the outside, by what something looks like. We think that we know all about a thing because we know what it looks like. In fact we know very little. We have not explored the depths.

Most entertainment, journalism, and much art, nowadays intend to flatter you with what you know and to make you feel good about yourself. The media never wants to say; “You don’t know anything at all and actually what you know is really primitive.” Rather, you are flattered and persuaded that you know a lot about everything. First catering to what it thinks you want to see, the media then tries to make you feel better about what it is you think you want to see. Although this may feel attractive for a moment, it does not sustain. The goods are delivered in a false spirit. Delivering content via flattery can be seductive but ultimately not satisfying.

It is rarely rewarding to be at the receiving end of someone who is trying to convince you of something. And yet, most commercial media intend to do exactly that. But theater is different. In the theater, when you feel that a play is trying to convince you of something, you will

probably want to say, “Stop it! Stop this! I don’t want this thing coming at me. I will decide what I think.”

Authentic perception begins with the necessity to receive information. Consider what we receive from the world as news. Your thirst to find out, to engage, to interact magnifies the breadth and intensity of the news received. Each of our senses receives news in discrete ways. Choreographer Mary Overlie calls this process “the news of a difference.” The content of the news we receive in each and every moment is about how one entity is different from another; one moment is different from the one that went before. A developed sense of the perception of differences is vital to an artist. Great art is always differentiated. The greater the art, the more differentiated it is. One moment is different from the next. One color is distinct from another. The art of differentiation is the diametrically opposite to receiving a general impression. Nothing is general. Every aspect is discrete, radiant.

In order to perceive with acuity and clarity, it is the artist’s job to become sensitive to differentiation. And yet, life can easily shut you down. It is possible, for example, to drink oneself into unconsciousness. In this shutting down, the shell or sheath under which you fossilize can become your very existence—the life sets and becomes hardened. Neuroscience shows that if the brain is not exercised regularly, it atrophies. The brain shuts down. In order to develop perception and differentiation, you must practice perception and differentiation regularly.

Aesthetics pertain to things perceivable by the senses. The word “aesthetic” derives from the Ancient Greek word for *sensation*. Aesthetics are not theoretical, rational, or academic concepts. Having nothing to do with cognition or knowing, aesthetics address how something *feels*. Aesthetics describe the sensations evoked in the act of perception and encourage a sensuous receptiveness and appreciation for beauty.

The opposite of aesthetic is anesthetic: the absence of sensation. As in anesthesiology, anesthetics numb by reducing sensitivity to pain. This leaves you unfeeling, unemotional, and insensitive. Ultimately, anesthetics engender unconsciousness. Numbness and unconsciousness spell the opposite of an aesthetic experience.

A Sanskrit treatise on art, the *Natya Shastra*, breaks the human “tastes”—in this case emotions or feelings—into nine categories called *rasas* or flavors. Much like Indian cuisine, where the number of

distinct tastes satisfied in one sitting determines the quality of the meal, an artistic experience, according to this hypothesis, should fulfill a similar function. It is considered essential for all nine tastes, or flavors, to be enjoyed and savored in the duration of one aesthetic experience. The *rasas* are part of the content of the theater experience.

There is no definitive counterpart to *rasa* in the English language. On a literal level, *rasa* means, “that which is being tasted or enjoyed.” Roughly translated “the juices of the poetics,” in the context of theater, the nearest meaning is human feelings or emotions. *Rasas* are emotional and visceral tastes. Think about savoring distinct and particular flavors within the unity of one production.

The nine *rasas* in Indian theater are: love, courage, loathing, anger, mirth, terror, pity, disgust, and surprise. In the context of *rasa* theory, a successful integration of diverse tastes makes the theater experience attractive and magnetic while encouraging aesthetic pluralism. The complex and differentiated juices contribute to the unity of an experience.

And yet, in our present culture, rarely do you see work that celebrates complexity or the human capacity for aesthetic pluralism. Complexity should not exist simply for the sake of complexity but also for the subsequent pleasure derived from it. It is indeed a pleasure to engage with complexity. Imagine work that is as complex as the world we inhabit, as complex as a relationship really is, as full of paradox and contradiction as our yearnings and desires. The theater is a space that can celebrate pluralism in a world that seems frightened of it. The theater is an art form that can open us to the infinite through complexity.

In the development of perception, learn to notice infinity in your very own life. Remember, for example, a moment when your mother looked at you. You will see more in that moment now than you did when you were actually in the moment with your mother. The longer you look, the deeper it becomes and the richer in content. And in this process, over time, you will develop compassion and insight. Learn to taste infinity in order to bring the infinite into your work.

My body is a barometer that I can check at crucial moments. For example, when offered criticism about an aspect of a production I am directing, I check my physical reaction. When I feel nothing, then I know that the critique is inaccurate. If I become defensive, irritated,

or angry, then I understand that the criticism is true, and I know that I must deal with the problem. This barometrical reading is, for me, a useful type of perception to develop.

I also listen to my body-barometer in choosing content. For me, there must be something uncertain, something at risk. The decision to do a project and my commitment to it are based on a physical sensation, a *frisson du corps*, or goose bumps. The content should promise a leap, potential for adventure, and the possibility of collapse or failure. If the notion of tackling particular subject matter gives me the chills, I test my barometer-body to see how deep the interest is and how sustaining the chill. The intensity of the physical charge indicates my passion and lets me know if there is enough juice to get me through all difficulties of preparation, research, fundraising, or whatever obstacles might arise in the realization of this production.

I was sitting on a bus headed to rehearsal in Salzburg, Austria when I received the big chill about a project entitled *Reunion*. I had been reading a book of the same title compiled by Helen Krich Chinoy, who had presented it to me several months earlier at a talk I gave at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. “Anne,” she said, “I think you will be interested in this.” And then, on that bus in Salzburg, while reading the book of interviews with members of the Group Theatre of the 1930s, I suddenly envisioned the production and felt the force of the central idea. I received a big chill.

Reunion is about political conviction, art, and, most of all, the evolution of a theater company. I imagined my theater company, SITI, constructing a play about another theater company. I could visualize Ellen Lauren playing Stella Adler, Will Bond as Bobby Lewis, Barney O’Hanlon as Clifford Odets. The idea of standing on the shoulders of those giants and reexamining their lives, politics, and objectives seemed mad and wonderful to me. The *frisson du corps* was palpable and intense. I recognized that the chill was powerful enough to sustain many years of development. On that bus in Salzburg, all at once, I saw and felt a play for SITI. And in that moment, I committed to it.

Find out what is missing

Ours is a culture of excess. In addition to too many material things, we are surrounded by counterfeit emotions such as self-pity, confusion,

cynicism, and hysteria. Rather than adding more to what is already a glut in the environment, look around and see the holes. What is lacking? What is missing? Start from there.

The music group Rachel's is a classically trained music ensemble that mixes rock and roll sensibilities with complex churning compositions. SITI Company fell in love with Rachel's and their music, and soon the two collectives began to collaborate.

Often Rachel's play live during our Viewpoints training sessions. I marvel at the band's ability to respond musically to the unfolding physical and vocal improvisations. They locate the groove of whatever is happening on stage and contribute in ways that propose another dimension to what is already going on. Christian Frederickson, one of the musicians, described how he works. "I listen for what is missing and I start from there," he explained.

Listen for what is missing and start from there. It seems so simple, and yet we inhabit a culture unaccustomed to empty spaces. But try. Look around and ask, "What is missing from this picture? Whose stories are missing? What is not being spoken about? Where are the holes?"

When I look around, the first thing that seems to be missing is the imaginative space that art can engender. Our society, chock full of real trauma, manufactured paranoia and war, needs silence and space. An opportunity for healing and regeneration is required for human flourishing. There needs to be time for insight and contemplation. There needs to be room for grief and forgiveness.

In a post-9/11 atmosphere of mass coercion and entertainment, where most human interaction is mediated by technology, people crave direct communion. What is missing is significant and substantive unmediated public conversation—people in a room together, breathing common air, thinking and talking collectively. Shared action in small rooms can resonate throughout an entire culture. Every time I find myself in a room with people discussing substantive issues, the act feels radical and absolutely necessary.

Also missing are experiences that do not assume the worst of us but rather ask for the best. Normally we are pandered to and flattered and calmed down. What is called for in the theater are productions that offer a workout for the mind, emotions, and perceptions. Howard Barker wrote, "Art is a problem. The man or woman who

exposes himself to art exposes himself to a problem.” The theater in these times can serve as a gym for the soul. Place the bar high and ask audiences to participate in ways that are not asked of them in daily life.

Our culture, via the corporately owned media conglomerates, marginalizes people on purpose. The effect is a sense of isolation, making people feel alone. The media message is of two kinds. One is, “Be a consumer. Your only purpose in life is to spend money.” The other is, “It is none of your business what’s going on in the world. Just let the smart guys do it.” The role we are given is one of spectatorship rather than participant.

What is needed, what is missing, is hope, encouragement, and a celebration of all that is complex and yet connected to the fiber of our beings. Collaboration is necessary. Collective action is the best strategy against isolation.

The theater is known as the slowest of all the art forms because it contains so many disparate ingredients and it is loaded down by their weight. The theater can include visual art, stand-up comedy, music, architecture, dance, sculpture, literature, and so on. In terms of innovation and originality, the theater seems to be the tortoise to all the other more agile unencumbered art forms. It is the slowest to draw on the new technologies and aesthetic movements.

But the theater’s weakness is also its greatest strength. Theater artists have the ability and opportunity and, yes, the responsibility to move across the lines between seemingly alien and unrelated professions—between economists and anthropologists, scientists and historians, political scientists and mathematicians—and include them in the process. We create spaces and opportunities where meetings can occur among people who do not usually interact with one another. These meetings stimulate other meetings in other spaces, and the development is exponential.

Director Peter Sellars’ production of *The Children of Herakles* by Euripides is an excellent example of cross-disciplinary traffic. The production toured Europe and the United States in 2002 and 2004 and included real refugee children onstage, television commentators and public figures, specialists in foreign-policy issues who were assigned speeches from Euripides that they delivered during the play, and direct visual references to the contemporary global refugee crisis.

Every night, a panel discussion between refugees, scholars, and diplomats preceded the performance of the play. After the performance, dinner was served to the audience, cooked by the parents and families of the refugee children. After that, a topical film was shown.

Sellars wants to restore to the theater its original function as the meeting place of art and social engagement. “The theater provides some of the last public spaces left in this country,” he stated. It is no accident that the formation of theater in ancient Athens coincided with the birth of democracy. “The first performance of Euripides’ play,” he offered, “served as a town meeting about refugee issues”: “All Athenian citizens were required to attend the theater as a preparation for voting—it provided it a forum where the most challenging issues of the day could be discussed in their true complexity, not by career politicians but by the greatest poets in the land.”

Let us invite other professions into our own. Let us open our arms to the idea of cross-fertilization between disciplines. As theater people, we can offer a context for different kinds of collaboration and relationships. We can make meeting spaces available. We can host alchemical exchanges. When you invite people into an art zone they can leave their usual roles and begin to collaborate in unexpected ways. The present moment is a perfect time to try this out and see what unexpected and fruitful results transpire.

Finally, what is missing and what the theater does, what the theater can do, and what the theater should do is to humanize those who have been dehumanized by the assumptions and frozen values of the world we inhabit. In the theater, we have the unique opportunity to question the world’s waxing spiritual fundamentalism and to challenge the permission to look at others as subhuman.

Learn what you need to know

What do you need to know about the world? I think that you need to know a great deal, or at least attempt to learn plenty. To be an artist on the global stage, that is to say, an articulate expresser of alternate worlds, you need a deep engagement and curiosity about humanity and its not-so-obvious secrets. Artists are activists. Artists are people who look around and say, “this is what needs to be done,” and then do it. Therefore, you need to know of what you speak.

There is nothing excusable about an artist who does not know what she or he is talking about and who talks or produces work nonetheless about something they know little about or into which they have looked only cursorily. For example, how is it possible to know what being an American is without going out and finding out what America is? Personally, I only began to glimpse my own culture after leaving the United States and abandoning certain familiar moorings including language, ethics, food, and easy relationships. Only then did I begin to clearly perceive my own assumptions and habitual tendencies in a clearer light. Going out and testing your ideas and being truly challenged by a whole range of experience is a vital beginning.

Find out who knows something authentic and go and learn from them. Get some inside information, because outside information is mostly corrupt. It is our obligation to study, to observe (as suggested earlier, quantum physics proposes that to observe is to disturb), to engage, to strain past our own assumptions about a subject, and to look into the areas that feel foreign and unknowable. Live there. Swim in those waters.

Americans are not encouraged to explore beyond the surface. We inhabit a culture that worships the surface. The reasons for this are political and they are cultural. Our perceptions have become dulled by a culture of overabundance. We are overloaded. We are satiated for a moment, and then want more.

In order to be taken seriously, we must hold ourselves to higher standards and make high demands upon ourselves. An athlete earns an audience's attention because of the seriousness of her or his training and purpose. The effort earns the athlete the right, the moral right, to say something. In the theater, we have to earn the moral right to say something.

What is unimaginable to most Americans is that the world might actually look different from the perspective of a different part of the world or an alternate point of view. China, for example, is depicted in a way that middle-class Americans might recognize it. China is presented in American terms. But why not present China from the point of view of the Chinese? How does a Chinese person think? How does the world look from China? Our task is to find out.

Our task is also to study the theater itself. You can learn to speak in the poetic language of the stage by studying the history of its

development. Through this study, you will meet the people who were involved in advancing the art form. There are many ancient tools and techniques that have been passed down through centuries of actors encountering audiences.

The theater carries its own history inside of itself. Every performer's body contains every body that ever performed. Just beneath the surface lurk unseeable texts about issues such as destiny, courage, and human folly. Ultimately, the theater is not only about what is visible. The theater is also about invisible worlds. What might seem on the surface a simple story is usually, in fact, much more complicated. Antonin Artaud called this multiple reality "the theater and its double:"

The pool of energies which constitute Myths, which man no longer embodies, is embodied in theater. By this double I mean the great magical agent of which the theater, through its forms, is only the figuration on its way to becoming the transfiguration. It is on the stage that the union of thought, gesture and action is reconstructed. And the double of the Theater is reality untouched by the men of today.

Since ancient times, the theater has excelled in the visual language of poetic representation. A piece of fabric represents a sea or river. You see fabric, but you think or imagine water. A limited visible vocabulary provokes the invisible double in the imagination of the audience.

The visible also carries the invisible via metaphor. A production can simultaneously function on the linear, temporal level—through story—and the timeless associative level—through metaphor. Metaphor is the container, the truck that transports meaning and associations. For example, when Miss Julie breaks a bird's neck, the action contains the dynamics of her relationship with the character Jean. When Oedipus puts out his eyes, this gesture contains all human blindness. The theater asks an audience to contemplate something more than the obvious. The audience dreams the play. Every theater artist needs to study metaphor and understand how it functions.

Learn how to delve into what you need to know. It takes patience and imagination to study. A surgeon contains the nerves and energy and then makes a definitive movement. The most vital actions we can

take in the world right now are exceedingly difficult. Patience and imagination are necessary. And we should encourage the audience's facility with patience and imagination in our art. We can promote and develop these skills.

And then, after all the research and study, try nonetheless to cultivate a beginner's sense of openness and adventure when approaching content. Despite the in-depth study, do not assume that you know very much. Develop a humble attitude and suppose that, if anything, you know very little. Do not be afraid to profess complete ignorance. Move toward the subject full of questions and curiosity. Be willing to let go of everything that you think you know. Make room for what can turn out to be a series of revelations.



I had to grow foul with knowledge, realize the futility of everything, smash everything, grow desperate, then humble, then sponge myself off the slate, as it were, in order to recover my authenticity. I had to arrive at the brink and then take a leap in the dark.

(Henry Miller)



I spend a lot of time with actors around a table before the staging process begins. We move slowly through the text and related materials in order to study and ask penetrating questions. But table work is not about finding answers. The discussions and slow, deep readings are about opening up possibilities and making room for discovery rather than finding answers or solutions. We look for clues and hints that can lead to unexpected associations and fruitful directions. The objective is not to emerge from the process with explanations; it is, rather, to provoke many more questions. We attempt to enter into the mystery of the material by opening up to the myriad of possible readings that one text can provoke. The process engenders what Marshall McLuhan called "information overload equals pattern recognition."

Develop patience

At the age of fifteen I saw a production that I did not understand: Shakespeare's *Macbeth* performed by the Trinity Repertory Company in Providence, Rhode Island. The experience felt mysterious, dense, complicated, and much wider than the person I had become by then. I could barely understand the language, much less the themes, character dilemmas, politics, and history enmeshed in the play. Intensely drawn by the magnetism and complexity of the production, my entire being leaned into the experience and was altered forever by it. I felt thrilled to be asked to stretch and imagine beyond the bounds of what I knew. The event decided my life's course. It was on that day that I determined that I would become a theater director. And it was also then that I realized that art is not about knowledge, rather it is about the intricate interaction of contrasting bites of the universe put together into a smaller universe. This network of disconnections made whole is the artwork. The only thing I was sure of is that I did not understand. There was more going on there than I could ever understand. And this was a beautiful thing to experience. To recognize that there is more going on than I would ever understand gave me an appetite for the future. The production showed me a microcosm of a universe, and I saw that the universe is wide. I felt that I was in the presence of a depth that I could not quite fathom and yet an irresistible personal invitation was issued to me directly.

A play is a poetic and associative fabrication and meditation about issues that seem unsolvable in real life. A playwright can take these unsolvable issues to another level where an audience begins to recognize them objectively and then deal with them personally. Through the experience, this personal source of unease can be lifted to a space where it has a spiritual and metaphysical context and can be shared with others. The larger questions about the nature of our own society can begin to be addressed via these experiments in social arrangements. And so, because these issues are both personal, from your daily life, and also new and revolutionary in arrangement, you find yourself listening to the play with a beautiful tension. You listen acutely. You pay complete attention to the play. The play creates a wide-open reflective place. But this new, complex, wide-open space demands both patience and imagination.

It is easy to move too quickly. People nowadays move too quickly toward things they really do not understand. It is tempting to move quickly to a conclusion you are not ready for. You tend to rush because you just want to move things along. You want to know already, get there, achieve it, and have a commodity. Do not rush. Marinate in it. Bring your imagination to work upon it. Wait till your observation of it reverses and then it is observing you.

The composer and conductor Leonard Bernstein once observed:

I think that's the most important aspect of any art—that it not be made up deliberately out of one's head. If I decide to sit down to the piano now and write a sonata to be concluded before 11 o'clock, because I have to, and I haven't an idea in my head, I could probably turn out a sonata, or something short, by 11 o'clock simply by sheer will. I doubt that it would be any good. If it were any good it would be a miracle because it will have proceeded not from the unconscious place but from the made-up, thinking intellectualized, censoring controlled part of my brain.

Our fate as artists is to live with and accept the paradox “keep moving and slow down, simultaneously,” or, *festina lente*. Learn how to live in this contradiction and enjoy its inherent irritation. Slow down but keep moving. Not easy. The three enemies that we face on a daily basis—distraction, laziness and impatience—test us and keep us honest.

Only with patience can we discover the worlds within worlds and lives within lives of an art moment. It is necessary to slow down and find the space between breaths where life starts all over again so that each new inhalation comes as a surprise. Slow breathing allows the mind and heart to function more expansively. Only through patient saturation and waiting like a motionless fisherman in the vicinity of an errant fish can we accomplish the necessary penetration of the universe. Only then will we discover the invisible pulse inside an action or experience the unpredictable diversity of the unfolding present moment.

The past decade has ushered in a new appreciation for slowness in cultural movements such as the Slow Food Movement, which extols taking time with preparation and bringing back the notion of taste to

the act of eating. These impulses are reactions against fast production, mass co-modification, and bulk culture.

In 1881 Friedrich Nietzsche introduced the notion of “slow reading:”

For philology is that venerable art which demands of its votaries one thing above all: to go aside, to take time, to become still, to become slow—it is a goldsmith’s art and connoisseurship of the WORD which has nothing but delicate, cautious work to do and achieves nothing if it does not achieve it *lento*. But precisely for this reason it is more necessary than ever today, by precisely this means does it entice and enchant us the most, in the midst of an age of “work,” that is to say, of hurry, of indecent and perspiring haste, which wants to “get everything done” at once, including every old or new book:—this art does not so easily get anything done, it teaches to read WELL, that is to say, to read slowly, deeply, looking cautiously before and aft, with reservations, with doors left open, with delicate eyes and fingers.

We tend to attack a text from our own way of thinking in order to decide as soon as possible what it means from our own perspective. We are in such a rush to decide what the sentences mean and to determine whether we agree or disagree, approve or disapprove that we generally do not see what the sentences might be saying on their own terms. We rush to judgment and interpretation.

The purpose of slowing down is to make room, to create the space to think like someone else, to think like the author. At first you will probably find yourself beached up upon the shores of your own habits and assumptions. With patience, you eventually develop the capacity to be present with the words on the page and to allow the words simply to be there before deciding what they mean.

In a consumer culture, our eyes are trained to manufacture desire. We desire things we see. We rush with desire toward results and ownership. Desire, impatience, fear, and insecurity tend to make us rush to conclusions. How can we look without desire? It is difficult to stand in front of a painting and just look at it, without trying to decide what it means. Cultivate a way of looking without desire, without preconceived ideas or perceptions. Practice it daily. Let things be, and then let them speak.

chapter 8

time

Time is the school in which we learn. Time is the fire in which we burn.

(Delmore Schwartz)



Perhaps my life is not measured in minutes, hours, or days, but rather in the space and quality of every single breath. Perhaps the quality of time “spent” depends upon my attitude toward time.

In the fall of 1985, the artist Christo and his partner Jeanne-Claude completed a remarkable project in Paris, France. They wrapped the city’s oldest bridge, the Pont Neuf, including the sidewalks and streetlamps, in vibrant light-gold cloth. I was living and working in Paris at the time and naturally intended to make a pilgrimage. On a beautiful autumn day, upon the completion of the project, I headed to the Latin Quarter to experience *The Pont Neuf Wrapped*. As I approached the neighborhood in the vicinity of the bridge, I noticed that the usual day-to-day atmosphere of the place had altered dramatically. It was as though everyone on the streets of the neighborhood had awoken from a long sleep. To me, this ubiquitous alertness felt pristine and refreshing. As I turned a corner and beheld the graceful, golden spectacle of the encased bridge, I gasped. Caught up in a collective wave of excitement, I fell headlong into the shared elation of being part of this extraordinary event.

Due to Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s temporary artwork, I recognized the true function of art: to awaken what is asleep. As a well-known

and photographed European attraction, the Pont Neuf had become over time not only a tourist destination, but also a cliché. The bridge and the surrounding streets had become drenched in daily habit and assumption. But with the intervention of the glorious golden covering and the context of an art event where one is asked to put on special lenses, suddenly the bridge was transformed and the entire neighborhood woke up. The bridge was once again visible. Christo and Jeanne-Claude made the “music more intense.” They covered an object to allow us to see it anew.

I decided to revisit the spot every day for the following week until the scheduled termination and dismantling. And this is when the real lesson about art kicked in. As I returned each day, Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s achievement quickly began to lose its power. Due to the traffic of shoes and cars, after only a couple of days the brilliant light golden bridge began to look dreary. Dirt and fatigue rapidly settled around the neighborhood and dragged the atmosphere down with it. The crowds visiting the neighborhood grew accustomed to the sight of the massive cloth covering and went back to sleep. How fast the remarkable, strange, and novel becomes customary and forgotten. What had been an energized and rarified atmosphere surrounding a glorious, almost mystical, presence became just the opposite. It now almost seemed ugly. And so I began to recognize an even deeper truth: *the experience of art is ephemeral*. The experience cannot and does not endure in the same intensity. We go back to sleep. The alertness slackens, and we return to habit and somnambulism. The transience of the art experience is unavoidable because we are human. This is not a sad thing, but rather a true thing.

Each return to the bridge made it clearer that I needed to learn to embrace the paradox of the permanent versus the impermanent, to enjoy it, to practice it, to savor the moment, to celebrate the ephemeral and not to be afraid of it. Transience and time must be an ally rather than an enemy. The moments of contact and the intensity of sensations resulting from an artistic encounter may be profound and powerful, but they are temporary.

The art experience is an intimate moment caught in the rush of time. To be conscious of how time works, to appreciate its pressure and flexibility, to recognize the objective and subjective varieties of time, is to begin to grasp how it functions in art. Even though much

of the artistic process is unpredictable and erratic, you can choose an exact relationship and attitude toward time.

The essence of time as most concretely experienced is the continuous unbroken passage of existence. Ultimately, one cannot touch time. We grasp it with our minds, not our hands. We give it material form in various ways, like dots or numbers on a clock, or sundials, or electronic signals. A visible manifestation can represent time but is not time itself. Albert Einstein believed time flow is an illusion. He said, "The distinction between past, present and future is only an illusion, however persistent."

Objective time is the attempt to break down the experience of time in a measurable way. We say the show starts at 8 P.M. Despite our own mood changes and regardless of the differences between people's dispositions, 8 P.M. stays fixed. Subjective time is the human experience of time passing. The feeling of this continuous passage varies from person to person and depends on changing moods and interests. In therapy, for example, you may experience fifty minutes differently from your therapist.

The theater can uniquely and eloquently express subjective time. Alice falls down the rabbit hole. The logic of time and space alters. The D.N.A. of the art form is akin to dreaming. An entire play can happen inside of one instant of one person's lifetime. The theater is able to compress time in the way that trauma and dreams do. Dreams are largely nonlinear, condensed, and associative. A few moments of sleep time can contain complicated episodes and wild flights of storytelling. If done with rigor and without abandoning dramaturgical logic, theater can do the same, and audiences will follow the logic of a dream. And, like dream time, there is freedom of movement and mind. Time in this case, the personal or subjective time, has nothing to do with clock time.

Theater time can also express the accelerated state of the brain during a near death experience. It is possible to convey the ostensible life-passing-before-your-eyes occurrence using the poetic grammar of the stage. In 1892, the Swiss geologist Albert Heim examined the mental states of thirty people who had survived near-death falls in the Alps:

Mental activity became enormous, rising to a hundred-fold velocity. Time became greatly expanded... In many cases there followed a sudden review of the individual's entire past.

In the space of an evening in the theater, the experience of time can alter radically, veering from “hundred-fold velocity” to lingering slowness. Thoughts and associations can accelerate to superhuman speeds with leaps of imagination on both sides of the footlights and then slow to near standstill. Sensitivity to time and an awareness of its plasticity and elasticity are the first steps toward creating an effective journey for audiences. You cannot literally manipulate time, but you can influence perception of it. Time can appear to slow down, stop or speed up, depending upon the framework you set up. Like John Cage’s notion that something is only as loud as the silence on either side, the effect of slowness can be produced by parallel rapidity. The juxtaposition of slow and fast focuses each. Imagine an actor walking at a reduced speed from upstage center to downstage in a direct line. In contrast, other actors move swiftly by from left to right and from right to left. The quick sideways movement makes the steadily walking figure seem much slower.

During the 1970s I enjoyed visiting the art galleries that sprang up all around Soho in downtown New York City. One day I found a little back room in one of the galleries featuring a sculpture by Dennis Oppenheim that had a significant impact on the way I think about the use of time in art. The bare room was lit by one bulb hanging down in the middle of the space directly over a pedestal upon which a small human figure with a brass head and a felt suit and a cast-iron bell were positioned adjacent to one another. The room was still and quiet. Suddenly, the figure lurched forward and its head hit the bell producing a loud metallic clang. I stood trembling in the little room. The movement and the sound had completely surprised and disoriented me. And now the clothed figure and bell were still and quiet again. I knew that the brusque sound and movement would happen again. I felt the suspense of knowing what would happen but I didn’t know *when* it would occur. After about a minute, it did happen again. The head lurched forward and hit the bell. And the effect the second time was just as surprising. Next I decided to count so that I would know how long the silence would take before the next clang. I counted but even when I knew the duration of the stillness, the sound and impact still surprised me.

Oppenheim’s sculpture, entitled *Attempt to Raise Hell* (1974), showed me the power of time treated with specificity. Time treated precisely

becomes subjective rather than measured, clock time. Subjective time is flexible in the way that clock time cannot be. While sitting in a car at a stoplight, for example, the time between the red and green lights can feel endless. Three minutes in a boxing ring is eternity. The duration seems endless. Within subjective time, events may swirl by quickly or slow to a crawl, depending upon the context or routine or newness of the experience.

A sense of the special quality of time is an essential tool in the creative process. Hannah Arendt describes the art experience as,

A timeless region, an eternal presence in complete quiet, lying beyond human clocks and calendars altogether...the quiet of the Now in the time-pressed, time-tossed existence of man... This small non-time space in the very heart of time.

There are many aspects and subsets of time: the internal clock, the individual's fated time on earth, the changing times within relationships and endeavors, the timelessness of sleep and dreaming and the times to act and times to be still, breath time, responsiveness in time, and so on. A natural respect for and sensitivity to time as well as exactitude in handling it will help to generate work with presence.

A paradox lies at the heart of cultivating an effective relationship to time. Although time is indeed a precious and limited commodity, it should never provoke hurry. Imagine the restricted period of a rehearsal or performance as an hourglass. You tip the hourglass over, and time is suddenly finite, pressurized, and critical. And yet the sand floats down through one glass funnel into the other with lightness and ease. A rehearsal or performance is like this. The time is finite but you do not panic, rather, you slow down, moments open up, and you relish the discoveries. The beauty is in the finiteness of the shared time. It is a different kind of time. It is, in a way, a lifetime, measured in a different currency. The rapture of time should be intensified by its brief duration.

The music group Fountains of Wayne wrote a song entitled "All Kinds of Time" about a young quarterback on a football team in the midst of losing to the opposing defense. The clock is running down, and he is under immense personal pressure to perform. Suddenly, he realizes that, in fact, he has all the time in the world. In an instant,

everything makes sense. He does not panic. He simply alters his own attitude toward time. He sees that, in fact, he has “all kinds of time:”

He takes a step back,
He's under attack,
He knows that no one can touch him now,
He seems so at ease,
A strange inner peace,
Is all that he's feeling somehow.
He's got all kinds of time,
He's got all kinds of time,
All kinds of time...

Approach the creative act with a respect for the finite nature of available time. But at the same time, cultivate intentional slowness. Speed up and slow down simultaneously. Within the pressure of limited time, try to work with the feeling that there is all the time in the world. Be alive and awake inside of this paradox.

Before my diagnosis of breast cancer in 1988, I had accepted a fully tenured endowed chair at the University of California in San Diego. Prior to the cancer verdict, I struggled over the decision about moving to southern California, but my thoughts reflected a cavalier attitude: “Well, life is long—I am only thirty-seven years old—so, well, why not?” The offer, a research position with only half-time teaching, seemed like a fine thing to do.

After my treatment and a good prognosis, I headed to La Jolla, California. But internally, everything had changed. I found myself driving on the bleak freeways of southern California wondering why I had accepted the job. All of a sudden, life did not feel so long and luxurious. I understood from the cancer experience that life is indeed precious and that it is finite. I quit the position in San Diego and embarked wholeheartedly on a series of what felt like more essential adventures. Since that time, I do nothing that I do not feel deeply connected to.

The theater can straddle many kinds of time in a single production. From fictional time to real time, subjective time, linear time, nonlinear time, time suspended, time stopped, time sped up, a life-time in an instant, rehearsal time, performance time, and so on, each

segment requires the appropriate time signature. In a similar way that the palm of every hand has a unique pattern of lines and creases, a work of art contains an independent logic of time and space. How do you find this logic? Like a musician in the heat of playing, you have to feel rather than think about it. Cultivate the capacity to improvise with time.

Sensitivity to issues of duration and tempo facilitates articulation in time. Changing the tempo of an action can radically alter its meaning and affect. The playwright Eugène Ionesco once said, “If you want to turn tragedy into comedy, speed it up.” In contrast, changing to a slower tempo can make certain information which is invisible at “normal” speeds obvious.

Experiments conducted by child psychologist Daniel Stern at Columbia University during the 1960s had a profound effect on the work of director Robert Wilson. Stern made over 300 films of mothers picking up their children from the time of birth to the age of three weeks. The mothers reach down and pick up their crying babies to comfort them. When the films run at normal speed, say twenty-four frames a second, the mothers appear loving and nurturing. Dr. Stern discovered that when he slowed the films down and examined them frame by frame, the mothers seemed to be lunging at their babies, who in turn responded with terror. The mothers protested, “But I love my child! I am going to the child to comfort the child.” It seems, however, that it is not so simple.

Particularly fascinated by how the dynamics between mother and child changed radically every three or four frames, Wilson created many large-scale works, including *The Life and Times of Joseph Stalin*, *The Life and Times of Sigmund Freud* and *Letter to Queen Victoria*, which explored the complications and richness inherent within a miniscule interaction. These early works stretched over massive amounts of time, slowing down each interaction to open up and reveal the mysteries of the diminutive magnified on a large stage.



We are moving at a crazy rate now—I think that’s good, but sometimes we have to slow down. Most theater is speeded-up time—everything is concentrated. It’s hard to stand off and

think. Of course, it's hard to think any time during the day. That's an adjustment too—we're not used to having time to think, as audiences or actors. In my pieces everything is slowed down. If it's going to take me five minutes to pick up a spoon, first of all it's going to be painful just to control it. But what happens with my awareness of my body as I do it?

(Robert Wilson)



Speed works best in conjunction with opposition. For example, for an actor to perform slow physical movement, it is necessary to speed up considerably on the inside. This is the central paradox that an actor understands and must practice. To be still onstage demands an internal acceleration of speed and energy in the body. On the other hand, moving quickly demands a concomitant interior stillness.

In a rehearsal, the pressure is on to create, find solutions, and make discoveries within a finite period of time. This pressure feels either exquisite or unbearable, depending upon your relationship or attitude toward time. Opposition is needed here too. Pressure can render you stupid and make you rush. Do not let that happen. If you treat pressure as an ally, you are more likely to craft differentiated moments that breathe. Begin each rehearsal with an awareness of the clock ticking but intentionally slow down rather than speed up. With this attitude, you will find that you need exactly as much time as you have.

The conductor Otto Klemperer described the importance of letting the orchestra “breathe” rather than being strangled by the pressure of time. The issue, he insisted, was to allow the musicians to play in rhythms natural to themselves rather than being constantly orchestrated by the conductor. The orchestra finds a pluralistic space together, full of diversity inside of one time signature. This is what I imagine democracy can be: multiplicity within a unified vision.

Imagine art as the space at the end of a breath before the next inhalation. Time stops. An actor knows that each inhalation can come as a surprise. When an audience begins to breathe with an actor, they enter into the actor's time signature. The actor plays with the audience's ease and expectations by truly being in the moment and becoming innocent of the future. Even though the lines are memorized

and the scene is intricately staged, the actor finds a state of being where even the period at the end of a sentence comes as a surprise. This paradox of artifice and innocence is the tightrope of the artistic process.

Invited to attend a thesis production at Yale University by the young director Juliet Carrillo, I traveled up to New Haven, Connecticut to see her show. I arrived for an afternoon performance in the big University Theatre with a full house including people of all ages. Juliet had adapted a Jorge Luis Borges novel for the stage. The production moved slowly and gracefully through the afternoon. The actors took their time, and to me it was a special South American time signature, unhurried and yet distilled and essential. I relaxed and enjoyed the experience. The lead actor lumbered up and down a long stairway, across the stage or upper balcony and eventually arrived where he was headed. But the time felt right, good, and appropriate. No hurry. The audience also responded with patience and an appreciation for being together in the theater throughout the afternoon.

On the train back to Manhattan, I thought about what a radical feat Juliet Carrillo had achieved with her production. She managed to create a space and time with its own inner logic and rigor, not an imitation of anything else. She found a vehicle for Borges' vision and world that felt true to the writing. She had found the correct time signature for the piece.

How do you handle the ever-accelerating pace of the world we inhabit? What do you do with Internet time and MTV time? Do you try to surpass the speed of MTV? This is a particular problem for young directors raised on MTV, because there is an assumption that MTV speed sets the standard for how fast things must move these days. Speed is seductive. It takes great courage and conviction to slow down and to ask an audience to do so also.

Near the beginning of Krzysztof Kieslowski's film *Blue*, Juliette Binoche, who plays a woman cut off from her immediate world, has just rejected a man in love with her. She is sitting in a café and looks down at her coffee cup. In extreme close-up, she lowers a sugar cube into the coffee. The cube soaks in the coffee, turning the white cube brown. In a documentary about the film, Kieslowski explained that this moment is pivotal because it allows the audience into the

woman's point of view, her isolation, and emotional state. Kieslowski felt that it should take five seconds, no less and no more, for the black coffee to saturate the cube as an expression of the woman's state. Most sugar cubes take eight seconds to be saturated. Others take three. Kieslowski's assistant spent an entire day trying to find the right sugar cube for this brief moment in the film.

When you watch the film, time changes in those five seconds. A door opens and eternity presents itself in the internal life of the character. Kieslowski's exactitude and sensitivity to the audience's experience of time informed his choice of the five-second duration. The exquisite pressure put around those five seconds is what makes it a concentrated expression of an eternal state rather than a random daily-life moment. The time, which seems to stop, is made essential by the attention given to it.



Time is what stops everything from happening at once.

(John Wheeler)



An artwork is a pressurized microcosm of a life. Consider a poem, for example, and the page upon which it lies, as an entire lifetime, including conception, birth, lifespan, and death. The poem has its own logic, language, laws, and anarchy. Resembling nothing outside of it, needing no reference point, the poem is a universe unto itself. William Carlos Williams wrote a poem entitled "This Is Just to Say:"

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox

and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

Forgive me
 they were delicious
 so sweet
 and so cold

(William Carlos Williams)

Within the space of the poem, Williams encapsulates the forgiveness and possibility inherent in a relationship. He plays with the senses and with the reader's expectations to create a time capsule to send to future generations.

A painting, too, can be complete unto itself, an object as universe. A symphony or a dance piece or a play creates an entire world within a finite time frame. Within each universe, time alters, and what is revealed is nothing less than eternity.

I heard an interview on National Public Radio with a jazz pianist who, due to a painful muscle disease, can only play his instrument once a month. It takes him four weeks to recuperate from the ache and stress caused by playing for twenty minutes. The musician's friends set up recording equipment inside his studio so that whenever he plays, the results are taped for posterity. When asked how he manages to practice, the pianist explained that he trains every single day for many hours in his head. He prepares mentally for the select moments of actual piano playing. These moments, for him, are golden.

The radio interview ended with a brief performance. The interviewer expressed regret that the pianist was to suffer for weeks after playing for the radio audience. The musician insisted that he was prepared and did indeed want to play. And then he played. I am struck by the musician's special relationship to the time that he plays the piano. These moments are not profligate. He does not waste time. What would happen if we approached our art with a deep respect for the special nature of time? Would this help to "make the music more intense?"

It seems remarkable to me that the greatest lessons that I have learned about time come from visual artists. Painting and sculptures are supposed to live outside of time. But in fact, they address the issue of time head on.

The minimalist sculptor Richard Serra makes huge monoliths of steel that seem to defy time. His series of *Torqued Ellipses* (1996–1999), for example, gigantic plates of towering steel, bent and curved, lean

in and out, carving private spaces from the large public sites in which they have been erected. The experience of walking through the space between the ellipses is to feel your own transitory impermanence in relation to the seemingly permanent and eternal metallic shapes. The experience is physical and it is visceral. The metal walls are monumental, and yet they also seem to teeter as though they could tip violently over at any moment. It is the apparent permanence of the work and the illusion of danger that sheds light on the impermanent.

Serra's large-scale metal sculptures oxidize over time. The patina, the rust, is a chemical reaction. Part of the conception of these pieces is how they will continue to rust and change with time. Permanence and impermanence are the object and subtext.

The issues of time and eternity, permanence and impermanence, duration and mortality, all seem to come together in the work of contemporary British environmental artist Andy Goldsworthy. Since the late 1970s, Goldsworthy has been making site-specific works using landscape and nature itself as a "found object"—as both the subject and raw material of his sculptures. He collaborates with nature to make his creations. Besides England and Scotland, he has created work at the North Pole, in Japan, the Australian Outback, and in the U.S.A.

Goldsworthy regards all his creations as temporary. The paradox of his work is its apparently temporary nature made eternal because of the ancient materials he chooses. He generally works with whatever he notices: water, twigs, leaves, stones, snow and ice, reeds and thorns. For example, he makes a pattern of ice that, after he has photographed it, melts. He says that his goal is to understand nature by directly participating in nature as intimately as he can. His cheerfulness in the face of the temporary is monumental. He reflects back the transience that he finds in nature. Of his sculpture *Storm King Wall* (1998–1999) he says:

Eventually when it falls down, whether that happens in 15 years or 300 years, it will be a tumbled-down line in the ground. I like that idea, of a faint trace left in the land... Each work grows, stays, decays. Process and decay are implicit. Transience in my work reflects what I find in nature.

As a young director I squandered time in rehearsal. Afraid to interfere with the process, aware only that I did not know enough to offer an opinion or contribute anything, I sat paralyzed in silence and watched the actors improvise. Then, of course, the dreaded moment came, close to opening, when I realized that nothing was decided. Suddenly I had to leap into action. Under the pressure of time, I let go of my insecurities, trusted my instincts, worked intuitively and came up with a show at the last moment. The creative work for me began at a very late moment in the process. In frustration, I asked myself, "Why not begin the creative process earlier?"

Around that same time, in 1981, invited to direct a parade in Northampton, Massachusetts, I accepted the job with the caveat that I could reverse the normal rules of a parade so that rather than the audience being on the sidewalks and the performers on the street, the audience would walk down the streets while the performances happened in shop windows, parking lots, and rooftops along the way. I also offered to produce a new play each night for the ten evenings leading up to the big parade date of August 10th. I promised that if audiences showed up at a particular park in the middle of town at 8 P.M. each evening beginning the first day of August, they would be offered a unique theatrical journey.

I organized a group of local actors, dancers, writers, and artists who promised to participate both in the parade and in the ten preview pieces, which we named "flashes." Everything proceeded smoothly in the parade preparation during the weeks leading up to August 1st. At 5 P.M. on August 1st, the ensemble of about thirty artist-volunteers showed up, and we began to construct the evening's performance. For each "flash" I had prepared a theme and a structure and knew that, say, on this particular day, in addition to the ensemble of artists, we would have a belly-dancing troupe, two horses and permission to use the coal hills at the edge of town. I divided the thirty or so volunteers into small workgroups and gave them each tasks to create certain sections of the performance. We needed to be ready with a show by the time the audience arrived at 8 P.M. At 6:30 the groups would show the pieces they had made and I began to give directions, putting the entire event together into a cohesive whole. We made a play each night in two and a half hours. Required to work at top speed, it was necessary to slow down inside. I had to trust

intuition and act on it moment by moment. This, I finally realized, is the creative process. There can be no hesitation, only connection. Time is a partner rather than an enemy.

In the process of making work quickly, I learned to slow down. I saw my previous habit of inaction during rehearsal as simple procrastination and fear. By accepting the incredibly short creative periods to accomplish work, I learned to embrace rather than avoid the creative flow. From that time on, even with a long rehearsal process, I try to put the same pressure into the process as I did with the “flashes.” My intention is to connect from a deep place to the task and to be decisive from the imbalance of not really knowing anything. I do not put the creative crisis off until tomorrow.

At Columbia University, along with director Brian Kulick, I oversee the graduate directing program. During the first year of training we insist that the directors cast, design, and stage two full productions per week with very little technical support. Usually, by the third week the directors feel drained and desperate. Their customary menagerie of director tricks is, by now, used up. Under the pressure of the intense schedule and the inherent difficulties and obstacles of putting up work in such an environment, the directors finally buckle down and start to work in the present moment, responding with the necessary courage to the task at hand, using whatever wit, muscles, courage, and skill they can conjure. They learn to slow down inside and to make room for innovation inside of a very finite objective time pressure.

Time is a vital ingredient in the recipe for making art, a partner rather than an enemy in the process of making the music more intense. The treatment of context, articulation, intention, attention, magnetism, attitude, and content are all contingent to your relationship to time—the time of a project, the time span of a relationship, your time on earth, and so on. The art of time is intuitive. Sense when to wait and when to plunge, and be brave enough to articulate in the face of transient experience. If you hesitate, you will miss the boat. You cannot force things to happen at a particular time, but you can prepare and pave the way for the eventuality of expression in the same way that you pave the way for visits of inspiration in your daily life: you create the proper conditions and circumstances. And then, you act.



I would like a clock for myself
because
sometimes it seems to me
my life is going by so quickly
and I don't know what is happening
I think
if I could slow it down
I would notice it
I would feel OK about it
before it's gone.

(Charles L. Mee Jr.)