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How to Incite Audiences and Engage Actors: Environmental Theatre and the Second Circle

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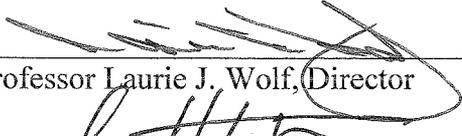
How to Incite Audiences and Engage Actors:
Environmental Theatre and the Second Circle

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Department of Theatre, Speech, and Dance from
The College of William and Mary

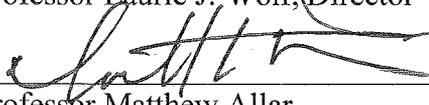
by

Larissa Anne Kruesi

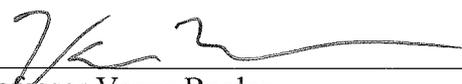
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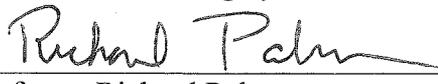
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Abstract

Environmental theatre removes many conventional expectations between actors and audience members and adds an element of surprise and unknown to a theatrical experience that affects all participants, whether they have rehearsed for two months or just joined the cast for that single night. Using scenic design to manipulate the audience, the director and actors are able to incorporate the audience into the performance, and immerse them into the action of the play. For the actors, the audience serves a second role of not only spectator, but also fellow actor. Each night, the actors are faced with new scene partners, and because they cannot predict or anticipate how the audience will affect their performance, the play is in a permanent state of evolution.

Applying Patsy Rodenburg's theory of the "Three Circles of Energy" to the actors' performance experience, I will observe how second circle contributes to an environmental theatre production and how the knowledge of the three circles affects the actors' performances, particularly their focus and their preparation. Using the actors' and the audience's feedback after each performance, I will learn how the rehearsal process prepared or did not prepare the actors for performances and how the audience perceived their role in the production.

Introduction

During the summer of 2010, my aunt sent me several articles about a couple of shows in London and several fringe shows in Edinburgh that took audiences on a physical, as well as narrative, journey by manipulating setting and audience seating. The first article, by Ben Brantley, described the English National Opera and Punchdrunk's production of *The Duchess of Malfi*, where scenes of the opera occurred in different rooms and the audience had to choose which characters to follow and which scenes to watch, and a production entitled *You Me Bum Bum Train*, created by Kate Bond and Morgan Lloyd, that takes audiences on a ride where they are forced to participate in the action until they signal to the actors that they want to stop (Brantley). The second article, by Steven McElroy, included several shows, such as *Roadkill*, *Sub Rosa*, and *The Author*, which all incorporated audience manipulation into their productions through scenic design (McElroy).

I was intrigued by these design choices as to how and why each show chose to execute their productions in such a provocative manner and was inspired to consider what working on a production like these would be like. I began to investigate guerilla and environmental theatre to discover how each theatrical form affected the audience and what would be involved in producing each type of production. From my research I discovered that guerilla theatre involves actors performing typically political pieces for an unsuspecting audience in a random location. The actors surround audiences without permission or prior knowledge of the performance. Environmental theatre focuses more on using the set design to manipulate and incorporate audiences into the production and provides for audience interaction.

Ultimately, I decided to pursue environmental theatre. Guerilla theatre did not allow for enough control over the audience and appears to focus more on promoting a politically based message towards the audiences, rather than incorporating them into the performance. Audiences are not given the choice as to whether or not they want to view the play and the “in-your-face quality” (Sierz) of the design, while supporting the goal of promoting a political message, places more weight and power with the actors than with the audience.

What attracted me to environmental theatre was the chance to allow audiences to live in the play with the actors. Instead of distancing spectators, it includes them, and provides a new understanding about the characters, the play, and the setting. There appears to be a balance where the actors are sharing their experiences with the audience and the audience can respond and contribute to their experience. The audience becomes an additional character in the production, but a character that is unpredictable and which changes every performance. Environmental theatre focuses on sharing with the audience to entice a change in them, instead of shouting at an audience to force a change.

Reading these news articles emphasized how little I knew about environmental theater and made me realize that I had never had the opportunity to experience such a production. I thought that directing an environmental theatre production would be interesting and different, partially because William and Mary Theatre typically uses either a proscenium or thrust stage design for their productions. I wanted to offer an unfamiliar piece of theater for the campus and the community, while learning more about the genre.

In the summer of 2011, while studying at Guildhall School of Music and Drama, I encountered Patsy Rodenburg's theory of the "Three Circles of Energy," which describes three types of human interaction. According to Rodenburg, living and performing in the second circle of energy equates with engaging others and being fully aware of yourself and your surroundings, helping people to make more personal connections. I was intrigued by how this theory might relate to environmental theatre, and planned to incorporate exercises which supported the theory into rehearsals.

Over the course of a four week rehearsal process, I rehearsed with five actors to stage a production of Annie Baker's *Circle Mirror Transformation* as an environmental theatre piece. My goal during the rehearsal process was to educate the actors about Rodenburg's theory, as well as environmental theatre, and then find ways to apply her theory to their performance. Rehearsals focused on encouraging the actors, through a series of games and exercises, to engage with one another in second circle and ultimately creating an ensemble that was prepared to engage each spectator and anticipate the unpredictable nature of the audience. By reinforcing the importance of second circle as an enabling tool for the actors to connect with the audience, I hoped that each actor would be able to engage the audience members on a personal level, transforming the audience into additional students in Marty's class. During performances we learned how effective second circle can be with certain audiences, but also the effectiveness of the actors being in second circle with one another, regardless of the attitude of the audience. There were several shows where the actors were able to connect with the audience in second circle, and several shows where they could not, but because the actors were in second circle with

each other for every performance, the audience always felt engaged and included in the play, which will be discussed further in Chapter Four.

Chapter One An Introduction and History of Environmental Theatre

It is 1968, and while you are sitting in the audience in the Performing Garage in New York City, which has been transformed into an ancient Greek theatre with constructed towers of Thebes, Dionysus tells you about his birth. Following his description, you then watch his birth through a canal of naked women standing in a line with their legs spread over naked men lying face down. When Dionysus emerges, he “rolls into the lap of the closest spectator” and then there is a dance of celebration where audience members willing to participate join the actors until the dance “becomes ecstatic” (Shank 96). If you were sitting in this audience in 1968, you were experiencing the first environmental theatre production produced by The Performing Group.

Environmental theatre is a theatrical ideology or philosophy where, instead of building a set to represent the play’s location on a stage with the audience separated from the playing space, the play’s location is actually constructed for the production with audience seating built into the set or the play is adapted for that specific venue. For example, an environmental theatre production of Tina Howe’s *Coastal Disturbances* would be performed on a beach, Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* would be performed in a forest or a constructed but realistic forest, specific scenes in Chekhov’s *The Seagull* would be performed in the forest with an added make-shift stage, and Lawrence and Lee’s *Inherit the Wind* would be performed in a courtroom. Performance spaces are found, transformed, or built to completion, and the audience seating is molded to become part of the set. Possibly in an environmental theatre production of *Inherit the Wind*, the audience would be seated in the courtroom as community members or the jury and in *Coastal Disturbances* they would be beach-goers, seated on towels. Environmental

theatre offers an audience member multiple opportunities to participate in the play with the characters and places them on a level playing field with the actors.

Schechner's production of *Dionysus in 69* involved a built theatrical space, with constructed set pieces creating a complete environment, but other theatre companies that rely on found space, also referred to as site-specific theatres, find a pre-existing street or building or room and perform with minimal changes to the environment. Depending on a theatre company's goals and resources, site-specific/found spaces or created spaces can be more effective and economical. Anne Hamburger, founder and artistic director of En Garde Arts, a site-specific theatre company, produced plays from 1985 through 1999, including well-known pieces and new plays written "specifically- or, rather site-specifically –for that space" (Gussow, "Peripatetic"). Her productions include Charles L. Mee Jr.'s *Orestes* performed at the old piers near the Penn Station rail yards on the West Side of Manhattan in 1993 (Gussow, "Making Theater") and *Crowbar* at the Victory Theater in 1990 about a ghost story of the building's past (Gussow, "Making It"). Architect Hugh Hardy explained that En Garde's productions make "people aware of the city, [make] them respond to places" and "it uses environmental art as an instrument of social commentary" (Gussow, "Making It"), demonstrating that En Garde's use of site-specific productions rather than built sets is meant to support their artistic goals. Most of En Garde's production received positive reviews, with their production of *Father Was a Peculiar Man* by Reza Abdoh and Mira-Lani Oglesby praised for "what is finally so winning about the show...is its sheer vitality. The performances are as large and passionate as the audacity of the conception" (Holden, "Carnival") and their production of Charles L. Mee, Jr.'s *Another Person is a Foreign Country* was complimented because

it “makes a strong theatrical impact” (Holden, “In Decayed“). En Garde Arts’s reviews indicate that their use of found space was effective for audiences and supported their productions to make them successful.

Transformed space is the middle ground between a found space (defined as a nontheatrical space) and a constructed space. Schechner explains that “it is possible sometimes to make just a few modifications to a found space so that a performance may more effectively ‘take place’ there” (Schechner, *Environmental* xxxvi). If necessary, a found space can be slightly altered to provide certain requirements for a show.

Particularly for settings which have many of the desired qualities for a production but lack a few small details, such as a lamp or a ladder, these pieces can be added to make the building or room or street a transformed space.

Elements of environmental theatre date as far back as Ancient Greek theatre, and the progression of Italian Carnival and Balinese cockfighting over the centuries between Ancient Greece and the twentieth-century contributed to the development of environmental theatre in the 1960s. Drawing upon certain aspects and methods used during these theatrical events, environmental theatre combined the use of space and the integration of the audience to become an interactive, unique theatrical experience.

Greek Origins

Ancient Greek theatre was designed as a collective community experience where individuals could comment on society and life through the performance and with fellow audience members and actors. Their “audiences included a few women, boys, and slaves, but were predominately adult males” (Butler 69) and “about one-eighth of the estimated

155,000 citizen, slave, and alien resident population of Periclean Athens in 430 B.C. was in attendance on any one day of a dramatic festival” (Butler 70). Theatre was an important aspect of Greek culture and life and appealed to a significant portion of the Greek population. During performances, audiences “were caught up in a feverish excitement, an intense interest in the outcome of the various contests” and “their volatility and enthusiasm were more characteristic of present-day football and baseball spectators than of the quiet, decorous, often passive demeanor exhibited by our theatre audiences” (Butler 69). The audience was invested in each play and performance and vocalized their reactions and responses without retribution or limitation. Rather than an isolated audience voyeuristically viewing a play, the audience was involved and passionately responded to the actors and action on stage. Contributing to the lively audience was the use of “direct address to the audience and the *parabasis* (when the chorus spoke as a body to the audience) in Old Comedy which was concerned with political matters,” and most likely “elicited especially sharp vocal reactions from members in the audience” (Butler 69). By dealing with political issues and directly addressing specific audience members, Greek theatre became provocative and did not allow for a passive audience. The actors encouraged the audience to participate and interact with them, allowing the audience to become a part of the world of the play. Greek theatre also had natural lighting and this design further encouraged “theatre [to produce] active spectators” because “the players could see the audience and, more important, the audience could see itself” so “it was conscious of its own presence” causing “the very form of the theater” to be “reminiscent of the places of public assembly and induced the same responses” with the audience, “free to comment, assist, and

intervene” (Arnott 17). Similar to Shakespeare’s plays at The Globe centuries later, the familiarity between the spectators and the actors provided a comfort and openness which allowed the audience to interact with the actors and to comment on the play. There was an open communication amongst all people who attended and participated in the performance.

The encouragement of active and open communication amongst spectators and actors would later apply to the construction of environmental theatre productions. In those productions, audiences and actors are all visible to one another and are free to interact, which allows for an open dialogue between all people involved in the performance.

Continuing With Carnival

Building upon the principle of active spectators and expanding upon it, carnival during the late Middle Ages also contributed lively performance elements to the creation of environmental theatre. Beginning as a multi-day celebration during the Middle Ages, several centuries passed before the practices of carnival were applied to a theatrical movement.

A tradition that is still practiced today, although it has since transformed and adapted to modern society, carnival was a festival that occurred prior to Lent as a final celebration before people were denied certain pleasures for a month. During the festival, there was a “suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions” (Bakhtin 10). Every rule was temporarily nullified and life became a topsy-turvy revelry. Seemingly, no one was in authority, although the church sanctioned the event, but the

lack of an immediate disciplinarian meant there was no one to enforce laws or accepted social behaviors. For the time, everyone could enjoy total and complete freedom.

Within society, carnival allowed people to abandon their usual personae and experience the liberation of a community without order or structure. The “medieval man...led two lives...one official... beholden to strict hierarchical order...the other of carnival and the public place, free...familiar contact with everybody and everything” (Todorov 78). Carnival created equality amongst communities, where everyone was free to interact with each other regardless of their social or economic status. Society normally forced the lower class citizens to become invisible to the upper classes, but during carnival, there were no superior classes or authority figures to reinforce the strict class structure. In conventional theatre set-ups, the fourth wall encourages the actors to ignore the audience and establishes the audience as observers, like an inferior class, spectators looking in without being a part of the play. This arrangement gives the actors a sense of superiority over the audience, because the performers experience what the audience can only view voyeuristically.

Beginning as early as Greek theatre and continuing today, formal theatre settings enforced social class, with upper class members possessing the best seats-both in terms of comfort and visibility-and with lower classes filling in the remaining seats. All “privileged persons (priests, archons, generals, high officials, public benefactors, and visiting notables) were granted seats of honor in all Greek theatres” while “the general public always sat on backless benches” (Butler 70), and at the Theatre of Dionysus in Greece, “67 special seats or thrones, each bearing the name of the priest or high official for whom it was reserved, were arranged in the front row facing the orchestra” (Butler

34). With a single stationary stage, the Greeks could identify the best seats in the audience and reserve them for citizens of importance. During carnival, there was no “best” seat because the action and the actors were constantly moving, and everyone had the opportunity to view the action anywhere they chose and to participate in any of the on-going festivities. The nature of carnival can be observed in the 1939 film version of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, directed by William Dieterle, where the opening scene is set during the Feast of Fools. While priests and nobles have stationary seats built above the street and can observe all spectators and actors below, common people on the ground are free to move with the action of the parades and shows. There are stages raised above the street, but spectators have the freedom to move around the stage and are not confined to a single seat. With the excitement of carnival occurring all around and constantly moving, everyone had an opportunity to observe the action, participate, and to interact with the actors and comment on the performances and plays.

The equality created by carnival was enforced by the activities of the festival. Bakhtin explains that “carnival does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators...carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people” (Bakhtin 7). Every person who attends carnival serves the dual role of actor and spectator. There are no physical or societal barriers to separate people into different classes or groups; each person is on the same social level and contributes their presence and their actions to the festival. Environmental theatre also eliminates the differentiation between actors and spectators, with the audience physically incorporated into the play and allowing each person to

interact with the actors. During carnival, everyone lived the experience, and during an environmental theatre performance, everyone lives within the world of the play.

For Medieval men and women, “carnival [was] the people’s second life, organized on the basis of laughter,” which created an alternate “festive life” (Bakhtin 8). The suspension of laws and all established orders provided for a distinct second world, founded on liberty and pleasure, but this lifestyle was temporary, like a theatre performance. During carnival, everyone was an equal participant, but after the festivities were over, social orders again shaped communities and authoritative figures regained their power. Peasants and members of the working class would have the memory of being equals and interacting with those who were usually their superiors, but after carnival ended, they returned to the reality of their lowly status and had to acknowledge the normalcy of this reality.

Because laws and expectations were temporarily suspended during carnival, life became unpredictable and unpremeditated. The “carnival experience ‘sought a dynamic expression; it demanded ever changing, playful, undefined forms’” (Bakhtin 11). Contributing to the lively and exciting activities of carnival, people could use their freedom in any way, which meant that almost anything could happen. The element of surprise and total unpredictability created a unique and constantly changing atmosphere. As an annual event, Carnival became a ritual, and at the same time every year, peasants, nobles, and clergy could anticipate a period of freedom and equality. Traditions and expectations were established and as people grew accustomed to the rules of Carnival, they could anticipate this period of merriment and excitement once a year.

Another ancient tradition, Balinese cockfighting, can assist with describing the phenomena of carnival and environmental theatre. In Bali, “the cockfight, and especially deep cockfight, is fundamentally a dramatization of status concerns” (Geertz 437). Although a performance, a number of the spectators also have a significant investment in the outcome of the fight. The cocks fighting represent their owners, and depending on which cock wins the fight, their owner’s social status can increase or decrease for the duration of that brief performance. Similar to “any art form...the cockfight renders ordinary, everyday experience comprehensible by presenting it in terms of acts and objects which have had their practical consequences removed and been reduced...to the level of sheer appearances” and “catches up...themes” such as “death, masculinity, rage, loss” and “puts a construction on them” and “makes them...meaningful” (Geertz 443-444). Cockfighting displays the struggle for social class and the rivalry amongst families within the Balinese community. The entire community can watch two families fight for status by attending a cockfight. Like theatre, social concerns and issues are placed on a stage for communities to observe and comment upon, and can affect the spectator’s views of each issue.

When Clifford Geertz visited Bali to observe cockfighting, he noted how “each match is a world unto itself” (Geertz 445). While the two cocks are fighting, all other activities and aspects of life are put on hold and everyone becomes invested in the match. For that time, everyone enters a different world with different expectations and rules and everyone is involved as a spectator of the fight. Assuming elements of ritual drama, which Schechner describes as being able to “absorb the whole attention and energies of a town without calling for any special construction” (Schechner, *Environmental* 23),

cockfighting can occur anywhere at any time without any planning, and become a temporary alternative world. The cockfight becomes a ritual, a world separate from everyday life, but one with commonly acknowledged rules and expectations. During “such gatherings” people “meet and disperse; the participants in them fluctuate; the activity that focuses them is discrete – a particular process that reoccurs rather than a continuous one that endures” (Geertz 424). The world of cockfighting is loose and flexible, open to any participants without discrimination or requirements. Once the match ends, this world dissolves, although “a shadow of the experience no doubt remains with the principals,” and Geertz compares the experience to “when we leave the theatre after seeing a powerful play well-performed; but it quite soon fades to become at most a schematic memory” because “any expressive form lives only in its own present-the one it itself creates” (Geertz 445). The experience of watching a performance is temporary, because once the show ends, all aspects of life that had been suspended are then reinstated and actors and spectators have to return to reality. While the cockfight lasts, the Balinese are absorbed in the action, but as soon as one cock defeats the other, the audience returns to their everyday lives.

Cockfighting supports Bali’s relationship with theatre. Schechner comments that “theater in Bali accompanies everyday life” because “there is no time out for theatre,” instead “to the Balinese theater happens anytime, anywhere, and its gestures are continuous with the rest of living” (Schechner, *Environmental* 22). When a cockfight begins, everyday life is suspended, but the setting is not altered or changed to allow for the cockfight. The performance is part of everyday life and can occur anywhere, converting the street or home or store into a found space.

Many of the elements seen in carnival and Balinese cockfighting can also be observed in environmental theatre performance. The unknown and unpredictable aspect of the audience during carnival evokes a different show for every performance, which also occurs during an environmental theatre production. The play maintains its vivacity because the actor and audience interaction is always changing and there is always a chance for an unexpected incident or event to occur during the performance. Both cockfighting and carnival create a second world that spectators invest and live in, which can also be experienced by audiences who attend an environmental theatre performance.

Richard Schechner and Environmental Theatre

Richard Schechner, currently a professor of Performance Studies at Tisch School of the Arts, is considered to be the founder of the environmental theatre movement. He began experimenting with the New Orleans Group in 1964 (Schechner xi) and in 1967 formed The Performance Group in New York City to continue experimenting with various theatrical practices, including environmental theatre (Shank 93). While working with the New Orleans Group, Schechner began to develop the “Six Axioms for Environmental Theater,” which he defines as his “first full statement regarding environmental theater” (Schechner xvii). In Schechner’s introduction to the revised edition of *Environmental Theater*, he explains that “the axioms came out of historical research and [his] practical work with the New Orleans Group” (Schechner xvii).

Schechner’s Six Axioms for Environmental Theater are:

1. The theatrical event is a set of related transactions.
2. All the space is used for the performance.
3. The theatrical event can take place either in a totally transformed space or in “Found Space.”

4. Focus is flexible and variable.
5. All production elements speak their own language.
6. The text need be neither of the starting point nor the goal of a production. There may be no verbal text at all. (Schechner ix-xlv)

To explain Axiom one, Schechner uses a broad definition for theatre, describing a theatrical event as including “audience, performers, scenario or dramatic text...performance text, sensory stimuli, architectural enclosure or some kind of space demarcation, production equipment, technicians, and [occasionally] house personnel” (Schechner, *Environmental* xix). Depending on the production, all or some of these elements can be involved and interact with one another during a theatrical event.

Expanding upon Axiom two, when Schechner worked with the New Orleans Group on Ionesco’s *Victims of Duty*, he noticed “that the audience pressed in during intense scenes and moved away when the action became broad or violent” but “usually they willingly gave way to performers and reoccupied areas after the action passed,” which demonstrates his second Axiom with “the exchange of space between performers and spectators” (Schechner, *Environmental* xxix). The actors and audiences are free to explore the performance space, and as they interact with one another they transform the space throughout the production. For the performance space there are two options: either “all the space [is] ‘designed,’ in which the environment [is] an organic transformation of one space” (Schechner, *Environmental* xxxii) or “the very opposite of such a total transformation of space” which is “found space...typically found outdoors or in public buildings that can be transformed” (Schechner, *Environmental* xxxiv). There is also the possibility of “combin[ing] the principles of transformed and found space” and “to make just a few modifications to a found space so that a performance may more effectively ‘take shape’ there” (Schechner, *Environmental* xxxvi). For *Victims of Duty*, “a large

room...at New Orleans' Le Petit Theatre de Vieux Carré was transformed into the Chouberts' living-room" (Schechner, *Environmental* xxxiii). The New Orleans Group altered the room in the theatre completely to create an entire, detailed living room, but if the designers had wanted to use a found space, they could have performed the play in a pre-existing house. Where orthodox theater has single-focus, environmental theatre is open to multi-focus, with "more than one event...happen[ing] simultaneously, distributed throughout the space," which "will not reach every spectator in the same way" (Schechner, *Environmental* xxxvii). In *Victims of Duty*, the actors used "local-focus" with "events are staged so that only a fraction of the audience can see and hear them" (Schechner, *Environmental* xxxvii) which "has the advantage of bringing certain scenes very directly to some members of the audience" (Schechner, *Environmental* xxxviii). Each audience member does not need to see or hear the same thing at the same time because "the environmental theater space becomes like a city where lights are going on and off, traffic is moving, parts of conversations faintly heard" (Schechner, *Environmental* xxxix), and spectators can choose where they want to focus their attention. The fifth Axiom indicates that performers do not have to be more important than the other design elements and during *Victims of Duty*, "dialog between the Detective as father and Choubert as son...was played in near-darkness" and "supported two films which were projected alternatively and sometimes simultaneously on opposite walls" so the Detective and Choubert "were not 'actors' but parts of the environment" (Schechner, *Environmental* xl). For this scene, the actors were not as important as the projections, but they contributed to the scene as part of the design. The sixth Axiom, that text does not necessarily need to be verbal in a production, is supported by Schechner's belief that

“text is a map with many possible routes; it is also a map that can be redrawn” and “you push, pull, explore, exploit” to “decide where you want to go” (Schechner, *Environmental* xliv). Schechner references a review of *Victims of Duty*, which the reviewer described as “the play was there somewhere...but it was subservient to, and generally obscured by, the formal enterprise of the production” (Schechner, *Environmental* xliv). An environmental theatre piece can incorporate or adapt the text to the extent that it supports the concept of the production. The actors and director do not have to rely solely on the text or strictly adhere to the playwright’s words.

Schechner defines “an environmental theater performance” as “one in which *all the elements or parts* making up the performance are recognized as alive” and “to ‘be alive’ is to change, develop, transform; to have needs and desires; even, potentially, to acquire, express, and use consciousness” (Schechner, *Environmental* x). Every element of the performance supports this need for energy and liveliness. There is no rigidity or mechanical aspect to the performance and the play is constantly evolving. The unpredictability of the performance allows the play to continue to change and transform and to remain alive through this constant growth. By nature, “neither ecological nor performance environments are passive,” but rather “they are interactants in events organically taking place throughout vivified spaces” (Schechner, *Environmental* x). Environmental theatre is based in everyday interactions between human beings with one another and with their environments, which are defined by their unpredictability and the potential for danger and excitement. These performances capture the necessity of interactions between human beings and human beings with their environments through the construction of the set and audience seating. The construction of an environmental

theatre piece “is a means of interaction between performers and spectators,” and “Schechner believes that such interaction is essential in fulfilling what people need from theatre—a narrative structure which provides an opportunity for exchange between people” (Shank 100). Environmental theatre’s setting allows for all people to interact with one another, whether they are performers or spectators, because everyone in attendance becomes both a performer and a spectator over the course of the performance. There is no distinction between the audience and the actor’s playing space, allowing the performance to encourage human connection and recognition.

The Performance Group’s first environmental theatre production was *Dionysus in 69* (1968), followed by *Makbeth* in 1969 and *Commune* in 1970 (Shank 93). Every production allowed for experimentation, which resulted in new discoveries about environmental theater as well as actor/audience interactions. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the production of *Dionysus in 69* began with “the birth ritual... followed by a dance of celebration which involves those members of the audience willing to participate” (Shank 96). The production offered audiences an opportunity to participate in the action and challenged the boundaries established by conventional theatrical models.

In The Performance Group’s second production, *Makbeth*, “the audiences (about seventy-five people) were free to move around in the space during the performance like unseen members of the court, hiding in corners and tiptoeing in stockinged feet from one shadow to another secretly to observe and overhear” which created “a labyrinthine environment” (Shank 98). Along with the environment’s design, the audience contributes to the setting’s atmosphere and reality. Spectators assume certain roles, whether they are

aware of their involvement or not, which shapes the actor's experience and performance as well the audience's experience. Schechner explained that the audiences' freedom to investigate and travel in the "environment was not designed for a conformity of reactions" (Shank 98), but rather for a personal experience and individual response to the performance. The audience's immersion into the set encouraged interaction and involvement in the play, which allowed the performance to become a lively, energetic event for all participants.

Critical and audience responses were mostly negative for *Makbeth*. The production received "poor critical reception" and due to "poor reviews from the critics and...lack of an audience" the production was forced to close (Harding and Rosenthal 309). In *The New York Times* review, Clive Barnes called the production "a most decent and most stimulating failure" because of the lack of a "coherent artistic discipline" and "that there is nothing in the performance to match the literary imagination of the concept or the visual brilliance of Brooks McNamara's," Jerry Rojo, and Lewis D. Rampino's scenic and costumes designs, respectively (Barnes). Although there is a lack of clear information about why the production received a poor critical response, one can speculate that it was due in part to audience participation within the setting of environmental theatre that put off critics and scared away audiences. As an emerging theatrical practice, audiences and critics were unfamiliar with the concept and execution of an environmental production, and their negative responses could be attributed to their lack of understanding and familiarity with the design. The Performance Group was also still in the process of developing environmental theatre, and as they began to develop expectations, audiences and critics could then adapt to these guidelines and new theatrical rules.

Barnes's criticism can be traced back to the emerging practice of environmental theatre, which was still developing and growing when *Makbeth* opened. Most of Barnes's complaints stem from the absence of one performing style. Environmental theatre drew from many theatre movements, including Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty and Brecht's Epic Theatre, which will be discussed further in Chapter Two, and as Schechner incorporated different elements from each practice, a style began to emerge, although apparently its principals were initially unclear.

Several years later, The Performance Group produced a production of Brecht's *Mother Courage*. For the first time, rehearsals were open to the public. While preparing for their 1973 production of *Mother Courage*, "most of our rehearsals were open" and "every rehearsal had from 5 to 40 people attending," allowing Schechner to observe that "their presence made a deep difference: work on the play began to include a public social care; and the work became about showing a way of working" (Schechner, *Performance* 138). The audience is an essential element for an environmental theatre production, and rehearsing with an audience, however small, assists the actors in finding ways to incorporate the audience and interact with them during the play.

The production of *Mother Courage* also conveyed influences from the ritualistic aspects of carnival and Balinese cockfighting. Many of "the ideas behind The Performance Group's production of *Mother Courage* are common in ritual performances: to control, arrange, or manipulate the whole world of the performance, not just present the drama at its center" (Schechner, *Performance* 139). Similar to the way carnival re-arranged the social order of the medieval world and the Balinese controlled the world of cockfighting, environmental theatre manipulates the world of the play and the audience.

The Role of Scenic Designer

Designing an environmental theatre production is much more detail-oriented than a proscenium or thrust staging because audiences are physically absorbed into the setting of the play and are free to notice any and every aspect of the design through close observation. Every design choice is elevated and greatly impacts how the audience will interact in the play and how they will receive the performance. Schechner explains that “the fullness of the space, the endless ways space can be transformed, articulated, animated- that is the basis of environmental theater design” (Schechner, *Environmental 1*). Space is the most significant element of environmental theatre and therefore, the most influential designer for an environmental theatre production is the scenic designer, because he decides how the audience will be physically incorporated into the play. He creates the world that the actors and spectators will live in for the duration of the performance and shapes the experience for each participant.

According to Schechner, “the first scenic principle of environmental theater is to create and use whole spaces” (Schechner, *Environmental 2*). To allow both the actors and the audience to live in the world of the play, the scenic designer must either find or construct a complete set appropriate for the play. The set is like a playground for the actors and the audience and the more complete a set is, the more opportunities there are for actors and audiences to interact with each other and to explore the life of the characters and the world of the play. Like the theory of “deep play,” discussed by Clifford Geertz in relation to Balinese cockfighting, if the world of performance is constructed to completion, the spectators and the performers become involved and invest themselves to the extent that they risk altering, and possibly losing, their status depending

on the outcome of the performance (Geertz 432). Although a constructed reality, “deep play” indicates that there are stakes involved for the people who participate in this world. In environmental theatre, if the spectators become invested in the world of the play, which is supported by the scenic design, they can also risk an emotional change or loss.

For many of The Performance Group’s productions, Schechner collaborated with environmental theatre scenic designer, Jerry Rojo, who he considers “in my opinion, the world’s leading environmentalist” (Schechner, *Environmental* 8-10). In an interview, Rojo explained that his role requires him to “try to find spatial metaphor for the play” (Rojo 21) he is designing. As a designer, Rojo has to think like an actor and a designer because he must consider how the actors will move through the space, but also how the audience will understand and move about the set. The scenic design reinforces the theme of the play for both audiences and actors. When he collaborated with Jim Clayburgh in designing the space for The Performance Group’s production of *Mother Courage*, “the space...expressed the interplay between Brecht’s drama and the larger performance in which this drama takes place” with a portion of the theatre being converted “into a ‘green room’ wholly visible to the audience.” (Schechner, *Performance* 138). During the performance, “when a performer was not in a scene she or he went to the green room for some coffee, to read, and to relax” and although “a little more shielded, but still in sight, [there] were places for performers to change costumes and apply makeup” (Schechner, *Performance* 138). Aware of Brecht’s desire to remind the audience that they were watching a play, Rojo and Clayburgh created a space which reinforced the fact that the actors were average human beings and emphasized that the production was not reality but a show.

Rojo explains that when working on an environmental theatre production, the entire production staff has to be aware that there is “always going to be the element of the unknown” (Rojo 27). Placing the audience physically inside the world of the play adds the potential for visible responses and physical reactions to the play and the characters. The actors and designers cannot anticipate how audiences will react to or interact with the play and must be prepared to mold their designs and performances to accommodate each specific audience.

Conclusion

Schechner was able to cultivate The Performance Group’s environmental theatre productions by incorporating elements of Greek Theatre, Carnival, and Balinese cockfighting into his productions, and creating an opportunity for an interactive and unpredictable audience. By promoting participation and interaction amongst audience members, environmental theatre encourages individual audience responses rather than a unified community reaction. This audience response exemplifies environmental theatre’s ability to break the theory of a socially approved, unified audience interpretation, or phenomenology. In the next chapter, environmental theatre’s affect on audiences will be considered, specifically in relation to phenomenology, as well as several other theatre practitioners’ theories about audience interaction.

Chapter Two The Community of Environmental Theatre

As discussed in Chapter One, environmental theatre adheres to different rules than conventional theatre and draws upon aspects of Carnival and Balinese cockfighting, which encourage the integration of performers and spectators. This chapter will consider the role of the audience and the unique audience responses and interactions which occur during an environmental theatre performance. Due to the proximity and the flexibility of the audience in the performance space, the actors are required to be more alert and able to adapt to the unpredictable behavior of the audience. The purpose of applying second circle energy to the actors' performances during *Circle Mirror Transformation* was to facilitate their efforts to connect and adapt to each audience.

Phenomenology

How an audience responds to a performance shapes the overall show because their reception impacts the actors' work. Frequently audiences find a uniform interpretation for a production, and rely on that single interpretation. Most audiences, "through homogeneity of reaction, [receive] confirmation of their decoding on an individual and private basis and [are] encouraged to suppress counter-readings in favour of the reception generally shared" (Bennett 153). Audiences tend to want their thoughts about the play to match up with other spectators as a reassurance of their interpretation. They are afraid of misinterpreting a play or missing an important point in the play. Seeking approval for their response to a performance reinforces the audience as a united group, but blocks the personal and creative possibilities of interpretation a play could provoke in a single person.

This community approval exhibited by audience members is defined by the social theory of phenomenology. According to phenomenology, “the reality that ordinary people inhabit is constituted by these legitimations of habitualized conduct” which range “from common sense typifications of ordinary language to theological constructions to sophisticated philosophical, cosmological, and scientific conceptualizations,” so that overall “these legitimations compose the paramount reality of everyday life” (Orleans). In other words, people’s daily behavior is ruled by societal laws and expectations, which are influenced by theology, philosophy, and scientific knowledge. An audience’s homogenous reaction to a play is based on their knowledge of socially accepted behaviors and rules, common sense, and their childhood schooling and parenting. Even though each audience member contributes their own personal experiences and feelings to the atmosphere of the auditorium, their desire to adhere to social norms causes them to repress their individual reactions and to receive the production uniformly in order to gain social acceptance. During the show, the audience exists in a state of liminality, where they are both an individual spectator with their own personal opinions and reactions, and where they are part of the community created by the audience members, with expectations for how everyone should respond to the play. Phenomenology argues that people tend to choose the response which will gain them social approval, creating a homogenous audience.

Phenomenology is based in human interactions, and how an audience reacts to an action on stage and, in turn, how they react to their fellow audience member’s reactions, conveys the phenomenological belief that all human behavior is a type of interaction. Along with analysis, “the central task in social phenomenology is to demonstrate the

reciprocal interactions among the processes of human action, situational structuring, and reality construction” (Orleans). Humans are always aware of other humans evaluating and reacting to their actions and behavior, and the interpretation of behavior becomes a dialogue. The audience is not just responding to the actors on stage, they are also responding to each other, creating a communication with the actors, but also with their fellow audience members.

These rules, however, apply solely to analyzing the audiences of a proscenium, thrust, or any other “standard” theatrical configuration. As Schechner explains: “the decorum of orthodox theater-going is such that the audience obeys strict rules of behavior,” which include that “they arrive more or less on time, they do not leave their seats except for intermission or at the end of the show, they display approval or disapproval within well-regulated patterns of applause, silence, laughter, tears” (Schechner, *Environmental* xxiii). These specific rules are established when the audience enters the theatre and sits down to watch a production. For experienced theatre-goers, this information is second nature, and for first-time theatre attendees, they will quickly adapt by observing the behavior of the audience members seated around them. Additionally, audience members know that the actors will always be in control as they sit and watch through the fourth wall. Part of the audience’s agreement with the actors is that the audience will not speak during the performance, or use their cell phones or take pictures, and they will respect the stage as the actors’ playing space.

With the exception of certain conditions, there is little possibility that an actor would make physical contact with an audience member and it is unlikely that they would make eye contact. A play, like Eugene O’Neill’s *The Iceman Cometh*, would never have

the actors break the fourth wall and look at the audience, whereas Long, Singer, and Winfield's *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare Abridged* or a production at London's Globe Theatre, would intentionally break the fourth wall as a theatrical style and a novelty. The actors address the audience or move within the crowd but on their own terms; they never relinquish control to the audience. In turn, the audience expects the actors to make eye contact and address them, while acknowledging that they are still observers and the actors can manipulate how they address the audience. Each of these situations still maintains actor control over the audience, but during an environmental theatre production, there is an element of unpredictability on both the actors' side and the audience's side.

Environmental theatre abolishes all of these rules and establishes its own set of guidelines. First, the majority of the control of the production is handed over to the audience. Seated in make-shift chairs, with possibly unassociated people wandering through the space or nearby, the audience can enter the action of the play whenever they choose. The audience does not have to remain seated for the whole production and they have the freedom to interact with the actors, physically and vocally whenever they choose to do so. In turn, the actors cannot control the audience, but can only be open-minded and prepared for the unexpected.

In place of a homogeneous reaction, environmental theatre and other experimental theatrical configurations encourage individual responses, because the nature of these productions is to constantly keep the audience "on their toes." When there are "shocks and surprises" in a performance, they "make a dent in a spectator's reflexes, so that he is suddenly more open, more alert, more awake and the possibility and the responsibility

arise[s] for onlooker and performer alike” (Brook 50). Making the performance unpredictable for the audience keeps them attentive and lively, which contributes to the actors’ performances. The unpredictability of both the audience and the actors allows for a vibrant, living piece of theatre. How an audience is incorporated into an environmental theatre production provides opportunities to surprise the audience and to encourage attentiveness, discouraging a group response or reaction. At its core, “‘environmental’ theatre goes against people experiencing homogenous group reactions” (Coppieters 47) because how the actors interact with each audience member is a personal experience and dependent on the person. Certain audience members may be more open to participating in the performance and will be receptive to invitations from the actors, whereas others may be self-conscious and uncomfortable with the actors being physically in their face and attempting to connect with them. Each audience member receives a different view of the play depending on where they sit and whether they decide to participate or not, which creates individual responses rather than a communal agreement about the play.

The Role of the Actor and the Audience

Environmental theatre changes the role of both the actors and the audience. Similar to medieval Carnival, actors assume the additional role of spectator, observing the audience’s actions, and in turn the spectators become actors, by participating in the play. The integration of audience seating into the set design creates this dual role for both the audience and the actors.

For the actors, this dual role changes how they approach their character and how they relate to the audience. The performers make choices as characters and as themselves and become double agents (Schechner, *Performance* 194) whenever they perform. All

actors make decisions as themselves and as their characters regardless of their rehearsal or performance space, but in environmental theatre, the proximity of the audience also requires them to make choices with a greater regard for how the audience responds to the show. The audience provides feedback for the actors, for example, “the audience looking at the drunk can laugh, can insult him and he can react to the people’s reaction” (Eco 117). There is an open dialogue between the actors and the audience, and how the audience reacts affects the subsequent choices of the actors.

There are several types of interaction in theatre with respect to audiences. Solely “with a focus on the audience, three aspects of interactive relations are important” and include “audience-stage interaction in the field of fiction, audience-actor interaction, and interaction in the audience” (Bennett 151). All three are important and necessary for a successful production. Where the audience is sitting in relation to the stage, affects their relationship with the actors and their opportunity to participate in the show. How the audience interacts with the actors can change the involvement of both groups and can introduce a dialogue which creates the dual role for audiences and actors. The interaction amongst audience members alters their response to the performance and fosters the community created by the audience.

Due to the audiences’ and the actors’ additional roles in the production, environmental theatre not only encourages audience interaction but demands it. By throwing an actor into the audience, the production attempts to break “divisions between the private and public man: the outer man whose behavior is bound by the photographic rules of everyday life...and the inner man whose anarchy and poetry is usually expressed only in his words” (Brook 47). Physically forcing the actors and the audience members to

relate to one another creates a personal interaction and allows people to behave naturally instead of following the rigid rules of what is accepted and not accepted in society. The performance becomes personal for every individual involved and allows the audience to embrace their dual role of actor as well as spectator by attempting to eliminate their inhibitions.

How the audience responds to actor interaction affects the actors' focus and is reflected in the performance quality of the show. Director Peter Brook once observed during a production that "to my surprise and dismay, much of the quality had gone from their acting," and although he "wanted to blame the actors...it was clear that they were trying as hard as they could" and that "it was the relation with the audience that had changed" (Brook 21). When an audience is tired or uninterested or disconnected, their energy changes and affects the actors. The actors must adapt their performance for every audience but when the communication between the actors and the audience does not align, it can negatively impact the entire show. During a performance, "the contribution of feedback is acknowledged by all actors" and "it is well known that an appreciative, knowledgeable audience can foster a 'better' performance from the actors and that a restless audience can disrupt the on-stage action, creating mistakes, lack of pace, and poor individual performances" (Bennett 151). An energetic, focused audience is as necessary for an enjoyable performance as a lively, driven cast. When one or the other lacks energy or attention, they destroy the opportunity for a rewarding performance shared between the cast and the audience.

The audience's response and interaction during the play affects how they interpret the play. Unlike reading a novel, where an individual directly interprets the text, "the

reading time is controlled by the performer and not the audience” when “under the terms of theatre performance,” so the audience is not the sole interpreter (Bennett 45). The audience is interpreting a piece of art which has already been interpreted by the actors, the directors, and the designers. Instead of an original interpretation of the play, the audience is interpreting an interpretation of a play. To a certain extent, the director, designers, and actors can guide and manipulate the audience’s interpretation of a play in how the production interprets the script, as long as they present a unified concept of their interpretation. Playwright Phyllis Nagy has said that “collaboration is necessary in order that a play exists in three dimensions for an audience on a particular evening” and that “collaboration is necessary in the creation of theatre, but not in the creation of a text” because “a single, intelligent, evocative and compelling point of view which is interpreted by collaboration causes theatrical excitement” (Nagy 131). Directors, designers, and actors collaborate to interpret a text, written by a single person, but meant for many people, and Nagy argues that as long as the production is presented with a single concept shared by all the designers and the director, the result will be a piece of exciting theatre. The audience will have a chance to form their own interpretation of the play and of the director’s concept for the play, which keeps them invested while watching a production.

How an audience interprets the performance resembles certain aspects of interpreting a novel. For literary theorist Wolfgang Iser, blanks in a text allow the reader to be “drawn into the events” because blanks are “made to supply what is meant from what is not said” (Iser, *Act* 168), and literary/cultural theorist Roland Barthes agrees that “[the] meaning [of a text] cannot be created by the work alone” (Barthes xi). The reader

has to interpret the blanks, which keeps them engaged with the text. Each individual has the liberty to interpret the text however they choose, drawing on the personal experiences and educations they bring to the work. When there are blanks in a text, “the unsaid comes to life in the reader’s imagination, so the said ‘expands’ to take on greater significance than might have been supposed” (Iser, *Act* 168), and in theatre “curtains or blackouts” are used “to denote act breaks or scene changes clearly,” which “work in the manner of Iser’s blanks,” because they “herald a change in perspective and permit the audience some time for the juggling of expectation and memories” (Bennett 44). In between scenes and during intermissions, the audience has an opportunity to reflect on what they have seen onstage and to create their own interpretation of the characters and the plot up to that point. They can absorb and analyze what they have just witnessed and prepare for upcoming scenes and actions. Certain scripts also include blanks in the text, such as works by Harold Pinter, who denotes beats, ellipses, and pauses in his stage directions. With each of these verbal breaks, the audience can interpret the silence differently, depending on their personal backgrounds and expectations. Pinter gives the audience space to reflect on what an actor has just said but also the liberty to discover meaning in a silence or a long pause.

Interpreting the production is another way to involve the audience in the play. When sitting in the audience, there “is the pleasure of contemplating a stage reality experienced as concrete activity in which the spectator takes part” (Ubersfeld 128) and this “pleasure derives from activity, the involvement of the audience in the interpretation of the multiplicity of signs both transparent and opaque” (Bennett 72). Theatre is an engaging and interactive art form dependent upon the audience’s attention and

involvement, which is partially demanded by the audience's need to interpret the performance. As the audience watches the world created on stage, they have an opportunity to make observations, comments, and critiques and to extract a meaning from the play and the choices of the actors, designers, and directors.

Brecht and Artaud

Both theatre practitioners Bertolt Brecht and Antonin Artaud encouraged the involvement of the audience in a theatrical production with their practices of Epic Theatre and the Theatre of Cruelty, respectively. They sought to encourage audience participation and interaction using several different techniques crafted by their theatrical practices.

In his manifesto on the Theatre of Cruelty, Artaud argues for a performance set-up with the actors encircling the audience, forcing them to become involved and invested in the performance with no option for an escape. He demands that “we abolish the stage and the auditorium and replace them by a single site, without partition or barrier of any kind, which will become the theater of action” and allow “a direct communication” to “be re-established between the spectator and the spectacle, between the actor and the spectator, from the fact that the spectator, placed in the middle of the action, is engulfed and physically affected by it” (Artaud 96). Artaud creates a theatre where the action is forcefully thrust upon the audience, demanding their attention and absorbing them into the action. His manipulation of the audience focuses more on enforcing a connection rather than encouraging audience participation through their placement in the play. In this configuration, the “diffusion of action over an immense space will oblige the lighting of a

scene and the varied lighting of the performance to fall upon the public as much as upon the actors” (Artaud 97), heightening the actors awareness of the audience but also the spectators’ awareness of one another. By surrounding the audience and using lighting to highlight both spectators and the action of the play, the audience becomes a part of the production, contributing their reactions and emotions to the overall performance. Artaud forced the audience to become part of the world of the play, leaving them no possibility of hiding or escaping.

The goal of this theatrical practice is to connect the actors with the audience, and the audience with the world of the play. Bennett explains that “Artaud...sought...to re-situate theatre as an immediate experience for both performers and audience” (Bennett 38), similar to the audience immersion in environmental theatre. By placing the audience into the action, they become part of everything that is happening in the play, and experience every emotion, realization, fear, and joy that the actors are experiencing simultaneously. However, not all audiences were receptive to Artaud’s theories. His production of *Les Cenci* in 1935 “was a critical and commercial flop, closing after 17 days” (Blankenship) and when Peter Brook directed Artaud’s play, *The Jet of Blood*, “part of the audience was immediately fascinated, part giggled” (Brook 145). Artaud succeeded in shocking the audience and forcing them out of their comfort zone, but the audience refused to allow itself to become part of the production. By giggling, these audience members forced a consciousness of themselves as an audience onto the entire theatre house and interrupted the possibility of incorporating the audience into the play. From these reviews, “it is nevertheless evident that audiences sought to resist the immediate relationship sought by Artaudian theatre” (Bennett 39). The audience used

laughing as a defense mechanism to interrupt the action of the show and to prevent audience members from becoming absorbed into the world of the play. Brook's production of Artaud's play and Artaud's productions demonstrate that both men "put emphasis on contact with the individual spectator and [the] desire to break through the comfortable, reassuring complacency of the audience as a group" (Bennett 60).

Encircling the audience with the action of the play and making them a part of the theatrical world, Artaud encouraged individual responses to the action, rather than the homogenous response observed in phenomenology. Artaud's practices are similar to environmental theatre, manipulating the audience and provoking individual reactions to the performance.

Brecht approached audience interaction with a different method. He wanted "the spectator" to no longer be "allowed to submit to an experience uncritically...by means of simple empathy with the characters in the play," like dramatic theatre spectators, but rather a spectator who left the theatre thinking: "I'd never have thought it - That's not the way...It's got to stop" (Brecht, *Brecht* 71). The audience needed to respond to the action on stage, participate, and consider what those actions meant for themselves and for society. Brecht encouraged this interactive response, "by means of a certain interchangeability of circumstances and occurrences," demanding that "the spectator must be given the possibility (and duty) of assembling, experimenting and abstracting" (Brecht, *Brecht* 60) the performance. He sought to involve his audience through their observation and analysis of the stage action, and used certain devices to encourage audience "assembling, experimenting, and abstracting." One device is the A-effect, or *verfremdungseffekt*, and "the object of this [A-effect (alienation effect)] is to allow the

spectator to criticize constructively from a social point of view” (Brecht, *Brecht* 125), so that “the spectator is himself included in the movement from ideology to real, from illusion to objective truth” (Heath 116), not leaving “the audience in a state of objectivity (i.e. dispassionately balancing pros and cons)” as complacent observers but “rather...that it makes them critical” (Brecht, *Brecht* 226). Brecht wanted the audience to respond to the action and interact by critiquing the events of the play. Epic theatre sought to educate the audience by forcing spectators to absorb the action and analyze every action within the performance. Other devices to produce the A-effect include “the epic theatre’s choruses and documentary projections, the direct addressing of the audience by its actors” (Brecht, *Brecht* 126) and the belief that “the actor must remain a demonstrator; he must present the person demonstrated as a stranger” (Brecht, *Brecht* 125). Each of these devices allow for interruption during the play and therefore, time for the spectator to observe and comment on the action he has seen. With the actors demonstrating rather than playing the characters, they are able to respond to audience commentary on their actions, allowing for an open dialogue between the actors and the audience.

Brecht also advocated for the use of repetition and direct addresses to the audience in productions. His play, *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, opens with “Wang, the water seller, introduc[ing] himself to the audience,” saying: “I sell water here in the city of Setzuan...when water is scarce, I have to go a long way to find any. And when it is plentiful, I am without income” (Brecht, *Good Woman* 3) and in subsequent scenes other characters, such as Shen Te also address the audience, explaining: “I’ve had a terrible experience...I was so alarmed by my own behavior” (Brecht, *Good Woman* 59). When an actor directly addresses the audience, the audience is taken out of the world of the play,

and can then reflect on what they have seen in the play up to that point. In Scene 2 of Brecht's *The Mother*, several words and lines are repeated:

IVAN: But it's not so dangerous.

THE MOTHER: It's not dangerous! You want to send Pavel and you tell him it's not dangerous.

IVAN: It's necessary.

THE MOTHER: It's necessary! The reading of books and coming home late is what brings it...It's necessary!...The next thing is the police walk into my house and act like a person were a criminal...

ANDRÉ: Mrs. Vlassova, it is necessary. (Brecht, *Mother* 47)

Each time a line or action or scene is repeated, the audience becomes aware of the scene or character's importance or the significance and variable meanings of a word or phrase, and can reflect on what they are watching because they become more familiar with the material after each repetition. This scene from *The Mother* emphasizes that Pavel's task is dangerous, but necessary.

Enforcing phenomenology, Brecht also believed that "the aesthetics of the day call for an impact that flattens out all social and other distinctions between individuals," so that "a collective entity is created in the auditorium for the *duration of the entertainment*, on the basis of the 'common humanity' shared by all spectators alike" (Brecht, *Brecht* 60). Sitting in the audience, social and economic distinctions were removed, allowing for a homogenous response from each spectator, but also a unified community critiquing society. While Artaud scattered his audience by throwing them uncomfortably into the action of the play, Brecht sought to unify his audience through an

open dialogue with the actors and their involvement in questioning and interpreting the play.

Semiotics

Semiotics, the study of signs, is an essential aspect of theatre and plays a huge role in audience interpretation of a theatrical piece. As the audience watches a performance, any actor or object can become a sign depending on the audience's interpretation of the play and their response to the performance.

Because any person or object placed on stage is potentially a symbol for the audience, what each audience chooses to interpret as a sign reveals aspects of their social and cultural backgrounds. Each audience member brings to the performance their personal experiences and expectations and when a certain object is placed on stage, it assumes a second meaning from an audience member's expectations and observations. As the audience watches a play, "in the *mise-en-scène* an object, first recognized as a real object, is then assumed as a sign in order to refer back to another object (or to a class of objects) whose constitutive stuff is the same as that of the representing object" (Eco 111). The object on stage is initially seen as itself, but then the audience attaches other associations and references to the object. Directors and designers must carefully consider what they choose to present so that the audience does not misinterpret anything which could affect their overall response to the production. Each actor or object can assume several other identities when placed on stage, for example, to convey that a man is intoxicated he must assume the characteristics of "his nose [being] red or violet; his eyes dimmed by a liquid obtuseness; his hair, his mustache or his beard ruffled and dirty; his

clothes splashed with mud,” and this list of qualities “is established by a social code, a sort of iconographic convention” (Eco 111). When an audience observes an actor with these external qualities, they label him as a drunkard because society has taught them that a person who has a ruddy face and dirty, disheveled clothing is typically a drunkard. The actor assumes the role of drunkard, and once the audience understands that he is a drunkard, they become aware of other associations and meanings that are attached to various personal and social expectations and conventions relating to a drunkard. He can become a sign of the lower class or of the unemployed depending on the audience, and the individual associations they bring to the performance about drunkards impacts how they view and interpret the character.

Each individual audience member affects how a sign is interpreted, and therefore, it is useful if the spectator possesses knowledge of the theatre, but not necessary for them to understand. Certain signs, such as “a spotlight focused on an actor,” which “would signify that one must pay particular attention to this character” for all audience members, but takes on additional meaning if the spectator knows “the principle rules of ‘theater language’ and [has] at her disposal a ‘basic dictionary’ allowing access to what happens on stage” (Pavis 255). An audience member who has little experience or background in theatre might overlook an important sign because they lack the knowledge of typical theatrical symbols. Utilizing their personal and social knowledge, “the spectator undoes the ambiguities of deictics and anaphoras; she fills moments devoid of meaning, secures connections, brings together disparate elements” and “ensures the coherence of the *mise-en-scène*’s options” (Pavis 255). The spectator has to invest energy in interpreting a sign onstage and finding other characteristics and expectations associated with an object, such

as a drunkard. How successfully the audiences connect an object to other objects or associations depend on their background and education.

How an object is interpreted when placed on stage is also affected by the director or designer's execution of placing it on stage. There are two forms of representation of a work of art, which include a "slavish imitation of the real that adds nothing to it" and "a form of representation which doesn't so much reproduce the object as reconstruct or re-create it" (Wiseman 126). An imitation of a work of art is dead and uninteresting, but a representation which recreates the art allows the art to become alive onstage. An imitation versus a recreation can produce different audience interpretations and can affect whether an object placed on stage is interpreted as a symbol or not and how it is read if it is considered to be a symbol. The "work of art...not an imitation but a re-creation of the object which incorporates into its image an 'experience of the object'" (Wiseman 127), allows the audience to incorporate more of their personal experiences into their interpretation and creates more associations with that symbol.

Patsy Rodenburg

Renowned British vocal coach, Patsy Rodenburg, developed over the course of her work in theatre, a theory of how people interact with one another, which she titled the "Three Circles of Energy." She graduated from the Central School of Speech and Drama, and then worked with the Royal Shakespeare Company, before creating the first Voice Department at the Royal National Theatre in 1990. Her career has included working with convicts and lecturing at business conventions, in addition to coaching actors, and she is

currently Head of Voice at Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London. The *Three Circles of Energy* consist of:

1. “[The] First Circle, you are connected and focused on yourself. This focus can be seen and heard in a collapsed body, an averted gaze, and a voice that drops back into you”
2. “[The] Second Circle, you are fully present in the world because your energy is placed on specific points outside of yourself...you have charisma, and if you catch the eye of another person in Second Circle, a powerful connection has been made”
3. “[The] Third Circle has a generalized connection to the world. People in Third Circle look past you, take up more physical space, and often speak too loudly” (“20 Questions”)

When she teaches voice classes to actors, Rodenburg encourages them to stay in second circle when acting because they will become receptive, alert, and prepared for any action that occurs while they are on stage. They build a relationship with other actors that becomes interesting for the audience to watch and which draws them into the world of the play.

Teaching at both Guildhall School of Music and Drama and at The National Theatre in London, Patsy Rodenburg has worked with many successful and famous actors, including Sir Ian McKellen, Dame Judi Dench, and Ralph Fiennes, who all attest to the effectiveness of her teachings. Ralph Fiennes has said that “Patsy Rodenburg’s guidance and the clarity and directness of her approach have been invaluable to me” (Rodenburg vi).

Because the audience assumes the dual role of actor, the way each actor negotiates second circle changes during an environmental theatre performance. They have to connect with their fellow actors but because the audience becomes another unpredictable actor for them to play with, they must engage them and connect with them, without moving into first or third circle. Peter Brook summarizes that the “onlooker is a partner who must be forgotten and still constantly kept in mind” (Brook 46). The actors cannot be overly conscious of the audience and play to them, but at the same time, they must remember that it is important for them to connect with audience members during a performance. While actors in second circle focus outside themselves to connect with another actor, actors in third circle tend to overact and ignore or upstage their fellow actors because they are instead seeking the audience’s approval. During an environmental theatre performance, the actors must negotiate first, second, and third circle, where they connect with both the other actors and the audience as an additional actor without playing only to the audience.

Conclusion

Many theatrical theorists and practitioners have influenced environmental theatre, particularly with respect to how to interpret the way actors interact with an audience. How an audience responds always affects a production, but with environmental theatre, the audience’s proximity heightens the audience’s affect on the production. Applying these theories to environmental theatre, I then began to work on adapting Annie Baker’s *Circle Mirror Transformation* from a standard theatrical piece to an environmental theatre production.

Chapter Three Practical Application – *Circle Mirror Transformation*

Relying on the research and investigation of environmental theatre and theatre theorists discussed in Chapters One and Two, in addition to several months of pre-production meetings in 2011, I was then prepared to apply these findings practically to the production of *Circle Mirror Transformation*. The rehearsal process was essential because as the actors learned about the second circle and grew as an ensemble, they began to prepare for an audience, which ultimately allowed me to test my thesis. This stage of the production served as training for the experiment, and was vital to the results discussed in Chapter Four.

Because there is always an element of subjectivity in the creative process, all of the actors' and designers' work, in addition to my observations, are based on personal feelings and opinions. From the beginning of the process – choosing the play, selecting a concept, holding auditions, casting actors – to the final product of performances, each stage involves individual evaluations and thoughts. There is no way to objectively cast a production because part of the casting process is whether you feel comfortable and willing to work with a certain actor. When casting this production, many of my choices were based on how I felt about the actor as I watched their auditions, in addition to whether they were adept with improvisation games during callbacks. My observations and the actors' work during rehearsals cannot be attributed to fact, but all of us provided honest and thoughtful reflections about the rehearsal process.

Certain terminology used in this chapter is unique to the theatrical profession, as there is specific vocabulary for all professions. Including these terms is the most effective

method for describing and analyzing the rehearsal process, but I will define and explain this terminology throughout the chapter.

Preparations

When I initially proposed producing an environmental theatre production of Annie Baker's *Circle Mirror Transformation*, I began by determining whether we would use a found, transformed, or created space and then decided how to incorporate the audience into the set design. Typically, William and Mary Second Season productions are performed in the Studio Theatre, which is also used for acting classes during the semester. Using the Studio Theatre as a transformed space, my set designer and I decided that we would only have to make minor alterations for the theatre to become Marty's acting classroom in the Shirley Community Center. Our production team determined that a circle of fifteen yoga mats, for audience and actor seating, as well as the chairs set up along two of the four walls of the theatre (which later became three of the four walls during the rehearsal process to accommodate a larger audience) would allow the audience to become classmates for the actors during the play (see Image 2 below). The only alterations we made to the space were moving the masking flats to allow for a larger performance space (see Image 1 below) and removing the lighting cart because it was labeled as property of William and Mary Theatre, which would undermine our establishing the space as a room in a community center in Shirley, Vermont. For the last scene of the play, which takes place outside, we decided to use the found space of the front steps of Phi Beta Kappa Hall. During the early stages of planning, set designer Nick Martin and I considered the wall of mirrors described as part of the setting for the play in the script. After several discussions we decided that based on our concept of self-

instruction through relationships with others, the mirrors were not necessary. The play is about self-realization in relation to other people and about finding personal connections with others. A wall of mirrors would have encouraged the actors and the audience to self-reflect by observing themselves in the mirror, rather than by connecting and communicating with the other people in the space. We instead added a hanging mirror over the door of a locker for the several scenes where the characters had brief moments of self-critique. These scenes included Week Three Scene Three, when the stage directions indicate that Lauren pops a pimple (Baker 39), Marty’s moment of self analysis in Week Five Scene Four when she is contemplating her injury from her night terrors (Baker 64), and Week Five Scene Five, when Shultz loses the “When I go to India” game (Baker 68). The mirror was hung so it faced the masking flats rather than the audience seated on the chairs or yoga mats so it would not be distracting or detract from the play.

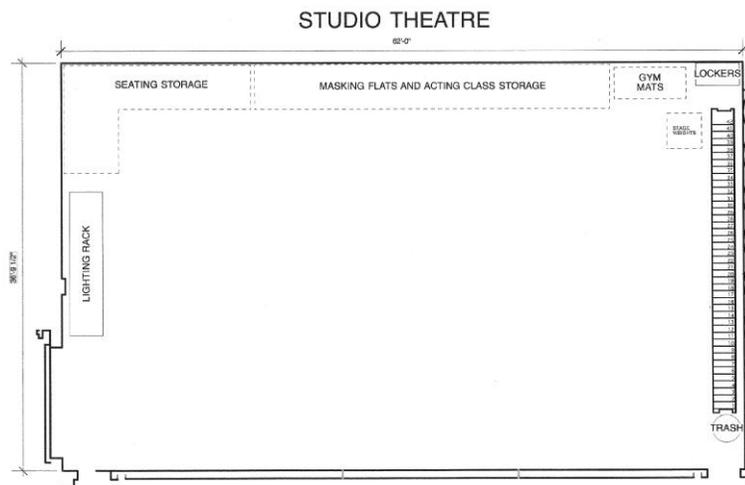


Image 1: Typical classroom set-up for the Studio Theatre

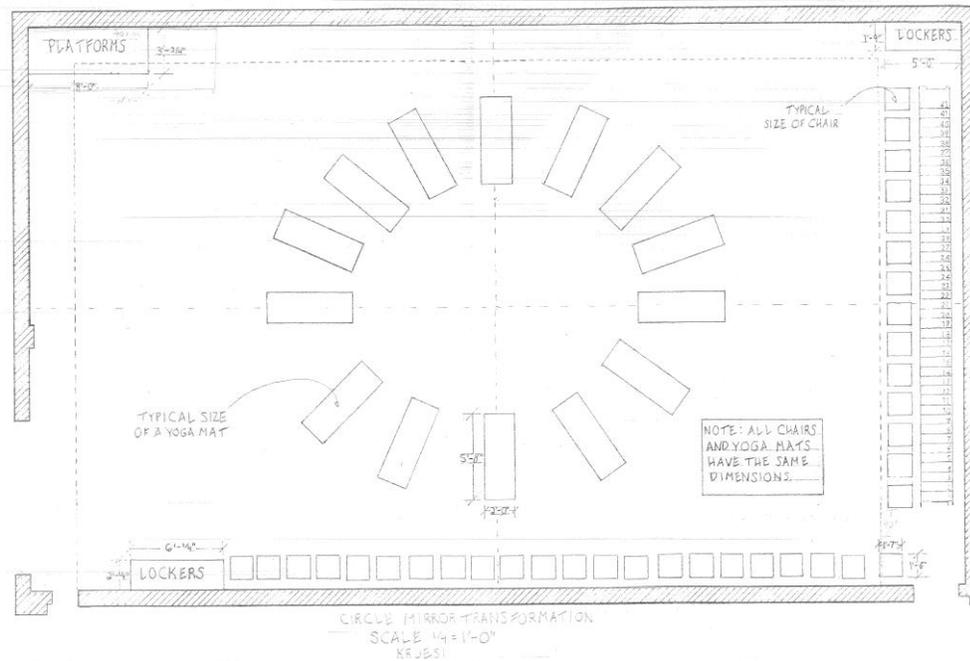


Image 2: *Circle Mirror Transformation* initial ground plan

Auditions and Callbacks

Once the production team and I had our design decisions and preparations underway, I began to prepare for auditions. I established personality traits for each character, and during auditions I looked for actors who possessed most of these qualities. Although the characters range in age from sixteen to sixty, I was not looking for specific physical traits but rather characteristics, such as warm, motherly, apologetic, or reserved. For Marty, I wanted someone who was maternal, warm, and a free spirit. I felt that James was an outsider and apathetic towards the class, so I looked for someone who was slightly stand-offish and more reserved. Shultz was an apologetic, uncertain character, so I looked for someone who was awkward but good-natured. I wanted Theresa to be confident, and for Lauren, I was looking for someone who was reserved and closed off from other people.

Although the initial audition process followed the standard theatre practice of presenting a monologue and possibly incorporating a direction, I adapted the callback process to meet the needs of this production. In addition to asking actors to read sides from the play and then take directions, which is standard for most productions, I also led the actors in improvisational games. At callbacks we played theatre improvisation games for the first half of the time and read scenes from the script for the second half. The games the actors played included explosion tag, three word scenes, and building a machine as a group. Explosion tag is a form of tag where the person who is “it” has to physically and verbally explode until they tag another person. Three word scenes is a game where two actors improvise a scene but can only say three words in each sentence. Building a machine is an improvisation game where one person begins with a stationary sound and movement, and then the next person adds a stationary sound and movement which complements the first person’s part of the machine. As more people add on to the machine, it becomes more challenging to find ways to join the machine while continuing to be an integral part and not isolated or superfluous. Each of these games was intended to demonstrate whether an actor was capable of being present in the moment, of working in a group, and if they were able to try ideas and act on impulses without over-thinking or second-guessing their actions. For reading scenes from the script, I was looking for chemistry between actors and whether they were able to take directions and then respond to adjustments.

Rehearsals

After my assistant director, Nathan Alston, and I had assembled a cast, we began rehearsals with a read-through. The script is divided into six weeks, each consisting of four to six scenes, and the company referred to each scene as Week One Scene One, etc., for the entirety of the rehearsal process. I wanted to establish this from the beginning because our rehearsal schedule was divided based on the scenes within each week. After the read-through, the actors and some of the production team viewed a video of British vocal coach, Patsy Rodenburg, explaining her theory of the *Three Circles of Energy*, as discussed in Chapter Two. Initially, Patsy Rodenburg's theory was abstract for the actors, but we worked intensively with the technique over the course of rehearsals, and the actors began to understand and incorporate her theory into their performances. From the beginning of the rehearsal process, we worked on building an ensemble. The actors warmed up before every rehearsal with several exercises. One exercise was walking around the rehearsal space in second circle, with the actors noticing one another and familiarizing themselves with the space. Another exercise was "go," where the actors stand in a circle and the person standing in the middle of the circle passes a plastic ball to the people standing in the outside circle. When someone in the circle wants to stand in the center, they say "go" and switch places with the actor in the middle, while keeping the plastic ball in motion. The game encourages the actors to be aware of one another and to trust one another. Later in the rehearsal process, the actors would "flock," which is an exercise involving music and movement. One actor leads the others in a series of movements, depending on the song, and as the song continues, they switch leaders.

As these games became more familiar to the actors and were beneficial in helping the actors to connect and heighten their awareness of one another, I decided to make the games a routine before each show. An hour before the show began, I ran the actors through some breathing and vocal exercises and then had them walk in the Studio Theatre in second circle. Once I felt that they were aware of each other and listening to one another, I would put on one of the songs they had picked for their characters as part of an acting exercise (see Appendix A) and have them “flock.” Depending on the song, one of the actors would lead the group, and then call on another actor to lead. Eventually each person was given a turn to lead, and by establishing that everyone must lead at least once during each song, the actors were encouraged to be aware of every other actor to make sure that everyone had met this requirement. After several songs, they would finish their warm-up by playing “go.” “Flocking” was a fun energizing game which woke the actors up and got them excited for the show, but I wanted to finish with “go” because the game is more focused and strongly enforces being aware of one another and being present. This routine of the same exercises every night helped to relax the actors and prepare them for each evening’s performance.

Before we worked through most of the two person scenes at the beginning of the rehearsal process, I instructed one actor to get into “grip” with their scene partner; this is where the two actors face each other while maintaining eye contact for several minutes. Both actors are instructed to remain relaxed and stand in an open position, facing each other with their arms and hands loose at their sides, while holding each other’s gaze. The actors are present with each other when they stand in “grip” together, staying focused on one another and not allowing their minds to wander. Then the actors would stay in “grip”

while walking around the rehearsal space. The goal of this exercise is make the actors comfortable with each other and to form a connection which will make them more aware of each other in the scene. After they had walked in “grip” for several more minutes, I would have each actor state their objectives for a specific scene and recite their objectives to each other in “grip” before running the scene to help clarify what their characters’ wanted and how their desires either aligned with or conflicted with their scene partner’s goals. For example, in Week Six Scene One, James comes to class after he has confessed to being in love with Theresa, and actor Nick Hampson decided that his objective was to win Marty back. In response Hannah-Lee, as Marty, wanted James to leave. As they recited these objectives to each other, they explored physical and vocal options and tactics for getting what they wanted, but also became aware of each other as obstacles in the scene. Based on my observations, once the actors seemed to be completely committed to these objectives, they went straight into the scene to apply these discoveries to their actual text. This exercise gave them a starting place at the beginning of rehearsals and allowed for an exploration of nuances as rehearsals continued. In Week Five Scene Four, Shultz and Theresa already have objectives from the class exercise in the script, but playing with these objectives in “grip” gave the actors a greater desire to get what they wanted. As actor Ryan recited “I need you to stay” and actress Alison recited “I want to go,” they found more of a necessity in these desires and more of a physical commitment to either leaving or convincing the other to stay. Each actor became more connected with the emotion that came from these desires and their inability to win what they wanted from the other person.

For group scenes involving acting games, such as circle mirror transformation, which is a game as well as the title of the play, the counting game, and the word game, the actors would play these games as themselves before running the scene in character. By playing the games first, they understood the rhythm of each game and the impulses they had, which they could then incorporate into their characters.

In the scenes where one character performs a monologue about another character, the other actors, while not speaking, worked on inner monologue and subtext to make these scenes feel truthful. The actor who was performing the monologue would focus on the subtext of each line by considering who they were directing each line towards and for what reason, while the actors sitting and observing the monologue would quietly recite their inner thoughts about the monologue to themselves. While watching this exercise, I observed that all of the actors remained engaged in the scene, even if they did not have any dialogue, and after rehearsal, several actors told me that the exercise helped them to make discoveries about their characters.

After the actors had run through each scene once, I met with each actor to discuss his or her character. During these meetings, I learned how each actor perceived their character and in several cases, the actors had made choices which I had not anticipated, but which made their characters more complex and dynamic. For example, when I met with the actor playing James, Nick Hampson, he explained that James focused on outward appearances and was in denial about his age, viewing himself on a level plane with his college students rather than as an authority figure. From our discussion, I was able to understand where James found motivation for many of his actions. By meeting with Mikaela Saccoccio, the actress who played Lauren, she was able to disentangle

Lauren's family history and encouraged to make choices about Lauren which were not explicit in the script but which contributed immensely to building her character. The script indicates that Lauren's mother is Lebanese and her father is Irish and includes several other details about their lives, but Mikaela had to invent a background for Lauren's parents: how they met, when and why they moved to the United States, why her grandmother came to live with them, what kinds of problems her father had with the law, and her school life. All of these details affected how she understood Lauren and influenced her motivation for her actions on stage. Shultz, played by Ryan Warsing, is the only character not given a full name, so part of Ryan's character work was to choose whether his name was his first or last name and then to decide on his other name, keeping in mind other character choices about his history. During each meeting, the actors made further discoveries about their characters and highlighted certain questions which they wanted to address later in rehearsals. I also assigned each actor ten character questions, which they were to answer while they learned their lines. The questions consisted of:

1. What is your full name
2. How old are you
3. Who are you closest to in the world
4. How political are you
5. How religious are you
6. What makes you laugh
7. What makes you cry
8. What is your favorite novel
9. What is your favorite film
10. What six songs would your character bring if they were stranded on a desert island

By thinking about these questions, the actors were able to investigate many facets of their characters and make choices which gave them a sense of ownership over them (see Appendix A and C). The more comfortable the actors were with their characters, and the

more aware they were of their character's background and personal quirks, the less likely it would be that an audience member's attitude or behavior would be able to disrupt their concentration during a performance.

The final group character work we conducted was a physicality workshop. Because the characters' ages range from sixteen to sixty, and all of the actors were between the ages of nineteen and twenty-two, we focused on ways to emphasize the differences in their characters' ages through how they stood, how they walked, and certain gestures that became typical of their characters. All of the actors tried walking around our rehearsal space as a sixteen-year-old, a thirty-five-year-old, a forty-eight-year-old, a fifty-five-year-old, and a sixty-year-old to eliminate any self-consciousness and to allow the actors to draw on each other's discoveries. Then they assumed the age of their characters and walked around the space. Actor Nick Hampson, playing James, found an aspect of stiffness in how his character walked and sat, which he then incorporated into his performance, particularly when he has to stand up after pretending to be Shultz's bed for several minutes. For Marty, played by Hannah-Lee Grothaus, although she is fifty-five, she is still active with yoga and exercise, which keeps her limber and energetic, so Marty did not assume the same qualities of stiffness or low energy as James. Mikaela Saccoccio, who played Lauren, discovered a certain discomfort and awkwardness within her body, which is frequently experienced by many sixteen-year-old girls and seen in how they carry themselves and how they stand. Alison Bushey, who played Theresa, had been rolling up on her tip-toes during rehearsals, and during the physicality workshop, she discovered that Theresa would actually stay more grounded and connected with the floor.

To assist the actors in preparing for an audience, I invited the designers first to sit in on a rehearsal as audience members. Then, two weeks before the show opened, I invited several theatre students to watch a rehearsal, which gave the actors an opportunity to interact with people who were not familiar with the environmental configuration of the production or the script. During the next two weeks of rehearsals, we invited as many people as possible to watch the rehearsals, although frequently only one or two people could attend and often only once or twice a week. The feedback we received from these impromptu audiences was helpful in finding moments in the play where the actors needed to give stronger encouragement to participate and finding different ways to connect with the audience. Not only did these small audiences help the actors prepare for interacting with a larger audience but also demonstrated how to prepare for and adapt to the unpredictable behavior of the audience (see Appendix C).

Several of the actors were very vocal in deciding how to incorporate the audience into certain games and how to prepare for the audience's participation. One game they were very concerned about playing with the audience was the word game, where the actors sit in a circle and each person says one word to create a story. As written in the script, the first word game does not have to be logical or make sense, but it is very important that the second word game at the end of the play makes sense to demonstrate that each character has learned something from the class and that they have all changed as people. Whenever we could get a small audience, the actors would get an opportunity to try the word games with the audience participating, but they found that playing the second word game with the audience prevented them from creating a cohesive story. Some audience members did not understand that the point of the game was to contribute

a word which would build upon another person's previous word, and would instead say a synonym or continue saying nouns and never include verbs. To rationalize not allowing the audience to play, we discussed each character's journey during the play and where they were mentally and emotionally during that scene. Each of the actors explained that their characters were very self-focused and were no longer concerned about the class as a whole, but rather with what they had lost, whether it was a wife or a girlfriend (see Appendix C). During the game, they were unconcerned with the audience/other students' involvement and were directing their words at whomever they had hurt. James is directing his words towards Marty, and Theresa is directing her words towards Shultz. They have become unaware of everyone except for the person who hurt them or the person they have hurt.

For the number game, where each actor lies on his or her back in a circle trying to count to ten without overlapping numbers, the actors were uncertain as to whether the audience would participate in the game, but they prepared for the possibility of audience participation by deciding that if an audience member said a number when two actors were supposed to overlap numbers, they would overlap on the next number or would say the same number that the audience member had said so the game would have to restart.

The actors and I decided not to allow the audience to participate in the secrets game and "When I Go to India," where one person chooses an object and the next person has to list that object and add another object going around the circle, because that would detract from the plot of the play. If ten additional secrets were added to the secrets game, James's secret that he is in love with Theresa would not have as much emphasis or power and the subsequent scenes of the play would not make as much sense to the audience.

Playing “When I Go to India” with the audience seemed an unnecessary risk because if one of the audience members forgot an object before it was Shultz’s turn, Shultz’s forgetting an object would become less important and less apparent (see Appendix C).

All of the character work, games, exercises, and practice audiences were meant to prepare the actors for a large and unpredictable audience. Although none of the actors, designers, or myself could anticipate how the audience would respond or behave during performances, the actors were as prepared as possible to adapt to each audience every night (see Appendix C).

The Designers’ Process

Unlike many professional and community productions, each actor was involved in the design decisions for their characters. As they discovered different facets of their characters, these choices were incorporated into what props they used and their costumes. All of the actors met individually with costume designer, Ruth Hedberg, so she could understand their characters and find ways of conveying their personalities through their clothes. Early in the rehearsal process, each actor was told to pick one piece of clothing or jewelry that his or her character considered to be their favorite clothing item or accessory, and then these pieces were included in the costume design. Hannah-Lee, who played Marty, chose a purple shawl as her favorite clothing item. Initially, she got the idea from the “When I go to India” game, where the first object Marty says is a purple shawl. Then she decided that Marty’s favorite color was purple, so the accessory was not only a character choice, but it also helped Hannah-Lee to make other choices about her character. Ryan Warsing, who played Shultz, decided that Shultz’s favorite piece of

clothing was a Carhartt jacket because he felt that a carpenter would most likely own this type of jacket and wear it often. Ruth was able to obtain a jacket similar to a Carhartt jacket and, for actor Ryan, this reinforced that Shultz was a carpenter.

The properties for the production were an integral part in creating a realistic environment and also provided information about each character. Properties master, Miles Drawdy, paid close attention to detail in his design, using Aquafina water bottles because the vending machine outside the Studio Theatre only sells the Aquafina brand and covering Theresa's Nalgene bottle with stickers promoting hooping and dance. All of the yoga mats used in the productions belonged to the cast, production team, or other acting students at William and Mary, supporting the classroom aspect of the space. The actors were told to choose what type of bag they would bring to class as a character exercise, and then Miles provided the actors with these items. For Shultz, we discussed that because he was divorced and an acting class novice, he might bring a plastic bag with a couple of basic items to class. Marty had a reusable bag because Hannah-Lee decided that Marty was environmentally conscious and Lauren had a backpack because she was in high school. Each choice was meant to support the environmental theatre design of the production while highlighting each character's personality.

When designing the lights for the production, lighting designer Taylor Nelms created a plot which replicated the light design used for acting classes in the Studio Theatre. The lights matched the intensity and brightness of the classroom lights and were placed in the same positions around the room (see Appendix C). Taylor set different lengths of time for each blackout indicated in the script to emphasize the emotion of the previous scene. In retrospect, I would have had each blackout last the same duration

because this was an environmental theatre piece and in the classroom, the lights would simply switch on and off without any variation in time. For the end of the play, when we moved the audience outside, Taylor used the actual outdoor lights. The lamppost on the right side of the outside stairs was not working, and Taylor considered changing the light bulb, but ultimately he left the lamppost unlighted because the outside stairs were a found space.

There were very few sound cues required in the script, but sound designer Zach Mott ensured that the sounds included were natural and realistic. When we discussed a sound cue for a cell phone ring, Zach was concerned that a sound coming from the Studio Theatre speakers would undermine the reality of the cell phone, and decided instead to use an actual cell phone so the ringing sound would come from the phone and appear to be realistic. The ticking clock was a sound element which is not in the script, but which the actors requested midway through the rehearsal process. When we rehearsed in the Lab Theatre, the actors grew accustomed to hearing the clock tick during moments of silence and when we moved into the Studio Theatre, they were aware of the absence of the sound of the clock and wanted to include it for the actual performances. Zach adjusted the volume level for the clock tick so that it was not too distracting and was only noticeable during moments of silence, similar to the volume of the clock in the Lab Theatre.

Conclusion

Throughout the entire rehearsal process and in every pre-production meeting, each designer, actor, and I endeavored that our choices were meant to support the staging

of *Circle Mirror Transformation* as an environmental theatre piece. Every designer considered our transformed space of the Studio Theatre and discovered ways to highlight its unique qualities. All of the exercises the actors practiced in rehearsals were meant to prepare them for performing in an environmental theatre piece, with the possibility of the audience responding and interacting with them and adding an unpredictable aspect to what they had rehearsed. However, this was a learning experience for all involved and there certainly were design elements and acting exercises which could have benefited from more consideration and detail.

By the end of the rehearsal process, the actors were prepared and excited for an audience and ready to encounter each spectator's reactions to the production. The preview and the four performances tested the actors' preparation and concentration but also finally transformed the show into a piece of environmental theatre because without the audience, there are only actors rehearsing. After each performance, the actors evaluated which circle they were performing in that night, and found that the audience had more of an impact on whether they were in first, second, or third circle than they had anticipated.

Chapter 4 The View from Second Circle

Once performances for *Circle Mirror Transformation* were completed, I had gathered feedback from the audiences and the actors, and then held a post-mortem to obtain additional details and thoughts from the actors and the designers. This chapter will discuss the actors' relationship with the *Three Circles of Energy* when applied to a performance situation and the audiences' responses and reactions to the production.

Theatrical productions are subjective experiences, and reviews and responses are based on personal feelings unique to each individual audience member. Often a portion of the audience will provide positive feedback for a play and the other portion will offer criticism for the show. There is never a right or wrong way to stage or respond to a production because designer and actor choices vary depending on their audience demographic and their venue. Because this chapter is based on personal feedback from actors and audiences, all data is subjective. The five actors working on the production offered honest and thoughtful responses to questions, but because the information they provided is based on their personal opinions, there is no way to scientifically quantify their responses.

Producing *Circle Mirror Transformation* as a piece of environmental theatre was a method of enhancing the play's theme of communication and connection amongst people. Environmental theatre removes the fourth wall from a performance, giving the audience a more direct connection both physically and emotionally with the actors, and allowing them the option to become a part of the play. *Circle Mirror Transformation* tells the story of five people desperately trying to connect with one another while learning about themselves as they play improvisation games, which serve as a metaphor for

learning how to act. To allow the audience to become members of the acting class, the actors had to connect with them on a personal level. According to Patsy Rodenburg's theory of the *Three Circles of Energy*, the most personal connections are formed when two people are in second circle, so to encourage the actors to reach out to the audience and establish personal connections, they rehearsed with each other in second circle and were encouraged to address the audience in second circle during the performances. The feedback from talk backs with the audience following each performance with the audience and a post-mortem with the actors and designers provided the majority of the results of applying second circle to the actors' performances and informed the analysis of their work.

Using Patsy Rodenburg's theory (explained in detail in Chapter Two), was meant to help the actors connect with and include the audience. Overall, the actors were able to use this theory to understand and adapt to any audience so they could continue to connect with them, regardless of the audience's attitude or participation during the performance. Most of the actors explained during the post-mortem that they were more aware of the three circles during performances than in rehearsal because, as the actors grew into an ensemble, acting in second circle became the expectation for rehearsals (see Appendix C). The audience, as an unknown and unpredictable element, forced them to remain alert during performances but also possessed the power to push the actors into first or third circle. What was useful for the actors was their ability to adapt to the audience's energy and response because they could find ways to regain their second circle energy. As actress Alison Bushey pointed out, (and this idea was supported in one of Patsy Rodenburg's videos), humans need all three circles for survival and in performance, and

by understanding and negotiating each circle, the actors can return to the second circle even if the audience is disruptive or unresponsive. During the second performance, one audience member responded “fascinating” to Theresa’s story in Week One (within the play world), and Alison was able to respond to him in third circle as the character of Theresa, while remaining in second circle as Alison.

One factor, which I did not anticipate, was that the audience might not be as willing to connect with the actors as the actors were to connect with them. The audience was always an unknown element for every show, but during performances when they refused to engage with the actors, the actors became aware of the emotional distance between themselves and the audience. Hannah-Lee Grothaus, who played Marty, described the audience in terms of Patsy Rodenburg’s theory and noted there were three shows where she analyzed the audience as being in first circle or third circle. These shows were the most challenging for the actors to remain in second circle. One of the performances was a preview, because the campus newspaper reviewer could only attend a dress rehearsal, so I decided to make the last dress rehearsal a preview and invited other audience members to allow the reviewer the chance to experience the production with an audience. The preview, where the actors were frequently in first circle, consisted of a small audience (about ten people) who were quiet and not enthusiastically willing to engage with the actors (see Appendix B). After the performance the actors explained that they felt cut off from the audience because they seemed reluctant to participate in the games. Their attitude caused the actors to become doubtful and uncertain of themselves, pushing them to perform in first circle. There were two performances with first circle audiences and when the audience was in first circle, the actors felt compelled to act either

in third circle- attempting to engage the audience by pushing their energy out-or in first circle, because the audience provoked them to doubt their performance and their actions. During the show where the audience was in third circle, the actors fell into first circle, feeling that the audience was overly vocal and not focused on the characters' relationships. Some of the actors lost their focus as they moved into first circle because they were frustrated with the disrespect of the audience or they were surprised by the audience's confidence (see Appendices B and C). The two performances where the audience was in second circle, allowed the actors to perform in second circle and encouraged the entire audience to feel as if they were students in the class; connecting with the characters on a personal level. These two performances demonstrated that when the actors are in second circle with the audience, they are able to form a closer connection with the actors. One audience member even said that she felt as though she was a part of the class (see Appendix B), indicating that the actors were successful in making personal connections with the audience. To fully immerse the spectators in the world of the play, the audience needs to be willing to become part of the story and the actors have to engage them and when both the audience and the actors are in second circle, it is possible to make the audience a part of the play.

For performances when the actors were not in second circle, the audience became an outside force, not part of the world of the play but rather a challenge for the actors. During the preview performance, the actors fell into first circle because they felt that the audience was not engaging with them and they were very hesitant to participate in the theatre games. The actors felt cut off from the audience because they were reserved, causing the actors to become inhibited and to perform in first circle. They ceased inviting

the audience to participate and attempting to engage with them because they felt that their efforts were pointless (see Appendix B). When the audience refused to connect with the actors and only contributed minimal energy, the actors felt as though the audience was judging them, and that they were removed from the characters and the class (see Appendix C). Similarly, during performance two, the audience was also more reserved and for the actors, it felt as though they were critical observers rather than fellow classmates. Actor Nick Hampson who played James, told me that for the second performance he was consistently in first circle, due in part to negative feedback he had received in a review of the show which had been printed that day. The audience did not come willing to participate in the play and kept themselves at a detached distance. Several actors fell into third circle in their attempt to engage the audience because they had to exert an extra effort in attempting to connect with the audience (see Appendix B). The audience's hesitation was exemplified during the game of circle mirror transformation. The first four audience members remained seated on their yoga mats and made arm gestures or sounds as a way of participating, instead of energetically standing and joining the actors as their fellow classmates. One audience member, seated in a chair commented on Theresa's story during the First Week (within the play), telling her that her story was "fascinating." Although physically closer so the actors could see and hear the audience more than they would be able to for a proscenium production, the audience failed to become part of the class because they came with the typical expectation that they would watch a play and judge the quality of the script, the acting, and the design choices.

As they entered the space for the second performance, the audience's attitude influenced the actors and pushed them into either first or third circle for the beginning of the show (see Appendix C). However, because the actors knew that second circle was their goal, they were able to refocus and achieve second circle with each other. Relying on their ensemble work, the actors were able to connect with each other, and as they got into second circle with each other, they began to include the audience more (see Appendix C). Audience members said that during the games and around the middle of the show, the actors were aware of them and the actors said that they did not feel like they were in second circle until the middle of the show (see Appendix B). Although the audience was self-conscious and hesitant to participate, according to their feedback, they felt engaged while watching the performance.

The fourth performance consisted of an audience entirely in third circle. They provoked the actors so that instead of trying to engage the audience, the actors tried to tune them out because they were distracting, for example applauding during blackouts and prolonged laughter during somber moments. The actors did not have to invite the audience to participate in the theatre games because the audience was ready to participate regardless of the actors. More audience members during this show than any other performance participated in the theatre games and this was the first show where the audience participated in the counting game. As the audience came in during the pre-show, I overheard several students discussing their plans to participate during the play and there were several students who fought for a chance to sit on a yoga mat rather than in a chair. The actors could not stay in second circle with the audience because the audience looked beyond them, attempting to demonstrate their ability to participate in the

show rather than observing the development of the characters. Instead of pushing to regain the audience's attention, the actors remained in second circle with each other, allowing the narrative to continue moving forward (see Appendix C). The actors had to disregard the audience and focus their energy entirely on one another. Referring back to Peter Brook's comment in Chapter Two, after a poor performance: "[I] wanted to blame the actors" but "it was clear that they were trying as hard as they could" and that "it was the relation with the audience that had changed" (Brook 21). The actors can only work so hard and then the audience has to meet them half-way. Although second circle was not useful for connecting with the audience that night, the actors depended on second circle to remain connected to one another. This performance demonstrated that using second circle to connect with the audience is only helpful for the actors if the audience is willing to invest in the characters and the story.

Each of the three performances where the audiences were not in second circle, forced the actors to find ways to reconnect with second circle, even though the audience was encouraging them to fall into first or third circle. However, with the knowledge of the three circles, actor Ryan Warsing explained that when the audience was in third circle on Saturday night, he felt forced to perform in second circle in order to be alert and prepared for the audience's interactions (see Appendix C). Because the actors had a common vocabulary and could analyze the audience's responsiveness, they could then determine the best method to engage the audience. Occasionally, performing in second circle with the audience did not increase their connection with audience members, particularly for audiences in first circle, but by performing in second circle with their fellow actors, they were able to capture the audience's attention. Actors Nick Hampson

and Mikaela Saccoccio both explained that during the three nights when the audiences were not in second circle, their ability to rely on their fellow actors and the ensemble allowed them to regain second circle and provided another method for trying to connect with the audience (see Appendix C).

During every talk back, the audience members consistently replied that they felt the actors were aware of them (see Appendix B), which attests to the actors' success in maneuvering through the three circles to adapt to each audience and ultimately being able to perform in second circle. Granted, not every audience member spoke during talk backs and all feedback is subjective, but the audience members who did contribute to the talk backs uniformly felt that the actors were aware of them through eye contact.

In addition to utilizing their knowledge of the three circles, the actors also relied on their character questions, and found the character exercises to be significantly helpful in preparing for an audience. Actor Nick Hampson explained that the questions asked during rehearsal were the most helpful because regardless of the audience's participation, or lack of participation, he could rely on his character's objectives and personality traits that we discovered in rehearsals (see Appendix C). All of the character homework each actor completed also helped to prepare them for the pre-show interaction with audience members, where the actors made small talk with the audience until Marty's class started and the show began. Actor Ryan Warsing as Shultz was able to connect with student Ben Lauer over participating in Boy Scouts during their childhoods (see Appendix B). Ryan explained later that all of the character discussions and questions were necessary because they allowed each actor the freedom to improvise (see Appendix C). By making decisions about their characters, the actors gained a solid understanding of their character's goals

and personalities, and created a familiar territory which could not be altered by any of the audience's actions. Every personal connection the actors made in character with the audience then encouraged the audience to be in second circle with the actors.

In environmental theatre, the audience's energy and emotions are an even more significant variable for the actors because their proximity affects the actors' mood. Actress Mikaela Saccoccio mentioned that for Lauren, her mood was dictated by the audience's perception of her (see Appendix C), which is unique to environmental theatre and does not have a chance to occur as often during a proscenium piece. The audience's apparent response to her character and her behavior allowed her to adapt to each audience because as Mikaela and as Lauren, she wanted the audience on her side (see Appendix C). The theatrical moment she relied on to win the audience over to her side was during the secrets game. During the first performance when the audience was in second circle and during the fourth performance when the audience was in third circle, Lauren intentionally revealed her secret to certain audience members (see Appendix B). When Lauren wrote out her secret, she would share what she had written with the audience members seated on mats and chairs around her, and they would silently approve or laugh. As her secret was read aloud, the audience shared the pleasure of being trusted with her personal information. On these nights, Mikaela was aware that both she and Lauren had won the audience over to her side because she was able to make a personal connection with them. For Mikaela, these occurrences indicated a victory in getting the audience to like her, and for Lauren, winning other students over to her side gave her power against Marty (see Appendix C).

Inviting small audiences to attend rehearsals was also extremely useful for the actors in preparing for actual performances. For the first stumble through, all of the designers were asked to attend the rehearsal and without warning the actors, were advised to participate if they felt comfortable. This was the first time the actors experienced the unknown factor of the audience and their unpredictable behavior during the play. For subsequent rehearsals, assistant director Nathan Alston participated in most games, attempting to break the actors' concentration and surprise them. Nathan gave the actors a chance to practice adapting to unknown audiences and inviting audience members into games. For our first rehearsal in the Studio Theatre, I invited the cast of the concurrent William and Mary Theatre main stage production, *The Night of the Iguana*, to attend as an audience. Only several actors and director Richard Palmer were able to attend the rehearsal, but actress Hannah-Lee Grothaus explained that having a small audience who was unfamiliar with the show was one of the most helpful exercises in preparing for performances (see Appendix C). There were several other rehearsals where one or two people unfamiliar with the play acted as audience members and gave the actors a chance to experiment with inviting spectators to participate in certain games and interacting with them. During the actual performances, the audience was much larger and was a greater challenge because the actors had to invite and connect with more people, but practicing on a small scale was still helpful for their preparation.

Regardless of whether the actors were in second circle, sometimes audience members did not feel like they could participate in certain games. For three of the four performances, the audience waited for an invitation before they would participate. Even if the actors were in second circle, some audience members said in talk backs that they

“wanted to be pointed to” and were looking for a sign of approval before they joined in. The audience explained that “eye contact gave [them] permission” and was inviting, and eye contact occurred most often and most sincerely when the actors were in second circle. During those moments, the actors were present with the audience member and able to connect with them on a personal level where they could encourage them to participate. However, for some audience members, eye contact was not a sufficient invitation, and the people who were looking for hand gestures wanted explicit permission to ensure that they were allowed to participate. When discussing this issue with actress Hannah-Lee Grothaus, she mentioned that she was not comfortable adding more gestures because it would be disrespectful to the audience members who were already participating, it would add time to the play and slow down the pace of the performance (see Appendix C), and if she was overly concerned with gesturing to each audience member she would no longer be in second circle but would fall into first or third circle.

Seating also contributed to whether audience members felt able to participate during certain games. The number of yoga mats which would fit in the Studio Theatre in a circle was limited, and to allow for a larger audience, three rows of chairs were included along three sides of the room, but this design automatically set up a divide between those spectators seated on chairs and those seated on yoga mats. We planned to seat only students on the ten yoga mats, partially because we could rely on them to participate in certain games during the play and partially because having non-students sit on the floor for two hours may not have been the best use of the audience. Although a greater age range within the audience seated on the floor would have been interesting, the majority of the audience consisted of students. Even with students, though, if they were

seated on the mats they would participate to varying degrees, but only during the fourth performance did students seated on chairs participate in games (see Appendix B). Audience members seated on the yoga mats were strongly encouraged to become members of Marty's creative drama class, not only because the actors incorporated them into the games, but also because of their physical proximity to the actors. The actors included these audience members in selected theatre games and had more opportunities to connect with them before the play began and during the games. Audience members seated on chairs along the walls were at more of a physical remove, so they were not pressured to participate in games when the characters were seated in a circle. However, the actors were still aware of them as additional students in Marty's classroom. Both audience members seated on yoga mats and on chairs explained that they felt that the actors were aware of them and most, at some moment during the play, made eye contact with at least one actor.

Depending on whether the audience was seated on the mats or on the chairs altered how they perceived and participated in the show. Everyone seated on the mats, which were reserved solely for student audience members, participated at least once during an improvisation game for every show; likewise the only people seated on chairs who participated were students. While the non-student audience members seated on the chairs acknowledged that they felt the actors were aware of them, none of them participated in the theatre games, even if the actors encouraged them through hand gestures or eye contact (see Appendix B). During talk backs, the most common response was that the spectator did not want to participate because they were afraid it would throw off or mess up the actors and the narrative of the story (see Appendix B). Even if they

wanted to participate, they were unsure how much of the action was improvised and how much was scripted.

Based on the audience responses and feedback from the talk backs, reception to this production was uniformly positive. Unlike the poor critical reception of Schechner's and The Performance Group's productions in the 1970s (discussed in detail in Chapter One), the audiences for *Circle Mirror Transformation* expressed positive responses to the production and the actors, even if they did not participate in any of the theatre games in the play (see Appendix B). Perhaps the mind-set of audiences has changed, or the forty years between Schechner's original productions and now has given audiences a chance to acclimate to the concept of environmental theatre, or possibly audiences are more open to interaction based theatre because of the rapid technological advances of our present world. Considering that the reviews for En Garde Arts's productions in the early 1990s were mostly positive and expressed fascination with the theatrical configuration (discussed further in Chapter One), there appears to be a progression of appreciation for interactive theatre over the past forty years, as guidelines have been cemented and audiences and critics have become more familiar with the style. The fact that only students participated in *Circle Mirror Transformation* supports Brantley's observation that interactive theatrical productions "reflect and confirm the daily reality of an age ruled by interactive media, in which information is fragmented, attention spans are brief, and individual identity is fluid," especially because "these [productions] drew theatergoers mostly in their 20s and 30s" and "what comes to mind...are YouTube, video games, Web surfing and watching television with a heavy thumb on the channel changer" (Brantley). Environmental theatre productions keep the audience on their toes as much as

it requires that the actors remain alert and aware of their surroundings and the audience. Similar to video games and the fast-paced world of the Internet, there is an element of danger and unpredictability for audiences as well as for the actors and maybe now audiences are ready for an interactive and surprising style of theatre.

Throughout this production, I discovered that while the actors performing in second circle is helpful in connecting with the audience and encouraging them to participate in the show, half the battle is the audience's frame of mind when they enter the space. The audience needs to be conditioned to the idea of environmental theatre, but even then, they may still not want to become a part of the world of the play. Alternatively, they may be so enthusiastic about joining the action, that they may not notice that there is a play concurrently unfolding around them as they laugh and jump and walk. When the actors were in second circle and the audience was in second circle, the Studio Theatre transformed into Marty's creative drama class for adults, and when the actors or the audience were in first or third circle, the play became a performance which allowed for audience interaction. However, what the five actors of *Circle Mirror Transformation* discovered was that possessing the knowledge of first and third circle, while relying on second circle, allowed them to adapt to all audiences, regardless of their focus and willingness to connect, and gave them the opportunity to present an engaging and truthful piece of environmental theatre.

Conclusion

Producing an environmental theatre piece poses many challenges for both designers and actors. The preparation of picking a script, deciding on the setting and either finding the space, transforming the space, or building a space from scratch is the first hurdle, but then finding actors who can perform with the audience in close proximity and who cannot rely on the fourth wall for protection is another challenge. By incorporating Patsy Rodenburg's theory of the *Three Circles of Energy* into rehearsals as part of the actors' preparation, I hoped to give the actors confidence in interacting with an audience so they could anticipate the unpredictability of each group and adapt to their responses.

For the actors, the knowledge of Rodenburg's theory proved useful for performances, regardless of the audience's attitude and willingness to participate in the show, but the effectiveness of second circle depended, in large part, upon the audience's energy. For the performances where audiences either did not want to participate or were more enthusiastic about participating than watching the play, it was difficult for the actors to connect in second circle with the audience because the audience was unwilling to connect with them. As Peter Brook said, a director cannot blame the actors if they are trying as hard as they can but the audience refuses to cooperate (Brook 21). The audience has to meet the actors halfway because of the reciprocal nature of performance; actors project their energy and emotions to the audience and in turn, the audience contributes their energy to the actors' performance. During the Thursday evening and Saturday afternoon performances the actors were engaged in that reciprocal relationship with the audience, and they were able to engage them in second circle. For the other performances

and the preview, the audience refused to connect with the actors, but because the actors were focused on maintaining second circle with one another, they were able to keep the play moving forward.

I would not consider these performances where the actors could not connect with the audience as failures because there is no strict definition of failure for an environmental theatre piece. Whether or not the audience participates in the play does not equate with success or failure for the performance. Every audience, whether they interacted with the actors or not claimed that they felt the actors were aware of them (see Appendix B), so the actors were always performing in second circle to the best of their abilities. The audience always received a top quality performance, with the actors devoted to connecting with them and always staying connected with their fellow actors, which is the goal for every theatrical performance. Shows where the audience did connect with the actors in second circle proved that it is possible for the actors and the audiences to make personal connections during environmental theatre productions, but none of the performances were failures.

There is a possibility that without educating the actors about Rodenburg's theory, they would still have been able to form intimate connections with the audience, but the purpose of using the theory of the *Three Circles of Energy* was to facilitate the actors' efforts in connecting with the audience. With this knowledge, the actors could evaluate the energy of each audience, which changed every night, and then adjust as necessary to have the greatest possible chance to engage the audience. Even with this information, during the final night with the third circle audience, the actors were unable to directly

connect with them, but they had tactics they could rely on to support their attempts to engage with the audience.

The nature of environmental theatre is to immerse the audience further into the world of the play and make them part of the story. Incorporating audience seating into the set design eliminates the fourth wall so there is no longer a divider between the actors and the audience. The actors have to respond to the audience and the audience has to react to the actors because neither can escape the other. Every individual spectator can see their fellow audience members and all of the actors can see every audience member. The close proximity of actors to audience members is unusual compared to standard theatrical practices, but it heightens the sense of both the actors' and the spectators' energy, whether they are responding positively or negatively, which affects the performance, making each show unique to that specific audience. Environmental theatre makes the production a personal experience for the actors and audiences, forcing an individual response from all people involved and eliminating the possibility of either the actors or the audience anticipating what will happen during the show. Using the second circle to encourage the growth of personal connections between actors and audiences supports the intimate nature of environmental theatre and promotes genuine emotional responses to the characters and the spectators.

This production of *Circle Mirror Transformation* proved that applying Patsy Rodenburg's theory of the *Three Circles of Energy* to an environmental theatre production is effective and useful for the actors. Using the second circle made the actors more alert and aware of the audience and each other, which minimized the shock and fear of the audience's reactions and responses, which were always unpredictable. The actors

could easily adapt to each audience, and even if the audience surprised them during the play, they were never thrown off or lost their focus because they were present and vigilant. Relying on the second circle also allowed the actors to grow as an ensemble, so that regardless of the audience, they could always rely on their fellow actors. Second circle applied two fold to environmental theatre: for the actors communicating with one another, and for the actors connecting with the audience, and as long as the audience was open to building a relationship with the actors, Marty's acting class became a reality for both the actors and the audience.