ALTERNATIVE DRAMATURGIES IN CONTEMPORARY WESTERN EUROPEAN THEATRE FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES

By

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation will examine how current alternative dramaturgies developed by theatres for young audiences in Western Europe are the direct result of the experimentations of the late twentieth century and, as such, are at the forefront of alternative dramaturgical experimentation and postdramatic theatre practices. Based on the premise that Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) in Western Europe participated in the rise of alternative dramaturgies during the late twentieth century, and continues to promote and improve alternative dramaturgical practices, the dissertation is the first of its kind to connect postdramatic dramaturgy to the alternative dramaturgies of TYA. This dissertation considers the following questions: (1) What are alternative dramaturgies? (2) How are contemporary Western European TYA companies advancing experimentation with alternative dramaturgies? (3) How are alternative dramaturgies promoting the importance of empathetic exchange and agency for young people? These questions are examined through the theories of Hans-Thies Lehmann and Ric Knowles and applied to the case studies of the 2014 Replay production of *COMET,* the 2015 hetpaleis production of *Het Hamiltoncomplex*, and both the 2015 and 2017 MAAS Theatre and Dans productions of *Rite of Spring: The Threat of Beauty*. Through this lens, I outline alternative dramaturgies in contemporary TYA as essential tools in the creation of complex, inclusive, and autonomous theatre for young people. Ultimately, this dissertation will demonstrate the importance of TYA and its alternative dramaturgy as a crucial part of theatre history as well as a leading force in contemporary experimental theatre.

CHAPTER ONE:

The Aesthetics of Agency:

Alternative Dramaturgies in Contemporary Western European

Theatre for Young Audiences

*Emancipation begins when we challenge the
opposition between viewing and acting; when
we understand that the self-evident facts that
structure the relations between saying, seeing
and doing themselves belong to the structure
of domination and subjection. It begins when
we understand that viewing is also an action
that confirms or transforms this distribution
of positions.*
                    - Jacques Rancière
                    The Emancipated Spectator (13)

In 1944, Fritz Heider and Marianne Simmel devised an experiment to explore the process

of perception. Created to gain insight into how human beings interpret situations and activities

without any specifically human components, the experiment asked participants to watch to a film

where three geometrical shapes moved in various directions and speeds, and to then interpret

what they saw. In Heider's and Simmel's published findings, "An Experimental Study of

Apparent Behavior" the results revealed an overwhelming response rate of narrative-based

observations, including individualized personifications of the three shapes and stories of rich and

detailed interactions between them. While the original experiment included a guided response

that fostered personification, the narratives varied and though many overlapped, there were both

minute and seismic differences in the participants' perceptions based on their interpretation of

the shapes as humans with complex personalities, desires, and drives (244-247). The spectators

of the Heider-Simmel video were given an opportunity to engage in a form of meaning-making

which allowed them to make decisions, choices, and insert their own cultural codes, communal

memories, and ideology onto two-dimensional objects. Even with the original intent of the film

potentially skewing the narrative towards the creators' perspective, the participants still brought

their own ideas, creativity, and individual experiences into their description of the event.

Over seventy years later, I participated in several workshops between 2015 and 2019 at

the UWC-ISAK Japan international summer school in which a variation of the Heider-Simmel

experiment was conducted on adolescents from diverse cultural, socio-economic, national, and

geo-political backgrounds. In this version, rather than focused upon the ways in which humans

perceive action and activities, the participants were simply shown the video and then asked to

describe what they saw. The answers varied widely from stories of bullying to war to potential

methods of conflict resolution. Even when one student described the video in terms of a

mathematical event, notably the only one in five years of observation to do so, her description of

the video as two-dimensional objects moving through a single plane over a confined time lapse

was still indicative of her own perception of the world. This ownership of perception by

adolescent spectators, the multiple ways in which a person can interpret an event, and the

potential for individualized engagement, as demonstrated by my observations of the Heider-

Simmel experiment, is at the heart of this dissertation.

While the experiment was based around a short film, the role of perception and narrative

is also an integral part of theatre. Throughout history, theatre has engaged with meaning-making

and the social, cultural, and political possibilities of communal narrative. In the late twentieth

century, experimental theatre companies in Western[1] Europe gained a renewed interest in theatre

and performance as a medium for meaning-making outside of explicit narrative, eschewing the

text-centric didacticism of naturalism championed by Yates, Zola, and Antoine and the

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[1] While acknowledging the problematic delineation of "West" and "East" and the linguistic

psychological realism steeped in Ibsen, Shaw, and Chekhov. Instead, experimental work began

to scrutinize existing forms, drawing upon theoretical readings of Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*

to deconstruct dramatic performance hierarchies, which establish a distinct distance between

spectator and performer (c.f. Ackerman and Puchner; Fuchs; Kloss; Knowles; Tompkins;

Worthen; Reynolds). However, the companies credited with pioneering these experimental art

forms are by-and-large seen as producing theatre specifically targeted towards adults. There is

very little existing scholarship focused on the advances in dramaturgical practice created by

Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA). With this gap in the existent exploration of alternative

dramaturgies and experimental theatre practices in mind, this dissertation will examine how

current alternative dramaturgies used by many theatres for young audiences in Western Europe

are the direct result of the experimentations of the late 20th century and, as such, are at the

forefront of alternative dramaturgy, multi-perspective viewership, and spectator agency.

By focusing specifically on the theatrical advances of TYA in Western Europe since the

late 20th century, I will examine how TYA has fostered a strong alternative dramaturgy which

relies on the semiotics inherent in the performance and inspires its audiences to practice

empathy, agency, and social consciousness. I build upon two premises: (1) TYA in Western

Europe participated in, and perhaps even championed, the rise of alternative dramaturgies during

the late 20th century and (2) that TYA continues to promote and improve alternative

dramaturgical practices by connecting to the cultural and ideological needs of young people,

pushing the boundaries of what theatre can mean, and how it can both affect and be affected by

those participating. To ascertain how alternative dramaturgies operate in contemporary Western

European TYA, this dissertation engages with the following questions:

1.   What are alternative dramaturgies?

2.   How are contemporary Western European TYA companies advancing experimentation with alternative dramaturgies?

3.   How are alternative dramaturgies promoting the importance of empathetic exchange and agency for young people?

Through these questions this dissertation aims to redefine current understandings of the progression of alternative dramaturgies in order to highlight a widely overlooked movement within TYA.

Alternative Dramaturgy in Theatre for Young Audiences: Definitions of the Terms

Theatre for Young Audiences

While the exact origins of Theatre for Young Audiences remain contested, many scholars suggest that the emergence of Western European professional theatre geared towards children and young audiences is a late 19th-, early 20th-century phenomenon (c.f. van de Water "Constructed Narratives;" Schuitema; McCaslin; Springhall). Typically defined as professional theatre by adult actors created specifically for children and/or youth, TYA is situated in the larger theatrical landscape as simultaneously belonging and Other. That is to say, while practitioners engage in theatrical exploration, dramaturgical advancements, and innovation in technology and design, the position of TYA as a subject of study, or even recognized as a valuable contribution to theatre history, remains widely overlooked. Despite this gap in scholarship, TYA has made great strides in establishing itself as a recognized field of study. The

International Association of Theatre for Children and Young people (ASSITEJ[2]) was established in 1965 with an aim to bring recognition to the field and bridge the cultural divide between the East and the West during the Cold War, while advocating for the "right of all children and young people to enrichment through the arts and their own cultural traditions, especially theatre culture" (ASSITEJ Constitution, 2016). The International Theatre for Young Audiences Research Network (ITYARN), established in 2006, was specifically founded to rectify the oversight in theatre scholarship by organizing international conferences and publishing peer-reviewed work and has been the official research network of ASSITEJ since 2011. *Youth Theatre Journal* (2009.1) provides a peer-reviewed journal for ITYARN articles. However, scholarship and research geared toward TYA still remains limited and is often relegated to TYA-specific publications rather than included in larger studies in theatre, performance, and practice.

In his foreword to *Theatre for Young Audiences: A Critical Handbook*, playwright David Wood argues for the importance of TYA as a recognized art form, proclaiming that

> Theatre for young audiences is an art form. There, I have said it. Theatre for children and young people is an art form. Full stop. Since 1967, when I wrote my first play for children, I have always qualified that statement with, 'I believe that...' or, 'it may sound pretentious, but in my opinion...' But this book has at last given me the confidence to state firmly that, along with opera, ballet, and mime, children's theater and theatre created specifically for teenagers is an art form in its own right, not just a junior version of adult or 'real' theatre. (vii)

Despite its existence within theatre history for over a century, there are still artists, like Wood, who feel the need to preface their work in children's theatre to legitimize its standing when

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[2] ASSITEJ comes from the original French title: *Association Internationale du Théâtre de L'Enfance et la Jeunesse.*

speaking to those in adult or "real" theatre. However, Wood also sees TYA as a specific art form outside of the traditional view of theatre history. He and his co-author, Janet Grant, suggest in *Theatre for Children: Guide to Writing, Adapting, Directing, and Acting* (1997) that, "Theatre for children is a separate art form with qualities that make it quite distinct from adult theatre. It is *not* simplified adult theatre; it has its own dynamics and its own rewards" (Wood and Grant 5). However, Wood's argument that TYA is a separate art form overlooks the role of theatre training and the broad definition of theatre, an oversight which other scholars seek to rectify.

In "There Is No Audience: Meeting the Dramaturgical Challenges of the Spectator in Children's Theatre" (2012), Tom Maguire walks the line between TYA as both part of theatre history and a distinct art form. He establishes the dichotomy between theatrical competency of the makers and the lack of knowledge (or interest) in theatre tradition by the spectators (11). Through the idea of "differential dramaturgies," Maguire suggests "that the spectator would understand the conventions of the performance irrespective of their theatrical competence" while "their modes of accessing the performance would be addressed" (18). Thus, rather than trying to control or dictate the mode of reception, Maguire advocates for a style of spectatorship which encourages and engages with agency as a key component of the TYA craft.

This question of spectatorship, which accesses the modes of perception specific to young people, is the foundation of Matthew Reason's seminal work, *The Young Audience: Exploring and Enhancing Children's Experiences of Theatre* (2010). Reason advocates for the connection of TYA and theatre, providing a study which "deals with children's engagement with theatre as theatre" (ix). His work examines spectator experiences that go "beyond the familiar questions of *why* children should experience theatre, and of *what kind*, and instead examine *how* children watch, understand, engage with, and remember theatre" (xi). By providing credibility to the

child as spectator, Reason's work advocates for the importance of spectator agency within TYA. However, by looking at TYA as existing within the "overlapping frames of reference, evoking discourses of education as much as aesthetics, pedagogy as much as art" (3) he also sets TYA within a different discourse than "adult" theatre. The two are, therefore, under the same umbrella term (theatre) yet different in the intent of the production. His conclusive argument is that TYA is part of a larger understanding of spectatorship, one in which the experiences of young audiences exemplify "the conscious and reflective pleasures that come from empathy and wonderment; and the social pleasures that come from shared experiences. Whether we think of staring or gazing or watching or witnessing, what we are dealing with is audiencing" (172). Thus, this dissertation intends to rely upon the premise set forth by Maguire and Reason that, while Woods is correct in identifying the distinction between traditional and youth spectatorship, TYA is a theatrical art form which aims to create aesthetically pleasing and profound performances for young people through experimentation and the exploration of other broader theatrical concepts.

Alternative

Stemming from the 15th century French *alternatif* as "changeable, variable, exhibiting variation" and the Latin *alternativus* as "movements to and fro, to ebb and flow, to be variegated" ("alternative"), the word "alternative" has a variety of definitions. The ontologically and epistemologically fitting definition of "alternative" as disjunctive, and a choice between multiple things ("alternative"), highlights the ways in which many non-text-centric performances are conceived and interpreted both by their creators and by their spectators. However, the definition of "alternative" as "various (hypothetical or imagined) realties, worlds, realms of existence,

differing from our own in trivial or fundamental ways" ("alternative") is of particular note when

conceiving the idea of an alternative dramaturgy. Perhaps most interestingly, the concept of

"alternative" as a hypothetical or imagined realm of existence, offers the definition of alternative

dramaturgies a unique position, privileging the imagination of its spectators within the definition

of the term.

Dramaturgy

Defining dramaturgy may be just as nebulous as "alternative," in that there are a variety of

different ways the term is understood.   In *Dramaturgy and Performance,* Cathy Turner and

Synne Behrndt begin their framework by acknowledging the tenuous nature of the term

"dramaturgy," pointing to Marianne van Kerkhoven's argument that "dramaturgy involves

everything, is to be found in everything, and is hard to pin down" (Kerkhoven qtd. in Turner and

Behrndt 21). They see dramaturgy as a slippery term which can encompass both the reception

and the production of a piece, one in which both the construction of signs and signifiers and, the

response to those codes, and the interpretation leads to a "dynamic event" (Turner and Behrndt

21). Their argument follows the established dramaturgical historiography, starting with the

Greek *dramaturgia* and Aristotle's *Poetics,* moving through G.E. Lessing's *Hamburgis*

Dramaturgi, the explorations of Johann Wolfgang van Goethe and Friedrich von Schiller in the

18th century, and rounding out their analysis with 20th century understandings of dramaturgy

from Bertolt Brecht, Hans-Thies Lehmann, and beyond.[3] Their conclusion, which highlights the

development of the concept of dramaturgy from a structure of analysis to an all-encompassing

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[3] For more see Aristotle's *Poetics,* Bertolt Brecht's *Brecht on Theatre,* Marvin Carlson's
Theories of the Theatre, Hotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Hamburg Dramaturgy,* and Lehmann's
Postdramatic Theatre

yet amorphous perception of how and why a performance works, ultimately posits that contemporary dramaturgy "might suggest new ways of negotiating our roles as spectators and critics" (Turner and Behrndt 97). Their concept of dramaturgy is a potentially revolutionary design where "the attempt to articulate and identify what we have witnessed, is itself a political act" (Turner and Behrndt 97). Building upon their conclusion, as well as the history of dramaturgy and scholarship it represents, this dissertation will demonstrate a way of looking, a way of conceiving human understanding in how we see, are seen, and wish to see. Moreover, while the history of dramaturgy is empowering in its interest in constructing meaning and the experience of the spectator, it also has a fraught connection with privilege and power, sometimes more interested in directing the gaze than unpacking why the gaze occurs. The liminal space between the direction of the gaze and the decision to gaze, as well as the power that choice can represent, is a vital part of TYA spectatorship and the empowerment the act of viewing can represent. For countries, cultures, and individuals grappling with fractured identities, colonialism, communal memory, and both generational and global politics, the negotiation of spectatorship as an articulation of self and witnessing becomes an especially significant act.

In places like Europe, where political, social, and theatrical history offer competing perspectives of privilege and power, clear definitions can be problematic if not impossible. Reflecting upon her work in "European Dramaturgy in the 21st Century: A Constant Movement," van Kerkhoven acknowledges that "Today – almost twenty years of dramaturgical experience later – I still do not know properly what dramaturgy is – let alone European dramaturgy" (7). For van Kerkhoven, dramaturgy is hard to concretely define as it is a process, a thing in which "Not only the subject but also the object is constantly moving, not standing still" (7). Paralleling the history of TYA alternative dramaturgy explored in chapter three, van Kerkhoven unpacks the

contemporary cultural scene in Europe, lamenting the ways in which twenty years of social, cultural, and economic changes have led to a world in which "all these small but important forms of freedom and autonomy of the citizen that seemed to be acquired since the period of May '68 are disappearing" (9). Yet, there is also innovation in the blend of science and art, experimentation funded by research which leaves room for creativity without constraints that result from a dependence on ticket sales, and the cultural and social need for inclusive, de-hierarchal, antiracist and anti-colonial work (van Kerkhoven 9-11). Europe's dramaturgy, therefore, is one in which dramaturgy is not only "about the emancipation of the performer but also about the emancipation of the spectator" (van Kerkhoven 11). This emancipation is found in fragmentation, in the way that individual construction creates meaning. It is a way of offering "an alternation between observation and immersion, between surrendering and attempting to understand" where the emphasis moves away from emancipation and towards a desire to explore perception (van Kerkhoven 11). Through her reflection, van Kerkhoven offers a useful idea of European dramaturgy as a concept focused upon the role of complexity, a conversation between multiple perspectives, and a bridge between shifting ideas, concepts of self, and perceptions of experiences. This idea of dramaturgy as a complex, shifting bridge between people, places, ideas, and even perhaps realities, becomes especially useful when defining alternative dramaturgies in a contemporary European context, and in the intensely complex and liminal space occupied by Theatre for Young Audiences.

Parallax Viewership

Used by astronomers to calculate large distances, there is an astronomical phenomenon, also known as a parallax, where an object can appear to be different, change positions, or even

change directions based on where and how the object is being observed ("parallax"). In performance, the parallax view draws from the astronomical phenomenon, creating a way to synthesize complex and dissonant perceptions (Woolf 45). The parallax perspective is based on an understanding that each spectator is calculating meaning through the different, changing, positions of their own identity, communal memories, cultural scripts, and subjective perspectives (c.f. Karatani; Woolf; and Boenisch). A parallax can also refer to the same event perceived by multiple perspectives, such as in James Joyce's 1922 novel *Ulysses*. Combining the concepts of the parallax view, parallax perspective, and the concept of the parallax within narrative, I posit that parallax viewership can encompass both the simultaneity of dissonant perspective in the individual spectator and the multiple, intercultural, and complex perspectives of multiple spectators engaging with the same performance within the nebulous temporary community known as the audience.

Alternative Dramaturgy

Not unlike the experience of "audiencing" put forth by Reason, the ideological underpinnings of more commonly recognized alternative dramaturgy movements of the 1960s aimed to deconstruct the cultural hegemonies of modernism and foster new experiments with form and performativity. For Richard Kostelanetz, alternative theatre, or mixed-means performances, "differ from conventional drama in de-emphasizing verbal language, if not avoiding words completely, in order to stress such presentational means as sound and light, objects and scenery, and/or the movement of people and props" (3). Elinor Fuchs builds upon this idea of de-emphasized verbal language by exploring "the presentation of time and space when we are no longer in a theater of character, when the human figure is no longer the single, perspectival

'point' of stage performance" (*Death of Character* 12). While Mike Vanden Heuvel looks at

the tension between drama and performance and contemporary experimentation, unraveling

traditional definitions of performance as the "staging of the literary artifact" (22-4) in order to

highlight how

> Performance deconstructs authorial power and its illusion of presence, and disperses its
>
> quanta of energies among the performers and the spectator as a potential source of a
>
> deferred, hypothetical, and immanent power. Performance is therefore initially the
>
> displacement of Presence, or power, and the affirmation of Absence and powerlessness.
>
> (5)

These expressions of alternative dramaturgy allow for this compilation of complex systems

through multimodal, de-hierarchized, and non-text-centric performance, empowering the

spectator by engaging with continuous experimentation surrounding the bounds of what theatre

can be and how the spectator can be offered agency through the potential of multilayered

meaning-making. For spectators whose social position exists on the fringes of power, alternative

dramaturgy's egalitarian approach to meaning-making can be especially powerful.

For young people, particularly those who live in a society where children and young

people are denied autonomy, their role as "human becomings" rather than full human beings

creates a liminal existence. As Victor Turner suggests in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-*

Structure (1966), liminal personae (such as adolescent spectators in TYA) are "neither here nor

there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom,

convention, and ceremonial" (95). Alternative dramaturgies, which focus upon radical restaging,

self-reflexivity, self-thematization, and renegotiating the place of theatre in a world where mass

media rapidly shifts the conversation of art (Lehmann 17), offer theatre practitioners and young

audiences a space to explore the liminality of non-binary existence. Within this dramaturgical ideology, the "threshold people" of TYA audiences can find a community and a new form of communication in the parallax of alternative dramaturgy, outside of the system which reduces them to liminal beings. They are offered spaces where they can create their own meaning, areas where "the binary of oppositions or discriminations" (Turner 106) can be explored and questioned.

When engaging with alternative dramaturgies, TYA is also offered a chance to explore the multitude of imaginative ways through which children and young people communicate with the world around them. As Beth Juncker highlights in "What's the Meaning? The Relations Between Professional Theatre Performances and Children's Cultural Life,"

> Children's cultural communities *communicate through action.* It is a community which constantly *deals with transformations*. You can actually be what you eat. A community *practicing the aesthetic -- symbolic dimension -- fictions -- every day.* In this dimension *everything can take place, but never ever for real*. And there is *one golden rule* here: children never start activities they don't like. (15)

There is an inherent understanding of agency within the cultural communities examined by Juncker, an agency that alternative dramaturgies explore through multimodal ways of thinking, creating, and communicating. Non-text-centric theatre, and especially theatre which leans on aesthetics and interpretive forms of communication, offer young audiences a spectator experience where they can engage with the performance as they might engage with their own community. There is a playfulness, an understanding of plurality where one can practice an aesthetic, to engage your imagination while also still being you, and acts which are predicated by choice.

How Do Individuals Make Meaning?

Material Semiotics

To explore the complexity of the relationship between the performed, performer, and spectator, and the agency which can result from a de-hierarchal approach to meaning-making, this dissertation will primarily use Ric Knowles' theory of Material Semiotics, which he sees as the essential interplay between the Performance Text (what exists on the stage), the Conditions of Production (who is onstage, how they are trained, who is directed, what the process involved, the architecture of the space, the historical and cultural moments influencing creative decisions, etc.) and the Conditions of Reception (who is viewing, how their experience was shaped by front-of-house and other pre-show experiences, where they come from, how they arrived, ticket prices, historical and cultural moments shaping their own experiences (*Reading* 3-9). First defined in *Reading the Material Theatre* (2004) and then expanded upon in *Theatre and Interculturalism* (2010) and *How Theatre Means* (2014), Knowles conceives the interchange between performance text, conditions of performance, and conditions of reception as a process through which meaning is made by "multiple and multiply coded systems of production, systems of communication, and systems of reception" in which "the social and cultural work done by the performance, its performativity, and its force – is the effect of all of these systems" (*Reading* 19). This understanding of semiotics as shaped by the material conditions of reception, as well as the signifiers presented to the spectator, adds a layer of complexity to how meaning is made in the theatre. Spectators have more agency as their own identity markers, positionality, and perceptions directly impact the meaning of what they are viewing.

For Knowles, making meaning while participating in a performative event is a complex and potentially emancipatory experience. The performance text becomes far more than the

literary artifact, encompassing all the ways through which spectators can read and analyze their experiences. Movement as well as the mise-en-scène comes together to create a "structural system that functions as the glue that holds the various sign-systems at work in a performance together" (*How Theatre Means 79*). In this space, time becomes musical, organizing itself through tempos, time signatures, bars, phrases, and movements (*How Theatre Means* 58). Space becomes relational with theatrical action carving out meaning through proximity and distance, vertical and horizontal positions, singular and choral figures, spectators and performers, all of which/whom come together to influence the ways through which the spectator perceives the event (*How Theatre Means* 59). The audience or, more accurately, the individual spectators which comprise the nebulous community known as "the audience," embodies an intercultural "possibility of interaction across a multiplicity of cultural positionings, avoiding binary codings" (*Theatre and Interculturalism* 4). This intersectional spectatorship within an intercultural audience allows for individual acts of viewership to be executed within the bounds of a structured performance, providing a form of communal engagement with individual yet shared acts of being. Therefore, drawing from this understanding of perception and event, the interaction between the performance text, the conditions of performance, and the conditions of reception, Knowles' theory allows for the argument that meaning is never stagnant. There is no specific and fixed moment of understanding, no right or wrong reading of a performance, nor any one party that's entitled to create meaning. This fluidity can have a vital impact upon marginalized communities, such as those engaged in the liminality of adolescence represented by my three case studies.

Postdramatic Aspects

Furthering this dissertation's examination of the ways through which alternative dramaturgy engages with multimodal and multilayered experiences of spectatorship in Theatre for Young Audiences, I will explore how a spectator might experience aesthetics and action as integral components of meaning-making. Engaging with aesthetics, what Juncker defines as "a sensitive, playful, symbolic shaping way of exploring and experiencing the world all of us take part in" (22), alternative dramaturgies provide a complex and potentially infinite space of creativity. This space also engages with a particular form of embodied empathy, a way in which creators and spectators can engage with themselves, each other, and the performance text.

In order to approach aesthetics and the ways in which one encounters meaning, I will be focusing primarily upon Hans-Thies Lehmann's theory of postdramatic theory, and particularly his interpretation of the aspects of text, space, time, body, and media, which can serve as simultaneous, overlapping, and complex components of the postdramatic experience. This theory is explored in his seminal work, *Postdramatisches Theater* (1999) and translated into English as *Postdramatic Theatre* (2006), which offers a useful look at how advancements in non-text-centric performance changed the late 20th-century performance landscape. Rooted in a critical look at theatre history and the various forms of dramaturgical practice and aesthetic forms, Lehmann is interested in how the postdramatic allows theatrical modes to be (de)constructed and (re)performed in a new way. For Lehmann, the postdramatic engages with postmodernism, expanding on ideas of:

> ambiguity; celebrating theatre as process; discontinuity; heterogeneity; non-textuality;
> pluralism; multiple codes; subversion; all sites; perversion; performer as theme and

protagonist; deformation; text as basic material only; deconstruction … nihilistic and

grotesque forms, empty space, silence. (Lehmann 25)

In these deformations, deconstructions, and plural spaces of discontinuous ambiguity, Lehmann

locates the five postdramatic aspects (text, space, time, body, and media) as a lens through which

one can analyze outside the constraints of the literary artifact, focusing instead upon both the

physical and metaphysical facets of performance.

However, this dissertation is not a specifically postdramatic reading of TYA. While the

ambiguity, cultural coding, and subversion involved in the postdramatic is especially impactful

for the adolescent experience, contemporary TYA engages with an added layer of complexity

which comes from the presence and existence of the individual spectator. While Lehmann is

interested in the act of viewing, he believes that the point of spectatorship is something which

"makes totality possible precisely because the position of the viewer, the point of view, is

excluded from the visible world of the picture, so that the constitutive act of representation is

missing in the represented" (Lehmann 79). Though this may be true for postdramatic theatre, it

is not true in TYA, an art form that is specifically predicated upon its inclusion of the position of

the viewer into the world of the picture. Thus, in order to reconcile Lehmann's understanding of

postdramatic aesthetics and the abundance of parallax viewership they foster alongside the

foundational component of the spectators within the purpose of theatre *for* young audiences, my

use of Ric Knowles and his theory of Material Semiotics, can offer crucial insight into the role of

the spectator in performance.

Methodology and Chapter Breakdown

The theoretical framework for this dissertation combines Lehmann and Knowles in order to fill in the gaps they each leave when approaching alternative dramaturgies of theatre made specifically for young audiences. Knowles's primary focus was never specific to alternative dramaturgy and his primary interest in unpacking text-centric forms of theatre, even when including aesthetic and non-text elements, only captures part of the experience of alternative dramaturgies in Theatre for Young Audience. The aspects of postdramatic theatre offered by Lehmann allow one to engage with specifically non-text-centric performances while material semiotics keep the "for" in Theatre for Young Audiences. Together they offer a rich complexity through which this dissertation can examine alternative dramaturgies used in contemporary Western European TYA and the implications of complex, inclusive, and autonomous theatre for young people they create.

While this framework can be applied to a wide, potentially global, range of TYA styles, productions, and audience demographics, I will be focusing on three case studies which represent similar yet divergent forms of alternative dramaturgy and spectator engagement. My case studies, chosen from productions which I have either seen, have access to through videotaped footage, and/or have access to the script as well as documented feedback, engage with similar themes and intentions yet with enough points of convergence and divergence to demonstrate three variations of how alternative dramaturgy can be used to engage adolescent audiences. All three case studies are intended for young audiences 13-and-up and engage with questions of identity, gender, violence, and power. However, they each represent a different degree of use of linguistic text. The first case study, Replay Theatre's production of John McCann's monodrama *COMET*, provides an example of how script-based theatre, even in forms that appear

linguistically-text-heavy like monodramas, does not necessarily require a text-centric approach. As a monodrama, *COMET* offers a unique opportunity to explore how the solo voice generates simultaneous interpretations of meaning while its production as guerilla theatre examines the role of space, power dynamics, and both interpersonal and intrapersonal engagements with material semiotics in theatre for young audiences. The second case study, hetpaleis' devised production *Het Hamiltoncomplex*, explores how language can be deconstructed through a series of episodes that play with the abundance of signs, distortions of language, and complex and multimodal forms of performance. The final case study, the ritualistic movement-based production of MAAS Theatre and Dans (in collaboration with Flat Foot)'s *Rite of Spring: The Threat of Beauty,* is almost entirely devoid of language, relying on aesthetics, movement, and spectator parallax, to create meaning. The goal of the three case studies is to unravel the existence of language in alternative dramaturgies, building upon each other to demonstrate the variety of ways through which text, space, time, the body, and media can interact with conditions of performance and conditions of reception, ultimately creating a powerful spectator experience.

Chapter Breakdown

The main body of the dissertation will feature five content chapters. In Chapter Two: **Making Meaning: Material Semiotics of Text, Space, Time, Body, and Media** I begin by unpacking my theoretical framework in order to demonstrate how choice, engagement, and perception join together to foster agency in young audiences. I explore a comprehensive conversation between Ric Knowles' material semiotics and Hans-Thies Lehmann's postdramatic aspects of text, space, time, body, and media in order to offer a complex and comprehensive foundation for the rest of the dissertation.

Chapter Three: **Moving Forward by Looking Back: Historical Roots of Alternative Dramaturgy in TYA** focuses on the theatre experimentation which emerged from the cultural and ideological shift in Western Europe during the latter half of the 20th century. Building upon the 1970 UNESCO report "Cultural Development: Experience and Policies" by Augustin Girard, as well as analysis provided by Manon van de Water (*Theatre, Youth, and Culture* 2012) and Hans van Maanen and Stephen Elliot Wilmer (1998), I will show that the post-World War II commitment to more diverse cultural production provided funding opportunities to companies and artists interested in Theatre for Young Audiences. Exploring how funding interacted with the emergence of the TYA Emancipatory Theatre movement, Theatre in Education, and both late 20th century and early 21st century experimental theatre, I trace the progression of alternative dramaturgy in TYA projects through the late 20th and early 21st century. I highlight how Emancipatory Theatre allowed for a performative (re)presentation of the chaos of childhood and adolescence and the intense weight placed upon the interpretation and abstraction of daily life, linking TYA Emancipatory Theatre to the theory and ideology of postdramatic productions in the 1980s; how Theatre In Education (TIE) contributed to new ways of conceiving interaction and participation with spectators; and how the development of TYA has continued to expand through the invention and incorporation of technology in the 21st century.

In Chapter Four, *"***The Normality of This Extraordinary Experience:" Carving Space with *COMET*,** I explore how directly engaging teenage spectators through guerilla theatre can redesign spaces of power. Unpacking how conditions of performance and conditions of reception can have a direct influence on a performance, I follow the construction of *COMET* from the history of the monodrama through the author's direct engagement with his targeted audience in the creation of the script to the impact of site-specific and guerilla theatre on both the

interpretation and possible intervention on its spectators. The chapter engages with cultural

conditions specific to Northern Ireland and post-Troubles male adolescence in order to unpack

the role of fractured identity, representation, and community explored through the piece. As the

first case study, I demonstrate how de-hierarchal performance experiences creates a plurality of

perspectives, non-text-centric aesthetics, and an interplay between the fictive and the real, even

in a theatrical event constructed through a solo voice performing a literary text.

Chapter Five: "**Betwixt and Between:"** *Het Hamiltoncomplex* **and the Plurality of**

Perspective, explores how gender performance is instructed by an act of viewership. Exploring

the ambiguity of cultural coding as it is applied to the gendered body, *Het Hamiltoncomplex*

offers a dense, episodic, and highly experimental deconstruction of the perceptions and

preconceptions of gender, girlhood, and adolescence. Devised by Lies Pauwels in collaboration

with the ensemble, the piece is performed by thirteen thirteen-year-old-girls and one adult male

body builder, thus deconstructing traditional definitions of TYA. The conditions of performance

represented by the presence of adolescent female bodies, and the specific ways in which those

bodies create potentially complicated conditions of reception, provide a rich tapestry of analysis.

Juxtaposing the various ways through which, onto which, and in which bodies create meaning

with a barrage of words, pop culture, soundscapes, and myths, *Het Hamiltoncomplex* plays with

the familiar-made-strange in order to subvert cultural conceptions of gender performance as

instructed by both the internal and external gaze.

Chapter Six: **"Whatever you feel about it is true:" Engaging Aesthetics in** *Rite of*

Spring: The Threat of Beauty builds upon the themes and insights from the other chapters in

order to explore how non-linguistic performance texts can encourage individualized meaning-

making for its spectators. As a case study into the ways in which meaning can also be created

through visceral experiences, *Rite of Spring* explores gender performativity and the fractured self

through a lush combination of aesthetics, semiotic coding, and gesture. The chapter is predicated

upon a unique engagement with material semiotics due to my access to multiple versions of *Rite*

of Spring. These include my experience viewing the production as a live spectator for the 2017

South Africa version, my access to the video of the 2017 outdoor Oerol festival production, as

well as my participation in a virtual viewing and discussion of the original 2015 *Voorjaarsoffer*

version as an Active Group member in the 2020 virtual Better Than Us Festival. Using my own

multilayered experience with parallax spectatorship, as well as comments from other participants

in the Active Group and the director, Moniek Merkx, this final case study unpacks the ways in

which conditions of reception have a direct influence upon perception and meaning-making. The

performance's interest in gender as a multilayered, complex, and non-binary identity creates an

apt metaphor for the process of viewership and the ways in which alternative dramaturgy can

invite its spectators to engage in their own agency and multilayered sense of self.

Conclusion

This dissertation seeks to explore how young people engage with complexity and how

encounters with human subjectivity, the ways in which individuals view the world around them,

can create a sense of agency through interactions with other perspectives, both internal and

external. Theatre for Young Audiences offers a unique medium through which young people

can engage with themselves and others, critique social constructions, and explore the process of

meaning-making. Alternative dramaturgies take the potential for multilayered, complex, and

fractured perceptions a step further by decentralizing linguistic text and offering multiple modes

of communication to act as signifiers in the production of meaning. With the potential that

comes from both an abundance of signs, and the possibility of empty signs, each spectator is able to construct their own joint-text, one in which their own parallax perspective can exist alongside the perspectives of others in a parallax viewership where no reading of the performance event is either right or wrong. They can live in the liminal space between the physical and metaphysical, encounter visceral understanding without tangible signification, and engage in empathetic exchange with both the external and internal. Ultimately, meaning is a thing of simultaneity, a thread converging and diverging with various points of contact, tracing the complexity of experience, the possibility of imagination, and the power of creativity. TYA alternative dramaturgies engage with this fluid parallax, providing power, agency, and ownership to the young people who choose to engage with any two-dimensional or three-dimensional objects moving and interacting in front of them.

CHAPTER TWO

Making Meaning:

The Material Semiotics of Text, Space, Time, Body, and Media

"If it was saying something…." said Lyra
"Like signalling."
"No one would know, though. No one could ever understand what it meant."
"Maybe it means nothing. It just is."
Everything means something," Lyra said severely.
"We just have to find out how to read it."
                 - Phillip Pullman, *Lyra's Oxford* (6)

      In "EF's Visit To A Small Planet: Some Questions To Ask a Play," theatre scholar and theorist, Elinor Fuchs, conceives of the play as a rich and diverse world and, approaching each element as a scientist might interpret data brought back by the Mars Rover, maps out the intricacies of how the ecosystem of a world operates. Originally created as a teaching tool to "forestall the immediate (and crippling) leap to character and normative psychology that underwrites much dramatic criticism" ("EF's Visit" 5), the metaphor of a performance as a planet, an alien terrain through which one might traverse, holds wider application when considering performance pieces where there may not be characters, narrative, or normative psychology upon which to focus. The world of the performance – its sounds, its gravity, its landscape, its interaction with time, the way it feels, the way it creates and destroys – is part of how the explorer, the spectator, interacts with what occurs onstage. The aspects provide a tractor beam to pull the spectator into the gravitational orbit of the world created by the performance while the interaction with different elements, and the ways in which different aspects can combine, create meaning for the intrepid spectator. For the youth navigating the worlds of non-text-centric TYA, this invitation to create meaning through exploration is also a form of empowerment, offering the chance to build worlds and engage with their own sense of agency.

For non-text-centric theatre in which its dramaturgy defies the written text as its central point of conception, the ability to explore and interact with the various aspects of the world is essential for making meaning. This chapter will offer a theoretical framework for unpacking non-text centric theatre for young audiences, and the alternative dramaturgies employed by their creators, through the lens of Ric Knowles' theory of Material Semiotics as applied to the five aspects of Hans-Thies Lehmann's theory of postdramatic theatre: text, space, time, body, and media. While there are many ways through which one can journey to the planet of alternative dramaturgy, this particular theoretical framework seeks to offer a comprehensive view of meaning-making through the young adult spectator's interpretation of various aspects of their experience. For young people, the agency inherent in creative interpretation is particularly important when engaging with empowerment and control. By using dramaturgies which eschew didactic, interpersonal, and discursive scripts, non-text centric TYA offers spectators the opportunity to create their own world, to design meaning from the various aspects they perceive, and engage with the ownership of semiotic interpretation used by humanity on a daily basis.

Making Meaning with Material Semiotics

Semiotics (often defined as the study of signs, signifiers, and their interpretation) has a strong history within the evolution of dramaturgy and the way in which meaning is made. In *Course in General Linguistics,* Ferdinand de Saussure explores the role of semiotics within spoken language, noting that "The linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound-image" (66). The role of the aural signifier, in this case spoken language, creates a way in which "the psychological imprint of the sound, the impression that it makes on our senses" creates meaning (de Saussure 66). For de Saussure, the linguistic sign is a two-sided entity in

which the combination of the sound-imagine and the concept creates a sign (59-65). Signs are created when the concept, or signified, and the sound-image, or signifier, combine to create meaning, yet the nature of the linguistic sign is arbitrary as "every means of expression used in society is based, in principle, on collective behavior or – what amounts to the same thing – on convention" (68). To de Saussure, the process is linear, where meaning is created when the signifier and the signified combine in one moment of fixed time, yet constantly evolve with the social, cultural, and linguistic conditions of those speaking and listening.

The fluidity of language and the way signs can change based upon who is signifying and what is being signified, can create a common understanding, as well as potential broadening, under Roland Barthes' concept of the global sign and its implications for non-texts. In *Mythologies,* Barthes looks at how theoretical forms of representation, such as myths, impact the way meaning is made. Going beyond the role of spoken language, Barthes is interested in the ways meaning is extracted from what is seen as well as what is heard. Allowing for a wider understanding of what constitutes a signifier, Barthes opens the door for visual mediums as well as the myths and cultural scripts the combination of aural and visual signs can conjure. To this end, Barthes offers a third term in order to round out de Saussure's semiology. For Barthes, the signifier and the signified do not create a sign, they are joined by signification in order to add weight and depth to meaning. In his version, the ability to communicate (in all forms of communication) stems from the signified as concept, the signifier as mental image, and the sign, or what Barthes calls the signification, as the "correlation of the first two: it is the dream itself in its totality, the parapraxis (a mistake in speech or behavior) or the neurosis, conceived as compromise, as economies effected thanks to the joining of a form" (222). Thus, Barthes attempts to embrace the true ambiguity of language, and all the subjectivity such ambiguity

implies, by looking at how myths are "full on one side and empty on the other" (226). This idea of meaning as no longer linear but cyclical, and the agency the cycle between the sign and the spectator represents, is crucial in unpacking how the semiotics of theatre are particularly empowering for young people.

The complexity of semiotics, and the agency it can represent, is further complicated by Charles Sanders Peirce in "What Is a Sign" when he breaks the sign into three categories: icons, indices, and symbols, where icons or images stand in for the object through imitation; indications or indices are physically connected to what is being conveyed, often mimicking or representing an object; while symbols are the general signs inherently determined by the interpreter. The sign relation is therefore a three-part system in which meaning is created by the object represented, the function of the object, and the value added. In this sense, the role of meaning-making, and the methods of communication it facilitates, can be multifaceted and extend beyond the spoken word. However, the system must include multiple parts of the definition of a sign for, on their own, each part is insufficient in conveying meaning. While Peirce is interested in making sure meaning is conveyed, his theory also creates a space in which the lack of one element denies obvious forms of communication, yet also leaves more room for interpretation. This interpretation, building upon the cyclical nature of meaning-making explored by Barthes, is offered more nuance and complexity through the ways in which multiple signifiers can overlap to signify meaning. In theatre, and especially for alternative dramaturgy, the potential for multiple spectators to focus upon overlapping yet convergent aspects of the sign offers a multilayered experience of perception, where each spectator creates meaning based upon what they perceive as well as how they perceive and why they extract meaning from their

individualized understanding of the icons, indices, and symbols combined to create their unique sign.

Applying semiological theories, such as those posed by de Saussure, Barthes, and Peirce, specifically to theatre, Ric Knowles is interested in how all signs and symbols, linguistic as well as anything and everything, can be used to create meaning in a specifically theatrical setting. His theory of material semiotics, defined in *Reading the Material Theatre* (2004) and expanded upon in his *Theatre and Interculturalism* (2010) and *How Theatre Means* (2014), offers a specific lens through which one can interpret the signs and symbols of theatre in the production of meaning-making (*Reading* 3-5). Drawing upon the scholarship of cultural materialists, scholars of theatre semiotics, and methodologies from cultural studies, Knowles creates a concrete foundation for Material Semiotics predicated upon the understanding that culture and politics are inherently linked to the artwork produced in a time period, as well as being influenced by that art. While cultural studies provide a methodology for engaging with spectatorship and the cultural conditions of humanity, the heart of material semiotics is found in the principle that theory must always be practiced and practice theorized (Knowles *Reading* 21). Exploring how the process of constructing meaning is based in the act of seeing and being seen, Knowles suggests that theatre scholars can expand their analysis of a production to consider the material conditions and cultural influences, which might impact the creation and reception of the piece (*Reading* 9). Thus, by shifting the understanding of how a production is created and received toward a negotiation of meaning between performance text, conditions of production, and conditions of reception, a more complete and nuanced exploration of the event occurs (*Reading* 9-11).

Performance, or the "raw theatrical event shared by practitioners and audiences" is not a stand-alone event but rather a set of interconnected components within the larger process of understanding and meaning-making as influenced by the "material conditions" in which it occurs (*Reading* 3). These coded systems of meaning shape and reshape the way an audience might perceive a production, especially when one considers how bias or cultural impact might cause the original intention of the text to be perceived differently, thus potentially shifting the understanding of that text. For Knowles, this "meaning" is never made in only one direction, but is rather a constant, often simultaneous, connection between the semiotics and materiality of any given moment for any given spectator and/or creator. How an actor trains, the political or cultural events that resonate within a moment in time, the personal experiences of a spectator, the way the lobby display directs one's gaze, and a plethora of other circumstances all converge to create meaning. Knowles sees the theory of material semiotics as "differently constituted in and by its different social, cultural, and theatrical applications, even as the method itself differently constitutes in each case the various performance texts that are its objects of study" (*Reading* 21). Thus, meaning is never bilateral. Theatre is a live act participating in a constant feedback loop where the text, the production, and the reception are constantly in conversation with each other.

The nuance and importance of material semiotics as a form of cultural production is explored by Manon van de Water in her *Theatre, Youth, and Culture* chapter, "Theory and Theatre for Young Audiences: Marginalization and Cultural Production." Unpacking the role of material semiotics in Theatre for Young Audiences, van de Water locates Knowles and material semiotics as a "useful mode of analysis by which to look at TYA and its place and function in society; in other words, TYA as cultural production and cultural capital" (*Theatre, Youth, and Culture* 45).

However, she also suggests that the idea of the semiotic process between the conditions of performance, the performance text, and the conditions of reception becomes "complicated in TYA by the fact that there are two audiences: those whom the production is intended for (the child/youth audience) and those who buy the tickets and make the decision to see/sponsor/fund the production (the buyer)" (*TYC* 46). This tension between TYA as aesthetic and TYA as commodity, and the two audiences which represent these approaches to the work, can play a role in the importance of alternative dramaturgies for TYA. Dramaturgical choices which explore concepts that move focus away from the centrality of text and towards a different aesthetic approach also offer the possibility for one show to have multiple meanings, depending upon who is doing the watching and why. In the case studies in chapter four, five and six, this dissertation will unpack this tension between TYA as an aesthetic and as a commodity, while also offering an understanding of the ways in which alternative dramaturgy can be simultaneously anti-consumerist and utterly marketable.

The concept of marketable meaning-making in TYA, especially in an increasingly global theatre world, adds new weight to semiotic systems which do not rely on linguistic signs to convey meaning. Larger TYA performance programs, such as the International Performance Arts for Youth (IPAY) and ASSITEJ, provide artists opportunities to gather and exchange dramaturgy and aesthetics while also creating an international market for productions. The accessibility of international tours, especially when it comes to spoken language, leads to the need for productions which communicate outside linguistic constraints, thus creating a system where productions which de-center the text are also more internationally marketable (van de Water *TYC* 56). The role of marketable meaning-making further complicates the role of linguistic text in TYA, as language-less productions have a wider appeal on the global market,

allowing alternative dramaturgies to take a more financially stable place in the TYA market. However, international festivals, especially ASSITEJ, have also started to play with the role of language and meaning-making through text-based productions where the language spoken is not necessarily the language understood by the audience. The role of language becomes especially fascinating during international festivals such as ASSITEJ and IPAY where the ways by which meaning can be conveyed and understood is often mediated through alternative dramaturgies. By approaching work through the aspects of text, space, time, body, and media, the material semiotics are given a tangible foothold in an international marketplace. A performance in Xhosa, Mandarin, Norwegian, or Dutch may not be fully comprehended by an English-speaking audience member such as myself, but the feeling, the aesthetics, and the material semiotics of the piece outside of the language is a live and comprehensible contribution. The role of media and the interplay with subtitles and live bodies also allow TYA productions to demonstrate "that the meaning-making process is anything but static and changes with changing audiences and alternative locales" (*TYC* 52). Thus, by cultivating alternative dramaturgies in TYA, artists and spectators alike can engage in dynamic theatre full of parallax perspectives and individualized meaning-making. The interplay between different signs, signified by different cultural codes and languages, signified to international audiences, creates a rich semiotic environment for TYA audiences, where the multi-layered conditions of performance and conditions of reception offer an endless arrangement of meaning for its spectators. In order to design their own interpretation, the intrepid spectators must explore the world through their own perception of the world, through its various aspects, and the ways in which its signs designate meaning.

Postdramatic Aspects: Text, Space, Time, Body, and Media

In order to engage with performance, especially global TYA performances such as the three case studies explored in this dissertation, sharing a common sign system through which one can interpret various aspects of the production is useful. In the case of contemporary alternative dramaturgies in TYA, Hans-Thies Lehmann's theory of the postdramatic theatre offers five intriguing aspects through which to dissect the experience of meaning-making. Published in 1999, Lehmann's now seminal text, *Postdramatisches Theater* has been embedded into the theoretical, critical, and dramaturgical conversations of the European theatre world. The 2006 English translation, *Postdramatic Theatre* (translated by Karen Jürs-Munby) included new edits, editorial notes, and an updated foreword. While the original 1999 book investigated the growing trend in European dramaturgy which Lehmann designated as being postdramatic, the 2006 translation offers an introduction and reframing within the context of postdramatic dramaturgy seven years later, and includes references to British and US theatre which are not in the original study (Lehmann ix).[4] In his opening remarks, Lehmann points out that there is a tension between postdramatic theatre and the dramatic theatre brought about by the 'in-yer-face' theatre movement, exemplified by Sarah Kane's *4.48 Psychosis,* yet, within the postdramatic it "is not the text but the theatrical means that are the focus of this study. The investigation is aimed at theatre, in as much as it problematizes the constitution of a dramatic fiction and [dramatic] world in general and with it also an immediate reference to social reality" (ix). Within this frame, and thinking towards the progression of its connection to other forms, postdramatic dramaturgy serves as an important corner stone of alternative, non-text-centered, dramaturgies and their

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[4] Due to language constraints, I will be relying on the 2006 translation though Manon van de Water has provided useful translation from the 1999 German version to compare meaning and intent between the two versions.

central aesthetics are seen throughout European work, including (and perhaps especially) Theatre
for Young Audiences.

Focusing upon the contemporary theatre companies of the late 20th century, and how they
renegotiated the semiotic relationship between performed/performer/spectator, Lehmann's
work is not an instructional manual for alternative dramaturgy, but rather a reflection upon the
trends he had noticed across Europe. While other critics (Fuchs, Harding, Kostelanetz, etc.) also
noticed the change in semiotic relationships at the end of the 20th century, either under the
postmodern theatrical umbrella or not, Lehmann made the particular argument that the
postdramatic was moving beyond the tenets of the postmodern. In order to establish a difference
between the two, Lehmann looked at how postdramatic dramaturgy tended to focus upon the
primary aspects of text, space, time, body, and media (145). These five aspects of postdramatic
theatre, when used to articulate one's approach to the material semiotics of a performance,
comprise the foundation of this dissertation.

Text

Rather than text as a linguistic or script-based phenomenon, Lehmann saw the text as being
written into and onto the bodies of the actors who, rather than characters, are live bodies onstage
who work as vessels for meaning-making and the reading of semiotics. For Lehmann,

> Theatre means the collectively spent and used up lifetime in the collectively breathed air
>
> of that space in which the performing *and* the spectating take place. The emission and
>
> reception of signs and signals take place simultaneously. The theatre performance turns
>
> the behaviour onstage and in the auditorium into a *joint text*, a 'text' even if there is no
>
> spoken dialogue on stage or between actors and audience. Therefore, the adequate

description of theatre is bound to the reading of this total text. Just as much as the gazes of al participants can virtually meet, the *theatre situation* forms a whole made up of evident and hidden communicative processes. (17)

This intersection of spectator and performance, the presence and reality of the live event mixed with the practice of imagination and pretend, is what enables the spectator and performer to create a joint-text, or simultaneous process of meaning-making through symbiotic experience. This symbiotic form of meaning-making is especially significant for young spectators experiencing life through a series of semiotic codes which may not include the spoken word, those inhabiting the liminal space between child and adult, 'being' and 'becoming,' in the eyes of their society or culture. For these spectators, the role of meaning-making, especially as inscribed upon or through the body, offers a sense of freedom, agency, and perhaps even a chance to be seen. However, the lived experiences of TYA's unique audience is also where postdramatic theatre and TYA may part ways, for the self-referential nature of many postdramatic works also depends upon a rich theatre history, where signs and intentions are based in the lexicon of theatricality, while alternative dramaturgy offers a chance to use the strategies and touchstones of postdramatic dramaturgy without remaining beholden to the knowledge of the past.

Space

Lehmann sees space as the idea of a ritualistic ground where "scenic montage leads to a perception reminiscent of cinematic montage" rather than space as the "distance covered onstage" which follows the traditional, literal interpretation of space onstage (151). In other words, space is something far less tangible than simply the architecture of the stage and the way

distance is occupied by bodies in the room. Rather, space enters into a more philosophical realm where it almost becomes "a place of traces" (152). Space is imbued with energy and meaning, just as important as the bodies which share the same physical presence, and rooted in physics. Site-specific theatre, promenade theatre, immersive theatre, and other forms of non-traditional performance space fit into this new idea of space as being somewhere between "framed theatre and 'unframed' everyday reality" (152). This play-space between the real and the intangible is imbedded not only in space but in all five elements (text, space, time, body, and media), and they work together to explore the perceived bounds of performative experience as shaped by components beyond those encased within an established script. This perception of space also has the potential to reclaim space, to shift the energy and meaning imbued by social structures, and empower those who reframe and reimagine what space can be. For young spectators engaging with these forms of theatre, the interpretation of space and its role in their everyday lives can impact their perception of the production as well as potentially shift their perception of the space itself outside of the shared time during its theatrical use.

Time

Not unlike the ways in which space can be reconfigured, the postdramatic also re-conceives the idea of time. For Lehmann, the "aesthetics of time" move beyond the duration in which a play takes place (both literally and theatrically) and start to operate in a more metaphysical way. Time is simultaneously the temporal reality of the spectator (how long they are sitting/standing/moving/observing the piece), the fictional/dramatic/conceived length of time for the characters (if there are characters) in the performance, and the broader sense of scientific understandings of time and its subjective qualities (relativity, quantum theory, space-time, etc.)

which undermine the idea of time as an objective phenomenon (Lehmann 154). The aesthetic of time, therefore, becomes a non-linear phenomenon. The dramaturgical aspects of time operate in a way that parallels the scientific theory rather than the perceptions of individual reality. Time collapses in on itself. Light and sound move at different speeds, leading to different phenomenon which seem simultaneous but are actually two different events.

There is no beginning, middle, and end as everything is happening simultaneously. This sense of distortion is realized in ideas of shared time, durational performance, prolongation, and repetition. Time can move but there is also static time, an idea of image-time and "the disposition of perception peculiar to the viewing of images" (Lehmann 157). This act of viewing and the cognitive processes of unpacking sensual stimuli while simultaneously occupying physical space where time continues to move around you, leads to what Lehmann calls a "hovering of perceptional focus between a 'temporalizing' viewing and a scenic 'going along', between the activity of seeing and the (more passive) empathy" (157). This exploration mirrors the process of viewing media such as television, or what Lehmann sees as the aesthetic of video clips (158). Not unlike the ways in which media is consumed, unpacked, and understood, the conception of time in postdramatic dramaturgy is also interested in the ways in which time can be experienced. How can theatre tap into film's ability to project a sense of simultaneity? How might time seem "out of joint," jumping between ideas, and undermine "the principle of consciousness to lend continuity and identity to experience through repetition" (158)? For young people growing up in a society saturated by media, who explore forms of communication in the brevity of emoticons, 160 characters, and two-minute online videos, the compression of time, the understanding of a temporal plane which is outside the bounds of

perceived existence, creates a rich and fruitful environment for time-based meaning-making in TYA.

Time can also provide a sense of unity. Using Aristotelian traditions and the idea of the external unity of time, Lehmann offers a synthesis of Aristotelian and Brechtian non-Aristotelian concepts of theatre in regard to the way time can operate within the spectator experience. While Aristotelian theatre is mostly a linear progression, Brechtian epic theatre offers "leaps in time that point to human reality and behavior as discontinuous" (158). Within both the linear and the disjointed perception of time is the simultaneity of in-time experience for spectators, regardless of the plot-based timeline they are experiencing. Looking at the Aristotelian understanding of dramatic time as the rise and fall of action, a "*time of the logic of a reversal*," Lehmann expands upon the idea that "drama brings logic and structure into the confusing plethora and chaos of being" (160). This ability to bring logic and structure to chaos may take different forms within the action of the play. However, the difference between the production and the experience of witnessing creates what Lehmann calls "The complementary aspects of the unity of time – continuity on the inside, isolation from the outside" (161). Time, in this sense, becomes a fantasy, a way in which it can be experienced as a physical truth (cells age, clocks move, audiences become slightly older) while also allowing the possibility of mentally erasing the concept of time by the action on the stage. Thus, the audience and the performers are united in their existence in real time, their bodies aging together in a shared space, even if the fictional world of the performance offers a different sense of time. They are equals within the moment, bodies sharing space within a moment of time, and through that unity also comes the potential for empowerment, especially if those bodies are often excused or dismissed. For liminal bodies of youth, this shared moment in space-time can create an added layer of power and agency,

offering an equal plane of existence with the 'adult,' and thus socially acknowledged, bodies of the performers, teachers, parents, and other spectators who join them in the physical reality of the performance event.

Body

Lehmann unpacks the role of the body on the stage by exploring the semiotics of body and presence across Western theatrical history. Starting with a pre-modernist conceptualization, he unpacks "the body" as a given, physical reality of the presence of an actor (162). The body, at this stage of theatrical history and meaning-making, is "in principle incidental" (162). The physical presence of the performer is onstage, a body, used as a vessel for the text, "a gratefully accepted given," and "the manifestation of the 'domination of nature applied to the human being'" (Rudolf zur Lippe qtd. in Lehmann 162). The body was a fixed component through which dramatic theatre could be interpreted. However, perceptions of the body eventually moved away from the idea of the body as a fixed component and towards a "theatre of potentiality."[5] This potential, the fluidity of meaning, its unplannable connections and gaps, and the existence of the 'in-between-bodies' creates a complex and nuanced semiotic experience. In this fluid understanding, the body transcends physical reality and connects more ontologically with processes of meaning-making.

Within this more fluid understanding of the body as a site of potential, the body itself is a signifier. Race, gender, ability, and emotion become a manifestation of ideology and significance, beyond the physical manifestation of the body, which can be inscribed with

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[5] For more see *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime* by Jean-François Lyotard, translated by Elizabeth Rottenberg.

meaning (Lehmann 161-162). Lehmann takes this idea of signification a step further by looking

at how the postdramatic creates a theatre of potentiality where the process of drama occurs, not

"between bodies," but rather "*with/on/to* the body" (163). The body is not the "carrier of agony

but rather the "image of its *agony*" (163).   Theatrical communication shifts, and "a *self-*

dramatization of physis"(163) creates a new sense of the image of the body, the reality of the

physical body, and the transcendence of the body into a new vessel for ideology and

metaphysical presence.

For Lehmann, dance is one of the clearest artistic forms in which the body is highlighted.

In dance, the body "articulates not meaning but energy, it represents not illustrations but

actions. Everything here is gesture" (163). This idea of body and movement as gesture

highlights Lehmann's interest in how action can take on multiple meanings in one act. For

example, "walking not as a means for displacing the body but not as an end in itself either"

(164). Drawing on Walter Benjamin, Lehmann sees the body and its "gestic essence" as a form

of potentiality, a way in which one action is simultaneously active, visible, and passive, all while

undermining "the real of space, time, and body" (164). Above all, Lehmann's assertion that "the

postdramatic body is a body of gesture" is centered in the understanding that "The gesture is a

potential that does not give way to an act in order to exhaust itself in it but rather remains as a

potential in the act, dancing in it" (Lehmann 164). Thus, the body is able to become

simultaneously exposed and obscured, a form of message and a form of being, or, as Lehmann

describes, "the most profound *stranger of the self*" (163). The physicality of a body in motion

allows for the spectator to simultaneously contemplate their own sense of space-time while also

shifting attention to a single physical aspect, an alienated motor apparatus where movement

"remains recognizable but is changed, as never seen" for every motion "takes on the beauty of a

purposeless *pure gesture*." (Lehmann 164). For Lehmann, the body is discontinuous and given

over to the totality of its role as *gestalt* (163): a vessel of speed, of time, of meaning, and, above

all, of gesture.[6] However, while the body can be read, it is also lived-in and, as such, the

experience of reading the body while also experiencing the ways in which one lives within their

own body complicates meaning. Therefore, in this reconfiguration of meaning-making,

communication, and spectatorship, the body becomes a phenomenological presence, impulsive,

turbulent, and deformed. When read through material semiotics, this potential reconfiguration

and its subsequent complexity, can also offer important implications surrounding the experience

of the body as a person, one with a material, lived history, imbued with the myths of cultural

scripts communal memories, as well as a potentially empty sign. The body as a gesture, a vessel

of meaning, allows the spectator to inscribe their own meaning onto the body of the performer.

However, the presence of the other, the unassailable truth that the body is also a human being,

allows the actor to exist underneath the signs indicated by the performance text, creating a

parallax in the conditions of reception which allows for a richer semiotic experience. For young

people engaging with TYA, especially as seen in the case studies of *Het Hamiltoncomplex* and

Rite of Spring found in chapter five and six*,* this acknowledgement of the liminality of the body,

the ability to both be and not be, also offers an important exploration of how to approach the

other, the reality of encountering difference, and the ways in which conditions of reception may

alter the intention of the performance.

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[6] Lehmann is also interested in the ways in which technology can infuse the body, creating a
sense of the 'programmable techno-body' and the ways in which actors experience 'thing-ness'
within an age of machinery and otherness (165), though for the purposes of this dissertation, I
have chosen to focus more upon the idea of the gesture and leave the larger question of the trans-
human and post-human as inscribed onto the postdramatic body for future studies.

Media

The role of media (stage technology, cultural technologies, as well as popular culture created by such medias) is the fifth, and perhaps the most fixed, aspect of Lehmann's postdramatic theory. He breaks the modes of media in the theatre into three distinct categories: (1) media which is occasionally used without "fundamentally defining the theatrical conception;" (2) a source of inspiration with a distinct aesthetic which changes the production itself; or (3) a form of media as performance, such as video installations (Lehmann 167-168). Media is also constitutive. Media as "a means of problematizing self-reflection, the electronic images in their 'post-epic' theatre refer directly to the everyday reality and/or the theatre process of the *players*" (Lehmann 168). Visual quotations as projected onstage as well as "a mental extension of the stage" can create a co-presence between video and live actor which allows for "functioning in general as the technically mediated *self-referentiality* of the theatre" (Lehmann 168). As such, technologically infused co-presence can allow the senses to be reordered and re-hierarchized, changing the system of seeing and hearing as the two fundamental aspects of spectatorship and offering new ways of experiencing performance. From the distortion of sight through mirrors and screens, the role of binaural sound, recordings, even current developments in scent design, Lehmann's original concept of constitutive theatre as both "perception and a desire to see" (169) and the "*consciousness* of presence, neither in need of sensuous confirmation nor ultimately capable of it" (170) has become even more important as technology and production possibilities develop and expand. These forms of media, and the role of media as a specific aesthetic, are particularly crucial in TYA due to their role in reshaping communication, especially in an art form which interacts with an audience who increasingly depends upon the tools, semiotics, and aesthetics of technology, beyond even the original theories of Lehmann.

Using the idea of media as both a method of production as well as an inspiration for creation, productions are able to explore how societies process information feedback. Media offers alternative dramaturgies a chance to engage with popular culture, technology, and innovation which, in turn, can impact theatrical creation as well as the interpretation of staged events. The simulation of reality offered by television, film, videogames, and other media, combined with the ways in which simulacra can be understood and replicated in theatre, is offered a new form through, and within, postdramatic media (Lehmann 167). Lehmann outlines the aesthetic of the media as inspirational, noting the

> rapid succession of images, the speed of conversation in shorthand, the gag consciousness of TV comedies, allusions to the popular entertainment of television, to film and television stars, to the day-to-day business of the entertainment industries and their movers and shakers, quotes from pop culture, entertainment films and controversial topics in the public sphere of media. (168)

The role of media in meaning-making, how content and concept are drawn from a sphere of popular culture, reshapes how communication can be relayed. Quoted motifs, references, imagery, and pacing are used as "musical phrases in a rhythm, as elements of a scenic image collage (Lehmann168). This idea of media as both a tool and a form of inspiration offers alternative dramaturgies the ability to explore how society is understood through mediums like television and film. For young people, especially those whose cultural navigation has been infused with early years programming, online gaming, social media, popular culture, and referential memetics, the ability to draw upon the postdramatic aspect of media creates an essential connection with which they as spectator can confront the world of the production, the tractor beam which can draw them in and ground them to the other more nebulous and fluid

signs and signifiers of alternative dramaturgies. Media has also come to the forefront of TYA experimentation in 2020 as even more companies seek to engage with virtual worlds, multimodal styles, and referential popular culture on a global scale in order to adapt to pandemic restrictions and the forced innovation the inability to perform for live audiences has fostered.

Conclusion

While there are many methods through which one can inhabit the worlds of alternative dramaturgy, exploring a production's material semiotics through the lens of the postdramatic aspects of text, space, time, body, and media offers a tangible and potentially empowered spectator experience. As Fuchs notes, "you can construct meaning in this world in many different ways. Conduct it in the most inclusive way you can" (9). Constructing meaning through material semiotics, especially when engaged through the aspects of text, space, time, body, and media, is one such inclusive method. This theoretical framework can also extend agency in how the spectator's journey to the performance is explored through a joint creation of meaning. The agency of this joint-text, the power of narrative creativity, and the levels of complexity offered in its multi-layered approach to perspective, offer young people an essential form of empowerment. Choosing how to engage a performance text, how to enter the world of a performance, and how to make meaning out of what one experiences, is a powerful act. Being able to bring one's own conditions of reception to the conditions of the performance, to experience the performance as an individual act within a shared moment of space-time, to find moments in which one's unique perception converges or diverges with the experience of others, is a powerful form of empathetic engagement. The non-text-centric performances explored in this dissertation demonstrate three different ways, different planetary terrains, through which an

intrepid spectator can explore the agency of creative meaning-making. They present multiple forms of material semiotics, offered through various signs (aural, visual, and mythological), yet all experience simultaneous yet multi-layered perception as their gravitational pull. Above all, each spectator is able to construct their own meaning yet there is a continuous understanding that no one perception is 'correct' and that, as Fuchs so eloquently notes at the ends of her own visit, "There will still be more to see" (Fuchs 9).

CHAPTER THREE

Moving Forward By Looking Back:

Historical Roots of Alternative Dramaturgy in TYA

Dramaturgy is for me learning to handle complexity.
It is feeding the ongoing conversation on the work,
it is taking care of the reflexive potential as well as
of the poetic force of the creation. Dramaturgy is
building bridges, it is being responsible for the whole,
dramaturgy is above all a constant movement.
The readiness to dive into the work, and to withdraw
from it again and again, inside, outside, trampling the leaves.
                -Marianne van Kerkhoven
                "European Dramaturgy in the 21st Century" (11)

The second half of the 20th century brought forth a striking shift in cultural, political, and

ideological approaches to identity, community, and art, resulting in a global phenomenon

surrounding revolution, reaction, and a desire for change. In the wake of the Second World War,

countries became increasingly interested in questions of culture and power. The 1960s became a

time of revolution with younger generations[7] taking the lead in a call for action and change

worldwide. Japan was coming to terms with a post-United States occupation; decolonization;

and drastic changes in educational policies, the definition of the child, and gender roles. Korea

was struggling with the aftermath of the Korean War and the role of the child in the 20th century.

In Czechoslovakia, the Prague Spring called for decentralization and democratization in the era

of the Soviet Union. South Africa was torn apart by Apartheid while the United States was in the

midst of the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War, sparking widespread cultural and

political revolution amongst younger generations. The Portugal Empire was disintegrating.

Internal civil war was ripping apart Nigeria, Laos, Sudan, and Northern Ireland. China was

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[7] For more on the construct of the 'generation' and different generational interactions with TYA
see van de Water's "Writing for the Generations: Past, Present, Future."

experiencing the Cultural Revolution. Riots and uprisings were common across the globe, and in Western Europe the desire for a drastic break from 1950s conservatism manifested itself in student protests, a rise in socialist movements, and artistic collectives/laboratories formed in a direct rejection of hierarchical approaches to governance.

The Western European desire for a de-hierarchical form of expression, both politically and culturally, manifested in the theatre scene, leading to explorations in alternative dramaturgies which experimented with content, form, and emancipatory spectatorship. With the end of World War II came the decentralization of Western European systems, and with the structural changes also came a shift in social and monetary incentives for wider explorations of cultural identity, cultural democracy, pluralism, and multiculturalism (c.f. van Maanen; Wilmer; van de Water *Theatre, Youth, and Culture* and *Dutch Theatre*). A renewed desire to preserve and foster diversity within their respective nations led many Western European countries to redesign their funding schemes with an aim to provide cultural exchanges between the urban centers and the rest of the country (c.f. van Maanen; Wilmer; Juncker; Bedard; Broster "TYA-UK Developments"; and van de Water *Dutch Theatre* and *Theatre, Youth, and Culture*). Fiscal incentives provided opportunities for multiple perspectives, languages, and communities to make art. Extensive travel schemes became a central feature throughout Western Europe to ensure that those perspectives were seen by more of the country (c.f. Wilmer; Juncker; Bedard; Broster "TYA-UK Developments"; and van de Water *Dutch Theatre*). The restructuring of cultural funding schemes was especially useful for emerging theatre laboratories and experimental artistic companies who now had the ability to explore new forms of expression and dramaturgy without the weighty incentive of ticket sales or cultural reproduction forcing artistic stagnation (c.f. Wilmer; van de Water *Theatre, Youth, and Culture* and *Dutch Theatre*)*. Younger artists

were able to create work with governmental support, and companies outside of the main metropolises were provided the opportunities to bring their unique cultural perspectives to the stage without dire fiscal consequences should their experiments fall short of audience expectation.

A change in funding and social interest in the late 1960s led to global communication and awareness amidst a backdrop of political upheaval, social revolutions, and a rise in technology. In the Netherlands, the "Actie Tomaat" (Action Tomato) movement railed against the theatrical conventions of the establishment, scorning restrictive theatre systems, and demanding innovation and experimentation, a call which was readily answered by an increasing interest in Theatre for Young Audiences due to their interest in innovative theatre practices for specific, and not always verbal, audiences (van de Water *Theatre, Youth, and Culture* and *Dutch Theatre*). In Sweden, the Radical Theatre Movement worked to create autonomous theatre collectives with the aim of decentralizing authority and control in the theatre while the Emancipatory Theatre Movement sought a more child-specific form of theatrical innovation (cf. van de Water *Theatre, Youth, and Culture*; Elnan; Zipes; Švachová). In Germany, divided by politics, culture, and ideology (as represented by the Berlin Wall), both the East and West German theatres engaged in new theatrical processes which spoke to the ideology of their respective political and cultural policies. Postdramatic powerhouses such as Heiner Müller, Peter Handke, and Elfriede Jelinek pushed the boundaries of theatre and led to a movement which would later inspire Lehmann's theory of the Postdramatic. While Müller explored *HamletMachine*, Volker Ludwig started The Grips to explore how emancipatory theatre and the centrality of spectator-agency could work in Theatre for Young Audiences. All across Western Europe theatre was becoming a bastion of

experimentation, focusing not only on how to decentralize power within the production process, but how to change the power dynamics between performer and spectator.

This rise in theatrical exploration, shifting beliefs of spectator agency, and increasing interest in deconstructing hierarchical power structures came alongside the 1959 Declaration of the Rights of the Child as adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations, which eventually was extended during the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In Article 12, the Rights of the Child guaranteed children the right to express their own views and to be taken seriously while Article 13 guaranteed the right to freedom of expression, a right which included the "freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice" ("Convention" 12, 13.1). Many articles focused upon child agency and personhood which, in combination with Article 17, ensured that children had "access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual, and moral well-being and physical and mental health" ("Convention" 17). The Rights of the Child gave an extra layer of credibility to companies invested in creating theatre for children. Thus, armed with government funding schemes, international recognition of the child and their rights, and a growing artistic hunger for exploration, experimental Western European TYA movements began in earnest.

Experimental Forms of the 1960s and 1970s

The Rise of Emancipatory Theatre

The importance of enabling discovery and questioning what theatre could be, what it could mean – and for whom – was at the forefront of Emancipatory Theatre practices in TYA in the 1960s.

Emancipatory Theatre[8] was invested in exploring spectator agency and the ability of one's

audience to construct their own meaning and experience (c.f. van de Water *Theatre, Youth, and*

Culture; Elnan; Zipes; Švachová). In Sweden, Suzanne Osten's Fickteatern and later, her more

well-known company Unga Klara, explored the importance of quality theatre for young people

based in the careful work of an enlightened and critically engaged ensemble (Elnan, "Staging the

Impossible" 40). Her work featured the ethos of the Swedish transformation of the 1960s,

outlined by Niklas Brunius in *Swedish Theatre,* as a movement "tired of the grand, realistic

tradition that prevailed unchallenged for several decades… [instead choosing] To give full reign

to playfulness, to avoid fixing the moves too early, to improvise on the given text" (42). This

interest in text-based didactic theatre with a child-centered message of emancipation paved the

way for future experimental forms (Švachová 52). Drawing from a wide collection of source

material, such as the Greek Tragedy *Medea* for Unga Klara's inaugural production of *Medea's*

Children in 1975*,* Osten and Unga Klara strove to create works that "contain two messages: first,

we think that children are equally important as ourselves; second, we believe that they

understand the same as us" (Osten qtd. in van de Water *Theatre, Youth, and Culture* 65). This

central mission in Unga Klara's work led to pieces which "treated meaningful themes of concern

to children, and used theatrical means and expressions that are unconventional, modern,

theatrical, and expressive" thus demonstrating "that simplification of language, symbols, means,

or themes is unnecessary" (Elnan, "The Notion of Children*"* 167 and Elnan, "Staging the

Impossible" 39-47).

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[8] While the Emancipatory Theatre movement was very text-centric, and often quite didactic, its experimentation with spectator engagement and interest in emancipatory theatre practices opened the door for later movements which took the underlying themes and ideology of emancipation and agency and pushed them further to explore non-text-centric theatre practices.

Medea's Children, devised for first- and second-grade students, led Unga Klara's call for meaningful themes and respect-based interactions by focusing upon *Medea* from the child's perspective, ending right before Medea murders her children, but still dealing with controversial issues which may be seen as taboos for children, a characteristic of Unga Klara to this day (Elnan, "The Notion of Children" 6). In "The Childish Unga Klara: Contemporary Swedish Children's Theatre and Its Experimental Aesthetics" (2016), Romana Švachová argues that *Medea's Children* was the turning point in Swedish children's theatre, inspiring conversations and debates about "what could be – and what should be – presented for a child on the stage" (55). This discussion of the question of taboo themes and the "protection" of the child laid the groundwork for an ideological shift in Western European TYA, demonstrating "that you can treat meaningful themes of concern to children, and use theatrical means and expressions that are unconventional, modern, theatrical, and expressive" (van de Water *Theatre, Youth, Culture* 65).

In Germany, The Grips theatre in Berlin explored dialogic forms of emancipatory youth spectatorship. Founded in 1969 by Volker Ludwig, The Grips was interested in creating theatre for young people to provoke critical thinking, imagination, and emancipatory education (c.f. Zipes; Perlstein and Laurina; van de Water *Theatre, Youth, and Culture*). In "Political Children's Theater in the Age of Globalization" (2003), Jack Zipes highlights that the name "Grips" "implies using one's intelligence politically to understand the world" (3). This linguistically significant company name drew from Ludwig's desire to connect theatre to emancipatory education and can be seen in how the Grips was created out of the desire "to encourage children to ask questions" (Ludwig qtd. in Zipes 3) for the purpose of "helping children to see our society as one that can be changed, to understand criticism as their undeniable right, to stimulate the enjoyment of creative thinking and of creating alternatives, thus

stimulating their social imagination" (Ludwig qtd. in Fischer 449). The theatrical devices used by The Grips were highly influenced by Brechtian Lehrstücke and early Grips theatre focused on a desire to inspire critique and creative thinking. These innovative practices can be seen in Rainer Hachfeld's *Mugnog-Kinder!* (1970), a Grips production which explored political activism, agency, and exploration through the eyes of two young people who turn a town upside-down in their refusal to yield to the symbolic power of the adult gaze. As Arno Paul, Biddy Martin, and J.D. Steakley suggest, *Mugnog* "introduced themes of self-determination and satisfaction of needs that were drawn from the study of Reich, Fromm and A.S. Neill without confusing the stage with a seminar" (102). By providing a production with no prescribed morality, exploration of the power of imagination, and characters who actively question symbols of authority, *Mugnog* provided a form of radical emancipatory spectatorship which focused upon respect for the young spectator.

In the Netherlands, emancipatory theatre was also interested in agency. As Manon van de Water notes in her introduction to *Dutch Theatre for Young Audiences,* emancipatory theatre practices used political overtones, connections between stage and spectator, and a desire to activate social change, even when that desire led to chaotic performances or funding withdrawals (1). Dutch emancipatory theatre was invested in creating theatre which left the traditional didacticism of Fairy Tales and moral posturing, and was far more interested in contemporary interests, lifestyles, existential questions, and the humanity of their young audiences (van de Water *Dutch Theatre* and *Theatre, Youth, and Culture*). The Theatre Schools of Arnhem and Amsterdam and Utrecht's The Academy for Word and Gesture were fertile grounds for emerging artists and, as van de Water notes, led to "a number of talented, energetic, and eager students who were itching for change" (*Dutch Theatre* 1). As theatre schools trained and graduated new

generations of artists invested in experimentation and agency, Dutch theatrical innovation grew, eventually moving beyond Emancipatory Theatre practices and towards forms which sought similar ideological results but in other, non-text-centric, forms.

The Rise of Theatre in Education (TIE)

While continental Western European theatre companies started to benefit from widespread funding schemes and cultural shifts towards experimentation and emancipation, the United Kingdom approached the latter half of their 20th century society in a slightly different political, cultural, and social direction. The UK cultural position as a bridge between Western European culture and a wider Western culture, which included North America, led to a slightly more capitalist approach to theatre. Large arts grants, which funded experimental work with children in Western Europe, went to companies who tapped into the UK's bourgeoning interest in Theatre in Education (TIE) and the role of drama in the classroom (c.f. Jackson "Learning Through Theatre;" Broster "UK-TYA Developments;" Maguire "Beyond the Culture of Concern;"). TIE programming is generally understood as a practice which combines educational programs with performance components and drama components and is usually led by professional artists who primarily traveled to classrooms (though some TIE programming engages with target groups in other spaces). It solidified itself as a favored youth arts program by the 1970s, gaining popularity in the classrooms as well as the funding boardrooms for its practical applications through pedagogy and exploration (c.f. Wooster; Jackson; Broster; Nicholson).

In "Education or Theatre? The Development of TIE in Britain" (2013), Anthony Jackson notes that TIE as a uniquely British phenomenon is specifically born from the history of British funding streams, furthered by the practicality of classroom-based learning outcomes.

Emphasizing the importance of practice-based learning over audience viewership, TIE is first

and foremost "a method of education and therefore with a justifiable claim to be seen as an

educational resource within the school system, and second, as an art form in its own right but one

that is particularly suited to its specific audience and age range" (Jackson 22). Born through a

symbiotic theatrical relationship, TIE was specifically influenced by Brecht and agit-prop, as

well as by adult-audience-centered 1960s 'alternative' theatre (Wooster 6). However, Roger

Wooster (2007) goes on to suggest that TIE was particularly invested in "theatrical

epistemologies of the 1960s within a post-war social event" which led to a specific connection

between "the needs of education and society" (6).[9] Jackson furthers the connections and the

impetus for TIE as a combination of experimental British theatre practices, which emerged in the

1960s, and theatrical aesthetics focused on experiments in performance art and semiotic

spectatorship, and the on-going shift in Educational policy (Jackson 22).[10]

Moreover, in his foreword to *Theatre for Young Audiences: A Critical Handbook* (2012),

David Wood echoes Jackson's studies, noting that there was originally a distinct political rift

between TIE and TYA practitioners, one that has yet to be fully studied, noting that "the TIE

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[9] The idea of the needs of education and the needs of society is part of the UK definition of 'emancipatory,' though it has rather different connotations than the emancipatory theatre practices explored on the European continent.

[10] While Jackson points to the 1965 Belgrade Theatre experiment as the first TIE project which quickly spread to Bolton, Edinburgh, Greenwich, Leeds, Watford and beyond (22), Helen Nicholson traces the impetus of TIE even further back, locating the rise of the manufacturing industry and the drastic shift in Industrialized Britain, leading to a radical break between the rise in theatre as a cultural commodity to distinguish the middle class from the working classes (19) and a connection between theatre and social reform, which was specifically "associated with education, health, public morality, and social cohesion" (20). Thus, Nicholson locates the genealogy of TIE as a natural outcome of Victorian England and the economic and social conditions of an industrialized nation. These two different understandings of TIE genealogy align with TIE's ideological schism in the 1980s when Thatcherism led to a rise in social revolution and half of TIE radicalized alongside striking miners and other labor movements while the other half focused on TIE as a beneficial pedagogical tool in a more mainstream context (Broster "Being There" 131).

lobby disliked theatres as middle-class institutions and thought children's theatre was whimsical and trivial. The children's theatre folk felt TIE was too educational and lacking in entertainment value" (viii). However, this rift eventually led to an amalgamation where "elements of both disciplines successfully merged and plays began to be produced that combined the thoughtfulness of TIE with the theatre magic and entertainment value of children's theatre. The best of both" (Wood ix). In *Theatre for Children and Young People: 50 Years of Professional Theatre in the UK* (2005), Stewart Bennett similarly points to the crossover between TYA and TIE, noting the Belgrade Theatre in Coventry as an entrance point for the lineage which overlaps with TYA, a lineage Gregory Readman ("All this and more") and David Broster ("Being there") further unpack in their chapters for *Theatre for Young Audiences.* This connection between performance practices and ideology led to a cultural and artistic shift which resonated through TYA practices and influenced British TYA productions for decades to come.

In his chapter, "Being There: An Examination of How Children Respond and Interact to an Immersive Theatre Environment," David Broster positions TIE as an intrinsic part of the UK TYA developmental process. He sees TIE as an essential component of the UK's "re-assessment of the position of the audience and its relationship to the performance," a relationship usually characterized as specifically TYA but one that "has been particularly developed within the Theatre in Education (TIE) movement" (118). He further argues that, "At its heart was the desire to create a methodology that would enable focused, inclusive, dialectical exploration, stimulated by the company and developed by the young audience both in and/or out of role; at the time something that stood apart from the aforementioned traditional expectations of both theatre and education" (Broster "Being There" 119). These practices led to an interest in participatory theatre, one which explores "the synthesis of experiential, active engagement and rational

analysis" (Broster "Being There" 120). Thus, the methods of participation[11] and engagement

explored in the early stages of TIE led to theatrical advancements in TYA, eventually

synthesizing to promote moments where "the experience of being involved and especially

physically involved in the action is an exciting one and a positive addition to an otherwise end-

on experience" (Broster "Being There" 127). The educational objectives of TIE remained very

influential well into the 21st century and echoes of its interest in participation and synthesis of

pedagogy and drama can be found in UK TYA practices today. Moreover, the historical

importance and progression of TIE in the British context has influenced the aesthetics of British

TYA, including practices which lean into alternative dramaturgy, de-hierarchized forms of

performative practices, and created incubators for experimental forms of communication and

meaning-making.

Experimental Forms of the 1980s and 1990s

Moving Beyond the Emancipatory

In the 1980s, many Western European TYA practitioners started to move away from the

primarily didactic text-based model of Emancipatory Theatre. They sought to explore inspiring

and engaging forms of theoretical and non-verbal communication while still upholding the

underlying principles of emancipatory theatre. As Beth Juncker argues in "What's the Meaning?

The Relations between Professional Theatre Performances and Children's Cultural Life," the

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[11] In "'All this and more:' Learning Through Participation in TIE," Gregory Readman uses John
O'Tool's 1976 *Theatre in Education* definitions of participation (Extrinsic, Peripheral, and
Integral) to advocate for the importance of Integral participation in TIE, noting that "the
audience perspective becomes also the perspective of characters within the drama, especially
when the audience members act as well as being acted upon. The structure of the dramatic
conflict, the audience's relative position to it, and therefore the total experience are altered"
(O'Toole qtd. in Redman 107).

1980s represented a distinct shift in Western European TYA (17). While the 1970s saw a rise in

young researchers exploring TYA theatres and productions, the 1980s saw a rise in theatres

approaching "children as a pedagogical challenge. They now wanted to professionalize their

work on all levels – artistic skills, dramatic genres, professional leadership – to take children as

an artistic challenge" (Juncker 17). The concept of artistic challenge, considering TYA through

advances in the aesthetic as well as the pedagogical, was furthered by the technological

inventions of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

In the Netherlands, experimental theatres of the 1980s and 1990s eschewed "traditional"

narrative forms, looking less toward a linear storytelling format, but rather toward "the thought,

image, or association" (van de Water *Theatre, Youth, and Culture* 30). Thanks in part to the

exploration of Emancipatory Theatre, and its ideological framework for aesthetically pleasing

and critically engaging theatre, TYA saw a drastic increase in experimentations with theatrical

form throughout Western Europe (c.f. van de Water *Theatre, Youth, and Culture* and *Dutch

Theatre*; Elan "Staging the Impossible"; Reynolds). The Netherlands was especially invested in

experimental forms of dramaturgies for youth, ones where "Productions challenged perceptions

and assumptions of what theatre for young people could and should be, defying any stereotyped

notion of 'children's theatre'" (van de Water *Dutch Theatre* 5). By the end of the 20th century,

practitioners across Western Europe were playing with new forms of aesthetic, non-linear, non-

narrative forms of theatre.

In the United Kingdom, a rapidly changing political landscape had a direct influence on

the trajectory of British TYA practices. As David Broster notes in "TYA-UK Developments –

Reflections Through the Looking Glass," Thatcherism and a monumental shift in education, arts

funding, and social revolutions, led to a rise in TYA which succeeded, "not only in terms of its

profile and status but also in terms of the content, aesthetics, and parameters of its work" (127).

As the UK was torn apart by strikes and protests, theatre companies began to experience an

ideological schism. The Standing Conference for Young People's Theatre experienced a split

between those who wished to engage in the social uprising against Thatcherism while others

wished to engage in theatre which was distinctly apolitical (Broster "TYA-UK Developments"

130). At the same time, drastic funding cuts led to an unraveling of TIE's dominance, and a rise

in commercial theatre caused a distinct rift between companies which played into the

commodification of the arts as playful escape and those who "perceived [such productions as a]

strangulation of the arts and erosion of notions of community and shared values that could be

found in the young people's theatre sector where even more challenging material began to

emerge" (Broster "TYA-UK Developments" 131).

While challenging material and a move away from TIE was emerging in Great Britain,

Northern Ireland was experiencing its own, and unique, political and social upheaval. Embroiled

between the politics and social policies of Westminster and a bloody conflict more commonly

known as The Troubles,[12] the need for arts created a surge of theatres, playwrights, and

experimentation in distinct Northern Irish/Irish theatre. In 1988 Brenda Winter, a prominent

Northern Irish theatre artist and member of the influential Charabanc Theatre, became the

Artistic Director of Northern Ireland's first theatre venue for young people (c.f. Byrne; Maguire

"Beyond the Culture of Concern" 49). Replay Productions (re-launched as Replay Theatre

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[12] The approximately 30-year conflict, often referred to as The Troubles, is still being debated by historians regarding the exact time span and terminology. The general belief is that it lasted from 1968 – 1998 and ended with the signing of The Good Friday Agreement/ The Belfast Accord in 1998. While some historians trace sectarian conflict as early as 1963, and the end date could be seen as either when British forces left Northern Ireland until 2007 or when loyalist paramilitary groups decommissioned their weapons until 2009, the brunt of the violent conflict spanned the 1968-1998 time span. For a more detailed account of the nuance of The Troubles see Chapter Four.

Company in 2009) brought a new form of theatre to young people, commissioning plays from renowned Northern Irish playwrights like Marie Jones, Nicola McCartney, and Gary Mitchell, and synthesizing its initial start as a TIE company with a focus on "the provision of high-quality theatre for young people" (Byrne; McGuire "Beyond the Culture of Concern" 49). The productions crossed sectarian lines, offering productions which were both uniquely national and universal, and explored the bounds of traditional theatrical definitions. They engaged in outreach projects, created participatory theatre, explored environmental theatre, and advanced the role of blended performance/participatory theatre in education for children with Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities (PMLD).

In the 1990s, Tony Blair and New Labour once again changed the landscape of UK and Northern Irish politics. While social regeneration became a central component of the Labour agenda, the pre-Thatcher Welfare State funding models were replaced by partnerships with private businesses ("TYA-UK Developments" 132). The Independent Arts Council for Great Britain was replaced by separate Arts Councils for each of the four kingdoms and both TIE and independent TYA company outreach often needed to receive their funding directly from school budgets. This change in funding schemes made it particularly difficult to justify TIE projects or TYA production outreach without a direct connection to established curriculum or socially directed 'just say no' programming ("TYA-UK Developments" 132). While this change often led to a stagnation in experiment, it also inspired young companies to find ways to push against the constraints of consumer mandated aesthetics and had a profound impact on a burst of innovation and exploration in the 21st century. At the turn of the 21st century, TYA companies began to emerge and introduce new and exciting works throughout England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Companies began to address specific national concerns and identity as

well as larger global questions of childhood, identity, and culture. In Northern Ireland, the end

of The Troubles with the signing of the Belfast Accord/The Good Friday Agreement in 1998

ended the violent conflict and allowed for safer movement and a rise in uninterrupted theatre

experiences.[13] Cahoots NI and Big Telly Theatre Company started exploring new innovations in

theatre for young people, often investing in production styles which could reach a diverse

audience, as well as find new venues for experimentation. Big Telly Theatre found ways to

blend commercial theatre productions, such as *Little Mermaid* and *Sinbad,* with aesthetic

experimentation by performing in swimming pools (Maguire 54). Cahoots NI started to lead

Northern Irish innovation in non-text-centric theatre, focusing on a "distinctive style" which

"combines magic and illusion, physical theatre and original music" (Cahoots NI). As the 20th

century closed, a new chapter in TYA aesthetic experimentation began.

Brave New World: TYA in the 21st Century

With the 21st century came a new form of communication, one in the form of technological

advancements and global interaction. As noted by Juncker in "What's the Meaning?,"

technological advancements led to a form of "cultural liberation" where "we are facing new

types of children, new kinds of audiences" (20). Home computers, an influx in video game

entertainment, and the internet led to a change in the culture of young people.[14]

Interconnectivity, artistic challenges, and a new form of communication began to permeate

young people's lexicon. As Juncker poignantly notes, this cultural liberation has turned

"children's theatre and young people's private bedrooms into great cultural institutions allowing

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[13] During the conflict, bomb threats often led to evacuations mid-performance.

[14] For an interesting case study on virtual interaction, see Tristan Jacobs' "The Virtual Puppet in the Machinima Movement: Discovering Virtual Puppetry in the 3D Performance Space of Video Games."

them at the same time to experience and create, to publish and communicate. The young

generation have grown to be a new participatory generation; they have taken authority and partly

turned their back to the arts institutions" (21). Yet, even while young people started to turn their

back on the institutions, TYA companies began to innovate and explore new forms of

theatricality which explored media as both a form of communication and a method of

performativity.

 In "Children as Experts: Contemporary Models and Reasons for Children's and Young

People's Participation in Theatre," Geesche Wartemann explores the role of participatory theatre

and young people in contemporary German TYA, noting the importance of placing "children and

teenagers as experts – as important co-producers during the process of production and the staging

of the show" (21). Wartemann tracks the progression of TYA as a theatre for young people into

a form of theatre for, as well as engaged directly with, the audience. She explores how,

especially in the past ten or so years, Germany has started to bring in young people "as equal

members of society and therefore as experts of everyday life in general" ("Children as Experts"

22). They are part of the workshop process, involved in direct participatory innovations, and

directly engaged as agents in their own experience. Wartemann links this experience to

Lehmann's "eruption of reality," noting the case study *Rimini Protokoll* and its role in

contemporary TYA. Quoting the director, Miriam Dreysse, Wartemann offers that

 The contemporary theatre is characterized by a search for new forms of theatricality,

 which does not illusionistically depict reality but nonetheless deals with it

 fundamentally. Just because the social reality is becoming more and more theatrical …

 theatre is looking for ways to articulate reality without itself becoming part of the

spectacle, of the private and the everyday becoming more and more theatrical" (Miriam

Dreysse, *Rimini Protokoll* 2015, qtd. in Wartemann "Children as Experts" 23)

Indeed, both Dreysse and Wartemann are pointing to a furthering of the ideological and

methodological gains of the latter 20th century, offering explorations of theatre in which reality is

unpacked and a new form of dramaturgy has emerged. As Wartemann further asserts, "In

opposition to the emancipatory theatre of the 1970s, contemporary forms of participatory theatre

with children, empowerment and participation already take place in the process of development

and during the shows as it offers a real of experience as well as publicity to the children and

teenagers being involved" ("Children as Experts" 29). Perhaps most importantly, she

underscores the importance of taking young people's perceptions and knowledge seriously,

advocating for a heightened form of active agency which empowers young people as equal

members in the creation as well as the performance enriches professional artists and target

audiences alike ("Children as Experts" 29).

Conclusion

In the following case studies, I build upon the history of TYA in Western Europe, using the

explorations in themes and material championed by Emancipatory Theatre, the participatory

nature and alternative uses of space championed by TIE, the experimentations of the 1980s and

1990s, Wartemann's exploration of contemporary participation, and Juncker's assertions that

contemporary modes of communication are essential elements of contemporary alternative

dramaturgies in Western European TYA. Each case study offers a unique example of how

contemporary alternative dramaturgies have drawn upon the lineage of TYA while also

exploring distinctly 21st century themes and experimenting with form, aesthetics, and content. I

have structured each of these contemporary 21st century performances in chronological order, though they also follow a similar progression to the historical lineage presented in this chapter.

The first case study, Replay Theatre Company's *COMET* (2014), uses aspects of British TIE practices to bring monodrama to Northern Irish classrooms as guerilla theatre. As the most text-heavy of the three case studies, there are traces of Emancipatory theatre's text-centric nature in the piece, though the production is distinctly part of the 21st century and brought young people into the early creation process, thus blending multiple elements of TYA and TIE history together into one text-heavy yet not necessarily text-centric piece. *COMET* also offers a clear example of how material semiotics impact spectatorship and is arguably the most culturally specific of the three productions, having been created in a distinctly Northern Irish context, though the piece itself has potential global appeal. The production also demonstrates how postdramatic aspects can apply to text-heavy performances where expectations for text-centric and didactic forms of theatre can be subverted and redesigned for a contemporary audience.

Het Hamiltoncomplex, a 2015 production from Belgium's hetpaleis, takes participatory practices a step further, incorporating young people into the devising process as performers as well as spectators. The aesthetics and structure of the production is also the most distinctly postdramatic, clearly drawing inspiration from the Dutch experimental practices of the 1980s and 1990s. While the piece is primarily interested in what Dreysse sees as the "the private and the everyday becoming more theatrical" (Dreysse qtd. in Wartemann "Children as Experts" 23) it also deals with particularly complex questions of material semiotics as the main female performers are 13-year-olds interplay with the themes of sexuality, fractured identity, and the act of looking through very specific and fascinating conditions of reception.

Finally, I look at the 2014/2015 MAAS Theatre and Dans (Netherlands) production of *Voorjaarsoffer: De dreiging van schoonheid* / 2017 MAAS Theatre and Dans and Flat Foot (South Africa) restaging as *Rite of Spring: The Threat of Beauty* as experienced through live spectatorship (2017 ASSITEJ World Congress) and virtual spectatorship (2020 Better Than Us virtual festival). The piece itself is a devised, primarily movement-based performance which draws upon aesthetics more than spoken language to convey meaning. Using interconnectivity and alternative forms of communication, the piece uses image and visceral aesthetics to connect with its spectators, modes of meaning-making. The blend of performance styles, the intercultural nature of the company and themes, and the unique virtual festival experience make it particularly distinct to the 21st century, while still connecting to the rich history of TYA.

CHAPTER FOUR

"The Normality of All This Extraordinary Experience:"

Carving Space with *COMET*

*In the North of Ireland we know that there
are few neutral spaces and even fewer
neutral individuals.*
        - Gerri Moriarty
        "*The Wedding* Community Play Project" (13)

Born from interviews with young men and women throughout Northern Ireland, John

McCann's contemporary monodrama *COMET* (2014) is part truth, part fiction, constructed to

reflect the sentiments and struggles of the male youth of contemporary Northern Ireland.

McCann's narrator struggles between personal and cultural history, turning to the audience to

share the complex, fragmented, and confounding story of his youth in a direct, engaging, and

interpersonal manner. Due to its particular use of linguistic and performance text, lyrical style,

and guerilla theatre presentation, *COMET* offers a compelling case study for the role of

alternative dramaturgy in language-based text and it repositions the role of language within the

meaning-making of material semiotics through postdramatic aspects of text, space, time, body,

and media. McCann's contemporary take on the Western (European) tradition of monodrama

proved itself to be a strong choice for addressing one of the most elusive audience demographics

in Theatre for Young Audience (TYA): the preteen and teenage male. Drawing from interviews

of the production's target audience as the inspiration of the play, and then crafting the work into

a monodrama focused upon direct engagement, *COMET* is able to foster an interest in theatre

and its ideological themes within young men who rarely engage with the medium. Moreover, by

directly engaging with his target audience and incorporating the point of view of young people,

McCann advances the role of empathetic design within his work. Replay Theatre Company

enhances the script's designed engagement through the elements of production, bringing the play directly to the spectators, shifting the spectator-actor dynamic, and de-hierarchizing the role of space within performance practice.

COMET became the inaugural production for Anna Newell's tenure as Artistic Director for Replay Theatre Company in the autumn of 2014. Newell cast Shaun Blaney as the play's sole character, an unnamed narrator, to relate McCann's story of friendship, betrayal, loss, and reclamation to secondary school audiences. Written in a lyrical form, the narrator recounts his character's friendship with a young man named Comet, a boy two years the narrator's senior, whose name conjures the astrophysical event where debris from the solar system orbits too close to the sun and overheats, releasing gas and dust which can leave a bright mark on the night sky (NASA). Both the teleological and ontological concepts of comets permeate the play, beginning with the narrator's play on the name and how, to his thirteen-year-old-self, Comet was "a dark attraction. His light too bright. His gravitational pull too strong" (6). However, for everyone else, Comet is less a brilliant astrophysical event, and more a small piece of frozen debris, quick to burn, and easily dismissed as "volatile, unpredictable, and troublesome" (6). Comet is seen as a young man who brings home reports such as, "Last year your son hit rock bottom, this year he started drilling" (McCann 8). Despite this outward appearance, Comet is more than a troubled young man. To the narrator, Comet is a powerful force, a bright flash of molten rock in the sky, something akin to a god in the narrator's memory. Comet is a friend who gives the narrator support, builds huts with him, and protects him from bullies, a boy who could build in such a way that no one would know how to get in except those whom the builders wished to see. Thus, the hut, not unlike Comet himself, remained one in which "Anyone outside only ever saw this hard, impenetrable shell" (McCann 9). All, that is, except the narrator. He saw the real Comet.

He saw the boy who knew that, "When people speak they are only projecting a version of themselves they need you to accept in that moment" (McCann 13). Yet, just like the physical event with which Comet shares his name, he vanishes from the narrator's life.

Comet disappears after his mother brings home a rich suitor and, upon destroying Comet's one relic of his father, a videocassette of the film *Death Wish*, she drives Comet off. All that is left are the knife scratches in the man's car: "Comet was here," and the lingering curses of a mother who calls after her disappearing son that she wished she had "bloody scraped you out of me with a rusty coat hanger when I had the chance" (McCann 11). The narrator follows Comet to Belfast Lough where Comet has waded into the water and tells the watching narrator, "Once a place tries to contain you rather than encourage you it's already lost you" (13). He then leaves the narrator with the final question, "Sometimes do you not think it'd be better if we weren't from here?" (13) and the narrator does not see his friend in childhood again.

Thus, left without his shining beacon of light, the narrator is forced to forge his own way in the world. He drinks too much, does any drug he can, and starts to slowly disappear. Until, one day, Comet resurfaces in a hospital and the narrator is forced to confront whether or not he would like to continue in his drug-fueled haze or break free and return to the person he was when he was with Comet. The play ends with the narrator sitting by Comet's bedside, pleading with him to "wake up and tell me we can have a second chance. That we can always be better than we were before" (McCann 21). Yet, Comet does not open his eyes. It is not until the dejected narrator starts to leave the hospital that a nurse follows him out to ask what he said because Comet's eyes have opened. This ending leaves the narrator, and subsequently his audience, some semblance of hope. The play ends without Comet speaking. There is no clear resolution. However, especially in the case of post-show workshops, this lack of conclusion provides a

chance for the young people watching to write the ending for themselves. They are offered the option of engaging with the monodrama as an exercise in empathetic sharing in order to discover new truths for themselves and their community.

The Alternative Dramaturgy of Monodrama

Monodrama comes from the traditions of storytelling and its unique blend of intrapersonal and interpersonal narrative. It is an art form whose popularity over the centuries is often prominent in times when introspection and identity become especially interesting to the cultural community. [15] As the purpose of the form is to create a direct interaction between spectator and performer, the ability to examine both intrapersonal and interpersonal spaces provides a theatrical conceit of psychological introspection specifically formulated for the communal setting. This simultaneously joint yet overlapping perspective creates fertile ground for alternative dramaturgical practices, tying into Hans-Thies Lehmann's idea of the joint-text and the importance of collectively breathing air, embodying a space in which performing and spectating happen together (Lehmann 17). The sharing of space is heightened by the length and dedication of the monodrama, linking early forms of the monodrama with contemporary interests in alternative dramaturgy. For Lord Tennyson, monodrama transcended the classical bounds of mini-solo performances such as soliloquies or dramatic monologues, creating "a little Hamlet, the history of the morbid, poetic soul, under the blighting influence of a recklessly speculative

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[15] It should be noted that monodrama is far from a specifically Western European art form, and has been used in various forms on a global scale for centuries. However, for the purposes of this dissertation, I will be focusing specifically upon the forms more closely linked to the lineage of monodramas as Western European alterative dramaturgy, rather than a large-scale discussion of monodrama as performed and perfected in various cultures and communities worldwide.

age" (Tennyson 270-271). [16] This ability creates a form of interaction "where successive phases of passion in one person take the place of successive persons" (Tennyson 198) and ties into contemporary interests in the fractured self and parallax perspectives. Thus, even in its early pre-alternative dramaturgy form, monodrama did not depend upon the exchange of performed interpersonal relationships, but rather leant heavily upon the individual and their sense of self within the soul, often as conflicted by outside social forces. Thus, at their core, monodramas are "an attempt to represent the 'motions of the soul'" (Culler 381). Juxtaposed with self-subsistence, monodramas stand as a theatrical intervention into the ideal that human beings are not *ens per accidens* but rather *ens per se* – a whole in which body and soul are unified and exist through choice and cognizance (Descartes 209). As the entire performance is enacted through one body, a solitary figure speaking of self and soul for an extended period of time, the narrative of self becomes inherently entwined with the philosophical conceit of existence, a reframing of the body and the mind which makes monodrama such an interesting form through which to explore alternative dramaturgy.

Monodramas are also an essential component of the postdramatic theatrical landscape. Rather than an anachronistic tool of classical theatre, Rousseauean operettas, or Russian symbolism, Lehmann locates contemporary forms of monodrama as ones in which the spatial relation of the living body onstage anchors an audience in order to provide an authentication of the experience of entering into the mind of another person (Lehmann 127). The dramaturgical interest of the monodrama is one anchored in the "*transgression of the border of the imaginary*

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[16] See *The Works of Tennyson* edited by Hallam Tennyson; Niklov Evreinov's "An Introduction to Monodrama*;"* Kurt Taroff's "Screens, Closets, and Echo-Chambers of the Mind: The Struggle to Represent the Inner Life on Stage;" and Marvin Carlson's "Whose Space is it, Anyway" among others.

dramatic universe to the real theatrical situation" (Lehmann 127). Lehmann sees this particular

phenomenon as one in which internal/stage communication becomes less stage-specific, instead

opening to the larger idea of a connection between performer and spectator, even taking on

similar characteristics to a cinematic close-up, where "in the perception of the enlarged face is

the removal of spatial experience" (Lehmann 127). This is to say, the actor/character dialogue is

centered upon the audience, they speak to the real person in front of them, and this direct form of

communication offers "its expressiveness more as the 'emotive' dimension of the performer's

language than as the emotional expression of the fictive character represented" (Lehmann 127).

The language, semiotic codes, and presence of the physical body offer a sense of reality,

highlighting the individual speaker as they tell a story, yet the abundance of words, the interplay

of the body in space, and the interaction with the spectators as tangible human beings, rather than

nebulous figures in the dark, shift the monodrama into a potentially postdramatic theatrical

practice.

For Lehmann, it is within these solo performances where the intra-scenic space and the

space of the spectator intertwine, entering into a direct discourse with each other, and offering a

new form of engagement (Lehmann 127). When the performer engages, shifting away from

"speaking at," choosing instead to "speak to" the audience, there is a way in which the spectator

becomes part of the action, simultaneously themselves and someone else- just as the body of the

actor is real while also someone else. It is within this "*latent split*" where the "'external

communication system' can exist almost without the construction of a 'fictional internal

communication system'" (Lehmann 127-128). Therefore, within the deconstruction of separate

worlds of understanding, the monodrama can be a form in which reality and fiction blur, and the

material semiotics of the Performance Text, Conditions of Production, and Conditions of

Reception (Knowles *Reading the Material Theatre*) interact to provide spectators with individualized experiences within the monodramatic structure. Monodramas provide a sense of rhythmic musicality, a lyric dynamism between performer and spectator, which is comprised of a shared presence of bodies in space, the physical reactions of sound waves moving from the voice of the actor to the ear. The sharing of air, the use of eye contact, and the aural engagement of linguistic rhythm offer the spectator an equitable existence in the space, both dramatic and physical, which may also foster greater introspection and philosophical inquiry.

The confessional aspect of monodrama also offers spectators the choice to participate, engage, and potentially even communicate, which creates spectator ownership through the form and its invitation for empathetic and active viewership. Monodrama participates in a philosophical and ideological battle for self, one in which the external forces of culture, cultural constructs of gender, and the internal complexity of cultural memory, are developed and ultimately deconstructed by the narrative form. Or, as Suzanne Keen suggests in her article "A Theory of Narrative Empathy," playing upon the role of emotional exchange and experience also engages in the "vicarious, spontaneous sharing of affect, … provoked by witnessing another's emotional state, by hearing about another's condition… mirroring what a person might be expected to feel in that condition or context" (208). For the audience, this narrative of empathetic experience can also explore the duality of their own lives, as the experience is presented both as therapeutic release for empathetic spectators as well as a mirroring of sympathetic performers who understand what it is they may be going through. It also offers a chance to see the self in another person, to recognize the other as human and thus engage in essential acts of empathy. Within both of these exchanges, the spectators, as rational agents, are then invited to participate in creating a narrative-based intellectual and emotional exchange of

empathy.

The act of creating an empathetic situation which transcends reality, without distancing the spectator through the veil of fiction, depends upon a parallax[17] in which the fictional internal communication system and external communication system are simultaneously, yet distinctly, overlaid in the cognition of the spectator. This parallax, created by the combination of intra-scenic space and the spectator space, is particularly central to the process of McCann's work and his choice to use interviews with existing subjects by reconceiving them into a single monologic form. By brining the expertise of young people and their own experiences into the process of creating a monodrama, and then creating a monodrama to play back those experiences in a monodramatic style which takes on the characteristics of film and online Vlogs, McCann is simultaneously asking the audience to put themselves in the shoes of the character and to place the character into the societal shoes of the culture his witnesses inhabit. This sense of "co-experience," or "inner imitation" is part of what Nikolai Evreinov identifies as monodrama's search for an inherently more human form of perception and co-existence between action and witnessing (185). Combining the expertise of young people with the monologic form further heightens what Evreinov sees as a form of art that allows for emotional co-experience and the understanding that art can shift an unclear perception through empathetic and discursive cognitive processes (185). The result is an alternative dramaturgy which taps into the desire to "see to it that he feels himself at one with the true participant" (Evreinov 197) while intensifying "the communication taking place in the here and now of theatre" (Lehmann 128), in order to

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[17] Here I am referring to the phenomenon in which the location where one is placed directly influences their perception of an object. While usually connected with astronomy, the theoretical concept also creates a distinct parallel between the variation of spectatorship and reception (for more, see Peter M Boenisch's "Towards a Theatre of Encounter and Experience" and *Postdramatic Theatre and the Political: International Perspectives on Contemporary Performance* edited by Karen Jürs-Munby, Jerome Carroll, and Steve Giles).

create a specific and essential space for the spectator to embody and enact their own agency.

Narrating Nothingness: *COMET* and Northern Irish Post-Troubles Adolescence

In Northern Ireland the need for self-substantiation and recognition of the self and others as rational is particularly poignant given the country's turbulent history of sectarian violence, often embodied by male adolescent paramilitaries fighting for the country's identity as either part of the Republic of Ireland or the United Kingdom. The conflict, grounded in centuries of complex and nuanced history, reached a boiling point in the 1960s when violence broke out, causing thirty some years of guerrilla warfare between Republican/Nationalists (those who wish to reverse the 1922 partition which separated Northern Ireland from the Free State of Ireland, now known as the Republic of Ireland), Loyalist/Unionists (those who wish Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom), and the British Forces.[18] While the exact dates of the conflict, more commonly known as The Troubles, are contentious, scholars typically define The Troubles between 1968-1998, starting with the devolvement of Derry Protests at the end of 1968 and ending with the Good Friday Agreement or Belfast Peace Accord in 1998.

In the height of the conflict, Northern Ireland was torn apart as Republicans/Nationalists fought against the British Army and Loyalist/Unionist forces in the hopes of reuniting the island of Ireland to what it was before the island's partition in 1922. Yet, Loyalists/Unionists fought to remain in control of their specifically British identity, entrenched in the cultural script of blood sacrifice, often citing the 1698 Battle of the Boyne and 1916 Battle of the Somme as key military events in which Loyalist blood was spilled for the good of the Empire. Both sides refused to

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[18] Typically, Nationalists and Unionists subscribe to the ideology of Ireland as one nation or Northern Ireland as the fourth kingdom of the United Kingdom, respectively, while Republicans and Loyalists are seen to be those who are willing to use violence to obtain/continue their respective ideological beliefs.

yield and as the years continued the paramilitary factions, the Nationalist Irish Republican Army

(IRA) and Irish National Liberation Association (INLA) and the Loyalist Ulster Volunteer Force

(UVF) and Ulster Defense Association (UDA), turned Northern Ireland into a war zone.[19] This

also meant that during The Troubles young men were expected to join their paramilitary tribe

and fight for their community, initiated into manhood through the right of the gun and the bomb.

Women were often secondary citizens, allowed to fight but as a secondary force. After the

disarmament of the IRA in 1998 and the UVF and UDA in 2009, the paramilitaries either

disbanded or shifted their objectives, leaving their young people without a solid identity to which

they could cling.

This cultural shift away from paramilitary cultures and their violent rites of passage into

adulthood has left Northern Irish young people stranded without a new path on which they can

find themselves outside of the conflict. As a rather ethnically homogenous nation, Northern

Ireland manages to find difference in minutia, creating a vacuum of communal disintegration and

desire for false historic narratives of grandeur in which the Northern Irish conflict forms strong

parallels with other communal or social conflicts around the globe. Furthermore, this tension

between collective memory and acute reality can lead to what Piotr Sztompka has identified as

cultural trauma, one where

> the shocks of change may reverberate in the area of affirmed values and norms, patterns
>
> and rules, expectations and roles, accepted ideas and beliefs, narrative forms and
>
> symbolic meanings, definitions of situations and frames of discourse. (161)

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[19] To complicate the conflict further, there were also battles for control within the various
sectarian factions both between the IRA and INLA and, especially, between the UVF and UDA.
Notably, the UVF and UDA conflicts continue to this day.

Drawing upon these reverberations of cultural trauma, *COMET* plays upon the intellectual

exchange of respect between performer and spectator while still breaking from the traditional

Troubles narrative of the Northern Irish conflict. This ideological tension, situated firmly at the

center of cultural trauma, provides a rich and complex interplay between the conditions of

performance, the performance text, and conditions of reception.

For the young men and women whose interviews created the story of Comet and the

narrator, the role of monodrama, especially as a form of alternative dramaturgy, created a unique

method in which their voices could be melded together in a non-sectarian, contemporary, and

empathetic emotional sharing. Through this careful construction of multiple perspectives into a

single voiced narrative, McCann is able to reshape the stereotype of adolescence within the

performance text. As he recounts in the introduction to the script:

> The affected pompous attitude that can be so energetic in someone a few years younger
>
> … now comes across as perilously fragile grandiosity. These were individuals who were
>
> clearly struggling to hold onto the 'who I was when I was a kid', the 'who I was when
>
> decisions has no consequence.' It was often painful to watch. But I also saw the opposite
>
> occurring during conversations: young people asking challenging questions of their
>
> friends and peers, tackling a little of that aforementioned pomposity with balance, tact,
>
> and care. (3)

These are young people suffering in silence. Young people "just plain surviving cause there's

nothing else for it… in shockingly poor mental health … [with] the sense of missed opportunities

and the perceived lack of second chances" (McCann 4). They are individuals who have lost a

sense of agency, disassociated from empathy, and left to become liminal bodies, outside of

childhood yet not quite recognized as agents in adulthood. Thus, this loss of selfhood and

agency becomes paramount to *COMET*'s dramaturgy where cross-communal connection can facilitate an investigation into how the philosophical tradition of monodrama as a familiar narrative, paired with the direct engagement of the audience, allows for a fascinating look into the complexity of a performance text's interaction with its conditions of performance as well as the conditions of reception.

The material semiotics of *COMET* are especially fascinating given the role of the classroom as a performance space. To capture the hyper-realism of McCann's piece, Replay chose to engage with their intended audience of young adolescents by producing *COMET* as an "intense guerilla performance for teenagers" ("Comet"). Blaney would simply walk into a secondary school classroom, the students unaware of the performance, and start talking. [20] The presence of the monodrama within the classroom space highlights what Lehmann locates as a "blurring of the borderline between real and fictive experience." The combination of monodramatic performance and the material semiotics of the classroom allows *COMET* to engage with its dramatic space, shifting the experience from "a metaphorical, symbolic space into a *metonymic space*." (Lehmann 151). This metonymic space, in which the scenic space is not a designed symbolic indicator of fictive worlds but rather a "part and *continuation* of the real theatre space" (Lehmann 151) adds an extra layer of complexity to the experience of watching the piece. The presence of the classroom, the absence of walking into a theatre, and the unexpected nature of the dramatic action, has a direct impact upon the ways in which the performance might be received. The space reads upon the performance text, but the text also

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[20] While the production also played with more traditional staging including a brief run at the Brian Friel Theatre at Queen's University Belfast alongside its touring classroom performances and, in 2017, a remount which toured both classrooms and stages throughout the United Kingdom, the original intent was to perform in classrooms without students knowing in advance. Occasionally the students were told of a scheduled drug prevention activity, which creates an interesting link to the late 20th century TIE "Just Say No" programming in the UK.

reads upon the space. As Lehmann notes, this form of postdramatic space is one in which "the site corresponds well to a certain text but because it is made to 'speak' and is *cast in a new light* through theatre… It becomes a co-player without having a definite significance. It is not dressed up but made visible" (Lehmann 152). It becomes a heterogeneous space, one of the everyday and the fictive, a multilayered and complex system of identity markers, perception, and symbolic significance, which allows for the "framed theatre and 'unframed' everyday reality" to be "scenically marked, accentuated, alienated, or newly defined" (Lehmann 152).

By redefining the physical classroom space into a nebulous performance space, the production embodies the liminality of both its narrator and, potentially, its spectators. For those not quite children and not quite adults, a performance which takes place in a room which is now not quite classroom, not quite theatre, has an important layer of symbolism. The complexity of the space's semiotic significance aligns with Lefebvre's classification of space as social product, a conceived representation, and a representational space (Lefebvre 26). As a social space, the classroom may serve "as a tool of thought and of action; that in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power" (Lefebvre 26). However, as a dramatic space, the social product shifts, infusing the social space of domination and power with that of multiplicity. In this shift, agency and de-hierarchal forms of communication are engaged and practiced for "the introduction of new ideas – in the first place the idea of a diversity or multiplicity of spaces quite distinct from that of multiplicity which results from segmenting and cross-sectioning space *ad infinitum*" (Lefebvre 27). This cross-sectioning leads to a practice in which "social space will be revealed in its particularity to the extent that it ceases to be indistinguishable from mental space (as defined by the philosophers and mathematicians) on the one hand, and physical space (as defined by practico-sensory activity

and the perception of 'nature') on the other" (Lefebvre 27). As such, the simultaneity of mental and physical space, influenced by the spatial practice in which "a society is revealed through the deciphering of its space" (Lefebvre 38), allows the scripted text, the performance text, and the choice of performance venue to deconstruct spaces of power through a performative twist on the representation of space.[21]

While the classroom is designed and constructed with a distinct purpose in mind, the reclamation of the space within the performance shifts the representation of space into a representational space, one in which "space as directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users'" (Lefebvre 39) redirects the power dynamics away from the societal structures[22] which disenfranchise young people, shifting the ownership of the space to those who inhabit it. This relational experience, and the ways in which the space is simultaneously impacted by the space and impacts the interpretation of the space, ties into Knowles's assertion that

> Theatrical action is also relational, in that it carves out spaces between performers and between spectators and performers, and these spatial relationships are charged with meaning. Proximity or distance and the movement through space are central to meaning-making in theatre, as are the vertical and horizontal axes of the spaces of performance and reception. (*How Theatre Means* 59)

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[21] When performed in the theatre this aspect of the play changes as the theatrical space contains its own representation of space, but with, perhaps, less social and cultural significance to young adults than their own classrooms.

[22] For more on see "The High Cost of Harsh Discipline and Its Disparate impact" by Russel W. Rumberger and Daniel J. Losen, *Culture and Pedagogy: International Comparisons in Primary Education* by Robin J. Alexander, "Conflict, Contact, and Education in Northern Ireland" by Ulrike Niens and Ed Cairns, and "History, Identity, and the School Curriculum in Northern Ireland: An Empirical Study of Secondary Students' ideas and Perspectives" by Keith C. Barton and Alan W. McCully, among others.

This charged meaning, created through the interpretation of space as well as the proximity of bodies in space, hits at the heart of *COMET*'s success. When Blaney would burst into a classroom and just start talking he would shift both the rules of the space as classroom and the spectator as student to those of performance and active agent. As he related in an interview with Daniel Perks:

> It couldn't be a one-man show with characters, it just had to feel like a complete stranger who needed to talk to you, get his message across. He didn't need you to talk back – would you listen?
>
> Every audience we went to did. We've taken it to what teachers consider problem schools and they're the ones you relish, essentially, they're the pupils that the show is for. Normally I would come into the classroom like I'd just walked in off the street, so the kids didn't know what was happening. (Perks and Blaney)

This use of real space as theatrical space, and a shift in the power dynamics between spectator and actor in terms of who comes to whom, taps into the power of space as an essential tool for meaning-making.

The representational space as the lived-in space of adolescent ownership was further explored by Replay's post-show use of the internet as an interactive platform. While Replay uploaded an unpublished script on their website with an evaluation report which included interviews, education materials, and insights from their classroom visits,[23] perhaps the most impactful virtual component of the production was an epilogue McCann was inspired to write after witnessing the reactions of his audience and inspired by their own ideas for what happens

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[23] Unfortunately these materials were removed when Newell left Replay and are no longer available to the online community. However I did have chance to access these materials and downloaded them before they were removed.

after the play ends. The epilogue was filmed and edited on a smart phone and then uploaded to vimeo performance.[24] This direct engagement with the postdramatic aspect of media (not only as a performance tool but also a dramaturgical lens and a second entrance into the lived space of the spectator) allowed for a complex and multilayered approach to how Lefebvre's lived, conceived, and perceived realms can become interconnected, allowing for bilateral and equitable movement through space, deconstructing the power dynamics through liminality, for the liminal personae of the young spectator. Therefore, by choosing to engage the audience in their own classrooms, creating a performance in which the students were unaware that a performance piece would be happening, alongside the additional online resources, *COMET* was able to directly confront and reach audience members who otherwise may have never attended a theatre piece.

The deconstruction of power dynamics represented by the use of space is reflected in how *COMET* uses monodrama to invite a form of empathetic complicity in its viewer. Through this act of engagement, it elicited a sense of emancipation along the lines of Rancière in that

> Theatre is the place where an action is taken to its conclusion by bodies in motion in front of living bodies that are to be mobilized. The latter might have relinquished their power. But this power is revived, reactivated in the performance of the former, in the intelligence which constructs that performance, in the energy it generates. (3)

This interchange of power is particularly liberating in the case of young adults engaging with *COMET*, for they are given a greater degree of power and agency than they might usually encounter. They *choose* to make eye contact during the performance, to pay attention, and to generate an intellectual exchange of energy between themselves and the performer/character. McCann's spectators are "active interpreters of the spectacle offered to them" in which they

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[24] The vimeo epilogue has replaced the education materials and scripts on Replay's website and can be accessed at its original source as well as https://www.replaytheatreco.org/comet.

"see, feel, and understand something in as much as they compose their own poem" (Rancière 13). They are the ones who may create a bridge between the issue of possession and communal experience. However, beyond the power granted to them in the operation of the medium, monodrama as a form of alternative dramaturgy also offers the power to extend the narrative outside of its own symbolic system.

This extension of narrative and emancipation, or at least the ability to assert a different form of power, is an underlying theme of McCann's work. *COMET* is about two young men, yes, but the play is more accurately about the audience and the young men and women McCann interviewed before writing the play. The play grapples with the overwhelming teenage experience in which any self-generated construction of one's identity is overshadowed by

> a sense of struggle, of struggling to continually make sense, of struggling with the
> transition from childhood to adulthood. But also the struggle to be at ease with yourself,
> to come to terms with yourself, to be the "real me." (McCann 3)

This "real me" is uninterested in the traditional Catholic-Protestant binary, but rather focused upon the liminality, both embodied and political, in which one struggles to find oneself. McCann's characters grapple with a concept of culturally scripted masculinity which has shifted from decades of outward violence to a new form of inward violence. As the narrator proudly reminds us, he and Comet were

> Young gods, the pair of us.
> Standing here there and everywhere.
> Acting all tectonic.
> Carrying ourselves like clenched fists
> All dagger-sharp eyes.

Trigger-happy tongues in machine-gun mouths.

But the thing is… it was all show.

Truth be told we were walking wounds.

Chemical spills on two legs.

Faces like a painter's radio.

Our bones screaming to be sky-scrapers.

Creaking and cracking under the pressure.

Rebels without a clue. (McCann 6-7)

To the narrator, his admission of the façade of bravado examines the hidden realities of

adolescence, but how might an audience of young people hear those words? How does this

admission of "dagger-sharp eyes" and "trigger-happy tongues" as a show for clueless, cracking,

and stressed bodies of young men speak to the young people sitting at the desks upon which the

narrator is sitting? Perhaps by choosing to focus upon the issues that haunt the youth of today

without providing any answers, the audience is encouraged to find their own answers, their own

way out of the mess their forefathers have created, a way to make their own rational choices in a

world which increasingly fails to make sense.

Even after Comet's disappearance, the narrator lives through the years, slowly forgetting

or letting go of his memory of Comet, becoming a new man, but not necessarily one that lives up

to his own desires of personhood. It is not until the narrator is faced with a realization of choice

and agency over his own destruction that the role of escapism is highlighted as deceptive and

abusive. Further highlighting the idea that Northern Irish theatre can extend beyond the external

violent struggles of protagonists in traditional Northern Irish Trouble narratives, the narrator's

violence is internal, inflicted through self-harm and tortured narratives of the past. He is a

fractured body, a layered self onto which his agony has been inscribed. This fracturing of self, and the physical embodiment of trauma as inscribed onto the body, calls to mind Lehmann's assertion that "the dramatic process occurs *between* the bodies; the postdramatic process occurs *with/on/to* the body" (174). His struggle, and the pain which accompanies it, may be experienced between the bodies of the spectators and the solitary figure of the narrator, between the cultural scripts and the bodies of those who came before, but ultimately the process is occurring between a fractured identity within a single body. He, not unlike Northern Ireland, is struggling with an understanding of the present and a loss of sense of self. Feeling absence and loss in a form of psychic pain, connected to his memory of Comet, the narrator is trapped by the etchings (both symbolic and literal) of the past:

> I soon found 'Comet was here' scrawled on the walls by the lockers, in the cement at the
> back of the school kitchens. In the pavement near the bus stop.
>
> Even when he wasn't here Comet was still bloody everywhere. (14)

Thus, as the narrator is left to struggle with a construction of personal narrative when its link to the past has broken, he turns – like so many others – to alcohol and drugs to numb the pain and find a new sense of self.

As the narrator struggles with the remnants of Comet, he also grapples with the remnants of his childhood and his sense of self. Comet connects to a time when he thought of himself as a god, even if it was just a show. With the façade neatly destroyed, he is left adrift in a world that no longer makes sense. His only hope comes near the end of the play, after Comet has been discovered in the hospital and the narrator starts to spend more time with his friend, and thus himself. Yet, this hope is undermined by the reality of life when his girlfriend forces him to choose. She desires for the narrator to choose her, the "him she likes," (McCann 14-15) and the

drugs rather than the comatose Comet, sobriety, and the possibility for real self-discovery that the break with destructive behavior would bring. The narrator finally chooses Comet when, "I tell her that the last thing I need is any of that crap and I'm not gonna forget about Comet. Not when I've just found him. Comet is the only friend I ever had" (McCann 17). Not unlike the stark reality of the real world, the narrator is left to a world where only he can make a choice to change his own life.

In the end, the narrator can only truly liberate himself once he makes the rational decision to choose a path for himself and, through the theoretical suppositions of monodrama, the spectators are offered a chance to also experience rational choice through the medium's reliance on empathetic sharing. Therefore, the necessity of agency becomes the ringing argument of the piece. Everyone can choose, everyone has the option to create their own interpretation of the world, make their own meaning, because,

> Comet and me, we could be your mate.
>
> Your cousin.
>
> Your brother.
>
> Even you. (21)

In this final reminder of the relationship between performer and spectator, *COMET's* young audience member is reminded that this performance, not unlike their own life, is ultimately under their own ethical and ideological control.

Conclusion

The plurality of perspectives, de-hierarchal aesthetics, and interplay between the fictive and the real underline the role of alternative dramaturgy in TYA spectatorship. As a case study, *COMET*

offers insight into how productions can use language even while de-centralizing the linguistic text by privileging meaning-making through aesthetic semiotic codes, as well as a postdramatic understanding of how text, space, time, body, and media can operate within a monodrama. By offering its spectators a chance to exist, at least briefly, in a space in which they, as spectators, have the power, the alternative dramaturgy of *COMET* demonstrates the potential empowerment these forms of joint-text and individual meaning-making can provide. Within alternative dramaturgies, combined with de-hierarchical understandings of space and bodies in space, spectators are offered the chance to choose how they engage with the performance in front of them: whether to listen, to stay in their seat, and/or to enter into a tacit contract with the symbolic world presented to them. They choose whether or not to bestow rationality onto the fantasy, turn fiction into fact (no matter how temporary), and engage in any social arguments within the larger artistic event. The deconstruction of authority within alternative dramaturgy, and the agency it cultivates, challenges young adults to overcome their preconceived notions of identity, community, and gender as the sole basis of selfhood in order to find the tools necessary to transcend cultural constraints and solidify their autonomy.

Ultimately, by acknowledging the agency of young people as spectators as well as subjects worthy of narrative, alternative dramaturgies like those used in *COMET* provide the tools to question the ideology of current young adult social strata to nurture their ability to transcend the cultural trauma of their collective past. The conditions of performance, the performance text, and the conditions of reception interact to bring complexity to the parallax perspectives offered both within the play and the experience of the spectators. The classroom itself becomes de-hierarchized, offering the spectators an opportunity to deconstruct their own role within a classroom, theatre, or other didactic space, instead becoming active instigators of

their own experience. Their role as an active agent also provides the spectators an ability to

engage with the concepts of freedom, choice, and rationality not often applied to the liminal

position of adolescence.[25] The material semiotics of *COMET* plays with the belief that young

adults are simultaneously beings and becomings –rational enough to be punished and convicted

as adults in a court of law but not enough to serve as fully-fledged members of society. The

performance text underscoring the pain such beliefs can cause, while the conditions of

performance and conditions of reception strive to deconstruct the disenfranchisement such ageist

hierarchies can perpetuate. In the end, the monologic tenet of equality through spectatorship,

enhanced through the alternative dramaturgy of the production, ultimately allows *COMET* to

offer its spectators a chance to practice active choice. They are the joint-authors of their own

experience, fostering meaning-making through the interpretation of the semiotic codes both

through the linguistic ones written by McCann and the aesthetic codes created by the production,

its staging in their own classrooms, and the unique perspectives each spectator brings to their

own experience.

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[25] Especially when dictated by culturally significant yet dogmatic connections to masculinity,
like those seen in late 20th century/early 21st century Northern Ireland.

CHAPTER FIVE

"'Betwixt and Between:"

Het Hamiltoncomplex and the Plurality of Perspective

When girls' business is presented onstage or
examined it inadvertently troubles us in one way
or another, whether it is tough, beautiful or otherwise.
                                        - Christine Hatton (175)

On July 5, 2016, members of the On The Edge Festival for the 2016 ASSITEJ Artistic

Gathering in Birmingham, UK, took their seats in the Birmingham Repertory Theatre's main

stage for a performance of *Het Hamiltoncomplex (The Hamilton Complex),* conceived/directed

by Lies Pauwels of Sontag Theatre Company, in collaboration with the Belgium theatre

company hetpaleis, which billed itself as an experience unlike the rest in the festival. While

TYA productions are traditionally defined as professional adult actors performing for young

people, *Het Hamiltoncomplex* is a devised piece created with, and for, 13-year-olds. The cast is

comprised of thirteen semi- or non-professional actresses[26] and one professional adult actor,[27]

and while the show was designated for the 13+ audience, *Het Hamiltoncomplex* performances

often drew audiences which were comprised of both the targeted young adult audience and

adult spectators.

Conceived/devised in 2014, *Het Hamiltoncomplex* explores the gender performance of

female adolescence and the idea of "things that change, that will never be what they would be"

("Lies Pauwels over Het Hamiltoncomplex"). Based on her interest in liminality and the

precipice of change, Pauwels cast thirteen 13-year-old actresses from a country-wide casting call

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[26] Anne Coopman, Luna de Boos, Bruce Eelen, Zita Fransen, Lies Genné, Robine Goedheid, Liesbeth Houtain, Julia Krekels, Aline Moponami, Ans Schoepen, Emma van Broeckhoven, Mona van den Bossche, and Lisa van den Houte.
[27] Stefan Gota.

leading to 45 auditions. Rather than casting the most experienced actors with the best resumes, a feat possible in a country where TYA often includes collaborations between adult practitioners and young people, Pauwels focused on the young women who inspired her *("Het Hamiltoncomplex:* the making of").[28] This focus on inspiration led to a collaborative process in which Pauwels's interest in the tipping points before change infused the devising process, and included the ideas and creative output of her performers. The result was an episodic performance featuring roughly twenty-one vignettes which contemplate and explore various experiences of gendered performance.

The piece, situated firmly within postdramatic dramaturgy, offers a constant barrage of images, ideas, visuals, and sounds which work to create a multi-layered, simultaneous, and constantly shifting perspective in which each spectator is invited to bring their own positionality to the joint-text. As a case study for how alternative dramaturgy operates in TYA, *Het Hamiltoncomplex* offers a unique look into the influence of postdramatic dramaturgy on European experimental theatre, as well as draws from the role of meaning-making within the aspects of text, space, time, body, and media which combine to create an aesthetic experience. The construction of *Het Hamiltoncomplex* highlights Lehmann's assertion that,

> [Postdramatic] Theatre here deliberately negates, or at least relegates to the background, the possibility of developing a narrative – a possibility that is after all peculiar to it as a time-based art. This does not preclude a particular dynamic within the 'frame' of the state – one could call it a *scenic dynamic*, as opposed to a dramatic dynamic (68).

For, although each vignette flows into the next, with some transitions squarely offering their own episode while others create a more blurred line between ideas, there is no connective narrative

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[28] The video is in Dutch, translations provided by Google Translation and Manon van de Water

tissue. While each of the female performers is given a name, their names have no specific character attached. They are figures in extremis. When they appear in frilly dresses with bright candy-colored curly wigs they speak in utterly stereotypical – yet symbolically significant – "Lolita" voices. They name themselves with the language of feminine virtue; they enact pregnancy; they are Red Riding Hood and the Wolf; they are the child bride; the party girl; the differently abled; the beaten symbol of female liberation falling, dirty and torn, upon a destroyed and deconstructed stage filled with the motifs of classical art. When there is dialogue it is deconstructed and distanced from narrative and plot. Any Aristotelian dramatic experience is internal to the spectator rather than the performer. For those who may see a climactic ending or a moral, it is an externally imposed, rather than an intentionally constructed, conclusion. This sense of nonlinear time and the constant construction and deconstruction of character, stereotype, and self leads to a nebulous characterization of gender and challenges each spectator to confront their own perceptions, and preconceptions, of gender, childhood, girlhood, and adolescence. Moreover, within its constant deconstruction of gender performance through a distinctly postdramatic dramaturgy, *Het Hamiltoncomplex* not only uses postdramatic dramaturgy to explore gender, it also offers a revision of the perception of gender, gender performance, and even gender performativity through a challenging production driven by the young performers and the literal presence of the adolescent female body throughout the piece.

Each episode is its own living portrait, sometimes literally embodied through tableaux based on Romantic portraiture, which creates the sense of dynamic paintings in a gallery collection. There is a theme to the collection, yet each moment represents its own unique feeling, plays with its own aesthetic, and offers its viewer a different perspective. This form of theatrical construction is, as Lehmann points out, "an aesthetic figuration of the theatre," one

focused upon "scenically dynamic formations" rather than story, visual arts, and performative aesthetics over narrative (Lehmann 68). In *Het Hamiltoncomplex*, the possibilities of scenically dynamic formation offer its spectators agency by allowing them to make meaning based on their own perspectives,[29] creating an empathetic design in meaning-making where the material semiotics of gendered performance from the adolescent perspective offers a multitude of readings. Thus, by exploring the plurality of perspective and the subsequent performance of gender instructed by the act of viewership, *Het Hamiltoncomplex* explores the ambiguity, cultural coding, and subversion involved in gender performativity as instructed by both the internal and external gaze.

Safety First: Perceptions of Protection and the Postdramatic Body

On the large proscenium stage of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, the dim preshow lights reveal a black stage floor partially covered by a rectangular wooden dance floor. Three standing microphones frame the wooden floor, one on each end and one in the center of the stage. Two red stage curtains frame the wings, slightly pulled out to partially cover a life-size plastic horse, which stands in front of a large Romantic landscape in the style of the Dutch Masters. To the left of the painting are three plastic columns in the Classical style, each a slightly different height, and the smallest central column appears sheared off in the middle. Above the columns, creating a partial arc above the stage, seven metal wires move from the far stage right column to just above the curtain covering the painting. From the wire arc hang a series of multi-colored balloons, streamers, flowers, and stuffed animals. On either side of the stage are three plastic chairs, two facing forward and one facing inwards towards the stage. Brightly colored

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[29] For more on how different perspectives might shape the reading of the show, see Tom Maguire's "Girl Watching: HET PALEIS's *Hamilton Complex*."

backpacks line the ends of the stage. On the far edges of the darkened wings stand two movable

televisions, their screens blank.

The lights rise and twelve performers file out to the front of the wooden floor. They

create a straight line of twelve thirteen-year-old female performers dressed in navy uniforms

with navy blue caps, black-and-white scarves, and a nametag.[30] The performers are various

heights and stages of development, some prepubescent and others well on their way into

womanhood. Over the speakers, the soundtrack of *Les Choriste,* "Vois sur ton Chemin"[31] begins

to play. The twelve performers sing along, standing straight, hands at their sides or gently folded

in front of their bodies. Their uniforms, the line of young performers, the lyrics and composition

of the melody, suggest an early secondary school performance. They are, seemingly, the

paradigmatic child performer, framed, as Isis Germano suggests in her article, "So Cute, So

Creepy: Children Undoing the Human in *Het Hamiltoncomplex*," within "the concept of

childhood innocence in a specific Western ideal of the subject" just as the spectators are

confronted with "the way we are conditioned to perceive childhood" (45). This societal

construction of girlhood,[32] the conditioning and perception of the idea of the child, especially

within a consciously Western sense, will be the central point of deconstruction throughout the

piece.

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[30] The uniforms invoke the shapes, lines, and accessories of the Air Belgium flight attendant
uniform and color similarities with the Thomas Cook Airlines Belgium uniform.

[31] The song, composed by Bruno Coulais and Christophe Barratier for the 2004 film *Les
Choriste*, was originally written for a small male chamber choir. The lyrics, translated from
French to English, roughly approximate: "Look out on your path/ Children who are lost and who
have been forgotten/ lend them a hand / and lead them towards another future. / Feel in the
middle of the night/ a surge of hope/ the indefatigability of life / the road to glory. / Childish
happiness / Erased and forgotten too fast / a golden light shines forever / and the end of the road"
(lyricstranslate.com).

[32] For more on the perception and construction of girlhood in *Hamiltoncomplex,* see Tom
Maguire's, "Girl Watching."

Het Hamiltoncomplex will not be a stereotypical portrayal of girlhood. Social constructs can be deconstructed. The performance has a power which extends beyond the superficial vestiges of childish performativity and reaches into the depths of cultural understanding of girlhood. As Evelyne Coussens notes in her review for *Theaterkrant*,

> It is not the seriousness of taking oneself *seriously,* because in *The Hamilton Complex* quite a bit is ironized, but the seriousness that goes with the act of speaking: they are not there for nothing, they have something to say... far beyond their family's endearing 'aahs' and 'oohs'. They demand that they be taken seriously. The power of their numbers, their powerful collective radiance and the polyphonic singing with which they open the performance enforce that connection, from the first minute. (Coussens)[33]

Thus, as the song comes to an end and the performance begins, any stereotypical understanding of child as performer begins to unravel. The televisions turn on and offer subtitles (in UK English as quoted in this chapter) as one performer steps forward to the central microphone and begins to speak in Dutch. She names herself as Gift and proceeds to introduce her fellow performers: Prudence, Precious, Charity, Destiny, Faith, Eternity, Melody, Marvellous, Lovely, Memory, and Patience.[34] As she introduces them, each performer takes out a green handkerchief to indicate they are the performer who matches the name, and walks back to a new place on the stage. The subtitles, originally a black background with blue writing, switch colors and fonts, creating a visual representation of their character as named on the screen.

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[33] Original source is in Dutch. English translation provided by Google Translate.
[34] While Gift speaks in Dutch the names are all in English.

Gift informs the audience that, "Today we are here to assist you and to guarantee your safety" (*HC* [35]18-19), a sentiment that may seem paradoxical coming from a thirteen-year-old performer. Gift is worried for the safety of her audience, no matter their age or social standing. In this space it will not be the female adolescent bodies in need of safety, but rather the supposedly passive spectators who are provided with exposition in the form of an introduction to the rules, regulations, and safety measures offered by the production. Gift points out exits, discusses emergency procedures, and asks for all bags to be placed below the seats. As she runs through a standard list of safety procedures which bear a striking resemblance to those provided before takeoff on an airplane, the other eleven performers enact a choreographed ritual of gestus. This juxtaposition of ritual and exposition invokes Lehmann's analysis of postdramatic theatre as "the replacement of dramatic action with ceremony" in which

> the whole spectrum of movements and processes that have no referent but are presented
>
> with heightened precision; events of peculiarly formalized communality; musical-
>
> rhythmic or visual-architectonic constructs of development; para-ritual forms, as well as
>
> the … ceremony of the body and of presence. (Lehmann 68)

In their ritualistic ceremony of self and presence, the performers offer the familiar-made-strange, a litany of safety procedures which mimic those heard on public transportation, at the start of traditional theatre productions, the beginning of films, and practically any situation which involves large crowds gathered together. The embodied language behind Gift offers a just-barely asynchronous gestic interpretation of the instructions, mirroring the verbal with embodied

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[35] Julie Verdickt, of hetpaleis, was kind enough to provide a PDF of the subtitles which were fed into the televisions. Thus, in order to simplify my references, direct quotations from the play will be cited as HC followed by the slide/page numbers which correlate with the PDF of the subtitles.

communication, while the sheer numbers of bodies gesticulating, the age of those bodies, and the

meaning behind the instructions work together to reframe a well-known ritual of safety.

The absurdity within this familiar-yet-strange exposition is heightened as the opening

monologue diverts away from exit procedures and moves towards health and safety instructions

surrounding illness, transmission, and disease. Continuing their chorography of gestic

communication, the performers embody Gift's spoken instructions as she reminds the audience

that "After the event you can also have yourself tested for bacterial or viral infections" but that

they are not liable for "any conditions that are of a sexually transmittable nature. Nor are

diseases transmitted by saliva or blood our responsibility" (*HC* 48-53).[36] However, spectators

are not to fear as, "you can take out insurance as part of your season ticket" *(HC* 57-58)*. The

discussion of Health and Safety procedures for illness and disease spirals further into the absurd

as Gift warns spectators to avoid "zone 4B and 7B as traces of leprosy and plague have been

found there," though one should not worry as, "if you should still contract one of these dated,

obsolete and old-fashioned diseases, we can still treat you for them. You can choose between a

modern or a back-to-the-Middle-Ages treatment" (*HC* 66-76*)*. This juxtaposition of modernity

and the Medieval, illness and performance, happenstance and choice, highlights the opening's

satire of societal concepts of safety and protection.

Then, almost as if in acknowledgement of their own biological positioning, Gift asks the

audience to "keep your hormones in check," kindly requesting that all spectators undergoing

puberty, menstruation, menopause, "and men – all men – endeavour to practice self-control" (*HC

83-90*). The layered meaning underneath the safety announcements, the conceit of exposition

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[36] The discussion of viral infection and testing within a theatrical space, while potentially
seeming absurd in 2014, becomes shockingly relevant and almost prophetic in a post COVID-19
theatrical landscape.

which is both familiar yet disconnected, taps into Lehmann's theory of "The *principle of exposition* applied to body, gesture and voice" which attacks the linguistic function of representation and,

> Instead of a linguistic *re*-presentation of facts, there is a 'position' of tones, words, sentences, sounds that are hardly controlled by a 'meaning' but instead by the scenic composition, by visual, not text oriented dramaturgy. The rupture between being and meaning has a shock-like effect: something is exposed with the urgency of suggested meaning – but then fails to make the expected meaning recognizable. (146)

The semiotic coding offered by the social conditions of the adolescent bodies providing the Health and Safety instructions, the disjointed yet choral gestures of the eleven silent performers, the subtitles, the persistent direct address, the constant eye contact between all twelve performers and the audience, creates a disconnect between the meaning of the words and the meaning-making offered by the complete mise-en-scène. Together, they create a simultaneity of meaning, signaling that spectators are expected to bring their unique cultural-coding to what they will see, but the performers will not be liable for these perspectives. This theme of positionality and spectatorship is brought to its peak when Gift, looking out into the audience, gives voice to what many adults in the audience may be thinking:

> Oh yes, there's just one other thing. We don't wish to humiliate or offend anyone, but given our young age, it seems a good idea to know whether there are paedophiles here today. We don't want to condemn anybody or anything, but I do hope that you can understand our point of view you never know if there is someone here – who loves a bit of 'not quite grown-up and not-quite-a-child'. 'betwixt and between, as the saying goes.

It's not that we disapprove or so – each to their own. It's just that we want to know what

we're up against. Because, as you surely know, we're in a crisis. (*HC* 91-114)

As Gift requests audience admission of any pedophiliac tendencies the eleven choral members

stare out into the audience, as if waiting for someone to admit their predilections.[37] By

reminding the audience of their young age, and cultural fears surrounding young female safety

and protection, Gift breaks through the absurdist conceits of her previous safety announcements

and (re)positions the spectator into an active role and the performers into a state of perceived

vulnerability.

The show openly acknowledges that *Het Hamiltoncomplex* is a piece in which young

adolescent women will be performing for a mixed-aged audience. The performers will be

placing themselves into scenarios which might read as sexual, and the very presence of their

body as a signifier may invite worry and fear. Leaning into this cultural script of vulnerability

they play with the questions: If society sees them as something in need of protection, who will

protect them? What is their role in an active citizenship if they are constantly to be on the

lookout for those who may wish to exploit them? However, as the performance unfolds it

becomes increasingly clear that there will be no perfect answer to any of these questions.

Perhaps this is the reason for their crisis, which lends added significance to the continuation of

the speech, in which Gift outlines their reasoning and their designs on creating a new citizenry

using as-yet-to-be-invented machines to judge morality, and asking the audience to

take responsibility for yourselves. After all, we live in a civilised society, and despite the

diversity present, we are obliged to fight for the same standards and values that can only exist

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[37] This section is also a reference to the inspiration for the title of the piece, British photographer
David Hamilton, whose work *Dreams of a Young Girl* (1971) and *Age of Innocence* (1995),
among others, showcase young women in various states of dress, which became the focus of an
inquiry into the line between child pornography and art.

if we adopt an altogether responsible policy. Because once we assume our responsibilities as citizens, then everything will be just hunky dory! The future is bright and perfect. Long live the future!" (*HC* 121-132)

Within the juxtaposition of the potential danger of spectator positionality and their own linguistic direction and authoritative position over the action on the stage, Gift and her gestic chorus complicate any social construct that regulates the role of the young adolescent girl to a position of subservience and victimhood. They are facing potential risks head on, but foremost forging a new society. Their ideology will mirror their dramaturgy, constructed through a postdramatic lens to point towards a diverse aesthetic, a complex sense of understanding, and the potential for a shift in cultural perceptions of girlhood.

The safety announcement offers a commentary upon narrative and identity, playing with what Rebecca Schneider, in her book *The Explicit Body in Performance*, sees as "the issue of who has the right to author the explicit body in representation – or more to the point, who determines the *explication* of that body, what and how it *means* – has repeatedly been a matter of political and juridical concern" (3). Though Schneider is specifically analyzing adult female performers and their own reclamation of sexuality in performance, the underlying theory of reclamation and power in representation, is ageless. Thus, the simultaneous abstraction of conventional ideas of protective versus protected bodies and the embodied ownership of authorial terms and personal performance offers a form of emancipation of adolescent experience, using a postdramatic upending of tradition to focus upon the way language and cultural understandings of safety can lead to the oppression and subjugation of the adolescent female body.

In other words, they will be playing with the postdramatic concept of the body, constructing and deconstructing a series of signs and signifiers, playing with stereotype, and engaging with Lehmann's theory that the postdramatic body is a paradox in which "the *body is absolutized*" yet, especially with the loss of specific signification, social reality and signification leads extreme performativity to allow a situation in which "The body becomes the *only subject matter. From now on, it seems, all social issues first have to pass through this needle's eye, they all have to adopt the form of a physical issue*" (Lehmann 96). The simultaneity of the performers, both as a distant and abstracted body and as a directly highlighted adolescent girl, confronts the spectators, deconstructing and reconstructing convention and frames the production's interest in "turning points and a moment that irrevocably becomes something different" ("Lies Pauwels over Het Hamiltoncomplex"[38]). This change, the instigation of the new, is perhaps what leads Gift to relay the hope that symbols of authority (doctors, police, and soldiers) are in the house because "we want to be protected. We want to be protected from storm and tsunamis, form cutthroats and priests, from tigers and bazookas, 'scilt en friend.' We want to become safe, be safe, and stay safe. Safety first" (*HC* 138-147). They express this call for safety and the seemingly sincere desire for safety, yet they then quickly abandon all notions of safety with their next demand. For, as much as they may want to become safe, they will also never be far from the stereotypes of their age and cultural concepts of girlish childhood, because they also want popular culture. In fact, what they really want is Belgian heart throb, Matteo Simoni.

As Simoni's photo is projected on both televisions, the performers begin to let out screams of excitement as the opening chords of a female-vocals cover of The Beatles' "Love Me

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[38] The YouTube video was titled in English but spoken in Dutch. Dutch translation for this video was provided by Manon van de Water.

Do" blast over the speakers. The mention of Simoni sends the performers into a state of abandon.

They run back and forth screaming, ripping off the blazers to reveal pink blouses, switching their

grey pencil skirt uniforms for flouncy green skirts more reminiscent of primary school uniforms.

They let down their hair. They pull backpacks from the side of the stage. The uniformed,

carefully choreographed professionals have been replaced by chaos. Their visceral screams,

calls to Matteo, and sporadic dancing all encapsulate Lehmann's assertion that "The principle of

the destruction of coherence is connected to the transformation of everyday experience which

seems to make a calm theatre impossible" (62). Here the images of obsessive and screaming

teenage fans, childish costuming, and unbridled emotions replace the carefully constructed

vestiges of professional adulthood. The performers have given over to stereotype. They have

transformed the everyday experience into a complex system of chaos and noise. They have

made a calm theatre impossible. Yet, not unlike cultural systems of order and gendered control,

the unbridled emotion and chaos of their behavior is not left unchecked for long.

Almost as if mirroring societal preconceived notions of adolescent safety and protocol,

three minutes of unbridled and continual screaming is all the performers are given before the

sounds of a metal whistle cut through the noise and the Man (performed by Romanian actor, and

professional body builder, Stefan Gota)[39] appears from the orchestra pit, dressed in a suit, his

blonde ponytail slicked away from his face, gesturing for calm adherence. He asserts himself

into the action, demanding order from chaos, and the performers slowly acquiesce, walking

around, cleaning up the stage, replacing their bare feet or heels with bobby socks and practical

sneakers, reforming their line, and bringing quiet to the stage. When they take too long he blows

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[39] Although beyond the scope of this dissertation, the role of the Man (especially his performance of various masculine versions of gender performativity) would make an intriguing case study for those interested in masculinity studies and the roles of the adult male surrounded by adolescent women.

his whistle, watching now from the aisles of the house. He looks out at the audience, observing

the spectators as well as the performers onstage. From his vantage point, posture, and gaze, his

role as bodyguard, protector, and observer seems to have a double-meaning. He may be

protecting the younger performers from the audience, but he also seems to be protecting the

audience from them. Their inability to be 'controlled' is constantly highlighted, from their

defiant and hostile silence, their choral gestures, their gaze which is directed only at the Man

and, notably, the only time no one looks out towards the audience in the entire piece. He is

symbolic of all the measures of safety they called for in their opening speech, yet his control is

chafing. They defy his offer of protection, struggle against the calm order of his established

society, and glare at the symbol of the adult gaze. Their return to choral gesticulation, one which

slightly mirrors that of the safety instructions,[40] is reconfigured and restructured through silence.

The shift in the gaze and the costuming seems to question the role of communication and

perception. Does society perceive the schoolgirl differently than the uniformed flight attendant?

Is either one their real self, either one truly free? This line of questioning plays into Lehmann's

assertion that

> The affirmation of a theatre-*aesthetic* perspective may, however, necessitate the remark
>
> that aesthetic investigations always involve *ethical*, moral, political, and legal questions
>
> in the widest sense. Art, and even more so theatre which is embedded in society in
>
> multiple ways – from the social character of the production and public financing to the

---

[40] For the Safety Instructions they were slightly asynchronous but now they are perfectly timed, the gestures of safety and instruction replaced with gestures of presentability (fixing their hair, brushing their skirts, adjusting their shirts, etc.). However, the chorality continues to offer an overwhelming sense of presence, just as their newly directed glare at the Man shifts the direction of their energy and takes what should be subservience and turns it into a moment of rebellion.

communal form of reception – exists in the field of *real socio-symbolic practice*." (18-19)

The young women, when reminded of their role in society, their positioning through stereotype and adult control, become regulated figures. The spectators, reminded that they are being watched while they watch, shift the perspective. The existence of live, young adult bodies, moderated, observed, perhaps even objectified by the adult gaze shifts the material semiotics. Society sees them in a very particular way, even if they wish to rebel against that symbolism. The Man may try to control them, he may stand for safety and order, but he is also a symbol of authority, something to defy, something to rally against. His control cracks, finally crumbling with their abrupt switch back into energetic selfhood for the entrance of Queen.

The emergence of Queen creates an important and abrupt shift in the energy, attention, and semiotic significance played out between the young women, the Man, and the audience. When Queen appears from backstage, she is led to a microphone by two of her fellow performers. The others surround her and exclaim her presence or murmur in excitement. Her steps are unsteady, regulated to a form of movement which is imposed upon her by neurotypical ableist cultural practices, rather than her self-created ambulatory style of sitting on the ground and pulling herself by her arms and then pushing with her feet, yet she adapts and loudly proclaims into the microphone, "I am Queen. I am Queen. I am Queen" before being helped down to the seated position she will maintain for the majority of the performance. Queen (performed by Robine Goedheid), becomes an instigator of defiance, disrupting the repetition of the gestic chorus, and offering a new version of female adolescence. For, while the other twelve performers might present as neurotypical and able-bodied, Queen embodies another subset of female adolescent identity. Her physicality and style of communication disrupts the norm. She

offers different ways of moving, complex ways of vocalizing, and when she adopts the physicality or communicative styles of those around her, she still makes them her own. She also challenges the image and embodiment of female identity, sexuality, and the tension between those who protect and those who need to be protected. While she could be perceived within a stereotype of the disabled body, engaging potential societal desires to protect, and perhaps even demean, she is also unquestionably Queen. While the others are given monikers which play into societal stereotypes of female weakness, subservience, or other patriarchal forms of powerlessness, Queen is royal. She is a ruling figure, a name with power, and her presence on the stage and her interactions with her fellow performers offer a subversion of the stereotypical disabled narrative. She challenges the nature of difference. Her presence, the semiotics surrounding her body and their potential cultural signifiers, and the deconstruction of the stereotypical narrative offer a potential destabilizing force, undoing the traditional notion of disability while simultaneously playing with the notion of gender and gender performance.

Queen is a powerful interjection into the ways in which the body is made explicit and how contemporary adolescent experiences are multifaceted, intersectional, and complicated. While her presence offers a philosophical insight into the representation of female gender performance and performativity, she also instigates a sudden shift in the energy and physicality of her fellow performers. With the proclamation of her name her fellow performers begin to run up and down the stage, lifting their skirts and showing their brightly colored underwear as a yodeling version of the William Tell Overture plays in the background. The shift is abrupt, absurd, and alienating. Why are they lifting their skirts? Should one look? Should one look away? As spectators are confronted with these questions, the performers look straight into the audience and the Man, standing on the side of the stage caught between looking out and then

quickly shifting to a performance of containment, runs after the individual performers, sometimes lifting them up and carrying them offstage, only to have the recently subdued performer run back out and do it again. Patriarchal control has been subsumed by the individuality of the female body and a sense of exuberance in defying social convention. The Man, attempting to bring order and propriety back to the stage, perhaps to protect the young women from the gaze of the spectator, polices their gender performance, but he is constantly overwhelmed, chaos regains control, and Queen claps in the corner.

The introduction of the fourteen characters (the thirteen young women and the Man), played out through their various forms of protection and control, combine to create a nuanced and complex construction of girlhood. The audience has been warned: this will not be a typical deconstruction of gender performance. This is a performance built upon a plurality of perspectives, performances of gender dictated by the act of gazing, an ambiguous plethora of semiotic potential. The next hour and a half will be full of playful stereotypes, violent disruptions, cognitive dissonance, social deconstruction, and discomfort.   The Man will never be fully in control, the female performers will never fully acquiesce to societal pressure but they may dive head first into the complex and unsettling presence of their bodies and what those bodies might signify. They will also avoid providing answers, even at the risk of their spectators leaving the theatre with a reinforced understanding of gender norms.[41] They will be Roodkapje (Little Red Ridinghood) and the Wolf. They will offer unsettling exchanges between themselves and the Man in various forms of pas de deux. They will flounce onto the stage in white lace dresses, curly candy-colored wigs with giant bows, and giggle as they tell you to look up information on everything from Samuel Beckett to the Rwandan Genocide, from Machiavelli to

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[41] For more on potential takeaways and negative stereotypes, see Tom Maguire's "Girl Watching: HET PALEIS's *Hamilton Complex*."

Kurt Cobain, from Stalin to Michael Jackson. They will reenact Romantic era paintings as living

tableaux, set to Kimya Dawson's "Utopia Futures," lumber around as zombies to Vivaldi's

"Concerto for Two Mandolin's in G Major," and dissolve the concepts of rhythm, space, and

time while slowly playing air guitar against Joan Baez's "Here's to You." Above all, they will

take the familiar and make it strange over and over again. They may be thirteen-years-old, but

they do not need to be protected from anything but the societal restrictions that prevent them

from being who they are and who they want to be.

A Barrage of Words: Text, Media, and the Disruption of Meaning

While the opening sequence of *Het Hamiltoncomplex* plays with text and meaning by

juxtaposing exposition-based linguistic text and semiotically charged "choreo-graphic" text, the

middle of the performance endeavors to dismantle the spoken word and its role in the

construction of female performance, selfhood, and identity through the subversion of language as

an effective means of communication. Just as the safety procedures and the introductions of the

fourteen characters[42] offered the familiar-made-strange, the slow unraveling of language as

meaning, starting with the shift from the subtitles for the spoken word to subtitles for the lyrics to

"Dystopian Futures" and "Here's to You" (each with their own background and color scheme,

not unlike the visual representation of the thirteen performers at the start of the piece), begins to

render language itself as the familiar-made-strange.

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[42] Gift, Prudence, Precious, Charity, Destiny, Faith, Eternity, Melody, Marvellous, Lovely, Memory, Patience, Queen, and the Man.

Breaking through the silence following the "Dystopian Futures"/Vivaldi[43]/"Here's to

You" sequence, Patience steps up to the microphone and the televisions turn back on. Patience

speaks in rhythm, each word punctuated by the televisions which portray the words in large,

white, capital letters. The words are in English, which Patience speaks with a slight accent,

changing some of the inflections. She offers a mesmerizing barrage of words, one where the

rhythmic style of speaking deprives the listener from finding meaning while simultaneously

playing with the mind's desire to make sense out of chaos. The result is an embodiment of

Derrida's theory of *différance*[44] combined with Brechtian *verfremdung* (defamiliarization) in

order to challenge the role of language, especially its role in the construction and subsequent

perception of gender, identity, and gender performance.

Language is rendered strange and unfamiliar as it both differs from and defers to

traditional social and cultural understanding. Not unlike how the embodiment of safety and

protection were given a plurality of perspectives, rendered ambiguous through the subversion of

cultural norms and constructions of gender performativity, here the English language is

deconstructed to explore the ambiguity of cultural coding created by semantics. Thus, the

interplay between meaning and meaninglessness is cemented early on as Patience leans in to

speak:

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[43] The choice of Vivaldi's "Concerto for Two Mandolins in G Major" (RV 532) is used in multiple sections throughout the piece but plays unhindered by other sounds, and is placed specifically between Kimya Dawson's "Dystopian Futures" and Joan Baez's "Here's to You" in an almost cinematic montage.

[44] Derrida created the term *différance,* or 'differance,' as a play on the French verb *différer* which can either mean 'to differ' or 'to defer (*Of Grammatology* 66), leading to, what Ric Knowles describes as the capturing of "the inevitable *deferral* of meanings that are carved out through *difference* ('differance' defers-differs)'" which, especially when spoken (thus highlighting the lack of aural signifier between an a and an e in the spelling of the written word), nullifies any argument for a "global or 'transcendental' signifier or signified that begins or completes the chain of signification, originates or confirms (or controls) final meaning" (*How Theatre Means* 11).

FUTURE

LOOKING

BETTER

NO

FOOD

ETERNAL

FEAR

NOT

HAPPY

VERY

HAPPY

CHOICE

NO

YES

CHOICE

FUTURE

ALONE (*HC* 384- 407)

Each word is left to become its own act, denying sentences, deconstructing the idea of communication, yet also providing moments of playful meaning-making, Patience is embodying Lehmann's theory of the *speech act as action*,

> a split emerges that is important for postdramatic theatre: it provokes by bringing to light that the word does not belong to the speaker. It does not organically reside in his/her body but remains *a foreign body*. Out of the gaps of language emerges its feared adversary and double: stuttering, failure, accent, flawed pronunciation mark the conflict between body and word. (147)

In her speech act, Patience provides an active denial of language as the sole method of communication. Even when she offers words which play with potential meaning they are always punctuated with moments of absurdity that break any attempt at semiotic signification, reminding the audience that words can also be empty symbols, the signifiers of social constructions of identity in all its forms.

Moreover, the presence of words, which should have meaning, accompanied by the distinctly anti-discursive performance of the speaker, offers the spectators the Brechtian idea of the "not…but,"[45] where one is reminded of what is not present by what is left out. This interplay between what is (the presence of words) and what is not (sentences or any particular discursive understanding of those words) feeds into Ric Knowles' theory that the "not…but" performs "a potentially radical critique of representations of identity grounded in such apparently stable things as gender, sexuality, nation, culture, and race" (*How Theatre Means 32*) and which

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[45] This refers to Brecht's theory that, "When he appears on stage, besides what he actually is doing he will in all essential points discover, specify, imply what he is not doing; that is to say he will act in such a way that the alternative emerges as clearly possible… The technical term for this procedure is 'fixing the "not…but"'" ("Short Description of a New Technique of Acting" 137).

potentially undermines any understanding of human subjectivity (selfhood that is formed, at least in part, by those things to which one is 'subject') as unified, self-contained, or autonomous (independent, able to make choices freely). If the self is understood to be a subject rather than an identity (with its implications of oneness), it is possible to afford it agency (as when the 'I' is the grammatical subject of a sentence), while also recognizing that it is constituted socially by a heterogeneous mix of influences – prominent among which are the historically and culturally specific myths and discourses in which the self participates and to which it has been 'subjected' and is now 'subject.' (*How Theatre Means 32*)

In these moments, the Brechtian deconstruction of selfhood and the postdramatic sense of language as a foreign body merges with what Julie Kristeva coins as the thetic phase, or the ways in which we can "distinguish the semiotic (drives and their articulations) from the realm of signification, which is always that of a proposition or judgment, in other words, a realm of positions" (Kristeva 43). Within these moments, the images and objects conjured by Patience's speech act are ones in which the spectator's own positionality creates meaning.[46] For instance, when Patience exclaims:

NO

DIFFERENCE

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[46] Another playful example of *différance* is when Patience plays with popular culture, such as when she combines "EMMA / WHAT'S / ON" (*HC* 544-546) to aurally conjure the English actress Emma Watson (famous for her performance as an adolescent female actress in the *Harry Potter* franchise). Shortly after, she combines the *différance* with the thetic phase, such as when she combines words and sounds to elicit spectator anticipation such as "JUST/JUSTIN/ BEEP/ BEEP / BEEP/ BEEP/ME/UP" (*HC 557*-563) where the linear move from just to Justin followed by the aural beep could lead to one thinking of Justin Bieber (the pop musician who also gained fame as an adolescent) only to subvert the conceit and instead play with the famous *Star Trek* idiom "Beam me up."

DAY

AFTER

DAY

SAME

SHIT

FEELING

SHITTY

SHITTY

SHITTY

TODAY

CLOTHES

SIZE

ZERO

PEOPLE

LOVING

ME

MYSELF

THE

OTHER

LOVING

ME

HELP

ME (*HC* 445-474)

The words join together to paint a picture of the social pressure placed upon young women to look a certain way, behave a certain way, and the struggle to find self-acceptance, especially at an age of social pressure and biological change. Spectators, based on their own perspectives and cultural coding, are offered meaning in the spaces within the "not…but." Technically they are just words (especially as Patience treats them as things, not as signs) but there is space for meaning when the words both differ from and defer to socially inscribed myths of gender performance and identity. A young woman might "feel shitty," day after day, because society pressures her to look a certain way, to be a "size zero," to love herself but only within certain parameters, which might lead to a call for help. This fits within a larger Western (and increasingly global) narrative of the young adolescent girl who starves herself to look like the images on televisions, magazines, and social media feeds.

However, any desire to pull meaning from the barrage of words is left specifically to the spectator and the plurality of perspective. The absurdity of language and attempts at meaning-making are highlighted when, immediately following this moment of potential clarity, the other female performers[47] return to the stage dressed as canines (perhaps wolves, perhaps dogs –the signifiers are purposefully ambiguous). Patience never stops speaking into the microphone, her

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[47] All but Queen.

rhythmic performance steady, the words gliding in and out of potential meaning, as the other

performers bark and howl, canter across the stage on all fours, interact with each other by

sniffing and nuzzling, and, whenever the Man appears, joining together to loudly bark as a group

to chase him off the stage. The disconnect between the dramatized presence and performative

sounds of Patience's barrage of words and the howling and barking of the young-women-as-

canine feeds into Lehmann's theory of "the *physis* of the voice" in which "screaming, groaning,

and animal noises" play into "the architectonic *spatialization*" where the "boundaries between

language and expression of live presence and language as prefabricated material are blurred.

The reality of the voice itself is thematized" (148). Yet, the presence of the female body

rendered canine (and all the possible sign systems such a signifier might invoke) are also

seemingly disjointed from the text, presenting a visual (and potentially aural) break from the

linguistic exploration offered by Patience and the video screens. In many ways, the combination

of sounds and images support Knowles' theory that

> There are times, or ways of seeing, in which an action is best considered
>
> phenomenologically, as something to which human consciousness, at least initially,
>
> responds directly, viscerally, and unreflectively without the intermediary of meaning or
>
> interpretation. (*How Theatre Means* 59).

Thus, the spectator may strive to create meaning from the signs (be they likenesses, icons,

indices, or symbols), however, the plurality of meaning is infinite. The visceral reaction of an

aural experience (such as the "physis of the voice" and physical reactions to sound waves hitting

the body) is ambiguous. The visual stimulus of young female bodies becoming canine

juxtaposed with one fully erect human framed by technology are rife with a density of signs yet

no concrete meaning. Any meaning (or lack of meaning) is derived from the spectator, rendering even the more tangible linguistic moments untenable.

The vignette reaches its peak when Charity, now free of her canine mask, joins the cacophony of sound as she rocks back and forth, screaming and hitting the ground with her palms.[48] Cecilia Bartoli's rendition of "Misero Pargoletto" underscores the polyphony of sound as Patience's barrage of words, Charity's screaming and pounding, the canine barking, and the dulcet tones of a canned soprano aria join together in what Lehmann describes as the "simultaneous superimposition of sonic worlds" (92). This simultaneous superimposition, the creation of the sonic space in *Het Hamiltoncomplex,* reflects Lehmann's analysis of the work of John Jesurun[49] in that, "a text machine of voices, words and associations is working at rapid speed with lightning fast responses and connections, practically without pause" (149). These various forms of vocal expression (spoken word, animal, visceral scream, singing) and the different methods of reception (enhanced through a microphone, live and unaided, pre-recorded and played back on a stereo) highlight postdramatic theatre's "electronic and corporeal/sensory disposition" towards the "newly discovered voice," otherwise understood as a form of "conceiving of the sign-making as a *gesticulation of the voice*" to create a "*sono-analysis* of the theatrical unconscious" (Lehmann 149). Within this sonic-based method of communication and

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[48] There are striking similarities between Charity's performative actions and vocalizations and those created organically by Queen throughout the piece. Whether or not Charity is directly mirroring Queen is uncertain, though very probable. Whether or not she is, the complex and complicated conversation around the ethics of able-bodied actors enacting disability and neurodivergence, is an important question and the role of Queen and the various moments of her physicality and vocalizations being adopted or co-opted by her fellow performers would make a fascinating subject for future study.

[49] John Jesurun is a New-York-based Writer, Director, Set and Media Designer whose work includes *Chang in a Void Moon* (1982), *Shatterhand Massacree* (1985), *Deep Sleep* (1986), *Everything That Rises Must Converge* (1990), *Firefall* (2009), *Stopped Bridge of Dreams* (2012), and the Vimeo web-serial *Shadowland* (2012).

meaning-making, the individual body, and its ability to create sonic meaning, is deconstructed and questioned. The combination of the animal voice, Charity's intermittent screaming, Patience's seemingly never-ending torrent of words, and the disembodied sounds of Bartoli singing, merge together to create a soundscape in which

> The electronically purloined voice puts an end to the privilege of identity. If the voice was classically defined as the most important instrument of the player, it is now a matter of the whole body 'becoming voice.' An explicit experience of auditive dimensions emerges when the tightly sealed whole of the theatre process is decomposed, when sound and voice are separated and organized according to their own logic, when the body-space, the scenic space and the space of the spectator are divided, redistributed and newly united by sound and voice, word and noise. (Lehmann 149)

In the case of *Het Hamiltoncomplex*, this sonic world of electronic and corporeal voices, *différance* and "not…but," canine and human, emotionless and visceral, overlap to create a sonic gender performance, an embodiment which questions not only what young women should look like, act like, and embody, but also how they should sound.

   Near the end of the episode, not unlike in the opening sequence, the Man eventually finds a way to create order, only to have a dismissal of social norms undermine his control. As Charity rocks back and forth and Patience speaks "ARE YOU HAPPY" over and over again into the microphone, the Man appears for the third time and, instead of being chased off, he brings leashes to 'domesticate' the canine bodies and voices. As their leashes are attached each canine-body falls silent and sits, the fading of the barking highlighting the rising sounds of Charity's screaming and Patience's constant stream of words. Then Patience's barrage begins to break down into a series of Latin loanwords and onomatopoeia, the speed accelerating, until she finally

exclaims her final four words: "HAPPY OH SO HAPPY" (*HC* 832-836), apparent meaning deconstructed by her expressionless and atonal delivery, takes a beat, and walks off the stage. In her absence, the canine-bodies are under control, even if some pull against that control and the only non-controlled sounds left are those of Charity's screaming, the pounding of her palms on the floor, as the sounds of Bartoli's aria play over the speakers. The visual of silent, leashed, female-yet-canine bodies controlled by the Man juxtaposed with Charity's screaming, rocking, and pounding female-as-human body creates a dichotomy between the controlled and the uncontrollable. The sounds of her screams create a sonic denunciation of the controlled and sonorous extended voice used by Bartoli in her operatic aria. The binaries offered by both the visual and aural juxtapositions, their refusal to adhere to a normalized form of image or a lateral aural presence, offer a microcosm of *Het Hamiltoncomplex* and its interest in liminality and the precipice of change. Both this moment and the production as a whole refuse to acknowledge or adhere to a singular form. In many ways they highlight Lehmann's assertion that

> Form knows *two limits:* the wasteland of unseizable extension and the labyrinthine chaotic accumulation. Form is situated midway. The renunciation of conventionalized form (unity, self-identity, symmetrical structuring, formal logic, readability or surveyability (Aristotle's 'synopton'), the refusal of the normalized form of the image, is often realized by the way of recourse to *extremes*. The order of images, which is tied to the 'medium' in the double meaning of the world – the organizing medium and the middle – is disturbed through the proliferation of signs. (Lehmann 90)

The role of the extreme, the renunciation of conventional form (be it aural, ideological, or otherwise), the role of sonic chaos, and even the juxtaposition of silent canine bodies and the single active human screaming and pounding her palms on the ground, disrupt linear meaning-

making. The constant reminder of the age of the bodies enacting these two limits also draw a parallel between the form of the dramaturgy and the form of the teenage girl. Adolescence is a disruption. Female adolescence is often realized within forms of extremes and there is no normalized image for their existence.

This juxtaposition of the "wasteland of unseizable extension" and "labrynthine chaotic accumulation," often explored through the dismantling of the spoken word and the embodiment of *différance,* the familiar-made-strange, and the 'not…but' continues through the rest of *Het Hamiltoncomplex*. Over and over again language is used as a tool for deconstructing traditional, social, and cultural understandings, placed in direct opposition to meaning-making or embodied performance, and subjected to a breakdown of singular meaning. Some tell stories which weave in and out of fairy tale and horrific narratives of parental abuse, rape, and murder, only to dismantle any sense of sympathy by directly confronting the manufactured emotions as a mistake. They appear in dirty nude body suits, faces smudged with dirt, and repeat their names in dejected tones, eyes downcast, voices small. They dance to "Alors on Danse" in the controlled spasms reminiscent of Pina Bausch. Eternity recreates Sia music videos starring thirteen-year-old dance prodigy Maddie Ziegler as the others look on smoking in the wings. They appear pregnant and defiantly list the reasons they will be keeping their babies. Queen and the Man engage in a powerful pas de deux. The others return to run around the stage in kimonos, destroying the set, as the televisions glitch, the lights turn red, and the Man enacts a series of bodybuilding poses in a blue Speedo while the sounds of bombs and gunfire blast from the speakers. They don nurses' uniforms and strut around the stage as if it is a catwalk to France Gall's "Laisse Tombur Les Filles," the repetition leading them to exhaustion as they fall only to be picked back up to pose again. This constant barrage of visual and aural stimuli, which

switches from one signification to another, jumps between meaning, consistently deconstructing the various stereotypes of the adolescent female body in order to offer new forms of perception and gender construction.

Conclusion

The production comes to a close as Charity takes the microphone to present her poem, "Rumplestiltskin is a Thirteen Year Old Girl" as her fellow performers continue to walk back and forth across the stage, posing, falling, and slowly returning to strut, only to eventually become a giant pile of bodies on the floor. Charity begins by reminding the audience that, "In the end it is a case of all's well that ends well" (*HC* 1013-1014), a statement complicated by the visual presence of the other performers, their breaking bodies slowly moving towards entropy behind her. Infused with the abundance of sign density created by layers of vignettes, identity markers, and gender performance throughout the piece, Charity gives voice to the central philosophy of *Het Hamiltoncomplex*. Confronting the various perceptions of her adolescent female body, complicating her presence as a site infused with liminality, Charity speaks to her audience, offering a potential manifesto to those who may identify with her message. For those who are nameless, who are searching for identity, who are imposed upon and forced into a performance of gender or age or identity, one can always choose for themselves. In the moment of the poem, her name is Rumplestiltskin, with all the cultural significance the fairy tale might imply. She embodies the production's interest in moments of change, the transitional spaces, the betwixt-and-between, declaring to the audience, "Your time starts now/ The transition won't take too long/ It's happening/ won't take long, I told you / don't worry about it/ in just a second everything will be different/ and the past will no longer be the past/ but will be gone" (*HC* 1025-

1033). Even as her fellow performers slowly stop getting back up, and a pile of bodies remains on the floor behind her, there is a sense of angry optimism in her performance. As she looks out, and as the Man moves the limp bodies of her fellow performers into a pile, her assertion that "The things cannot shatter to pieces / after all, I must save the world" (1056-1057) connects with the images behind her, offering new meaning to her words.

As she continues her poem, the fellow performers stand back up, stripping off their nurses' uniforms to reveal brightly-colored bathing suits, and then donning ceremonial sashes embroidered with their performance names. Creating a tableaux indicative of Beauty Pageants, the images juxtapose her admission that, "And I, I just float / between opportunities / chances / And thousands of options / And I suppose I have to seize them" (*HC* 1092 – 1096). Yet the performance ends on a potentially optimistic note for, "It will work out / it's good / it's good / it's good / I am it" (1099-1103), a sentiment that is further highlighted when, after her final lines, "Now you/ Come on girl / you do it well" (1105-1107), the swelling overture of "Land of Hope and Glory" begins to blare over the speakers. The performers run around, screaming their names into the microphones. They carry each other, take turns, overlap, repeating their names over and over again. And so, the production ends as it began, a subversion of gender performativity through the acknowledgement and subsequent deconstruction of the act of looking, both through an internal and external gaze. As the performers gleefully shout their names, giggle and run around the stage, the rich sounds of brass instruments and sweeping drums behind them seem to remind their spectators that this is a performance built upon a plurality of perspectives, performances of gender dictated by the act of gazing, but ultimately an act of defiance.

The defiance of those final moments reverberate through the house, underscoring how *Het Hamiltoncomplex* exemplifies how alternative dramaturgy can foster parallax viewership in

order to engage with multi-layered, complex, and challenging explorations of gender, cultural coding, and the act of looking. The barrage of sounds, visuals, images, and ideas create an abundance of signs, allowing for a simultaneity of meaning as each spectator creates their own joint-text. The ambiguity of the performance text, combined with the conditions of performance and the conditions of reception allow for a unique and potentially controversial experience, where the role of the adolescent female body is exploited, explored, and empowered. The postdramatic aspects of text, space, time, body, and media join together to offer an aesthetic experience where how one perceives is both the central point of the performance and the primary act of spectating. This exploration of the plurality of perspective, and its influence upon how gender is constructed and viewed, makes *Het Hamiltoncomplex* a unique and important case study into the ways in which alternative dramaturgy can challenge stereotypes and social conditioning, offering parallax perspectives based upon the individual ideological positions and identity locations of its spectators. Thus, the ambiguity of the cultural coding, and subsequent subversion of gender performativity as created and instructed by both the internal and external gaze, is a collaborative effort between the conditions of the performance and the conditions of reception, between the young women presenting and the spectators viewing the performance. Ultimately, there is no definitive answer to any of the questions posed by the production. Any takeaway is left up to the individual. The only certainty anyone is left with is the power of self-ownership and agency, embodied by Queen as she ends the play, standing in the center of the stage, confidently declaring, "I am Queen. I am Queen. I am Queen."

CHAPTER SIX

"Whatever you feel about it is true"

Engaging Aesthetics in *Rite of Spring: The Threat of Beauty*

*Just as women used to be unconscious of the powerful
effects that cultural stereotypes had on them, they may
also be unconscious of powerful forces within them that
influence what they do and how they feel.*
   – *The Goddess in Every Woman* (Bolen 1)

In the spring of 2020 the Better Than Us Festival, was created as an experiment to offer TYA

productions online during the Covid-19 pandemic and then host virtual discussions about those

productions between young adult spectators and industry professionals. The festival prototyped a

form of cross-cultural exchange with the creation of their Active Group, a collection of young

people interested in theatre from around the world, who agreed to watch a series of TYA

productions online and then meet via Zoom to discuss their reactions between each other, theatre

professionals, and members of the theatre company featured that day. The first round was such a

success that Festival organizer Olga Zaets from Rostov on the Don (Russia), created a second

round of productions and conversations, expanding the group, which led to five days of lively

conversations between the Active Group's 16 young theatre makers – including myself—

between the ages of 13 and 31 from Wales, Italy, Germany, Chile, Russia, and the USA, and the

Professionals' Group, which included artists, Artistic Directors, Producers, and scholars from

Russia, Germany, Wales, Italy, Denmark, Belgium, and the USA. The third production of the

Festival, MAAS Theatre and Dance's 2014/2015 devised production *Voorjaarsoffer: De

dreiging van schoonheid (Rite of Spring: The Threat of Beauty),*[50] sparked a conversation

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[50] The 2015 production of *Voorjaarsoffer* was directed by Moniek Merkx and Choreographed by
Klaus Jürgens and toured the Netherlands. The ensemble was comprised of Anne Fé de Boer

regarding the semiotic power of (re)presentations of female sexuality and sexualization in non-linear and non-narrative theatre tropes. Active Group members quickly, and excitedly, began to unpack their feelings of wonder, confusion, surprise, and excitement about the show with observations such as:

- *"It is like nothing I have ever seen before"*

- *"I feel like I could ramble on forever about it"*

- *"I didn't understand but I understood"*

- *"Even if you couldn't understand what was going on you can still feel emotions, read the signs, and see it for yourself"*

- *"I'm 16. I thought I had seen it all but it was disturbing"*

- *"I didn't understand the plot but I loved everything about it, then, reading the description, I understood even more"*

- *"It's prehistorical but you can still see it in modern days. It is something frozen in time"*

- *"I loved how brutal it was"* ("Better Than Us," June 2020).

Their sentiments, echoing conversations I overheard at the production's 2017 remount,[51] performed for the 2017 ASSITEJ Cradle of Creativity Festival and World Congress, captured the strength and exciting dramaturgical advancements of non-linguistic performance texts. Through

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(Netherlands), Mees Borgman (Netherlands), Rochelle Deekman (Netherlands), Marieke Dermul (Belgium/Netherlands), Jouman Fattal (Syria/Netherlands), Nastaran Rzawi Khorsani (Iran/Netherlands), Gale Rama (Suriname/Netherlands), and Lotte Rischen (Netherlands).

[51] The restaged version of *Rite of Spring* for the 2017 ASSITEJ World Congress in Cape Town, South Africa, as well as the Oerol Festival in the Netherlands, was directed by Merkx, choreographed by Jürgens and Art Srisayam, and the ensemble included members of MAAS as well as the South African dance company Flat Foot. The 2017 ensemble was comprised of Dermul, Segametsi Gaobepe (South Africa), Fattal, Kirsty Ndawo (Durban, South Africa), Zinhle Nhle Nzama (South Africa), Rama, Rischen, and Shelby Tanelle Strange (South Africa).

the careful combination of aesthetics, repetition, and the performance of gender, *Rite of Spring*

combines theatre practices, drawing from dance and movement theatre, to inspire complex and

individualized meaning-making. As such, *Rite of Spring: The Threat of Beauty* offers a case

study in how alternative dramaturgy can provide young people with complex systems of semiotic

coding, overlapping symbols, and ritual, which promote spectator agency through the

construction of their own meaning-making and the visceral responses to those experiences.

Setting the Stage: Cycles of Meaning

Using an oval thrust, the three sides of the audience bend to face each other, separated by a 10-

meter by 16-meter stage space comprised of a white circular catwalk structure 4.5 meters high

and roughly 3 meters in width surrounding an open play space on the stage floor.[52] The space

offers a literal and symbolic circle. This circle calls to mind a catwalk, the cycle of the seasons,

the circle of life, the "Spring Rounds" of Igor Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* (1913),[53] an egg,

and various pagan symbols of life, femininity, and the earth.[54] The design creates a space that is

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[52] In the case of the 2017 Oerol Festival, the open play space comprised of the the forest floor
and two trees surrounded by the oval catwalk structure.

[53] In the foreword to the 2000 edition of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring (Scenes of Pagan Rus'
[Russia] in Two Parts),* Boris Mikhailovich Yarustovsky writes that "in 1910 when he was
completing *The Firebird: '...* there arose a picture of a sacred pagan ritual: the wise elders are
seated in a circle and are observing the dance before the death of the girl whom they are offering
as a sacrifice to the god of Spring in order to gain his benevolence. This became the subject of
The Rite of Spring.'" (vii). The ballet was originally produced in Paris at the Théâtre des
Champs-Elysées in 1913. However, the performance was met with "riotous' spectatorship which
led to the curtain being lowered mid-scene and Stravinsky fleeing the theatre" (Yarustovsky viii).

[54] I will be focusing upon three variations of *Rite of Spring,* the filmed 2015 Netherlands
performance, my experience as a spectator for the 2017 ASSITEJ performance, and the filmed
2017 performance at the Oerol festival. The 2015 and 2017 ASSITEJ versions were performed
inside. Notably, the Oerol festival was an outdoor festival which led to a slight change in the set
design, as the platform was built around the existing forest, leading to two trees existing in the
oval play space, as well as careful use of the forest beyond the play space as a canvas for distant
image painting not available in either of the stage-based productions.

imbued with semiotic significance, while simultaneously creating a tangible and physical area in

which cyclical movement, performance, and interpretation become a logical part of both the

performative and spectator experience. The performers use this structure as a catwalk, a playing

space, a mirror, and a canvas. The minimal yet effective scene design allows the performance to

focus upon movement, gestus, and repetition. The layering of potential sign interpretations

further encourages each spectator to interpret the performance through their own experience and

meaning-making. Because the signs are never concrete, nor stationary, the fluidity allows for

meaning-making to shift and evolve, or, as Merkx articulated in the Better Than Us talk back, "It

is a show about development, and it is a show that develops" (Merkx 2020).

There is no distinct and cohesive story line; rather, the fractured vignettes flow between

concepts, always connected by an overarching narrative of the spectator's own making. For

those familiar with Igor Stravinsky's 1913 ballet, *The Rite of Spring*, there are distinct

similarities between the construction of Merkx's work and the Episodes[55] of the original

Stravinsky piece. However, while both *Part I: L'Adoration de la Terre* (The Adoration of the

Earth) and *Part II: Le Sacrifice* (The Sacrifice) served as inspiration for the underlying structure

of Merkx's *Rite of Spring: The Threat of Beauty,* her production does not require spectators to

have any knowledge of Stravinsky nor his version of *The Rite of Spring.* Instead, the piece relies

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[55] The Stravinsky's episodes are as follows: First Part: *L'Adoration de la Terre (*The Adoration of the Earth) – Introduction; Les Augures Printaniers: Danses des Adolescentes (The Augurs of Spring: Dances of the Young Girls); Jeu du Rapt (Ritual of Abduction); *Rondes Printanières (*Spring Rounds); *Jeux des Cités Rivales* (Ritual of the Two Rival Tribes); *Cortège du Sage (*Procession of the Oldest and Wisest One [the Sage])*; Adoration de la Terre (Le Sage)* (The Adoration of the Earth (The Sage); *Danse de la Terre* (The Dancing Out of the Earth). Second Part: Le Sacrifice (The Sacrifice or The Exalted Sacrifice) -- Introduction; *Cerdes Mystérieux des Adolescentes* (Mysterious Circles of the Young Girls); *Glorification de l'Elue* (The Naming and Honoring of the Chosen One); *Evocation des Ancêtres* (Evocation of the Ancestors or Ancestral Spirits); *Action Rituelle des Ancêtres* (Ritual Action of the Ancestors); *Danse Sacrale (L'Elue)* (Sacrificial Dance (The Chosen One)). (Stravinsky)

upon the ever-present connective tissue made of gender, performativity, and ritual for

> *Rite of Spring* is about peer pressure, hormones and the fear of beauty. A modern
>
> coming of age story mixed with prehistoric pagan spring rituals. The threat of natural
>
> forces, the struggle with oneself and the desire to break free turn these young women
>
> into charming monsters. Close to the heart theatre, figuratively and literally, because
>
> the audience sits around the performance area. ("Rite of Spring" MAAS website)[56]

Performers shift from stereotypical tropes of masculinity to stereotypes of femininity, finally

finding a sense of cohesion and empowerment between the two extremes. They are vulnerable

and extreme, soft and brutal, mortals and gods.

Highlighting the shifting nature of self and the ritual of identity, the aural aesthetics

simultaneously mirror and generate the evolution of the piece. The production begins with the

performers marching out onto the stage to Joop van Brakel's rather minimalist sound design,

creating a sense of anticipation and foreboding. The sound design, the first interjection into the

audience's meaning-making, creates "An independent *auditory semiotics*" (Lehmann 91). The

repetition of aural phrases, the use of specific instrumentation, the rhythmic connection to pop

music and electronica,[57] and the sporadic yet poignant moments of lyric-based singing,[58] create a

foundation for the piece, embedding a form of auditory messaging and semiotic processing

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[56] Website is originally in Dutch but offers an English translation version.

[57] During the Better Than Us virtual festival, Merks broke down the inspiration of the sound design, observing that the original plan was to use Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* (1913), which served as the primary inspiration for the piece. However, unable to secure the rights, they instead turned towards an original design which ended up providing a far richer aural landscape, pulling from contemporary sounds, and directly interplaying with the movement as the composition was designed in tandem with the movement (Merks 2020). It is worth noting that one can find similarities between Stravinsky and van Brakel in the texture, rhythmic similarities, and tonality, though these references seem more like a slight nod rather than a true sampling.

[58] The lullaby sung by the figure in white, roughly twenty minutes into the piece, changed with the cast, reflecting the cultural makeup of the performers and their intended audience.

beyond that of the visual. This interplay between aural experience, the use of media, and visual stimuli provides an opportunity for the piece to establish a de-hierarchized use of signs. While there are available aesthetic semiotic connections between Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* and MAAS's *Rite of Spring,* such as the equal signification of sound and movement to cycle through ritual and the seasons, the strength of *Rite of Spring: The Threat of Beauty* is the way in which it incites interconnected aural and visual semiotics between the various themes and the aesthetic experience. Created during van Brakel's observations and experiences of the devising process, one of the vital aspects of the sound design is that it was a central component of the devising process, as van Brakel was "in the room every day" (Merkx 2020). This direct contact between the aural design and the visual construction is a vital component of the piece's sense of symbiosis and feedback. The direct connection between the visual and the aural amplifies the emotional effect of the aesthetics, leading one Better Than Us participant to note that, while they didn't necessarily understand the narrative, they *felt* emboldened and powerful ("Better Than Us," June 2020). As such, the de-hierarchized approach to sound design, and the organic approach to physical interaction between body and sound, offers a visceral experience for the spectators, creating multiple points of entry for meaning-making, and multiple sensory codes through which meaning can be made.

Part I: L'Adoration de la Terre

Performing Masculinity

The piece begins by investigating the ways in which masculine performativity is inscribed upon the body. The female performers, dressed in black, green, and grey shades of leather, fur, and cotton, vestiges of working-class male adolescence, enact a dance of masculinity. As bodies in

space, performative manifestations of masculine violence and human tribalism, the performers are formidable, violent, insular, communally-driven, and utterly disinterested in the gaze of the spectators who surround them. They seem far more concerned with the appearance of tough dominance than the actual act of expulsion. They are controlled and controlling, dominated and dominant, the individual in the group. They are walking stereotypes, simultaneously embedded with too much semiotic significance and empty of any concrete meaning. On the surface they are simply posturing, a superficial form of empty sign density. Yet, confronted with the realities of meaning-making and material semiotics (both literal and philosophical), one can never fully misunderstand that this performance of gender is being enacted by *female* bodies, and thus there is a complex system of multiple semiotic codes which create a "*dialectic of plethora and deprivation,* plentitude and emptiness" (Lehmann 89). The simultaneity of abundance and emptiness, where signs can be interpreted in so many ways it almost becomes meaningless, is also where spectators are provided the most agency for, within this complexity of coding, spectators are confronted with a distinct aesthetic and asked to interject their own meaning-making within the real and the intangible imbedded in the aspects of the postdramatic (text, space, time, body, and media).[59]

The performance of masculinity, on its surface, is the deprivation of the full self, an empty sign pointing towards a superficial understanding of gender performance. The addition of the female body enacting the masculine performance adds abundance, creating a plethora of meaning in the layers of complexity. Thus, it is within this embodiment of control and dominance, the simplified and yet overwhelmingly-signified, where *Rite of Spring*'s play on superficial masculine stereotypes, enacted by the physicality of the female body, expertly calls to

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[59] For more on these aspects and Lehmann's philosophy of aesthetics, please refer to Chapter Two.

mind Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) and her assertion that that gender is a performative

act. The choreography's use of cycles and repetition call to mind Butler's suggestion that

identity is a practice, one that is "not *determined* by the rules through which it is generated

because signification is *not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition* that both

conceals itself and enforces its rules precisely through the production of substantializing effects"

(*Gender Trouble* 145). By creating a repetitive practice of masculinity which is constricted, not

only by the confines of the stage, but by the bounds of cultural understanding of male

performance and identity, the performers produce a simultaneity of meaning.

As the performers strut around the catwalk with their hands in their pockets, at their sides, or

balled into fists, the spectators become simultaneously distanced from the inner circle and

tangibly close to those who walk and sit on the catwalk. When they congregate, they split into

groups, patrolling the stage in their newly formed tribes and battling for control. Their *"Jeux des

cités rivales"* ("Ritual of the Rival Tribes") offers a gestus of stereotypical masculinity as well as

racial tension, as Merkx purposefully broke her two tribes into visibly white and non-white

performers, a dichotomy which is meticulously unpacked and complicated as the piece unfolds

(Merkx 2020). Their movements, the reassertion of dominance and violence, leaves a "place of

traces" [60] in which the space simultaneously creates a playing area and the philosophical idea of

presence. They roll, punch, jockey for territorial control, and shove each other, constantly vying

for physical presence, space, and power as the distorted feedback of an electric guitar

intersperses rhythmic sounds of alarm. It is within this absence of clear characters, and the

layers of semiotic meaning of female bodies performing maleness, where the performance plays

with gender norms, stereotypes, and construction.

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[60] For more on Lehmann's theory of Space please refer to Chapter Two.

For Merkx, this interplay between various gendered facets of each performer formed a central component of the devising process   In order to capture the various forms in which women expresses themselves, their identity, and their gender performance, she spent the majority of the ten weeks of rehearsal devising through exercises, assignments, and games (Merkx 2020). Her original MAAS cast was comprised of female performers between 22 and 32,[61] all professionals with physical training in mime and physical theatre, with an expert understanding of physical awareness (Merkx 2020). This awareness of physicality and movement was a particularly important factor in performing/devising the physicality of masculinity. For Merkx, the core of the work was finding the performers' masculine sides, and for two straight days: "we had lunch as men, we dropped our clothes on the ground as men, and we did these exercises to really fuel what it was like – after that they didn't want to go back to girls" (Merkx 2020). In the early workshops, the actors started to take on the stereotypes of men, they took up more space, they made bigger movements. By exploring clichés, they were able to complicate superficial understandings of gender, contemplate their own truth, and make interesting discoveries about their individual performances as women. For example, Merkx noticed that, "When you are wondering 'how's my makeup, how's my hair,' it makes you smaller" (Merkx 2020). For Merkx, this ownership of the masculine as well as feminine sides of each performer was essential for making a "transition to become a more complete, more layered, person, not just about your outer beauty" (Merkx 2020).

The exploration of masculine and feminine traits became more complex when Merkx transferred the piece to South Africa, collaborating with the South African dance company, Flat Foot, and re-devising the production based on the new dynamics of her multinational ensemble.

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[61] Notably, many of the Active Group participants thought the performers were also adolescents and were surprised to learn they were adult professional performers.

She quickly discovered that "in Holland they were up for playing boys but in South Africa they didn't want to show masculinity" often remarking that "We don't like men, we want to be women" (Merkx 2020). This cultural distinction between varying views of gendered performance also speaks to Ric Knowles' assertion that intercultural theatre plays with the space between cultures and the liminality of intercultural concepts placed on the stage (*Theatre and Interculturalism* 4). In this complex series of material semiotics and social structures, the play is transformed by the cultural, personal, and nuanced experiences of performers from different backgrounds, which also translate into inevitable variations in spectator reception in different cultural contexts. Within this complexity, *Rite of Spring* grapples with Lehmann's theory that, "the body also becomes ambiguous in its signifying character, even to the point of turning into an insoluble enigma" (107). The ensemble's performances, culturally coded and deconstructed, move towards signifying in a way in which "a body of unmeaning gesture (dance, rhythm, grace, strength, kinetic wealth) turns out as the most extreme charging of the body with significance concerning the social reality" (Lehmann 107). Thus, the underlying assertion remains constant between both casts: performative gendered constrictions may seem dictated by social regulation and communal rule, but gender performance originates within each distinct individual's exploration of body in space. Each performer's gender performance is not the creation of male bravado, but rather the repetition of an act which simultaneously secures the role of the female body as masculine and removes the question of specific gender from the performer entirely.

The Liminal Body

Gender, rehearsed/practiced/inscribed, becomes a signified act. The constant performance of gender, and its culturally affirmed semiotic traits, shows itself to be both performative and

undetermined by biological sex, offering a suggestion to the spectators that their own enactment of gender is, in fact, a self-perpetuated performance. These implications about gender performance are solidified when, during one repetition, a male character removes his hat, undoing his hair, revealing the long flowing vestiges of the female body/performer underneath. Slowly the body transforms. First, removing the long hair from its constraints, and then slowly taking on physical attributes of femininity, the performer[62] creates a stark difference between this transformation and the earlier performance of violent masculinity. This shift in the sign of the body marks an ambiguity of the physical text, realizing liminality through embodied performance.

This performance of fluid gender is also striking in its shift out of liminality and back into stark binary constructions of gender performance once the male/female body is fully realized as female. Once the transformation is complete, the tough masculine exterior is replaced by a shy, slightly flirtatious, and all-too-notably "female" code of conduct, which brings to mind Butler's assertion that, "just as a script may be enacted in various ways, and just as the play requires both text and interpretation, so the gendered body acts in part in a culturally restricted corporeal space and enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives" ("Performative Acts" 526). Thus, by starting with the discursive rather than a prediscursive construction, the young woman establishes her performativity within a specifically masculine cultural act and is then revealed and transformed into the "gender which persons are said to have" as opposed to the "essential attribute that a person is said to *be"* (Butler *Gender Trouble* 7). This distinction of self, what is inscribed onto the body both by societal norms and self-perpetuated repetition, also holds an absence. By erasing part of the self and replacing it with a superficial semblance of a

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[62] Anne Fé de Boer in 2015 and Shelby Strange in 2017.

new gendered identity, the switch seems to align with Merkx's Better Than Us discussion with the Active Group around individuality and identity as a multifaceted and layered concept of self, beyond the superficial, and thus limited by enforcing any performance within a strict binary ("Better Than Us," June 2020).

Furthering its deconstruction of gendered performance, *Rite of Spring* includes a marked change in the performance of the other female bodies/male characters interacting with the "newly formed" woman onstage. Slowly three of the performers are revealed as women, each taking on the performative attributes of femininity at the cost of their performed masculine self. Their switch, and the notable change in the interactions of the masculine figures once the feminine enters the space, speaks to Simone de Beauvoir's assertion in *The Second Sex* (1949) that one is not born, but rather becomes a woman, and that becoming a woman is to be both oppressed by patriarchal values while also oppressing oneself through the enjoyment of certain benefits which come from that oppression (104-107, 306). Butler takes this idea a step further through her analysis of de Beauvoir, arguing that

> *woman* itself is a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end. As an ongoing discursive process, it is open to intervention and resignification. Even when gender seems to congeal into the most reified forms, the "congealing" is itself an insistent and insidious practice, sustained and regulated by various social means. (*Gender Troubles* 33)

This switch from male to female performativity can inspire multiple interpretations of a single event. Depending on the conditions of reception, the move could be seen as empowering, or as dehumanizing, or as nothing at all. Though she may seem to enjoy the attention bestowed upon her as a result of her new female construction, there also might be a sense of entrapment as well,

as she is surrounded and backed into a specific corner of the playing space by the other masculine performers. Within this metamorphosis, the concept of 'becoming woman,' the presence of the Other onstage can be seen through how the body is not simply an internal performative act but an external change as well.

This simultaneously physical and metaphorical shift underscores Patrice Pavis's assertion that the signified and the signifier are not fractured, segmented, or disjointed, but rather an ensemble of systems which can be understood simultaneously as well as separately (*Analyzing* 8). Lehmann takes Pavis a step further in this understanding of simultaneity by suggesting that true metamorphosis occurs when "the signs can no longer be separated from their 'pragmatic' embeddedness in the *event* and the *situation* of theatre in general" (Lehmann 104). Thus, it is within this shifting action onstage, the changing of costuming, and, above all, changing of the way the body is conceived within the space-time of the theatrical event, that the ensemble's performance of masculinity alters from territorial behavior to peacocking as the male characters catcall, posture, compliment the feminine performance onstage, and show off. They jostle for attention. Their acts of violence turn from territorial intimidation and communal fistfights to both communal and individual acts of courtship. They join and dance, evoking the feeling of being in a club, a party, and other communal masculine rituals of adolescent mating. They kick in the air, spin their arms, chassé, and focus all their attention on the three newly female-presenting bodies as a new figure appears on the platform, circling the action with a white MacBook computer placed carefully upon the top of her head. The presence of this striking figure[63] evokes Stravinsky's character of The Sage, now in contemporary guise. As the mating ritual continues, this modern sage walks the length of the catwalk several times, her physical

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[63] Played by Rochelle Deekman (2015) and Kirsty Ndawo (2017).

height above the audience creating the need to look up, to create a physical act of worship from the spectators below. The performers below shift. Circling, revolving, repeating, their gestus of courtship is constantly punctuated by the presence of technology, the symbol of online attention, of social media, of technology, of the constant eye of others on the otherwise more private rituals of attraction and desire.

Part II: Le Sacrifice

Performing Femininity

The second half of the piece shifts the focus from how gender is constructed to how beauty is threatening. Starting with a return to the opening musical leitmotif, the performers return, repeating their original circling of the stage as the MacBook figure spins in the center of the stage, arms outstretched. Replacing their blacks, greys, and greens with nude spandex accompanied by partially worn garments in whites, beiges, and pastel pinks of lace and satin,[64] there is a distinct juxtaposition between their performance of masculinity and this new embodiment of femininity. The music is the same, the ensemble's trajectory around the catwalk remains the same, but they are now distinctly *feminine*. They are virginal and girlish. They are not women as constructed by self-desire but, rather, femininity as regulated social norms, popular culture, and symbols of structural gender identity. They have embodied cultural constructs of femininity, at least aesthetically, not only through what they wear but also through what they don't wear. They literally embody the absence of masculinity as they subtract their own performances of masculinity from the stage space. They circle the stage, moving in a cyclical and ritualistic fashion, and conjure a collective, communal, identity. Though this does

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[64] Notably, in the 2017 version most are already wearing their full costumes, rather than wearing the nude spandex.

not negate the individual identity. They are not female as a functionary of male negation, so much as a reflection of its absence (Butler *Gender Trouble* 39); less a reinforcement of paternal power as an indication of womanhood and its many layers, even when the masculine layers are forcibly removed.

This removal of stereotypically masculine performance is further highlighted as the women slowly start to break out of their catwalk and take on new symbols of stereotypical girlish femininity. Some giggle, play, and flirt with the audience. Two performers steal the laptop from the head of the MacBook figure,[65] which aligns with a tonal shift in the sound design. The now discarded, and no longer technologically infused body, leaves the stage as the two newly emboldened controllers of the laptop lie down and start playing with the laptop, narrating their desire to send emails, being "very busy women," and constantly clicking "send!" like young children modeling 'adult' behavior. Others circle, complimenting each other, interacting with the audience, using verbal spars and undercutting each other with words and actions, while another figure walks the catwalk spitting water onto the heads of various spectators. A masked cat figure dances around the space, dictating the pace, tempo, and attitude of the performance[66] while two figures[67] perform a pas de deux, running to hold each other, jumping in a series of lifts, and engaging in a series of weight transfers in the center of the stage. They are surrounded by strutting women who interact with the audience, snore, and crawl around the stage.

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[65] In the 2015 version they even re-enact a similar game of keep-away as seen in the masculine performance, yet there is a distinct change in the game.

[66] While there are distinct changes between the 2015 and 2017 representations of the cat-mask. In the 2015 version, Khorasani appears with her hair obscuring her face and a cat mask on the back of her head as the energy intensifies.In the 2017 version, Ndawo reappears, having replaced her MacBook with a white cat mask and the energy starts to languish.

[67] Rama and Fattal in 2015 and Rama and Nzama in 2017.

Eventually, all of the performers enter into languid states of being. Perhaps exhausted, perhaps codified, by their newly feminine vestiges. The slowing of their movement, the lengthening of time, calls to mind Lehmann's theory of time as a metaphysical concept. The slowing of the bodies seems to demonstrate Lehmann's interpretation of Kant in that the 'inner sense' "was to guarantee the unity of self-consciousness through the form of a 'temporal order'" (Kant qtd. in Lehmann 155). The newfound femininity, perhaps the new sense of self-consciousness, creates a new embodiment of time. Spectators are brought into a disjointed temporal experience, with the music playing at one speed and the bodies enacting movements in another, a split between what is seen and heard, perhaps not unlike the inner workings of bodies that were only recently dressed as men but are now fully actualized within the stereotypes of womanhood.[68] However, the languid movements and slowing of time are abruptly disrupted when one of the circling figures[69] wraps one hand in a glove of black bondage, walks to the edge of the oval, and throws up.

This visceral interruption of her gestus of femininity through the releasing of white frothy liquid onto the platform next to the oval catwalk may be one of the most shocking, and thus impactful, moments of the production. In the 24 May 2017 South African production I witnessed, adolescent spectators next to her let out screams of delight/disgust/surprise, perhaps recognizing this as a sign of bulimia and the self-mutilation of the female body in order to retain social standards of beauty, or a sign of disgust with self. In the 2015 video recording, the audience lets out sounds of light chatter, groans, and other vocalizations of discomfort and shock. During their discussion, the 2020 Active Group unpacked its presence in the piece and its

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[68] The switch to womanhood may also be seen as completed by the visual representation of a cat and the cultural slang of many different languages and social contexts, in which a cat is used as a linguistic symbol for female anatomy.

[69] Played by Rischen.

impact upon their experience. The reactions all seem to indicate that there is something

profoundly disturbing in the act. For some it might be the embodiment of self-harm, for others a

bodily reaction to gender performativity, for others an act which could signal the production's

earnest attempt to revolt against the male gaze. What is profound in the moment is the way it

uses visual and aural triggers to engage spectator meaning-making. She is throwing up, clearly

and indisputably, yet the symbolism of that moment is distinctly ambiguous.

The ambiguity is further highlighted when her bound and rejected figure re-joins the

ritualistic dance, white froth still present on her mouth.[70] Her performance is the epitome of a

body in extremis, full of "impulsive gesticulations, turbulence and agitation, hysterical

convulsions, … disintegrations of form, loss of balance, fall and deformation" (Lehmann 163).

She is an enactment of the Bakhtinian grotesque,[71] a deconstruction of the idea that the female

body is an object for the male enjoyment as something cruel, tangible, and painful. When she re-

joins the others, she offers a stark reminder of the easily dismissed, subsumed, and reintegrated

aspects of the female body. She becomes the grotesque within the machine, the reintegrated self,

and the price of communal performative gender. However, spectators are only given so much

time to sit in their discomfort with Rischen's frothy figure, as a white-clad figure[72] elicits a loud

battle cry, triggering a stark shift in both the sound design and the movement.

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[70] In the 2017 version she even broke from the ritual to draw near to the audience, coming
straight for a young man near me, replicating Strange's earlier seductive crawling towards the
same, very invested, young men.

[71] Mikhail Bakhtin, a Russian theorist, wrote on the role of the body and the grotesque as a form
of deconstruction of social hierarchies. Placed together with the idea of the carnival and the
collective, the grotesque explores bodily function and "the lower stratum" as a place where the
recognition and overemphasis on 'grotesque' features of humanity lead to a sense of renewal,
one unashamed, the antithesis of austerity, and the emergence of new orders (*Rabelais and His
World* 1965*)*.

[72] Deekman in 2015 and Ndawo in 2017.

The battle cry leads to a resurgence of the rhythmic drum score, bringing the performers back onto the platform to begin a repetitive series of movements formulated upon a gestus of an almost 'childish feminine.' This *Cercles Mystérieux des Adolescentes* (Mysterious Circles of the Young Girls) offers an exploration of childhood and the semiotics of adolescence. The performers repeat a series of movements; they roll their heads, whip their long hair, vogue, brush their cheeks, shake their fingers, blow raspberries, pull their hair to the sides and spin, kick up their legs, and crawl across the platform. They repeat these gestures over and over, slowly moving along the entire length of the oval platform. The specificity of the movement, the repetition, and the communal sharing of each gesture calls to mind Butler's assertion that "gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self" ("Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" 519).

This new, repetitive gender construction mirrors many of the earlier movements of Part I, grouping and ungrouping, using somersaults across the space to form a new communal tribe, but now the energy is more playful. Racial lines have been discarded and no group stays together for long. The earlier socially constructed rituals of masculine performance have been exchanged for those of extreme superficial femininity. The performers become their gestures and, due to the mechanical gestus of the choreography, create an energy which "represents not illustrations but actions" (Lehmann 174). Even as they slowly begin to disperse, leaving smaller and smaller groups to repeat the patterns, the diminution is superseded by the constant repetitive nature of the movements. They seem to signify that "if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors

themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief" ("Performative Acts"

520). There are no more individuals in this group, they have become the gestures, the repetition,

the action.

The repetitive gestus is simultaneously interrupted and heightened by the appearance of

an instructor[73] dressed in a white tutu and red high heels several sizes too large. As the instructor

'glides' across the catwalk, she speaks into a microphone, offering various instructions,

seemingly for heightened femininity. Below, in the center of the playing space, her pupil[74]

enacts a literal, if slightly mistranslated, physicalization of the verbal instructions: "Shoulders

down, one foot in front of the other, take small steps." The

interaction/misunderstanding/misinterpretation between the instructor and her pupil create an

almost farcical version of femininity. Although the instructor is empowered by the presence of a

microphone and the spatial power dynamic of her position on the catwalk above her student on

the floor of the playing space, the instructor as a symbol of social constructs of femininity is

visually undermined by her too-large shoes, as well as her own overly/overtly performative

enactment of her own instructions which renders her credibility doubtful at best. Moreover, her

position as a beacon of femininity ventures on the absurd when juxtaposed with the pupil's

exaggerated and awkward enactment of the instructions, seemingly signifying that gender is

tenuous, a construct which may be instructed and enforced by society but is ultimately a

foundation built to crumble. Through these moments of fragility and absurdity, this

deconstruction of a socially 'correct' construction of gender embodies Butler's theory that "Only

when the mechanism gender construction implies the contingency of that construction does

'constructedness' per se prove useful to the political project to enlarge the scope of possible

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[73] Marieke Dermul.

[74] Khorasani in 2015 and Gaobepe in 2017.

gender configurations" (Gender Trouble 38). It is within this contingency of construction that a spectator might discover their own interpretation of the scene, and of gender itself. Moreover, the construction of gender as explored throughout the piece, but especially through this moment of instruction, is an active choice which can also create moments of failure, an interpretation highlighted when considered alongside Butler's assertion that "there need not be a 'doer behind the deed,' but that the 'doer' is variably constructed in and through the deed" (Gender Trouble 142).

The production's playful embodiment of the construction of gender identity is further deconstructed with the arrival of four new characters, performers now dressed in white, with small bowls full of petals and red paint. The newly arrived performers sit in a circle, sticking paint and petals on each other's foreheads, and giggle. They stand and watch, laughing in the direction of both the instructor and the pupil as they attempt to practice speaking in a low voice. Both instructor and pupil appear distraught, slowly stuttering in their attempts to instruct/be instructed in the construction of "womanness." They watch as the women move to various positions around the catwalk and begin to paint flowers in red paint on the stage. The women sing, tracing their image over and over on the mirrored surface of the interior of the catwalk or upon the white surface of the catwalk itself. Suddenly they stop, sitting upright, hands to the sky, red paint dripping off their fingers, as they cry inconsolably. Then, just as suddenly as they started to cry, they go right back to painting their flowers and singing, only to abruptly stop and return to the crying position after a short time. This cycle repeats, over and over, as the figures of the instructor and pupil look on, walk towards the singing and/or crying figures, confer in the center of the stage, then go back to the crying figures.

Rituals of Pain

The continuous cycle of singing, crying, and painting suddenly interrupted by a new monstrous figure,[75] dressed in a black negligée, a red handprint across her mouth, crawls up onto the stage. With the emergence of the bloody figure the performers begin to scream as the music changes to a slower rhythmic, minor chord. The figure marks a tonal shift in the performance as well as literally marking the bodies of the performers as she places her red hand onto the instructor's face, leaving a clear red handprint on her forehead. The sounds of wailing intensify as the newly bloodied instructor slowly climbs onto the catwalk and stumbles a few feet down the oval, the handprint now clearly visible on her face. They circle the catwalk in a slow, slightly mechanical gait, hands outstretched, passing the images of dripping red flowers. The shift seems to conjure a darker side of ritual, one in which ritual and sacrifice are done in the name of femininity as well, perhaps, as a form of violence to the feminine. The distinct shift in the mise-en-scène abstracts the idea of the threat of beauty as something powerful and frightening. The barrage of images and sounds are potentially painful, visually and aurally indicative of trauma, yet also potentially of rebirth. There is an emptiness in the ritual, yet also an abundance of sign density and potential for meaning-making. There is no correct answer, no grounding signpost to indicate the 'right' interpretation, and within the parallax of spectator experience, the performance text offers a distinct and individualized experience for each spectator.

The sounds of pain and the visual tension from the bloody figure intensify when the white-clad figures, petals still plastered to their foreheads, begin to leave, hiding their red hands behind their backs, shifting their bodies to prevent the various audience sections from seeing the red paint which drips off their palms and fingers. There is no more celebration or joy in their

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[75] Embodied by Rischen.

red paint, only shame, nervous laughter, and a circling figure in black. Eventually only one of the white-clad women[76] remains. She clings to the side of the platform, holding her body in pain, wailing. Suddenly the bloody figure places her hand on the wailing figure's forehead, pulling her head up, and leaving a large red handprint behind. The pain seems to intensify. This placing of the body into actualized physical pain, the body in extremis, is part of what Lehmann describes as a "transition from represented pain to pain experienced in representation" (177). For Lehmann, it is within this transition where cognitive dissonance and meaning-making can occur, a place where "bodies in pain causes a schism for the perception: here the represented pain, there the playful, joyful act of its representation that is itself attesting to pain" (177). They break conceived notions of performance as play, evoking empathetic responses, not for established characters, but for human bodies in anguish. They become a ritual of cruelty, a sacrifice in the name of femininity. This idea of ritual and sacrifice intensifies as the bloody figure of Rischen continues to amble slowly around the catwalk to the sounds of crying which begin to echo through the distorted reverberation of a microphone.

The sacrificial air of the Episode transitions into outright anguish when a figure[77] appears on the edge of the platform, wearing a red dress that is falling off her body, her hair covering her face. She carries a microphone and stumbles onto the stage as she intersperses lyrics of Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody" in between bouts of crying. Weaving and stumbling around the play space, she sings into the microphone. The lyrics, "Mama, ooooh, I don't want to die" highlighting the entrance of a second figure in red, embodied by a similarly disheveled Rama, who proceeds to throw herself around the stage. As Rama spins, tumbles,

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[76] Borgman in 2015 and Nzama in 2017.

[77] In 2015 the figure is Khorsani, whose red dress barely stays on the right side of her body, exposing the nude bodysuit underneath. In 2017 the figure is Fattal, slightly more covered but similarly disheveled in her own version of the red dress.

rolls, and sways, the singer's intonation evokes pain and despair, but also anger and

rebellion. The interplay of aural signifiers from the dissonance of the repetitive violin leitmotif

and the electronic distortion of the voice, suggests a silencing of the self and an amplification of

the underlying anguish. They are two kinds of exhaustion, representations of what Merkx

identifies as "the tragical side of being a woman" (Merkx 2020). They evoke what Lehmann

sees as "the challenge to actualize the incomprehensible by means of the body, which

itself is 'pain memory' because culture and 'pain as the most powerful mnemonic aide'

(Nietzsche) have been inscribed in it in disciplining ways" (177). Yet, their semiotically infused

bodies are left purposefully ambiguous. Are they the embodiment of menstruation?

Representations of female violence? The survivors of assault and mutilation? The meaning is

left to the audience, infused by what Marco de Marinis calls the "multiplicity of codes,

multidimensionality" and "textual structure of performance" (83). They are both the ugly and the

vulnerable sides of womanhood, torn, exposed, and exhausted for all to see.

By physicalizing the body in pain, the performance plays with Adorno's

"mimesis to pain" (qtd. in Lehmann 177), the jarring notion of true reality (the actual bodies of

the human beings performing) and the fictive pain of the performed bodies throwing themselves

in anguish to the floor, creating a symbolic (as well as physical) manifestation of the social,

cultural, and spatial which form their emotions. The figures in red to wail, sing, and throw

themselves around the floor, as the lyrics ask: "Is this the real life/ is this just make believe?" A

solitary white clad figure[78] lies on the edge of the platform, crying while a figure in maroon,[79] a

giant white and pink tongue-like shape cascading from her mouth, lifts her arms up and down as

she glides in a procession around the catwalk. These figures are the "*stranger of the self*," the

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[78] Borgman in 2015 and Nzama in 2017.

[79] de Boer in 2015 and Strange in 2017.

"ritual cruelty exploring the extremes of what is bearable or when phenomena that are alien and uncanny to the body are brought to the surface" (Lehmann 174). They are bodies struggling with themselves, desiring to break free. A desire which is physically embodied when a second alarm sounds and Rama's red clad figure begins to frantically run around the stage. She falls and the music shifts to a rhythmic drumming with bass guitar interlay, as the white-clad figure joins her in their sprint around the space. The other red-clad figure growls and cries into the microphone before raising her hands into the air and spinning, surrounded by the racing figures of red and white. Together they create an overlapping image of cycles, the circling figure, racing around the oval structure, and simultaneously they embody both the emptiness and the abundance of ritual.

Rituals of Acceptance

The alarm sounds again, signaling a new change as the frantic energy created by the running, wailing, and rhythmic frenzy of the soundscape is replaced by one of mystery and wonder. This feeling is visually embodied by the emergence of a new figure,[80] her hair up in a chignon, a white high neck dress with lace rose embellishments, as she serenely looks up at the rose petals that begin to fall from the ceiling.[81] She steps off the platform and walks into the center of the playing space, looking up, as all of the other figures stop running, walking, and crying and join her in the play space, circling with their arms up high, as if welcoming the petals. Eventually they slowly stop spinning and begin to circle each other. They start in groups of two, slowly joining with two others, then creating a large group. They break from their circles and begin to march as a group around the stage in an echo of Part I, only this time they are joining

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[80] Performed by Fattal.
[81] In the 2017 Oerol Festival version they walk together through the trees, adorned in crowns made of roses, and enter the play space together and begin to circle with their arms open as one.

together rather than splitting apart. The effect is peaceful rather than ominous. They stop and

circle again, arms outstretched to the ceiling, join back in their groups of four and spin around

each other, re-joining again as a full circle in the center of the play space, then break back apart

and start to walk in figure eights around the stage. This choreographic mirroring of the violence

of Part I, now redirected and accompanied by a tonal shift, achieves a joining of the two selves

(re)presented by the performers. They have dared to break through the circle, to show all facets

of themselves, and found the fluidity that comes from playing with identity in order to become

one's identity.

The emotional pull of the communal march, the rose petals falling from the ceiling, the

rose crowns, and the distinct change in the soundscape is further highlighted by the arrival of a

final figure dressed in blue.[82] The lights shift to blue as she reaches down into a bowl to bring

out blue-colored chalk, which she paints across her forehead and then blows into the circling

figures in the stage space below. This new figure seems to invoke the goddess Kali,[83] also

known as the Divine Mother or the Mother of the Universe. The Kali figure begins to enact a

series of movements with her arms and body, slowly joined by Durvel and Rama, who line up

behind her, creating the appearance of six arms, which move and sway, bringing to mind a multi-

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[82] Embodied by Khorsani in 2015 and Ndawo in 2017.

[83] Kali is an intriguing choice, representing a postcolonial figure as well as a deity steeped in
both ancient and contemporary symbolism. In "Loving Paradoxes: A Feminist Reclamation of
the Goddess Kali," Dalmiva argues that "the move [from Kali to *Kali-bhakti],* in its attempt to
overcome conceptual dualisms within 'Western' thought, underscores and reinforces a much
deeper dualism and Orientalism – the *rationality* of the West versus the *spirituality* of the
East. The rationality/spirituality divide mapped on to the West/East distinction comes in handy
to deprive the 'East' of spirituality and 'mind' which, in turn, reinforces a whole range of
hierarchies. Second, it is too easy to transition from Kali as symbol of contradictions to Kali as
symbol of undifferentiated monism. But if transcendence of dualism is to be geared
toward securing greater social justice, it is not clear how an appeal to an undifferentiated spiritual
ooze can help" (128).

armed deity. The Kali figure is then lifted by all of the performers, and, cross-legged but raised

high above the stage, Kali continues her intricate hand gestures, sticking out her striking blue

coated tongue. She is creation and destruction, meekness and power, survivor and killer, the

"redeemer both of Nature and women" (Dalmiya 125). She is free of societal pressures and

chooses her own identity and power and, in doing so, is the ultimate threat of beauty.

This sense of the whole, the multilayered and complex understanding of the self as an

intricate combination of genders, neither stereotypically one nor the other, washes over the final

moments of the production. Mirroring that of the young girls early in Part II, the performers

move mechanically around the catwalk as they gesture, creating stereotypes as they produce

the gestus of a wave, a cry, rub their stomachs, rock a baby, drink tea or coffee, type on a

computer while talking on the phone, fist fight, and smoke. They are all creation and

destruction, violence and serenity, work and play. For the spectators in the audience, these

gestures offer different representations of life, different facets of who one is and who one might

be. They are not confined and constricted, but rather free to create their own interpretation of

self. The performance text weaving through the conditions of performance and the conditions of

reception to present a parallax viewership, one in which each person is able to make their own

meaning, be who they want to be, and construct their own sense of self through the multilayered

simultaneity of complex identity construction.

Conclusion

From seduction, to ritual, to blood, *Rite of Spring: The Threat of Beauty* deconstructs and

reconstructs itself, becoming one form of womanhood only to morph into something else. The

performance is one of human fragility, of social construct, and of pointless assumptions of

externally established identities. Yet, at its core, there is struggle, sacrifice, and rebirth. For the women onstage, their pain can be seen as that of a patriarchal system that relegates them to stereotypes of womanhood. For the spectators, these conditions of performance, combined with the performance text, create conditions of reception which can offer a possibility of introspection and, optimistically, change by offering visual representations of female agency and empowerment. Thus, by providing the tools for understanding without simplifying the message, the performance offers the option of self-reflection and meaning-making on the audience's terms, thus creating the opportunity to instill a personal understanding of the joint-text performed onstage.

For the spectators, such as those in the Active Group, this joint-text can also spark meaningful conversations around gender, gender performativity, and the societal pressures that come with social constructs. Even mitigated through video, unable to experience the visceral sharing of literal space, breathing the same air, feeling the heat and presence of the performers, nor directly engaged as the in-person audiences were, the online Active Group was still struck by the aesthetics, the lack of linguistic text, and – perhaps most notably – their visceral experiences. The post-show discussion centered on various interpretations of the semiotics. For one Active Group participant, "The stage was like a cycle – cycle of a woman, cycle of the four seasons, cycle resembling the uterus of the woman who has her period, the dancers were the cramps" while for another it was about "the compromise of people living their life to be normal but trying to be different or special is like living your life on a catwalk" ("Better Than Us" 2020). Some members were reminded of their own encounters with gender performativity and social constructions of gendered interaction, feelings of being unsafe, and the social standards that apply to beauty and the expectations of how, "when you are a pretty woman based on societal

standards you aren't seen as a whole human" ("Better Than Us" June 2020). For them, as well

as for some of the male-identifying members of the group, there was a sense of emancipation in

the transformation and agency onstage, highlighting Merkx's vision for Rite of Spring, and her

original intent to explore the multiple layers of womanhood, delving beyond outer beauty to

explore how "it's not about the fear of beauty, it is far more than that, the development of your

inner beauty" (Merkx 2020).

In the end, the material semiotics, cultural coding, and symbolic orders constructed

through movement, sound, costuming, and physical phrasing provide an aesthetic framework

which makes *Rite of Spring* a significant case study for exploring the ways alternative

dramaturgy can facilitate a profound form of emancipatory spectatorship. By eschewing realism

and dialogue, the piece provides the space for each spectator to participate in their own meaning-

making, as they are simultaneously joined in the group experience of witnessing while

individually experiencing a joint-text constructed by their own interpretation of the production's

symbols' intersections. The production embodies the panorama of postdramatic theatre: a

combination of "parataxis, simultaneity, play, sign density, musicalization, scenography,

temperature, physicality, interruption of the real, and the dichotomy of event/situation"

(Lehmann 82-104). In this way, *Rite of Spring: The Threat of Beauty* offers an opportunity to

revise the process of cognition towards simultaneous meaning-making – one in which the

audience is invited to play with "dissolving the logocentric hierarchy and assigning the dominant

role to elements other than dramatic logos and language" (Lehmann 93). Ultimately, as Merkx

told the Active Group of the Better Than Us Festival, "Whatever you are feeling about it is true"

(Merkx 2020).

CHAPTER SEVEN

Liminal Spectators and Parallax Perspectives:

A Conclusion

The meaning is to make laughter bubble, to make
the room of the theatre symbolically rise, to make
tears burst, to make silence noisy. If the performance
does not give meaning to the audience here and now,
if the audience is bored with right opinions, worthy
values, it will never be part of their life after. They
won't tell others about it, they won't take inspiration
from it, they won't use it as bricks for identity building.
They will just forget it!
The crucial point is the meeting, the moment,
the experience in the fourth dimension we call cultural life!"
                    - Beth Juncker "What's the meaning?" (15)

There is a power that comes from weaving together possibility and imagination to make

meaning from the signs and symbols of performance through the complex experience of

spectatorship. Creating understanding through the threads of convergence and divergence,

engaging in the plurality of perception, and encountering the complexity of experience allows

each spectator to construct their own joint-text, their own journey in which they can directly

impact the outcome of their own lived experience. For the young people who engage with the

alternative dramaturgy of TYA, as both spectators and participants, this fluid space between

understanding and signification offers agency in the act of making meaning while simultaneously

engaging with shared encounters and the parallax perspectives of others. For the practitioners

who engage with contemporary Western European traditions of alternative dramaturgies in TYA,

the history and development of Western European theatre practices, supportive economic

systems, cultural shifts in philosophy and ideology, and complex cultural codes can come

together to create a rich and multimodal practice of empathy, agency, and social consciousness.

As this dissertation has shown, TYA in Western Europe held a prominent position in mid-to-late 20th century dramaturgical experimentation and the development of alternative dramaturgy as a way to champion the importance of complexity in meaning-making, explore human subjectivity, and play with different ways of viewing the world through interacting with a multitude of internal and external perspectives. Moreover, by exploring the material semiotics of Ric Knowles in conjunction with Hans-Thies Lehmann's postdramatic aspects of text, space, time, body, and media, this dissertation has highlighted how alternative dramaturgies in TYA have created connections between the cultural and ideological needs of young people by engaging with new forms of communication and expanded conditions of reception. Performance texts, such as *COMET, Het Hamiltoncomplex,* and *Rite of Spring: The Threat of Beauty,* can offer exciting multi-sensory experiences while the conditions of the performance focus on innovative forms of creation and production. Thus, from the creation of Emancipatory Theatre through the participatory explorations of TIE, from the postdramatic and experimental forms of the late 20th century to 21st century experiments with virtual performance spaces, contemporary Western European TYA has pushed the boundaries of what theatre can be, how it can mean, and the ways in which young people play a crucial role in the process of creating, understanding, and engaging with culture.

These alternative dramaturgies offer complex and multilayered systems of production in order to play with theatrical realms of existence and provide encounters with perspectives which simultaneously resonate with spectator experiences within a larger community while juxtaposing different individual acts of viewing. While forms of engagement and production through alternative dramaturgy can take a range of forms – such as those demonstrated in *COMET, Het Hamiltoncomplex* and *Rite of Spring* – the various forms share in a dynamic exploration of how

performances are constructed and received. Within this frame, alternative dramaturgies ultimately encompass explorations of theatre creation which de-centralizes linguistic text to offer de-hierarchal processes of meaning-making through all aspects of the performance text, conditions of performance, and conditions of reception.

For alternative dramaturgies in Western European TYA, this exploration is crucial for engaging with the complex and liminal space inhabited by many TYA spectators. Companies engaging with alternative dramaturgy explore means of communication that aim to speak *with* young people, not just speak *to* (or even *for*) their target audiences. Some productions, like *Het Hamiltoncomplex,* bring young people in as embodied experts of their own experience, pulling on the power of representation and the complicated semiotic experience of the live adolescent body onstage. Some, like *COMET,* seek to weave interviews and shared experiences together into poetic marathons of communal memory and cultural scripts. Others, like *Rite of Spring,* devise aesthetic happenings free of discursive takeaways, instead relying upon the spectator's own visceral experience to bring meaning to the moment. Yet they all provide examples of how text (both linguistic and "choreo-graphic"), space, time, the body, and media can interact to create an intricate and empowering spectator experience. Most importantly, they demonstrate how alternative dramaturgy is not relegated to any single form of theatre. From scripted monodramas to devised movement theatre, alternative dramaturgy can offer conditions of production which explore performance texts through egalitarian means of creation, using decentralized systems of meaning-making to empower conditions of reception by focusing on spectator agency.

These de-hierarchical performance experiences focus on the plurality of perspective, inviting parallax viewership through overlapping perceptions of the performance text, conditions

of production, personal conditions of reception, and encounters with both the embodied experiences and the literal live bodies of others. By playing with language, engaging with the abundance and emptiness of signs, and the visceral aesthetic experiences within meaning-making, alternative dramaturgies offer a deconstruction of the notions of privilege, cultural capital, and systemic structures of power. While a single theatrical experience may not have the power to change the world, the experiences created by productions like *COMET, Het Hamiltoncomplex,* and *Rite of Spring* can offer a space in which young people may choose to explore empathy by encounter the Other and taking ownership of their own perceptions, potentially engaging in the deconstruction of power and privilege in the process.

Implications for Future Research

In order to demonstrate the role of Western European TYA in the advancement of late 20th and early 21st century alternative dramaturgy, as well as how Western European TYA continues to promote and improve alternative dramaturgical practices, I focused this dissertation upon a very specific understanding of Western European alternative dramaturgy in TYA which can serve as a microcosm of the global TYA scene. By using Knowles' theory of material semiotics in conjunction with Lehmann's theory of postdramatic dramaturgy and the five aspects of text, space, time, body, and media, I was able to unpack three similar yet divergent case studies for how alternative dramaturgies can be applied to contemporary Western European TYA performance models. Their overlapping themes, target audiences, and interest in de-hierarchical aspects of production created a lens through which various methods of production, forms of spectatorship, and ways of viewing could be explored. They all demonstrate how theatre created specifically for, and with, adolescent participants can inspire innovation. They all use creative

techniques and imaginative performance practices to balance intersectional spectatorship with communal engagement. Above all, they explore how individual acts of viewership can occur within a larger form of communal engagement in order to examine how meaning is not fixed, perspective is not right or wrong, and no one is more entitled to create meaning than anyone else.

Within these similarities, the divergent components of the three case studies also demonstrate how similar ideological outcomes can be reached through a multitude of different performance texts and conditions of performance. Alternative dramaturgy can take the form of monodrama, merging literary artifacts with guerilla performance practices, undermining the potential hierarchy of language through the use of space, the role of the spectator as the co-player, and the role of young people as experts in the creation of the text as well as their own engagement with a performance. Alternative dramaturgy can be found in the devising of performances with young people, merging the inspiration of an adult director with the lived experiences of adolescent performers. It can be found in devising performances for young people, engaging with past experiences and the lived experiences of adult performers to invoke visceral reactions and shared moments of empathetic exchange across age groups. Alternative dramaturgy can be found in the use of multiple languages to communicate without ever providing a singular didactic narrative. Words can be rendered meaningless, sound can attack, and movement can offer individualized vehicles of engagement. Time can speed up and slow down, space can rearrange, and technology can infuse meaning onto the body and inspire the senses. Just as there is no one way to perceive alternative dramaturgy, there is no one way to use alternative dramaturgy when creating a performance.

These case studies, and the methods they exemplify, are by no means exhaustive. While they are meant to frame the larger implications of alternative dramaturgy, not unlike how a

cinematic close-up uses minute detail to tell a larger story, there is a whole world of TYA yet to explore. TYA is a global phenomenon and, as Manon van de Water has astutely highlighted, it does not exist in a vacuum (van de Water *"TYA as Cultural Production"* 18). There is a broad range of artistic expansions fostered by intercultural exchange. International gatherings, such as the annual ASSITEJ festivals, bring practitioners and scholars from around the world together to exchange ideas. From Birmingham to Cape Town, Beijing to Kristiansand, virtual spaces to the streets of Tokyo, these artistic gatherings bring together practitioners from different continents, and performance practices dedicated towards various age groups and target audiences, inspiring dialogue and creating new ideas born from intercultural collaboration. These exchanges have inspired explorations in how alternative dramaturgies used for Theatre for the Early Years can be adapted to inspire theatre made specifically for young adults. Performance practices for spectators with Profound Multiple Learning Disorders can be used to improve spectator experience and heighten performer-to-spectator engagement for adolescents. They have explored how alternative dramaturgy practices in East Asia can inspire new forms of storytelling in Africa. South American movement theatre can encourage Oceanic puppetry. Ultimately, each age group, target audience, dramatic style, and cultural practice is worthy of its own study. While I have chosen to focus upon the microcosm of alternative dramaturgy of Western European TYA from the past ten years, examining case studies which investigate the role of gender in productions created specifically for audiences 13 and up, there is more to explore. Alternative dramaturgy in TYA, even when limited to the specific constraints I placed on my own research, can provide enough material to fill several books, far beyond the scope of one dissertation. These developments are exciting and important facets of contemporary theatre production and worthy of further study.

My hope is that this dissertation can provide other practitioners and scholars a close-up of the complexity and wonder offered by alternative dramaturgy, zooming in to focus on one small but important facet of a much larger, tangled, and rich tapestry. Western Europe is one small part of an expansive global theatre scene, and alternative dramaturgies stemming from other theatrical histories and cross-cultural exchanges are immensely important and worthy of study. While Western European theatre traditions formed the backbone of my personal history with theatre, thus leading to the frame of reference for this particular dissertation, I believe the role of non-text-centric conditions of performance are also vitally important, not to mention highly prominent, in TYA practices across the globe. Not unlike how the second iteration of *Rite of Spring* pulled from the intercultural experiences of its collaboration between MAAS and Flat Foot, contemporary TYA productions are increasingly collaborative, merging theatrical conceits and performance practices from different cultures to create new, exhilarating, and extraordinary forms of alternative dramaturgy. My analysis of one small slice of one continent's specific TYA scene is designed to inspire other explorations of alternative dramaturgy practices, operating as a springboard to explore other studies, such as the material semiotics of postdramatic practices in baby theatre, the conditions of reception and the use of visceral aesthetics in theatre for neurodivergent audiences, or the importance of spectator agency for young people across the globe.

Final Thoughts

In this dissertation I have sought to demonstrate how alternative dramaturgies explore multimodal ways of thinking, creating, and communicating. Focusing on the theatrical advances of TYA in Western Europe since the latter part of the 20th century, I examined how TYA

fostered methods of non-text-centric performance practices which used material semiotics to inspire spectators to engage with their own agency in conjunction with empathy for others. By unpacking my case studies through the lens of Lehmann's postdramatic aspects of text, space, time, body, and media I explored how multilayered, complex, and fractured performances create multiple modes of communication. Each case study demonstrated how language can provide meaning but is only one small part of the full performance text, impacting meaning-making, but is by no means the sole, or even the central, creator of understanding. One does not need language to tell a story, to create meaning, or to experience a performance event. The theoretical and practical applications explored in this dissertation demonstrate the potential for meaning-making in the emptiness and the abundance of signs, the pull of a live body, the visceral reaction to sound, and the potential for meaning in movement. They exemplify how spectators can construct their own joint-text. They show how a lack of concrete messaging or didactic narratives can free spectators to engage in their own meaning-making, drawing from their own perspectives while also engaging with the parallax viewership of those experiencing the shared event.

Understanding the text, making sense of the semiotic codes of a particular language, may be an important component in creating a detailed analysis of a performance text but it is not necessarily crucial for enjoyable engagement or making meaning with other aspects of the performance experience. Whatever you perceive is real. Whatever you feel is true. We are all making meaning out of the signs offered to us, creating narratives from what we see, stories from what we feel. Whether sitting in a classroom watching a stranger jump up on your teacher's desk, viewing a filmed production for a virtual festival, sitting in a dark theatre watching young women scream, or watching a video of three shapes move within a single plane, we are the

creators of our own experience and what we see is not going to be the same as what those around us see. Each individual perceives an event through their own conditions of reception, framed through the performance text, influenced by the conditions of performance, but ultimately based on their own experiences, perceptions, and positionality. In the end, I find myself returning to Heider and Simmel because only when we confront questions created by parallax viewership and recognize the complex and multifaceted beauty of infinite possibilities "can we hope to deepen our insight into the processes of perception, whether of movement or of other human beings" (Heider and Simmel 243-244).

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